

ARISTOTLE
Nicomachean Ethics

Translation, Glossary,
and Introductory Essay

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ARISTOTLE

NICOMACHEAN ETHICS

BOOK I

Chapter 1. Every art and every inquiry, and likewise every action and choice, seems to aim at some good, and hence it has been beautifully said that the good is that at which all things aim. But a certain difference is apparent among ends, since some are ways of being at work, while others are certain kinds of works produced, over and above the being-at-work. And in those cases in which there are ends of any kind beyond the actions, the works produced are by nature better things than the activities. And since there are many actions and arts and kinds of knowledge, the ends also turn out to be many: of medical knowledge the end is health, of shipbuilding skill it is a boat, of strategic art it is victory, of household management it is wealth. But in as many such pursuits as are under some one capacity—in the way that bridle making and all the other skills involved with implements pertaining to horses come under horsemanship, while this and every action pertaining to war come under strategic art, and in the same way other pursuits are under other capacities—in all of them the ends of all the master arts are more worthy of choice than are the ends of the pursuits that come under them, since these latter are pursued for the sake of those arts. And it makes no difference whether the ends of the actions are the ways of being at work themselves, or something else beyond these, as they are with the kinds of knowledge mentioned. 1094a 10

Chapter 2. If, then, there is some end of the things we do that we want on account of itself, and the rest on account of this one, and we do not choose everything on account of something else (for in that way the choices would go beyond all bounds, so that desire would be empty and pointless), it is clear that this would be the good, and in fact the highest good. Then would not an awareness of it have great weight in one's life, so that, like archers who have a target, we would be more apt to hit on what is needed? But if this is so, one ought to try to get a 20

grasp, at least in outline, of what it is and to what kind of knowledge or capacity it belongs.

1094b And it would seem to belong to the one that is most governing and most a master art, and politics¹ appears to be of this sort, since it prescribes which kinds of knowledge ought to be in the cities, and what sorts each person ought to learn and to what extent; also, we see that the most honored capacities, such as generalship, household economics, and rhetorical skill, are under this one. Since this capacity makes use of the rest of the kinds of knowledge, and also lays down the law about what one ought to do and from what one ought to refrain, the end of this capacity should include the ends of the other pursuits, so that this end would be the human good. For even if the good is the same for one person and for a city, that of the city appears to be greater, at least, and more complete both to achieve and to preserve; for even if it is achieved for only one person that is something to be satisfied with, but for a people or for cities it is something more beautiful and more divine. So our pursuit aims at this, and is in a certain way political.

Chapter 3. One would speak adequately if one were to attain the clarity that goes along with the underlying material, for precision ought not to be sought in the same way in all kinds of discourse, any more than in things made by the various kinds of craftsmen. The things that are beautiful and just, about which politics investigates, involve great disagreement and inconsistency, so that they are thought to belong only to convention and not to nature. And the things that are good also involve some inconsistency of this sort, because harm results from them for many people, for before now some people have been ruined by wealth, and others by courage. So one ought to be content, when speaking about such things and reasoning from such things, to point out the truth roughly and in outline, and when speaking about things that are so for the most part, and reasoning from things of that sort, to reach conclusions that are also of that sort. And it is necessary also to take each of the things that are said in the same way, for it belongs to an educated person to look for just so much precision in each kind of discourse as the nature of the thing one is concerned with admits; for to demand demonstrations from a rhetorician seems about like accepting probable conclusions from a mathematician.

All people are good at making distinctions about the things they are

¹ Aristotle does not specify the noun implicit in the substantive adjective "the political..." (*hê politikê*), so "politics" here, from its context, means either the knowledge, the art, or some other capacity that is devoted to the things of the city. The word art (*technê*) applies to the skilled know-how involved in making or producing anything, from shoes to health to laws to good citizens. The city (*polis*) is the self-sufficient political community, large enough to feed and defend all its members but small enough for them all to have active dealings with one another.

acquainted with, and each is a good judge of those things. Therefore, good judgment goes along with the way each one is educated, and the one who has been educated about everything has it in an unqualified way. For this reason, it is not appropriate for a young person to be a student of politics, since the young are inexperienced in the actions of life, while these are the things about which politics speaks and from which it reasons. Also, since the young are apt to follow their impulses, they would hear such discourses without purpose or benefit, since their end is not knowing but action. And it makes no difference whether one is young in age or immature in character, for the deficiency doesn't come from the time, but from living in accord with feeling and following every impulse. For knowledge comes to such people without profit, as it does to those who lack self-restraint; but to those who keep their desires in proportion² and act in that way, knowing about these things would be of great benefit.

About the one who is to hear this discourse, and how it ought to be received, and what task we have set before ourselves, let these things serve as a prelude.

Chapter 4. Now taking up the thread again, since every kind of knowing and every choice reach toward some good, let us say what it is that we claim politics aims at, and what, of all the goods aimed at by action, is the highest. In name, this is pretty much agreed about by the majority of people, for most people, as well as those who are more refined, say it is happiness, and assume that living well and doing well are the same thing as being happy. But about happiness—what it is—they are in dispute, and most people do not give the same account of it as the wise. Some people take it to be something visible and obvious, such as pleasure or wealth or honor, and different ones say different things, and even the same person often says different things; when sick one thinks it is health, but when poor, that it is wealth, and when they are conscious of ignorance in themselves, people marvel at those who say it is something grand and above them. And some people believe that, besides these many good things, there is some other good, by itself, which is also responsible for the being good of all these other things.

Now to review all the opinions is perhaps rather pointless, and it would be sufficient to review the ones that come most to prominence or seem to have some account to give. And let it not escape our notice that

² This phrase (*kata logon*) might be translated "in accord with reason," and the word *logos* is sometimes even translated as "principle," but these renderings mistakenly suggest that desire must be secondary to thought, or that action should be deduced from rules. At 1139b 4-5, Aristotle puts thought and desire on a perfectly equal footing in human choice, and this chapter is the first of many explanations he gives of why the precision of formulated principles and deductive conclusions cannot govern human action.

arguments from first principles differ from those that go up toward first principles. For Plato rightly raised this question, and used to inquire whether the road is from first principles or up to first principles, just as, on a race course, the run is either from the judges to the boundary or back again. One must begin from what is known, but this has two meanings, the things known to us and the things that are known simply.³ Perhaps then we, at any rate, ought to begin from the things that are known to us. This is why one who is going to listen adequately to discourse about things that are beautiful and just, and generally about things that pertain to political matters, needs to have been beautifully brought up by means of habits. For the primary thing is that something is so, and if this is sufficiently evident, there is no additional need for the reason why. And such a person either has or easily gets hold of the things that come first. If one neither has them nor has it in him to get hold of them, let him harken to Hesiod:

- 10 Altogether best is he who himself has insight into all things,
But good in his turn is he who trusts one who speaks well.
But whoever neither himself discerns, nor, harkening to another,
Lays to heart what he says, that one for his part is a useless man.

Chapter 5. For our part, let us speak from the point where we digressed. Most people and the crudest people seem, not without reason, to assume from people's lives that pleasure is the good and is happiness. For this reason they are content with a life devoted to enjoyment. For there are three ways of life especially that hold prominence: the one just now mentioned, and the political life, and third, the contemplative life. Now most people show themselves to be completely slavish by choosing a life that belongs to fatted cattle, but they happen to get listened to because most people who have power share the feeling of Sardanapalus.⁴ But refined and active people choose honor, for this is pretty much the goal of political life. Now this appears to be too superficial to be what is sought, for it seems to be in the ones who give honor rather than in the one who is honored, but we divine that the good is something of one's own and hard to take away. Also, people seem to pursue honor in order to be

³ In Bk. I, Chap. 1 of the *Physics* and at 1029b 3-12 of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle discusses this distinction at more length. What is "known to us" is first for us because it is familiar, but it hardly deserves the name of knowledge; what is "known" in the simple or proper sense comes last in the order of our inquiry, but is first in the order of things, making everything else known. Dialectical inquiry begins where we are, rather than attempting prematurely to reason from clear and distinct first principles.

⁴ An Assyrian king of the 9th century BC, credited with saying "Eat, drink, and be merry, since the other things are not worth this snap of the fingers."

convinced that they themselves are good. At any rate they seek to be honored by the wise and by those who know them, and for virtue; it is clear, then, that at least according to these people, virtue is something greater,⁵ and one might perhaps assume that this, rather than honor, is the end of the political life.

But even this seems too incomplete, since it seems possible, while having virtue, even to be asleep or to be inactive throughout life, and on top of these things, to suffer evils and the greatest misfortunes. No one would consider one who lived in that way to be happy, except when defending a hypothesis.⁶ And this is enough about these things, since they are spoken of sufficiently in the current popular writings. And the third way of life is the contemplative one, about which we shall make an investigation in what follows. The life of money making is a type of compulsory activity, and it is clear that wealth is not the good being sought, since it is instrumental and for the sake of something else. For this reason one might suppose that the things spoken of before are more properly ends, since they provide contentment on account of themselves, though it appears that even they are not what is sought, even though many arguments connected with them are tossed around. So let these things be put aside.

Chapter 6. No doubt the better thing to do is to examine the universal good and go through the difficulties in the way it is spoken of, and yet such an inquiry becomes like trudging uphill because the men who introduced the forms were my friends.⁷ But no doubt it would be admitted to be better, indeed to be necessary when keeping the truth safe is at stake, even to abandon the things that are one's own, both

⁵ Virtue (*aretē*) means the excellence that makes anything an outstanding specimen of its kind, especially well fitted to its ends. In itself it has no moral implications. It carries them conventionally when it is applied to human beings, and this is its primary use, but the word by no means excludes amoral or immoral conceptions of human superiority. Meno, in the Platonic dialogue of that name, believes that virtue is nothing but money and power, however acquired, but he repeatedly finds it impossible to deny that it involves temperance and justice (*Meno* 73A-B, 78D-E). This mixture of incompatible attitudes is part of the ordinary human heritage, out of which dialectic may begin. The English word "virtue" has something of this same fruitful ambiguity; compare "she defended her virtue" with "the virtue of this tax-avoidance scheme is..."

⁶ In the *Topics* (104b 19-23) Aristotle uses the word hypothesis for three paradoxes that thinkers have defended: that contradiction is impossible (*Antisthenes*), that everything is in motion (*Heracleitus*), and that there is only one being (*Melissus*). In Plato's *Gorgias*, starting at 470E, Socrates defends the hypothesis mentioned here, that a just person is happy even while unjustly suffering the greatest afflictions.

⁷ This exemplary act of finding the mean in departing from one's teacher out of respect for that teacher's own highest aims has given rise to a proverb: a friend to Plato but a greater friend to the truth. A fragment of a verse eulogy

Against
Plato

for other reasons and because we are philosophers; for while both [the truth and one's friends] are loved, it is a sacred thing to give the higher honor to the truth.

20 Now those who brought in this opinion did not make forms within which a primary and a derivative instance were spoken of (which is why they did not construct a form of number), but the good is attributed to what something is and also to the sort of thing it is and to a relation it has, while the thinghood of something, which is something on its own, by nature has priority over a relation it has (for this is like an offshoot and incidental attribute of what is), so that there could not be any form common to these.⁸ Further, since *good* is meant in just as many ways as *being* is (for in the sense of what something is, the good is spoken of as, for instance, the god or the intellect; in the sense of being of a certain sort, it is spoken of as the excellences; in the sense of being a certain amount, it is spoken of as the proper limit; in the sense of being related to something, it is spoken of as the useful; in the sense of being some time, it is spoken of as an opportune moment; and in the sense of place, it is spoken of as a dwelling or other things of that sort),⁹ it is clear that there could not be any common good that is one and universal, for if there were it could not have been meant in all the ways of attributing being but only in one.

attributed to Aristotle called Plato "a man whom the wicked have no right even to praise,/ who, alone or the first of mortals, showed clearly/ by his own life and by the course of his arguments/ that a man becomes good and happy at the same time." [Quoted by Olympiodorus: see Barnes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton University Press, 1985), Vol. II, p. 2463, and Jaeger, *Aristotle* (Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 107.]

⁸ The form (*eidos* or *idea*) was treated in discussions in Plato's Academy and in his dialogues as some element common to things that bear the same name, identical in them all, and hence universal to them. In the *Meno* (72B-D), Socrates asks, about bees, virtues, and health, what it is in each kind that doesn't differ at all but makes every instance *be* a bee, a virtue, or health. Aristotle's point here is that this question doesn't always have an unequivocal answer; in particular, it doesn't work when asked of all good things. A good diet is a secondary or derivative notion, that makes sense only in relation to good health, and in turn to the good of some species of animal. In this cluster of instances, there is a primary sort of good that determines different kinds of good derivative from it.

⁹ The examples given are six of the eight ways being is meant, or is attributed to things. When something is said to *be* a tree, the verb does not have an unequivocal meaning that can be plugged in when something is said to *be* red, etc. Aristotle would call redness a being, but not an independent thing. In the *Metaphysics*, at 1017a 23-27, Aristotle adds acting and being acted upon to the six senses of being, sometimes called "categories," given here. (Yet another two are given in the book called the *Categories*, but they are easily reducible to two of the eight, while the whole point of distinguishing these highest classes of things is that they are irreducibly many.)

Further, since, of the things that come under one form, there is also one kind of knowledge, there would also be some one kind of knowledge of all things that are good, but as it is there are many, even of the good things that come under one way of attributing being; for example, of the opportune moment, in war, the knowledge of it is the general's art, while in disease it is the physician's art, and of the proper limit in food, the knowledge is the physician's art, while in exercises it is the art of the gymnastic trainer. And one might raise the question even of what in the world they mean by speaking of each whatever-itself, seeing as how there is one and the same meaning for both a human being and the human-being-itself, namely the meaning of human-ness. For insofar as something is a human being, there will be no difference, and if that is the way it is, there will be no difference either insofar as something is good. Surely it will not be any more good by being everlasting, inasmuch as a long-lasting thing is no more white than one that lasts only a day. The Pythagoreans seem to speak in a more credible way about the good, when they place one-ness in the column of good things,¹⁰ and Speusippus seems to have followed them. But about these things let there be some other discussion.

But a certain debatable point in the things that have been said comes to light, on the grounds that the arguments were not meant to be about every sort of good, but that the goods spoken of as coming under one form are those that are pursued, and with which people are satisfied, for their own sake, while the things that tend to produce these, or to preserve them in some way, or to prevent their opposites are spoken of as good by derivation from these and in a different way. It is clear, then, that good things would be meant in two ways, some on account of themselves and others derived from these. Then separating the things that are good in themselves from the useful things, let us examine whether the former are meant in accordance with one form. But what sort of things should one set down as good in themselves? Are they not those things that one pursues even when they are isolated from everything else, such as having good sense, or seeing, or certain

¹⁰ Instead, that is, of making it the source of all good; the good itself, mentioned in Plato's *Republic*, is identified in his teachings in the Academy with the one itself, discussed in his *Parmenides*. A version of the Pythagorean column of goods, along with a column of corresponding opposites, is given in 986a of the *Metaphysics*. Beginning at 1072b 30 of that work, Speusippus is linked with the Pythagoreans as believing that the highest good is not a source of things but something that develops, perhaps what is now called an "emergent property," but Aristotle certainly does not treat that opinion as credible. The Pythagoreans taught that all things are numbers, and Aristotle is quick to point out the absurdities that follow from that (e.g., at 990a 18-29), but since it implied that numbers are not separate from perceptible things, he found it on that score preferable to the technical opinions of Plato and some of his disciples (see 1090a 16-35).

20 pleasures and honors? For even if we pursue these things by reason of some other thing, one would still place them among things good in themselves. Or is there nothing else except the form that is good in itself? But then the form would be of no use. But if the things mentioned are among things good on account of themselves, the meaning of the good in all of these would have to show itself as the same, just as the meaning of whiteness is the same in snow and in lead paint. But of honor and good sense and pleasure there are distinct and divergent meanings of that by which they are good. Therefore there is not any good that is shared and comes under one form.¹¹

30 But then in what way is good meant? For these things certainly do not seem to have the same name by chance. But do they have the same name by being derived from one thing, or by all adding up together into one thing, or rather by analogy?¹² For as sight is in relation to the body, intellect is in relation to the soul, and some other thing is in relation to something else. But perhaps these things ought to be let go for now, since to be precise about them would be more at home in another kind of philosophic inquiry. And it is similar with the form, for even if there is some one good that is attributed in common, or is something separate itself by itself, it is clear that it is not a thing done or possessed by a human being, and something of that sort is being

¹¹ The argument is about as tight as could be: either the good itself has no instances, or all the instances of it that are good in themselves must be good in the same way. But note that the conclusion depends on accepting the common opinions that honor and pleasure are good in themselves, while Aristotle has already questioned whether honor is dependent on a higher good and whether pleasure, in the sense of bodily enjoyment, is good at all in any way that could satisfy a human being. The discussion here is a dialectical beginning, and one must ask how it holds up at the end of the whole ten books of inquiry, especially since a different and better threefold distinction of goods is made at 1104b 30-31.

¹² A tree and a dog are each said to have a bark, but it is only by chance that the same name is used. A knife and a human being are both called medical, by derivation from one thing: the medical art. A human being and a society are both called healthy by analogy, since they have in common only a similar relation of the parts to the whole. A human being and a dog are both animals, by sharing a common universal in an unequivocal way, and hence come under one form in the broad sense the word "form" has in this discussion. The remaining possibility, that each thing called by a certain name is partial, and is only so called because all of them together add up to that meaning, is what was referred to in Plato's Academy as an eidetic number, a form composed of unlike forms. Aristotle drops that possibility here, and addresses it elsewhere only where he attacks it, in the *Metaphysics*, Book XIII, Chapters 6-9. Two excellent reconstructions of this notion, of very different kinds, are made by Jacob Klein, in *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra* (M.I.T. Press, 1968), Chapter 7C, and Robert Williamson, in "Eidos and Agathon in Plato's *Republic*," in *The St. John's Review*, Vol. XXXIX, Nos. 1 and 2 (1989-90).

looked for now. But perhaps it might seem to someone that it would be better to be acquainted with it with a view to those good things that can be possessed or done; for having this as a sort of pattern, we would also know the things that are good for us better, and if we know them, we will hit upon them.

Now while the argument has a certain plausibility, it seems to be discordant with the kinds of knowledge we have, for all of them leave aside an acquaintance with the good itself in order to aim at some particular good and hunt for what they lack. And surely it is not reasonable that all those skilled in arts should be ignorant of, and not even look for, something of such great assistance. And it is impossible to say in what respect a weaver or a carpenter will be benefitted in relation to his art by knowing this good itself, or how one who has beheld the form itself will be a better doctor or general. For it appears that the doctor does not consider health in that way, but the health of a human being, or perhaps rather that of this particular person, since he heals them each by each. So let these things have been spoken of just this much.

Chapter 7. And let us go back again to the good that is being sought, whatever it may be. For it seems to be a different thing in each different action and art, since it is a different thing in the medical art and the general's art, and similarly with the rest. What then is the good in each of them? Or is it that for the sake of which they do everything else? In the medical art this is health, in the general's art it is victory, in the housebuilder's art it is a house, and in a different art it is something else, and in every action and choice it is the end, since everyone does everything else for the sake of this. And so, if there is some end for all actions, this would be the good that belongs to action, and if there is more than one such end, these would constitute that good. So the argument, in transforming itself, has reached the same place;¹³ and one must try to make this still more clear.

Now since the ends seem to be more than one, while we choose some of them on account of something else, such as wealth, flutes, and instrumental things generally, it is clear that they are not all complete,¹⁴

¹³ The same place is the question formulated at the beginning of Chapter Two and again at the beginning of Chapter Four, with each circular digression giving it more content.

¹⁴ "Complete" here translates *teleion*, the adjective derived from *telos*, the word translated as "end" in Chapter One above, and used interchangeably by Aristotle with the phrase *hou heneka*, "that for the sake of which." The root sense of *telos* is wholeness or completion, and Aristotle's "teleology" is his teaching that all natural events aim at producing or maintaining the wholeness of natural beings, understood not only in a bodily and biological sense but also as the wholeness of being-at-work that constitutes their lives. In human beings, the achievement of this wholeness of life requires choices carried out in action; hence the end appears as a purpose, the accomplish-

30 but it is manifest that the highest good is something complete. So if there
is some one thing alone that is complete, this would be what is being
sought, but if there are more than one of them, it would be the most
complete of these. And we say that a thing that is pursued on account
of itself is more complete than a thing pursued on account of something
else, and that what is never chosen on account of anything else is more
complete than things chosen both for themselves and on account of
something else, and hence that, in an unqualified sense, the complete
is what is chosen always for itself and never on account of anything
1097b else. And happiness seems to be of this sort most of all, since we choose
this always on account of itself and never on account of anything else,
while we choose honor and pleasure and intelligence and every virtue
indeed on account of themselves (for even if nothing resulted from them
we would choose each of them), but we choose them also for the sake
of happiness, supposing that we will be happy by these means. But no
one chooses happiness for the sake of these things, nor for the sake of
anything else at all.

10 And the same thing appears to follow from its self-sufficiency, for
the complete good seems to be self-sufficient. And by the self-sufficient
we mean not what suffices for oneself alone, living one's life as a hermit,
but also with parents and children and a wife, and friends and fellow
citizens generally, since a human being is by nature meant for a city.
But one must take some limit for these connections, since by stretching
out to ancestors and descendants and friends of one's friends they go
beyond all bounds; but this must be examined later.¹⁵ But we set down
as self-sufficient that which, by itself, makes life choiceworthy and lack-
ing in nothing, and such a thing we suppose happiness to be. What's
more, we suppose happiness to be the most choiceworthy of all things
while not counting it as one of those things, since if it were counted
among them it is clear that it would be more choiceworthy together with
the tiniest amount of additional good, for the thing added becomes a
preeminence of good, and of good things, the greater is always more
20 worthy of choice. So happiness appears to be something complete and
self-sufficient, and is, therefore, the end of actions.

But perhaps to say that the highest good is happiness is obviously
something undisputed, while it still begs to be said in a more clear and
distinct way what happiness is. Now this might come about readily if
one were to grasp the work of a human being. For just as with a flute
player or sculptor or any artisan, and generally with those to whom
some work or action belongs, the good and the doing it well seem to be
in the work, so too it would seem to be the case with a human being, if

ment of which completes the action. The purpose behind all other purposes
would be the human end that is complete simply.

¹⁵ This comes up in relation to descendants and ancestors in Bk. I, Ch. 11, and
in relation to friends in Bk. IX, Ch. 10

indeed there is some work that belongs to one. But is there some sort
of work for a carpenter or a leather worker, while for a human being
there is none? Is a human being by nature idle? Or, just as for an eye or a
30 hand or a foot or generally for each of the parts, there seems to be some
sort of work, ought one also to set down some work beyond all these
for the human being? But then what in the world would this be? For
living seems to be something shared in even by plants, but something
peculiarly human is being sought. Therefore, one must divide off the
1098a life that consists in nutrition and growth. Following this would be some
sort of life that consists in perceiving, but this seems to be shared in by
a horse and a cow and by every animal. So what remains is some sort
of life that puts into action that in us that has articulate speech; of this
capacity, one aspect is what is able to be persuaded by reason, while
the other is what has reason and thinks things through. And since this
is still meant in two ways, one must set it down as a life in a state of
being-at-work, since this seems to be the more governing meaning.

And if the work of a human being is a being-at-work of the soul in
accordance with reason, or not without reason, while we say that the
work of a certain sort of person is the same in kind as that of a serious
person of that sort, as in the case of a harpist and of a serious harpist,
10 and this is simply because in all cases the superiority in excellence is
attached to the work, since the work of a harpist is to play the harp and
the work of a serious harpist is to play the harp well—if this is so and
we set down that the work of a human being is a certain sort of life,
while this life consists of a being-at-work of the soul and actions that
go along with reason, and it belongs to a man of serious stature to do
these things well and beautifully,¹⁶ while each thing is accomplished

¹⁶ Two notions important to the *Ethics* as a whole begin to be made use of here.
The word serious (*spoudaios*) is usually translated as "good" or "excellent,"
as though it were simply an idiom of ancient Greek that had lost its root
meaning. But the meaning of the word belongs to the primary evidence from
which ethics argues. We all consider some people more worthy of respect than
others, and if we disagree about who they are we can begin a discussion. A
serious harpist is not just one who is highly skilled technically, but one who
chooses well the uses worthy of that skill. The serious person is not one who
displays a sense of urgency and cannot relax, but one who recognizes the
few things that are worth being serious about. (Compare 1025a 9-16.)
The beautiful (*to kalon*) is often translated as "noble" or "fine," on the grounds
that the Greek word applied to admirable actions as well as to things well shaped
or formed. But again, this is not a use of language peculiar to any place or time,
but a word that intends something that belongs to the primary evidence that all
ethical discussion must have in common. Just recall the last time you said "that
was a beautiful thing you did," and reflect on what you meant. It may be that
such judgments are fluctuating or conventional (1094b 14-16), but even to raise
the question whether they always are, one must be open to the possibility of
judging on a more stable basis.

well as a result of the virtue appropriate to it—if this is so, the human good comes to be disclosed as a being-at-work of the soul in accordance with virtue, and if the virtues are more than one, in accordance with the best and most complete virtue. But also, this must be in a complete life, for one swallow does not make a Spring, nor one day, and in the same way one day or a short time does not make a person blessed and happy.

20 So let the good have been sketched in outline in this way, for presumably one needs to rough it in first and then inscribe the details later. And it would seem to be in the power of anyone to carry forward and articulate things that are in good shape in the outline, and that time is a good discoverer of such things, or makes the work easier; in fact the advances in the arts have come from this, since it is in anyone's power to add what is left out. But it behooves one to remember the things that were said before, and not to look for precision in the same way in all things, but in accordance with the underlying material in each case, and to the extent that it is appropriate to that course of inquiry.

30 For both a carpenter and a geometrician look for a right angle, but in different ways, for the one seeks it to the extent that it is useful to the work, while the other seeks for what it is or what it is a property of, since he is someone who beholds the truth. So one ought to do the same in other things, so that side issues do not become greater than the work being done.¹⁷

1098b And one ought not to demand a reason in all things alike, either, but it is sufficient in some cases for it to be shown beautifully that something is so, in particular such things as concern first principles; that something is so comes first and is a first principle. And of first principles, some are beheld by way of examples, others by sense perception, others by becoming experienced in some habit, and others in other ways. So one must try to go after each of them by the means that belong to its nature, and be serious about distinguishing them rightly, since this has great weight in what follows. For the beginning seems to be more than half of the whole, and many of the things that are inquired after become illuminated along with it.

10 **Chapter 8.** And, in connection with the beginning, one must examine it not only from its conclusion and the things on the basis of which the statement was made, but also from the things that are said about it; for when something is true, everything that pertains to it is consonant with it, but when something is false, the truth quickly

¹⁷ The dismissal of any discussion of the good itself, in Chapter 6 above, is an example of this. Aristotle believes there are forms, and that there is a highest good separate from perceptible things, but these topics require long and complex inquiry, in Books VII-IX and XII of the *Metaphysics* especially. As he says at 1096b 30-31, these questions are at home in a different sort of philosophizing.

shows itself dissonant with it. Now since good things have been parceled out into three kinds, some being called external while the others are associated with the soul or the body, we speak of the ones that are associated with the soul as the most governing and as especially good, and it is the actions and ways of being at work that belong to the soul that we set down as associated with the soul. Therefore our beginning is well stated, at least according to this opinion, which is an ancient one and agreed to by the philosophers. And it is right, too, that certain actions and ways of being at work should be said to be the end, since in that way the end comes to be among the goods associated with the soul and not among the external goods. It is also consonant with our statement that the one who is happy is said to live well and do well, since the end was just about said to be some way of living well and acting well.

And it appears that all the things that are looked for concerning happiness are present in what was said. For to some people it seems to be virtue, to others practical judgment, and to others some sort of wisdom, while to others it seems to be all or some of these combined with pleasure, or not without pleasure, while others include external abundance alongside these. Some of these things are said by many people and from ancient times, others by a few well-reputed men, and it is reasonable that neither of these groups would be wholly mistaken, and that they would be right in some one point at least or even in most of them. Now our statement is consonant with the ones who say that happiness is virtue or a certain virtue, since being at work in accordance with it is part of virtue. But presumably it makes no small difference whether one supposes the highest good to consist in possession or in use, that is, in an actively maintained condition or in a way of being at work. For even if the actively maintained condition is present it is possible for it to accomplish no good thing, for instance in someone who is asleep or in someone who is incapacitated in some other way, but if the being-at-work is present this is not possible, for necessarily the one who is at work in accordance with virtue will act and act well. Just as, with those at the Olympic games, it is not the most beautiful or the strongest who are crowned, but those who compete (for it is some of these who are victors), so too among those who in life are well favored and well mannered¹⁸ it is the ones who act rightly who become accomplished people.

And the life they lead is also pleasant in itself. For feeling pleasure is one of the things that belong to the soul, and to each person, that to which he is said to be passionately devoted is pleasant, for example, a horse to one who is passionately devoted to horses, a show to one who

¹⁸ Literally "the beautiful and good," the phrase, sometimes run together as one word, by which the Athenian aristocracy referred to itself.

is passionately devoted to shows; and in the same way acts of justice are pleasant to one who is passionately devoted to justice and generally things in accord with virtue to one who is passionately devoted to virtue. In most people, then, the things that are pleasant to them are in conflict with one another, since they are not pleasant by nature, but the things that are pleasant to those who are passionately devoted to what is beautiful are the things that are pleasant by nature, and of this sort are actions in accordance with virtue, so that they are pleasant both to these people and in themselves. So the life these people lead has no additional need of pleasure as a sort of appendage, but has its pleasure in itself. For in addition to what has been said, one who does not delight in beautiful actions is not even a good person, for no one would call anyone just who did not delight in acting justly, nor call anyone generous who did not delight in generous actions, and similarly in the other cases. And if this is so, actions in accordance with virtue would be pleasant in themselves.

But certainly they are also good and beautiful, and each of these in the highest degree, if the one who judges rightly about them is the serious person, who judges them the way we said. Therefore happiness is best and most beautiful and most pleasant, and these are not separated in the manner of the epigram at Delos:

Most beautiful is what is most just, and most desirable is to be healthy;
But most pleasant by nature is to get exactly what one yearns for.

All of these are present in the best ways of being at work, and it is these, or the one of these which is best, that we declare to be happiness. Nevertheless, it appears that there is an additional need of external goods, as we said, since it is impossible, or not easy, to engage in beautiful actions if one is not equipped for them. For many things are done, as if by instruments, by means of friends and wealth and political power, and those who lack certain things, such as good ancestry, good children, and good looks, disfigure their blessedness; for someone who is completely ugly in appearance, or of bad descent, or solitary and childless is not very apt to be happy, and is still less so perhaps if he were to have utterly corrupt children or friends, or good ones who had died. So as we said, there seems to be an additional need of this sort of prosperity, which is why some people rank good fortune on the same level as happiness, while others give that rank to virtue.

Chapter 9. This is also why there is an impasse about whether happiness comes by learning or habit or training of some other kind, or else comes to one's side by some divine lot or even by chance. Now if there is anything else that is a gift of the gods to human beings, it is reasonable that happiness too should be god-given, and it most of

all human things, in the measure by which it is the best of them. But perhaps this would be more at home in another sort of investigation, though it appears that even if happiness is not god-sent but comes to one by means of virtue and some sort of learning or training, it is still one of the most divine things, for the prize for virtue also seems to be the highest end and something divine and blessed. And it should also be widely shared, since it admits of belonging to all those who are not incapacitated for virtue, by means of some sort of learning and taking pains. And if it is better for it to be this way, rather than for one to be happy by chance, it is reasonable that this is the way it stands, if indeed things in accordance with nature occur naturally in the most beautiful possible way, as similarly is the case with things that result from art or from any sort of cause, and especially from the highest sort of cause. But for what is greatest and most beautiful to be left to chance would be too discordant.

And what is being sought is further illuminated by our formulation, for happiness was said to be a certain sort of being-at-work of the soul in accordance with virtue, while all the other good things are either conditions that need to be present for happiness or else things that naturally assist the work and are useful as tools. And these things would also be in agreement with what was said in the beginning, for we set down that the highest good is the end of politics, while it takes the greatest part of its pains to produce citizens of a certain sort, namely, ones that are good and inclined to perform beautiful actions.¹⁹ It is reasonable, then, that we do not speak of a cow or horse or any other animal as happy, since none of them is able to share in being at work in such a way. And for this reason a child is not happy either, since he is not yet capable of performing such actions on account of age; children who are called happy are pronounced blessed on account of our hope.²⁰ For there is need, as we said, of both complete virtue and a complete life, for many changes and all sorts of chances come about in the course of a life, and it is possible for the most thriving person to fall into great misfortunes in old age, just as the story is told of Priam

¹⁹ These would include, in any community, a willingness to sacrifice comfort or property, or to risk injury or death, if such actions were necessary means to something manifestly worthwhile.

²⁰ To some extent, the Greek word *eudaimonia* differs from our word happiness, but Aristotle's interest is not in words and their use. Sardanapalus, referred to in Chapter 5 above as a spokesman for most people, would have to say that no one is in a better condition than a child or animal completely wrapped up in pleasure and play. Aristotle's criterion here for happiness amounts to the same thing as the criterion by which he says below, at 1111b 8-9, that children and animals do not make choices: his opinion that they cannot distance themselves from what is immediate in order to give preference to something remote that is recommended only by reason or beauty.

in the epics about Troy; no one calls happy the one who suffers such fortunes and dies in misery.

10 **Chapter 10.** But then ought one to call no other human being happy either who is still alive, and is it necessary, as Solon said, to look at the end? But if one ought really to lay down this rule, is anyone happy once he is dead? Or is this completely absurd, both for other reasons and especially for us who say that happiness is some way of being at work? But if we do not say that someone who is dead is happy, and Solon did not mean that, but that only at that time may one safely pronounce a human being blessed, as being then beyond evils and misfortunes, this too has in it something disputable, since there seem to be things that are
20 good or evil for one who has died, if indeed there also are for someone who is alive but not aware of them, such as honors and dishonors and good actions and misfortunes of children and of descendants generally. But this also contains an impasse, for it is possible for many reverses of fortune concerning descendants to befall someone who has lived blessedly until old age and died proportionately to that, and for there to be some among their descendants who are good and happen to have lives in accord with what they deserve, while others have lives of an opposite sort. And it is evident that they admit of having every possible degree of separation from their ancestors, so that it would become absurd if the one who is dead were to change along with them, and become at one time happy but then miserable again; but it would be absurd as well if
30 the fortunes of the descendants did not pertain at all to their ancestors over some length of time.

But one ought to go back again to the thing that produced the earlier impasse, for perhaps what is now being inquired about might also be seen into from that direction. If in fact one ought to look to the end and at that time judge each person blessed, not as being blessed but as having been so before, how is it not absurd if, when someone is happy, what belongs to him cannot be truly judged as his because one does
1100b not want to call the living happy on account of reverses and because one assumes that happiness is something durable and not at all easily changed, while fortunes often come back around again for the same people? For it is clear that, if we were to follow along with the fortunes, we would often call the same person happy and miserable in turns, making the happy person out to be a kind of chameleon or a structure built on rotten foundations.

10 So is following up these fortunes not right at all? For what goes well or badly does not lie in them, but a human life has need of them as something added, as we said, while the things that govern happiness are ways of being at work in accordance with virtue, while opposite ways of being at work determine an opposite condition. And what is now producing an impasse bears witness to this formulation, since in none of the acts of human beings is stability present in the same way

it is present in ways of being at work in accordance with virtue; for these seem to be more durable even than the kinds of knowledge. And among these themselves, the most honored are the ones that are more enduring because those who are blessed pass their lives in them most of all and most continuously, since this seems to be the reason that forgetfulness does not encroach upon them. So what is sought will belong to the happy person, who will be happy throughout life, for such a person will always, or most of all people, be acting and contemplating the things that go along with virtue, and will bear what fortune brings most beautifully and in complete harmony in every instance, being in the true sense good and flawlessly squarely centered. 20

But since many things happen by chance, going all the way from the great to the small, the small bits of good fortune, and similarly those of the opposite sort, are clearly not of decisive weight in one's life, but if great ones come along, and many of them, they will readily make one's life more blessed (for it is the nature of them to contribute to adorning life and also for the use of them to become beautiful and serious), and if it turns out the opposite way this limits what is blessed and mars its dignity, since it imposes pains and hinders many ways of being at work. Nevertheless, even in these circumstances something beautiful shines through when one bears many and great misfortunes calmly, not through insensitivity, but through good breeding and greatness of soul. If, as we said, it is ways of being at work that govern life, no one who is among the blessed could become miserable, since such a one will never do base or hateful things; for we suppose that one who is truly good and sensible will bear all fortunes gracefully and will always act in the most beautiful way the circumstances permit, just as a good general will make the best use for war of the terrain that is at hand and a shoemaker will make the most beautiful shoe out of the leather that is given, and the same way with all other artisans as well. And if it is this way, one who is happy could never become miserable, though surely one would not be blessed if he were to fall into fortunes like those of Priam. But neither would such a one be changeable and easily thrown off balance, since one will not be easily dislodged from happiness, even by the misfortunes of fortune, unless they are many and great, and from such misfortunes such a person would not become happy again in a short time, but, if at all, in the fullness of some long time in which one had come to devote oneself to great and beautiful causes. 1101a 10

What then prevents our calling happy the person who is at work in accordance with complete virtue and supplied with a sufficient stock of external goods, not for any chance amount of time but for a complete life? Or ought one to add, when he shall have both lived in that way and died in a proportionate way, since the future is unclear to us, and we set it down that happiness is final in every sense and complete in every way? And if this is so, we shall call blessed those among the living to 20

whom the things mentioned belong and go on belonging, but blessed as human beings. And let the distinctions be made to this extent about these things.²¹

Chapter 11. That the fortunes of one's descendants and all one's friends have no influence at all seems too unfeeling and contrary to people's opinions, but since the things that come to pass are many and have all sorts of differences, with some of them more relevant and others less, to distinguish each of them would seem a long if not endless task, but to sketch what is said in a general outline would perhaps be sufficient. Now if, just as among the misfortunes that surround oneself, some have a certain weight and power to tip the scale of one's life while others seem more lightweight, so too is the same thing the case with the things that relate to all one's friends, and it makes a difference whether each experience happens to concern those who are living or those who are dead, much more even than whether the lawless and terrible things in the tragedies are presupposed or enacted on stage, and so one ought to reckon in this difference and more, perhaps, the impasse about whether those who have done their part and departed this life have any share in anything good or the reverse. For it seems from these considerations that if anything at all gets through to them, whether good or the reverse, it would be something faint and small, either simply or as it relates to them, or if not, at any rate so little and of such a kind as not to make happy those who are not, or to take away the blessedness of those who are. So it appears that when the friends of the departed fare well, and likewise when they fare badly, this has an influence on those who are departed, but of such a kind and amount as neither to make the happy not be happy nor anything else of the sort.²²

Chapter 12. Now that these distinctions have been made, let us

²¹ The beginning outline formulation of what happiness is, arrived at in Chapter 7, has now been tested in Chapters 8-10 and found to imply that happiness is an inner condition manifested in outward acts, pleasant in itself, and, to the extent possible with human things, in one's own power and durable. Perhaps even more important, the arguments by which it was tested have turned up a series of crucial pieces of evidence: (1) We recognize some actions as beautiful things to do (1099a 5-7). (2) A political community always has a stake in the inclination its citizens have toward doing what is beautiful (1099b 29-32). (3) Happiness is possible only to mature human beings, who can choose what is beautiful in preference to what is immediately gratifying (1099b 32-1100a 4). (4) Among things recognized as beautiful are greatness of soul amid misfortunes (1100b 30-33) and an acceptance of death that preserves its proportion to one's life (1101a 17).

²² An incidental remark in the middle of this chapter stands out, and seems to carry meaning poetically, as well as logically. A playwright keeps horrendous deeds, like the blinding of Oedipus, offstage as a matter of tact. Aristotle too, in this chapter, may be speaking the truth in a way that will be tactful to listeners or readers who try to make their lives do credit to their dead loved ones.

consider whether happiness belongs among things that are praised or rather among things that are honored, for it is clear that it does not belong among capacities.²³ Everything that is praised seems to be praised for being some sort of attribute or for holding itself in a certain condition, since we praise someone who is just or courageous or generally good, as we also praise virtue, on account of actions and works, and we praise someone who is strong or a good runner, and so on, for being naturally possessed of some attribute and standing in some relation toward something good and serious. This is clear also from praise that concerns the gods, since it is obviously ridiculous to hold them up against ourselves, but this is what happens, because praise comes about by holding things up to some standard, as we said. But if praise is for things of that sort, it is clear that there is no praise for the highest goods, but something greater and better, as is also evident since we pronounce the gods, as well as the most godlike among men, blessed and happy. And it is the same with good things, for no one praises happiness as one would praise justice, but rather blesses it as something better and more divine. And Eudoxus also seems to have been a good advocate for pleasure's title to the medal of highest honor because he believed its not being praised, though it is something good, indicates that it is something more powerful than the good things that are praised, and is of the same sort as the god and the good, for to these as well other things are held up as to a standard.

Praise belongs to virtue, for from this, people become apt at performing beautiful actions, and honorific speeches are similarly for deeds, whether of the body or of the soul. But perhaps to be precise about these things is more appropriate to those who have taken pains over honorific speeches, but for us it is clear from what has been said that happiness belongs among things that are honored and among ends. And it seems to be this way because it is also a source, since every one of us does everything else for the sake of this, and we set down the source and cause of good things as something honored and divine.

Chapter 13. And since happiness is a certain way of being at work in accordance with complete virtue, something one would have to examine would be virtue, for perhaps in this way we might get a better insight into happiness. And it seems that the one skilled in politics in the true sense has taken pains about this especially, for such a one wants to make the citizens good and obedient to the laws. We have, as a pattern in these matters, those who gave laws to the people of Crete and Sparta, and any others of that sort there might have been. And if this investigation belongs to politics, it is clear that the inquiry would be in accord with the project we chose at the beginning. And it is clear that one ought to examine virtue of a human sort, since we

²³ We post-Nietzscheans might say "it is clearly not something value-free."

were looking for the human good and a human happiness, and by human excellence we mean the kind that belongs not to the body but to the soul, and we assert that happiness is a being-at-work of the soul. Now if this is the way it is, it is clear that one who is skilled in politics needs to know in some way the things that concern the soul, just as one who is going to cure the eyes must also know about the whole body, and even more so, to the extent that politics is more honorable and elevated than medicine; and the more refined among medical doctors do busy themselves in many ways with knowing about the body. So the one skilled in politics must study the soul, but must study it for the sake of political concerns and to the extent that is sufficient for what is sought, for to be more precise than that is perhaps too much trouble for the things proposed.

Now some things about the soul are said in an adequate way even in popular writings, and one ought to make use of them, for example, that there is an irrational part of the soul and a part having reason. Whether these are distinct in the same manner as the parts of the body, or of any divisible thing, or else are two in meaning while they are inseparable in nature, as are the convex and the concave in the circumference of a circle, makes no difference for the present concern. And within the irrational part, one part seems to be common to living things and vegetative—I mean the part responsible for nutrition and growth—for one would attribute such a power of the soul to all things that take nourishment, and even to embryos, and attribute the very same power to fully developed living things, since this is more reasonable than supposing some other one. So the excellence of this would seem to be something common and not human, for this part or this power seems to be most at work during sleep, while a good and a bad person are least distinguishable in sleep. (This is why people say that for half their lives the happy do not differ at all from the miserable, and this follows reasonably, since sleep is an inactivity of that in the soul by which it is said to be serious or contemptible.) There is an exception if in some way some motions penetrate a little bit, and in this way the dreams of decent people become better than those of people at random. But this is enough about these things, and one ought to leave the nutritive part alone, since by its nature it has no allotment of the human sort of excellence.

But a certain other nature belonging to the soul seems to be without reason and yet to share in reason in some way. For we praise the reason that belongs to people who are self-restrained or unrestrained, and the part of the soul in them that has reason, since it exhorts them in the right way and to what is best, but there seems also to be naturally present in them something else besides reason, which does battle with and strains against reason. For exactly as in the case of parts of the body subject to muscular spasms, when one has chosen to move them

to the right they are on the contrary turned away to the left, so too is it with the soul, for the impulses of unrestrained people are contrarily directed. But while in the body we see the part that swerves, with the soul we do not see it. Nevertheless one must presumably consider there to be something in the soul as well contrary to reason, which opposes it and stands in its way, though it makes no difference in what way it is distinct. But this seems to have a share in reason, as we said; in a self-restrained person at any rate it is obedient to reason, and presumably in a temperate and brave person it is still more amenable to reason, since in such a person all parts of the soul are in harmony with reason.²⁴

So it appears that the irrational part of the soul is twofold, since the vegetative part of it has no share at all in reason, while the desiring and generally appetitive part does share in it in some way, insofar as it listens to and can obey reason. In the same way too we call listening to one's father or friends "being rational," though not of course in the way mathematicians mean that. And that the irrational part is in some way persuaded by reason, is indicated by admonition and by every sort of chastisement and encouragement. But if one ought to say that this part of the soul has reason, then having reason will also be twofold, namely having it in the governing sense and in itself, or in the sense of something that can listen to a father. And virtue as well is divided in accordance with the same distinction, for we speak of virtues as pertaining either to thinking or to character, and speak of wisdom, astuteness, and practical judgment as intellectual virtues, and generosity and temperance as virtues of character. For in speaking of character we do not mean that someone is wise or astute, but gentle or temperate, but we also praise someone who is wise for an active condition of the soul, and among active conditions of the soul, we call the ones that are praised virtues.

BOOK II

Chapter 1. Now since virtue is of two sorts, one pertaining to thinking and the other to character, excellence of thinking is for the most part, both in its coming to be and in its growth, a result of teaching, for which reason it has need of experience and time, while excellence of character comes into being as a consequence of habit, on account of which it even gets its name by a small inflection from

²⁴ This overcoming of inner conflict will become an important mark of a true virtue. The temperate person does not have to restrain an impulse toward every chocolate bar, but has outgrown the subjection to such feelings that characterizes a child or an adult of weak character. Similarly, in Plato's *Republic* (443D), Socrates says that a just person "himself rules himself and organizes and becomes a friend to himself, being a harmony of the three parts of the soul."

20 habit.²⁵ It is also clear from this that none of the virtues of character comes to be present in us by nature, since none of the things that are by nature can be habituated to be otherwise; for example, a stone, which by nature falls downward, could not be habituated to fall upward, not even if one were to train it by throwing it upward ten thousand times, nor could fire be habituated to move downward, nor could any of the things that happen by nature in one way be habituated to happen in another way. Therefore the virtues come to be present neither by nature nor contrary to nature, but in us who are of such a nature as to take them on, and to be brought to completion in them by means of habit.

Also, with those things that come to belong to us by nature, we are provided with the potencies for these beforehand, and we produce the being-at-work of them in return. (This very thing is obvious in the case of the senses, for it was not from repeatedly seeing or repeatedly 30 hearing that we took on the senses, but on the contrary, having them, we used them—we did not get them by using them.) But we do take on the virtues by first being at work in them, just as also in other things, namely the arts; the things that one who has learned them needs to do, we learn by doing, and people become, say, housebuilders by building 1103b houses or harpists by playing the harp. So too, we become just by doing things that are just, temperate by doing things that are temperate, and courageous by doing things that are courageous. What happens in cities gives evidence of this, for lawmakers make the citizens good by habituating them, and since this is the intention of every lawmaker, those that do not do it well are failures, and one regime differs from another in this respect as a good one from a worthless one.

Also, it is from and by means of the same things that every virtue both comes into being and is destroyed, and similarly every art, for people become both good harpists and bad harpists from harp playing, 10 and it is analogous with housebuilders and all the rest; from building houses well people will be good housebuilders and from building them badly they will be bad ones. If it were not that way, there would have been no need of a teacher, but everyone would have been born good

²⁵ The word character (*êthos*) derives from habit (*ethos*) by a mere lengthening of the initial vowel from epsilon to eta. How the condition meant by character derives from habit is more complex. Ethical virtue is by no means simply a set of socially approved habits. It requires a pre-existent natural capacity meant to be completed properly in a certain way, as the following discussion explains; an appropriate habit, which might be imposed by parents or by other social training, is a second necessary condition for its development. But there is a third and crucial necessary factor that brings a virtue into being, that is the deliberate contribution of the person who comes to have it, the *hexis* or active condition that enters the discussion in Chap. 5 below, as a result of which Aristotle considers us to be responsible for our own characters (1114b 22-24).

or bad at the arts. And it is the same way in the case of the virtues, for by acting in our dealings with people some of us become just, others unjust, and by acting in frightening situations and getting habituated to be afraid or to be confident, some of us become courageous and others become cowards. And it is similar with the things that are involved with desires and with angry impulses, for some people become temperate and gentle, while others become spoiled and irritable, the ones from 20 turning themselves this way in these situations, the others from turning themselves that way. In a word, active states come into being from being at work in similar ways. Hence it is necessary to make our ways of being at work be of certain sorts, for our active states follow in accordance with the distinctions among these. It makes no small difference, then, to be habituated in this way or in that straight from childhood, but an enormous difference, or rather all the difference.

Chapter 2. Now since our present occupation is not for the sake of contemplation, as the other kinds of study are (for we are investigating not in order that we might know what virtue is, but in order that we might become good, since otherwise there would be no benefit from it), it is necessary to investigate, with respect to the things involved in 30 actions, how one ought to perform them, since these actions also determine the sorts of active states that come into being, as we have said. Now the phrase “acting in accordance with right reason” is commonly accepted, and let it be set down—there will be a discussion of it later, both what right reason is and how it is related to the other virtues.²⁶ But let this be acknowledged in advance—that every discourse that 1104a concerns actions is obliged to speak in outline and not precisely—just as we said also at the beginning that one ought to demand that discourses be in accord with their material, while matters that are involved in actions and are advantageous have nothing rigidly fixed about them, any more than do matters of health. And since the general discourse is of this sort, still more does the discourse that concerns particulars lack precision, for it falls under no art nor under any skill that has been handed down, but it is always necessary for those who are acting to look at the circumstances surrounding the occasion themselves, just as is the case also with the medical art or the art of steering a ship. But even though the present discourse is of this sort, one ought to try to 10 help it along.

First, then, one must recognize this, that things such as virtues are of such a nature as to be destroyed by deficiency and by excess, as we see (since one must use visible examples as evidence for invisible things) in the case of strength and health; for excessive gymnastic exercises, as well as deficient ones, destroy one’s strength, and similarly drink and food, when they come to be too much or too little, destroy one’s

²⁶ See Book VI, Chapters 5-13, where the final formulation at 1144b 26-28 identifies right reason in matters of action with practical judgment.

20 health, while proportionate amounts produce, increase, and preserve these. And it is the same way also with temperance and courage and the other virtues. Someone who runs away from and fears everything and endures nothing becomes a coward, while someone who fears nothing at all but goes out to confront everything becomes rash; similarly, someone who indulges in every pleasure and refrains from none becomes spoiled, while someone who shuns them all, like a boorish bumpkin, becomes in a certain way insensible. So temperance and courage are destroyed by excess and by deficiency, but are preserved by an intermediate condition.

30 But it is not only the case that the same things from which and by the action of which their coming into being and increase comes about, produce their destruction as well, but it is also in these same things that the being-at-work of the virtues will consist. For it is that way also in the more visible cases, such as that of strength, since strength comes about from taking in a lot of food and enduring a lot of labor, while it is especially the strong person who would be capable of doing these very things. And so it is in the case of the virtues as well, for by refraining from pleasures we become temperate, and once having become temperate we are most capable of refraining from them; and it 1104b is similar in the case of courage, for by habituating ourselves to disdain frightening things, and by enduring them, we become courageous, and having become courageous we shall be most capable of enduring frightening things.

10 **Chapter 3.** As a sign of the active states of one's soul, one must consider the pleasure or pain that accompanies one's deeds, for someone who refrains from bodily pleasures and delights in this very thing is temperate, but someone who does so while feeling burdened by it is spoiled, and someone who endures terrifying things and delights in them, or is at any rate not pained by them, is courageous, but someone who does so while being pained is a coward. For the sort of virtue that belongs to character is concerned with pleasures and pains, since it is on account of pleasure that we perform base actions, and on account of pain that we refrain from beautiful actions. Hence it is necessary to be brought up in some way straight from childhood, as Plato says, so as to take delight and feel pain in those things in which one ought, for this is the right education.²⁷

Also, if the virtues are concerned with actions and feelings, while

²⁷ This is what is called an education in music in Plato's *Republic*, and is discussed from 376E to 403C. Aristotle's reference is to 402A, where Socrates gives the reason for what contemporary readers call "censorship" of the stories and music children are allowed to hear. The point is not whether depictions of sex and violence, or music without grace, will make children act in certain ways, but that it will coarsen their sensibilities before they are able to make choices on their own.

pleasure or pain follows upon every feeling and every action, for this reason too virtue would be concerned with pleasures and pains. Punishments indicate this too, since they come about by means of these, for they are a certain kind of medicines, and medicines by their nature work through opposites. Also, as we said just now, every active condition of the soul is in its nature related to and concerned with the sorts of things by the action of which it naturally becomes worse or better, and it is by means of pleasures and pains that people become base, through pursuing and avoiding them, either the ones one ought not, or when one ought not, or in a way one ought not, or in as many other ways as such distinctions are articulated. This is also why people define the virtues as certain states of freedom from passion, and of calmness, but they do not define them well, because they say this simply but do not add "as one ought" and "as one ought not" and "when" and the rest.

Therefore, it is established that virtue of this sort is an aptitude productive of the best actions that concern pleasures and pains, and that vice is the opposite. And this might become evident to us from the following considerations that concern the same things. For since there are three things that lead to choices and three that lead to avoidance, the former being what is beautiful, what is advantageous, and what is pleasant, and the contraries being what is ugly, what is harmful, and what is painful, the good person is apt to go right and the bad person is apt to go astray concerning all of these, but especially concerning pleasure, for this is shared with the animals, and follows along with everything that comes by choice, since even the beautiful and the advantageous seem pleasant.²⁸ Also, this has grown up with us all from infancy, and for this reason it is difficult to scrub away this feeling, since it is ingrained in our life. And we measure our actions, some of us more, others less, against the yardstick of pleasure and pain. On account of this, then, it is necessary that our whole concern be about these things, for to be delighted or pained well or badly plays no small role in our actions. And it is even harder to fight against pleasure than Heracleitus says it is to fight against anger,²⁹ but artfulness and

²⁸ The word used here for choice has a reduced meaning that can apply to an animal-like act guided exclusively by imagination and aimed solely at pleasure. Note too, by the way, that Aristotle includes some of his most important observations in subordinate clauses within throw-away arguments; a spectacular example has occurred here, with the meaning of *good* being distinguished into its three primary senses. This picks up the question that was dismissed at 1096b 30, not with the precision that would carry it outside the inquiry about ethics, but with a definite dialectical step forward, and later observations will continue the upward motion from the evidence of human action toward a single governing meaning of the good.

²⁹ "It is hard to fight against anger, for what it wants to happen, it purchases

10 virtue always come to be concerned with what is more difficult, for it is better to do well at this. And so for this reason the whole concern both of virtue and of politics is about pleasures and pains, since one who deals with these well will be a good person, and one who deals with them badly will be bad.

Let it stand as stated, then, that virtue is concerned with pleasures and pains, that it grows by the action of those things out of which it comes into being, or is destroyed by them when they do not happen in the same way, and that it is at work in connection with those things out of which it has come into being.

Chapter 4. One might raise as an impasse, though, how we mean that it is necessary to become just by performing just actions and temperate by performing temperate actions, for if people do things that
20 are just or temperate they already are just or temperate people, just as, if they do the things that have to do with writing or with music, they are literate or musical people. Or is it not even this way in the case of the arts? For it is possible to produce something literate by chance or by being advised by someone else. One will be literate, then, only when one produces something literate and does so in a literate way, that is, in accordance with the art of writing within oneself. Anyway, it is not the same in the case of the arts as with the virtues, for the things that come into being by means of the arts have their being-well-made in themselves; it is sufficient for these to come into being in a certain condition. But with the things that come about as a result of the virtues,
30 just because they themselves are a certain way it is not the case that one does them justly or temperately, but only if the one doing them also does them being a certain way: if one does them first of all knowingly, and next, having chosen them and chosen them for their own sake, and third, being in a stable condition and not able to be moved all the way out of it.³⁰

1105b For having the other kinds of artfulness, these things do not count, except the mere knowing, but for having the virtues, the knowing is of little or no strength, while the other conditions have not a little but

in exchange for life" (Fragment 85 in the Diels numbering). Exactly what Heraclitus meant by *thumos*, translated here as "anger," is uncertain. In Plato's *Republic* (439E-441C), Socrates distinguishes it as the middle, spirited part of the soul, that can ally itself with either reason or desire to control the third part. The "musical" education Socrates prescribes, which Aristotle has called the right education at 1104b 13 above, is aimed at taming and winning over this irrationally spirited element straight from childhood.

³⁰ The last eleven words of the sentence translate Aristotle's marvelous adverb *ametakinêtos*; *akinêtos* would mean in the manner of someone immovable or rigid, but the added prefix makes it convey the condition of those toys that can be knocked over but always come back upright on their own, a flexible stability or equilibrium.

all the power, and they are the very ones which arise from repeatedly performing just or temperate actions. Thus, while the actions are called just or temperate whenever they are the sorts of things that a just or temperate person would do, the one who does them is not just or temperate unless he also does them in the way that just and temperate people do them. It is well said, then, that by performing just actions one becomes a just person and by performing temperate actions one becomes a temperate person, and no one is going to become good by not performing these actions. But most people do not perform them, but believe that by taking refuge in talk³¹ they are philosophizing and in that way will be people of serious stature, doing something similar to those sick people who listen to the doctors carefully but do none of the things they order. So just as they will be in no good condition in body if they treat themselves in this way, neither will those who philosophize in this way be in any good condition in soul.

Chapter 5. After these things, one must examine what virtue is. Now since there are three kinds of things that come to be present in the soul—feelings, predispositions, and active conditions—virtue would be one of these. And by feelings I mean desire, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, affection, hatred, yearning, jealousy, pity, and generally those things which are accompanied by pleasure or pain. It is the predispositions in accordance with which we are said to be apt to feel these, such as those by which we are predisposed to be angry or to be annoyed or to feel pity. And it is the active conditions in accordance with which we bear ourselves well or badly toward the feelings; for example, in relation to being angry, if we are that way violently or slackly, we bear ourselves badly, but if in a measured way, we bear ourselves well, and similarly in relation to other feelings.

Now neither virtues nor vices are feelings, because we are not said to be of serious or trifling moral stature as a result of our feelings, but we are said to be so as a result of our virtues and vices, and because we are neither praised nor blamed as a result of our feelings (for one is not praised for being afraid or for being angry, nor is one blamed simply for being angry, but for being so in a certain way), but we are praised or blamed as a result of our virtues and vices. Also, we are angry and frightened without choice, but the virtues are certain kinds of choices, or not present without choice. And on top of these things, as a result of the feelings we are said to be moved, but as a result of the virtues and vices we are said not to be moved but to be disposed in a certain way.

And for these reasons, the virtues and vices are not predispositions either, since we are not called good or bad, nor are we praised or

³¹ Aristotle's words here allude to something Socrates says in Plato's *Phaedo* at 99E, but are in no way intended to apply to him; Socrates ends that dialogue by accepting death in accordance with his philosophic talk, knowingly, by deliberate choice, and from a firm conviction.

10 blamed, simply for being predisposed to feel something. Also, we are predisposed by nature, but we do not become good or bad by nature; but we spoke about this before.³² So if the virtues are neither feelings nor predispositions, what remains is that they are active conditions. Therefore what virtue is, in the sense of the general class to which it belongs, has been said.

Chapter 6. But it is necessary to say not only this, that it is an active condition, but also what sort of active condition it is. And something one ought to state is that every virtue, as well as bringing that of which it is the virtue to completion in a good condition, also makes it yield work of a good kind, as the excellence of the eye makes both the eye and its work first-rate, since by means of the excellence of the eye we see well. 20 Similarly, the excellence of a horse both makes it a first-rate horse, and makes it good at running, at carrying its rider, and at holding still in the face of enemies. So if this is the way things are in all cases, then also the virtue of a human being would be the active condition from which one becomes a good human being and from which one will yield up one's own work well.

How this will be, we have already spoken of, but it will be clear in the following manner as well, if we examine what sort of nature virtue has. Now in everything continuous and divisible it is possible to take a greater amount, a lesser amount, or an equal measure, and these either on account of the thing itself or in relation to us, and the equal measure is a certain kind of mean between excess and deficiency. By a mean that 30 belongs to the thing, I am speaking of what holds a position equally apart from either of the extremes, which is one and the same thing for everyone, but the mean in relation to us is what neither goes too far nor falls short, and this is not one thing nor the same thing for everyone. For example, if ten are a lot and two are few, then six are a mean amount for those who take it according to the thing, since it both exceeds and is exceeded by an equal amount, and this is a mean according to the arithmetic proportion. But the mean in relation to us is not something 1106b one needs to take in this way, for it is not the case, if ten pounds is a lot for someone to eat and two pounds a little, that the gymnastic trainer will prescribe six pounds, for perhaps even this is a lot for the one who is going to take it, or a little. For it is a little to Milo,³³ but to someone beginning gymnastic training it is a lot. And it is similar with running and wrestling.

Now in this way everyone who has knowledge avoids excess and deficiency, but seeks the mean and chooses this, but not the mean that belongs to the thing but the mean in relation to us. So if every kind of knowledge accomplishes its work well in this way, by looking to

³² See 1103a18-32.

³³ Milo of Croton was the Olympic champion wrestler six times. Reports credited him with being able both to carry and to eat a whole ox.

the mean and guiding its works toward this (which is why people are accustomed to remark about works that are in a good condition that it is not possible either to take anything away from or to add anything to them, on the grounds that excess and deficiency destroy what is well made, but the mean condition preserves it; and good craftsmen, as we are saying, do their work looking toward this), while virtue is something more precise and better than any art, just as nature is, then virtue would be something apt to hit the mean.

I am speaking of virtue of character, for this is concerned with feelings and actions, and among these there is excess and deficiency, and the mean. For instance, it is possible to be afraid or be confident or to desire or be angry or feel pity, or in general to feel pleasure or feel pain 20 both more and less, and on both sides not in the right way; but to feel them when one ought, and in the cases in which, and toward the people whom, and for the reasons for the sake of which, and in the manner one ought is both a mean and the best thing, which is what belongs to virtue. And similarly, concerning actions also, there is excess and deficiency, and the mean. And virtue is concerned with feelings and actions, in which excess and deficiency go astray, while the mean is praised and gets them right, and both of these belong to virtue. Therefore, virtue is a certain kind of mean condition, since it is, at any rate, something that makes one apt to hit the mean. Also, it is possible to go wrong in many ways (for what is bad belongs to what is unlimited, as the Pythagoreans conjectured, and what is good belongs among what is limited), but there 30 is only one way to get something right (which is why the one is easy and the other is difficult, it being easy to miss the target and difficult to hit it); so for these reasons excess and deficiency belong to vice and the mean condition belongs to virtue,

For the good are good simply, but the bad are bad in every sort of way.

Therefore, virtue is an active condition that makes one apt at choosing, consisting in a mean condition in relation to us, which is determined by a proportion and by the means by which a person with practical judgment would determine it. And it is a mean condition between two vices, one resulting from excess and the other from deficiency, and is also a mean in the sense that the vices of the one sort fall short and those of the other sort go beyond what is appropriate both in feelings and in actions, while virtue both discovers and chooses the mean. Hence, in terms of its thinghood and the articulation that spells out what it is for it to be, virtue is a mean condition, but in terms of what is best and what is done well, it is an extreme. But not every action admits of a mean condition, nor does every feeling, for some of them as soon as they are named are understood as having baseness 1107a involved with them, such as joy at others' misfortunes, shamelessness, 10

and envy, and in the case of actions, adultery, stealing, and murder, for with all these things and things like them what is meant is that the things themselves are base, and not the excesses or deficiencies of them. There is, then, never any possibility of getting anything right about them, but one always goes astray, nor is there any doing well or not well about such things by committing adultery with the right woman and when and in the way one ought, but simply doing any of these things is to go wrong. It would be like believing that there was also a mean condition and an excess and deficiency concerned with being unjust or a coward or dissipated, for at that rate there would be a mean condition in excess and in deficiency, and an excess in excess and a deficiency in deficiency. But just as there is no excess or deficiency of temperance or courage, because the mean is in a certain way an extreme, so there is no mean condition or excess and deficiency of those other things, but however one does them one is in the wrong; in general there is no mean in excess, and in deficiency, nor any excess or deficiency of the mean condition.³⁴

Chapter 7. But it is necessary not just to speak of this universally, but also to apply it to the particulars, for in discourses about actions, those that are universal are common to more instances, but those that are about parts of the topic are more truthful, since actions are concerned with particulars, and discourse needs to harmonize with them. So one should take these from the list.³⁵ Now concerning fear and confidence, the mean condition is courage: of people who go to excess, the one who

³⁴ Failure to pay attention to this argument causes serious misunderstandings of what Aristotle intends by a mean. Since there cannot be too much courage, the mean is not a synonym for playing it safe; since there cannot be too little courage, it is a condition that, when present at all, is all-sufficient. A virtue such as courage is not a limited thing but the thing that confers limit on something else. It is in fear and confidence, and in the actions they lead to, that there can be excess and deficiency, but courage is not a position on the scale of fear and confidence. It is a condition of the soul in which one holds oneself, in which actions can be clearly envisioned and freely chosen without being determined by fear or confidence. These things gradually become more evident as the inquiry proceeds, but it should be clear at this point that a virtue, while it occupies a mean between vices and hits a mean in making choices, is not itself any kind of quantity.

³⁵ In 1220b-1221a of the *Eudemian Ethics*, there is a list of fourteen virtues of character alongside their corresponding vices of excess and deficiency. In the present chapter thirteen virtues (or quasi-virtues) of character, with their corresponding vices, are mentioned, but not displayed in a diagram. There are two minor virtues in each work that do not appear in the other (proper passion for honor and charm here, dignity and patience there), and one virtue taken in the *Eudemian Ethics* list as belonging to character (practical judgment) is treated in this work as an intellectual virtue. The avoidance of a diagram here seems deliberate, as Aristotle's stated purpose of attending to the particular virtues would be undermined by forcing them into too rigid an application of a general scheme.

exceeds in fearlessness is without a name (and many of these things are nameless), the one who exceeds in confidence is rash, and the one who exceeds in fearing but falls short in being confident is a coward.³⁶ Concerning pleasures and pains—though not all of them and less so concerning pains—the mean condition is temperance and the excess is dissipation. Those who fall short concerning pleasure don't turn up very often, for which reason they and their sort have not happened on a name, but let them be termed "insensible." Concerning giving and taking money, the mean condition is generosity, the excess and deficiency being wastefulness and stinginess. In the latter, people exceed and fall short in contrary ways, for the wasteful person exceeds in letting go of things but falls short in getting them, while the stingy person exceeds in getting and falls short in letting go. Though we are speaking now in outline and under headings, content with just this, more precise distinctions will be made later about these topics.

There are also other dispositions concerned with money, the mean condition being magnificence (for a magnificent person is different from a generous one, since the former is concerned with great things and the latter with small ones), the excess being gaudiness or vulgarity, and the deficiency being chintziness; and these differ from those that concern generosity, but in what way they differ will be said later. And concerning honor and dishonor, the mean condition is greatness of soul, the excess is spoken of as a certain sort of vanity, and the deficiency is smallness of soul, and as we were saying generosity was related to magnificence, differing by being concerned with small things, so too, related in that way to greatness of soul, which is concerned with great honor, there is a certain disposition which is concerned with small honor, for it is possible to have an appetite for honor in the way one ought and also more or less than one ought; the person who exceeds in such appetites is called passionate for honor, the one who falls short is said to be lacking the passion for honor, and the person at the mean is without a name. The dispositions too are without names, except that of the person passionate for honor, which is called the passion for honor, which shows that the people at the extremes claim the right to the mean territory, and we do the same; there are times when we call the person at the mean passionate for honor and times when we speak of such a person as lacking the passion for honor, and times when we praise the person who is passionate for honor, but times when we praise the person who lacks the passion for honor. The reason why we do this will be stated in what follows, but for now let us mention the rest of the virtues in the

³⁶ We might call the nameless type incautious. The threefold distinction suggests that we recognize someone as a coward whether he gets that way from too much fear or too little confidence, while we see rashness as overconfidence rather than under-cautiousness. See 1115b 24-1116a 9.

way we have been led along.³⁷

Concerning anger, there are also excess, deficiency, and a mean condition, and while they are pretty much without names, since we speak of the person at the mean as gentle, let us call the mean condition gentleness; of the extremes, let the person who exceeds be irritable and the vice irritability, and let the one who falls short be slow to anger and the deficiency slowness to anger. And there are three other mean conditions, that have some likeness to each other but differ from one another, for while they are all concerned with communal life in words and actions, they differ because one is concerned with what is true in them and the others with what is pleasant; of the latter, one sort occurs in playfulness and the other in all things in the course of life. So one ought to speak about these also, in order that we might see more clearly that the mean condition is praised in everything, while the extremes are neither praised nor are they right, but they are blamed. Now most of these are also without names, but we ought to try, as in the other cases, to make up names ourselves for the sake of clarity and to make it easy to follow.

Concerning truth, then, one who is at the mean is a truthful person, and let the mean condition be called truthfulness; pretence in the direction of exaggeration is bragging and the one who has it is a braggart, while pretence in the direction of understatement is irony and the one who has it is ironic. Concerning what is pleasant in playfulness, the person at the mean is charming and the disposition is charm, the excess is buffoonery and one who has it is a buffoon, and the one who falls short is a certain sort of boor and the active condition is boorishness. Concerning the remaining sort of pleasantness in life, the one who is pleasant in the way one ought to be is friendly and the mean condition is friendliness,³⁸ the one who goes to excess, if it is for no purpose, is

³⁷ This phrase implies following the "beaten path" of popular or conventional opinion, though commentators often twist it to mean Aristotle's own "usual method." In the *Politics* (1256a 2, b 15-22), the beaten path of opinion is Aristotle's warrant for accepting a kind of teleology at variance from his own opinions, as these are developed in all his theoretical works. Political inquiry does not impose philosophic conclusions on human communities, but studies people who have certain ineradicable opinions. In the *Parts of Animals* (643b 11), the beaten path is Aristotle's guide to the natural, though not neatly logical, classification of animals. Here in the study of ethics, the recognition that excellence of character is always a mean between opposite vices is like the popular classification of animals as birds, fish, and so on; Aristotle takes it as deeply revealing, not the whole story, and not to be taken as having logical precision or pushed to extremes.

³⁸ In Bk. IV, Chap. 6, this is said to be a nameless virtue that resembles friendship. The full treatment of friendship and its relation to action, character, and feeling occupies Bks. VIII and IX.

obsequious, but if it is for his own advantage, he is a flatterer, and the one who falls short and is unpleasant in everything is a certain sort of contrary person and hard to get along with.

And there are also mean conditions among and involving the feelings, for while a sense of shame is not a virtue, the person with a sense of shame is also praised, since even in these matters one sort of person is spoken of as a mean, and another sort as going to excess, as the shy person is ashamed about everything; the one who falls short, or is ashamed about nothing at all, is shameless, while the one at the mean is the person with a sense of shame. Righteous indignation is a mean condition between joy at the misfortunes of others and envy, which are concerned with pain and pleasure at what occurs among those who happen to be one's neighbors, for the person inclined toward righteous indignation is pained at those who fare well without deserving it, while the envious person, exceeding that, is pained at all those who fare well, and the one who takes joy in others' misfortune falls so far short of being pained as to be delighted. But there will be a fitting occasion concerning these things in another place; and concerning justice, since it is not meant in a single sense, after distinguishing these we will speak about the way in which both its kinds are mean conditions.³⁹

Chapter 8. Since there are three dispositions, two of them vices, one resulting from excess and the other from deficiency, and one of them a virtue, the mean condition, they are all in some way opposite to all; for the extremes are opposite both to the mean and to one another, while the mean is opposite to the extremes. Just as the equal amount is greater in relation to the lesser and less in relation to the greater, so too the mean active conditions exceed in relation to the deficiencies and fall short in relation to the excesses in both feelings and actions. For the courageous person appears rash in relation to the coward and cowardly in relation to the rash person, and similarly the temperate person appears dissipated in relation to the insensible person and insensible in relation to the dissolute person, and the generous person appears wasteful in relation to the stingy person and stingy in relation to the wasteful person. Hence the people at each of the extremes push the person at the mean away toward the other extreme, and the coward calls the courageous person rash while the rash person calls him a coward, and analogously

³⁹ The two sorts of mean mentioned in this paragraph are only quasi-virtues, mere habits or predispositions of feeling. Righteous indignation (*nemesis*) is the natural basis of justice, evident in the child's heartfelt protest "that's not fair," but it is not a developed state of character that disposes one toward right choices. It is not mentioned again, but is superseded by the discussion of justice in Bk. V. A sense of shame is discussed again in Bk. IV, Chap. 9, but as a temporary stage of development that people need to grow out of. All the other active states identified in this chapter as virtues are discussed at greater length in Bks. III and IV.

in the other cases.⁴⁰ But while these are opposed to one another in this way, the greatest contrariety belongs to the extremes in relation to one another rather than to the mean, for these stand farther apart from one another than from the mean, just as the great is farther from the small and the small from the great than the two of them are from the equal. Also, a certain likeness to the mean shows up in some of the extremes, as in rashness in relation to courage or in wastefulness in relation to generosity, while in the extremes in relation to one another there is the greatest unlikeness; but things standing at the greatest remove from one another are defined as contraries, so that the things standing at the greater remove would be the more contrary.

In comparison with the mean it is in some cases the deficiency that is more opposite, but in other cases the excess; for example, in relation to courage it is not rashness, which is the excess, that is more opposite, but cowardice, which is the deficiency, but in relation to temperance it is not insensibility, which is the lack, that is more opposite, but dissipation, which is the excess. This turns out to be the case for two reasons, one of which comes from the thing itself, for on account of one extreme's being nearer to and more like the mean, we do not place this but its contrary as more opposite to the mean; for example, since rashness seems to be more like courage and nearer to it, while cowardice seems more unlike it, we set the latter down as more opposite, since the things that stand at a greater remove from the mean seem to be more contrary to it. This, then, is one reason, coming from the thing itself, but the other reason comes from us ourselves, for those things toward which we ourselves tend more by nature in any way appear more contrary to the mean. For example, we ourselves tend more by nature toward pleasures, on account of which we are more easily carried away toward dissipation than toward orderliness. So we more so call those things contrary toward which the extra tendency occurs more, and for this reason dissipation, which is the excess, is more contrary to temperance.

Chapter 9. It has been said sufficiently, then, that virtue of character is a mean condition, and in what way, namely because it is a mean between two kinds of vice, the one resulting from excess and the other from deficiency, and that it is such a mean condition on account of being apt to hit the mean in feelings and actions. And this is why it is work to be of serious moral stature, since in each kind of thing it is work to get hold of the mean; for instance, to take the center of a circle belongs not to everyone but to one who knows something, and so too, while getting angry, or giving and spending money, belong to everyone and are easy, to whom and how much and when and for what purpose and in what way to do these things are no longer in everyone's power, nor

⁴⁰ A powerful historical example of this may be found in Thucydides's account of a civil war in Corcyra, in Bk. III, Chap. 82 of *The Peloponnesian War*.

are they easy; for this reason what is done well is rare and praiseworthy and beautiful.

Hence the one who aims at the mean ought first to pull back from what is more contrary to it, just as Calypso advises,⁴¹

Keep the ship out beyond that thick spray and swell,

for of the extremes the one is a greater error, the other a lesser. Since then, to hit the mean with extreme precision is a difficult thing, as the second best way to sail,⁴² as people say, one ought to take the least of the evils, and this will be most the case in the way which we are speaking of. Also, one ought to consider what we ourselves are carried away toward, since different people are of a nature to incline toward different things, and this will be recognizable from the pleasure or pain that comes about in our own case. We ought then to drag ourselves over toward the opposite side, for by pulling far away from going wrong we will come to the mean, the very thing that people do who straighten warped pieces of lumber. And in everything one must guard most against the pleasant thing and against pleasure, for we do not judge it without bribes. So exactly the way the town elders felt toward Helen, we ought to feel toward pleasure, and to think over in every instance what they said, for by sending it off in that way we shall go astray less.⁴³

By doing these things, then, to say it in summary, we shall be most able to hit the mean. But this no doubt is difficult, and especially in

⁴¹ The line is spoken by Odysseus to his men at XII, 219 of the *Odyssey*, as a result of Circe's advice to him in lines 106-110 that he would lose six men near Scylla but lose everyone near Charybdis. (Calypso's advice to him to keep the North star always on his left when he sailed from Ogygia is at V, 276-7. The order and location of events in the first half of the *Odyssey* are notoriously difficult to keep straight.)

⁴² This is generally taken to mean that, when the wind fails, one sails in the second best way by rowing. A famous occurrence of this metaphor is in Plato's *Phaedo*, at 99D.

⁴³ At III, 156-160 of the *Iliad*, the old men of Troy say, in effect, let her beauty exert its power somewhere else. At 398A of the *Republic*, Plato elaborates the same message toward Homer himself, that a poet so holy, wondrous, and pleasant must be sent off, crowned and anointed, to some other city.

The three pieces of general advice in this paragraph are extensively referred to in the secondary literature as "rules." This goes back at least to the footnotes in John Burnet's 1900 text of this work, creeps even into the translation in the Loeb edition, and then turns up in later commentary as though it had been Aristotle's own word. But Aristotle uses the word rule (*kanôn*) only in two places in this work, and only in order to say that there can be no such thing in ethics; the only rule is the judgment of a good human being (1113a 33), because a rule applied to particulars would need to be flexible (1137b 29-32), that is, not a straightedge at all. In the course of this inquiry, as the understanding of pleasure is progressively deepened, major exceptions to the second and third of the generalizations given here will emerge.

particular cases, for it is not easy to determine how and with whom and on what sort of grounds and for how much time one ought to be angry, and we sometimes praise those who underdo it and call them gentle, while at other times we praise those who are severe by proclaiming them manly. But the person who deviates a little from what is done well is not blamed, whether the deviation is toward the more or toward the less, but someone who deviates more is blamed for it, since this person does not escape notice. But at what point and for how much of a deviation one is to be blamed is not easy to determine by a formulation, for no other perceptible thing is either; such things are in the particulars, and the judgment is in the perceiving. Therefore this much is clear: that while the mean active condition is praised in all things, one ought to incline away from it sometimes toward the excess and sometimes toward the deficiency, for in that way we shall most easily hit the mark of the mean and of what is done well.

BOOK III

Chapter 1. Now since virtue is concerned with feelings and actions, and praise and blame come about for willing actions, but for unwilling actions there is forgiveness and sometimes even pity, it is no doubt a necessary thing for those who inquire about virtue to distinguish what is a willing act and what is an unwilling act, and it is a useful thing for lawmakers as well, with a view to honors and punishments. Now it seems that unwilling acts are the ones that happen by force or through ignorance, a forced act being one of which the source is external, and an act is of this sort in which the person acting, or acted upon, contributes nothing, for instance if a wind carries one off somewhere, or people do who are in control. But with respect to those things that are done through fear of greater evils, or for the sake of something beautiful—for instance if a tyrant who was in control of one's parents and children were to order one to do some shameful thing, and in the case of one's doing it they would be saved but as a result of one's not doing it they would be killed—there is some dispute whether they are willing or unwilling.

Something of this sort happens also in connection with things thrown overboard in a storm, for no one simply throws them away willingly, but all those who have any sense do so for their own safety and that of the rest of the people aboard. Such actions then are mixed, but they are more like willing acts, since at the time when they are done they are preferred, and the end for which an action takes place is in accordance with its occasion. So one has to say what is willing or unwilling at the time when someone does it, and one does things of this sort willingly, for the source of the moving of the parts that are instrumental in such actions is in oneself, and anything of which the source is in oneself is also up to oneself either to do or not. So things

of this sort are willing acts, though in an unqualified sense they would perhaps be unwilling acts, since no one would choose any such thing for itself.

Sometimes people are even praised for actions of this sort, when they endure something shameful or painful in return for things that are great and beautiful, and conversely they might be blamed, since enduring things that are exceedingly shameful for no beautiful object, or for one only moderately beautiful, belongs to a person of low moral stature. For some things, while no praise is forthcoming, there is forgiveness, when one does what one ought not to do on account of motives of this sort, when they strain human nature too far, and no one could endure them.⁴⁴ Yet some things perhaps it is not possible to be forced to do, but one ought instead to die suffering the most terrible things, for the things that force the Alcmaeon of Euripides to kill his mother seem ridiculous.⁴⁵ But it is difficult sometimes to distinguish what sort of thing should be chosen in return for what, and what should be endured for what, and still more difficult for those who have discerned it to abide by what they have chosen, since for the most part the things one anticipates are painful and the things they force one to do are shameful, which is why praise and blame come about according as people are or are not forced.

So what sort of thing ought one to say is forced? In an unqualified sense, is it not what is done whenever the cause is in external things and the one acting contributes nothing? But with those things that are in themselves unwilling acts, but are chosen in the present circumstances and in return for these particular ends, and their source is in the one acting, while they are unwilling acts in themselves, in the present circumstances and in return for these particular ends they are willing acts. But they are more like willing acts, since actions are in the particulars, and with respect to these they are willing acts. But it is not easy to give an account of what sort of things one ought to choose in return for what sort of ends, since there are many differences among the particular circumstances.

But if someone claims that things that are pleasant or beautiful are sources of compulsion (for they exert force while being external),

⁴⁴ These conditions amount to a definition of forgiveness (*sun-gnômê*): it is a judgment, made by putting oneself in another's place in imagination, that the other person's action was wrong, but only for reasons no human being could be expected to overcome.

⁴⁵ The play is lost, but fragments indicate the following chain of reasons for the killing: his father's command, accompanied by curses, when he was dying at Thebes, where he fought as one of the seven allies because his wife persuaded him to, because in turn she was bribed with a necklace. One might contrast this with the several strong reasons that converge to drive the Orestes of Aeschylus to the same act (*Libation Bearers*, 299-305).