

ARISTOTLE
NICOMACHEAN ETHICS

BOOK I

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

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

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

And it would seem to belong¹ to the one that is most governing and most a master art, and politics appears to be of this sort, since it prescribes which kinds of knowledge ought to be in the cities, and what sorts each person ought to learn and to what extent; also, we see that the most honored capacities, such as generalship, household economics and rhetorical skill, are under this one. Since this capacity makes use of the rest of the kinds of knowledge, and also lays down the law about what one ought to do and from what one ought to refrain, the end of this capacity should include the ends of the other pursuits, so that this end would be the human good. For even if the good is the same for one person and for a city, that of the city appears to be greater, at least, and more complete both to achieve and to preserve; for even if it is achieved for only one person that is something to be satisfied with, but for a people or for cities it is something more beautiful and more divine. So our pursuit aims at this, and is in a certain way political.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

20
 Chapter 5. For our part, let us speak from the point where we digressed. Most people and the crudest people seem, not without reason, to assume from people's lives that pleasure is the good and is happiness. For this reason they are content with a life devoted to enjoyment. For there are three ways of life especially that hold prominence: the one just now mentioned, and the political life, and third, the contemplative life. Now most people show themselves to be completely slavish by choosing a life that belongs to fatted cattle, but they happen to get listened to because most people who have power share the feeling of Sardapalpus.⁴ But refined and active people choose honor, for this is pretty much the goal of political life. Now this appears to be too superficial to be what is sought, for it seems to be in the ones who give honor rather than in the one who is honored, but we divine that the good is something of one's own and hard to take away. Also, people seem to pursue honor in order to be

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

1095b
 But even this seems too incomplete, since it seems possible, while having virtue, even to be asleep or to be inactive throughout life, and on top of these things, to suffer evils and the greatest misfortunes. No one would consider one who lived in that way to be happy, except when defending a hypothesis.⁶ And this is enough about these things, since they are spoken of sufficiently in the current popular writings. And the third way of life is the contemplative one, about which we shall make an investigation in what follows. The life of money making is a type of compulsory activity, and it is clear that wealth is not the good being sought, since it is instrumental and for the sake of something else. For this reason one might suppose that the things spoken of before are more properly ends, since they provide contentment on account of themselves, though it appears that even they are not what is sought, even though many arguments connected with them are tossed around. So let these things be put aside. //

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

attributed to Aristotle called Plato "a man whom the wicked have no right even to praise, / who, alone or the first of mortals, showed clearly / by his own life and by the course of his arguments, / that a man becomes good and happy at the same time." [Quoted by Olympiodorus: see Barnes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton University Press, 1985), Vol. II, p. 246] and Jaeger, *Aristotle* (Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 107.]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁶ Two notions important to the *Ethics* as a whole begin to be made use of here. The word serious (*spoudaios*) is usually translated as "good" or "excellent," as though it were simply an idiom of ancient Greek that had lost its root meaning. But the meaning of the word belongs to the primary evidence from which ethics argues. We all consider some people more worthy of respect than others, and if we disagree about who they are we can begin a discussion. A serious harpist is not just one who is highly skilled technically, but one who chooses well the uses worthy of that skill. The serious person is not one who displays a sense of urgency and cannot relax, but one who recognizes the few things that are worth being serious about. (Compare 1025a 9-16.)

The beautiful (*to kalon*) is often translated as "noble" or "fine," on the grounds that the Greek word applied to admirable actions as well as to things well shaped or formed. But again, this is not a use of language peculiar to any place or time, but a word that intends something that belongs to the primary evidence that all ethical discussion must have in common. Just recall the last time you said "that was a beautiful thing you did," and reflect on what you meant. It may be that such judgments are fluctuating or conventional (1094b 14-16), but even to raise the question whether they always are, one must be open to the possibility of judging on a more stable basis.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

100b So is following up these fortunes not right at all? For what goes well or badly does not lie in them, but a human life has need of them as something added, as we said, while the things that govern happiness are ways of being at work in accordance with virtue, while opposite ways of being at work determine an opposite condition. And what is now producing an impasse bears witness to this formulation, since in none of the acts of human beings is stability present in the same way

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

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

1101a What then prevents our calling happy the person who is at work in accordance with complete virtue and supplied with a sufficient stock of external goods, not for any chance amount of time but for a complete life? Or ought one to add, when he shall have both lived in that way and died in a proportionate way, since the future is unclear to us, and we set it down that happiness is final in every sense and complete in every way? And if this is so, we shall call blessed those among the living to

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BOOK II

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

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