

Aristotle

*Nicomachean
Ethics*

translated by

Terence Irwin

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Preface

This translation attempts to make Aristotle's terse and concentrated Greek fairly intelligible to those who read him in English. I have, for example, divided Aristotle's longer and more complex sentences, and tried to make explicit the points that he conveys by hints or allusions. However, I have wanted to avoid making Aristotle appear to say more than he actually says, and therefore have distinguished elucidations and supplements from the actual rendering of the Greek words (see Introduction, sec. 'This Edition'). I hope the translation is clear and explicit enough to show how Aristotle's argument proceeds, in general and in detail, and at the same time literal enough to show what grounds the text offers for different lines of interpretation. At each stage I have benefited from the work of previous translators, and above all from the admirably scholarly and fluent version by Sir David Ross. The notes and glossary are meant to make the translation more intelligible, sometimes by defending particular interpretations, sometimes by indicating the inadequacy of an English term for capturing the Greek completely. At the same time, since there is no full and recent English commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, I have thought it useful to include some exegetical notes. These are not a commentary, but provide some information that may be helpful to readers who are beginning the study of the *Ethics*, and are often puzzled (as they should be) about the exact drift of the argu-

since they want to live with their friends, they share the ac-
tions in which they find their common life.

11.93 Hence virtuous people have the
best life together

Hence the friendship of base people turns out to be vicious.
For they are unstable, and share base pursuits; and
by becoming similar to each other, they grow vicious. But
the friendship of decent people is decent, and increases the
more often they meet. And they seem to become still better
from their activities and their mutual correction. For each
moulds the other in what they approve of, so that [you will
learn] what is noble from noble people'.

So much, then, for friendship. The next task will be to
discuss pleasure.

12. Pleasure

12.1 The Right Approach to Pleasure

12.11 Pleasure is of great ethical importance

The next task, presumably, is to discuss pleasure. For it
seems to be especially proper to our [animal] kind, and hence
when we educate children we steer them by pleasure and pain.
Besides, enjoying and hating the right things seems to be most
important for virtue of character. For pleasure and pain ex-
tend through the whole of our lives, and are of great impor-
tance for virtue and the happy life, since people decide to
do what is pleasant, and avoid what is painful. Least of all,
then, it seems, should these topics be neglected.

This is especially true because they arouse much dispute.
For some say pleasure is the good, while others, on the con-
trary, say it is altogether base.

12.12 But this should not tempt us
to exaggerate the badness of pleasure,
since such exaggeration is self-defeating

Now presumably some who say it is base say so because
they are persuaded that it is so. Others, however, say it be-
cause they think it is better for the conduct of our lives to
present pleasure as base even if it is not. For, they say, since
the many lean towards pleasure and are slaves to pleasures,
we must lead them in the contrary direction, because that
is the way to reach the intermediate condition.

Surely, however, this is wrong. For arguments about ac-
tions and feelings are less credible than the facts; hence any
conflict between arguments and perceptible [facts] arouses
contempt for the arguments, and moreover undermines the
truth as well [as the arguments]. For if someone blames
pleasure, but then has been seen to seek it on some occa-
sions, the reason for his lapse seems to be that he approves
of every type of pleasure; for the many are not the sort to
make distinctions.

True arguments, then, would seem to be the most useful,
not only for knowledge but also for the conduct of life. For
since they harmonize with the facts, they are credible, and
so encourage those who comprehend them to live by them.

Enough of this, then; let us now consider what has been
said about pleasure.

12.2 The Case for Pleasure: No Sound
Argument Proves that It is the Good

12.21 Eudoxus' arguments

Eudoxus thought that pleasure is the good.

(1) This was because (a) he saw that all [animals], both
rational and non-rational, seek it. (b) In everything, he says,
what is choiceworthy is decent, and what is most choice-
worthy is supreme. (c) Each thing finds its own good, just

as it finds its own nourishment. (d) Hence, when all are drawn to the same thing [i.e. pleasure], this indicates that it is best for all. (e) And what is good for all, what all aim at, is the good.

Eudoxus' arguments were found credible because of his virtuous character, rather than on their own [merits]. For since he seemed to be outstandingly temperate, he did not seem to be saying this because he was a friend of pleasure; rather, it seemed, what he said was how it really was.

(2) He thought it was no less evident from consideration of the contrary. (a) Pain in itself is to be avoided for all. (b) Similarly, then, its contrary is choiceworthy for all. (c) What is most choiceworthy is what we choose not because of, or for the sake of, anything else. (d) And it is agreed that this is the character of pleasure, since we never ask anyone what his end is in being pleased, on the assumption that pleasure is choiceworthy in itself.

(3) Moreover, [he argued], when pleasure is added to any other good, e.g. to just or temperate action, it makes that good more choiceworthy; and good is increased by the addition of itself.

12.22 Discussion of Eudoxus' arguments

This [third] argument, at least, would seem to present pleasure as one good among others, no more a good than any other. For the addition of *any* other good makes a good more choiceworthy than it is all by itself.

Indeed Plato uses this sort of argument when he undermines the claim of pleasure to be the good. For, he argues, the pleasant life is more choiceworthy when combined with intelligence than it is without it; and if the mixed [good] is better, pleasure is not the good, since nothing can be added to the good to make it more choiceworthy.

Nor, clearly, could anything else be the good if it is made more choiceworthy by the addition of anything that is good

in itself. Then what is the good that meets this condition, and that we share in also? That is what we are looking for.

12.3 The Case Against Pleasure: No Sound Argument Proves that It is not a Good

12.31 An exaggerated reply to Eudoxus' first argument

When some object that what everything aims at is not good, surely there is nothing in what they say. For if things seem [good] to all, we say they *are* [good]; and if someone undermines confidence in these, what he says will hardly inspire more confidence in other things. For if [only] beings without understanding desired these things, there would be something in the objection; but if intelligent beings also desire them, how can there be anything in it? And presumably even in inferior [animals] there is something superior to themselves, that seeks their own proper good.

12.32 An exaggerated reply to Eudoxus' second argument

The argument [offered against Eudoxus] about the contrary would also seem to be incorrect. For they argue that if pain is an evil, it does not follow that pleasure is a good, since evil is also opposed to evil, and both are opposed to the neutral condition [without pleasure or pain].

The objectors' general point here is right, but what they say in the case mentioned is false. For if both pleasure and pain were evils, we would also have to avoid both, and if both were neutral, we would have to avoid neither, or else avoid both equally. Evidently, however, we avoid pain as an evil and choose pleasure as a good; hence this must also be the opposition between them.

1173a10 12.33 *Pleasure and quality*

Again, if [as the objectors argue] pleasure is not a quality, it does not follow [as they suppose] that it is not a good. For neither are virtuous activities or happiness qualities.

12.34 *Pleasure admits of degrees*

They say that the good is definite, whereas pleasure is indefinite because it admits of more and less.

If their judgement rests on the actual condition of being pleased, it must also hold for justice and the other virtues, where evidently we are said to have a certain character more and less, and to express the virtues more and less in our actions. For we may be more [and less] just or brave, and may do just or temperate actions more and less.

If, on the other hand, their judgement rests on the [variety of] pleasures, then surely they fail to state the reason [why pleasures admit of more and less], namely that some are unmixed [with pain] and others are mixed.

Moreover, just as health admits of more and less, though it is definite, why should pleasure not be the same? For not every [healthy person] has the same proportion [of bodily elements], nor does the same person always have the same, but it may be relaxed and still remain up to a certain limit, and may differ in more and less. The same is quite possible, then, for pleasure also.

12.35 *Pleasure is not a process*

They hold that what is good is complete, whereas processes and becoming are incomplete; and they try to show that pleasure is a process and a becoming. It would seem, however, that they are wrong, and pleasure is not even a process.

Pleasures are not quick or slow

For quickness or slowness seems to be proper to every process – if not in itself (as, e.g., with the universe), then

in relation to something else. But neither of these is true of pleasure. For though certainly it is possible to become pleased quickly, as it is possible to become angry quickly, it is not possible to be pleased quickly, not even in relation to something else. But this is possible for walking and growing and all such things [i.e. for processes]. It is possible, then, to pass quickly or slowly into pleasure, but not possible to be [quickly or slowly] in the corresponding activity, i.e. to be pleased quickly [or slowly].

The relation of pleasure to pain is not suitable for a process

And how could pleasure be a becoming? For not just any random thing, it seems, comes to be from any other; but what something comes to be from is what it is dissolved into. Hence whatever pleasure is the becoming of, pain should be the perishing of it.

They do indeed say that pain is the emptying of the natural [condition, and hence the perishing], and that pleasure is its refilling, [and hence the becoming]. Emptying and filling happen to the body; if, then, pleasure is the refilling of something natural, what has the refilling will also have the pleasure. Hence it will be the body that has pleasure.

This does not seem to be true, however. The refilling, then, is not pleasure, though someone might be pleased while a refilling is going on, and pained when he is becoming empty.

This belief [that pleasure is refilling] seems to have arisen from pains and pleasures in connection with food; for first we are empty and suffer pain, and then take pleasure in the refilling. However, the same is not true for all pleasures; for pleasures in mathematics, and among pleasures in perception those through the sense of smell, and many sounds, sights, memories and expectations as well, all arise without [previous] pain. If this is so, what will they be comings-to-be of? For since no emptiness of anything has come to be, there is nothing whose refilling might come to be.

12.36 *Good and bad pleasures:**Three different accounts*

Some people cite the disgraceful pleasures [to show that pleasure is not a good].

(1) To them we might reply that these [sources of disgraceful pleasures] are not pleasant. If things are healthy or sweet or bitter to sick people, we should not suppose that they are also healthy, or sweet, or bitter, except to them; nor should we suppose that things appearing white to people with eye disease are white, except to them. Similarly, if things are pleasant to people in bad condition, we should not suppose that they are also pleasant, except to these people.

(2) Or we might say that the pleasures are choiceworthy, but not when they come from these sources, just as wealth is desirable, but not if you have to betray someone to get it, and health is desirable, but not if it requires you to eat anything and everything.

(3) Or perhaps pleasures differ in species. For those from fine sources are different from those from shameful sources; and we cannot have the just person's pleasure without being just, any more than we can have the musician's without being musicians, and similarly in the other cases.

12.37 *Arguments for the third account:**Pleasure is not the good*

The difference between a friend and a flatterer seems to indicate that pleasure is not good, or else that pleasures differ in species. For in dealings with us the friend seems to aim at what is good, but the flatterer at what is pleasant; and the flatterer is reproached, whereas the friend is praised, on the assumption that in their dealings they have different aims.

Besides, no one would choose to live with a child's [level of] thought for his whole life, taking as much pleasure as possible in what pleases children, or to enjoy himself while

doing some utterly shameful action, even if he would never suffer pain for it.

Moreover, there are many things that we would be eager for even if they brought no pleasure, e.g. seeing, remembering, knowing, having the virtues. Even if pleasures necessarily follow on them, that does not matter, since we would choose them even if no pleasure resulted from them.

It would seem to be clear, then, that pleasure is not the good, that not every pleasure is choiceworthy, and that some are choiceworthy in themselves, differing in species or in their sources [from those that are not]. So much, then, for the things that are said about pleasure and pain.

12.4 *Pleasure is an Activity, not a Process*

What, then, or what kind of thing, is pleasure? This will become clearer if we take it up again from the beginning.

12.41 *Pleasure is complete at any time*

Seeing seems to be complete at any time, since it has no need for anything else to complete its form by coming to be at a later time. And pleasure is also like this, since it is some sort of whole, and no pleasure is to be found at any time that will have its form completed by coming to be for a longer time. Hence pleasure is not a process either.

12.42 *A process needs time for its completion . . .*

For every process, e.g. constructing a building, takes time, and aims at some end, and is complete when it produces the product it seeks, or, [in other words, is complete] in the whole time [that it takes].

. . . *And consists of dissimilar sub-processes*

Moreover, each process is incomplete during the processes that are its parts, i.e. during the time it goes on; and it con-

sists of processes that are different in form from the whole process and from each other.

For laying stones together and fluting a column are different processes; and both are different from the [whole] production of the temple. For the production of the temple is a complete production, since it needs nothing further [when it is finished] to achieve the proposed goal; but the production of the foundation or the triglyph is an incomplete production, since [when it is finished] it is [the production] of a part.

Hence [processes that are parts of larger processes] differ in form; and we cannot find a process complete in form at any time [while it is going on], but [only], if at all, in the whole time [that it takes].

The same is true of walking and the other [processes]. For if locomotion is a process from one place to another, it includes locomotions differing in form—flying, walking, jumping and so on. And besides these differences, there are differences in walking itself. For the place from which and the place to which are not the same in the whole racecourse as they are in a part of it, or the same in one part as in another; nor is traveling along one line the same as traveling along another, since what we cover is not just a line, but a line in a [particular] place, and this line and that line are in different places.

Hence it is not complete at every time

Now we have discussed process exactly elsewhere. But, at any rate, a process, it would seem, is not complete at every time; and the many [constituent] processes are incomplete, and differ in form, since the place from which and the place to which make the form of a process [and different processes begin and end in different places].

12.43 *Hence pleasure is not a process*

The form of pleasure, by contrast, is complete at any time. Clearly, then, it is different from a process, and is something whole and complete. This also seems true because a process must take time, but being pleased need not; for what [takes no time and hence is present] in an instant is a whole.

This also makes it clear that it is wrong to say there is a process or a coming-to-be of pleasure. For this is not said of everything, but only of what is divisible and not a whole; for seeing, or a point, or a unit, has no coming to be, and none of these is either a process or a becoming. But pleasure is a whole; hence it too has no coming to be.

12.5 *Pleasure Completes an Activity*

12.51 *The best activity requires the faculty in the best condition with the best object*

Every faculty of perception is active in relation to its perceptible object, and completely active when it is in good condition in relation to the finest of its perceptible objects. For this above all seems to be the character of complete activity, whether it is ascribed to the faculty or to the subject that has it. Hence for each faculty the best activity is the activity of the subject in the best condition in relation to the best object of the faculty.

12.52 *The best activity is pleasantest*

This activity will also be the most complete and the pleasantest. For every faculty of perception, and every sort of thought and study, has its pleasure; the pleasantest activity is the most complete; and the most complete is the activity of the subject in good condition in relation to the most excellent object of the faculty. Pleasure completes the activity.

12.53 *Pleasure completes an activity by being a consequent final cause*

But the way in which pleasure completes the activity is not the way in which the perceptible object and the faculty of perception complete it when they are both excellent—just as health and the doctor are not the cause of being healthy in the same way. For clearly a pleasure arises that corresponds to each faculty of perception, since we say that sights and sounds are pleasant; and clearly it arises above all whenever the faculty of perception is best, and is active in relation to the best sort of object. When this is the condition of the perceptible object and of the perceiving subject, there will always be pleasure, when the producer and the subject to be affected are both present.

Pleasure completes the activity—not, however, as the state does, by being present [in the activity], but as a sort of consequent end, like the bloom on youths.

Hence as long as the objects of understanding or perception and the subject that judges or attends are in the right condition, there will be pleasure in the activity. For as long as the subject affected and the productive [cause] remain similar and in the same relation to each other, the same thing naturally arises.

12.54 *Hence pleasure is not continuous because an activity is not continuous*

Then how is it that no one is continuously pleased? Is it not because we get tired? For nothing human is capable of continuous activity, and hence no continuous pleasure arises either, since pleasure is a consequence of the activity.

Again, some things delight us when they are new to us, but less later, for the same reason. For at first our thought is stimulated and intensely active towards them, as our sense of sight is when we look closely at something; but later the

activity becomes lax and careless, so that the pleasure fades also.

12.55 *The connection between pleasure and activity explains why we desire pleasure*

We might think that everyone desires pleasure, since everyone aims at being alive. Living is a type of activity, and each of us is active towards the objects he likes most and in the ways he likes most. The musician, e.g., activates his hearing in hearing melodies; the lover of learning activates his thought in thinking about objects of study; and so on for each of the others. Pleasure completes their activities, and hence completes life, which they desire. It is reasonable, then, that they also aim at pleasure, since it completes each person's life for him, and life is choice-worthy.

Do we choose life because of pleasure, or pleasure because of life? Let us set aside this question for now, since the two appear to be yoked together, and to allow no separation; for pleasure never arises without activity, and, equally, it completes every activity.

12.6 *Pleasures Differ in Kind*

12.61 *Different activities require different pleasures to complete them*

Hence pleasures also seem to be of different species. For we suppose that things of different species are completed by different things. That is how it appears, both with natural things and with artifacts, e.g. with animals, trees, a painting, a statue, a house or an implement; and similarly, activities that differ in species are also completed by things that differ in species. Activities of thought differ in species from activities of the faculties of perception, and so do these from each other; so also, then, do the pleasures that complete them.

12.62 *An activity is promoted by its proper pleasure*

This is also apparent from the way each pleasure is proper to the activity that it completes. For the proper pleasure increases the activity. For we judge each thing better and more exactly when our activity is associated with pleasure. If, e.g., we enjoy doing geometry, we become better geometers, and understand each question better; and similarly lovers of music, building and so on improve at their proper function when they enjoy it.

Each pleasure increases the activity; what increases it is proper to it; and since the activities are different in species, what is proper to them is also different in species.

12.63 *And conversely it is impeded by an alien pleasure*

This is even more apparent from the way some activities are impeded by pleasures from others. For lovers of flutes, e.g., cannot pay attention to a conversation if they catch the sound of someone playing the flute, because they enjoy flute-playing more than their present activity; and so the pleasure proper to flute-playing destroys the activity of conversation.

The same is true in other cases also, whenever we are engaged in two activities at once. For the pleasanter activity pushes out the other one, all the more if it is much pleasanter, so that we no longer even engage in the other activity. Hence if we are enjoying one thing intensely, we do not do another very much. It is when we are only mildly pleased that we do something else, e.g. people who eat nuts in theatres do this most when the actors are bad.

Since, then, the proper pleasure makes an activity more exact, longer and better, while an alien pleasure damages it, clearly the two pleasures differ widely.

For an alien pleasure does virtually what a proper pain does. The proper pain destroys activity, so that if, e.g.,

writing or rational calculation has no pleasure and is in fact painful for us, we do not write or calculate, since the activity is painful. Hence the proper pleasures and pains have contrary effects on an activity; and the proper ones are those that arise from the activity in itself. And as we have said, the effect of alien pleasures is similar to the effect of pain, since they ruin the activity, though not in the same way as pain.

12.7 *Which Pleasures are Goods?*

12.71 *The goodness of the activity determines the goodness of the pleasure*

Since activities differ in degrees of decency and badness, and some are choiceworthy, some to be avoided, some neither, the same is true of pleasures; for each activity has its own proper pleasure. Hence the pleasure proper to an excellent activity is decent, and the one proper to a base activity is vicious; for, similarly, appetites for fine things are praiseworthy, and appetites for shameful things are blameworthy.

And in fact the pleasure in an activity is more proper to it than the desire for it. For the desire is distinguished from it in time and in nature; but the pleasure is close to the activity, and so little distinguished from it that disputes arise about whether the activity is the same as the pleasure.

Still, pleasure is seemingly neither thought nor perception, since that would be absurd. Rather, it is because [pleasure and activity] are not separated that to some people they appear the same.

Hence, just as activities differ, so do the pleasures. Sight differs from touch, in purity, as hearing and smell do from taste; hence the pleasures also differ in the same way. So also do the pleasures of thought differ from these [pleasures of sense]; and both sorts have different kinds within them.

12.72 *The function of each kind of animal determines its proper activity and its proper pleasure*

Each kind of animal seems to have its own proper pleasure, just as it has its own proper function; for the proper pleasure will be the one that corresponds to its activity.

This is apparent if we also study each kind. For a horse, a dog and a human being have different pleasures; and, as Heraclitus says, an ass would choose chaff over gold, since asses find food pleasanter than gold. Hence animals that differ in species also have pleasures that differ in species; and it would be reasonable for animals of the same species to have the same pleasures also.

12.73 *The human function determines the proper human pleasure, as measured by the virtuous person*

In fact, however, the pleasures differ quite a lot, in human beings at any rate. For the same things delight some people, and cause pain to others; and while some find them painful and hateful, others find them pleasant and lovable. The same is true of sweet things. For the same things do not seem sweet to a feverish and to a healthy person, or hot to an enfeebled and to a vigorous person; and the same is true of other things.

But in all such cases it seems that what is really so is what appears so to the excellent person. If this is correct, as it seems to be, and virtue, i.e. the good person in so far as he is good, is the measure of each thing, then what appears pleasures to him will also be pleasures, and what is pleasant will be what he enjoys.

And if what he finds objectionable appears pleasant to someone, that is nothing surprising, since human beings suffer many sorts of corruption and damage. It is not pleasant, however, except to these people in these conditions.

Clearly, then, we should say that the pleasures agreed to be shameful are not pleasures at all, except to corrupted people.

But what about those pleasures that seem to be decent? Of these, which kind, or which particular pleasure, should we take to be the pleasure of a human being? Surely it will be clear from the activities, since the pleasures are consequences of these.

Hence the pleasures that complete the activities of the complete and blessedly happy man, whether he has one activity or more than one, will be called the human pleasures to the fullest extent. The other pleasures will be human in secondary and even more remote ways corresponding to the character of the activities.

13. *Happiness: Further Discussion*

13.1 *Recapitulation: Happiness is an End in Itself, Consisting in Virtuous Action*

We have now finished our discussion of the types of virtue; of friendship; and of pleasure. It remains for us to discuss happiness in outline, since we take this to be the end of human [aims]. Our discussion will be shorter if we first take up again what we said before.

We said, then, that happiness is not a state. For if it were, someone might have it and yet be asleep for his whole life, living the life of a plant, or suffer the greatest misfortunes. If we do not approve of this, we count happiness as an activity rather than a state, as we said before.

Some activities are necessary, i.e. choice-worthy for some other end, while others are choice-worthy in themselves. Clearly, then, we should count happiness as one of those activities that are choice-worthy in themselves, not as one of those choice-worthy for some other end. For happiness lacks nothing, but is self-sufficient; and an activity is choice-worthy in itself when nothing further beyond it is sought from it.

This seems to be the character of actions expressing virtue; for doing fine and excellent actions is choiceworthy for itself.

13.2 *Happiness is Virtuous Action, not Amusement*

13.2.1 *Amusement is popularly regarded as happiness*

But pleasant amusements also [seem to be choiceworthy in themselves]. For they are not chosen for other ends, since they actually cause more harm than benefit, by causing neglect of our bodies and possessions.

Moreover, most of those people congratulated for their happiness resort to these sorts of pastimes. Hence people who are witty participants in them have a good reputation with tyrants, since they offer themselves as pleasant [partners] in the tyrant's aims, and these are the sort of people the tyrant requires. And so these amusements seem to have the character of happiness because people in supreme power spend their leisure in them.

13.2.2 *But popular reputation is inadequate evidence*

However, these sorts of people are presumably no evidence. For virtue and understanding, the sources of excellent activities, do not depend on holding supreme power. Further, these powerful people have had no taste of pure and civilized pleasure, and so they resort to bodily pleasures. But that is no reason to think these pleasures are most choiceworthy, since boys also think that what they honour is best. Hence, just as different things appear honourable to boys and to men, it is reasonable that in the same way different things appear honourable to base and to decent people.

As we have often said, then, what is honourable and pleasant is what is so to the excellent person; and to each type of person the activity expressing his own proper state is most choiceworthy; hence the activity expressing virtue is most choiceworthy to the excellent person [and hence is most honourable and pleasant].

13.2.3 *Happiness cannot be amusement*

Happiness, then, is not found in amusement; for it would be absurd if the end were amusement, and our lifelong efforts and sufferings aimed at amusing ourselves. For we choose practically everything for some other end -- except for happiness, since it is [the] end; but serious work and toil aimed [only] at amusement appears stupid and excessively childish. Rather, it seems correct to amuse ourselves so that we can do something serious, as Anacharsis says; for amusement would seem to be relaxation, and it is because we cannot toil continuously that we require relaxation. Relaxation, then, is not [the] end, since we pursue it [to prepare] for activity.

Further, the happy life seems to be a life expressing virtue, which is a life involving serious actions, and not consisting in amusement.

Besides, we say that things to be taken seriously are better than funny things that provide amusement, and that in each case the activity of the better part and the better person is more serious and excellent; and the activity of what is better is superior, and thereby has more the character of happiness.

Moreover, anyone at all, even a slave, no less than the best person, might enjoy bodily pleasures; but no one would allow that a slave shares in happiness, if one does not [also allow that the slave shares in the sort of] life [needed for happiness]. Happiness, then, is found not in these pastimes, but in the activities expressing virtue, as we also said previously.

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13.3 *Theoretical Study is the Supreme Element of Happiness*

If happiness, then, is activity expressing virtue, it is reasonable for it to express the supreme virtue, which will be the virtue of the best thing.

The best is understanding, or whatever else seems to be the natural ruler and leader, and to understand what is fine and divine, by being itself either divine or the most divine element in us.

Hence complete happiness will be its activity expressing its proper virtue; and we have said that this activity is the activity of study. This seems to agree with what has been said before, and also with the truth.

13.31 *The activity of theoretical study is best*

For this activity is supreme, since understanding is the supreme element in us, and the objects of understanding are the supreme objects of knowledge.

13.32 *It is most continuous*

Besides, it is the most continuous activity, since we are more capable of continuous study than of any continuous action.

13.33 *It is pleasantest*

We think pleasure must be mixed into happiness; and it is agreed that the activity expressing wisdom is the pleasantest of the activities expressing virtue. At any rate, philosophy seems to have remarkably pure and firm pleasures; and it is reasonable for those who have knowledge to spend their lives more pleasantly than those who seek it.

13.34 *It is most self-sufficient*

Moreover, the self-sufficiency we spoke of will be found in study above all.

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For admittedly the wise person, the just person and the other virtuous people all need the good things necessary for life. Still, when these are adequately supplied, the just person needs other people as partners and recipients of his just actions; and the same is true of the temperate person and the brave person and each of the others.

But the wise person is able, and more able the wiser he is, to study even by himself; and though he presumably does it better with colleagues, even so he is more self-sufficient than any other [virtuous person].

13.35 *It aims at no end beyond itself*

Besides, study seems to be liked because of itself alone, since it has no result beyond having studied. But from the virtues concerned with action we try to a greater or lesser extent to gain something beyond the action itself.

13.36 *It involves leisure*

Happiness seems to be found in leisure, since we accept trouble so that we can be at leisure, and fight wars so that we can be at peace. Now the virtues concerned with action have their activities in politics or war, and actions here seem to require trouble.

This seems completely true for actions in war, since no one chooses to fight a war, and no one continues it, for the sake of fighting a war; for someone would have to be a complete murderer if he made his friends his enemies so that there could be battles and killings.

But the actions of the politician require trouble also. Beyond political activities themselves these actions seek positions of power and honours; or at least they seek happiness for the politician himself and for his fellow-citizens, which is something different from political science itself, and clearly is sought on the assumption that it is different.

Hence among actions expressing the virtues those in poli-

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then, if he were to choose not his own life, but something else's.

And what we have said previously will also apply now. For what is proper to each thing's nature is supremely best and pleasantest for it; and hence for a human being the life expressing understanding will be supremely best and pleasantest, if understanding above all is the human being. This life, then, will also be happiest.

13.4 The Relation of Study to the Other Virtues in Happiness

13.41 The other virtues are human, not divine

The life expressing the other kind of virtue [i.e. the kind concerned with action] is [happiest] in a secondary way because the activities expressing this virtue are human.

For we do just and brave actions, and the others expressing the virtues, in relation to other people, by abiding by what fits each person in contracts, services, all types of actions, and also in feelings; and all these appear to be human conditions.

Indeed, some feelings actually seem to arise from the body; and in many ways virtue of character seems to be proper to feelings.

Besides, intelligence is yoked together with virtue of character, and so is this virtue with intelligence. For the origins of intelligence express the virtues of character; and correctness in virtues of character expresses intelligence. And since these virtues are also connected to feelings, they are concerned with the compound. Since the virtues of the compound are human virtues, the life and the happiness expressing these virtues is also human.

The virtue of understanding, however, is separated [from the compound]. Let us say no more about it, since an exact account would be too large a task for our present project.

tics and war are pre-eminently fine and great; but they require trouble, aim at some [further] end, and are choice-worthy for something other than themselves.

But the activity of understanding, it seems, is superior in excellence because it is the activity of study, aims at no end beyond itself and has its own proper pleasure, which increases the activity. Further, self-sufficiency, leisure, unwearied activity (as far as is possible for a human being), and any other features ascribed to the blessed person, are evidently features of this activity.

Hence a human being's complete happiness will be this activity, if it receives a complete span of life, since nothing incomplete is proper to happiness.

13.37 It is a god-like life

Such a life would be superior to the human level. For someone will live it not in so far as he is a human being, but in so far as he has some divine element in him. And the activity of this divine element is as much superior to the activity expressing the rest of virtue as this element is superior to the compound. Hence if understanding is something divine in comparison with a human being, so also will the life that expresses understanding be divine in comparison with human life.

We ought not to follow the proverb-writers, and 'think human, since you are human', or 'think mortal, since you are mortal'. Rather, as far as we can, we ought to be immortal, and go to all lengths to live a life that expresses our supreme element; for however much this element may lack in bulk, by much more it surpasses everything in power and value.

13.38 It realizes the supreme element in human nature

Moreover, each person seems to be his understanding, if he is his controlling and better element; it would be absurd,

13.42 *The other virtues require more external goods than study requires*

Moreover, it seems to need external supplies very little, or [at any rate] less than virtue of character needs them. For grant that they both need necessary goods, and to the same extent, since there will be only a very small difference even though the politician labours more about the body and such-like. Still, there will be a large difference in [what is needed] for the [proper] activities [of each type of virtue].

For the generous person will need money for generous actions; and the just person will need it for paying debts, since wishes are not clear, and people who are not just pretend to wish to do justice. Similarly, the brave person will need enough power, and the temperate person will need freedom [to do intemperate actions], if they are to achieve anything that the virtue requires. For how else will they, or any other virtuous people, make their virtue clear?

Moreover, it is disputed whether it is decision or action that more controls [whether someone has virtue], on the assumption that it depends on both. Hence, clearly, complete virtue depends both on decision and on actions. But for actions many external goods are needed, and the greater and finer the actions the more numerous are the external goods needed.

But someone who is studying needs none of these goods, for that activity at least; indeed, for study at least, we might say they are even hindrances.

In so far as he is a human being, however, and [hence] lives together with a number of other human beings, he chooses to do the actions expressing virtue. Hence he will need the sorts of external goods [that are needed for the virtues], for living a human life.

13.43 *Beliefs about the gods support the supremacy of study*

In another way also it appears that complete happiness is some activity of study. For we traditionally suppose that the

gods more than anyone are blessed and happy; but what sorts of actions ought we to ascribe to them? Just actions? Surely they will appear ridiculous making contracts, returning deposits and so on. Brave actions? Do they endure what [they find] frightening and endure dangers because it is fine? Generous actions? Whom will they give to? And surely it would be absurd for them to have currency or anything like that. What would their temperate actions be? Surely it is vulgar praise to say that they do not have base appetites. When we go through them all, anything that concerns actions appears trivial and unworthy of the gods.

However, we all traditionally suppose that they are alive and active, since surely they are not asleep like Endymion. Then if someone is alive, and action is excluded, and production even more, what is left but study? Hence the gods' activity that is superior in blessedness will be an activity of study. And so the human activity that is most akin to the gods' will, more than any others, have the character of happiness.

A sign of this is the fact that other animals have no share in happiness, being completely deprived of this activity of study. For the whole life of the gods is blessed, and human life is blessed to the extent that it has something resembling this sort of activity; but none of the other animals is happy, because none of them shares in study at all. Hence happiness extends just as far as study extends, and the more someone studies, the happier he is, not coincidentally but in so far as he studies, since study is valuable in itself. And so [on this argument] happiness will be some kind of study.

13.44 *But a human being also needs moderate external goods*

However, the happy person is a human being, and so will need external prosperity also; for his nature is not self-sufficient for study, but he needs a healthy body, and needs to have food and the other services provided.

Still, even though no one can be blessedly happy without external goods, we must not think that to be happy we will need many large goods. For self-sufficiency and action do not depend on excess, and we can do fine actions even if we do not rule earth and sea; for even from moderate resources we can do the actions expressing virtue. This is evident to see, since many private citizens seem to do decent actions no less than people in power do—even more, in fact. It is enough if moderate resources are provided; for the life of someone whose activity expresses virtue will be happy.

Traditional views held by the wise support us

Solon surely described happy people well, when he said they had been moderately supplied with external goods, had done what he regarded as the finest actions, and had lived their lives temperately. For it is possible to have moderate possessions and still to do the right actions.

And Anaxagoras would seem to have supposed that the happy person was neither rich nor powerful, since he said he would not be surprised if the happy person appeared an absurd sort of person to the many. For the many judge by externals, since these are all they perceive.

Hence the beliefs of the wise would seem to accord with our arguments.

But theory must be tested in practice

These considerations do indeed produce some confidence. The truth, however, in questions about action is judged from what we do and how we live, since these are what control [the answers to such questions]. Hence we ought to examine what has been said by applying it to what we do and how we live; and if it harmonizes with what we do, we should accept it, but if it conflicts we should count it [mere] words.

13.45 The person who studies is most loved by the gods

The person whose activity expresses understanding and who takes care of understanding would seem to be in the best condition, and most loved by the gods. For if the gods pay some attention to human beings, as they seem to, it would be reasonable for them to take pleasure in what is best and most akin to them, namely understanding; and reasonable for them to benefit in return those who most of all like and honour understanding, on the assumption that these people attend to what is beloved by the gods, and act correctly and finely.

Clearly, all this is true of the wise person more than anyone else; hence he is most loved by the gods. And it is likely that this same person will be happiest; hence the wise person will be happier than anyone else on this argument too.

14. Ethics, Moral Education and Politics

14.1 We Must Study Moral Education to See How to Make People Virtuous

We have now said enough in outlines about happiness and the virtues, and about friendship and pleasure also. Should we then think that our decision [to study these] has achieved its end? On the contrary, the aim of studies about action, as we say, is surely not to study and know about each thing, but rather to act on our knowledge. Hence knowing about virtue is not enough, but we must also try to possess and exercise virtue, or become good in any other way.

14.11 Argument alone is not enough

Now if arguments were sufficient by themselves to make people decent, the rewards they would command would justifiably have been many and large, as Theognis says, and rightly bestowed. In fact, however, arguments seem to have enough influence to stimulate and encourage the civilized ones

among the young people, and perhaps to make virtue take possession of a well-born character that truly loves what is fine; but they seem unable to stimulate the many towards being fine and good.

For the many naturally obey fear, not shame; they avoid what is base because of the penalties, not because it is disgraceful. For since they live by their feelings, they pursue their proper pleasures and the sources of them, and avoid the opposed pains, and have not even a notion of what is fine and [hence] truly pleasant, since they have had no taste of it.

What argument could reform people like these? For it is impossible, or not easy, to alter by argument what has long been absorbed by habit; but, presumably, we should be satisfied to achieve some share in virtue when we already have what we seem to need to become decent.

14.12 *Nature, habit and teaching are all needed*

Some think it is nature that makes people good; some think it is habit; some that it is teaching.

The [contribution] of nature clearly is not up to us, but results from some divine cause in those who have it, who are the truly fortunate ones.

Arguments and teaching surely do not influence everyone, but the soul of the student needs to have been prepared by habits for enjoying and hating finely, like ground that is to nourish seed. For someone whose life follows his feelings would not even listen to an argument turning him away, or comprehend it [if he did listen]; and in that state how could he be persuaded to change? And in general feelings seem to yield to force, not to argument.

Hence we must already in some way have a character suitable for virtue, fond of what is fine and objecting to what is shameful.

14.2 *Moral Education Requires Legislation*

14.21 *Both children and adults need laws*

But it is hard for someone to be trained correctly for virtue from his youth if he has not been brought up under correct laws, since the many, especially the young, do not find it pleasant to live in a temperate and resistant way. Hence laws must prescribe their upbringing and practices; for they will not find these things painful when they get used to them.

Presumably, however, it is not enough to get the correct upbringing and attention when they are young; rather, they must continue the same practices and be habituated to them when they become men. Hence we need laws concerned with these things also, and in general with all of life. For the many yield to compulsion more than to argument, and to sanctions more than to what is fine.

14.22 *Hence the state legislates for morality*

This, some think, is why legislators should urge people towards virtue and exhort them to aim at what is fine, on the assumption that anyone whose good habits have prepared him decently will listen to them, but should impose corrective treatments and penalties on anyone who disobeys or lacks the right nature, and completely expel an incurable. For the decent person, it is assumed, will attend to reason because his life aims at what is fine, while the base person, since he desires pleasure, has to receive corrective treatment by pain, like a beast of burden; that is why it is said that the pains imposed must be those most contrary to the pleasures he likes.

As we have said, then, someone who is to be good must be finely brought up and habituated, and then must live in decent practices, doing nothing base either willingly or unwillingly. And this will be true if his life follows some sort of understanding and correct order that has influence over him.

14.23 *A state is a better moral educator than an individual*

A father's instructions, however, lack this influence and compelling power; and so in general do the instructions of an individual man, unless he is a king or someone like that. Law, however, has the power that compels; and law is reason that proceeds from a sort of intelligence and understanding. Besides, people become hostile to an individual human being who opposes their impulses even if he is correct in opposing them; whereas a law's prescription of what is decent is not burdensome.

14.24 *But states neglect this task, and leave it to individuals*

And yet, only in Sparta, or in a few other cities as well, does the legislator seem to have attended to upbringing and practices. In most other cities they are neglected, and each individual citizen lives as he wishes, 'laying down the rules for his children and wife', like a Cyclops.

It is best, then, if the community attends to upbringing, and attends correctly. If, however, the community neglects it, it seems fitting for each individual to promote the virtue of his children and his friends—to be able to do it, or at least to decide to do it.

14.3 *Moral Education Needs Legislative Science*

14.31 *Both states and individuals need legislative science*

From what we have said, however, it seems he will be better able to do it if he acquires legislative science. For, clearly, attention by the community works through laws, and decent attention works through excellent laws; and whether the laws are written or unwritten, for the education of one or of many, seems unimportant, as it is in music, gymnastics

and other practices. For just as in cities the provisions of law and the [prevailing] types of character have influence, similarly a father's words and habits have influence, and all the more because of kinship and because of the benefits he does; for his children are already fond of him and naturally ready to obey.

14.32 *Sometimes an individual can legislate more accurately in individual cases*

Moreover, education adapted to an individual is actually better than a common education for everyone, just as individualized medical treatment is better. For though generally a feverish patient benefits from rest and starvation, presumably some patient does not; nor does the boxing instructor impose the same way of fighting on everyone. Hence it seems that treatment in particular cases is more exactly right when each person gets special attention, since he then more often gets the suitable treatment.

14.33 *But he also needs universal legislative science*

Nonetheless a doctor, a gymnastics trainer and everyone else will give the best individual attention if they also know universally what is good for all, or for these sorts. For sciences are said to be, and are, of what is common [to many particular cases].

Admittedly someone without scientific knowledge may well attend properly to a single person, if his experience has allowed him to take exact note of what happens in each case, just as some people seem to be their own best doctors, though unable to help anyone else at all. None the less, presumably, it seems that someone who wants to be an expert in a craft and a branch of study should progress to the universal, and come to know that, as far as possible; for that, as we have said, is what the sciences are about.

Then perhaps also someone who wishes to make people

better by his attention, many people or few, should try to acquire legislative science, if we will become good through laws. For not just anyone can improve the condition of just anyone, or the person presented to him; but if anyone can it is the person with knowledge, just as in medical science and the others that require attention and intelligence.

14.4 *Who Should Teach Legislative Science, and How?*

Next, then, should we examine whence and how someone might acquire legislative science? Just as in other cases [we go to the practitioner], should we go to the politicians? For, as we saw, legislative science seems to be a part of political science.

14.41 *Some of the obvious candidates lack experience, others lack theory*

But is the case of political science perhaps apparently different from the other sciences and capacities? For evidently in others the same people, e.g. doctors or painters, who transmit the capacity to others actively practise it themselves. By contrast, it is the sophists who advertise that they teach politics but none of them practises it. Instead, those who practise it are the political activists, and they seem to act on some sort of capacity and experience rather than thought.

For evidently they neither write nor speak on such questions, though presumably it would be finer to do this than to compose speeches for the law courts or the Assembly; nor have they made politicians out of their own sons or any other friends of theirs. And yet it would be reasonable for them to do this if they were able; for there is nothing better than the political capacity that they could leave to their cities, and nothing better that they could decide to produce in themselves, or, therefore, in their closest friends.

14.42 *Both experience and theory are necessary*

Certainly experience would seem to contribute quite a lot; otherwise people would not have become better politicians by familiarity with politics. Hence those who aim to know about political science would seem to need experience as well.

By contrast, those of the sophists who advertise [that they teach political science] appear to be a long way from teaching; for they are altogether ignorant about the sort of thing political science is, and the sorts of things it is about. For if they had known what it is, they would not have taken it to be the same as rhetoric, or something inferior to it, or thought it an easy task to assemble the laws with good reputations and then legislate. For they think they can select the best laws, as though the selection itself did not require comprehension, and as though correct judgement were not the most important thing, as it is in music.

It is those with experience in each area who judge the products correctly and who comprehend the method or way of completing them, and what fits with what; for if we lack experience, we must be satisfied with noticing that the product is well or badly made, as with painting. Now laws would seem to be the products of political science; how, then, could someone acquire legislative science, or judge which laws are best, from laws alone? For neither do we appear to become experts in medicine by reading textbooks.

And yet doctors not only try to describe the [recognized] treatments, but also distinguish different [physical] states, and try to say how each type of patient might be cured and must be treated. And what they say seems to be useful to the experienced, though useless to the ignorant.

Similarly, then, collections of laws and political systems might also, presumably, be most useful if we are capable of studying them and of judging what is done finely or in the contrary way, and what sorts of [elements] fit with what.

Those who lack the [proper] state [of experience] when they go through these collections will not manage to judge finely, unless they can do it all by themselves [without training], though they might come to comprehend them better by going through them.

14.43 *The right approach to legislative science*

Since, then, our predecessors have left the area of legislation uncharted, it is presumably better to examine it ourselves instead, and indeed to examine political systems in general, and so to complete the philosophy of human affairs, as far as we are able.

First, then, let us try to review any sound remarks our predecessors have made on particular topics. Then let us study the collected political systems, to see from them what sorts of things preserve and destroy cities, and political systems of different types; and what causes some cities to conduct politics well, and some badly.

For when we have studied these questions, we will perhaps grasp better what sort of political system is best; how each political system should be organized so as to be best; and what habits and laws it should follow.

Let us discuss this, then, starting from the beginning.

Notes

Book I

1094a1-22 The *EN* seeks to describe and understand the highest good and to prescribe ways to achieve it. Here Aristotle explains what sort of thing the highest good will be, assuming for the moment that there is one (see ch. 2, 7). He calls it 'the good', 1094a22; for 'highest' see 1095a16.

There are subordinate and superordinate CRAFTS and SCIENCES with subordinate and superordinate ENDS; the highest superordinate end is the highest good. The argument is fuller at 1097a15.

1094a2 'seems to aim' We begin with an APPEARANCE.

'has been well described . . .' cf. 1172b9. Aristotle need not agree that the description is completely accurate. If 'action and decision' refers to action on a decision, then he need not mean that every single thing we do aims at some good; for we do things that are not ACTIONS on a DECISION (cf. 1111b9-15).

1094a3 'difference' Cf. *Met.* 1050a21-b2. Here and in a16 the difference between ACTIVITIES with and without further products (see FUNCTION) corresponds to the later distinction between PRODUCTION and ACTION. In a5 'action' must have the sense noted in ACTION #2.

1094a10-18 'But whenever . . .' 'Sciences' is supplied except in 'sciences we have mentioned', a18. Aristotle refers to all the 'actions, crafts and sciences' of a7. None of these meets his most stringent conditions for a SCIENCE.

1094a23 'and if . . . right mark.' Or: 'like archers who have a target to aim at, we are more likely to hit what is right [if we know what the target is].' The version in the text implies that knowledge of the good gives us a target we would otherwise lack (cf. Plato, *Rep.* 519c2); the alternative version does not imply this.

1094a26 'It seems . . .' The argument is this:

(1) The highest good is the all-inclusive end.