

20 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

10 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

20 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.<sup>24</sup>

30 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

<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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.

30 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 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 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.

10 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, 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

<sup>25</sup> The word character (*ethos*) 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 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 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.<sup>26</sup> But let this be acknowledged in advance—that every discourse that 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 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

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

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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 bootish 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.

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 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.

**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.<sup>27</sup>

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

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.<sup>28</sup> 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 Heraclitus says it is to fight against anger,<sup>29</sup> but artfulness and

<sup>27</sup> 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 *goal* 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.

<sup>29</sup> "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.

20 **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 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, 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.<sup>30</sup>

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 *himos*, 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 tanning and winning over this irrationally spirited element straight from childhood.

<sup>30</sup> The last eleven words of the sentence translate Aristotle's marvelous adverb *anekatakrinētos*; *akrinētos* 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 talk<sup>31</sup> 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.

20 **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.

30 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

<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> 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. 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 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 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,<sup>33</sup> 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

<sup>32</sup> See 1103a18-32.

<sup>33</sup> 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.

10 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 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 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 involved with them, such as joy at others' misfortunes, shamelessness,

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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.<sup>34</sup>

**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.<sup>35</sup> Now concerning fear and confidence, the mean condition is courage; of people who go to excess, the one who

<sup>34</sup> 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.

<sup>35</sup> In 1120b-1121a 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.<sup>36</sup> 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

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<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup>

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,<sup>38</sup> the one who goes to excess, if it is for no purpose, is

<sup>37</sup> 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 nearly 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.

<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup>

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

<sup>39</sup> The two sorts of mean mentioned in this paragraph are only quasi-virtues, mere habits or predispositions of feeling. Righteous indignation (*timisis*) 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.<sup>40</sup> 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

<sup>40</sup> 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,<sup>41</sup>

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,<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup>

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

<sup>41</sup> The line is spoken by Odysseus to his men at XII, 219 of the *Odyssey*, as a result of Crete'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.)

<sup>42</sup> 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.

<sup>43</sup> 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 (*kanon*) 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 (113a 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 blameworthy. 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

30 **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.

10 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.

20 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.<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup> 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.

30 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),

<sup>44</sup> 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.

<sup>45</sup> 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 (*Litiation Barriers*, 299-305).