

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. 1110a 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.

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

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

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

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

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

everything would be forced according to that person, since everyone does everything for the sake of these ends.⁴⁶ Also, those who act by force and are unwilling act with pain, while those who act on account of what is pleasant and beautiful do so with pleasure. And it is ridiculous to blame external things but not oneself, for being easily caught by such things, and to take credit oneself for beautiful deeds but blame the pleasant things for one's shameful deeds. So it appears that what is forced is that of which the source is from outside, while the one who is forced contributes nothing.

20 What is done on account of ignorance is in every instance not a willing act, but it is unwilling by its painfulness and in one's regretting it,⁴⁷ for while someone who does a thing on account of ignorance without being in any way distressed by the action has not acted willingly, since he did not even know what he was doing, he has not acted unwillingly either, since he is not pained by it. So since the unwilling person seems to be in repentance for what was done on account of ignorance, let the one who is not repentant, since he is different, be nonwilling, since it is better for one who differs to have a special name. But acting on account of ignorance seems different from acting while being ignorant, since someone who is drunk or angry does not seem to act on account of ignorance but on account of one of the states mentioned, and while not knowing but being ignorant. Now every bad person is ignorant of what one ought to do and what one ought to keep away from, and on account
30 of being in error in such a way people come to be unjust and generally bad; but unwillingness is not meant to be applied because someone is ignorant of what is advantageous, for the ignorance that is involved in choice is the cause not of something unwilling but of depravity, nor is it a general kind of ignorance that makes an act unwilling (since people are certainly blamed for that), but an ignorance of the particulars in
1111a which the action occurs and with which it is concerned, for in these cases there is pity and forgiveness, since the one who is ignorant of any of these acts unwillingly.

Perhaps, then, it would not be a bad idea to distinguish what these circumstances are and how many of them there are. And so they are:

⁴⁶ Comparison with 1104b 30-31 shows that a dialectical step has been taken toward the primary meaning of the good. The advantageous has dropped out of the earlier threefold division of goods sought by human action, since it can never be an end but is always a means to something else. The beautiful and the pleasant remain.

⁴⁷ In this context, pain is a synonym for remorse, an effect the act has on one's feelings, and regret is a synonym for repentance, an effect the act has to change one's thinking. Neither of these notions belongs exclusively to a Christian context, nor does that of forgiveness, explicated above at 1110a 24. All three of these things are decisive criteria for ethical conclusions within any view of the world.

who is acting, what the act is, what it is concerned with or consists in, and sometimes also with what (such as an instrument), for the sake of what (such as saving a life), and in what manner (such as gently or violently) it is done. Now no one could be ignorant of all these without being insane, since it is clear that one could not be ignorant of who is acting, for how could one not know at least that this is oneself? But someone might be ignorant of what he is doing, as people say that while they were talking things slipped out, or that they didn't know the things were forbidden to speak of, as Aeschylus said about the mysteries,⁴⁸ or that they set it off while meaning to show it, as the person said about the catapult. Or someone might suppose that her son was an enemy, as Merope did,⁴⁹ or that the spear that came to hand was rounded at the end, or the stone was pumice; or by giving someone something to drink to save his life, one might kill him; or when meaning just to touch, the way sparring partners do, one might land a punch. So since ignorance is possible about all these circumstances in which the action takes place, the person who was ignorant of any of them seems to have acted unwillingly, and especially in the case of the most controlling circumstances; and the most controlling ones seem to be the things in which the action consists and for the sake of which it is done. And if an action is to be called unwilling as a result of this sort of ignorance, it is also necessary that it be painful to the one who does it and held in regret.

Since an unwilling act is one that is done by force or on account of ignorance, a willing act would seem to be one of which the source is in oneself, when one knows the particular circumstances in which the action takes place. For things done on account of spiritedness or desire are probably not rightly called unwilling acts. In the first place, none of the other animals would any longer do anything willingly, nor would children. And then, of the things that result from desire and spiritedness, do we do none of them willingly, or do we do the beautiful ones willingly and the shameful ones unwillingly? Or is this ridiculous when one thing is responsible for them? And perhaps it is absurd to call things toward which one ought to extend oneself unwilling, and one ought to get angry at some things and to desire some things, such as health and knowledge. And while unwilling acts seem to be painful, those that result from desire seem to be pleasant. Also, what difference does it make to whether things that are wrong are unwilling

⁴⁸ Aeschylus was brought to trial for revealing secret religious rituals in some of his plays (now lost), but was acquitted. His remark, "I said what came to my mouth," became a proverbial excuse.

⁴⁹ In Euripides's lost play *Cresphontes* she recognizes her son just in time to avoid killing him. In Aristotle's *Poetics*, 1153b 31-1154a 10, this is one example of how acting with or without knowledge affects the impact of tragedy.

1111b acts, that they result from reasoning or from spiritedness? Both kinds of error are to be avoided, and irrational feelings seem to be no less human than reasoning is, so that actions that come from spiritedness and desire belong to the human being too.⁵⁰ So it is absurd to set these down as unwilling acts.

Chapter 2. Now that willing and unwilling acts have been distinguished, it follows next to go through what concerns choice, for this seems to be what belongs most properly to virtue and to determine one's character more than one's actions do. A choice is obviously something willing, but they are not the same thing, as what is willing covers a wider range, since children and the other animals share in willing acts but not in choice, and we speak of things done on the spur of the moment as willing acts, but not as things done as a result of choice. Those who say that choice is desire, or spiritedness, or wishing, or some sort of opinion do not seem to speak rightly. For choice is not shared by irrational beings, while desire and spiritedness are. And a person lacking self-control acts while desiring something but not choosing it, while a person with self-control conversely acts while choosing something but not desiring it. And while desire sets itself against choice, desire does not set itself against desire.⁵¹ And desire is for what is pleasant or painful, while choice is of something neither painful nor pleasant.

20 Still less is it spiritedness, for things done out of spiritedness seem to be the ones least in accord with choice. But it is surely not wishing either, even though that appears a close approximation to it, since there can be no choice of impossible things, and if anyone were to claim to choose something impossible, that person would seem to be foolish; but there is wishing even for impossible things, such as deathlessness. And there is also wishing for things that can in no way be done by oneself, such as for a certain actor to win an award, or for an athlete to win a contest,

⁵⁰ In Plato's *Republic*, the soul is divided into three parts, the reasoning, spirited, and desiring parts. In an image in 588B, Socrates likens the whole soul, and the reasoning part, to the look of a human being, while the other two parts have the look of an animal and a monster. A misreading of this image might make spiritedness and desire seem alien presences in us, though Socrates is clear that the human being is responsible for taming and uniting everything in the soul. In Plato's *Laws*, beginning in 863A, the Athenian Stranger prescribes different and lesser penalties for crimes of passion that are unpremeditated results of the desire for pleasure or an unbridled temper, but still holds the person who acts in those ways responsible. The present paragraph seems to be addressed not to Plato, but to his superficial readers.

⁵¹ In the context of the preceding sentence, this must mean that once an object is fixed on by desire, it is not desire that can oppose it but only a different capacity. Two different desires may obviously conflict. In such a case, Aristotle says in Bk. III, Chap. 11, of *On the Soul*, now one of them, now the other, knocks its rival out of the way like a ball.

but no one chooses such things, but only those things one believes could come about by one's own act. Also, wishing is rather for an end, while choice is of things that are related to the end; for example, we wish to be healthy, but we choose those things by means of which we will become healthy, and we wish to be happy and say so, while it would not fit the meaning to say we choose to be happy, since, universally, choice seems to be concerned with things that are up to us. 30

So it could not be opinion either, since there seems to be opinion about all things, and no less about things that are everlasting or things that are impossible than about things that are up to us; and opinion is divided into the false and the true, not into the bad and the good, while choice instead is divided into the latter two kinds. Now no doubt no one even claims that choice is the same as opinion as a whole, but it is not even the same as some particular opinion, for by choosing good or bad things we are certain kinds of people, but not by having opinions. And we choose to take or avoid something from among those alternatives, but we have an opinion about what it is or whom it benefits or in what way, while taking or avoiding is not at all what we have as an opinion. And choice is praised for being a choice of what it ought to be, more than for being rightly made, while opinion is praised for being as something truly is. And we choose what we most of all know to be good, but we have opinions about things we do not know very well, and it seems not to be the same people who choose best who also have the best opinions, but rather some people seem to have better opinions but to choose what they ought not, on account of vice. And if an opinion comes before a choice or comes along with it, that makes no difference, for we are not considering this, but whether it is the same as any sort of opinion. 1112a 10

What then is choice, or what sort of thing is it, since it is none of the things mentioned? It is obviously something willing, but not everything that is willing is something chosen. But might it just be one that has been deliberated about first? For choice is involved with reason and thinking things through. And even its name seems to give a hint that it is something taken before other things.⁵²

Chapter 3. But do people deliberate about all things, and is everything a thing to be deliberated about, or about some things is deliberation not possible? Perhaps one ought to mean by a thing to be deliberated about, not what some fool or insane person might deliberate about, but those things that people with sense would deliberate about. Now no 20

⁵² Choice is *proairesis*. Without the prefix *pro* it would mean taking one thing out of some array, as a child or animal might, but that prefix could mean merely taking in preference, implying no temporal structure. Aristotle construes it as meaning taking in advance, beforehand in one's thinking.

one deliberates about everlasting things, such as the cosmos, or about the diagonal and side of a square, that they are incommensurable; but neither does one deliberate about things that are in motion but always happen according to the same pattern, whether by necessity or else by nature or by means of some other cause, such as solstices and the risings of stars; nor about things that are sometimes one way and sometimes another such as drought and rain; nor about things that are by chance, such as finding a treasure; but not about all human things either, as no Spartan deliberates about how the Scythians should best be governed, for none of these things could happen through us. We deliberate about things that are up to us and are matters of action, and these are the ones that are left. For the causes responsible for things seem to be nature, necessity, and chance, and also intelligence and everything that is due to a human being. And among human beings, each sort deliberates about the things to be done by its own acts.

1112b And there is no deliberation about the precise and self-contained kinds of knowledge, such as about letters (for we are not in doubt about how something ought to be spelled), but as many things as come about by our act, but not always in the same way, about these we do deliberate, for example about the things done by medical skill or skill in business, and more so about piloting a ship than about gymnastic training, to the extent that the former is less precisely formulated, and similarly also about the rest of the skills but more about those that are arts than those that are kinds of knowledge, since we are more in doubt in connection with the former. Deliberating is present in things that happen in a certain way for the most part, but are unclear as to how they will turn out, and in which this is undetermined. And we take others as fellow deliberators for large issues, not trusting that we ourselves are adequate to decide them. We deliberate not about ends but about the things that are related to the ends, for a doctor does not deliberate about whether he will cure someone, nor a rhetorician about whether he will persuade, nor someone holding political office about whether he will produce good order, nor does anyone else deliberate about ends, but having set down the end, they consider in what way and by what means it would be the case.

When it appears that the end would come about by more than one means, people examine through which of them it will come about most easily and most beautifully, but if the end will be accomplished by only one means, they examine how it will come to be through this means, and this in turn through some other, until they come to the first thing that will be responsible for the end, which is the last thing in the process of discovery. The one who deliberates in the way described seems to be inquiring and analyzing just as one would with a geometrical diagram (and it is evident that, while not all inquiry is deliberation, as mathematical inquiries are not, all deliberation is inquiry), and what

comes last in an analysis is what comes first in the synthesis.⁵³ And if people come up against something impossible, they back off, for instance if the thing requires money and it is not possible for this to be procured; but if it seems to be possible they get started with acting. And things are possible which could come about by our own act, for those that are done by the help of friends are in a certain sense by our own act, since the source is in us. Sometimes one is looking for instruments and at other times for how to use them, and similarly in other cases, sometimes for that by means of which and sometimes for how or by whose help.

So it seems, as was said, that a human being is the source of actions and that deliberation is about the things to be done by oneself, while the actions are for the sake of something else. For the end could not be deliberated upon, but the things that are related to the end are; and deliberation is not about particulars either, such as whether this is a loaf of bread and whether it has baked long enough, for these things belong to sense perception. And if they would always be deliberated upon it would go to infinity. What is deliberated and what is chosen are the same thing, except that the thing chosen is already determined, since the thing chosen is what is decided out of the deliberation. For each person stops searching for how he will act when he traces the source of it back to himself, and to the part of himself that leads the way, for this is what chooses. And this is clear also from the ancient regimes that Homer depicted, for the kings used to report what they had chosen to their people. Since, among the things that are up to us, the desired thing that has been deliberated upon is what is chosen, choice would be the deliberate desire of things that are up to us, for having decided as a result of deliberating, we desire in accordance with our deliberation.⁵⁴ So let this have been a description of choice in outline, and of what sort of things it concerns, and that they are means to ends.

⁵³ The great examples of ancient Greek geometry that we possess, Euclid's *Elements* and Apollonius's *Conics*, demonstrate their propositions synthetically, but a few instances of analysis have survived in Apollonius's Propositions II, 44, 46, 47, and 49-51, and in manuscript additions to Euclid's Propositions XIII, 1-5. The synthesis starts with something admitted and deduces what is sought; the analysis assumes what is sought and deduces other things until it reaches one that is already admitted, then reverses the steps, so long as they are all logically convertible, to produce a synthetic demonstration. Rene Descartes, in the fourth of his *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, blamed the ancient geometers for concealing their method of discovery and begrudging it to posterity, but it was no secret. Descartes, who invented a geometrical algebra, was primarily interested in the power to solve problems, while his ancient predecessors seemed interested, instead, in contemplating theorems in the full complexity of their derivation from self-evident beginnings.

⁵⁴ This discussion of moral responsibility has shown it to be dependent on a certain kind of thinking, so choice will be addressed again in connection