

Aristotle

Aristotle was born in 384 B.C. in northern Greece (in Stagira). His father was the physician to the king (Philip of Macedonia), and Aristotle later became tutor to Philip's son Alexander (later to become Alexander the Great). Aristotle studied with Plato for 18 years, but when Plato died, Aristotle turned much more to the sciences—biology in particular—and his various theories ruled Western science for almost 2,000 years. He set up his own school in Athens but when Alexander died and his empire started to fall apart, anti-Macedonian feeling in Athens was such that Aristotle beat a hasty retreat, supposedly remarking that the Athenians would not have a second chance to sin against philosophy. Aristotle's influence, however, came to rule not only Athens but all of Europe and the Mediterranean. Many of his views on science, for example, were not seriously challenged for 1,500 years, and his views on ethics still provide the touchstone to which moral philosophers return again and again.

Aristotle was a student in Plato's academy, but he ultimately grew to disagree with Plato almost entirely. The difference between them is enormous, in style as well as in substance. Plato's Socratic dialogues are literary as well as philosophical masterpieces, dramatic plays that could be performed as well as studied. Aristotle, on the other hand, wrote ponderous and technical philosophical treatises, brilliant but more difficult to read. (Actually, this is misleading; Aristotle wrote dialogues, too, but none of them have survived.) Many of Plato's ethical investigations, furthermore, were mainly concerned with the most metaethical questions—the definition of the Good and Justice. Aristotle, on the other hand, was more interested in the details of everyday life—how a good person should behave and what goes wrong when someone knows what should be done but doesn't do it (or knows what should not be done and does it anyway). The *Nicomachean Ethics* covers the entire spectrum of ethical issues, from the most general metaethical concerns about the nature of the Good to

the most specific questions about the value of certain emotions (pride, for example) and the way one ought to act toward friends. Indeed, there has probably never been a book more complete on the subject of ethics than Aristotle's *Ethics*. (In fact, Aristotle wrote at least two treatises in ethics. The "Nicomachean" treatise—generally thought to have been edited by Aristotle's son Nicomachus and later named for him—is by far the better known. The other treatise, the "Eudemian Ethics" differs in some significant ways from *The Nicomachean Ethics*, but these differences will not concern us here, and we will simply refer to the better-known treatise as the *Ethics*.)

The stated purpose of the *Ethics* is to describe "the good for man." The emphasis on description here is extremely important, for Aristotle often begins an investigation by pointing to or describing "what most men think." However, this appeal to received opinion is only the starting point. Aristotle then analyzes the accepted views, checking their consistency with one another as well as with other securely held beliefs on related subjects, ultimately coming up with a conclusion or a definition that usually differs in important ways from any of the opinions with which he began. For instance, in determining the true nature of happiness, a state about which most people have an opinion, Aristotle begins by surveying the various candidates for the happy life. Some say it is a life built on wealth, others on honor, still others on pleasure. After showing the defects of each of these conceptions, Aristotle gives his own account of happiness, one that is grounded in large part on commonsensical observations but that is, at the same time, startlingly new. Although his ultimate definition of happiness is by no means "what most men think," his account of happiness is achieved in part by pointing to commonly observable characteristics of humans and the sorts of lives they tend to lead or are capable of leading.

One of the most important concepts in Aristotle's theory, that of a thing's *telos*, or end, is developed in a similar way. From his many studies of the natural world, Aristotle concluded that nature is purposive, that "she does nothing in vain." That is, everything (almost) has a particular purpose for which it is best suited, and that purpose or goal is what Aristotle calls its *telos*. Included in this account are not only natural objects such as plants and animals, but man-made artifacts as well. Moreover, we can inquire about the *telos* of particular parts of animals or objects as well. For instance, the purpose, or function, of the eye is to enable us to see; the ear, to provide hearing.

The way in which we ascertain the *telos* of something is again, empirically based. We look at the entity in question and ask, What is it for? or more precisely, What can it do either uniquely or best? In other words, we look for what it has that other things lack and that makes it better suited for a particular function. For example, there are a number of tools we might use in sharpening a pencil: a knife, our teeth, a nail file, a saw, scissors, or a pencil sharpener. Although we can get the job done by other means, it is clear that it is *best* done by the pencil sharpener. That is, of all the tools available, if the task at hand is pencil sharpening, we can do no better than to seek out a pencil sharpener. (Conversely, although we might accomplish other tasks with a pencil sharpener—trimming hair, for instance—it will not be the best tool for the job, for its function is reserved for pencil sharpening.) After we have determined what the function of a particular object or being is, we can see why it is built the way it is. The pencil sharpener, once again, has a sharp edge on the inside of a small hole *because* that is the arrangement of parts that is best for sharpening

pencils. This provides us, then, with what is known as a *teleological explanation*, one that is given in terms of the thing's function or end.

But it also provides us (or Aristotle) with the starting point for developing a theory of the good. After we have identified the specific function of an artifact or natural object, we can talk about its effectiveness in achieving that function. That is, we can judge a thing's value by how well it fulfills its role or function. A good knife is not one that is decorative or fun for kids to play with, but rather one that cuts well. Consequently, a sharp knife is *better* than a dull one. For Aristotle, value is assessed in terms of function. To say something is a good *x* is to say that it accomplishes the task well for which *x*'s are intended. Although he does not always put it this way, Aristotle's use of the term "good" always presupposes knowledge of the thing's function. Again, Aristotle included not only objects, but species, including human beings, in his teleological account. The question with which we begin the *Ethics* then is, What is the good for man? To answer this we must first determine the *telos* of man, that is, that which human beings can do either uniquely or better than anything else. Only then can we make judgments about how well particular men fulfill that *telos*. And it will turn out on Aristotle's account that our unique quality is the ability to deploy reason, with regard to both practical and intellectual matters.

In subsequent books of the *Ethics*, Aristotle goes on to describe the central concepts of happiness (*eudaimonia*) and virtue or excellence (*arete*) and to list and describe the various virtues. He also spends considerable effort attacking the hedonist, who argues that the good for man is pleasure, and analyzing various pitfalls that plague our attempts to be good. Two full books are devoted to describing the virtues of friendship—an emphasis lacking in many ethical treatises that should make us stop and think about the usual neglect of this very important part of life. ("No one would choose to live without friends," he says.)

THE NICOMACHEAN ETHICS*

THE GOAL OF HUMAN ACTIVITY: FROM BOOK I

Aristotle begins his *Ethics* by clearly stating his teleological premise: Everything seems to aim at some good. This "teleology" provides the framework for his entire argument, and the main question is, Exactly what is this ultimate good? Notice that, for Aristotle, ethics and politics are part of the same discipline, and the good of the individual and the good of the society (the state) go hand in hand. More specifically, Aristotle tells us that Politics is the "master-art or master-science" because it determines what men will do in society. Although he does not discuss it explicitly in the *Ethics*, an important component of Aristotle's views on human nature is the claim that we are essentially social, or political, animals. As a result, anything that can be said to be a part of human happiness or flourishing will necessarily take place within a society. Because it is politics that determines what people will do in society, an inquiry into the good man, says Aristotle, is a "sort of political inquiry."

* Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, translated by F. H. Peters with some revisions and changes in the paragraphing. Copyright 1901 by K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.

1. Every art and every kind of inquiry, and likewise every act and purpose, seems to aim at some good; and so it has been well said that the good is that at which everything aims. But a difference is observable among these aims or ends. What is aimed at is sometimes the exercise of a faculty, sometimes a certain result beyond that exercise. And where there is an end beyond that act, there the result is better than the exercise of the faculty. Now since there are many kinds of actions and many arts and sciences, it follows that there are many ends also; e.g. health is the end of medicine, ships of shipbuilding, victory of the art of war, and wealth of economy. But when several of these are subordinated to some one art or science,—as the making of bridles and other trappings to the art of horsemanship, and this in turn, along with all else that the soldier does, to the art of war, and so on,—then the end of the master art is always more desired than the end of the subordinate arts, since these are pursued for its sake. And this is equally true whether the end in view be the mere exercise of a faculty or something beyond that, as in the above instances.

2. If then in what we do there be some end which we wish for on its own account, choosing all the others as means to this, but not every end without exception as a means to something else (for so we should go on *ad infinitum*, and desire would be left void and objectless),—this evidently will be the good or the best of all things. And surely from a practical point of view it much concerns us to know this good; for then, like archers shooting at a definite mark, we shall be more likely to attain what we want. If this be so, we must try to indicate roughly what it is, and first of all to which of the arts or sciences it belongs. It would seem to belong to the supreme art or science, that one which most of all deserves the name of master-art or master-science. Now Politics seems to this description. For it prescribes which of the sciences a state needs, and which each man shall study, and up to what point; and to it we see subordinated even the highest arts, such as economy, rhetoric, and the art of war. Since then it makes use of the other practical sciences, and since it further ordains what men are to do and from what to refrain, its end must include the ends of the others, and must be the proper good of man. For though this good is the same for the individual and the state, yet the good of the state seems a grander and more perfect thing both to attain and to secure; and glad as one would be to do this service for a single individual, to do it for a people and for a number of states is nobler and more divine.

This then is the aim of the present inquiry, which is a sort of political inquiry.

3. We must be content if we can attain to so much precision in our statement as the subject before us admits of; for the same degree of accuracy is no more to be expected in all kinds of reasoning than in all kinds of handicraft. Now the things that are noble and just (with which Politics deals) are so various and so uncertain, that some think these are merely conventional and not natural distinctions. There is a similar uncertainty also about what is good, because good things often do people harm: men have before now been ruined by wealth, and have lost their lives through courage. Our subject, then, and our data being of this nature, we must be content if we can indicate the truth roughly and in

outline, and if, in dealing with matters that are not amenable to immutable laws, and reasoning from premises that are but probable, we can arrive at probable conclusions. The reader, on his part, should take each of my statements in the same spirit; for it is the mark of an educated man to require, in each kind of inquiry, just so much exactness as the subject admits of: it is equally absurd to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician, and to demand scientific proof from an orator.

But each man can form a judgment about what he knows, and is called "a good judge" of that—of any special matter when he has received a special education therein, "a good judge" (without any qualifying epithet) when he has received a universal education. And hence a young man is not qualified to be a student of Politics; for he lacks experience of the affairs of life, which form the data and the subject-matter of Politics. Further, since he is apt to be swayed by his feelings, he will derive no benefit from a study whose aim is not speculative but practical. But in this respect young in character counts the same as young in years; for the young man's disqualification is not a matter of time, but is due to the fact that feeling rules his life and directs all his desires. Men of this character turn the knowledge they get to no account in practice, as we see with those we call incontinent; but those who direct their desires and actions by reason will gain much profit from the knowledge of these matters.

So much then by way of preface as to the student and the spirit in which he must accept what we say, and the object which we propose to ourselves.

Aristotle now returns to his main theme, the ultimate good. Everyone (the "masses" as well as "men of culture") agrees that it is happiness or *eudaimonia* (more accurately "doing or living well"). But most people ("the masses") take this happiness to be something very specific, such as pleasure, wealth, health, or fame, whereas the philosophers ("men of culture," mainly Plato) take the ultimate good to be something outside of human life (Plato's Form of the Good). Aristotle then looks at three examples of the good life, two of which he rejects (pleasure and honor); the third, the life of contemplation (living as a philosopher)—which he accepts—the postpones for future discussion. After reviewing and rejecting a number of candidates for the account of the good which he seeks, Aristotle again returns to his main point. (Remember that these were originally lectures, not written down as a book.) What is happiness? Recall that the state that we are trying to define is not a momentary burst of pleasure or a giddy feeling that, just now, our lives are as we'd like them to be. Rather the concept of *eudaimonia* (Aristotle's term for happiness) refers to a complete life well lived. While Aristotle does not deny the pleasures of the flesh, or the advantages of wealth and honors, the fleeting (not to mention corruptible) nature of such goods disqualifies them from constituting the sort of long-term well-being, or flourishing, which he believes is the ultimate goal of human beings.

Again, to ask about the final goal, or end, is to ask about a thing's function. Thus, happiness is to be found in terms of the function of man—that is, the ultimate end that is not just one good thing among others, but the goal of all good things in life. Here Aristotle's biological teleology is fully evident: Our function cannot be

simply "to live," for this we share even with plants. It cannot be just to move around and experience the world, for even cows can do this. The one thing that is uniquely human (and note that our function must be unique in this sense) is our reason. Our function, then, is to be rational. This does not exclude other human activities, such as physical prowess, nor does it exclude pleasure (more on this later); indeed, Aristotle holds that if one is totally lacking in some important external good, such as wealth or honors, happiness will be impossible. Although many have criticized Aristotle for his elitism, his point is, in fact, a realistic one. It will be impossible to flourish if we are hungry all the time, living without friends, or without any meaningful activities. But all of this is not yet happiness, although these are the preconditions of happiness.

To be clear on Aristotle's sketch of happiness and its role in ethics and politics, we must finally make the connections between his most important concepts so far: the good, happiness (*eudaimonia*), the final goal (*telos*), and excellence (*arête*). The question with which ethics begins according to Aristotle is, What is the good for man? In other words, what goals should human beings strive for? What sort of life should they attempt to lead? (It is these sorts of formulations of the question that led Aristotle to claim that ethics and politics are intimately connected.) The answer to these first questions is one that is both obvious and widely agreed upon: happiness.

However, what exactly happiness amounts to is not so uncontroversial. It is at this point that Aristotle's teleology (and the assumptions it entails) comes into play. In particular, he assumes that you will achieve long-term well-being, *eudaimonia*, only if you are, as the U.S. Army put it, being "all that you can be." Although certain external goods such as wealth, honor, or fame might offer momentary satisfaction, true happiness, for Aristotle, can never be made up of such fleeting, often accidental, pleasures. Instead, it has to do with taking on and meeting certain challenges, of honing your skills, of developing your capacities, and most of all, of making use of your uniquely human attribute—reason. And all of this is based on the fact that we have such capacities. Thus, from the empirical observation that we have certain powers that other species lack, Aristotle concludes that our best and most noble activities are those that make use of our unique capacities (Why else would we have them?). It is for this reason that Aristotle inquires into our *telos*, asking what makes us unique, or uniquely capable of leading (and excelling at) a particular sort of life.

The final step to this account—which will occupy Aristotle for the remainder of the *Ethics*—is the determination of the sort of excellence of which rational animals are capable. Recall that for Aristotle "good" is not a concept that is meaningful independently of the objects to which it is attributed; rather it always presupposes the function of whatever it is applied to: a good knife has a very different sort of virtue (and thus, a very different meaning of the word "good") than a good person. Excellence is always tied to function. After Aristotle has determined the function of man to be rational activity, what needs to be filled in is what the excellence—or the virtue—of the rational soul consists of.

4. Since—to resume—all knowledge and all purpose aims at some good, what is this which we say is the aim of Politics; or, in other words, what is the

highest of all realizable goods? As to its name, I suppose nearly all men are agreed; for the masses and the men of culture alike declare that it is happiness, and hold that to "live well" or to "do well" is the same as to be "happy." But they differ as to what this happiness is, and the masses do not give the same account of it as the philosophers. The former take it to be something palpable and plain, as pleasure or wealth or fame: one man holds it to be this, and another that, and often the same man is of different minds at different times,—after sickness it is health, and in poverty it is wealth, while when they are impressed with the consciousness of their ignorance, they admire most those who say grand things that are above their comprehension. Some philosophers, on the other hand, have thought that, beside these several good things, there is an "absolute" good which is the cause of their goodness. As it would hardly be worthwhile to review all the opinions that have been held, we will confine ourselves to those which are most popular, or which seem to have some foundation in reason.

But we must not omit to notice the distinction that is drawn between the method of proceeding from your starting-points or principles, and the method of working up to them. Plato used with fitness to raise this question, and to ask whether the right way is from or to your starting-points, as in the race-course you may run from the judges to the boundary, or *vice versa*. Well, we must start from what is known. But "what is known" may mean two things: "what is known to us," which is one thing, or "what is known" simply, which is another. I think it is safe to say that we must start from what is known to us. For the undemonstrated fact is here the starting-point, and if this undemonstrated fact be sufficiently evident to a man, he will not require a "reason why." Now the man who has had a good moral training either has already arrived at starting-points or principles of action, or will easily accept them when pointed out. But he who neither has them nor will accept them may hear what Hesiod says—

The best is he who of himself doth know;

Good too is he who listens to the wise;

But he who neither knows himself nor heeds

The words of others, is a useless man.

5. It seems that men not unreasonably take their notions of the good or happiness from the lives actually led, and that the masses who are the least refined suppose it to be pleasure, which is the reason why they aim at nothing higher than the life of enjoyment. For the most conspicuous kinds of life are three: this life of enjoyment, the life of the statesman, and, thirdly, the contemplative life. The mass of men show themselves utterly slavish in their preference for the life of brute beasts, but their views receive consideration because many of those in high places have the tastes of Sardanapalus. Men of refinement with a practical turn prefer honour: for I suppose we may say that honour is the aim of the statesman's life. But this seems too superficial to be the good we are seeking; for it appears to depend upon those who give rather than upon those who receive it;

while we have a presentiment that the good is something that is peculiarly a man's own and can scarce be taken away from him. Moreover, these men seem to pursue honour in order that they may be assured of their own excellence,—at least, they wish to be honoured by men of sense, and by those who know them, and on the ground of their virtue or excellence. It is plain, then, that in their view, at any rate, virtue or excellence is better than honour; and perhaps we should take this to be the end of the statesman's life, rather than honour. But virtue or excellence also appears too incomplete to be what we want; for it seems that a man might have virtue and yet be asleep or be inactive all his life, and, moreover, might meet with the greatest disasters and misfortunes; and no one would maintain that such a man is happy, except for argument's sake. But we will not dwell on these matters now, for they are sufficiently discussed in the popular treatises. The third kind of life is the life of contemplation: we will treat of it further on. As for the money-making life, it is something quite contrary to nature; and wealth evidently is not the good of which we are in search, for it is merely useful as a means to something else. So we might rather take pleasure and virtue or excellence to be ends than wealth; for they are chosen on their own account. But it seems that not even they are the end, though much breath has been wasted in attempts to show that they are . . .

7. Leaving these matters, then, let us return once more to the question, what this good can be of which we are in search. It seems to be different in different kinds of action and in different arts,—one thing in medicine and another in war, and so on. What then is the good in each of these cases? Surely that for the sake of which all else is done. And that in medicine is health, in war is victory; in building is a house,—a different thing in each different case, but always, in whatever we do and in whatever we choose, the end. For it is always for the sake of the end that all else is done. If then there be one end of all that man does, this end will be the realizable good,—or these ends, if there be more than one.

By this generalization our argument is brought to the same point as before. This point we must try to explain more clearly. We see that there are many ends. But some of these are chosen only as means, as wealth, flutes, and the whole class of instruments. And so it is plain that not all ends are final. But the best of all things must, we conceive, be something final. If then there be only one final end, this will be what we are seeking,—or if there be more than one, then the most final of them. Now that which is pursued as an end in itself is more final than that which is pursued as means to something else, and that which is never chosen as means than that which is chosen both as an end in itself and as means, and that is strictly final which is always chosen as an end in itself and never as means.

Happiness seems more than anything else to answer to this description: for we always choose it for itself, and never for the sake of something else; while honour and pleasure and reason, and all virtue or excellence, we choose partly indeed for themselves (for, apart from any result, we should choose each of them), but partly also for the sake of happiness, supposing that they will help to make us happy. But no one chooses happiness for the sake of these things, or as a means to anything else at all. We seem to be led to the same conclusion when

we start from the notion of self-sufficiency. The final good is thought to be self-sufficing [or all-sufficing]. In applying this term we do not regard a man as an individual leading a solitary life, but we also take account of parents, children, wife, and, in short, friends and fellow-citizens generally, since man is naturally a social being. Some limit must indeed be set to this; for if you go on to parents and descendants and friends of friends, you will never come to a stop. But this we will consider further on: for the present we will take self-sufficing to mean what by itself makes life desirable and in want of nothing. And happiness is believed to answer to this description. And further, happiness is believed to be the most desirable thing in the world, and that not merely as one among other good things: if it were merely one among other good things [so that other things could be added to it], it is plain that the addition of the least of other goods must make it more desirable; for the addition becomes a surplus of good, and of two goods the greater is always more desirable. Thus it seems that happiness is something final and self-sufficing, and is the end of all that man does.

But perhaps the reader thinks that though no one will dispute the statement that happiness is the best thing in the world, yet a still more precise definition of it is needed. This will best be gained, I think, by asking, What is the function of man? For as the goodness and the excellence of a piper or a sculptor, or the practiser of any art, and generally of those who have any function or business to do, lies in that function, so man's good would seem to lie in his function, if he has one. But can we suppose that, while a carpenter and a cobbler has a function and a business of his own, man has no business and no function assigned him by nature? Nay, surely as his several members, eye and hand and foot, plainly have each his own function, so we must suppose that man also has some function over and above all these.

What then is it? Life evidently he has in common even with the plants, but we want that which is peculiar to him. We must exclude, therefore, the life of mere nutrition and growth. Next to this comes the life of sense; but this too he plainly shares with horses and cattle and all kinds of animals. There remains then the life whereby he acts—the life of his rational nature, with its two sides or divisions, one rational as obeying reason, the other rational as having and exercising reason. But as this expression is ambiguous, we must be understood to mean thereby the life that consists in the exercise [not the mere possession] of the faculties; for this seems to be more properly entitled to the name.

The function of man, then, is exercise of his vital faculties [or soul] on one side in obedience to reason, and on the other side with reason. But what is called the function of a man of any profession and the function of a man who is good in that profession are generically the same, e.g. of a harper and of a good harper; and this holds in all cases without exception, only that in the case of the latter his superior excellence at his work is added; for we say a harper's function is to harp, and a good harper's to harp well. Man's function then being, as we say, a kind of life—that is to say, exercise of his faculties and action of various kinds with reason—the good man's function is to do this well and beautifully [or nobly]. But the function of anything is done well when it is done in accordance with the proper excellence of that thing. If this be so the result is that the good of man is exercise of his faculties in accordance with excellence or virtue, or, if

there be more than one, in accordance with the best and most complete virtue. But there must also be a full term of years for this exercise; for one swallow or one fine day does not make a spring, nor does one day or any small space of time make a blessed or happy man.

This, then, may be taken as a rough outline of the good; for this, I think, is the proper method,—first to sketch the outline, and then to fill in the details. But it would seem that, the outline once fairly drawn, any one can carry on the work and fill in the several items which time reveals to us or helps us to find. And this indeed is the way in which the arts and sciences have grown; for it requires no extraordinary genius to fill up the gaps. We must bear in mind, however, what was said above, and not demand the same degree of accuracy in all branches of study, but in each case so much as the subject-matter admits of and as is proper to that kind of inquiry. The carpenter and the geometer both look for the right angle, but in different ways: the former only wants such an approximation to it as his work requires, but the latter wants to know what constitutes a right angle, or what is its special quality; his aim is to find out the truth. And so in other cases we must follow the same course, lest we spend more time on what is immaterial than on the real business in hand. Nor must we in all cases alike demand the reason why; sometimes it is enough if the undemonstrated fact be fairly pointed out, as in the case of the starting-points or principles of a science. Undemonstrated facts always form the first step or starting-point of a science; and these starting-points or principles are arrived at some in one way, some in another—some by induction, others by perception, others again by some kind of training. But in each case we must try to apprehend them in the proper way, and do our best to define them clearly; for they have great influence upon the subsequent course of an inquiry. A good start is more than half the race, I think, and our starting-point of principle, once found, clears up a number of our difficulties.

8. We must not be satisfied, then, with examining this starting-point or principle of ours as a conclusion from our data, but must also view it in its relation to current opinions on the subject; for all experience harmonizes with a true principle, but a false one is soon found to be incompatible with the facts. Now, good things have been divided into three classes, external goods on the one hand, and on the other goods of the soul and goods of the body; and the goods of the soul are commonly said to be goods in the fullest sense, and more good than any other. But "actions and exercises of the vital faculties may be said to be of the soul." So our account is confirmed by this opinion, which is both of long standing and approved by all who busy themselves with philosophy. But, indeed, we secure the support of this opinion by the mere statement that certain actions and exercises are the end; for this implies that it is to be ranked among the goods of the soul, and not among external goods. Our account, again, is in harmony with the common saying that the happy man lives well and does well; for we may say that happiness, according to us, is living well and doing well. And, indeed, all the characteristics that men expect to find in happiness seem to belong to happiness as we define it. Some hold it to be virtue or excellence, some prudence, others a kind of wisdom; others, again, held it to be all or some of these, with the addition of pleasure, either as an ingredient or as a necessary

accompaniment; and some even include external prosperity in their account of it. Now, some of these views have the support of many voices and of old authority; others have few voices, but those of weight; but it is probable that neither the one side nor the other is entirely wrong, but that in some one point at least, if not in most, they are both right.

First, then, the view that happiness is excellence or a kind of excellence harmonizes with our account; for "exercise of faculties in accordance with excellence" belongs to excellence. But I think we may say that it makes no small difference whether the good be conceived as the mere possession of something, or as its use—as a mere habit or trained faculty, or as the exercise of that faculty. For the habit or faculty may be present, and yet issue in no good result, as when a man is asleep, or in any other way hindered from his function; but with its exercise this is not possible, for it must show itself in acts and in good acts. And as at the Olympic games it is not the fairest and strongest who receive the crown, but those who contend (for among these are the victors), so in life, too, the winners are those who not only have all the excellences, but manifest these in deed.

And, further, the life of these men is in itself pleasant. For pleasure is an affection of the soul, and each man takes pleasure in that which he is said to love,—he who loves horses in horses, he who loves sight-seeing in sight-seeing, and in the same way he who loves justice in acts of justice, and generally the lover of excellence or virtue in virtuous acts or the manifestation of excellence. And while with most men there is a perpetual conflict between the several things in which they find pleasure, since these are not naturally pleasant, those who love what is noble take pleasure in that which is naturally pleasant. For the manifestations of excellence are naturally pleasant, so that they are both pleasant to them and pleasant in themselves. Their life, then, does not need pleasure to be added to it as an appendage, but contains pleasure in itself.

Indeed, in addition to what we have said, a man is not good at all unless he takes pleasure in noble deeds. No one would call a man just who did not take pleasure in doing justice, nor generous who took no pleasure in acts of generosity, and so on. If this be so, the manifestations of excellence will be pleasant in themselves. But they are also both good and noble, and that in the highest degree—at least, if the good man's judgment about them is right, for this is his judgment. Happiness, then, is at once the best and noblest and pleasantest thing in the world, and these are not separated, as the Delian inscription would have them to be:

What is most just is noblest, health is best,

Pleasantest is to get your heart's desire.

For all these characteristics are united in the best exercises of our faculties; and these, or some one of them that is better than all the others, we identify with happiness.

But nevertheless happiness plainly requires external goods too, as we said, for it is impossible, or at least not easy, to act nobly without some furniture of fortune. There are many things that can only be done through instruments, so to speak, such as friends and wealth and political influence; and there are some things whose absence takes the bloom off our happiness, as good birth, the

blessing of children, personal beauty; for a man is not very likely to be happy if he is very ugly in person, or of low birth, or alone in the world, or childless, and perhaps still less if he has worthless children or friends, or has lost good ones that he had. As we said, then, happiness seems to stand in need of this kind of prosperity; and so some identify it with good fortune, just as others identify it with excellence.

9. This has led people to ask whether happiness is attained by learning, or the formation of habits, or any other kind of training, or comes by some divine dispensation or even by chance. Well, if the Gods do give gifts to men, happiness is likely to be among the number, more likely, indeed, than anything else, in proportion as it is better than all other human things. This belongs more properly to another branch of inquiry; but we may say that even if it is not heaven-sent, but comes as a consequence of virtue or some kind of learning or training, still it seems to be one of the most divine things in the world; for the prize and aim of virtue would appear to be better than anything else and something divine and blessed. Again, if it is thus acquired it will be widely accessible; for it will then be in the power of all except those who have lost the capacity for excellence to acquire it by study and diligence. And if it be better that men should attain happiness in this way rather than by chance, it is reasonable to suppose that it is so, since in the sphere of nature all things are arranged in the best possible way, and likewise in the sphere of art, and of each mode of causation, and most of all in the sphere of the noblest mode of causation. And indeed it would be too absurd to leave what is noblest and fairest to the dispensation of chance.

But our definition itself clears up the difficulty; for happiness was defined as a certain kind of exercise of the vital faculties in accordance with excellence or virtue. And of the remaining goods [other than happiness itself], some must be present as necessary conditions, while others are aids and useful instruments to happiness. And this agrees with what we said at starting. We then laid down that the end of the art political is the best of all ends; but the chief business of that art is to make the citizens of a certain character—that is, good and apt to do what is noble. It is not without reason, then, that we do not call an ox, or a horse, or any brute happy; for none of them is able to share in this kind of activity. For the same reason also a child is not happy; he is as yet, because of his age, unable to do such things. If we ever call a child happy, it is because we hope he will do them. For, as we said, happiness requires not only perfect excellence or virtue, but also a full term of years for its exercise. For our circumstances are liable to many changes and to all sorts of chances, and it is possible that he who is now most prosperous will in his old age meet with great disasters, as is told of Priam in the tales of Troy; and a man who is thus used by fortune and comes to a miserable end cannot be called happy.

We tend to think of happiness as a feeling or sense of contentment. For Aristotle, it is "doing well," and not just for a while (your freshman year of college) but for a whole lifetime. Indeed, the insistence that we can be happy only after having lived a full life leads Aristotle to a curious question that would not even make sense to our more fleeting sense of happiness:

What is happiness? Happiness is an activity of the soul, in accordance with virtue or excellence. We now have to see what virtue is (the main topic of the next several books), with the preliminary understanding that virtue is primarily of the soul. (Aristotle's notion of the soul is appropriate to a biologist and is not that of a theologian, nor even of Plato.) Furthermore, there are two kinds of virtues, *intellectual* virtues (which have to do with rational principles and the ability to act correctly in accordance with reason (for example, being courageous). Note that "moral" here has nothing particularly to do with what we call "morality"—an impersonal set of principles that we are all bound to obey.

Like Plato, Aristotle proceeds to divide the soul according to function. The first main division is between the irrational and the rational parts of the soul, each of which are then further divided into two parts. The irrational "half" of the soul is made up of our vegetative faculty, which we share with plants and other animals and, as such, is of no interest to the ethicist. The other part of our irrational part is a bit more complicated: It "is irrational, and yet in some way partakes of reason." What Aristotle has in mind here is that part of us that produces desires independently of thought. He speaks of it as "the faculty of appetite or of desire in general." It is irrational insofar as we do not control the desires and appetites we come to have—they just seem to come upon us. However, this part of us is somewhat rational (it partakes in, or listens to reason) insofar as we then deliberate on and decide what to do about such desires. Finally, the rational "half" of our soul is divided into two faculties as well: those that are responsible for the intellectual and the moral excellences.

13. Since happiness is an exercise of the vital faculties in accordance with perfect virtue or excellence, we will now inquire about virtue or excellence; for this will probably help us in our inquiry about happiness. And indeed the true statesman seems to be especially concerned with virtue, for he wishes to make the citizens good and obedient to the laws. Of this we have an example in the Cretan and the Lacedaemonian lawgivers, and any others who have resembled them. But if the inquiry belongs to Politics or the science of the state, it is plain that it will be in accordance with our original purpose to pursue it.

The virtue or excellence that we are to consider is, of course, the excellence of man; for it is the good of man and the happiness of man that we started to seek. And by the excellence of man I mean excellence not of body, but of soul; for happiness we take to be an activity of the soul. If this be so, then it is evident that the statesman must have some knowledge of the soul, just as the man who is to heal the eye or the whole body must have some knowledge of them, and that the more in proportion as the science of the state is higher and better than medicine. But all educated physicians take much pains to know about the body. As statesmen and students of Politics, then, we must inquire into the nature of the soul, but in so doing we must keep our special purpose in view and go only so far as that requires, for to go into minutest detail would be too laborious for the present undertaking.

Now, there are certain doctrines about the soul which are stated elsewhere with sufficient precision, and these we will adopt. Two parts of the soul are

distinguished, an irrational and a rational part. Whether these are separated as are the parts of the body or any divisible thing, or whether they are only distinguishable in thought but in fact inseparable, like concave and convex in the circumference of a circle, makes no difference for our present purpose.

Of the irrational part, again, one division seems to be common to all things that live, and to be possessed by plants—I mean that which causes nutrition and growth; for we must assume that all things that take nourishment have a faculty of this kind, even when they are embryos, and have the same faculty when they are full grown; at least, this is more reasonable than to suppose that they then have a different one. The excellence of this faculty, then, is plainly one that man shares with other beings, and not specifically human. And this is confirmed by the fact that in sleep this part of the soul, or this faculty, is thought to be most active, while the good and the bad man are undistinguishable when they are asleep (whence the saying that for half their lives there is no difference between the happy and the miserable; which indeed is what we should expect; for sleep is the cessation of the soul from those functions in respect of which it is called good or bad), except that they are to some slight extent roused by what goes on in their bodies, with the result that the dreams of the good man are better than those of ordinary people. However, we need not pursue this further, and may dismiss the nutritive principle, since it has no place in the excellence of man.

But there seems to be another vital principle that is irrational, and yet in some way partakes of reason. In the case of the continent and of the incontinent man alike we praise the reason or the rational part, for it exhorts them rightly and urges them to do what is best, but there is plainly present in them another principle besides the rational one, which fights and struggles against the reason. For just as a paralyzed limb, when you will to move it to the right, moves on the contrary to the left, so is it with the soul; the incontinent man's impulses run counter to his reason. Only whereas we see the refractory member in the case of the body, we do not see it in the case of the soul. But we must nevertheless, I think, hold that in the soul too there is something beside the reason, which opposes and runs counter to it (though in what sense it is distinct from the reason does not matter here). It seems, however, to partake of reason also, as we said: at least, in the continent man it submits to the reason; while in the temperate and courageous man we may say it is still more obedient; for in him it is altogether in harmony with the reason.

The irrational part, then, it appears, is twofold. There is the vegetative faculty, which has no share of reason; and the faculty of appetite or of desire in general, which in a manner partakes of reason or is rational as listening to reason and submitting to its sway,—rational in the sense in which we speak of rational obedience to father or friends, not in the sense in which we speak of rational apprehension of mathematical truths. But all advice and all rebuke and exhortation testify that the irrational part is in some way amenable to reason. If then we like to say that this part, too, has a share of reason, the rational part also will have two divisions: one rational in the strict sense as possessing reason in itself, the other rational as listening to reason as a man listens to his father. Now, on this division of the faculties is based the division of excellence; for we speak of intellectual excellences and of moral excellences, wisdom and understanding and

prudence we call intellectual, liberality and temperance we call moral virtues or excellences. When we are speaking of a man's moral character we do not say that he is wise or intelligent, but that he is gentle or temperate. But we praise the wise man, too, for his habit of mind or trained faculty, and a habit or trained faculty that is praiseworthy is what we call an excellence or virtue.

DISCUSSION

In Book I, Aristotle has set out his central question and his general strategy for answering it. The question is, "What is the good life for man?—by which he means, what is our ultimate goal in life? What do we really want? What will really make us happy?" The strategy, already partially determined by the teleological form of this main question, is to examine various aspects of human life and put them in a kind of (teleo-)logical order. Thus, such different sides of our personalities as emotions, habits, intelligence, and skills are considered, and in each case their place in the overall scheme of the good life is determined.

The logical framework Aristotle has set up, then, is an overall teleological scheme. Everything we do has a goal, and all of the things that we do have an ultimate goal. This is called "happiness." [The question then becomes, "What is happiness?" Aristotle's answer is in terms of human "function," our unique characteristic, which is reason. Happiness is therefore living according to reason. But what does this mean? It does not mean just thinking (although, in the contemplative life, Aristotle gives great importance to thinking): Happiness is a life of *activity* in accordance with reason. But activity in accordance with reason is called *virtue* or *excellence*, which is a matter of cultivated habit as well as understandable in terms of rational principles. Thus, we have our middle term between abstract happiness and particular activities; happiness is the virtuous life, and with this general outline, Aristotle turns to the concept of virtue and the particular kinds of virtue.

As matter-of-fact as Aristotle makes all of this seem, his framework can be questioned in a number of ways. First, one can ask why we should accept the teleological scheme that he gives us. A person who believes that the purpose of life is to serve God and do His bidding, for example, will not accept Aristotle's strictly humanistic framework in which all human activity is aimed at satisfying *our* goals and functions. (It is worth noting, however, that St. Thomas Aquinas later turned Aristotle's arguments into a very Christian conception of morality.) Second, even if we do accept the teleological humanistic framework, does it follow that there is a single goal ("happiness") that is the "end" of all of our activities? Can you think of other goals? Third, must we accept the argument that happiness is necessarily tied to reason (again, even if we accept the teleological scheme)? What problems are there with Aristotle's conception of "reason" so far? Finally, why consider virtue so important? Important for whom? If a person can enjoy a life of slovenly but harmless vice, or can be content with a life of mediocrity and comfort, devoid of "excellence," why should we deny that person his or her conception of the good life? What kinds of arguments can you raise at this point for and against Aristotle's framework for "the good for man"?

MORAL VIRTUE: FROM BOOK II

The second book of the *Ethics*—and several chapters to follow—is concerned with "the moral virtues," those "excellences" that have to do with correct behavior. (The word "virtue" and the word "excellence" are used interchangeably as translations of *arete*.) It is in the list of moral virtues, perhaps more than anywhere else, that the vast differences between Aristotle's Athens and our modern society are most evident. Aristotle's society was only a few generations removed from comparatively primitive tribal times, and during his lifetime Greece was constantly involved in wars (both among the city-states and with other nations). Thus, military virtues such as courage are of primary importance. Moreover, many Christian virtues are absent from the list: Faith is not to be found, nor hope, humility, or charity. Indeed, some of these would be *vices* for an Aristotelian Greek. Athens was an elitist society with a privileged class of male citizens, and it was for them alone that Aristotle was writing. The moral virtues, therefore, are specific to an aristocratic, wealthy, and politically powerful brotherhood. It is worth pointing out, however, that the formal structure of virtues that he advocates (the doctrine of the mean) is independent of any particular society. In studying Aristotle's account of the virtues, it would be a good idea to write up your own list of virtues, marking the similarities and differences.

Aristotle begins the second book by repeating his distinction between the moral and intellectual virtues and characterizing the former by reference to "habit or custom." Indeed, this is a most important concept for Aristotle, which we will find to be quite absent from some later ethicists (Kant, for example). Being a good person is first of all doing the right things without even thinking about it. Aristotle would consider the plight of a person who has to "wrestle with his conscience" all the time to be absurd and not at all good (much less happy), even if, in the end, he did the right thing. Being virtuous is, first of all, having good habits, which means having had the luck to be brought up in the right way.

1. Excellence, then, being of these two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual excellence owes its birth and growth mainly to instruction, and so requires time and experience, while moral excellence is the result of habit or custom and has accordingly in our language received a name formed by a slight change from the word for custom. From this it is plain that none of the moral excellences or virtues is implanted in us by nature; for that which is by nature cannot be altered by training. For instance, a stone naturally tends to fall downwards, and you could not train it to rise upwards, though you tried to do so by throwing it up ten thousand times, nor could you train fire to move downwards, nor accustom anything which naturally behaves in one way to behave in any other way. The virtues, then, come neither by nature nor against nature, but nature gives the capacity for acquiring them, and this is developed by training.

Again, where we do things by nature we get the power first, and put this power forth in act afterwards: as we plainly see in the case of the senses; for it is not by constantly seeing and hearing that we acquire those faculties, but, on the contrary, we had the power first and then used it, instead of acquiring the

power by the use. But the virtues we acquire by doing the acts, as is the case with the arts too. We learn an art by doing that which we wish to do when we have learned it; we become builders by building, and harpers by harping. And so by doing just acts we become just, and by doing acts of temperance and courage we become temperate and courageous. This is attested, too, by what occurs in states; for the legislators make their citizens good by training: e.g. this is the wish of all legislators, and those who do not succeed in this miss their aim, and it is this that distinguishes a good from a bad constitution.

Again, both the moral virtues and the corresponding vices result from and are formed by the same acts; and this is the case with the arts also. It is by harping that good harpers and bad harpers alike are produced: and so with builders and the rest; by building well they will become good builders, and bad builders by building badly. Indeed, if it were not so, they would not want anybody to teach them, but would all be born either good or bad at their trades. And it is just the same with the virtues also. It is by our conduct in our intercourse with other men that we become just or unjust, and by acting in circumstances of danger, and training ourselves to feel fear or confidence, that we become courageous or cowardly. So, too, with our animal appetites and the passion of anger: for by behaving in this way or in that on the occasions with which these passions are concerned, some become temperate and gentle, and others profligate and ill-tempered. In a word, acts of any kind produce habits or characters of the same kind. Hence we ought to make sure that our acts be of a certain kind; for the resulting character varies as they vary. It makes no small difference, therefore, whether a man be trained from his youth up in this way or in that, but a great difference, or rather all the difference.

Aristotle now seeks a general test for virtue. He has already characterized a virtue as involving activity in accordance with reason and said that virtue must be manifested in us as habit, as part of our character. But now, he asks, how can we tell what activities and habits are the rational ones? And how can we test to see whether someone has a virtue or not? The fact that a person does a virtuous act does not necessarily mean that he or she is virtuous. A soldier might not run in battle because he is more afraid of his commanding officer than he is of the enemy. This is not courage, even though he does what the courageous man does—stays in battle. A student who does not cheat on an exam because he or she is afraid of getting caught is not virtuous, even though he or she has done what virtuous students do, namely, not cheated on an exam.

Aristotle's theory of virtue is this: A virtue is neither too much nor too little; it is a "mean between the extremes." Too much perseverance in the face of an enemy isn't courage, but foolhardiness. Too little perseverance is cowardice. Having too much to drink is vulgar and ruinous but, Aristotle insists, refusing to drink altogether is not virtuous either. Virtue is having the right amount (of perseverance, of drink, of money, of humor, of strength, of pleasure). It is worth noting how Aristotle does not consider abstinence itself to be a virtue; a man who does not enjoy himself he calls a "boor." Virtue is a kind of moderation, and this is cultivated, as we have seen, by habitually practicing moderation.

2. But our present inquiry has not, like the rest, a merely speculative aim; we are not inquiring merely in order to know what excellence or virtue is, but in order to become good; for otherwise it would profit us nothing. We must ask therefore about these acts, and see of what kind they are to be; for, as we said, it is they that determine our habits or character. First of all, then, that they must be in accordance with right reason is a common characteristic of them, which we shall here take for granted, reserving for future discussion the question what this right reason is, and how it is related to the other excellences.

But let it be understood, before we go on, that all reasoning on matters of practice must be in outline merely, and not scientifically exact: for, as we said at starting, the kind of reasoning to be demanded varies with the subject in hand; and in practical matters and questions of expediency there are no invariable laws, any more than in questions of health. And if our general conclusions are thus inexact, still more inexact is all reasoning about particular cases; for these fall under no system of scientifically established rules or traditional maxims, but the agent must always consider for himself what the special occasion requires, just as in medicine or navigation. But though this is the case we must try to render what help we can.

First of all, then, we must observe that, in matters of this sort, to fall short and to exceed are alike fatal. This is plain (to illustrate what we cannot see by what we can see) in the case of strength and health. Too much and too little exercise alike destroy strength; and to take too much meat and drink, or to take too little, is equally ruinous to health, but the fitting amount produces and increases and preserves them. Just so, then, is it with temperance also, and courage, and the other virtues. The man who shuns and fears everything and never makes a stand, becomes a coward; while the man who fears nothing at all, but will face anything, becomes foolhardy. So, too, the man who takes his fill of any kind of pleasure, and abstains from none, is a profligate, but the man who shuns all (like him whom we call a "boor") is devoid of sensibility. Thus temperance and courage are destroyed both by excess and defect, but preserved by moderation. But habits or types of character are not only produced and preserved and destroyed by the same occasions and the same means, but they will also manifest themselves in the same circumstances. This is the case with palpable things like strength. Strength is produced by taking plenty of nourishment and doing plenty of hard work, and the strong man, in turn, has the greatest capacity for these. And the case is the same with the virtues: by abstaining from pleasure we become temperate, and when we have become temperate we are best able to abstain. And so with courage: by habituating ourselves to despise danger, and to face it, we become courageous; and when we have become courageous, we are best able to face danger.

The test of virtue is this: A man who is virtuous *enjoys* being virtuous. A person is not more virtuous because he or she is in great pain, having been deprived of some desired goal (the regret of having said "no" or desperately wanting one [too many] more martinis). The virtuous person prefers being virtuous and does not regret it. The

courageous man enjoys being courageous (which is not to say, of course, that he has to enjoy the danger of battle). And again, this is a matter of upbringing; a person must be educated to enjoy virtue and not enjoy vice. (What would Aristotle say about a society such as ours, where entertainment for youths consists in the glorification of gratuitous violence?)

3. The pleasure or pain that accompanies the acts must be taken as a test of the formed habit or character. He who abstains from the pleasures of the body and rejoices in the abstinence is temperate, while he who is vexed at having to abstain is profligate; and again, he who faces danger with pleasure, or, at any rate, without pain, is courageous, but he to whom this is painful is a coward. For moral virtue or excellence is closely concerned with pleasure and pain. It is pleasure that moves us to do what is base, and pain that moves us to refrain from what is noble. And therefore, as Plato says, man needs to be so trained from his youth up as to find pleasure and pain in the right objects. This is what sound education means.

Another reason why virtue has to do with pleasure and pain is that it has to do with actions and passions or affections; but every affection and every act is accompanied by pleasure or pain. The fact is further attested by the employment of pleasure and pain in correction; they have a kind of curative property, and a cure is effected by administering the opposite of the disease.

Again, as we said before, every type of character [or habit or formed faculty] is essentially relative to, and concerned with, those things that form it for good or for ill; but it is through pleasure and pain that bad characters are formed—that is to say, through pursuing and avoiding the wrong pleasures and pains, or pursuing and avoiding them at the wrong time, or in the wrong manner, or in any other of the various ways of going wrong that may be distinguished. And hence some people go so far as to define the virtues as a kind of impassive or neutral state of mind. But they err in stating this absolutely, instead of qualifying it by the addition of the right and wrong manner, time, etc. We may lay down, therefore, that this kind of excellence [*i.e.* moral excellence] makes us to do what is best in matters of pleasure and pain, while vice or badness has the contrary effect. But the following considerations will throw additional light on the point.

There are three kinds of things that move us to choose, and three that move us to avoid them: on the one hand, the beautiful or noble, the advantageous, the pleasant; on the other hand, the ugly or base, the hurtful, the painful. Now, the good man is apt to go right, and the bad man to go wrong, about them all, but especially about pleasure: for pleasure is not only common to man with animals, but also accompanies all pursuit or choice; since the noble, and the advantageous also, are pleasant in idea. Again, the feeling of pleasure has been fostered in us all from our infancy by our training, and has thus become so engrained in our life that it can scarce be washed out. And, indeed, we all more or less make pleasure our test in judging of actions. For this reason too, then, our whole inquiry must be concerned with these matters; since to be pleased and

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pained in the right or the wrong way has great influence on our actions. Again, to fight with pleasure is harder than to fight with wrath (which Heraclitus says is hard), and virtue, like art, is always more concerned with what is harder; for the harder the task the better is success. For this reason also, then, both [moral] virtue or excellence and the science of the state must always be concerned with pleasures and pains; for he that behaves rightly with regard to them will be good, and he that behaves badly will be bad. We will take it as established, then, that [moral] excellence or virtue has to do with pleasures and pains; and that the acts which produce it develop it, and also, when differently done, destroy it; and that it manifests itself in the same acts which produced it.

Aristotle now pursues this idea, that virtue requires habituation of right activity. For an act to be virtuous,

- You must know what you are doing.
- You must deliberately choose to do it.
- You must do it for its own sake.
- It must be a manifestation of a state of character and not just an isolated incident.

4. But here we may be asked what we mean by saying that men can become just and temperate only by doing what is just and temperate: surely, it may be said, if their acts are just and temperate, they themselves are already just and temperate, as they are grammarians and musicians if they do what is grammatical and musical. We may answer, I think, firstly, that this is not quite the case even with the arts. A man may do something grammatical [or write something correctly] by chance, or at the prompting of another person: he will not be grammatical till he not only does something grammatical, but also does it grammatically [or like a grammatical person], *i.e.* in virtue of his own knowledge of grammar. But, secondly, the virtues are not in this point analogous to the arts. The products of art have their excellence in themselves, and so it is enough if when produced they are of a certain quality; but in the case of the virtues, a man is not said to act justly or temperately [or like a just or temperate man] if what he does merely be of a certain sort—he must be in a certain state of mind when he does it; *i.e.* first of all, he must know what he is doing; secondly, he must choose it, and choose it for itself; and, thirdly, his act must be the expression of a formed and stable character. Now, of these conditions, only one, the knowledge, is necessary for the possession of any art; but for the possession of the virtues knowledge is of little or no avail, while the other conditions that result from repeatedly doing what is just and temperate are not a little important, but all-important.

The thing that is done, therefore, is called just or temperate when it is such as the just or temperate man would do; but the man who does it is not just or

self
condition

temperate, unless he also does it in the spirit of the just or the temperate man. It is right, then, to say that by doing what is just a man becomes just, and temperate by doing what is temperate, while without doing thus he has no chance of ever becoming good. But most men, instead of doing thus, fly to theories, and fancy that they are philosophizing and that this will make them good, like a sick man who listens attentively to what the doctor says and then disobeys all his orders. This sort of philosophizing will no more produce a healthy habit of mind than this sort of treatment will produce a healthy habit of body.

What is a virtue? So far we have seen that it is (a) activity, (b) in accordance with reason, (c) the mean between the extremes, (d) a matter of habit, (e) and gives pleasure to the virtuous person. Aristotle now approaches this question again, asking whether a virtue is

1. A passion or an emotion.
2. A power or natural faculty.
3. A habit or trained faculty.

We already know the answer (number 3), but Aristotle gives us his reasons for rejecting the first two possibilities. (Why is it important to him that a virtue is not simply an emotion? What would follow if virtues were emotions?)

5. We have next to inquire what excellence or virtue is. A quality of the soul is either (1) a passion or emotion, or (2) a power or faculty, or (3) a habit or trained faculty; and so virtue must be one of these three. By (1) a passion or emotion we mean appetite, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, love, hate, longing, emulation, pity, or generally that which is accompanied by pleasure or pain; (2) a power of faculty is that in respect of which we are said to be capable of being affected in any of these ways, as, for instance, that in respect of which we are able to be angered or pained or to pity; and (3) a habit or trained faculty is that in respect of which we are well or ill regulated or disposed in the matter of our affections; as, for instance, in the matter of being angered, we are ill regulated if we are too violent or too slack, but if we are moderate in our anger we are well regulated. And so with the rest.

Now, the virtues are not emotions, nor are the vices—(1) because we are not called good or bad in respect of our emotions, but are called so in respect of our virtues or vices; (2) because we are neither praised nor blamed in respect of our emotions (a man is not praised for being afraid or angry, nor blamed for being angry simply, but for being angry in a particular way), but we are praised or blamed in respect of our virtues or vices; (3) because we may be angered or frightened without deliberate choice, but the virtues are a kind of deliberate choice, or at least are impossible without it; and (4) because in respect of our emotions we are said to be moved, but in respect of our virtues and vices we are not said to be moved, but to be regulated or disposed in this way or in that.

For these same reasons also they are not powers or faculties; for we are not called either good or bad for being merely capable of emotion, nor are we either praised or blamed for this. And further, while nature gives us our powers or faculties, she does not make us either good or bad. (This point, however, we have already treated.) If, then, the virtues be neither emotions nor faculties, it only remains for them to be habits or trained faculties.

Harking back to Book I, Aristotle defines excellence or virtue in general as that which makes a thing both good in itself and able to perform its proper function. Thus, the sort of moral virtue we seek is described by Aristotle as "the habit or trained faculty that makes a man good and makes him perform his function well." He now pursues his analysis of moral virtue as habitual rational activity and the choice of a mean between extremes. Although most moral systems stigmatize acting excessively (being too loud, too drunk, and so on), few have made the corollary claim that Aristotle points to, namely, that a deficiency can be just as bad. The person who is constantly belittling him- or herself is as just as bad, or imbalanced, as the one who is puffed up with unwarranted pride. Likewise, both a deficiency and an excess of self-esteem (to use a contemporary "virtue") can be problematic. The point is that there is a right combination of the extremes, so to speak, just as in a fine painting there is just the right amount of color, line, and so on—to either add to or subtract from it would be to make it worse. However, we must always take into account our own natures when looking for the proper mean.

But not all activities or motives can be moderated. You can drink just so much, not more or less, and you can stay in battle just so long. But you cannot commit just the right amount of adultery or theft, for any amount of such activities is wrong. Similarly, although a person can have a right amount of anger and be angry at the right things (which is a virtue), he or she cannot have a virtuous amount of envy, for envy is one of those emotions that is degrading in any amount.

6. We have thus found the genus to which virtue belongs: but we want to know, not only that it is a trained faculty, but also what species of trained faculty it is. We may safely assert that the virtue or excellence of a thing causes that thing both to be itself in good condition and to perform its function well. The excellence of the eye, for instance, makes both the eye and its work good; for it is by the excellence of the eye that we see well. So the proper excellence of the horse makes a horse what he should be, and makes him good at running, and carrying his rider, and standing a charge. If, then, this holds good in all cases, the proper excellence or virtue of man will be the habit or trained faculty that makes a man good and makes him perform his function well.

How this is to be done we have already said, but we may exhibit the same conclusion in another way, by inquiring what the nature of this virtue is. Now, if we have any quantity, whether continuous or discrete, it is possible to take

either a larger [or too large], or a smaller [or too small], or an equal [or fair] amount, and that either absolutely or relatively to our own needs. By an equal or fair amount I understand a mean amount, or one that lies between excess and deficiency. By the absolute mean, or mean relatively to the thing itself, I understand that which is equidistant from both extremes, and this is one and the same for all. By the mean relatively to us I understand that which is neither too much nor too little for us; and this is not one and the same for all. For instance, if ten be too large and two too small, six is the mean relatively to the thing itself, for it exceeds one extreme by the same amount by which it is exceeded by the other extreme: and this is the mean in arithmetical proportion. But the mean relatively to us cannot be found in this way. If ten pounds of food is too much for a given man to eat, and two pounds too little, it does not follow that the trainer will order him six pounds: for that also may perhaps be too much for the man in question, or too little; too little for Milo, too much for the beginner. The same holds true in running and wrestling. And so we may say generally that a master in any art avoids what is too much and what is too little, and seeks for the mean and chooses it—not the absolute but the relative mean.

If, then, every art or science perfects its work in this way, looking to the mean and bringing its work up to this standard (so that people are wont to say of a good work that nothing could be taken from it or added to it, implying that excellence is destroyed by excess or deficiency, but secured by observing the mean; and good artists, as we say, do in fact keep their eyes fixed on this in all that they do), and if virtue, like nature, is more exact and better than any art, it follows that virtue also must aim at the mean—virtue of course meaning moral virtue or excellence; for it has to do with passions and actions, and it is these that admit of excess and deficiency and the mean. For instance, it is possible to feel fear, confidence, desire, anger, pity, and generally to be affected pleasantly and painfully, either too much or too little, in either case wrongly; but to be thus affected at the right times, and on the right occasions, and towards the right persons, and with the right object, and in the right fashion, is the mean course and the best course, and these are characteristics of virtue. And in the same way our outward acts also admit of excess and deficiency, and the mean or due amount. Virtue, then, has to deal with feelings or passions and with outward acts, in which excess is wrong and deficiency also is blamed, but the mean amount is praised and is right—both of which are characteristics of virtue. Virtue, then, is a kind of moderation inasmuch as it aims at the mean.

Again, there are many ways of going wrong (for evil is infinite in nature, to use a Pythagorean figure, while good is finite), but only one way of going right; so that the one is easy and the other hard—easy to miss the mark and hard to hit. On this account also, then, excess and deficiency are characteristic of vice, hitting the mean is characteristic of virtue.

Virtue, then, is a habit or trained faculty of choice, the characteristic of which lies in moderation or observance of the mean relatively to the persons concerned, as determined by reason, *i.e.* by the reason by which the prudent man would determine it. And it is a moderation, firstly, inasmuch as it comes in the middle or mean between two vices, one on the side of excess, the other on

the side of defect; and, secondly, inasmuch as, while these vices fall short of or exceed the due measure in feeling and in action, it finds and chooses the mean, middling, or moderate amount. Regarded in its essence, therefore, or according to the definition of its nature, virtue is a moderation or middle state, but viewed in its relation to what is best and right it is the extreme of perfection.

But it is not all actions nor all passions that admit of moderation; there are some whose very names imply badness, as malevolence, shamelessness, envy, and, among acts, adultery, theft, murder. These and all other like things are blamed as being bad in themselves, and not merely in their excess or deficiency. It is impossible therefore to go right in them; they are always wrong: rightness and wrongness in such things (*e.g.* in adultery) does not depend upon whether it is the right person and occasion and manner, but the mere doing of any one of them is wrong. It would be equally absurd to look for moderation or excess or deficiency in unjust cowardly or profligate conduct; for then there would be moderation in excess or deficiency, and excess in excess, and deficiency in deficiency. The fact is that just as there can be no excess or deficiency in temperance or courage because the mean or moderate amount is, in a sense, an extreme, so in these kinds of conduct also there can be no moderation or excess or deficiency, but the acts are wrong however they be done. For, to put it generally, there cannot be moderation in excess or deficiency, nor excess or deficiency in moderation.

Aristotle now gives us his list of the virtues, and it is here that the reader would be well advised—if he or she has not done so already—to make out a comparable list of his or her own virtues, to see how it compares. Here is Aristotle's list:

- Courage (particularly, but not only, in battle).
- Temperance (self-control in such pleasant activities as eating, drinking, sex).
- Justice (being fair with others; and keeping one's promises and contracts).
- Liberality (spending money; notice that charity itself is not a virtue, and giving away all of one's money [like some of the saints did] would be considered not only excessive but insane).
- Magnificence (living well materially, driving a substantial but not too flashy chariot, living in a big [but not too big] house, giving good [but not too ridiculously lavish] parties).
- Pride (taking public pleasure in one's accomplishments and status. Notice that, for Aristotle, not doing so, being humble, is a vice).
- High-mindedness (not being petty).
- Aspiration (being ambitious but not too ambitious. Notice that Aristotle says that this virtue has no name in Greek and that what we call "ambition" is taken by him to be a vice. Why?).
- Gentleness (not wimpiness—Athens was a very "macho" society—but charm and concern for others, sensitivity).
- Truthfulness (not being a liar, particularly with regard to one's own accomplishments).
- Wittiness (having a sense of humor).