

thing it is or what sorts of things it is concerned with; otherwise they would not class it as the same as, or even inferior to, rhetoric, nor would they think it is an easy thing for someone to make laws by collecting the laws that are well thought of, since he would be able to pick out the best ones, as if picking them out did not require understanding, and judging them rightly were not a very great task, as it would be in matters pertaining to music. For it is those who have experience with each sort of thing who judge its works rightly, and understand by what means and in what manner they are achieved, and what sorts of things harmonize with what others; for those who lack experience, it is good enough if they do not fail to notice whether the work is well or badly made, as in the case of painting.

The laws seem to be the works of the political art. How then could anyone become skilled in lawmaking from these, or judge the best ones? For it is manifest that people do not even become medical doctors from textbooks, even though these attempt to state not only the treatments, but also the manner in which one might cure people and how one needs to treat each sort, distinguishing them by their conditions; while these writings seem to be of benefit to people with experience, to those who have no knowledge they are useless. So perhaps collections of laws and constitutions would be useful to those who are capable of examining them and judging what is good or the contrary, and what sorts of things harmonize with what; but for those who, lacking that active capacity, go through such things, it would not be possible to judge them well except spontaneously, though perhaps one might become more astute about them. Since, then, what has to do with lawmaking has been left undiscovered by those who have gone before, perhaps it would be better to examine it ourselves instead, and to examine what has to do with a political constitution as a whole, in order that the philosophic inquiry about human things might be brought to completion as far as is in our power.

First, then, if anything partial has been well said by our predecessors, let us try to go through it, and then, on the basis of the collection of constitutions, to look at what sorts of things preserve and destroy cities, and what sorts do so for each sort of constitution, and for what reasons some are governed well and others are the reverse. For when these things have been examined, perhaps we might also have more insight into what sort of constitution is best, and how each sort is best arranged, and by using what laws and customs. So having made a beginning, let us discuss it.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ This paragraph is a rough description of Aristotle's *Politics*. He is believed to have had descriptions of 158 constitutions, all of which were lost until a copy of his *Constitution of Athens* was discovered in Egypt in 1890. It is worth noting that, while this last sentence links the two works, the *Nicomachean Ethics* is one of the most polished writings of Aristotle that we possess, while the *Politics* is one of the least.

GLOSSARY

Note: This is not a complete glossary, but an explanation of some of the words used in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that are most important or most easily misunderstood. The same Greek word is not always translated in the same way; the range of meanings of a Greek word is never matched exactly by that of any English word, and different contexts bring different parts of such a range to the foreground. In some rare cases, as with "active condition" and "temperance," a word is translated in a rigidly consistent way to avoid confusion with a related, but importantly distinct, word. More often, even if complete consistency were possible, it would itself be misleading by suggesting that connotations of the English words could be attributed to Aristotle. In general, then, the English word given in bold type is only the predominant translation used, and in one case ("speech") it is a translation used only once, but for the meaning that is at the root of all the rest.

active condition (*hexis*) Any way in which one deliberately holds oneself in relation to feelings and desires (1105b 25-26), once it becomes a constant part of oneself. For example, fear is a feeling, and lack of confidence is a predisposition to feel fear; both are passive conditions. Courage or confidence are active conditions one may develop toward them. One's character is made up of active conditions. Hence this is one of the most important words in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and the foundation of Aristotle's understanding of human responsibility (1114b 21-23). It is sometimes mistranslated as "habit" because, in the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas read a Latin translation of Aristotle that used *habitus* for *hexis* and *mos* for habit (*ethos*). The confusion that has resulted persists even when *hexis* is translated as "disposition" or "state," words that are too general since they can mean something passively present as well as something actively achieved. A habit is a necessary precondition for the formation of an active condition (1104b 8-13, 1179b 24-26), but there is all the difference in the world between the two.

base (*phaulos*) Of low or corrupt character, or having a shallow and flighty attitude toward things that deserve respect; opposite to anyone or anything of serious worth (*spoudaios*).

beautiful, the (*to kalon*) The good that is chosen for its own sake (1176b 8-9), and hence the highest form of good, taking precedence over the advantageous and the pleasant; the end that determines all virtue of character (1115b 12-13, 1122b 6-7). The word is usually translated elsewhere as "the noble" to avoid "aesthetic" implications, but the Greek uses the word in exactly the way we might say "that was a beautiful thing you did," and Aristotle is emphatic that such a thing can be recognized only by sense-perception (*aisthēsis*; 1109b

23, 1126b 4). The beautiful is what makes an action right, in the same sense in which a painting or poem or musical composition might get everything exactly right. Aristotle considers the recognition of things well made by the arts to be a special case of the more precise and primary recognition of work well accomplished and action well performed (1106b 8-18), in which the quality of what is done is not separable from that of the person doing it (1105a 26-31). See also the entry for *the good*.

being-at-work (*energeia*) The central notion in all of Aristotle's philosophy, the activity by which anything is what it is. To understand any of Aristotle's inquiries is to grasp the centrality in it of being-at-work. In the *Metaphysics*, everything that is derives from and depends upon the things that have their being only by constant activity. In the *Physics*, nature is not explainable by material but only by the formative activities always at-work in material. In *On the Soul*, a soul is not a detachable being but the being-at-work-staying-itself of an organized body. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, everything depends upon the idea of an active condition (*hexis*) that can be formed by a deliberately repeated way of being-at-work, and that can in turn set free the being-at-work of all the human powers for the act of choice (Bk. II, Chaps. 2-3). For example, actions that belong to courage must be performed before one can become courageous; after the active condition is formed, actions that belong to courage spring from it, not as dead habit but from the full and unimpeded presence of active thinking and desiring.

blessed (*makarios*) Happy to the maximum extent, for which all the external goods of fortune, such as health, riches, and a flourishing family, are necessary but not sufficient conditions (1099a 29-b 8).

character (*êthos*) A stable condition of the soul that makes someone apt to choose in a consistent way (1111b 5-6, 1139a 33-35; compare 1105a 29-33). The word refers only to active conditions determined by deliberate choices to form oneself in particular ways, and never to a mere temperament or natural disposition. Since feelings arise spontaneously, and desires are influenced by habits formed early in life, before one is in a position to choose, character involves taking hold of the things toward which one has been passive, and forming the rational and irrational parts of the soul into a single whole. Particular states of character may be either virtues or vices.

charm (*eutrapelia*) A flexible capacity to speak gracefully and appropriately to others on occasions of relaxation (Bk. IV, Chap. 8), a minor virtue of character. The word is usually translated elsewhere as wit, but the emphasis is not on the content of one's speech, but on one's adroitness at suiting it to the occasion and to the pleasure of those who are at hand.

choice (*proairesis*) Desire informed by deliberation, or thinking infused with desire, and hence an act of the whole human being, in which neither the rational nor the irrational part is superior (1139b 4-5). If desire predominates, one merely takes one thing in preference to others, as an animal or small child

might, but deliberation allows one to take a course in the light of alternatives not immediately present and of long-term consequences not obvious at the moment. If rationally determined principles or rules predominate, desires may be left unsatisfied; hence the only "rule" that can make choice be right is the judgment of a person of good character, whose desires are neither excessive nor corrupted (1113a 29-33).

cleverness (*deinotês*) The ability to reason well from ends to means. Mere cleverness, ungoverned by clarity about ends, is therefore no advantage to its possessor, since it can bring about ruin more effectively. It is one component of practical judgment (1144a 23-29).

contemplation (*theôria*) The being-at-work of the intellect, a thinking that is like seeing, complete at every instant. In contemplation a human being is most fully active, in that the power underlying all thinking and perceiving has emerged, but also most at rest in what is knowable. Contemplation is discussed in detail in the *Metaphysics* (1072b 14-30) and in *On the Soul* (408b 1-32, 430a 10-25); in the *Nicomachean Ethics* it is painstakingly uncovered as the most complete human happiness (1177b 19-1179a 30). The relation between contemplation and the virtues of character is best explained in the *Physics* (247b 1-248a 6); to come to rest in contemplation, a human being must overcome the disorder of the soul native to it from childhood.

courage (*andreia*) An achieved condition by which one is apt to choose to endure frightening things, and even the risk of death, when it is a beautiful thing to do so (1115b 7-13). It is not a lack of fear but a capacity to keep fear in proportion and not be ruled by it. Aristotle's careful distinction of courage, in Bk. III, Chap. 8, from the many things that resemble it, provides a model of what constitutes a virtue of character.

decency (*epieikeia*) A sense for what is appropriate. In Bk. V, Chap. 10, Aristotle focuses on decency as the attribute by which people recognize when particular circumstances call for a departure from strict justice, or from any general rules. In that chapter, the word is often translated elsewhere as "equity" in the technical legal sense of that word, but this is misleading, since Aristotle is describing something that goes beyond what is equitable (*to ison*). Decency is one of Aristotle's most frequent ways of naming human goodness.

dissipation (*akolasia*) The vice by which one deliberately chooses to be, or acquiesces in being, someone who indulges in the pleasures of eating, drinking, and sex whenever they are available (1146b 22-23). It differs from mere weakness or lack of restraint (*akrasia*) by being an active condition and part of one's character. The word is related to the meaning of a "spoiled" child (1119a 33-b 7). Desires not brought under control by choice beginning in childhood become the foundation of a slavish kind of life (1118a 23-25), ruled by irrational impulses. "Dissipation" is not an ideal translation, but it

seems better than the usual alternatives, which are either obsolete (profligacy), quaint (licentiousness), or too weak (intemperance). It is used consistently here to distinguish the vice from the state of weakness; it captures something of the way in which the vice of deliberate overindulgence puts a human soul at variance with itself (1166b 19-22).

end (*telos*) That for the sake of which anything comes to be or is done, frequently connected with the metaphor of an archer's target, but most importantly, by the root sense of the word, the wholeness in which something comes to completion. In the non-human world, anything that maintains itself in wholeness has its end in being itself. For human beings, ends may also appear as purposes, things chosen in advance that, when accomplished, bring actions to completion. The *Nicomachean Ethics* begins by identifying the meaning of the good, in its broadest sense, with the end at which anything aims.

equality (*isotês*) A governing notion for both justice and friendship. It is used in a broader sense than mere sameness of quantity, to include sameness of ratios. In the case of justice, numerical equality is the standard only for judicial penalties, which seek to undo harm (1132a 2-6); distributive justice, which governs the awarding by a community of honors and of goods from the common supply, goes by proportional equality, apportioning the distribution in accord with what is deserved (1131a 25-32), and the justice that gets things straight in voluntary exchange looks to reciprocal equality, in which quantity is inversely proportional to the worth of what is exchanged (1132b 31-33). In the case of friendship, equality as sameness of character is the aim of friendships based on virtue (1159b 2-5), while friendships of people in inherently unequal conditions are preserved by proportional equality, in which benefits on one side are matched by affection, gratitude, and honor on the other (1158b 23-28, 1163b 1-12). In all human things, measurement is a bringing of qualitative differences under quantitative metaphors (1132b 10-20, 1133b 18-20), where the greatest precision comes from the judgment of a decent and experienced person (1137b 26-32).

forgiveness (*sun-gnomê*) A judgment, made by putting oneself in another's place in imagination, that the other person's action was wrong, but only for reasons that no human being could be expected to overcome (1110a 23-26), appropriate when the other person indicates by remorse and regret that the action was unwilling (1110b 18-19, 1111a 1-2). The word is translated as compassion in Bk. VI, Chap. 11, where it is used more broadly for the thoughtful discernment involved in all decent treatment of others.

fraternal association (*hetairikê*) A social club of young rich men. At the time of the Peloponnesian War, these groups in Athens were antidemocratic political parties that took part in oligarchic governments, and one of which was suspected of sacrilegious vandalism in a major scandal. In Aristotle's time they were banned from political activity, and he treats them as outgrowths of the bond between brothers, friendships for pleasure of leisured young men

alike in age and tastes. "Comrade" (*Itetairos*), a general word for a fellow worker or fellow soldier or sailor, is most often used in Bk. VIII to refer to a fellow member of such a club.

friendship (*philia*) Any association of people who spend time and do things together, share in pains and pleasures, and wish for each other's good (1166a 1-10). The Greek word takes in all love felt and practiced toward family members, fellow countrymen, and generally those like oneself. Aristotle finds its highest form in the attachment between people of good character, present in each for the sake of the being and well-being of the other, while friendships for the sake of pleasure or usefulness are partial and less enduring. The treatment of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is longer than that of any other topic, and comes just before the conclusion of the whole inquiry. Books VIII and IX are continuous, but the break makes the first book focus on friendship as a small version of the political community, in which a bond stronger than justice holds people together, while the second treats it as an expansion of the self, through which all one's powers can approach their highest development. Friendship thus provides a bridge between the virtues of character and those of intellect.

good, the (*to agathon*) That at which anything aims, and by which it becomes fully and properly itself. The good of a changeable thing: other than a human being is achieved by natural development, when all suitable conditions are present and nothing impedes it. The good of a human being must be secured by intelligence, choice, and effort. The question whether there is a single human good that governs and determines all subordinate goods is dismissed at 1096b 26-31 as an explicit topic, but the whole of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is a gradual ascent to its discovery. The kinds of good chosen are distinguished at 1104b 30-31 as the advantageous, the pleasant, and the beautiful. At 1110b 9-11, the advantageous drops out as subordinate to the other two. At 1148a 22-25, pleasures are ranked as better and worse in accord with the beautiful. At 1169a 8-11, it is said that the greatest of goods is achieved by aiming at the beautiful in action, and throughout the inquiry the beautiful is present in the guise of that which is simply for its own sake. In the *Metaphysics* (1072a 19-b 4), the beautiful that is beyond appearance is identified with the divine intellect, which is responsible for the formative identities that make each thing what it is.

greatness of soul (*megalopsuchia*) The well-founded attitude that one is worthy of great things. It is variously translated elsewhere as "pride," "magnanimity," or "high-mindedness," but these words all miss part of its meaning, which applies both to people like Achilles who do not tolerate insults and people like Socrates who do not care about good or bad fortune (*Posterior Analytics*, 97b 14-26). Book IV, Chap. 3, in which Aristotle discusses greatness of soul, is a model of his dialectical approach to ethics, disentangling what is worthwhile in what might otherwise be a merely contemptuous attitude

toward others held by an aristocrat or "elitist." In the course of the chapter, Aristotle shows that those who are greatly concerned with honor ought to consider honor itself something small (1124a 4-19), and that those who are genuinely serious must take few things seriously (1125a 9-16). The lengthy treatment Aristotle gives it elevates greatness of soul to the status of a fifth cardinal virtue, alongside courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom, but its position in the inquiry makes it the lowest of four kinds of active lives that organize all the virtues around one center (1123b 33-1124a 3), superseded successively by justice (1129b 25-27), practical judgment (1144b 30-1145a 2), and friendship (1157a 18-19, 29-31).

habit (*ethos*) Anything that is done because it has been done many times before (1103a 19-23). The study of ethics is about the things that have to do with character (*êthos*), not about socially approved habits, or habits of any kind. Character consists of active conditions, which are not habits, though they require habits as preconditions (1179b 23-26) before they can be brought about by thinking, understanding, and choice. Hence virtues are never habits, and the habits that lead to them are not arbitrarily variable, but require a natural foundation (1103a 23-26). For example, acts that are naturally just (Bk. V, Chap. 7) must be performed in particular ways that vary with local habits and customs, giving rise to the mistaken opinion that justice is merely relative or conventional.

happiness (*eudaimonia*) The condition at which any human being aims, generally taken to result from something obvious such as pleasure, wealth, or honor (1095a 22-23), but argued by Aristotle to be some being-at-work of the soul in accordance with all the virtues, or with the best and most complete of them, that endures throughout life (1098a 16-18), and that fulfills our characteristic capacity as thinking beings (1098a 3-4). The best and most complete virtue is finally discovered to be contemplative wisdom (1177a 12-18), but as part of a human life it is inseparable from friendship and from all the virtues of character (1170b 8-14, 1178b 5-7).

honor (*timê*) The good opinion of others and the display of it in prizes, awards, and political offices. In Bk. I, Chap. 12, Aristotle distinguishes honor, which is bestowed upon the highest goods and those who embody them, and always looks upward, from praise, which is given to those who measure up to some standard, and always implies one's own superior fitness to judge. Honor is the highest aim sought in competitive athletics and in political life, and by people who regard success in life as a competition. Aristotle considers the desire for honor a sign that one has risen above the shallowest belief in happiness as bodily enjoyment, but still as a secondary good, since it is unstable and is always given on account of some perceived excellence, which would be the more primary good even if it were unrecognized by others (1095b 22-31). The Greek word does not have the meaning we sometimes intend by speaking of a sense of honor as an internal standard for self-respect. The

sense of one's own worth, when this is both accurate and considerable, is called greatness of soul. The word honor always implies something external; at 1123b 20-21 it is called the greatest of external goods, but this conclusion is overturned at 1159a 25-26 and 1169b 8-10.

impasse (*aporía*) A logical stalemate or paradox that brings one's thinking to a stop. Sophistical reasoning seeks to produce impasses as a display of cleverness, but they are necessary starting points for genuine inquiry; when one is stuck at an impasse, the only way forward is a new perspective or deeper formulation (1146a 21-27, b 6-8). In Aristotle's *Physics*, the definition of motion is a powerful achievement that resolves the impasses of Zeno's paradoxes. In Bk. VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, impasses about unrestraint lead to a deeper understanding of vice; in Bks. VIII and IX, impasses about friendship (1155b 8-13, 1168a 28-29) lead to a distinction of its kinds, and a deepened understanding of virtue.

intellect (*nous*) The direct contemplative beholding of the sources of knowledge (1141a 7-8), that gets hold of the universal within any particular perception (1139b 28-29). Hence, as grasping the highest unarticulated sources of thinking, intellect is at the opposite extreme from the perception of ultimate particulars (1142a 25-27), but since this grasping is not abstraction but an openness to that which organizes those very particulars into wholes, intellect unites those extremes (1143a 35-b 5). Grasping the particular as an example of the universal (*epagôgê*), usually mistranslated elsewhere as "induction," is not a gathering of instances but a contemplative act by which intellect stands at the root of both theoretical and practical knowing, being at once the starting point of wisdom's reasoned knowledge (1141b 2-3) and the experienced eye for particulars of someone with practical judgment (1143b 13-14).

irony (*eirônía*) The gracious vice, associated especially with Socrates, of understating one's own merits; if those merits are small and obvious, understating them becomes ludicrous (1127b 22-31). The profound meaning of the word, for the various ways of speaking on more than one level at once, is a later development; the vague use of the word for anything from coincidence to paradox is a recent degeneration.

justice (*dikaíosunê*) Most properly, an active condition of the soul by which one chooses neither more nor less than one's fair share of those goods that one can have only by depriving others of them; this is the justice that is a part of virtue, but the word is also used for the whole of virtue, regarded as a relation toward other people (1129b 26-27). In the latter sense, justice is a willing acceptance of the laws of the community as governing one's own life (1129b 12-19). In the former sense, justice is again subdivided into its various manifestations: in the distribution of honor and of a community's common supply of possessions in proportion to what people deserve (1130b 30-33, 1131a 25-29); in the equitable judgment of penalties for those who wrong others in any way and thus gain undeserved advantage (1132a 6-14); and in

the equitable reciprocal exchange of commodities and services (1132b 31-34). All the forms of justice in its particular sense are opposed to greed (*pleonexia*), the desire to have more of some good thing than one deserves (1129b 1-10), and hence justice involves quantitative judgments, even when the things judged are not strictly measurable. (See the entry for *equality*.) This quasi-mathematical aspect of justice means that the judgments that govern choices of what is just do not look to what is beautiful (compare 1133b 32-33), even though Aristotle calls that the end aimed at by all virtue of character. What is just is superceded in particular cases by what is decent (Bk. V, Chap. 10), and justice itself, as the necessary foundation of shared life, is superceded by friendship, which does look toward the beautiful (1155a 22-30).

knowledge (*epistêmê*) An active condition of the soul by which one is convinced, by explicit reasoning from some source of evidence, that something is invariably the case (Bk. VI, Chap. 3). There are kinds of knowledge (*epistêmai*) concerned with various topics, but the usual translation "sciences" carries connotations that are not part of Aristotle's meaning, of an experimental method of discovery, or that precision is possible only by means of mathematics, or that a body of propositions as opposed to an active condition of the soul can contain knowledge (1147a 10-24). Knowledge becomes wisdom (*sophia*) when its sources are grasped by the contemplative intellect (*nous*, 1141a 18-20); it is a necessary component of skilled making (*technê*) and of deliberate choice, since both depend in part on a rational understanding of something invariable within their material or circumstances (1139a 27-b 1), but these capacities work with things that can be other than they are, and require a know-how that comes from experience, while the latter also requires a judgment that depends on good character.

mean (*meson*) The balanced choice that precisely achieves its end (1106b 8-16). In matters of feeling and action its precision is not quantitative, or subject to calculation, but a judgment made directly by sense-perception (1109b 23, 1126b 3-4), looking to what is beautiful (1115b 12-13, 1122b 6-7). Every virtue of character is a reliable capacity to discern and choose the mean in connection with some kind of feelings and actions, and is therefore itself a mean condition (*mesotês*) between vices of excess and deficiency, but the virtue is never something middling, mediocre, or moderated, but a maximum condition (1106b 36-1107a 8, 22-23) in which all the human powers of thinking and desire are present and free to work together (1139a 22-26, b 4-5). The balanced or whole human being is therefore not a slave to pleasure, fear, or greed, nor one who must hold all desires and aversions rigidly in control, but one who is free to choose what is truly desirable by seeing things as they are (1113a 29-b 2).

ought (*dei*) An impersonal verb signifying what is needed in any situation or circumstances. What one ought to do is never a duty imposed by reason, society, or any external authority, but is rooted in human nature, and

the demands imposed by its own need to put to work the capacities within it (1097b 22-34). It does not imply moral obligation, since the vices are based upon opinions of what anyone ought to do to be happy (1152a 4-6). What ought to be done is spoken of impersonally because there are natural consequences in all human beings of actions involving pleasure and pain (1104b 18-24), but it cannot be prescribed by any general rules since it is always dependent upon particulars (1106b 36-1107a 2, 1126b 2-4).

politics (*tiê politikê*) The aptitude, skill, knowledge, or other capacity that makes someone suited to arrange and carry out the things that pertain to a city. Aristotle never specifies the noun implicit in the phrase "the political _____," and at the very end of the *Nicomachean Ethics* he raises the question whether any of those who lay claim to this capacity are worthy of the name; his partial identification of it with practical judgment (1141b 23-24) suggests that it should be an art, a skilled know-how directed at producing a successful city. The city (*polis*) is a sovereign and self-sufficient human community, small enough that all citizens can take part in ruling it, that comes into being for the sake of mere life but secures the conditions for good life or well-being (*Politics* 1275b 18-21, 1252b 29-30); since the city aims at the human good, and a human being is by nature meant for life in a city (1097b 11), a necessary part of the political study is ethics, the inquiry about human character and happiness, while the rest of its study and practice have to do with means to that end.

practical judgment (*phronêsis*) The active condition by which someone discerns the right means to the right end in particular circumstances (1144a 6-9). Hence the intellectual virtue of practical judgment and the whole of virtue of character are mutually dependent and must develop together, since the right end is apparent only to someone of good character, while the formation of good character requires the repeated choice of the right action, which is impossible without practical judgment (1144b 18-32, 1145a 4-6). Apart from virtue of character, the capacity to reason from ends to means is mere cleverness (1144a 23-29); practical judgment involves skill in making distinctions and seeing connections, but if one does not recognize that such thinking imposes upon oneself an obligation to act, that skill is merely astuteness (1143a 4-15). Practical judgment is acquired primarily by experience of particulars, but also involves a knowledge of things that are universal and unvarying within those particulars (1141b 14-24), the things studied by Aristotle in his inquiries into politics and ethics. The word *phronêsis* is generally translated elsewhere as "practical wisdom" or "prudence." The latter now has connotations of caution that Aristotle does not intend, and that contribute to the misunderstanding of choosing the mean as playing it safe. The former is used by those who believe that Aristotle is imposing a distinction between *phronêsis* and *sophia* that was not present before his time, but this is a dubious assumption; in earlier writings as diverse as the *Odyssey* and Plato's *Philebus*, *phronêsis* has a general sense of thoughtfulness or intelligence (clearly intended at 1172b

28-30), while *sophia* always carries some implication of excelling in precision (1141a 9-17). The translation "practical judgment" is chosen here as the best way of conveying Aristotle's central understanding that ethical choices can never be deductions from any rules, principles, or general duties, but always require a weighing of particular circumstances and balancing of conflicting principles in a direct recognition of the mean.

praise (*epainos*) The expressed approval given to those who measure up to some standard, implying the superior fitness of those who bestow it to recognize that standard; Aristotle distinguishes praise from the more humble attitude of honor, which is given to those who display the highest good (Bk. I, Chap. 12). Throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle takes the things that are customarily praised as starting points for inquiry, but only as starting points. He argues that any widespread and enduring belief must have something true about it (1098b 27-29), and that the truth is confirmed when it explains why a false opinion seems plausible (1154a 22-25). Aristotle characteristically moves from what is in fact praised to what is worthy of such praise, as the aim of an implicit and imprecise recognition of the good (1095b 25-26, 1153b 31-32). For example, out of the commonplace admiration for the ostentatious display of wealth, Aristotle uncovers a genuine virtue of putting great private wealth to appropriate public use (Bk. IV, Chap. 2).

rule (*kanôn*) Literally a ruler or straightedge, the word comes to signify any standard by which other things are measured or to which they must conform. Aristotle uses the word only to deny that there are any such things in ethics, apart from the flexible judgment of a serious and decent human being (1113a 31-33, 1137b 29-32). At 1109a 30-b 13 Aristotle gives three general pieces of advice for hitting the mean, which commentators and even some translators have called "rules," but he says clearly that the right thing to do is always something particular that must be perceived (1109b 20-23). From the beginning of the inquiry, Aristotle warns against looking for the precision of formulations and deductions in ethics (1194b 11-27), and his central metaphor of hitting the mean is taken from the skilled eye of the productive artist rather than from the deductive procedure of the mathematician (1106b 5-16).

serious (*spoudaios*) Deserving respect. This is the word that Aristotle reserves for people of the highest human excellence, who see things as they are and know which of them are worth taking seriously (1113a 29-33), thus providing, by their own judgment and choices, the standard for the rest of us to look to. To distinguish the meaning of the word from a mere grave attitude, which could be assumed by anyone, this translation always renders it by a phrase such as "of serious stature," or "of serious worth." The root sense of the word implies haste and urgency, or even anxiety (connotations which Aristotle reserves for the related word *spoustitos*), but Aristotle decisively transforms the meaning of the word by arguing that a truly serious person takes few things seriously (1125a 12-16). In Bk. X, Chap. 6, as Aristotle's inquiry takes

the next-to-last step toward the discovery of happiness, seriousness (*spoudê*) becomes the ultimate criterion that makes an activity worthy of choice.

shame, a sense of (*aidôs*) A respectful attitude that holds one back from inappropriate behavior (Bk. IV, Chap. 9). It involves both feeling and thinking, but Aristotle regards it as something less than a virtue and appropriate only to the young, a restraint that is unnecessary when a mature active condition has been formed. What is shameful (*aischros*), the extreme opposite of what is beautiful, is recognized by a decent person hypothetically, as that which one ought to be ashamed to do.

speech (*logos*) The power of rational articulation, the characteristic capacity of a human being, by which we think things through and understand what is said or written by others (1098a 3-5). Since *logos* applies to anything in which that power is embodied, it can mean word, sentence, proposition, argument, reasoning, rational understanding, talk, a discourse, a story, a chapter, or a book. A human being is a unity of reason and desire, and suffers if either side gets the upper hand (1111b 1-2, 1139b 4-5). In a good human being, reason and desire are in harmony (1102b 23-28). Since the mathematical meaning of *logos* is ratio, a human life or a choice that is *kata logon* may be understood equally well as "in accord with reason" and "in proportion."

temperance (*sôphrosunê*) The active condition by which one chooses bodily pleasures in the ways and to the extent that they enhance life, not by an effort of self-control but by a harmony of desire with reason (1119a 11-20). "Moderation" is a more contemporary translation of the word, but it is too broad, and it is inaccurate if it implies that desires must be given less than full satisfaction; in a temperate person, the desires themselves are appropriate and can be trusted. Along with courage, temperance is a fundamental virtue of the irrational part of the soul, a stable state of character which, in any mature human being, replaces the overgrown impulses of childhood (1179b 29-1180a 1).

unrestraint (*akrasia*) An active condition so feeble that Aristotle more often calls it a passive experience (see note to 1146b 22), in which a good choice is made (1152a 17), but cannot be carried out in action because no character has been formed by habituation (1147a 14-24, 34-35). The word is properly used of a weakness for the bodily pleasures chosen by a dissipated person, but by analogy for being overpowered even by one's zeal for good and desirable things (Bk. VII, Chaps. 4, 6). Unrestraint is not vice, and self-restraint is not virtue; the need for restraint of each new impulse that arises is an immature and unstable condition, but one beyond which most human beings never get (1150a 9-16).

unwilling (*akôn*) Acting as a result of external force, or in ignorance of some important particular circumstance, and afterward feeling regret because of the pain of remorse (1109b 35-1110a 1, 1110b 18-19, 1110b 30-1111a 2). Any-

thing one does while knowing the circumstances, that is up to oneself, is a willing act, even if it is not deliberately chosen (1111a 22-24). Hence Aristotle does not posit a separate human faculty of will to explain perverse and self-destructive acts, as St. Paul (*Romans*, 7.15) and St. Augustine (*Confessions*, Bk. VIII, Chap. 9) do (compare *Gospel of John*, 1.13), but assigns such behavior to unrestraint in one's desires; his primary example is *hubris*, understood as gratuitously insulting speech or action indulged in for the mere pleasure of feeling the power to cause pain (1149b 20-26). The display of *hubris* is a willing act, not a willful departure from rational choice.

vice (*kakia*, *ponêria*, *mochthêria*) A stable active condition of the soul by which one consistently chooses extremes of feeling and action knowingly and for their own sake (1105a 30-33, 1107a 2-6, 1152a 4-6). Vice is a formed state of character, deliberately chosen, blamable finally because it prevents all the powers within the human soul from coming into any sort of internal harmony (1166b 11-29).

virtue (*aretê*) The excellence that makes anything an outstanding specimen of its kind, especially well fitted to its ends. When applied to human beings, the word has no necessary moral implications, though it carries them conventionally. For example Meno, in the Platonic dialogue bearing his name, identifies virtue with power and money (73C-D, 78C-D), but even he, when pressed, is uncomfortable about excluding justice and temperance. This mixture of incompatible opinions is part of the ordinary human heritage, out of which philosophic inquiry may and must begin. The English word "virtue" is an apt translation, just because of its own fruitful ambiguity, combining durable moral connotations with amoral uses such as "the virtue of this tax-avoidance scheme..." Aristotle distinguishes virtue of intellect from virtue of character, but uses the word primarily for the latter, which he defines as a stable active condition of the soul, by which one consistently chooses the mean in matters of feeling and action knowingly and for its own sake (1105a 30-33, 1106b 36-1107a 2). The standard lexicon of ancient Greek derives the word *aretê* from the name of Ares, the war god, but it is more likely related to the verb *arariskein*, meaning to fit together or be fitting. Aristotle's account of virtue finds it displayed especially in the decent person (*epitêkês*) who recognizes and chooses what is appropriate, and in the well-balanced person in whom all the parts of the soul are in harmony with one another (1102b 27-28). This human mean does not, in Aristotle's view, require the sacrifice or holding back of any of our powers, but sets free the full being-at-work of them all.

wisdom (*sophia*) The combination of a reasoned knowledge of conclusions (*epistêmê*) with an immediate knowing of their sources by means of the contemplative intellect (*nous*), about things that are everlasting and unchanging (1141a 18-20, 1139b 19-24). Each component of wisdom is an active condition (*hexis*), the live attentive beholding of what is known along with the evidence that makes it convincing (1139b 31-35).

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