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# Nicomachean Ethics

Edited by  
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*Nicomachean Ethics*

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ARISTOTLE



*Nicomachean Ethics*

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY

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## Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page</i> vi
<i>Introduction</i>	vii
<i>Chronology</i>	xxxvi
<i>Further reading</i>	xxxviii
<i>Note on the text</i>	xli
Nicomachean Ethics	i
Book I	3
Book II	23
Book III	37
Book IV	60
Book V	81
Book VI	103
Book VII	119
Book VIII	143
Book IX	164
Book X	183
<i>Glossary</i>	205
<i>Index</i>	209

## *Book I*

### Chapter 1

Every skill and every inquiry, and similarly every action and rational choice, is thought to aim at some good; and so the good has been aptly described as that at which everything aims. But it is clear that there is some difference between ends: some ends are activities, while others are products which are additional to the activities. In cases where there are ends additional to the actions, the products are by their nature better than the activities. 1094a

Since there are many actions, skills, and sciences, it happens that there are many ends as well: the end of medicine is health, that of shipbuilding, a ship, that of military science, victory, and that of domestic economy, wealth. But when any of these actions, skills, or sciences comes under some single faculty – as bridlemaking and other sciences concerned with equine equipment come under the science of horsemanship, and horsemanship itself and every action in warfare come under military science, and others similarly come under others – then in all these cases the end of the master science is more worthy of choice than the ends of the subordinate sciences, since these latter ends are pursued also for the sake of the former. And it makes no difference whether the ends of the actions are the activities themselves, or something else additional to them, as in the sciences just mentioned.

## Chapter 2

So if what is done has some end that we want for its own sake, and everything else we want is for the sake of this end; and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (because this would lead to an infinite progression, making our desire fruitless and vain), then clearly this will be the good, indeed the chief good. Surely, then, knowledge of the good must be very important for our lives? And if, like archers, we have a target, are we not more likely to hit the right mark? If so, we must try at least roughly to comprehend what it is and which science or faculty is concerned with it.

1094b Knowledge of the good would seem to be the concern of the most authoritative science, the highest master science. And this is obviously the science of politics, because it lays down which of the sciences there should be in cities, and which each class of person should learn and up to what level. And we see that even the most honourable of faculties, such as military science, domestic economy, and rhetoric, come under it. Since political science employs the other sciences, and also lays down laws about what we should do and refrain from, its end will include the ends of the others, and will therefore be the human good. For even if the good is the same for an individual as for a city, that of the city is obviously a greater and more complete thing to obtain and preserve. For while the good of an individual is a desirable thing, what is good for a people or for cities is a nobler and more godlike thing. Our enquiry, then, is a kind of political science, since these are the ends it is aiming at.

## Chapter 3

Our account will be adequate if its clarity is in line with the subject-matter, because the same degree of precision is not to be sought in all discussions, any more than in works of craftsmanship. The spheres of what is noble and what is just, which political science examines, admit of a good deal of diversity and variation, so that they seem to exist only by convention and not by nature. Goods vary in this way as well, since it happens that, for many, good things have harmful consequences: some people have been ruined by wealth, and others by courage. So we should be content, since we are discussing things like these in such a way, to



demonstrate the truth sketchily and in outline, and, because we are making generalizations on the basis of generalizations, to draw conclusions along the same lines. Indeed, the details of our claims, then, should be looked at in the same way, since it is a mark of an educated person to look in each area for only that degree of accuracy that the nature of the subject permits. Accepting from a mathematician claims that are mere probabilities seems rather like demanding logical proofs from a rhetorician.

Each person judges well what he knows, and is a good judge of this. So, in any subject, the person educated in it is a good judge of that subject, and the person educated in all subjects is a good judge without qualification. This is why a young person is not fitted to hear lectures on political science, since our discussions begin from and concern the actions of life, and of these he has no experience. Again, because of his tendency to follow his feelings, his studies will be useless and to no purpose, since the end of the study is not knowledge but action. It makes no difference whether he is young in years or juvenile in character, since the deficiency is not related to age, but occurs because of his living and engaging in each of his pursuits according to his feelings. For knowledge is a waste of time for people like this, just as it is for those without self-restraint. But knowledge of the matters that concern political science will prove very beneficial to those who follow reason both in shaping their desires and in acting. 1095a

Let these comments – about the student, how our statements are to be taken, and the task we have set ourselves – serve as our preamble.

## Chapter 4

Let us continue with the argument, and, since all knowledge and rational choice seek some good, let us say what we claim to be the aim of political science – that is, of all the good things to be done, what is the highest. Most people, I should think, agree about what it is called, since both the masses and sophisticated people call it happiness, understanding being happy as equivalent to living well and acting well. They disagree about substantive conceptions of happiness, the masses giving an account which differs from that of the philosophers. For the masses think it is something straightforward and obvious, like pleasure, wealth, or honour, some thinking it to be one thing, others another. Often the

same person can give different accounts: when he is ill, it is health; when he is poor, it is wealth. And when people are aware of their ignorance, they marvel at those who say it is some grand thing quite beyond them. Certain thinkers used to believe that beyond these many good things there is something else good in itself, which makes all these good things good. Examining all the views offered would presumably be rather a waste of time, and it is enough to look at the most prevalent ones or those that seem to have something to be said for them.

1095b Let us not forget, however, that there is a difference between arguments from first principles and arguments to first principles. For Plato rightly used to wonder about this, raising the question whether the way to go is from first principles or to first principles, as in the racecourse whether it is from the judges to the post or back again as well. For while we should begin from things known, they are known in two senses: known by us, and known without qualification. Presumably we have to begin from things known by us. This is why anyone who is going to be a competent student in the spheres of what is noble and what is just – in a word, politics – must be brought up well in his habits. For the first principle is the belief *that* something is the case, and if this is sufficiently clear, he will not need the reason *why* as well. Such a person is in possession of the first principles, or could easily grasp them. Anyone with neither of these possibilities open to him should listen to Hesiod:

This person who understands everything for himself is the best of all,  
And noble is that one who heeds good advice.  
But he who neither understands it for himself nor takes to heart  
What he hears from another is a worthless man.<sup>1</sup>

## Chapter 5

But let us begin from where we digressed. For people seem, not unreasonably, to base their conception of the good – happiness, that is – on their own lives. The masses, the coarsest people, see it as pleasure, and so they like the life of enjoyment. There are three especially prominent types of life: that just mentioned, the life of politics, and thirdly the life of contemplation. The masses appear quite slavish by

<sup>1</sup> Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 293, 295–7.

rationally choosing a life fit only for cattle; but they are worthy of consideration because many of those in power feel the same as Sardanapallus.<sup>2</sup>

Sophisticated people, men of action, see happiness as honour, since honour is pretty much the end of the political life. Honour, however, seems too shallow to be an object of our inquiry, since honour appears to depend more on those who honour than on the person honoured, whereas we surmise the good to be something of one's own that cannot easily be taken away. Again, they seem to pursue honour in order to convince themselves of their goodness; at least, they seek to be honoured by people with practical wisdom, among those who are familiar with them, and for their virtue. So it is clear that, to these people at least, virtue is superior.

One might, perhaps, suppose virtue rather than honour to be the end of the political life. But even virtue seems, in itself, to be lacking something, since apparently one can possess virtue even when one is asleep, or inactive throughout one's life, and also when one is suffering terribly or experiencing the greatest misfortunes; and no one would call a person living this kind of life happy, unless he were closely defending a thesis. But enough of this, because these issues have been sufficiently dealt with in our everyday discussions. 1096a

The third kind of life is that of contemplation, which we shall examine in what follows.

The life of making money is a life people are, as it were, forced into, and wealth is clearly not the good we are seeking, since it is merely useful, for getting something else. One would be better off seeing as ends the things mentioned before, because they are valued for themselves. But they do not appear to be ends either, and many arguments have been offered against them. So let us put them to one side.

## Chapter 6

It would perhaps be quite a good idea to examine the notion of the universal and go through any problems there are in the way it is employed, despite the fact that such an inquiry turns out to be difficult going because those who introduced the Forms<sup>3</sup> are friends. It will

<sup>2</sup> A mythical king of Assyria.

<sup>3</sup> I.e., Plato and his followers.

presumably be thought better, indeed one's duty, to do away with even what is close to one's heart in order to preserve the truth, especially when one is a philosopher. For one might love both, but it is nevertheless a sacred duty to prefer the truth to one's friends.

Those who introduced this idea did not set up Forms for series in which they spoke of priority and posteriority, and this is why they did not postulate a Form of numbers. But the good is spoken of in the categories of substance, of quality and of relation; and that which exists in itself, namely, substance, is naturally prior to what is relative (since this seems like an offshoot and attribute of what is). So there could not be some common Form over and above these goods.

Again, good is spoken of in as many senses as is being: it is used in the category of substance, as for instance god and intellect, in that of quality – the virtues, in that of quantity – the right amount, in that of relation – the useful, in that of time – the right moment, and in that of place – the right locality, and so on. So it is clear that there could not be one common universal, because it would be spoken of not in all the categories, but in only one.

Again, since there is a single science for the things answering to each individual Form, there should have been some single science for all the goods. But as it happens there are many sciences, even of the things in one category. For example, the right moment: in war, it is military science, in illness, medicine; or the right amount: in diet, it is medicine, in exercise, gymnastics.

1096b One might also be puzzled about what on earth they mean by speaking of a 'thing-in-itself', since the definition of humanity is one and the same in humanity-in-itself and human being. Inasmuch as they are human, they will not differ. And if this is so, the same will be true of good.

Nor will a thing be any the more good by being eternal, since a long-lasting white thing is no whiter than a short-lived one.

The Pythagoreans<sup>4</sup> seem to give a more plausible account of the good, when they place the one in their column of goods; and Speusippus<sup>5</sup> seems to have followed them in this. But let this be the topic of another discussion.

An objection to what we have said might be that they did not speak

<sup>4</sup> Followers in Southern Italy of Pythagoras of Samos, who flourished around 530 BCE.

<sup>5</sup> Nephew of Plato, and head of Plato's Academy from 407–339 BCE.

about every good, and that things which are pursued and valued for their own sake are called good by reference to a single Form, while those that tend to be instrumental to these things or in some way to preserve them or prevent their contraries are called good for the sake of these – in a different way, in other words. Clearly, then, things should be called good in two senses: things good in themselves, and things good for the sake of things good in themselves. So let us distinguish things good in themselves from those that are means to them and see whether the former are called good with reference to a single Form. What sort of things should one put in the class of things good in themselves? Those that are sought even on their own, such as understanding, sight, certain types of pleasure, and honours? For even if we do seek these for the sake of something else, one would nevertheless put them in the class of things good in themselves. Perhaps nothing but the Form? Then the Form would be useless. But if those other things are in the class of things good in themselves, the same definition of the good will have to be exemplified in all of them, as is that of whiteness in snow and white lead. But the definitions of honour, practical wisdom and pleasure are distinct, and differ with respect to their being good. There is therefore no common good answering to a single Form.

But how, then, are things called good? For they do not seem like items that have the same name by chance. Is it through their all deriving from one good, or their all contributing to one good, or is it rather by analogy? For as sight is good in the body, so intellect is in the soul, and so on in other cases. But perhaps we should put these questions aside for the time being, since seeking precision in these matters would be more appropriate to another area of philosophy.

But the same is true of the Form. For even if there is some one good predicated across categories, or a good that is separate, itself in itself, clearly it could not be an object of action nor something attainable by a human being, which is the sort of thing we are looking for.

Perhaps someone might think that it would be better to understand it with an eye to those goods that are attainable and objects of action. For with this as a sort of paradigm we shall know better the goods that are goods for us, and if we know them, we shall attain them. This argument has some plausibility, but seems to be inconsistent with the sciences: they all aim at some good and seek to remedy any lack of the good, but they leave to one side understanding the universal good. And if there

were such an important aid available, it is surely not reasonable to think that all practitioners of skills would be ignorant of it and fail even to look for it.

There is also a difficulty in seeing how a weaver or carpenter will be helped in practising his skill by knowing this good-in-itself, or how someone who has contemplated the Form itself will be a better doctor or general. For apparently it is not just health that the doctor attends to, but human health, or perhaps rather the health of a particular person, given that he treats each person individually.

That is enough on these issues.

## Chapter 7

But let us return again to the good we are looking for, to see what it might be, since it appears to vary between different actions and skills: it is one thing in medicine, another in military science, and so on in all other cases. What then is the good in each case? Surely it is that for the sake of which other things are done? In medicine it is health, in military science, victory, in housebuilding, a house, and in other cases something else; in every action and rational choice the end is the good, since it is for the sake of the end that everyone does everything else. So if everything that is done has some end, this will be the good among things done, and if there are several ends, these will be the goods.

Our argument, then, has arrived at the same point by a different route, but we should try to make it still clearer. Since there appear to be several ends, and some of these, such as wealth, flutes, and implements generally, we choose as means to other ends, it is clear that not all ends are complete. But the chief good manifestly is something complete. So if there is only one end that is complete, this will be what we are looking for, and if there are several of them, the most complete. We speak of that which is worth pursuing for its own sake as more complete than that which is worth pursuing only for the sake of something else, and that which is never worth choosing for the sake of something else as more complete than things that are worth choosing both in themselves and for the sake of this end. And so that which is always worth choosing in itself and never for the sake of something else we call complete without qualification.

Happiness in particular is believed to be complete without qualifica-

tion, since we always choose it for itself and never for the sake of anything else. Honour, pleasure, intellect, and every virtue we do indeed choose for themselves (since we would choose each of them even if they had no good effects), but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, on the assumption that through them we shall live a life of happiness; whereas happiness no one chooses for the sake of any of these nor indeed for the sake of anything else. 1097b

The same conclusion seems to follow from considering self-sufficiency, since the complete good is thought to be self-sufficient. We are applying the term 'self-sufficient' not to a person on his own, living a solitary life, but to a person living alongside his parents, children, wife, and friends and fellow-citizens generally, since a human being is by nature a social being. We must, however, set some limit on these, since if we stretch things so far as to include ancestors and descendants and friends of friends we shall end up with an infinite series. But we must think about this later. For now, we take what is self-sufficient to be that which on its own makes life worthy of choice and lacking in nothing. We think happiness to be such, and indeed the thing most of all worth choosing, not counted as just one thing among others. Counted as just one thing among others it would clearly be more worthy of choice with even the least good added to it. For the good added would cause an increase in goodness, and the greater good is always more worthy of choice. Happiness, then, is obviously something complete and self-sufficient, in that it is the end of what is done.

But perhaps saying that happiness is the chief good sounds rather platitudinous, and one might want its nature to be specified still more clearly. It is possible that we might achieve that if we grasp the characteristic activity of a human being. For just as the good – the doing well – of a flute-player, a sculptor or any practitioner of a skill, or generally whatever has some characteristic activity or action, is thought to lie in its characteristic activity, so the same would seem to be true of a human being, if indeed he has a characteristic activity.

Well, do the carpenter and the tanner have characteristic activities and actions, and a human being none? Has nature left him without a characteristic activity to perform? Or, as there seem to be characteristic activities of the eye, the hand, the foot, and generally of each part of the body, should one assume that a human being has some characteristic activity over and above all these? What sort of thing might it be, then?

1098a For living is obviously shared even by plants, while what we are looking for is something special to a human being. We should therefore rule out the life of nourishment and growth. Next would be some sort of sentient life, but this again is clearly shared by the horse, the ox, indeed by every animal. What remains is a life, concerned in some way with action, of the element that possesses reason. (Of this element, one part has reason in being obedient to reason, the other in possessing it and engaging in thought.) As this kind of life can be spoken of in two ways, let us assume that we are talking about the life concerned with action in the sense of activity, because this seems to be the more proper use of the phrase.

If the characteristic activity of a human being is an activity of the soul in accordance with reason or at least not entirely lacking it; and if we say that the characteristic activity of anything is the same in kind as that of a good thing of the same type, as in the case of a lyre-player and a good lyre-player, and so on, without qualification, in the same way in every case, the superiority of the good one in virtue being an addition to the characteristic activity (for the characteristic activity of the lyre-player is to play the lyre, that of the good lyre-player to play it well); then if this is so, and we take the characteristic activity of a human being to be a certain kind of life; and if we take this kind of life to be activity of the soul and actions in accordance with reason, and the characteristic activity of the good person to be to carry this out well and nobly, and a characteristic activity to be accomplished well when it is accomplished in accordance with the appropriate virtue; then if this is so, the human good turns out to be activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are several virtues, in accordance with the best and most complete. Again, this must be over a complete life. For one swallow does not make a summer, nor one day. Neither does one day or a short time make someone blessed and happy.

So let this serve as an outline of the good, since perhaps we have first to make a rough sketch, and then fill it in later. One would think that anyone with a good outline can carry on and complete the details, and that in this task time will bring much to light or else offer useful assistance. This is how skills have come to advance, because anyone can fill in the gaps. But we must bear in mind what we said above, and not look for the same precision in everything, but in each case whatever is in line with the subject-matter, and the degree appropriate to the inquiry. A carpenter and a geometrician approach the right-angle in different



ways: the carpenter in so far as it is useful for his work, while the geometrician seeks to know what it is, or what sort of thing it is, in that he aims to contemplate the truth. We should therefore do the same in every other case, so that side-issues do not dominate the tasks in hand. Nor should we demand an explanation in the same way in all cases. A sound proof that something *is* the case will suffice in some instances, as with first principles, where the fact itself is a starting-point, that is, a first principle. Some first principles we see by induction, some by perception, some by a kind of habituation, and others in other ways. We must try to investigate each type in the way appropriate to its nature, and take pains to define each of them well, because they are very important in what follows. The first principle seems to be more than half the whole thing, and to clarify many of the issues we are inquiring into. 1098b

## Chapter 8

But we must consider the first principle in the light not only of our conclusion and premises, but of the things that people say about it. For all the data harmonize with the truth, but soon clash with falsity.

Goods have been classified into three groups: those called external goods, goods of the soul, and goods of the body. Goods of the soul are the ones we call most strictly and most especially good, and the actions and activities of the soul we may attribute to the soul. Our conception of happiness, then, is plausible in so far as it accords with this view, a venerable one that has been accepted by philosophers.

Our account is right also in that we are claiming that the end consists in certain actions and activities. For the end thus turns out to be a good of the soul and not an external good.

Another belief that harmonizes with our account is that the happy person lives well and acts well, for we have claimed that happiness is pretty much a kind of living well and acting well.

Again, all the things that people look for in happiness appear to have been included in our account. Some think that happiness is virtue, some practical wisdom, others a kind of wisdom; while others think it is a combination of these or one of these along with more or less pleasure. Yet others include external prosperity as well. Some of these views are popular and of long standing, while others are those of a few distin-

guished men. It is not likely that either group is utterly mistaken, but rather that at least one component of their view is on the right track, perhaps even most of them.

Our account of happiness is in harmony with those who say that happiness is virtue or some particular virtue, since activity in accordance with virtue is characteristic of virtue. Presumably, though, it makes a great difference whether we conceive of the chief good as consisting in possession or in use, that is to say, in a state or in an activity. For while a state can exist without producing any good consequences, as it does in the case of a person sleeping or lying idle for some other reason, this is impossible for an activity: it will necessarily engage in action, and do so well. As in the Olympic Games it is not the most attractive and the strongest who are crowned, but those who compete (since it is from this group that winners come), so in life it is those who act rightly who will attain what is noble and good.

It is also the case that the life of these people is pleasurable in itself. For experiencing pleasure is an aspect of the soul, and each person finds pleasure in that of which he is said to be fond, as a horse-lover finds it in a horse, and someone who likes wonderful sights finds it in a wonderful sight. In the same way, a lover of justice finds it in the sphere of justice and in general a person with virtue finds pleasure in what accords with virtue. The pleasures of the masses, because they are not pleasant by nature, conflict with one another, but the pleasures of those who are fond of noble things are pleasant by nature. Actions in accordance with virtue are like this, so that they are pleasant to these people as well as in themselves. Their life therefore has no need of pleasure as some kind of lucky ornament, but contains its pleasure in itself, because, in addition to what we have already said, the person who does not enjoy noble actions is not good. For no one would call a person just if he did not enjoy acting justly, or generous if he did not enjoy generous actions; and the same goes for the other virtues. If this is so, it follows that actions in accordance with virtue are pleasant in themselves. But they are also good and noble as well as pleasant; indeed, since the good person is a good judge of goodness and nobility, actions in accordance with virtue have them to a degree greater than anything else; and here he judges in accordance with our views.

Happiness, then, is the best, the noblest and the pleasantest thing, and these qualities are not separate as in the inscription at Delos:

Noblest is that which is the most just, and best is being healthy.  
But most pleasant is obtaining what one longs for.

This is because the best activities have all of these qualities. And we say that happiness consists in them, or one of them – the best.

Nevertheless, as we suggested, happiness obviously needs the presence of external goods as well, since it is impossible, or at least no easy matter, to perform noble actions without resources. For in many actions, we employ, as if they were instruments at our disposal, friends, wealth, and political power. Again, being deprived of some things – such as high birth, noble children, beauty – spoils our blessedness. For the person who is terribly ugly, of low birth, or solitary and childless is not really the sort to be happy, still less perhaps if he has children or friends who are thoroughly bad, or good but dead. As we have said, then, there seems to be an additional need for some sort of prosperity like this. For this reason, some identify happiness with good fortune, while others identify it with virtue. 1099b

## Chapter 9

Hence the problem also arises of whether happiness is to be acquired by learning, habituation, or some other training, or whether it comes by virtue of some divine dispensation or even by chance.

If there is anything that the gods give to men, it is reasonable that happiness should be god-given, especially since it is so much the best thing in the human world. But this question would perhaps be more suited to another inquiry. Even if it is not sent by the gods, however, but arises through virtue and some sort of learning or training, it is evidently one of the most divine things. For that which is the prize and end of virtue is clearly the chief good, something both divine and blessed.

It would also be something widely shared, since everyone who was not incapacitated with regard to virtue could attain it through some kind of learning and personal effort. And if it is better to be happy in this way than by chance, it is reasonable that happiness should be attained like this. For what is in accordance with nature is by nature as noble as it can be, and so is what is in accordance with skill and every other cause, especially that in accordance with the best cause. To entrust what is greatest and most noble to chance would be quite inappropriate.

The answer to our question is also manifest from our account of happiness, since we said that it was a certain kind of activity of the soul in accordance with virtue; and of the other goods, some are necessary conditions of happiness, and others are naturally helpful and serve as useful means to it.

And this agrees with what we said at the beginning. We took the end of political science to be the chief good, and political science is concerned most of all with producing citizens of a certain kind, namely, those who are both good and the sort to perform noble actions.

It is with good reason, then, that we do not call an ox, a horse or any  
1100a other animal happy, because none of them can share in such activity. And for this same reason, a child is not happy either, since his age makes him incapable of doing such actions. If he is called blessed, he is being described as such on account of the potential he has, since, as we have said, happiness requires complete virtue and a complete life. For there are many vicissitudes in life, all sorts of chance things happen, and even the most successful can meet with great misfortunes in old age, as the story goes of Priam<sup>6</sup> in Trojan times. No one calls someone happy who meets with misfortunes like these and comes to a wretched end.

## Chapter 10

Should we then call no one happy while they are alive, but rather, as Solon advises, wait to see the end?<sup>7</sup> Even if we must assume this to be right, is it really the case that he is happy when he is dead? Or is this not quite ridiculous, especially for us, claiming as we do that happiness is some kind of activity?

But if it is not that we call the dead person happy, and Solon meant not this, but that we can at that stage safely call a person blessed in so far as he is now beyond the reach of evils and misfortunes, even this claim is open to dispute. For both good and evil are thought to happen to a dead person, since they can happen to a person who is alive but not aware of them. Take, for example, honours and dishonours, and the good and bad fortunes of his children or his descendants generally. But this view also gives rise to a problem. Though a person may have lived a blessed

<sup>6</sup> King of Troy at the time of its destruction by Agamemnon.

<sup>7</sup> See Herodotus, *Histories* 1.30–2. Solon was an Athenian lawgiver in the early sixth century, thought to be the founder of democracy.

life into his old age and died accordingly, many reverses may happen in connection with his descendants. Some of them may be good and meet with the life they deserve, others the contrary; and clearly the relation to their ancestors can vary to any degree. It would indeed be odd if the dead person also were to share in these vicissitudes, and be sometimes happy, sometimes wretched. But it would also be odd if the fortunes of descendants had no effect on their ancestors for any time at all.

But we should return to the original question, since considering it might shed light on the one now under discussion. If we must wait to see the end and only then call a person blessed, not as such but as having been so before, surely it is odd that – because we do not wish to call the living happy on account of possible changes in their fortunes, and because happiness is understood as something permanent and not at all liable to change, while the living experience many turns of the wheel – when he is happy, he will not be truly described as such? For clearly, if we were to follow his fortunes, we should often call the same person happy and then wretched, representing the happy person as a kind of chameleon, or as having an unsound foundation. Or is following a person's fortunes the wrong thing to do? For they are not what doing well or badly depend on, though, as we said, they are required as complementary to a fully human life. What really matter for happiness are activities in accordance with virtue, and for the contrary of happiness the contrary kind of activities. 1100b

The question we have been discussing is further confirmation of our account, since nothing in the sphere of human achievement has more permanence than activities in accordance with virtue. They are thought to be more lasting even than the sciences, and the most honourable to be the more lasting, because the blessed spend their lives engaged, quite continually, in them above all (which seems to be why there is no forgetting in connection with these activities).

The quality in question, then, will belong to the happy person, and he will be happy throughout his life. For he will spend all, or most, of his time engaged in action and contemplation in accordance with virtue. And he will bear changes in fortune in a particularly noble way and altogether gracefully, as one who is 'genuinely good' and 'foursquare without a flaw'.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Simonides; see Plato, *Protagoras* 339b. Simonides (c. 556–468) was a Greek poet from Ceos.

Many things, however, both large and small, happen by chance. Small pieces of good fortune or its contrary clearly do not affect the balance of life. But many great events, if they are good, will make a life more blessed, since they will themselves naturally embellish it, and the way a person deals with them can be noble and good. But if they turn out the other way, they will oppress and spoil what is blessed, since they bring distress with them and hinder many activities. Nevertheless, even in their midst what is noble shines through, when a person calmly bears many great misfortunes, not through insensibility, but by being well bred and great-souled.

1101a If activities are, as we have said, what really matter in life, no one blessed could become wretched, since he will never do hateful and petty actions. For the truly good and wise person, we believe, bears all the fortunes of life with dignity and always does the noblest thing in the circumstances, as a good general does the most strategically appropriate thing with the army at his disposal, and a shoemaker makes the noblest shoe out of the leather he is given, and so on with other practitioners of skills. If this is so, the happy person could never become wretched, though he will not be blessed if he meets with luck like that of Priam. Nor indeed will he be unstable and changeable. He will not be shifted easily from happiness, and not by ordinary misfortunes, but by many grave ones. He would not recover from these to become happy again in a short space of time. If he does recover, it will be after a long and complete period of great and noble accomplishments.

What is to prevent us, then, from concluding that the happy person is the one who, adequately furnished with external goods, engages in activities in accordance with complete virtue, not for just any period of time but over a complete life? Or should we add that he will live like this in the future and die accordingly? The future is obscure to us, and we say that happiness is an end and altogether quite complete. This being so, we shall call blessed those of the living who have and will continue to have the things mentioned, but blessed only in human terms.

So much for the distinctions we draw in these areas.

## Chapter 11

Nevertheless, the idea that the fortunes of a person's descendants and all his friends have no effect on him seems excessively heartless and

contrary to what people think. But, given that the things that happen are many and various, some affecting us more and others less, it looks as if it would be a long – even interminable – job to distinguish them in detail. It will be enough, perhaps, to give a general outline.

If, then, as some of a person's misfortunes have a certain weight and influence on his life, while others seem lighter, so too there are similar differences between the fortunes of all his friends; and if it makes a difference whether each of these misfortunes happens to people when they are alive or when they are dead (a greater difference even than whether the dreadful crimes in tragedies happened before the play or are perpetrated on the stage); then this difference must be taken into account in our reasoning, or rather, perhaps, the fact that there is a puzzle about whether the dead can partake of any good or evil. For it does seem, from what we have said, that if anything good or bad does actually affect them, it will be pretty unimportant and insignificant, either in itself or in relation to them; or if not, it must at least be of such an extent and kind as not to make happy those who are not happy already nor to deprive those who are happy of their being blessed. So when friends do well, and likewise when they do badly, it does seem to have some effect on the dead. But it is of such a nature and degree as neither to make not happy those who are happy, nor anything like that. 1101b

## Chapter 12

Now that these matters have been sorted out, let us consider whether happiness is a thing to be praised or instead something to be honoured. For it is clearly not just a capacity.

Anything that is praised seems to be praised for its being of a certain kind and its standing in a certain relation to something else: the just person, the brave person, and the good person and virtue in general we praise for their actions and what they bring about. And we praise the strong person, the fast runner, and each of the others, because he is naturally of a certain kind and stands in some sort of relation to something good and excellent. This is clear also from praise of the gods. For it seems absurd that they should be judged by reference to us, but this happens because, as we have said, praise involves reference to something else. But if praise applies only to things standing in relations, clearly it is not praise that applies to the best things, but something

greater and better. This is in fact obvious, since the gods and the most godlike of people we call blessed and happy. The same goes for things that are good, since we never praise happiness as we might justice, but rather call it blessed, as something better and more divine.

And Eudoxus<sup>9</sup> seems to have been right in pressing the claims of pleasure to supremacy. He believed that the fact that it is not praised despite its being a good indicates that it is better than things that are praised; and he thought that god and the good are like this, because it is by reference to these that other goods are praised. For praise is indeed appropriate to virtue, since it makes us the kind of people to perform noble actions; eulogies, however, are bestowed on what is achieved in the spheres of the body and of the soul alike. But perhaps clarity here is more the job of those who have gone into the subject of encomiums. For  
1102a us, anyway, it is clear from what has been said that happiness is something honourable and complete.

And that it is so seems to follow as well from its being a first principle. It is for the sake of this this we all do all the rest of our actions, and the first principle and cause of goods we take to be something honourable and divine.

### Chapter 13

Since happiness is a certain kind of activity of the soul in accordance with complete virtue, we ought to look at virtue. For perhaps then we might be in a better position to consider happiness.

Besides, the true politician is thought to have taken special pains over this, since he wants to make citizens good and obedient to the laws. As an example, we have the lawgivers of the Cretans and the Spartans, and any others of that ilk. If this inquiry is a part of political science, pursuing it will clearly accord with our original purpose.

Clearly, it is human virtue we must consider, since we were looking for human good and human happiness. By human virtue, we mean that of the soul, not that of the body; and happiness we speak of as an activity of the soul. If this is right, the politician clearly must have some understanding of the sphere of the soul, as the person who is to attend to eyes must have some understanding of the whole body; more so,

<sup>9</sup> c. 390–c. 340 BCE. Outstanding mathematician and pupil of Plato.



indeed, in that political science is superior to medicine, and held in higher esteem, and even among doctors, the sophisticated ones go to a great deal of effort to understand the body. The politician, then, must consider the soul, and consider it with a view to understanding virtue, just to the extent that is required by the inquiry, because attaining a higher degree of precision is perhaps too much trouble for his current purpose.

Some aspects of the soul have been dealt with competently in our popular works as well, and we should make use of these. It is said, for example, that one element of the soul has reason, while another lacks it. It does not matter for the moment whether these elements are separate like the parts of the body or anything else that can be physically divided, or whether they are naturally inseparable but differentiated in thought, like the convex and concave aspects of a curved surface.

Of the element without reason, one part seems to be common: the vegetative, the cause of nutrition and growth. For one should assume such a capacity of the soul to exist in everything that takes in nutrition, even embryos, and to be the same in fully grown beings, since this is more reasonable than assuming that they have a different capacity. 1102b

The virtue of this element is clearly something shared and not specific to human beings. For this part and its capacity are thought more than others to be active during sleep, and the good and bad person to be hardest to distinguish when they are asleep (hence the saying that the happy are no different from the wretched for half of their lives – which makes sense, since sleep is a time when the soul is not engaged in the things that lead to its being called good or bad), except that in some way certain movements on a small scale reach the soul, and make the dreams of good people better than those of ordinary people. But enough of this. Let us leave the nutritive capacity aside, since by nature it plays no role in human virtue.

But there does seem to be another natural element in the soul, lacking reason, but nevertheless, as it were, partaking in it. For we praise the reason of the self-controlled and of the incontinent, that is, the part of their soul with reason, because it urges them in the right direction, towards what is best; but clearly there is within them another natural element besides reason, which conflicts with and resists it. For just as paralysed limbs, when one rationally chooses to move them to the right, are carried off in the opposite direction to the left, so also in the soul:

the impulses of incontinent people carry them off in the opposite direction. In the body we do indeed see the lack of control, while in the soul we do not see it; but I think that we should nevertheless hold that there is some element in the soul besides reason, opposing and running counter to it. In what way it is distinct from the other elements does not matter. But it does seem to partake in reason, as we said. The element in the soul of the self-controlled person, at least, obeys reason and presumably in the temperate and the brave person it is still more ready to listen, since in their case it is in total harmony with reason.

So the element without reason seems itself to have two parts. For the vegetative part has no share at all in reason, while the part consisting in appetite and desire in general does share in it in a way, in so far as it listens to and obeys it. So it has reason in the sense that a person who listens to the reason of his father and his friends is said to have reason, not reason in the mathematical sense. That the element without reason is in some way persuaded by reason is indicated as well by the offering  
1103a of advice, and all kinds of criticism and encouragement. And if we must say that this element possesses reason, then the element with reason will also have two parts, one, in the strict sense, possessing it in itself, the other ready to listen to reason as one is ready to listen to the reason of one's father.

Virtue is distinguished along the same lines. Some virtues we say are intellectual, such as wisdom, judgement and practical wisdom, while others are virtues of character, such as generosity and temperance. For when we are talking about a person's character, we do not say that he is wise or has judgement, but that he is even-tempered or temperate. Yet we do praise the wise person for his state, and the states worthy of praise we call virtues.

## *Book II*

### Chapter 1

Virtue, then, is of two kinds: that of the intellect and that of character. Intellectual virtue owes its origin and development mainly to teaching, for which reason its attainment requires experience and time; virtue of character (*ēthos*) is a result of habituation (*ethos*), for which reason it has acquired its name through a small variation on ‘*ethos*’. From this it is clear that none of the virtues of character arises in us by nature. For nothing natural can be made to behave differently by habituation. For example, a stone that naturally falls downwards could not be made by habituation to rise upwards, not even if one tried to habituate it by throwing it up ten thousand times; nor can fire be habituated to burn downwards, nor anything else that naturally behaves in one way be habituated to behave differently. So virtues arise in us neither by nature nor contrary to nature, but nature gives us the capacity to acquire them, and completion comes through habituation.

Again, in all the cases where something arises in us by nature, we first acquire the capacities and later exhibit the activities. This is clear in the case of the senses, since we did not acquire them by seeing often or hearing often; we had them before we used them, and did not acquire them by using them. Virtues, however, we acquire by first exercising them. The same is true with skills, since what we need to learn before doing, we learn by doing; for example, we become builders by building, and lyre-players by playing the lyre. So too we become just by doing 1103b just actions, temperate by temperate actions, and courageous by courageous actions. What happens in cities bears this out as well, because

legislators make the citizens good by habituating them, and this is what every legislator intends. Those who do not do it well miss their target; and it is in this respect that a good political system differs from a bad one.

Again, as in the case of a skill, the origin and means of the development of each virtue are the same as those of its corruption: it is from playing the lyre that people become good and bad lyre-players. And it is analogous in the case of builders and all the rest, since from building well, people will be good builders, from building badly, bad builders. If this were not so, there would have been no need of a person to teach them, but they would all have been born good or bad at their skill.

It is the same, then, with the virtues. For by acting as we do in our dealings with other men, some of us become just, others unjust; and by acting as we do in the face of danger, and by becoming habituated to feeling fear or confidence, some of us become courageous, others cowardly. The same goes for cases of appetites and anger; by conducting themselves in one way or the other in such circumstances, some become temperate and even-tempered, others intemperate and bad-tempered. In a word, then, like states arise from like activities. This is why we must give a certain character to our activities, since it is on the differences between them that the resulting states depend. So it is not unimportant how we are habituated from our early days; indeed it makes a huge difference – or rather all the difference.

## Chapter 2

The branch of philosophy we are dealing with at present is not purely theoretical like the others, because it is not in order to acquire knowledge that we are considering what virtue is, but to become good people – otherwise there would be no point in it. So we must consider the matter of our actions, and in particular how they should be performed, since, as we have said, they are responsible for our states developing in one way or another.

The idea of acting in accordance with right reason is a generally accepted one. Let us here take it for granted – we shall discuss it later, both what right reason is and how it is related to the other virtues. But  
1104a this we must agree on before we begin: that the whole account of what is to be done ought to be given roughly and in outline. As we said at the

start, the accounts we demand should be appropriate to their subject-matter; and the spheres of actions and of what is good for us, like those of health, have nothing fixed about them.

Since the general account lacks precision, the account at the level of particulars is even less precise. For they do not come under any skill or set of rules: agents must always look at what is appropriate in each case as it happens, as do doctors and navigators. But, though our present account is like this, we should still try to offer some help.

First, then, let us consider this – the fact that states like this are naturally corrupted by deficiency and excess, as we see in the cases of strength and health (we must use clear examples to illustrate the unclear); for both too much exercise and too little ruin one's strength, and likewise too much food and drink and too little ruin one's health, while the right amount produces, increases and preserves it. The same goes, then, for temperance, courage and the other virtues: the person who avoids and fears everything, never standing his ground, becomes cowardly, while he who fears nothing, but confronts every danger, becomes rash. In the same way, the person who enjoys every pleasure and never restrains himself becomes intemperate, while he who avoids all pleasure – as boors do – becomes, as it were, insensible. Temperance and courage, then, are ruined by excess and deficiency, and preserved by the mean.

Not only are virtues produced and developed from the same origins and by the same means as those from which and by which they are corrupted, but the activities that flow from them will consist in the same things. For this is also true in other more obvious cases, like that of strength. It is produced by eating a great deal and going through a great deal of strenuous exercise, and it is the strong person who will be most able to do these very things. The same applies to virtues. By abstaining from pleasures we become temperate, and having become so we are most able to abstain from them. Similarly with courage: by becoming habitu- 1104b  
ated to make light of what is fearful and to face up to it, we become courageous; and when we are, we shall be most able to face up to it.

### Chapter 3

We must take as an indication of a person's states the pleasure or pain consequent on what he does, because the person who abstains from

bodily pleasures and finds his enjoyment in doing just this is temperate, while the person who finds doing it oppressive is intemperate; and the person who enjoys facing up to danger, or at least does not find it painful to do so, is courageous, while he who does find it painful is a coward. For virtue of character is concerned with pleasures and pains: it is because of pleasure that we do bad actions, and pain that we abstain from noble ones. It is for this reason that we need to have been brought up in a particular way from our early days, as Plato says,<sup>10</sup> so we might find enjoyment or pain in the right things; for the right education is just this.

Again, if the virtues are to do with actions and situations of being affected, and pleasure and pain follow from every action and situation of being affected, then this is another reason why virtue will be concerned with pleasures and pains.

The fact that punishment is based on pleasure and pain is further evidence of their relevance; for punishment is a kind of cure, and cures by their nature are effected by contraries.

Again, as we said recently, every state of the soul is naturally related to, and concerned with, the kind of things by which it is naturally made better or worse. It is because of pleasures and pains that people become bad – through pursuing or avoiding the wrong ones, or at the wrong time, or in the wrong manner, or in any other of the various ways distinguished by reason. This is why some have classified virtues as forms of insensibility or states of rest; but this is wrong, because they speak without qualification, without saying ‘in the right way’ and ‘in the wrong way’, ‘at the right time’ and ‘at the wrong time’, and the other things one can add.

We assume, then, that virtue will be the sort of state to do the best actions in connection with pleasures and pains, and vice the contrary. The following considerations should also make it plain to us that virtue and vice are concerned with the same things.

There are three objects of choice – the noble, the useful, and the pleasant – and three of avoidance – their contraries, the shameful, the harmful, and the painful. In respect of all of these, especially pleasure, the good person tends to go right, and the bad person to go wrong. For pleasure is shared with animals, and accompanies all objects of

<sup>10</sup> Plato, *Republic* 401e–402a; *Laws* 653a–c.

choice, because what is noble and what is useful appear pleasant as well. 1105a

Again, pleasure has grown up with all of us since infancy and is consequently a feeling difficult to eradicate, ingrained as it is in our lives. And, to a greater or lesser extent, we regulate our actions by pleasure and pain. Our whole inquiry, then, must be concerned with them, because whether we feel enjoyment and pain in a good or bad way has great influence on our actions.

Again, as Heraclitus says, it is harder to fight against pleasure than against spirit.<sup>11</sup> But both skill and virtue are always concerned with what is harder, because success in what is harder is superior. So this is another reason why the whole concern of virtue and political science is pleasures and pains: the person who manages them well will be good, while he who does so badly will be bad.

Let it be taken as established, then, that virtue is to do with pleasures and pains; that the actions which produce it also increase it, or, if they assume a different character, corrupt it; and that the sphere of its activity is the actions that themselves gave rise to it.

## Chapter 4

Someone might, however, wonder what we mean by saying that becoming just requires doing just actions first, and becoming temperate, temperate actions. For if we do just and temperate actions, we are already just and temperate; similarly, if we do what is literate or musical, we must be literate or musical.

But surely this is not true even of the skills? For one can produce something literate by chance or under instruction from another. Someone will be literate, then, only when he produces something literate and does so in a literate way, that is, in accordance with his own literacy.

Again, the case of the skills is anyway not the same as that of the virtues. For the products of the skills have their worth within themselves, so it is enough for them to be turned out with a certain quality. But actions done in accordance with virtues are done in a just or temperate way not merely by having some quality of their own, but

<sup>11</sup> Heraclitus, 22 B 85 DK. *fl. c.* 500 BCE. Important Ionian philosopher.

rather if the agent acts in a certain state, namely, first, with knowledge, secondly, from rational choice, and rational choice of the actions for their own sake, and, thirdly, from a firm and unshakeable character. The  
1105b second and third of these are not counted as conditions for the other skills, only the knowledge. With regard to virtues, knowledge has little or no weight, while the other two conditions are not just slightly, but all-important. And these are the ones that result from often doing just and temperate actions. Actions, then, are called just and temperate when they are such as the just and the temperate person would do. But the just and temperate person is not the one who does them merely, but the one who does them as just and temperate people do. So it is correct to say that it is by doing just actions that one becomes just, and by doing temperate actions temperate; without doing them, no one would have even a chance of becoming good.

But the masses do not do them. They take refuge in argument, thinking that they are being philosophers and that this is the way to be good. They are rather like patients who listen carefully to their doctors, but do not do what they are told. Just as such treatment will not make the patients healthy in body, so being this kind of philosopher will not make the masses healthy in soul.

## Chapter 5

Next we must consider what virtue is. There are three things to be found in the soul – feelings, capacities, and states – so virtue should be one of these. By feelings, I mean appetite, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, love, hate, longing, emulation, pity, and in general things accompanied by pleasure or pain. By capacities, I mean the things on the basis of which we are described as being capable of experiencing these feelings – on the basis of which, for example, we are described as capable of feeling anger, fear or pity. And by states I mean those things in respect of which we are well or badly disposed in relation to feelings. If, for example, in relation to anger, we feel it too much or too little, we are badly disposed; but if we are between the two, then well disposed. And the same goes for the other cases.

Neither the virtues nor the vices are feelings, because we are called good or bad on the basis not of our feelings, but of our virtues and vices; and also because we are neither praised nor blamed on the basis of our



feelings (the person who is afraid or angry is not praised, and the person who is angry without qualification is not blamed but rather the person who is angry in a certain way), but we are praised and blamed on the basis of our virtues and vices. Again, we become angry or afraid without rational choice, while the virtues are rational choices or at any rate involve rational choice. Again, in respect of our feelings, we are said to be moved, while in respect of our virtues and vices we are said not to be moved but to be in a certain state. 1106a

For these reasons they are not capacities either. For we are not called either good or bad, nor are we praised or blamed, through being capable of experiencing things, without qualification. Again, while we have this capacity by nature, we do not become good or bad by nature; we spoke about this earlier.

So if the virtues are neither feelings nor capacities, it remains that they are states. We have thus described what virtue is generically.

## Chapter 6

But we must say not just that virtue is a state, but what kind of state. We should mention, then, that every virtue causes that of which it is a virtue to be in a good state, and to perform its characteristic activity well. The virtue of the eye, for example, makes it and its characteristic activity good, because it is through the virtue of the eye that we see well. Likewise, the virtue of the horse makes a horse good – good at running, at carrying its rider and at facing the enemy. If this is so in all cases, then the virtue of a human being too will be the state that makes a human being good and makes him perform his characteristic activity well.

We have already said how this will happen, and it will be clear also from what follows, if we consider what the nature of virtue is like.

In everything continuous and divisible, one can take more, less, or an equal amount, and each either in respect of the thing itself or relative to us; and the equal is a sort of mean between excess and deficiency. By the mean in respect of the thing itself I mean that which is equidistant from each of the extremes, this being one single thing and the same for everyone, and by the mean relative to us I mean that which is neither excessive nor deficient – and this is not one single thing, nor is it the same for all. If, for example, ten are many and two are few, six is the mean if one takes it in respect of the thing, because it is by the same

amount that it exceeds the one number and is exceeded by the other. This is the mean according to arithmetic progression. The mean relative  
1106b to us, however, is not to be obtained in this way. For if ten pounds of food is a lot for someone to eat, and two pounds a little, the trainer will not necessarily prescribe six; for this may be a lot or a little for the person about to eat it – for Milo,<sup>12</sup> a little, for a beginner at gymnastics, a lot. The same goes for running and wrestling. In this way every expert in a science avoids excess and deficiency, and aims for the mean and chooses it – the mean, that is, not in the thing itself but relative to us.

If, then, every science does its job well in this way, with its eye on the mean and judging its products by this criterion (which explains both why people are inclined to say of successful products that nothing can be added or taken away from them, implying that excess and deficiency ruin what is good in them, while the mean preserves it, and why those who are good at the skills have their eye on this, as we say, in turning out their product), and if virtue, like nature, is more precise and superior to any skill, it will also be the sort of thing that is able to hit the mean.

I am talking here about virtue of character, since it is this that is concerned with feelings and actions, and it is in these that we find excess, deficiency and the mean. For example, fear, confidence, appetite, anger, pity, and in general pleasure and pain can be experienced too much or too little, and in both ways not well. But to have them at the right time, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end, and in the right way, is the mean and best; and this is the business of virtue. Similarly, there is an excess, a deficiency and a mean in actions. Virtue is concerned with feelings and actions, in which excess and deficiency constitute misses of the mark, while the mean is praised and on target, both of which are characteristics of virtue. Virtue, then, is a kind of mean, at least in the sense that it is the sort of thing that is able to hit a mean.

Again, one can miss the mark in many ways (since the bad belongs to the unlimited, as the Pythagoreans portrayed it, and the good to the limited), but one can get things right in only one (for which reason one is easy and the other difficult – missing the target easy, hitting it difficult). For these reasons as well, then, excess and deficiency are characteristics of vice, the mean characteristic of virtue:

<sup>12</sup> Famous athlete from Croton of the later sixth century.

For good people are just good, while bad people are bad in all sorts of ways.<sup>13</sup>

Virtue, then, is a state involving rational choice, consisting in a mean relative to us and determined by reason – the reason, that is, by reference to which the practically wise person would determine it. It is a mean between two vices, one of excess, the other of deficiency. It is a mean also in that some vices fall short of what is right in feelings and actions, and others exceed it, while virtue both attains and chooses the mean. So, in respect of its essence and the definition of its substance, virtue is a mean, while with regard to what is best and good it is an extreme. 1107a

But not every action or feeling admits of a mean. For some have names immediately connected with depravity, such as spite, shamelessness, envy, and, among actions, adultery, theft, homicide. All these, and others like them, are so called because they themselves, and not their excesses or deficiencies, are bad. In their case, then, one can never hit the mark, but always misses. Nor is there a good or bad way to go about such things – committing adultery, say, with the right woman, at the right time, or in the right way. Rather, doing one of them, without qualification, is to miss the mark.

It would be equally wrong, therefore, to expect there to be a mean, an excess and a deficiency in committing injustice, being a coward, and being intemperate, since then there would be a mean of excess and a mean of deficiency, an excess of excess and a deficiency of deficiency. Rather, just as there is no excess and deficiency of temperance and courage, because the mean is, in a sense, an extreme, so too there is no mean, excess or deficiency in the cases above. However they are done, one misses the mark, because, generally speaking, there is neither a mean of excess or deficiency, nor an excess or deficiency of a mean.

## Chapter 7

But this general account on its own is not enough. We must also apply it to particular cases, because though more general discussions of actions are of wider application, particular ones are more genuine. This is

<sup>13</sup> Unknown.

because actions are to do with particulars, and what we say should accord with particulars. We may take them from our diagram.

1107b In fear and confidence, courage is the mean. Of those who exceed it, the person who exceeds in fearlessness has no name (many cases lack names), while the one who exceeds in confidence is rash. He who exceeds in being afraid and is deficient in confidence is a coward.

With respect to pleasures and pains – not all of them, and less so with pains – the mean is temperance, the excess intemperance. People deficient with regard to pleasures are not very common, and so do not even have a name; let us call them insensible.

In giving and taking money, the mean is generosity, while the excess and deficiency are wastefulness and stinginess. People with these qualities are excessive and deficient in contrary ways to one another. The wasteful person exceeds in giving away and falls short in taking, while the stingy person exceeds in taking and falls short in giving away. (At present, we can be content with giving a rough and summary account of these things; a more detailed classification will come later.)

There are other dispositions connected with money. One mean is magnificence, for the magnificent person, in so far as he deals with large amounts, differs from the generous one, who deals with small. The excess is tastelessness and vulgarity, the deficiency niggardliness, and they differ from the states opposed to generosity; how they differ will be stated below.

In honour and dishonour, the mean is greatness of soul, while the excess is referred to as a kind of vanity, the deficiency smallness of soul. And just as we said generosity is related to magnificence, differing from it by being concerned with small amounts, so there is a virtue having to do with small honours that corresponds in the same way to greatness of soul, which is to do with great ones. For one can desire small honours in the right way, and in excessive and deficient ways as well. The person who exceeds in his desires is described as a lover of honour, the person who is deficient as not caring about it, while the one in between has no name. Their dispositions are nameless as well, except that of the lover of honour, which is called love of honour. This is why those at the extremes lay claim to the middle ground. We ourselves sometimes refer to the person in the middle as a lover of honour, sometimes as one who  
1108a does not care about it; and sometimes we praise the person who loves

honour, sometimes the one who does not care about it. The reason for our doing this will be stated below. For now, let us discuss the remaining virtues and vices in the way laid down.

In anger too there is an excess, a deficiency, and a mean. They are virtually nameless, but since we call the person in between the extremes even-tempered, let us call the mean even temper. Of those at the extremes, let the one who is excessive be quick-tempered, and the vice quick temper, while he who is deficient is, as it were, slow-tempered, and his deficiency slow temper.

There are three other means, having something in common, but also different. For they are all to do with our association with one another in words and actions, but differ in that one is concerned with the truth to be found in them, while the other two are respectively concerned with what is pleasant in amusement and in life as a whole. We should talk about these things as well, then, so that we can better see that in all things the mean is praiseworthy, while the extremes are neither praiseworthy nor correct, but blameworthy. Most of them again have no names, but, for the sake of clarity and intelligibility, we must try, as in the other cases, to produce names ourselves.

With respect to truth, then, let us call the intermediate person truthful and the mean truthfulness; pretence that exaggerates is boastfulness and the person who has this characteristic is a boaster, while that which understates is self-depreciation and the person who has this is self-deprecating. In connection with what is pleasant in amusement, let us call the intermediate person witty, and the disposition wit; the excess clownishness, and the person with that characteristic a clown; and the person who falls short a sort of boor and his state boorishness. With respect to the remaining kind of pleasantness, that found in life in general, let us call the person who is pleasant in the right way friendly and the mean friendliness, while he who goes to excess will be obsequious if there is no reason for it, and a flatterer if he is out for his own ends; someone who falls short and is unpleasant all the time will be a quarrelsome and peevish sort of person.

There are also means in the feelings and in connection with the feelings. Shame, for example, is not a virtue, but praise is also bestowed on the person inclined to feel it. Even in these cases one person is said to be intermediate, and another – the shy person who feels shame at everything – excessive; he who is deficient or is ashamed of nothing at

all is called shameless, while the person in the middle is properly disposed to feel shame.

1108b Appropriate indignation is a mean between envy and spite; these three are concerned with pain and pleasure felt at the fortunes of those around us. The sort of person to experience appropriate indignation is pained by those who do well undeservedly; the envious person goes beyond him and is pained by anybody's doing well; while the spiteful person, far from being pained at the misfortunes of others, actually feels enjoyment.

There will also be an opportunity elsewhere to discuss means like these.

As for justice, since it is a term used in more than one way, we shall distinguish its two varieties after discussing the other virtues, and say how each variety is a mean.

## Chapter 8

Of these three dispositions, then, two are vices – one of excess, the other of deficiency – and the third, the mean, is virtue. Each is in a way opposed to each of the others, because the extremes are contrary to the mean and to one another, and the mean to the extremes. For as the equal is greater in relation to the less, but less in relation to the greater, so the mean states are excessive in relation to the deficiencies, but deficient in relation to the excesses; this is so in both feelings and actions. For the courageous person seems rash in relation to the coward, and a coward in relation to the rash person. Similarly, the temperate seems intemperate in relation to the insensible, but insensible in relation to the intemperate, and the generous person wasteful in relation to the stingy person, but stingy in relation to the wasteful. This is why those at one extreme push away the intermediate person to the other, the coward calling the courageous person rash, the rash person calling him a coward, and analogously in other cases.

Since they are set against one another in this way, the greatest opposition is that of the extremes to one another, rather than to the mean. For they are further from each other than from the mean, as the great is further from the small and the small further from the great than either is from the equal. Again, some of the extremes seem rather like the mean, as rashness seems like courage, and wastefulness like gener-

osity. The greatest dissimilarity is that between extremes; and the things that are furthest from each other are defined as contraries, so that the further things are apart, the more contrary they will be. In some cases, the deficiency is more opposed to the mean than is the excess, in others the excess is more opposed than the deficiency; for example, it is not rashness, the excess, which is more opposed to courage, but cowardice, the deficiency; while it is not insensibility, the deficiency, but intemperance, the excess, which is more opposed to temperance. There are two reasons for this. 1109a

One derives from the nature of the thing itself. Because one extreme is nearer and more like the mean, we set in opposition to the mean not this but rather its contrary; for example, since rashness is thought to be more like courage and nearer to it, and cowardice less like it, it is cowardice rather than rashness that we set in opposition, because things that are further from the mean are thought more contrary to it. This, then, is one reason, deriving from the nature of the thing itself.

The other derives from our nature. It is the things to which we ourselves are naturally more inclined that appear more contrary to the mean; for example, we are naturally more inclined to pleasures, and are therefore more prone to intemperance than self-discipline. We describe as more contrary to the mean, then, those extremes in the direction of which we tend to go; this is why intemperance, an excess, is more contrary to temperance.

## Chapter 9

Enough has been said, then, to show that virtue of character is a mean, and in what sense it is so; that it is a mean between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency; and that it is such because it is the sort of thing able to hit the mean in feelings and actions. This is why it is hard to be good, because in each case it is hard to find the middle point; for instance, not everyone can find the centre of a circle, but only the person with knowledge. So too anyone can get angry, or give and spend money – these are easy; but doing them in relation to the right person, in the right amount, at the right time, with the right aim in view, and in the right way – that is not something anyone can do, nor is it easy. This is why excellence in these things is rare, praiseworthy and noble.

So the person who is aiming at the mean must first steer away from the extreme that is in greater opposition to it, as Calypso advised:

Beyond this spray and swell keep your ship.<sup>14</sup>

1109b For one of the extremes is a greater missing of the mark, the other less so; and since hitting the mean is extremely hard, we must take the next best course, as they say, and choose the lesser of two evils. This will be done best in the way we are suggesting.

But we must also consider the things towards which we as individuals are particularly prone. For we each have different natural tendencies, and we can find out what they are by the pain and pleasure that occur in us. And we should drag ourselves in the opposite direction, because we shall arrive at the mean by holding far off from where we would miss the mark, just as people do when straightening warped pieces of wood. In everything, we should be on our guard especially against the pleasant – pleasure, that is – because we are not impartial judges of it. So we should adopt the same attitude to it as the elders did towards Helen, and utter their words in everything we do;<sup>15</sup> for by dismissing pleasure in this way, we shall miss the mark to a lesser degree.

To sum up, then, it is by doing these things that we shall best be able to hit the mean. Admittedly, however, hitting it is difficult, especially in particular cases, since it is not easy to determine how one should be angry, with whom, for what reasons, and for how long; indeed we sometimes praise those who fall short and call them even-tempered, and sometimes those who flare up, describing them as manly. But the person who is blamed is not the one who deviates a little, either in excess or deficiency, from the right degree, but the one who deviates rather more, because he does not escape our notice. But how far and to what extent someone must deviate before becoming blameworthy it is not easy to determine by reason, because nothing perceived by our senses is easily determined; such things are particulars, and judgement about them lies in perception.

This much, then, is clear – that the mean state is in every case to be praised, but that sometimes we must incline towards the excess, sometimes towards the deficiency, because in this way we shall most easily hit the mean, namely, what is good.

<sup>14</sup> Homer, *Odyssey* xii.219f.

<sup>15</sup> Homer, *Iliad* iii.156–60.



## *Book III*

### Chapter 1

Since virtue is to do with feelings and actions, and since voluntary feelings and actions are praised and blamed, while the involuntary ones are pardoned and occasionally even pitied, presumably anyone considering virtue must determine the limits of the voluntary and the involuntary. It will be useful as well for legislators, in connection with honours and punishments.

Things that happen by force or through ignorance are thought to be involuntary. What is forced is what has an external first principle, such that the agent or the person acted upon contributes nothing to it – if a wind, for example, or people with power over him carry him somewhere. 1110a

As for things done through fear of greater evils or for the sake of something noble – if a tyrant, for example, had one's parents and children in his power and ordered one to do something shameful, on the condition that one's doing it would save them, while one's not doing it would result in their death – there is some dispute about whether they are involuntary or voluntary. The same sort of thing happens also in the case of people throwing cargo overboard in storms at sea. Without qualification, no one jettisons cargo voluntarily; but for his own safety and that of others any sensible person will do it.

Such actions, then, are mixed, though they seem more like voluntary ones, because at the time they are done they are worthy of choice, and the end of an action depends on the circumstances. So both voluntariness and involuntariness are to be ascribed at the time of the action. In fact, the person acts voluntarily, because in actions like this the first principle

of moving the limbs that serve as instruments lies in him; and where the first principle lies in a person, it is in his power to act or not to act. Such actions are therefore voluntary, but, without qualification, they are presumably involuntary, since no one would choose any of them in itself.

People are sometimes praised for actions like this, when they endure some disgrace or pain in return for great and noble objects; and if they do the contrary, they are blamed, since it is characteristic of a bad person to endure the greatest disgraces for no noble end or for something unimportant.

In some cases, not praise but pardon is given, when a person does wrong because of things that strain human nature to breaking-point and no one would endure. But some things perhaps we cannot be compelled to do, and rather than do them we ought to die after the most terrible suffering; for the things that compelled Euripides' Alcmæon to kill his mother seem absurd.<sup>16</sup> It is nevertheless hard sometimes to determine what should be chosen at what cost, and what should be endured for what gain; and harder still to stand by our decisions, because the expected consequences are generally painful, and what one is compelled to do is shameful. This is why those who have been compelled or not  
1110b to do are praised and blamed.

What sort of actions, then, should we describe as forced? If we speak without qualification, is it not whenever the cause is in the external circumstances and the agent contributes nothing? On the other hand, actions that in themselves are involuntary, but worth choosing at a certain time and for certain benefits, and have their first principle in the agent, are in themselves involuntary, but at that time and for those benefits voluntary. But they are more like voluntary actions, because actions are in the sphere of particulars, and here the particulars are voluntary. It is not easy, however, to explain what sort of things ought to be chosen in return for what, since there are many differences in particulars.

If someone were to claim that sweet and noble things are forcible (in that they compel us from an external position), he would be committed to all actions' being forced, since it is with those ends in view that everyone does everything. And people who are forced to act and do so involuntarily find it painful, while those who act because of what is

<sup>16</sup> The play is now lost. Alcmæon's father, Amphiaraus of Argos, had been persuaded by his wife to join an expedition against Thebes. Amphiaraus foresaw his own death, and charged his sons to avenge him, by killing his wife.

pleasant or noble do so with pleasure. It is ridiculous to blame external circumstances and not oneself for being an easy prey to such things, and to take responsibility for noble actions oneself, but to make pleasant things responsible for shameful ones. What is forced, then, seems to be what has an external first principle, where the person forced contributes nothing.

Everything done through ignorance is non-voluntary, but what is involuntary also causes pain and regret; for the person who acted through ignorance, and is not upset in the slightest by what he has done, has not acted voluntarily, in that he did not know what he was doing, nor again involuntarily, in that he is not pained. Of those who act through ignorance, then, the one who regrets what he did seems to be an involuntary agent, while the one who shows no regret, since he is a different case, can be thought of as a non-voluntary agent; since he is a separate case, it is better that he should have a name of his own.

Acting through ignorance seems to be different from acting in ignorance, because the drunk or the person in a rage is not thought to act through ignorance, but through drunkenness or anger; he does so, however, not knowingly but in ignorance. In fact, every wicked person is ignorant of what he should do and refrain from doing, and missing the mark in this way makes people unjust and generally bad. An action is not properly called involuntary, however, if the agent is ignorant of what is beneficial, because it is not ignorance in rational choice that causes the involuntariness (that rather causes wickedness), nor ignorance of the universal (since people are blamed for that), but ignorance of particulars – the circumstances of the action and what it is concerned with. For it is on these that pity and pardon depend, since someone who is ignorant of any of them is acting involuntarily. IIIIa

Perhaps it would be no bad thing, therefore, to delineate their nature and number. A person may be ignorant of who he is, of what he is doing, of the sphere in which or to what he is doing it, and sometimes also of what it is that he is doing it with (e.g., a tool), of what it is for (e.g., safety), and of the way in which he is doing it (e.g., gently or roughly). No one could be ignorant of all of these unless he were mad, and clearly not of the person doing the action; for how could he be ignorant of himself? But someone could be ignorant of what he is doing: people, for example, who say they are ‘flustered while speaking’, or ‘did not know that it was a secret’, as Aeschylus said of the Mysteries, or ‘let

it off when they wanted to show how it worked', as the person said of the catapult. Again, someone might think his son an enemy, as did Merope,<sup>17</sup> or that a pointed spear had a button on it, or that a stone was a piece of pumice. Or one might kill someone with a drink intended to save him. Or when wanting only to seize a person's hand, as in sparring, one might hurt him. There may be ignorance, then, concerning all of these aspects of the action, and the person who is ignorant of any of them seems to have acted involuntarily, especially in the case of the most important – these seem to be to what the action is being done and what it is for. It is, then, an action called involuntary on the basis of this particular kind of ignorance that must also give rise to pain and regret.

So, since what is involuntary is what is done by force or because of ignorance, what is voluntary would seem to be what has its first principle in the person himself when he knows the particular circumstances of the action.

It is probably a mistake to describe actions done through spirit or appetite as involuntary. For, first, none of the other animals, or children, will act voluntarily; and, secondly, is it meant that none of the actions we do through appetite and spirit is done involuntarily, or that we do the noble ones voluntarily, the disgraceful ones involuntarily? Would this not be absurd, since there is only one cause in play? And it would presumably also be odd to describe as involuntary things that we ought to desire; and there are indeed some things at which we ought to feel angry, and others, like health and learning, that we ought to want. Also, what is involuntary is thought to be painful, but what is in accordance with appetite pleasant. Again, what is the difference, as far as their being involuntary is concerned, between actions that miss the mark on the basis of calculation and those that miss it on the basis of spirit? For both are to be avoided, and the non-rational feelings are thought to be no less part of human nature, so that actions arising from spirit and appetite are also characteristic of a human being. It would be odd, then, to class them as involuntary.

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## Chapter 2

Now that we have delineated what is voluntary and what involuntary, we should next discuss rational choice; for it is thought to be very

<sup>17</sup> In Euripides' *Cresphontes* (lost). Merope was wife of Cresphontes, king of Messenia.

closely tied to virtue, and a better guide to men's characters than their actions.

Rational choice is obviously a voluntary thing, but it is not the same as what is voluntary, which is a broader notion: children and the other animals share in what is voluntary, but not in rational choice, and we describe actions done spontaneously as voluntary, but not as done in accordance with rational choice.

People who claim it is appetite or spirit or wish or some kind of belief do not seem to be right, since rational choice is not shared by beings who lack reason, while appetite and spirit are shared. Again, the incontinent person acts from appetite, but not from rational choice; while the self-controlled person does the contrary, and acts from rational choice, but not from appetite. Also, appetite can be in opposition to rational choice, but not to appetite. Again, appetite is concerned with what is pleasant and what is painful, rational choice with neither. Still less is it spirit, since actions done from spirit are least of all thought to be in accordance with rational choice.

But, though it does seem closely connected with wish, it is not this either. For there is no rational choice of what is impossible, and someone claiming that he was rationally choosing this would be thought a fool. But there may be wish even for things that are impossible, such as immortality. And wish can also be for things one could never bring about by one's own efforts, such as that some actor or athlete win in a competition. No one, however, rationally chooses things like this, but only things that he thinks might come about through his own efforts. Again, wish is more to do with the end, rational choice with what is conducive to the end; for example, we wish to be healthy, but we rationally choose things that will make us healthy; and we wish to be happy, and say that we do, but to claim that we rationally choose to be so does not sound right. For in general rational choice seems to be concerned with things that are in our power.

Neither could it be belief, because belief seems to be concerned with everything – no less with what is eternal and what is impossible than with what is in our power. Besides, distinctions are made here on grounds of truth and falsity, not badness and goodness, as happens with rational choice.

Now perhaps no one does claim that it is the same as belief in general. 1112a  
But it is not even the same as any particular species of belief, since our

characters arise from our rationally choosing what is good and bad, not from having certain beliefs. And what we rationally choose is to obtain or avoid something good or bad, while we hold beliefs about what that is, whom it benefits, or in what way; we never really believe to obtain or avoid things. And rational choice is praised for its being of what is right rather than for its being correct, while belief is praised for being true. And we rationally choose what we best know to be good, while we hold beliefs about what we do not know at all to be good. And it appears as well that it is not the same people who are best at rationally choosing and at believing: some seem quite good at believing, but through vice choose what they should not. Whether belief is prior to rational choice or accompanies it makes no difference, because it is not this we are considering, but whether it is the same as some species of belief.

Given that it is none of the things we have mentioned, what is it, then, or what sort of thing is it? It is obviously something voluntary, but not everything that is voluntary is an object of rational choice. Well, is it what has been decided by prior deliberation? For rational choice does involve reason and thought, and its name (*prohairesis*) too seems to signify something that is chosen (*haireton*) before (*pro*) other things.

### Chapter 3

Do people deliberate about everything, and is everything an object of deliberation, or is there no deliberation about some things? Presumably, we ought to describe as an object of deliberation what a sane person would deliberate about, not some fool or lunatic.

No one deliberates about eternal things, such as the universe, or the fact that the diagonal is incommensurable with the side; nor things that involve movement but always happen in the same way, either from necessity or by nature or through some other cause, such as the solstices or the rising of the stars; nor things that happen now in one way, now in another, such as droughts and rains; nor what happens by chance, such as the finding of treasure. We do not deliberate even about all human affairs; no Spartan, for example, would deliberate about the best form of government for the Scythians. The reason is that we could not bring about any of these things.

Rather, we deliberate about what is in our power, that is, what we can

do; this is what remains. For nature, necessity and chance do seem to be causes, but so also do intellect and everything that occurs through human agency. Each group of people deliberates about what they themselves can do.

There is no deliberation about precise and self-sufficient sciences – III 2b  
letters, for example, because we are in no doubt about how they should be written. Rather, what we deliberate about are things that we bring about, and not always in the same way – questions of medicine and of finance, for example, and of navigation more than of gymnastics, in that navigation has not been developed to such a level of exactness. We deliberate about other fields in the same way, and more about the skills than about the sciences, since we are less certain about the skills.

Deliberation is concerned with what usually happens in a certain way, where the consequences are unclear, and where things are not definite. On important issues, we do not trust our own ability to decide and call in others to help us deliberate.

We deliberate not about ends, but about things that are conducive to ends. For a doctor does not deliberate about whether to cure, nor an orator whether to persuade, nor a politician whether to produce good order; nor does anyone else deliberate about his end. Rather they establish an end and then go on to think about how and by what means it is to be achieved. If it appears that there are several means available, they consider by which it will be achieved in the easiest and most noble way; while if it can be attained by only one means, they consider how this will bring it about, and by what further means this means is itself to be brought about, until they arrive at the first cause, the last thing to be found. For the person who deliberates seems to inquire and analyse in the way described as though he were dealing with a geometrical figure (it seems that not all inquiry is deliberation – mathematics, for example – but that all deliberation is inquiry), and the last step in the analysis seems to be the first that comes to be.

If people meet with an impossibility, they give up: take, for example, the case where they need money, but there is none available. But if it seems possible they will try to do it. What is possible is what can be accomplished by our own efforts; what can be brought about through our friends is in a sense accomplished by our own efforts, in that the first principle is in us. The question is sometimes what tools to use, sometimes what use to make of them. The same goes for other cases:

sometimes the question is the means, sometimes how they are to be used or the means to that use.

It seems, then, as we have said, that a human being is a first principle of actions. Deliberation is about what he can do himself, and actions are done for the sake of other things, because it is not the end but what is conducive to an end that is the object of deliberation. Nor are  
1113a particulars the object, such as whether this is bread or has been baked as it should; these are matters of perception, and if we are always deliberating, it will never come to an end.

The objects of deliberation and of rational choice are the same, except that the object of rational choice has already been determined, since it is what has been decided upon as the result of deliberation that is the object of rational choice. For each person stops inquiring how he is to act as soon as he has traced the first principle back to himself, that is, to the part of him that gives commands, because it is this that rationally chooses. There is a good illustration of this in the ancient constitutions depicted by Homer: the kings proclaimed to the people what they had rationally chosen.

Since the object of rational choice is one of the things in our power that is desired after deliberation, rational choice will be deliberative desire for things in our power; for, when we have decided on the basis of deliberation, we desire in accordance with our deliberation.

Let this serve as an outline of rational choice, the nature of its objects, and the fact that it is concerned with what is conducive to ends.

## Chapter 4

Wish, we have said, is for the end; but some think that the end here is the good, others the apparent good. Those who claim that the object of wish is the good are committed to the view that what a person wishes if he is choosing incorrectly is not an object of wish (if it were an object of wish, it would also be a good, but it was, perhaps, bad). On the other hand, those who claim the apparent good to be the object of wish must say that nothing is an object of wish by nature, but only what seems so to each person; and different people have different, and perhaps opposing, views.

If these consequences are unsatisfactory, then, should we say that, without qualification and in truth, the object of wish is the good, but for



the individual it is the apparent good? Then for the good person the object of wish is that which is truly an object of wish, but for the bad person it is any chance thing. This is like the case of bodies, where things that are truly healthy are healthy for bodies that are in good condition, while for those that are diseased other things are healthy; and the same goes for things that are bitter, sweet, hot, heavy, and so on. The good person judges each case rightly, and in each case the truth is manifest to him. For each state has its own conception of what is noble and pleasant, and one might say that the good person stands out a long way by seeing the truth in each case, being a sort of standard and measure of what is noble and pleasant. In the case of the masses, however, pleasure seems to deceive them, because it looks like a good when it is not; people therefore choose what is pleasant thinking it to be a good, and avoid pain thinking it to be an evil. 1113b

## Chapter 5

Since, then, the object of wish is the end, and the object of wish and of rational choice is what conduces to the end, actions concerning what conduces to the end will be in accordance with rational choice and voluntary. The activities of the virtues are concerned with what conduces to the end; virtue, then, is in our power, and so is vice. Where it is in our power to act, it is also in our power not to act, and where saying 'No' is in our power, so is saying 'Yes'; so that if it is in our power to act when it would be noble, it will also be in our power not to act when it would be shameful, and if it is in our power not to act when it would be noble, it will also be in our power to act when it would be shameful. Now if it is in our power to do noble and shameful actions, and the same goes for not doing them, and if, as we saw, being good and bad consists in this, then it is in our power to be good or bad.

The saying, 'No one is voluntarily wicked, nor involuntarily blessed', seems partly false, and partly true. For no one is involuntarily blessed, but wickedness is voluntary; otherwise we shall have to disagree with what we have just said, and deny that a human being is a first principle or the begetter of his actions as he is of his children. But if it is clear that he is, and we cannot refer back to any other first principles beyond those within us, the actions whose first principles are within us will themselves also be in our power and voluntary.

This view seems to be backed up not only by each of us as private individuals, but also by legislators themselves. For they punish and penalize anyone who does wicked things, unless he acts by force or through ignorance for which he is not himself culpable, and they reward anyone who does noble things, as if encouraging the one while deterring the other. But no one is urged to do what is neither in our power nor voluntary; people assume it to be a waste of time to persuade us not to be hot or in pain or hungry or anything else like that, because we shall experience them anyway.

1114a Indeed, legislators punish an offender for ignorance itself, if he is thought to be responsible for the ignorance. For example, there are double penalties for a drunken offender; the first principle lies in him, in that he had the power not to get drunk, and his getting drunk was the cause of his ignorance. And they punish those who are ignorant of any uncomplicated point of law that they ought to have known. The same sort of thing happens in other cases where people are thought to be ignorant through negligence, on the ground that it was in their power not to be ignorant, because it was up to them whether they took care.

Well, perhaps he is the sort of person not to take care. Nevertheless, people are themselves responsible for turning out like this, through the slackness of their lives – responsible for being unjust by doing wrong, or intemperate by spending their time in drinking and the like; in each sphere people’s activities give them the corresponding character. This is clear from the case of people training for any competition or action, since they practise the relevant activity continually. A person would have to be utterly senseless not to know that states in each sphere arise from their corresponding activities.

Again, it is unreasonable to think that someone who does unjust actions does not wish to be unjust, or that someone who does intemperate actions does not wish to be intemperate. If a person does what he knows will make him unjust, he will be unjust voluntarily. It does not follow, however, that, if he wishes, he will stop being unjust and be just. For neither does the ill person become well like this; but he is ill voluntarily, by living incontinently and ignoring his doctors, if that was what happened. At that time, it was open to him not to be ill, but it is no longer so once he has thrown away his chance; similarly, one can no longer recover a stone once one has thrown it, though it was in one’s power to throw it, because the first principle lay within one. So too from

the start it was open to the unjust person and the intemperate person not to become such, so that they are what they are voluntarily; but now that they have become what they are, it is no longer possible for them to be otherwise.

But it is not only the vices of the soul that are voluntary; those of the body are too for some people, whom we go on to blame. For nobody blames someone unattractive by nature, but we do if he is so through not exercising and looking after himself. The same goes for weakness and disability; nobody would criticize a person blind by nature, or as the result of a disease or an injury, but rather pity him; everyone, however, would blame a person who was blind from drinking or some other intemperance. So bodily vices in our power are blamed, while those not in our power are not. And if so, then in other cases the vices that are blamed will be those in our power.

But suppose somebody argues: ‘Everyone aims at what appears good to him, but over this appearance we have no control; rather, how the end appears to each person depends on what sort of person he is. So, if each person is in some way responsible for his own state, he will also be in some way responsible for how it appears. If he is not, however, then no one will be responsible for his own wrongdoing, but he will do these things through ignorance of the end, thinking that they will result in what is best for him. His aiming at the end is not up to him, but he must be born with a kind of vision, to enable him to judge nobly and to choose what is truly good. And a person is naturally good if he has this naturally noble capacity, since it is the greatest and noblest thing, and one cannot acquire or learn it from another; rather, his state will result from its natural character, and when it is naturally good and noble, this will be complete and true natural excellence.’ 1114b

If this is true, how will virtue be any more voluntary than vice? For how the end appears and is determined – by nature or whatever – is the same for both the good and the bad person, and it is by referring everything else to this that they do whatever they do.

So whether it is not by nature that the end appears to each person in whatever way it does appear, but the person plays some role as well, or whether the end is fixed by nature, but virtue is voluntary because the good person does the remaining actions voluntarily, vice will be no less voluntary than virtue. For the part played by the person himself is found to the same extent in the actions of the bad person, even if not in the end.

If, then, as we suggested, virtues are voluntary (because we are in some way partly responsible for our states of character, and it is by our being the kind of people that we are that we assume such and such as our end), vices also will be voluntary; they are on the same footing.

With regard to virtues in general, then, we have given an outline account of their genus: they are means, they are states, they lead to actions that are in accordance with virtues and such as those from which they developed, they are in our power and voluntary, and they are as correct reason prescribes.

1115a Actions and states, however, are not voluntary in the same way. For, being aware of the particulars we are in control of actions from the first principle to the end, but, though we control the first principle, the progress through the particular stages of states is not noticeable, as happens with illnesses; but, because it was in our power to behave in this way or that, states are voluntary.

Let us now resume consideration of the virtues, and one by one say what each is, what sort of things it is concerned with, and in what way; at the same time, it will be clear how many there are.

## Chapter 6

First let us discuss courage. That it is a mean concerning feelings of fear and confidence we have already made clear. Obviously, what we fear are fearful things, and these are, without qualification, evils; this is why people define fear as an expectation of evil.

We fear all evils, such as disgrace, poverty, disease, friendlessness, and death, but not all of them seem to be the concern of the courageous person. For some things, like disgrace, it is right and noble to fear, and shameful not to fear: the person who fears this is good and properly disposed to feel shame, and the one who does not is shameless. Some people extend the term 'courage' to cover his case, since he has a degree of similarity to the courageous person, in that the latter is also a sort of fearless person.

Presumably, however, we ought not to fear poverty or disease, nor in general anything that does not arise from vice or through us. But the person who is fearless of these is still not courageous, though he too is described as such by transference of meaning, because some people who are cowards in the perils of battle are generous and face the loss of their

money in good heart. Nor is a person a coward if he fears wanton violence against his wife and children or envy or anything like that. Nor is he courageous if he displays confidence when he is about to be flogged.

What sort of fearful things, then, do concern the courageous man? Surely the worst kind, since no one is more likely to stand his ground in the face of horrors? Death is the most fearful thing of all, since it is a limit, and when someone is dead nothing any longer seems good or bad for him. But not even death in all its forms, such as death at sea, or from illness, seems to be the concern of the courageous person. Which forms do concern him, then? Surely the most noble? These are deaths in battle, because they take place in the greatest and noblest danger; and this fits with the way honours are bestowed in cities and the courts of monarchs. So it is the person who does not fear a noble death, or the risks of immediate death, that should really be described as courageous; and risks in battle are most of all like this.

Nevertheless, the courageous person will also be fearless at sea and when he is ill, but not in the same way as seamen; for while courageous people have given up hope of safety and shudder at the idea of such a death, seamen are sanguine because of their experience. Again, while people act courageously in situations where there is a possibility of sturdy resistance or a noble death, in these sorts of disaster there is no room for either. 1115b

## Chapter 7

Not everyone finds the same things fearful. But we do say that there are things beyond human endurance, which would be fearful to anyone – anyone sane that is. Things not beyond human endurance differ in scale and degree, and so do those that inspire confidence.

The courageous person will be undaunted so far as is humanly possible; so, though he will fear even the things not beyond human endurance, he will stand his ground for the sake of what is noble (since this is the end of virtue) in the right way and as reason requires. But one can fear these things to a greater or lesser degree, and even fear things that are not fearful as if they were. One kind of missing the mark is to fear the wrong thing, another to fear in the wrong way, another to fear at the wrong time, and so on; and the same goes for what inspires

confidence. So the courageous person is the one who endures and fears – and likewise is confident about – the right things, for the right reason, in the right way, and at the right time; for the courageous person feels and acts in accordance with the merits of the case, and as reason requires.

The end of every activity is being in accordance with its state. To the courageous person, courage is noble; and so its end is also noble, since the character of everything is determined by its end. So it is for the sake of what is noble that the courageous person stands his ground and acts in accordance with courage.

Among the excessive, the person who exceeds in fearlessness has no name (we said before that many do not have a name), but if he feared nothing – not even an earthquake or rough seas, as people say of the Celts – he would be a sort of madman or insensible. The person who exceeds in confidence about fearful things is rash. But the rash person also seems to be a boaster and a pretender to courage; at any rate, in relation to what is fearful, he wishes to appear like the courageous person is in reality, and so imitates him when he can. This is why most of them are rash cowards; for on these occasions they put on a show of confidence, but they do not stand their ground against what is fearful.

1116a Rash people are impetuous, eager for danger before it arrives, but shrinking from it when it does; the courageous, however, are keen when the time for acting comes, but cool beforehand.

1115b The person who exceeds in fear is the coward, since he fears the  
1116a wrong things, in the wrong way, and so on. He is also deficient in confidence, but he reveals himself more in his excessive pain. So, because he fears everything, he is a despondent sort. The contrary is true of the courageous person, because confidence is characteristic of a person of hope.

The coward, the rash person, and the courageous, then, are all concerned with the same things, but are in different states in relation to them; the first two exceed and fall short, while the state of the courageous person is intermediate and right.

As we have said, then, courage is a mean in relation to what inspires confidence and fear in the circumstances described; and it makes choices and stands its ground because it is noble to do so, or shameful not to. To commit suicide as a way of escaping poverty or love or anything painful is not characteristic of a courageous person, but rather

of a coward; for it is softness to run away from problems, and such a person endures death not because it is noble, but to escape an evil.

## Chapter 8

Courage, then, is something like this. But the name is applied to five other states of character as well.

First comes citizen courage, since this is most like courage proper: citizens are thought to endure danger because of the legal penalties and opprobrium if they do not, and because of the honours they receive. This is why the most courageous people are thought to be those among whom cowards are held in dishonour and courageous people honoured. Homer depicts people like this, such as Diomedes and Hector:

Polydamas will be the first to cast reproach on me<sup>18</sup>

and

For one day Hector will proclaim among the Trojans  
'By me the son of Tydeus . . .'<sup>19</sup>

This is most like what we described earlier, because it arises from virtue: it arises from shame and a desire for what is noble (honour, in other words), and aversion to opprobrium, for the disgrace it brings.

One might put in the same class those who are compelled by their commanders. But they are not as good, in so far as they act not through shame, but fear – avoiding not disgrace, but pain. Their superiors apply compulsion, as did Hector:

If I see anyone skulking far away from the battle,  
He can be sure that he will not escape the dogs.<sup>20</sup>

The same thing is done by those who line their men up in front of 1116b them and beat them if they retreat, and those who position them in front of trenches or suchlike; they are all applying compulsion. But one ought to be courageous not under compulsion, but because it is noble.

Experience of particulars is also thought to be courage; this is why Socrates thought that courage is knowledge.<sup>21</sup> Some people have it in one situation, others in another, but in war professional soldiers have it;

<sup>18</sup> Homer, *Iliad* xxii.100.      <sup>19</sup> Homer, *Iliad* viii.148f.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Homer, *Iliad* ii.391–3, xv.348–51.

<sup>21</sup> See Plato, *Laches* 199a–d; *Protagoras* 360d; *Meno* 88c–d.

for they have seen with their own eyes the many false alarms that seem to arise in war, and so they seem courageous, because others do not know what such alarms are like. Again, their experience makes them especially able in attack and defence, because they are proficient in the use of their weapons and have the sort that is best for attacking and defending. So they are like armed men contending against unarmed, or trained athletes against amateurs; for in contests like this too it is not the most courageous who are best at fighting, but those who are strongest and whose bodies are in the best condition.

Professional soldiers turn out to be cowards, however, when the danger is too much for them and they are inferior in numbers and equipment. They are first to run away, while the citizen troops stand fast and die, as happened at the temple of Hermes. This is because, to the citizens, running away is a disgrace, and death worth choosing in preference to saving one's life in such a way; but the professionals were facing the danger on the initial assumption that they were stronger, and when they find out the truth, fearing death more than disgrace, they run away; and the courageous person is not like this.

Spirit is also referred to as courage; those influenced by spirit, like wild animals charging at those who wound them, also seem to be courageous, since courageous people feel spirit as well. For spirit is readiest to rush headlong into danger, which explains Homer's 'into his spirit he put strength', 'might and spirit he aroused', 'bitter might in his nostrils', and 'his blood boiled'.<sup>22</sup> All such phrases seem to indicate the stir and impulse of spirit.

Now courageous people act for the sake of what is noble, but spirit does help them. Brutes, however, are influenced by pain; for it is being injured or frightened that influences them, as one can see from the fact that when they are in a forest, they do not come near us. So they are not courageous, because they rush into danger driven on by pain and spirit, and do not think of the horrors that await them. For otherwise even 1117a hungry donkeys would be courageous, because they will not stop eating even when they are beaten!<sup>23</sup> Adulterers, as well, do many reckless things because of their appetite.

This form of courage caused by spirit, then, seems the most natural,

<sup>22</sup> Homer, *Iliad* ix.11, xiv.151, xvi.529; v.470, xv.232, 594; *Odyssey* xxiv.318f.; cf. Theocritus xx.15.

<sup>23</sup> See Homer, *Iliad* xi.557–62.



and to be courage if it is accompanied by rational choice and directed towards some end.

People too feel pain when they get angry, and pleasure when they retaliate. But those who fight for these reasons, though they may be good at fighting, are not courageous; they are doing so not for the sake of what is noble nor as reason requires, but because of feeling. Nevertheless, they do resemble courageous people quite closely.

Nor are hopeful people courageous, since they are confident in danger only because they have often been victorious over many enemies. They resemble the courageous, however, because both are confident; but courageous people are confident for the reasons given above, while the hopeful are so because they think that they are strongest and that no harm will come to them (drunks behave like this as well, because they become hopeful). And when things do not turn out as they expected, they run away; as we noticed, however, it is characteristic of the courageous person to endure what is – and appears – fearful for a human being, because it is noble to do so, and shameful not to.

It therefore seems to be characteristic of the more courageous person to be unafraid and unruffled in sudden alarms rather than to be so in those that are foreseen: it comes more from his state of character, because less from preparation. Foreseen actions can be rationally chosen on the basis of calculation and reason, but unforeseen ones only in virtue of one's state of character.

Those who act in ignorance also seem courageous; they are quite similar to the hopeful, but inferior to them in so far as the hopeful have a self-confidence that they lack. So, while the hopeful will stand firm for a time, those who are under a delusion, once they find out or suspect that the situation is other than they imagined, run away. This happened to the Argives, when they fell in with the Spartans and took them to be Sicyonians.<sup>24</sup>

We have now covered what courageous people, and those who seem to be courageous, are like.

## Chapter 9

Courage is concerned with both confidence and fear, but not to the same degree with both – more with fearful things; for the person unruffled in

<sup>24</sup> In 392 BCE, in the battle at the Long Walls of Corinth.

the midst of them and with the right attitude to them is courageous more than the person like this in the face of things that inspire confidence. As we have said, then, people are called courageous for enduring what is painful; so courage involves pain, and is justly praised, since it is more difficult to endure what is painful than to abstain from what is pleasant.

1117b Nevertheless, the end that courage aims at would seem to be pleasant, but to be obscured by what else is happening. This happens, for instance, in gymnastic competitions. For the end for boxers – their reason for doing what they do, namely, the crown and the honours – is pleasant, but, since they are flesh and blood, being hit is distressing and painful, as is all the hard exercise they do; and because of the number of these painful things, what they are aiming at, being small, seems to have nothing pleasant in it. And so, if this is true of courage as well, death and wounds will be painful for the courageous person, and he will face them involuntarily, but he will stand his ground against them because it is noble, or shameful not to.

And the more he is possessed of virtue as a whole and the happier he is, the more pain he will feel at the thought of death. For life is especially worth living for a person like this, and he knows that he is losing the greatest goods – and this is painful. But he is no less courageous for that, and is perhaps even more so, because he chooses what is noble in war at the cost of these goods. So it is not true, then, except in so far as one achieves the end, that the exercise of every virtue is pleasant.

It is quite possible, I suppose, that the best professional soldiers are not like this, but rather those who are less courageous and have nothing to lose; they are ready to face danger, and sell their lives cheaply.

So much, then, for courage. It should not be difficult to grasp what it is – in outline, at least – from what we have said.

## Chapter 10

After courage, let us say something about temperance, since these two are thought to be the virtues of the parts without reason. Temperance is a mean concerned with pleasures, as we have already said; it is less concerned with pains, and in a different way. Intemperance also manifests itself in the same sphere. Let us now determine, then, what sort of pleasures they are concerned with.

A distinction should be drawn between pleasures of the body and those of the soul. As examples of the latter, consider love of honour and love of learning, since, in each case, when the person enjoys what he loves, it is not his body so much as his mind which is at all affected. People concerned with pleasures like this are described neither as temperate nor as intemperate. The same goes for those concerned with the other non-bodily pleasures: those who like telling stories and chatting, and spend their days on whatever comes along, we call idle gossips, but not intemperate, nor do we so describe people who feel pain at losing money or friends. 1118a

Temperance, then, will be concerned with bodily pleasures, but not even all of these. For people who enjoy what they see, such as colours, shapes, a painting, are called neither temperate nor intemperate; yet it would seem possible to enjoy even these in the right way, as well as excessively or deficiently. The same goes for what we hear; nobody describes people who enjoy music or acting to an inordinate degree as intemperate, nor as temperate those who do so in the right way. Nor do we do this in the case of smells, except incidentally. We describe as intemperate not those who enjoy the smells of apples, roses or incense, but rather those who enjoy the smells of perfumes and cooked dishes. These are what intemperate people enjoy, because they remind them of the objects of their appetites. One can see other people also, when they are hungry, enjoying the smell of food; but enjoying such things is characteristic of the intemperate person, since these are the objects of his appetites. Nor do other animals take pleasure in these senses, except incidentally. It is not the smell of hares that dogs enjoy, but eating them, and smell makes them aware of the presence of hares. Nor is it the lowing of an ox that a lion enjoys, but devouring it; he seems to enjoy the lowing because it was through it that he perceived that the ox was near. In the same way, it is not the sight of 'a deer or wild goat'<sup>25</sup> that he enjoys, but the fact that he is going to have a meal.

It is with pleasures like these, then, that temperance and intemperance are concerned – those in which other animals share; this is why they seem slavish and brutish. These pleasures are touch and taste; but even taste appears to have little or no role to play. For the job of taste is to discriminate flavours, as do wine-tasters, or cooks preparing dishes;

<sup>25</sup> Homer, *Iliad* iii.24.

1118b but people do not really enjoy these sorts of thing – at least, intemperate people do not – but rather the gratification itself, which arises entirely through touch in the cases of food, drink and what people call the sexual pleasures. This is why a certain gourmet prayed that his throat might become longer than a crane’s, demonstrating that it was the touching which gave him pleasure.

So the sense to which intemperance is related is the most widely shared, and seems justly subject to criticism, because it is something we have not in so far as we are human, but in so far as we are animals. To enjoy such things, then, and to love them most of all is brutish. The most genteel of the pleasures of touch – such as those produced in the gymnasium through massage and heat – are indeed exceptions here, since the sense of touch characteristic of the intemperate person is to do not with the body as a whole, but certain parts of it.

## Chapter 11

Some appetites are thought to be common, others peculiar to particular individuals. That for sustenance, for example, is natural, since everyone who needs it has an appetite for food or drink, or sometimes both; and that for sex, when one is, as Homer puts it, young and blooming.<sup>26</sup> But not everyone has an appetite for this or that kind of sustenance or sex, nor the same kinds; so it seems to be a matter of personal taste. Nevertheless, there is also something natural in it, because one thing will please one kind of person, another another, and some things are more pleasant to everyone than certain others.

In the case of the natural appetites, the number of people who miss the mark is low, and they do so in only one direction, that of excess. To eat whatever is at hand or to drink until one is full to bursting is to exceed the amount that accords with nature, since natural appetite is the replenishment of what one lacks. This is why these people are called ‘belly-crazy’, since they fill their bellies beyond what is right; it is utterly slavish people who become like this.

In the case of the pleasures peculiar to particular individuals, however, many people miss the mark, and in many ways: people are called lovers of such and such because they enjoy the wrong things,

<sup>26</sup> Homer, *Iliad* xxiv.130f.

enjoy things more than most people do, or enjoy things in the wrong way. And intemperate people go to excess in all these ways; for they enjoy certain things they should not (because those things are detestable), and if they enjoy the sort of things that it is right to enjoy, they enjoy them more than is right or more than most people enjoy them.

Clearly, then, excess with regard to pleasures is intemperance and to be blamed. With regard to pains, however, one is not called temperate, as one is called courageous, for enduring them, nor intemperate for not doing so. Rather, the intemperate person is so called for being more pained than he ought to be when he fails to get pleasant things (even his pain being caused by pleasure), while the temperate is described as such because he is not pained at the absence of what is pleasant, or at abstaining from it.

The intemperate person, then, has an appetite for all pleasant things, or the most pleasant, and is led by his appetite to choose them at the cost of everything else. So he is pained both when he fails to get them and when he has an appetite for them, because appetite involves pain; but experiencing pain on account of pleasure seems absurd. 1119a

People who are deficient in relation to pleasures and enjoy them less than they ought are not generally found, since such insensibility is not a human characteristic. Even the other animals make discriminations between different kinds of food, and enjoy some but not others; and if there is anyone who finds nothing pleasant and is indifferent about everything, he must be far from being human. And because he is found so rarely, this sort of person has not been given a name.

The temperate person occupies a mean position with regard to pleasures. For he does not enjoy the things that the intemperate enjoys most – rather he actually dislikes them – nor, in general, pleasures it would be wrong to enjoy; nor does he enjoy any pleasure to excess; nor does he feel pain or appetite at the absence of pleasures, except perhaps in moderation, and not more than is right, at the wrong time, and so on. But things that are pleasant and conducive to health or vigour he desires in a moderate way, as is right, and other pleasant things as well, as long as they are not incompatible with health or vigour, contrary to what is noble, or beyond his means. For the person who fails to abide by these limitations enjoys such pleasures more than they deserve; the temperate person is not like this, but enjoys them as correct reason prescribes.

## Chapter 12

Intemperance seems more of a voluntary matter than does cowardice, since it is caused by pleasure, which is to be chosen, while cowardice is caused by pain, which is to be avoided. And pain upsets and ruins the natural state of the person who is experiencing it, while pleasure does nothing of the sort. Intemperance, then, is more voluntary. So it is also more reprehensible, since it is easier to accustom oneself to resist pleasures; for there are many of them in life, and the modes of accustoming oneself are quite safe, while with fearful things the contrary is true.

It would seem, however, that cowardice is voluntary in a way that its particular instances are not. For it is itself painless, but particular instances upset people because of the pain, to the extent that they even throw away their arms and disgrace themselves in other ways. This is why they even seem to be forced. In the case of the intemperate, the contrary is true. The particular instances are voluntary (since he acts through appetite and desire), but taken as a whole the condition is less so, because nobody has an appetite for intemperance.

1119b We also apply the name intemperance to children's errors, because they have a certain resemblance. Which is called after which is not relevant to our present purpose, but it is clear that the posterior is called after the prior. The transfer of the name does not seem inapposite, since that which desires what is disgraceful and grows quickly ought to be disciplined. Appetites and children fall especially into this category, since children live in accordance with appetite, and the desire for what is pleasant is found especially in them.

If, then, it is not going to be obedient and subject to its ruler, it will get out of hand. For the desire of an irrational being for what is pleasant is insatiable and indiscriminate, and the activity of desire will strengthen the tendency he is born with. And if appetites are strong and excessive, they actually expel calculation. They should therefore be moderate and few in number, and in no kind of opposition to reason – this is what we mean by 'obedient' and 'disciplined' – and as the child ought to live in accordance with what his tutor prescribes, so ought the appetitive element in accordance with reason.

So the appetitive element in a temperate person ought to be in

harmony with reason; for the aim of both is what is noble, and the temperate person's appetite is for the right thing, in the right way, and at the right time, and this is what reason requires as well.

So let us now conclude our discussion of temperance.

## *Book V*

### Chapter 1

We must consider justice and injustice – what sort of actions they are concerned with, what kind of mean justice is, and what are the extremes between which the just is a mean. Let our inquiry be conducted in the same way as our preceding discussions. 1129a

We see that everyone means by justice the same kind of state, namely, that which disposes people to do just actions, act justly, and wish for what is just. In the same way, by injustice they mean the state that makes people act unjustly and wish for what is unjust. So let us too begin with these assumptions as a rough basis for our discussion.

What is true of sciences and capacities is not true of states, since it seems that contraries can both be the concern of the same capacity or science, while a state does not produce results contrary to itself. For example, as a result of health, we do not do actions contrary to health, but only those that are healthy; we say that we are walking healthily when we walk as a healthy person would.

One can often identify a contrary state from its contrary, and states from their subjects. If it is clear what the good state is, then the bad state also becomes clear, and the good state is identified from the things that are in that state, and they from it: if the good state is firmness of flesh, then the bad state must be flabbiness, and what conduces to the good state must be what produces firmness of flesh. It generally follows that if one contrary is spoken of in more than one way, so is the other; if the just, for example, is spoken of in more than one way, so is the unjust. It seems, in fact, that justice and injustice are spoken of in more than one way, but



because the different senses of each are close to one another, their homonymy passes unnoticed and is not so obvious as it is in cases when the two are far apart. For example (and here the difference in outward appearance is a large one), the word ‘key’ is used homonymously for the collar-bone of an animal and for that which people use to lock doors.

Let us acquire some grasp, then, of how many ways there are in which a person is said to be unjust. Both the lawless person and the greedy and unfair person seem to be unjust. Obviously, then, both the lawful person and the fair person will be just; and thus the just is the lawful and the fair, and the unjust is the lawless and the unfair.

1129b

Since the unjust person is greedy, he will be concerned with goods – not all goods, but those with which good and bad fortune are concerned; these are always good without qualification, but not always for a particular individual. (People pray for and pursue these things, but they should not; rather, they should pray that those goods that are good without qualification may also be good for them, and they should choose things that are good for them.)

The unjust person does not always choose more, but, in the case of things that are bad without qualification, he chooses less. But because the lesser evil itself seems to be a kind of good, and greed is for what is good, he therefore seems to be greedy. He is indeed unfair, this being an inclusive term that covers both.

Since, as we saw, the lawless person is unjust and the lawful just, it is clear that whatever is lawful is in some way just; for the things laid down by legislative science are lawful, and each of these we describe as just. The laws have something to say about everything, their aim being the common interest either of all the citizens, or of the best, or of those in power, or of some other such group. So, in one sense, we call anything just that tends to produce or to preserve happiness and its constituents for the community of a city.

Law requires us to do the acts of a courageous person – not, for example, to desert our post, run away or throw down our weapons – as well as those of a temperate person – such as not to commit adultery or wanton violence – and those of an even-tempered person – not to hit or slander anyone, for instance. And similarly it demands actions in accordance with the other virtues, and forbids those in accordance with the vices, correctly if it is correctly established, less well if it is carelessly produced.

Justice in this sense, then, is complete virtue, not without qualification, but in relation to another person. For this reason, it is often held that justice is the greatest of the virtues, and that ‘neither evening star nor morning star is such a wonder’.<sup>29</sup> We express this in the proverb, ‘In justice is all virtue combined’.<sup>30</sup>

And it is complete virtue in the fullest sense, because it is the exercise of complete virtue. It is complete because he who possesses it can exercise his virtue in relation to another person, not only himself. There are many people who can exercise virtue in their own affairs, but are unable to do so in their relations with others. This is why the aphorism of Bias,<sup>31</sup> ‘Office will reveal the man’, seems a good one, since an official is, by reason of his position, engaged in relations with other people and the community at large. For the same reason, justice is the only virtue considered to be the good of another,<sup>32</sup> because it is exercised in relation to others: it does what is beneficial for another, whether he is in office over one or is a fellow-citizen.

1130a

So the worst person is the one who exercises his wickedness in relation to himself and in relation to his friends, and the best is not he who exercises his virtue in relation to himself but the one who exercises it in relation to others, since this is a difficult thing to do. Justice in this sense, then, is not a part of virtue, but the whole of virtue, and the injustice contrary to it is not a part of vice, but vice as a whole. The difference between virtue and justice in this sense is clear from what we have said. For they are the same, but what it is to be each of them is different. In so far as it is seen in relation to others, it is justice, while as an unqualified state, it is virtue.

## Chapter 2

But, since we say there is such a thing, we are looking for the justice that is a part of virtue and similarly for the injustice that is a part of vice.

There is evidence that such a particular form exists. In all other cases of wickedness, the person who exercises it acts unjustly, but is not at all greedy (the person who throws away his shield through cowardice, for example, or speaks abusively through bad temper, or refuses financial

<sup>29</sup> Euripides, *The Wise Melanippe*, fr. 486 Nauck.

<sup>30</sup> Theognis, 147. Late seventh-century (or mid-sixth century) elegaic poet, from Megara.

<sup>31</sup> One of the Seven Sages. <sup>32</sup> Cf. Plato, *Republic* 343c.

assistance through stinginess). But when someone is greedy, his action is often not in accordance with any of these forms of wickedness, still less all of them; but, since we blame him, it is in accordance with some form of wickedness, namely, injustice. There is, then, another kind of injustice, which is part of injustice as a whole, and what is unjust can here be seen as part of the whole of what is unjust in the sense of being contrary to law.

Again, someone who commits adultery for gain and makes money out of it would seem unjust, but not intemperate, while another who does so through appetite, though it costs him and he loses money for it, would seem to be intemperate rather than greedy. Obviously, this is because the first acts for gain.

Again, all other unjust acts are always attributed to some form of wickedness, such as adultery to intemperance, desertion of a comrade in battle to cowardice, physical assault to anger. But if the person gains by what he does, it is attributed to no other form of wickedness than injustice.

Clearly, then, besides universal justice, there is another form of injustice – particular injustice; it has the same name, because its definition falls under the same genus, both being effective in relation to somebody else. But, whereas the one is concerned with honour or money or security – or that which includes all of these, if we had a name for it – and is motivated by the pleasure that results from gain, the other is concerned with all the things with which the good person is concerned.

Clearly, then, there are several kinds of justice, and there is one that is distinct from virtue as a whole; we must ascertain what it is and what sort of thing it is.

What is unjust has been divided into what is unlawful and what is unfair, and what is just into what is lawful and what is fair. Injustice in the sense above corresponds to what is unlawful. But what is unfair is not the same as what is unlawful, but differs as part from whole (since everything that is unlawful is unfair, while not everything that is unfair is unlawful); and so what is unjust, and injustice in the sense of unfairness, are not the same as what is unjust and injustice in the other sense, but differ as parts from wholes. For this injustice is a part of injustice as a whole, and similarly particular justice a part of justice as a whole. So we must discuss justice and injustice in the particular sense,

and similarly what is just and unjust. Let us therefore put aside the justice and injustice that correspond to virtue as a whole, the one being the exercise of virtue as a whole in relation to another, the other of vice.

It is obvious, too, how we should distinguish what is just and what is unjust in accordance with these types of justice and injustice, since most acts required by law, we might say, are enjoined from the point of view of virtue as a whole. For law requires us to live in accordance with each single virtue and forbids us to live in accordance with each form of wickedness. And the things that tend to produce virtue as a whole are the actions required by law that are laid down for education in good citizenship. But any decision must be delayed as to whether the education of the individual as such, on the basis of which he is a good person without qualification, is a branch of political science or of some other science; for, presumably, being a good person is not in every case the same as being a good citizen.

One type of particular justice, and of what is just in that same sense, is that found in distributions of honour or money or the other things that have to be shared among members of the political community (since here one person can have a share equal or unequal to another's).

Another type is that which plays a rectificatory role in transactions. 1131a  
This type divides into two, since some transactions are voluntary, others involuntary. The voluntary transactions are things like selling, buying, lending at interest, pledging, lending without interest, depositing, and letting (they are called voluntary because the first principle in these transactions is voluntary). The involuntary ones are either secret – such as theft, adultery, poisoning, procuring, enticing away slaves, treacherous murder, and false witness – or involve force, such as assault, imprisonment, murder, robbery, maiming, slander, and insult.

### Chapter 3

Since the unjust person is unfair, or unequal, and what is unjust is unfair, or unequal, it is clear that there is a mean in respect of what is unfair, namely, what is fair, or equal. In any kind of action in which there is a more and a less, there is also an equal. So if what is unjust is unequal, what is just must be equal – something that everyone thinks, even without argument.

Since what is equal is a mean, the just will be some sort of mean.

Because equality requires at least two terms, what is just must be a mean, and equal, and relative, namely, just for certain people. And, in so far as it is a mean, it must be between certain extremes (excess and deficiency); in so far as it is equal, it must involve two terms; and in so far as it is just, it must be so for certain people. So what is just requires at least four terms: the persons for whom it is just are two, and the shares in which its justice consists are two. There will be the same level of equality between persons as between shares, because the shares will be in the same ratio to one another as the persons. For if the persons are not equal, they will not receive equal shares; in fact quarrels and complaints arise either when equals receive unequal shares in an allocation, or unequals receive equal shares.

This is clear also from the principle of distribution according to merit. For everyone agrees that justice in distribution must be in accordance with some kind of merit, but not everyone means the same by merit; democrats think that it is being a free citizen, oligarchs that it is wealth or noble birth, and aristocrats that it is virtue.

So the just is a sort of proportion. Being proportionate is not a property peculiar to abstract number, but belongs to number in general, since proportion is an equality of ratios, and involves at least four terms. Now it is obvious that discrete proportion involves four terms. But the same is true of continuous proportion, since it treats one term as two, 1131b mentioning it twice; for example, as the line A is to the line B, so is B to C. B, then, has been mentioned twice; so if B is set down twice, the proportional terms will be four.

What is just will also involve at least four terms, and the ratio is the same, since the persons and the shares are divided in the same ratio. As the term A, then, is to the term B, so will C be to D, and consequently, in permutation, as A is to C, so B is to D. And so whole will bear the same ratio to whole. It is this combination which the distribution brings about, and, if the terms be united in this way, brings about justly.

What is just in distribution, therefore, is the conjunction of the term A with the term C, and of the term B with the term D. And the just in this sense is a mean, and the unjust violates the proportion, since what is proportionate is a mean, and the just is proportionate. Mathematicians call this kind of proportion geometrical, because in geometrical proportion what happens is that whole is to whole as each part is to each

part. But this proportion is not continuous, since there is not a single numerical term for person and share.

What is just in this sense, then, is what is proportionate. And what is unjust is what violates the proportion: one side becomes too large, the other too small, which is actually what happens in practice, since the one who acts unjustly gets more of what is good, while the one treated unjustly gets less. In the case of evil, the reverse is the case, since the lesser evil is counted as a good in comparison with the greater evil; the lesser evil is more worthy of choice than the greater, what is worthy of choice is a good, and what is more worthy of choice is a greater good.

This, then, is the first species of what is just.

## Chapter 4

The other kind of justice is rectificatory, which is found in both voluntary and involuntary transactions. It belongs to a different species from that above. For the just in distribution of common property is always in accordance with the proportion stated above, since if the distribution is from common funds, it will be in the same ratio as are the corresponding investments to one another. And the injustice that is opposed to this kind of justice is what violates the proportion.

What is just in transactions is nevertheless a kind of equality, and what is unjust a kind of inequality, in accordance, however, not with that kind of proportion, but with arithmetical proportion. For it makes no difference whether it is a good person who has defrauded a bad or a bad person a good, nor whether it is a good or bad person that has committed adultery. The law looks only to the difference made by the injury, and treats the parties as equals, if one is committing injustice, and the other suffering it – that is, if one has harmed, and the other been harmed. So the judge, since this kind of injustice is an inequality, tries to equalize it. For even when one party is struck, and the other strikes, or one kills, and the other is killed, the suffering and the action are divided unequally. The judge tries to equalize them with the penalty, decreasing the gain that has been made. For the word ‘gain’ is generally employed in such cases, even if it is not appropriate for some of them, such as assault, and the same goes for the use of the word ‘loss’ of the victim. At any rate, when the damage has been assessed, the one is called loss, the other gain. 1132a

What is equal is therefore a mean between the greater and the less, but the gain and the loss constitute the greater and the less in contrary ways: more good and less evil constitute gain, while the contraries constitute loss. And the mean between them, as we saw, is what is equal, which we say is just. So what is just in rectification will be the mean between loss and gain.

1132b These names, 'loss' and 'gain', are in fact derived from voluntary exchange. For having more than one's share is called gaining, while having less than one had at the beginning is called losing – in buying and selling, for example, and other transactions in which the law has left people free to decide their own terms. But when neither party gets too much or too little, and both get what they gave, they say that they have what belongs to them, and that they neither lose nor gain. It follows that in voluntary transactions the just is a mean between some kind of gain and loss; it consists in having an equal amount both before and after the transaction. This is why, when people are in dispute, they turn to a judge. To appeal to a judge is to appeal to what is just, because a judge is meant to be, as it were, justice personified. They seek the judge also as an intermediary, and some people even call them mediators, on the basis that if they are awarded what is intermediate, they will be awarded what is just. What is just, then, is intermediate, since the judge is so. The judge restores equality. It is as if there were a line divided into unequal parts, and he takes away that by which the greater segment exceeds the half, and adds it to the smaller segment. And when the whole has been equally divided in two – when the parties have equal shares – then they say that they have what belongs to them. It is for this reason that it is called just (*dikaïos*), because it is a division into two parts (*dicha*), just as if one were to call it divided in two (*dichaios*), and the judge (*dikastēs*) is a divider in two (*dichastēs*).

1132b What is equal is a mean between the greater and the less according to arithmetical proportion, because when a certain amount is subtracted from one of two equals and added to the other, the other exceeds the first by double that amount; for if the amount had been subtracted, but not added to the other, it would have exceeded it by only once that amount. It therefore exceeds the mean by once the amount, and the mean exceeds by once the amount that from which the amount was subtracted.

In this way, then, we shall work out what we must subtract from the

party with more, and add to the party with less; for we must add to the party with less the amount by which the mean exceeds what he has, and subtract from the greatest quantity the amount by which it exceeds the mean. Let the lines AA', BB' and CC' be equal to one another. From the line AA', let the segment AE be subtracted, and the segment CD added to the line CC', so that the whole line DCC' exceeds the line EA' by the segment CD and the segment CF; thus it exceeds the line BB' by the segment CD.

## Chapter 5

Some hold that reciprocity is just without qualification. This was the claim of the Pythagoreans, since they defined, without qualification, what is just as reciprocity with another.

Reciprocity, however, fits neither distributive nor rectificatory justice (though people do take even the justice of Rhadamanthus<sup>33</sup> to be a conception of rectificatory justice: 'If a person should suffer what he did, right justice would be done'<sup>34</sup>), since often they conflict. For example, if a person in authority strikes someone, he should not be struck in return, but if someone has wounded an official, he should not only be struck in return, but receive an additional punishment. Again, voluntariness and involuntariness make a great difference.

When people associate with one another for the purpose of exchange, however, this kind of justice – reciprocity in accordance with proportion, not equality – is what binds them together, since a city is kept together by proportionate reciprocation. For people seek to return either evil for evil – otherwise they feel like slaves – or good for good – otherwise no exchange takes place, and it is exchange that holds them together. This is why they erect a temple of the Graces in a conspicuous place, so that benefits might be repayed. This is the special characteristic of grace, because one ought both to perform a return service to someone who has been gracious, and another time to make the first move by being gracious oneself. 1133a

It is a diagonal conjunction that produces proportionate reciprocation. Let A represent a builder, B a shoemaker, C a house, and D a shoe. The builder must get from the shoemaker the product of his labour, and

<sup>33</sup> Mythical son of Zeus and Europe, one of the judges of the dead in Elysium.

<sup>34</sup> Hesiod, fr. 174 MW.



must hand over his own in return. If, first, proportionate equality is established, and then reciprocation takes place, the result we mentioned will follow. If not, there is no equality, and the bargain falls through, since there is no reason why what one produces should not be more valuable than what the other produces, and the products must therefore be equated.

This is the case with the other crafts as well. For they would have been ruined if what the passive party received were not the same in quantity and quality as what the active party produced; it is not two doctors who associate for exchange, but rather a doctor and a farmer, and, in general, people who are different and unequal, and must be made equal. This is why everything that is exchanged must be in some way commensurable. This is where money comes in; it functions as a kind of mean, since it is a measure of everything, including, therefore, excess and deficiency. It can tell us, for example, how many shoes are equal to a house or some food. Then, as builder is to shoemaker, so must the number of shoes be to a house. For without this, there can be no exchange and no association; and it will not come about unless the products are in some sense equal. Everything, then, must be measured by some one standard, as we said before. This standard is in fact demand, which holds everything together; for if people needed nothing, or needed things to different degrees, either there would be no exchange or it would not be the same as it now is. But by social convention money has come to serve as a representative of demand. And this is why money is called *nomisma*, because it exists not by nature but by convention (*nomos*), and it is in our power to change its value and to render it worthless.

1133b There will be reciprocity, then, when the equation has been made, so that the shoemaker's product is to the farmer's as farmer is to shoemaker. But we must bring them into the form of a proportion not after they have exchanged goods, but when they still have their own; otherwise one extreme will have both excesses. In this situation, they are equals and capable of association, because it is possible to establish this kind of equality between them. Let A be a farmer, C some food, B a shoemaker, and D his product equated to C; if this kind of reciprocity had been impossible, the two would not have entered into an association with one another.

That demand holds things together as a single entity is obvious

from the fact that whenever people – either both, or one of a pair – have no need of one another, they do not enter into exchange. This is what happens whenever someone wants something that one has not got oneself – when, for example, people offer an export licence for corn in return for wine. It is imperative, therefore, that this equation be made.

Money is, as it were, our guarantor for future exchange: if we do not need a thing now, we can have it if ever we do need it, since we must be able to get it if we pay. The same thing happens to money as to other commodities, in that its value is not always the same, but it does tend to be more stable. Everything, then, must have a value put on it, because then there will always be exchange, and if exchange, association between people.

So money makes things commensurable as a measure does, and equates them; for without exchange there would be no association between people, without equality no exchange, and without commensurability no equality. It is impossible that things differing to such a degree should become truly commensurable, but in relation to demand they can become commensurable enough. So there must be some one standard, and it must be on an agreed basis – which is why money is called *nomisma*. Money makes all things commensurable, since everything is measured by money. Let A be a house, B ten minae, C a bed. A is half of B, if the house is worth, or equal to, five minae; and C, the bed, is worth one tenth of B. It is obvious, then, how many beds are equivalent to a house, namely, five. This is clearly how exchange took place before the existence of money, since it makes no difference whether you pay five beds for a house, or the value of five beds.

We have now described the nature of what is just and unjust. The distinctions we have drawn make it clear that acting justly is a mean between committing injustice and suffering it, since the one is having more than one's share, while the other is having less.

Justice is a kind of mean – not in the same way as the other virtues, but because it is concerned with a mean, while injustice is concerned with extremes. And justice is the state in accordance with which the just person is said to be the kind of person who is disposed to do just actions in accordance with rational choice, and to distribute goods – either between himself and another or between two others – so as to assign not more of what is worth choosing to himself and less to his neighbour

1134a

(and conversely with what is harmful), but what is proportionately equal; and similarly in distributing between two other people.

Injustice, on the contrary, is concerned with what is unjust, that is, a disproportionate excess or deficiency of what is beneficial or harmful; so injustice is an excess and a deficiency, because it is concerned with excess and deficiency. In one's own case, this is an excess of what is unqualifiedly beneficial, and a deficiency of what is harmful; in the case of others, though the general result is the same, the proportion may be violated in either direction. In an unjust action, to have too little is to suffer injustice, while to have too much is to commit it.

This, then, can be taken as an adequate account of the nature of justice and injustice, and similarly of what is just and unjust in general.

## Chapter 6

We have stated above how reciprocity is related to justice. But we must not forget that what we are investigating is not only justice in the unequal sense, but political justice. This is found among people who associate in life to achieve self-sufficiency, people who are free and either proportionately or arithmetically equal. So between people who are not like this there is nothing politically just, but only something just by approximation. For what is just exists only among people whose relations are governed by law, and law only among those liable to injustice, since legal justice consists in judgement between what is just and what is unjust. Among those liable to injustice will also be found the committing of injustice, though injustice is not found among all those who commit injustice. Committing injustice consists in assigning to oneself too large a share of what is good without qualification, and too little of what is bad without qualification.

1134b This is why it is not a person that we allow to rule, but rather law, because a person does so in his own interests and becomes a tyrant. The magistrate, however, is a guardian of what is just, and so of what is equal as well. If he is just, he seems not to have more than his share, since he does not assign to himself a greater share of what is unqualifiedly good, unless it is in proportion to his deserts. He thus seems to labour for others, which is why people say that justice is the good of another, as we mentioned above. He ought therefore to receive some sort of reward,

namely, honour and privilege; and people who find these insufficient are the ones who become tyrants.

What is just for a master and for a father are not the same as this, though they are similar. For there is no unqualified injustice in relation to what is one's own, and a man's property, as well as his child until it reaches a certain age and becomes independent, are, as it were, a part of him; and no one rationally chooses to harm himself, which is why there is no injustice in relation to oneself. So nothing politically just or unjust is possible here, because, as we saw, they depend on law, and exist only among people where law is natural, namely, those who share equally in ruling and being ruled. There is therefore more of what is just in relation to one's wife than one's children or possessions, since this is what is just in households; but this too is distinct from what is politically just.

## Chapter 7

As regards what is politically just, one part is natural, the other legal. What is natural is what has the same force everywhere and does not depend on people's thinking. What is legal is what originally makes no difference whether it takes one form or another, but does matter when people have adopted it; for example, that the ransom for a prisoner be one mina, or that a goat be sacrificed and not two sheep, and all the laws that people lay down for particular occasions, such as that sacrifices be carried out for Brasidas,<sup>35</sup> and decisions made by special decree.

Some people think that everything just is like this, since what is natural is unchangeable and has the same force everywhere, as fire burns both here and in Persia, while they see what is just as changing. As it stands, this is false, though it is true in a sense. Among the gods, indeed, it is probably not true at all, but among us, though there is such a thing as what is natural, everything is nevertheless changeable; but still some things are so by nature, and others are not.

It is obvious, in the case of contingent things, which sort are by nature, and which are not, but are legal and conventional, assuming that both are similarly changeable. And the same distinction will hold in other cases: by nature, the right hand is superior, but it is still possible for everyone to become ambidextrous.

<sup>35</sup> d. 422 BCE. Distinguished Spartan general.

1135a The sorts of things that are just in accordance with convention and expedience are like standard measures. For measures for wine and corn are not the same everywhere, but are larger in wholesale markets, smaller in retail. Similarly, things that are not just by nature, but are just for a particular group of people, are not the same everywhere, since political systems are not the same either, though only one is naturally the best everywhere.

Each type of what is just and legal stands as a universal in relation to particulars; for the actions done in virtue of them are many, but each of them is a single entity, since it is a universal.

There is a difference between an unjust act and what is unjust, and between a just act and what is just. For what is unjust is so by nature or by ordinance; this, once done, is an unjust act, but before that it is not yet an unjust act, though it is unjust. The same goes for a just act, though here the general type is more usually called an act of justice, and what is called a just act is what rectifies an unjust act.

Later we must examine each of these actions, to see what sort and how many are their species, and what they are concerned with.

## Chapter 8

Given that just and unjust actions are as we described, a person acts unjustly or justly whenever he does these things voluntarily; when he acts involuntarily, he does not do so unjustly or justly, except incidentally, since the actions he performs are incidentally just or unjust.

Whether something is an unjust or a just act is determined by what is voluntary and what is involuntary. For when it is voluntary, it is blamed, and is thereby also an unjust act. So there will be things that are unjust, but not yet unjust acts, unless voluntariness is present as well. By voluntariness I mean, as I have said, that which lies in an agent's power and which he does knowingly, that is, not in ignorance of the person affected, the instrument used, or the end of the action – for example, whom he is striking, with what, and to what end; and each such action must be neither incidentally just nor done through compulsion (for example, if someone were to take the hand of another and use it to strike a third party, the second person would not be acting voluntarily, since the action did not lie within his control). The person struck may be the agent's father, though the agent knows only that he is a human being or

one of the people present, and is unaware that he is his father. A similar distinction may be made in the case of the end, and with regard to the action as a whole. An involuntary action, then, is one performed in ignorance, or, if not in ignorance, beyond the agent's control or under compulsion; there are plenty of things in the course of nature that we do and suffer knowingly, and which have nothing voluntary or involuntary about them, such as growing old or dying. 1135b

Both unjust and just actions alike may be incidentally just. For if someone returned a deposit involuntarily and through fear, we should say that he is neither doing just actions nor acting justly, except incidentally. In the same way, we should say that someone who is forced involuntarily into not returning a deposit is only incidentally acting unjustly and doing unjust actions. Some of our voluntary actions we do with rational choice, namely, those that are the consequence of previous deliberation; others, those that are not the consequence of such deliberation, we do without rational choice.

So there are three ways in which people can injure one another when they associate. What is done in ignorance is an error, when the person affected, the nature of the act, the instrument used or the end is different from what the agent supposed. He thought, for example, that he was not hitting anyone, or not with this object, or not this person, or not for this end; but the result turned out to be different from what he had thought (he meant, for instance, only to prick the other person, not wound him), or the person hit or the object used was different.

When the injury occurs contrary to reasonable expectation, it is a misadventure. When, however, it is not contrary to reasonable expectation, but is without malice, it is an error (someone makes an error when the first principle of the cause is in him, but when it is external he is unfortunate). When the agent acts knowingly, but without previous deliberation, it is an injustice; for example, actions done from spirit and the other feelings that are necessary and natural for human beings. For people who inflict these sorts of harm and make these errors are committing injustice, and their actions are injustices, but it does not follow that the agents are unjust or wicked, because the harm is not due to wickedness.

Since one can commit injustice without yet being an unjust person, 1134a  
what sort of unjust acts make the person who commits them, such as a thief, an adulterer, or a pirate, unjust in each type of injustice? Or is the

1135b quality of the act irrelevant? For a person might have sex with a woman knowing who she was, but through feeling rather than the first principle of rational choice. So he commits injustice, but he is not unjust; a person is not a thief, for example, though he stole, or an adulterer, though he committed adultery, and so on. But a person who acts like this from rational choice is unjust and wicked. This is why actions done from spirit are rightly thought to be unpremeditated, because the first principle is not in the person who acts from spirit, but in the one who made him angry.

1136a Again, the dispute is not about whether the action took place or not, but about its justice, since it is an apparent injustice that has given rise to the anger. For they are not disputing the fact, as people do in contracts, where one of the parties must be wicked unless the dispute arises from forgetfulness. Rather they agree about the fact, and dispute about which action was just (whereas a person who has deliberately harmed another is not ignorant of this), so that the one thinks he is being treated unjustly, while the other disagrees.

But if a person harms another by rational choice, he does act unjustly; and it is committing these acts of injustice, when they violate proportionality or equality, which make a person unjust. Similarly, a person is just when he acts justly by rational choice, but acts justly if he merely acts voluntarily.

Some involuntary acts are pardonable, others not. Errors that people make not only in ignorance but through ignorance are pardonable; those made in ignorance through a feeling that is neither natural nor human, and not through ignorance, are not pardonable.

## Chapter 9

Assuming our definitions of suffering and committing injustice are adequate, someone might wonder, first of all, whether things are as Euripides suggests in the odd lines:

‘I killed my mother; that’s my story in brief.’  
‘Both voluntarily, or involuntarily both?’.<sup>36</sup>

For is it really possible to suffer injustice voluntarily, or is it always

<sup>36</sup> Euripides, *Alcmaeon* fr. 68 Nauck.

involuntary, as acting unjustly is always voluntary? And is it always one or the other, or sometimes voluntary, sometimes involuntary? The same goes for being treated justly. Acting justly is always voluntary, so it would be reasonable to expect a like opposition in either case – that suffering injustice and being treated justly are either both voluntary or both involuntary. But it would seem absurd even in the case of being treated justly for it always to be voluntary, since some people are involuntarily treated justly.

Someone might go on to ask the further question whether everyone who has been dealt an injustice is being treated unjustly, or whether the case is the same in suffering injustice as it is in doing it. For it is possible in both doing and suffering to participate in what is just incidentally; and clearly the same goes for what is unjust, since doing something unjust is not the same as acting unjustly, and suffering something unjust is not the same as being treated unjustly. The same goes for acting justly and being treated justly; it is impossible to be treated unjustly unless someone is acting unjustly, or to be treated justly unless someone is acting justly.

But if acting unjustly, without qualification, is inflicting harm voluntarily – in the sense of having knowledge of the person acted upon, the thing used in the action, and the way it was performed – and if the incontinent person voluntarily harms himself, then he would voluntarily be treated unjustly, as well as being able to treat himself unjustly (this is also one of the questions raised, whether a person can treat himself 1136b unjustly). Moreover, someone could, through incontinence, voluntarily be harmed by another who was acting voluntarily, so that it would be possible to be treated unjustly voluntarily. Or is it rather that our definition is not correct, and that to ‘harming someone with knowledge of the person acted upon, the thing used in the action, and the way it was performed’ we should add that the action be ‘against the wish of the person acted upon’?

Someone can, then, be harmed and suffer injustice voluntarily, but no one is voluntarily treated unjustly. For no one wishes this, not even the incontinent man. Rather, he acts contrary to his wish, because no one wishes for what he does not think is good, and what the incontinent does is not what he thinks he ought to do.

The person who gives away his own property, as Homer says Glaucus gave to Diomedes ‘gold arms for bronze, the worth of a hundred oxen for



that of nine',<sup>37</sup> does not suffer injustice. To give is in his power, but to suffer injustice is not; there must be someone to treat him unjustly. Clearly, then, suffering injustice is not voluntary.

Two of the topics we rationally chose to discuss still remain, namely, whether it is the person who distributes more to someone than he deserves who is committing injustice or the person who receives it, and whether a person can treat himself unjustly.

If the first suggestion is possible, and it is the distributor who acts unjustly and not the person who has more than he should, and if someone can knowingly and voluntarily assign more to someone else than to himself, this is a case of a person's treating himself unjustly. And indeed this is what moderate people seem to do, since a good person will tend to take less than his share. Or is this too simple? For perhaps he is greedy for some other good, such as honour or what is unqualifiedly noble. Again, a solution to the problem can be found in our definition of acting unjustly. He does not suffer anything contrary to his own wish, so that he is not unjustly treated in this respect at any rate; and if he does suffer anything, it is only harm.

Clearly it is the distributor who acts unjustly, and not always the person who receives more than his share. For it is not the person who possesses what is unjust who acts unjustly, but he who voluntarily does what is unjust, namely, the person in whom we find the first principle of the action – and this is in the distributor, not the recipient.

Also, since doing is spoken of in many different ways, and there is a sense in which soulless things, or a hand, or a slave at the order of his master can kill, the recipient does not act unjustly, though he does do something unjust.

Again, if the distributor gave judgement in ignorance, he does not act unjustly as far as legal justice goes, nor is his judgement unjust, except in a sense (legal justice and primary justice being different). But if he  
1137a knew what he was doing when he judged unjustly, then he himself is also greedy, either for favour or for revenge. The person who has judged unjustly for these reasons, then, has more than his share, quite as though he has a share of the unjust award: when he judges on that condition about land, he took not land but money.

People think that acting unjustly is within their power, and therefore

<sup>37</sup> Homer, *Iliad* vi.236.

that justice is an easy matter, when in fact it is not. While having sex with a neighbour's wife, punching the person next to us, putting money in somebody's hands, are easy and in our power, doing these things through having a certain character is neither easy nor in our power.

In the same way, people think that knowing what is just and what is unjust does not require any wisdom, because it is not difficult to grasp what the laws say, though the acts they prescribe are not just other than in an incidental way. But knowing how acts are to be done and distributions to be effected if they are to be just is more of a job than knowing what health requires. Though, even in the case of health, knowing about honey, wine, hellebore, cautery and surgery may be easy, knowing how one should prescribe them to make people healthy, and to whom and at what time, is as demanding a task as it is to be a doctor.

Again, for this same reason, people suppose that acting unjustly is no less a characteristic of a just person than of an unjust, because the just person would be no less but even more able to do each act. For he could have sex with a woman or hit somebody; and a courageous person could throw away his shield and turn to run in either direction. But to act in a cowardly or unjust way is not to do things of this kind, except incidentally, but to do them on the basis of having a certain character. In the same way, being a doctor or curing a patient is a matter not merely of operating or not operating, of prescribing or not prescribing, but of doing them in a particular way.

What is just is found among people who have a share of things that are good without qualification, and whose share can be excessive or deficient. No share can be excessive for some – for example, I suppose, the gods – and for others – those who are incurably vicious – none of them is beneficial, but they are all harmful; there are yet others for whom they are beneficial up to a point. So what is just is a human affair.

## Chapter 10

We have next to say something about equity and what is equitable – about how equity is related to justice, and what is equitable to what is just. On examination they seem to be neither without qualification the same nor generically different. Sometimes we praise what is equitable and the person with that quality, so that when we are praising someone for other things we even transfer the term 'equitable', as an equivalent 1137b

to 'good', showing that what is more equitable is better. At other times, however, when we follow through the logical implications, it seems odd that what is equitable, if it is something beyond what is just, should be praiseworthy. For if they are different, one or other of what is just and what is equitable is not good; or if they are both good, they are the same.

These, then, are roughly the claims causing the puzzle about what is equitable; but, in a sense, they are all correct and do not conflict with one another. For what is equitable, though superior to one kind of what is just, is nevertheless just, and it is not by being a different genus that it is superior to justice. The same thing, then, is just and equitable, and while both are good, what is equitable is superior. What makes for the puzzle is that what is equitable is just, but not what is legally just – rather a correction of it. The reason is that all law is universal, and there are some things about which one cannot speak correctly in universal terms. In those areas, then, in which it is necessary to make universal statements but not possible to do so correctly, the law takes account of what happens more often, though it is not unaware that it can be in error. And it is no less correct for doing this; for the error is attributable not to the law, nor to the law-giver, but to the nature of the case, since the subject-matter of action is like this in its essence.

So when law speaks universally, and a particular case arises as an exception to the universal rule, then it is right – where the law-giver fails us and has made an error by speaking without qualification – to correct the omission. This will be by saying what the lawgiver would himself have said had he been present, and would have included within the law had he known. What is equitable, therefore, is just, and better than one kind of justice. But it is not better than unqualified justice, only better than the error that results from its lacking qualification. And this is the very nature of what is equitable – a correction of law, where it is deficient on account of its universality.

This is also the reason why not everything is regulated by law: about some things it is impossible to legislate, so that a special decree is required. For when the object is indeterminate, so also is the rule, like the leaden rule of Lesbian architecture. Just as this rule adapts to fit the shape of the stone and does not remain rigid, so the special decree adapts to fit the circumstances.

The nature of what is equitable, then, is clear, as is the fact that it is just and superior to one kind of justice. It is also evident from this who

the equitable person is. He is the kind of person who chooses rationally and who does equitable things; he does not stand on his rights in a bad way, but tends to accept less than his share, though he has law on his side. This is the equitable person, and his state of character is equity, which is a sort of justice, not some distinct state. 1138a

## Chapter 11

Whether a person can treat himself unjustly or not is evident from what we have said.

First, some just acts are legal requirements in accordance with virtue as a whole; for example, law does not allow a person to kill himself, and what it does not allow, it forbids. Again, when a person voluntarily harms another illegally, and he is not acting in retaliation, he acts unjustly, a voluntary agent being one who knows the person affected and the instrument used. A person who cuts his throat in a fit of anger is doing this voluntarily, contrary to correct reason, and the law does not allow this; so he is acting unjustly. But towards whom? Surely towards the city, not himself, since he suffers voluntarily, and no one voluntarily suffers injustice? This is why the city imposes a penalty, and a kind of dishonour attaches to the person who has done away with himself, on the ground that he has perpetrated an injustice against the city.

Again, in so far as the person acting unjustly is merely unjust and not altogether bad, it is impossible for him to treat himself unjustly (this is different from the other type of injustice, in that there is a sense in which the unjust person is wicked in the same way as the cowardly person, not by possessing wickedness in its entirety, so that his acting unjustly is not in accordance with wickedness in its entirety either). For this would be for the same thing to have been subtracted from and added to the same person at the same time, and that is impossible. Rather, justice and injustice must always involve more than one person.

In addition, an unjust act is voluntary and done from rational choice, and prior in the sense that a sufferer of injustice who retaliates in kind is not thought to be acting unjustly; but when a person harms himself, he suffers and does the same things at the same time.

Again, it would mean that a person could voluntarily be treated unjustly.

Besides, no one acts unjustly without committing particular acts of

injustice. And no one commits adultery with his own wife, burgles his own house, or steals his own property.

In general, the question of whether a person can treat himself unjustly is to be resolved in line with the distinction we made concerning the voluntary suffering of injustice.

It is obvious too that both acting unjustly and suffering injustice are bad (because the former is to have less than the mean, the latter more, the mean here playing a role similar to that of what is healthy in medicine and that of what conduces to bodily fitness in physical training). Nevertheless, acting unjustly is the worse, because it is blameworthy and implies vice that is either complete and without qualification or nearly so (since not every voluntary act of injustice involves injustice), while suffering injustice involves neither vice nor injustice. In 1138b itself, then, suffering injustice is less bad, but nothing prevents its being the greater evil in an incidental way. What is incidental, however, is not the concern of a skill; rather, the skill says that pleurisy is more serious than a stumble, even though the latter may turn out incidentally to be the more serious, if the fall it causes incidentally leads to one's being taken prisoner or put to death by the enemy.

By transference of meaning and by resemblance there is a kind of justice not between a person and himself, but between certain parts of him. This is not full-blooded justice, however, but the sort one finds between master and slave, or in the management of a household. For in theories of this kind, the part of the soul with reason is distinguished from the part without. It does seem to people who take this point of view that there can actually be such a thing as injustice to oneself, because it is possible for each of the parts to suffer things that are contrary to their desires; so there is something just in their relations with one another, as there is in those between ruler and ruled.

This may be taken, then, as our account of justice and the other virtues of character.