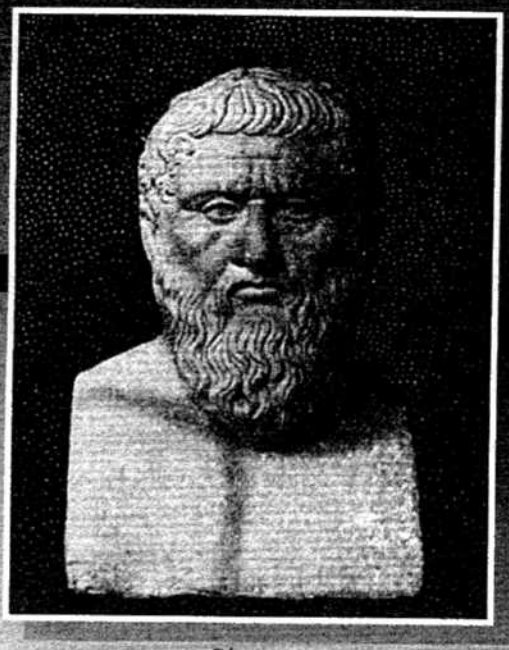

Plato

CHAPTER 2

Knowledge and Virtue

The lifetime of Plato (427–347 B.C.E.) covers a period of social, political, and intellectual change in both the city-state of Athens and Greece as a whole. From approximately 600 B.C.E., an expansion of trade had occurred between the Greeks and the peoples of other parts of the Mediterranean Sea. One by-product of this contact had been an increased awareness of various different social systems and ways of life besides their own.

This awareness encouraged two tendencies against which Plato's philosophy was a complex reaction. The first was a widespread tendency to question the validity of traditional Greek customs and ways of life. The second was an increasingly *relativistic* attitude toward ethical standards, traditional Greek polytheistic religion, and many other beliefs as well. This relativism held that what each individual or society believes may be true only "*for*" that individual or society. It denied that any belief is ever simply true or false objectively. In such a view, there would never be any point in trying to ask which of two seemingly opposed beliefs is in fact correct. Each belief would be correct *for* the person who held it and false *for* the person who rejected it. Beyond that there would be no objective matter of fact. All facts would exist only relative to the particular person(s) who believed them to hold.

This relativist viewpoint is often associated with the so-called Sophists in general, but it was advanced primarily by the Sophist named Protagoras (481?–411? B.C.E.) Protagoras' famous slogan, "Man is the measure of all things," was interpreted by Plato as an expression of a relativist viewpoint, and so Protagoras became one of Plato's principal opponents. Plato also opposed the doctrine of *hedonism*—the thesis that pleasure is the good—because it seemed to him to imply a relativistic view according to which a person should approve of any activity that gives him or her pleasure.

The Sophists were a varied and unorganized collection of teachers and thinkers who traveled from place to place in Greece, especially after about 450 B.C.E., offering lectures and lessons in all sort of subjects, from wrestling to political rhetoric to what

we now call philosophy. Athens was the main center of their activity. There they were much in demand as teachers and even as celebrities, though more traditional-minded Athenian citizens were highly suspicious of them and regarded them as a threat to civic order and tradition. Many Sophists were actively sought as advisors on how, for instance, a citizen might win a case in a law court by giving an effective and eloquent speech. A Sophist known as Gorgias (485?–380? B.C.E.) offered to teach anyone who paid the appropriate fee to speak convincingly about any subject whatever. Even though not all Sophists were relativists, this kind of activity, along with Protagoras' slogan as Plato interpreted it, combined to give all of the Sophists the reputation of being self-seeking tricksters who believed in no objective values and used clever language to manipulate others to their own advantage.

Plato's teacher Socrates (470–399 B.C.E.) was sometimes called a Sophist, but Plato presents him in a completely different light. Socrates often insisted on how difficult it is for anyone to attain knowledge of the real truth about difficult questions, especially concerning ethics. He was for the most part an exploratory rather than a dogmatic philosopher. However, he never abandoned the conviction that there is, even about controversial ethical issues, an objective truth that is not simply relative to an individual's beliefs. Some beliefs, Socrates held, are objectively true and others are objectively false. His philosophical mission was to find out which are which. Like the Sophists, however, Socrates often offended Athenian traditionalists. Indeed, he was put to death in 399 B.C.E. on charges of impiety and of corrupting the youth of Athens with his ideas.

Socrates influenced Plato greatly, not through writing (Socrates wrote nothing) but through personal acquaintance and through the intelligent and courageous manner both of Socrates' response to the charges against him and of his death, which Plato describes in his *Apology of Socrates, Crito,* and *Phaedo.* These experiences, reinforced by the failure of Plato's attempt to persuade the dictator of the Sicilian city of Syracuse to accept his ethical ideas, left Plato disillusioned with political activity and turned him toward a life mainly of philosophizing—though always with practical aims and implications. At some time between 387 and 367 he founded a school in the district of Athens known as the Academy. This school continued to exist for more than 800 years.

Plato presents Socrates' way of thinking in his own works, most of which are dialogues in which Socrates plays the leading role. Some of these dialogues are searches for definitions of important ethical concepts: the *Charmides* concerning temperance, for instance, the *Laches* concerning courage, and the *Euthyphro* concerning piety. These works probably reflect closely the conversational style of philosophy that Socrates practiced, especially in that they reach few firm conclusions and confine themselves mainly to exploring philosophical problems and disagreements. However, in other works, though Socrates often appears in them as a character, Plato sets forth his own philosophical doctrines in a much more definite way. In the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* he discusses love. In the *Gorgias* he investigates various ethical issues and vigorously attacks hedonism. The *Theaetetus* deals with questions about knowledge, and the *Sophist* attacks problems about the notion of being. The *Timaeus* presents an account of the structure of the universe.

The *Republic,* Plato's best-known work, explores the concept of justice, largely by giving parallel descriptions of both human society and the human soul or personality. As contrasted with relativist thinkers like Protagoras, Plato believes that there is both an objectively correct answer to questions like "What is justice?" and objectively correct

beliefs about which sorts of personality, institutions, and actions are just. He also believes, and argues in the *Republic,* that among all of the virtues that a person may have, justice is the most important, especially because it brings about happiness in the just person, who is far happier than an unjust one.

Justice in anything, according to Plato, is a special sort of balance, order, or harmony among its components. In an individual person, this harmony is established and governed by reason, and in a political community it is maintained by the wise philosopher-rulers. In a just individual soul or personality, harmony obtains among the person's desires for various different things and among the satisfactions that result from fulfilling those desires. Plato divides these desires into three groups: (1) the desire of reason for knowledge and orderliness, (2) the desire of "spirit" (*thymos*) for self-defense, and (3) the bodily appetites. In a just political community—Plato focuses on the city-state, or *polis,* into which Greeks typically organized themselves—harmony obtains among the three main classes of people: (1) the philosopher-rulers, (2) the military, and (3) the artisans and farmers. Within such a society each individual has his or her own naturally established role or function, serving to maintain the stability and unity of the community as a whole. At the personal level, analogously, each desire, so long as it is governed by reason, has a role in the individual's overall life.

The idea of objective correctness enters into Plato's doctrine in his view that justice is, emphatically, *not* established merely by convention or the laws or customs that may happen to be observed in one place or another. Rather, he holds, a certain kind of order or harmony among groups in society is what social justice really is, even though this harmony is only very imperfectly exemplified in actual societies in the world. Analogously, Plato also holds that individual justice consists in one particular kind of reason-governed balance among a person's desires and satisfactions, even though different actual societies may regard various different kinds of behavior as just and lawful. Moreover, Plato holds both that the individual who is the most just in this way is also the most happy and that the most just society is likewise the happiest one. These two facts obtain objectively, Plato maintains against the relativist, and are not dependent on the particular desires, preferences, or tastes that an individual may have or that a society may approve of.

Plato attempts to provide a theoretical basis for these claims in his theory of "Forms" or "Ideas." These entities, according to him, exist neither in an individual's private consciousness nor in space and time, but rather timelessly and objectively so that they are accessible to any wise person's reason when it operates independently of the senses and of the person's accidental tastes and pleasures.

Plato holds that the nature and structure of these entities—which include the Form of Justice and the Form of the Good—determine the objective facts that exist to be known. He seems to have derived this scheme from mathematics, especially geometry. For instance, a sensible figure drawn in the sand would be a circle, he thinks, insofar as it perfectly exemplifies the Form of Circle, which is an ideal pattern of circularity. Plato carries this analogy over into the discussion of all concepts, including virtue, justice, and happiness. Facts about the sensible world—such as which individuals and communities are just or unjust—are determined by which souls and cities most closely resemble the Form of Justice. The full understanding of this difficult scheme (which Plato does not claim to be able to present fully in the *Republic* nor in any other of his writings) is the goal of the education of the rulers in Plato's ideal city-state. The ultimate

goal is the understanding of the Good (which Plato explicitly refuses to identify with pleasure):

> In the world of knowledge [the Form or Idea of the Good] appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light [i.e., the sun] in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual [world]; and this is the power upon which he who would act rationally either in public or private life must have his eye fixed.[a]

The understanding of the Good, Plato thus contends, will enable the philosopher-rulers to organize their community so that it and its inhabitants are virtuous and happy.

1. Plato gives an account of the manner in which his philosophical opponents, the Sophists, answer the question "Why should men be morally virtuous?" They maintain that the weak value justice only because it restrains the strong. Most people would take advantage of their neighbors if they were certain that they would not be apprehended and punished, for they are interested only in their own welfare. Injustice is more profitable than justice, provided that it is possible to escape detection. This conception of human nature is presented by Glaucon [a brother of Plato] in the following story of Gyges' ring.

Now that those who practice justice do so involuntarily and because they have not the power to be unjust will best appear if we imagine something of this kind: having given both to the just and the unjust power to do what they will, let us watch and see whither desire will lead them; then we shall discover in the very act the just and unjust man to be proceeding along the same road, following their interest, which all natures deem to be their good, and are only diverted into the path of justice by the force of law. The liberty which we are supposing may be most completely given to them in the form of such a power as is said to have been possessed by Gyges, the ancestor of Croesus the Lydian. According to the tradition, Gyges was a shepherd in the service of the king of Lydia; there was a great storm, and an earthquake made an opening in the earth at the place where he was feeding his flock. Amazed at the sight, he descended into the opening, where, among other marvels, he beheld a hollow brazen horse, having doors, at which he stooping and looking in saw a dead body of stature, as appeared to him, more than human, and having nothing on but a gold ring; this he took from the finger of the dead and reascended. Now the shepherds met together, according to custom, that they might send their monthly report about the flocks to the king; into their assembly he came having the ring on his finger, and as he was sitting among them he chanced to turn the collet of the ring inside his hand, when instantly he became invisible to the rest of the company and they began to speak of him as if he were no longer present. He was astonished at this, and again touching the ring he turned the collet outwards and reappeared; he made several trials of the ring, and always with the same result—when he turned the collet inwards he became invisible, when outwards he reappeared. Whereupon he contrived to be chosen one of the messengers who were sent to the court; where as soon as he arrived he seduced the queen, and with her help conspired against the king and slew him, and took the kingdom. Suppose now that there were two such magic rings, and the just put on one of

them and the unjust the other; no man can be imagined to be of such an iron nature that he would stand fast in justice. No man would keep his hands off what was not his own when he could safely take what he liked out of the market, or go into houses and lie with any one at his pleasure, or kill or release from prison whom he would, and in all respects be like a god among men. Then the actions of the just would be as the actions of the unjust; they would both come at last to the same point. And this we may truly affirm to be a great proof that a man is just, not willingly or because he thinks that justice is any good to him individually, but of necessity, for wherever anyone thinks that he can safely be unjust, there he is unjust. For all men believe in their hearts that injustice is far more profitable to the individual than justice, and he who argues as I have been supposing, will say that they are right. If you could imagine anyone obtaining this power of becoming invisible, and never doing any wrong or touching what was another's, he would be thought by the lookers-on to be a most wretched idiot, although they would praise him to one another's faces, and keep up appearances with one another from a fear that they too might suffer injustice.[b]

2. Thrasymachus, the celebrated Sophist, elaborates the advantages of injustice in political and economic affairs. He contends that injustice is rewarding particularly when it is conducted on a large scale. Happiness, he concludes, comes from injustice and not from justice.

So entirely astray are you in your ideas about the just and unjust as not even to know that justice and the just are in reality another's good; that is to say, the interest of the ruler and stronger, and the loss of the subject and servant; and injustice the opposite; for the unjust is lord over the truly simple and just: he is the stronger, and his subjects do what is for his interest, and minister to his happiness, which is very far from being their own. Consider further, most foolish Socrates, that the just is always a loser in comparison with the unjust. First of all, in private contracts: wherever the unjust is the partner of the just you will find that, when the partnership is dissolved, the unjust man has always more and the just less. Secondly, in their dealings with the State: when there is an income tax, the just man will pay more and the unjust less on the same amount of income; and when there is anything to be received the one gains nothing and the other much. Observe also what happens when they take an office; there is the just man neglecting his affairs and perhaps suffering other losses, and getting nothing out of the public, because he is just; moreover he is hated by his friends and acquaintances for refusing to serve them in unlawful ways.

But all this is reversed in the case of the unjust man. I am speaking, as before, of injustice on a large scale in which the advantage of the unjust is most apparent; and my meaning will be most clearly seen if we turn to that highest form of injustice in which the criminal is the happiest of men, and the sufferers or those who refuse to do injustice are the most miserable—that is to say tyranny, which by fraud and force takes away the property of others, not little by little but wholesale, comprehending in one, things sacred as well as profane, private and public; for which acts of wrong, if he were detected perpetrating any one of them singly, he would be punished and incur great disgrace—they who do such wrong in particular cases are called robbers of temples, and man-stealers and burglars and swindlers and thieves. But when a man besides taking away the money of the citizens has made slaves of them, then, instead of these names of reproach, he is termed happy and blessed, not only by the citizens but by all who hear of his having achieved the consummation of injustice. For mankind censure injustice, fearing that they may be the victims of it and not because they shrink from committing it. And thus, as I have shown, Socrates, injustice, when on a sufficient scale, has more strength and freedom and mastery than justice; and, as I said at first, justice is the interest of the stronger, whereas injustice is a man's own profit and interest.[c]

Aristotle

CHAPTER 3

Moral Character

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), the philosopher with whom only Plato compares in influence on the history of Western thought, was born in the Greek colony of Stagira in Macedonia. His father, Nicomachus, a student of natural history and an eminent physician, held the post of physician to Amnytas II, King of Macedonia, father of Philip the Great, until his death in Aristotle's eighteenth year. At his father's death, Aristotle, who had been brought up in an atmosphere of science and scholarship, went to Athens to study philosophy under Plato, and he remained at the Academy until Plato's death in 347 B.C.E.

Though Aristotle was unquestionably Plato's most talented student, he was by no means his most devoted disciple: "Dear is Plato, but dearer still is truth." It has been suggested that his refusal to defer to the master cost him the nomination to succeed Plato as the head of the Academy. In any event, Aristotle was passed over in favor of Speusippus, a man who did not approach him in intellectual stature. In 343 B.C.E. Aristotle was selected as tutor to Alexander, the thirteen-year-old son of King Philip of Macedonia. It was Philip who planned and began the world conquest that Alexander the Great so nearly fulfilled. There is no evidence that Aristotle, in his three years as tutor, modified the influence of father on son or in any way affected the subsequent thoughts and deeds of Alexander; neither is there evidence that Aristotle ever recognized the significance of Alexander's goal of political unity. A bond of friendship was formed between teacher and pupil, however, and it is reported that Alexander later subsidized some of Aristotle's researches in the natural sciences.

At the age of forty-nine, Aristotle returned to Athens and founded the Lyceum, the second of the four great schools of antiquity. An immediate success as a lecturer, he entered into the enormously productive period of his life: combining the roles of encyclopedist, scientist, and philosopher, he is reputed to have written over four hundred works, to have conducted and directed prodigious researches in botany and zoology, and to have amassed one of the great libraries of the Greek world. As the result of an

anti-Macedonian uprising after the death of Alexander in 323 B.C.E., Aristotle left Athens. It is said by some authorities that he was accused of dangerous teachings and indicted by the Athenian citizens, just as Socrates had been seventy-six years earlier, but that he, in contrast to Socrates, accepted the option of exile. Aristotle died at Chalcis on the island of Euboea in the next year.

According to Aristotle's own classification, his works deal with the theoretical sciences, as in *Metaphysics, Physics, De Caelo* (astronomy), *De Generatione et Corruptione* (biology), *De Anima* (psychology); the practical sciences, as in *Nicomachean Ethics, Eudemian Ethics, Politics;* the productive or poetical sciences *(Rhetoric, Poetics);* and logic *(Organon).* On such impressive evidence, it is said of Aristotle that for his time he knew all that was to be known.

Historically, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is the first systematic treatment of ethics in Western civilization. It belongs in the tradition begun by Socrates and advanced by Plato, a tradition that stresses both the supremacy of our rational nature and the purposive nature of the universe. Nevertheless, within this broad framework, the ethical theories of Aristotle and those of his teacher, Plato, stand in sharp contrast. This difference stems from conflicting conceptions of the nature of the ultimate moral principle and is a consequence of different metaphysical positions. Aristotle takes issue with Plato's thesis that individual objects are intelligible only in terms of immutable forms or ideas that exist in and of themselves. According to Aristotle's doctrine, the forms that make objects understandable cannot exist apart from particular objects. That is, individual objects, for Aristotle, are a *unity* of a universal, repeatable form and a unique content or matter: "no form without matter, no matter with form." Consequently, Aristotle rejects the Platonic view that the moral evaluations of daily life presuppose a "good" that is independent of experience, personality, and circumstances. Rather, he insists that the basic moral principle is immanent in the activities of our daily lives and can be discovered only through a study of them.

In keeping with his general position, Aristotle begins his ethical inquiry with an empirical investigation of what it is that people fundamentally desire. In his search, he finds such goals as wealth and honors inadequate. He points out that an ultimate end for people must be one that is, first, *self-sufficient*—"that which [even] when isolated makes life desirable and lacking in nothing"—second, *final*—"that which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else"—and third, *attainable.* People are agreed, Aristotle maintains, that happiness alone is the goal that meets these requirements. However, he recognizes that this is no more than a preliminary agreement about what it is that we should investigate in ethics. More specifically, we want to know the nature of happiness and the conditions of its attainment.

Following Plato, Aristotle tells us that happiness must be explained in terms of reason, a human being's distinctive function or activity. In his philosophical system, however, this view is significantly modified by the doctrine of *potentiality* and *actuality.* Just as the acorn actualizes its unique potentiality by becoming an oak, people actualize their distinctive or defining potentiality by living the life of reason. To Aristotle, this means that happiness depends on the actualization—the full realization—of one's rationality.

Consideration of the conditions requisite to the attainment of happiness leads Aristotle into a discussion of virtue. For him, as for other Greek philosophers, *virtue* refers to the excellence of a thing and hence to the disposition to perform effectively

its proper function. For example, a "virtuous" knife cuts well, and a "virtuous" physician successfully restores patients to health. By the same token, Aristotle argues, a virtuous person lives according to reason, thus realizing his or her distinctive potentiality. However, he subdivides human virtue into two types, the *moral* and the *intellectual*. The moral virtues concern the habitual choice of actions in accordance with rational principles. The contemplation of theoretical truths and the discovery of the rational principles that ought to control everyday actions give rise to the intellectual virtues. But whereas contemplation, that activity by which people may attain the highest human happiness, is limited to the divinely gifted few, the practical virtues, with their lesser degrees of happiness, are within reach of the ordinary person.

Aristotle, then, in harmony with the Greek tradition, stresses the value of contemplation but, withal, is much impressed with the fact that people live for the most part at the level of practical decision and routine behavior. The good habits necessary to moral virtue are not strictly personal matters but can best be formed in a sound social and legal structure:

> It is difficult to get from youth up a right training for virtue if one has not been brought up under right laws; for to live temperately and hardily is not pleasant to most people, especially when they are young. For this reason their nurture and occupations should be fixed by law; for they will not be painful when they have become customary. But it is surely not enough that when they are young they should get the right nurture and attention; since they must, even when they are grown up, practice and be habituated to them, we shall need laws for this as well, and generally speaking to cover the whole life; for most people obey necessity rather than argument, and punishments rather than the sense of what is noble.[a]

1. Aristotle assumes that any investigation, practical or theoretical, has a teleological basis—that is, it aims at some end or good. By using examples from ordinary experience, he attempts to show that ends or goods form a hierarchy.

Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim. But a certain difference is found among ends; some are activities, others are products apart from the activities that produce them. Where there are ends apart from the actions, it is the nature of the products to be better than the activities. Now, as there are many actions, arts, and sciences, their ends also are many; the end of the medical art is health, that of shipbuilding a vessel, that of strategy victory, that of economics wealth. But where such arts fall under a single capacity—as bridle making and the other arts concerned with the equipment of horses fall under the art of riding, and this and every military action under strategy, in the same way other arts fall under yet others—in all of these the ends of the master arts are to be preferred to all the subordinate ends; for it is for the sake of the former that the latter are pursued. It makes no difference whether the activities themselves are the ends of the actions, or something else apart from the activities, as in the case of the sciences just mentioned.[b]

2. Analogously, each theoretical pursuit has its appropriate end, but the science of

politics—ethics and social philosophy—includes all the others in the sense that it determines their roles and directs their development. For this reason, the science of politics can have as its proper end nothing less than "the good for man."

If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and the chief good. Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right? If so, we must try, in outline at least to determine what it is, and of which of the sciences or capacities it is the object. It would seem to belong to the most authoritative art and that which is most truly the master art. And politics appears to be of this nature; for it is this that ordains which of the sciences should be studied in a state, and which each class of citizens should learn and up to what point they should learn them; and we can see even the most highly esteemed of capacities to fall under this, for example, strategy, economics, rhetoric; now, since politics uses the rest of the sciences, and since, again, it legislates as to what we are to do and what we are to abstain from, the end of this science must include those of the others, so that this end must be the good for man. For even if the end is the same for a single man and for a state, that of the state seems at all events something greater and more complete whether to attain or to preserve; though it is worthwhile to attain the end merely for one man, it is finer and more godlike to attain it for a nation or for city-states.[c]

3. Aristotle warns us against expecting a high degree of precision in our study of political science, because it deals with the human variable. As such, it is a subject best handled by those of experience.

Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions, any more than in all the products of the crafts. Now fine and just actions, which political science investigates, admit of much variety and fluctuation of opinion, so that they may be thought to exist only by convention, and not by nature. And goods also give rise to a similar fluctuation because they bring harm to many people; for before now men have been undone by reason of their wealth, and others by reason of their courage. We must be content, then, in speaking of such subjects and with such premises to indicate the truth roughly and in outline, and in speaking about things which are only for the most part true and with premises of the same kind to reach conclusions that are no better. In the same spirit, therefore, should each type of statement be *received;* for it is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits; it is evidently equally foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician and to demand from a rhetorician scientific proofs.

Now each man judges well the things he knows, and of these he is a good judge. And so the man who has been educated in a subject is a good judge of that subject, and the man who has received an all-round education is a good judge in general. Hence a young man is not a proper hearer of lectures on political science; for he is inexperienced in the actions that occur in life, but its discussions start from these and are about these; and, further, since he tends to follow his passions, his study will be in vain and unprofitable, because the end aimed at is not knowledge but action. And it makes no difference whether he is young in years or youthful in character; the defect does not depend on time, but on his living, and pursuing each successive object, as passion directs. For to such persons, as to the incontinent, knowledge

brings no profit; but to those who desire and act in accordance with a rational principle knowledge about such matters will be of great benefit.[d]

4. Among those who are sufficiently mature to discuss ethics, there is verbal agreement that the ultimate human good is happiness, but opinions about its precise nature vary.

Let us resume our inquiry and state, in view of the fact that all knowledge and every pursuit aims at some good, what it is that we say political science aims at and what is the highest of all goods achievable by action. Verbally there is very general agreement; for both the general run of men and people of superior refinement say that it is happiness, and identify living well and doing well with being happy; but with regard to what happiness is they differ, and the many do not give the same account as the wise. For the former think it is some plain and obvious thing, like pleasure, wealth, or honor; they differ, however, from one another—and often even the same man identifies it with different things, with health when he is ill, with wealth when he is poor; but, conscious of their ignorance, they admire those who proclaim some great ideal that is above their comprehension. Now some thought [for example, Plato] that apart from these many goods there is another which is self-subsistent and causes the goodness of all these as well. To examine all the opinions that have been held were perhaps somewhat fruitless; enough to examine those that are most prevalent or that seem to be arguable.[e]

5. Aristotle then proceeds to discuss the general criteria that make possible the identification of a human being's chief good.

Let us again return to the good we are seeking, and ask what it can be. It seems different in different actions and arts; it is different in medicine, in strategy, and in the other arts likewise. What then is the good of each? Surely that for whose sake everything else is done. In medicine this is health, in strategy victory, in architecture a house, in any other sphere something else, and in every action and pursuit the end; for it is for the sake of this that all men do whatever else they do. Therefore, if there is an end for all that we do, this will be the good achievable by action, and if there are more than one, these will be the goods achievable by action.

So the argument has by a different course reached the same point; but we must try to state this even more clearly. Since there are evidently more than one end, and we choose some of these (for example, wealth, flutes, and in general instruments) for the sake of something else, clearly not all ends are final ends; but the chief good is evidently something final. Therefore, if there is only one final end, this will be what we are seeking, and if there are more than one, the most final of these will be what we are seeking. Now we call that which is in itself worthy of pursuit more final than that which is worthy of pursuit for the sake of something else, and that which is never desirable for the sake of something else more final than the things that are desirable both in themselves and for the sake of that other thing, and therefore we call final without qualification that which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else.

Now such a thing happiness, above all else, is held to be; for this we choose always for itself and never for the sake of something else, but honor, pleasure, reason, and every virtue we choose indeed for themselves (for if nothing resulted from them we should still choose each of them), but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, judging that by means of them we shall be happy. Happiness, on the other hand, no one chooses for the sake of these, nor, in general, for anything other than itself.

From the point of view of self-sufficiency the same result seems to follow; for the final good is thought to be self-sufficient. Now by self-sufficient we do not mean that which is

sufficient for a man by himself, for one who lives a solitary life, but also for parents, children, wife, and in general for his friends and fellow citizens, since man is born for citizenship. But some limit must be set to this; for if we extend our requirement to ancestors and descendants and friends' friends we are in for an indefinite series. Let us examine this question, however, on another occasion; the self-sufficient we now define as that which when isolated makes life desirable and lacking in nothing; and such we think happiness to be; and further we think it most desirable of all things, without being counted as one good thing among others—if it were so counted it would clearly be made more desirable by the addition of even the least of goods; for that which is added becomes an excess of goods, and of goods the greater is always more desirable. Happiness, then, is something final and self-sufficient, and is the end of action.[f]

6. Although it is agreed that happiness meets these criteria, Aristotle recognizes that the precise nature of happiness still remains to be explained. His definition of happiness contains two vital concepts: "Activity of soul," which means the exercise of reason, and "in accordance with virtue," which describes the quality of the performance.

Presumably, however, to say that happiness is the chief good seems a platitude, and a clearer account of what it is is still desired. This might perhaps be given, if we could first ascertain the function of man. For just as for a flute player, a sculptor, or any artist, and, in general, for all things that have a function of activity, the good and the "well" is thought to reside in the function, so would it seem to be for man, if he has a function. Have the carpenter, then, and the tanner certain functions or activities, and has man none? Is he born without a function? Or as eye, hand, foot, and in general each of the parts evidently has function, may one lay it down that man similarly has a function apart from all these? What then can this be? Life seems to be common even to plants, but we are seeking what is peculiar to man. Let us exclude, therefore, the life of nutrition and growth. Next there would be a life of perception, but *it* also seems to be common even to the horse, the ox, and every animal. There remains, then, an active life of the element that has a rational principle; of this, one part has such a principle in the sense of being obedient to one, the other in the sense of possessing one and exercising thought. And, as "life of the rational element" also has two meanings, we must state that life in the sense of activity is what we mean; for this seems to be the more proper sense of the term. Now if the function of man is an activity of soul which follows or implies a rational principle, and if we say "a so-and-so" and "a good so-and-so" have a function which is the same in kind, for example, a lyre player and a good lyre player, and so without qualification in all cases, eminence in respect of goodness being added to the name of the function (for the function of a lyre player is to play the lyre, and that of a good lyre player is to do so well): if this is the case, [and we state the function of man to be a certain kind of life, and this to be an activity or actions of the soul implying a rational principle, and the function of a good man to be the good and noble performance of these, and if any action is well performed when it is performed in accordance with the appropriate excellence: if this is the case,] human good turns out to be activity of soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete.

But we must add "in a complete life." For one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy. . . . [Also, a happy man] needs the external goods as well; for it is impossible, or not easy, to do noble acts without the proper equipment. In many actions we use friends and riches and political power as instruments; and there are some things the lack of which takes the luster from happiness, as good birth, goodly children,

beauty; for the man who is very ugly in appearance or ill born or solitary and childless is not very likely to be happy, and perhaps a man would be still less likely if he had thoroughly bad children or friends or had lost good children or friends by death.[g]

7. Aristotle's definition of happiness cannot be fully understood until the nature of virtue has been thoroughly examined. But the nature of virtue, in turn, depends on the structure of the soul, which contains both rational and irrational components. Two functions fall to the rational part: the control of a human being's irrational propensities and the exercise of reason for its own sake.

Since happiness is an activity of soul in accordance with perfect virtue, we must consider the nature of virtue; for perhaps we shall thus see better the nature of happiness. The true student of politics, too, is thought to have studied virtue above all things; for he wishes to make his fellow citizens good and obedient to the laws. As an example of this we have the lawgivers of the Cretans, the Spartans, and any others of the kind that there may have been. And if this inquiry belongs to political science, clearly the pursuit of it will be in accordance with our original plan. But clearly the virtue we must study is human virtue; for the good we were seeking was human good and the happiness human happiness. By human virtue we mean not that of the body but that of the soul; and happiness also we call an activity of soul. But if this is so, clearly the student of politics must know somehow the facts about soul, as the man who is to heal the eyes or the body as a whole must know about the eyes or the body; and all the more since politics is more prized and better than medicine; but even among doctors the best educated spend much labor on acquiring knowledge of the body. The student of politics, then, must study the soul, and must study it with these objects in view, and do so just to the extent which is sufficient for the questions we are discussing; for further precision is perhaps something more laborious than our purposes require.

Some things are said about it, adequately enough, even in the discussions outside our school, and we must use these; e.g., that one element in the soul is irrational and one has a rational principle. Whether these are separated as the parts of the body or of anything divisible are, or are distinct by definition but by nature inseparable, like convex and concave in the circumference of a circle, does not affect the present question.

Of the irrational element one division seems to be widely distributed, and vegetative in its nature, I mean that which causes nutrition and growth; for it is this kind of power of the soul that one must assign to all nurslings and to embryos, and this same power to full-grown creatures; this is more reasonable than to assign some different power to them. Now the excellence of this seems to be common to all species and not specifically human . . . let us leave the nutritive faculty alone, since it has by its nature no share in human excellence.

There seems to be also another irrational element in the soul—one which in a sense, however, shares in a rational principle. For we praise the rational principle of the continent man and of the incontinent, and the part of their soul that has such a principle, since it urges them aright and towards the best objects; but there is found in them also another element naturally opposed to the rational principle, which fights against and resists that principle. For exactly as paralyzed limbs when we intend to move them to the right turn on the contrary to the left, so is it with the soul; the impulses of incontinent people move in contrary directions. But while in the body we see that which moves astray, in the soul we do not. No doubt, however, we must none the less suppose that in the soul too there is something contrary to the rational principle, resisting and opposing it. In what sense it is distinct from the other elements does not concern us. Now even this seems to have a share in a rational principle, as we said,

at any rate in the continent man it obeys the rational principle—and presumably in the temperate and brave man it is still more obedient; for in him it speaks, on all matters, with the same voice as the rational principle.

Therefore the irrational element also appears to be twofold. For the vegetative element in no way shares in a rational principle, but the appetitive, and in general the desiring element in a sense shares in it, insofar as it listens to and obeys it; this is the sense in which we speak of "taking account" of one's father or one's friends, not that in which we speak of "accounting" for a mathematical property. That the irrational element is in some sense persuaded by a rational principle is indicated also by the giving of advice and by all reproof and exhortation. And if this element also must be said to have a rational principle, that which has a rational principle (as well as that which has not) will be twofold, one subdivision having it in the strict sense and in itself, and the other having a tendency to obey as one does one's father.[h]

8. The virtues corresponding to the two functions of reason are the intellectual and the moral. The wise individual personifies the intellectual virtues, whereas the continent person typifies the moral virtues. The former's excellence is attained through instruction and evidenced by knowledge. The excellence of the latter is produced by habits of choice and expressed in practical actions tempered by both the circumstance and the individual.

Virtue too is distinguished into kinds in accordance with this difference; for we say that some of the virtues are intellectual and others moral, philosophic wisdom and understanding and practical wisdom being intellectual, liberality and temperance moral. For in speaking about a man's character we do not say that he is wise or has understanding but that he is good tempered or temperate; yet we praise the wise man also with respect to his state of mind; and of states of mind we call those which merit praise virtues.

Virtue, then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time), while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit, whence also its name *ethike* is one that is formed by a slight variation from the word *ethos* (habit). From this it is also plain that none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature. For instance the stone which by nature moves downwards cannot be habituated to move upwards, not even if one tries to train it by throwing it up ten thousand times; nor can fire be habituated to move downwards, nor can anything else that by nature behaves in one way be trained to behave in another. Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit.

Again, of all the things that come to us by nature we first acquire the potentiality and later exhibit the activity (this is plain in the case of the senses; for it was not by often seeing or often hearing that we got these senses, but on the contrary we had them before we used them, and did not come to have them by using them); but the virtues we get by first exercising them, as also happens in the case of the arts as well. For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g., men become builders by building and lyre players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.[i]

9. Aristotle turns his attention to the task of explaining moral virtue. He analyzes human personality into three elements: "passions, faculties, and states of character." Because passions (for example, anger and fear) and faculties (for example, the ability to feel anger and fear) are not in and of themselves blameworthy or praiseworthy,

virtue must be a state of character. Experience shows that the states of character that enable a person to fulfill his or her proper function aim at an intermediary point between the opposing extremes of excess and deficiency. The morally virtuous person, then, always chooses to act according to the "golden mean," but, Aristotle points out, the mean is not the same for all individuals.

We must . . . not only describe [moral] virtue as a state of character, but also say what sort of state it is. We may remark, then, that every virtue or excellence both brings into good condition the thing of which it is the excellence and makes the work of that thing be done well; e.g., the excellence of the eye makes both the eye and its work good; for it is by the excellence of the eye that we see well. Similarly the excellence of the horse makes a horse both good in itself and good at running and at carrying its rider and at awaiting the attack of the enemy. Therefore, if this is true in every case, the virtue of man also will be the state of character which makes a man good and which makes him do his own work well.

How this is to happen we have stated already, but it will be made plain also by the following consideration of the specific nature of virtue. In everything that is continuous and divisible it is possible to take more, less, or an equal amount, and that either in terms of the thing itself or relatively to us; and the equal is an intermediate between excess and defect. By the intermediate in the object I mean that which is equidistant from each of the extremes, which is one and the same for all men; by the intermediate relatively to us that which is neither too much nor too little—and this is not one, nor the same for all. For instance, if ten is many and two is few, six is the intermediate, taken in terms of the object; for it exceeds and is exceeded by an equal amount; this is intermediate according to arithmetical proportion. But the intermediate relatively to us is not to be taken so; if ten pounds are too much for a particular person to eat and two too little, it does not follow that the trainer will order six pounds; for this also is perhaps too much for the person who is to take it, or too little—too little for Milo [a famous Greek athlete], too much for the beginner in athletic exercises. The same is true of running and wrestling. Thus a master of any art avoids excess and defect, but seeks the intermediate and chooses this—the intermediate not in the object but relatively to us.[j]

10. Aristotle is now ready to assemble the results of his investigation into a definition of moral virtue.

Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e., the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. Now it is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect; and again it is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate. Hence in respect of its substance and the definition which states its essence virtue is a mean, with regard to what is best and right an extreme.

But not every action nor every passion admits of a mean; for some have names that already imply badness, e.g., spite, shamelessness, envy, and in the case of actions adultery, theft, murder; for all of these and suchlike things imply by their names that they are themselves bad, and not the excesses or deficiencies of them. It is not possible, then, ever to be right with regard to them; one must always be wrong. Nor does goodness or badness with regard to such things depend on committing adultery with the right woman, at the right time, and in the right way, but simply to do any of them is to go wrong. It would be equally absurd, then, to expect that in unjust, cowardly, and voluptuous action there should be a mean, an excess, and a deficiency; for at that rate there would be a mean of excess and of deficiency, an excess of excess, and a deficiency of deficiency.

But as there is no excess and deficiency of temperance and courage because what is intermediate is in a sense an extreme, so too of the actions we have mentioned there is no mean nor any excess and deficiency, but however they are done they are wrong; for in general there is neither a mean of excess and deficiency, nor excess and deficiency of a mean.[k]

11. His general formulation of moral virtue completed, Aristotle proceeds to a direct examination of specific moral virtues.

We must, however, not only make this general statement, but also apply it to the individual facts. For among statements about conduct those which are general apply more widely, but those which are particular are more genuine, since conduct has to do with individual cases, and our statements must harmonize with the facts in these cases. We may take these cases from our table. With regard to feelings of fear and confidence courage is the mean; of the people who exceed, he who exceeds in fearlessness has no name (many of the states have no name), while the man who exceeds in confidence is rash, and he who exceeds in fear and falls short in confidence is a coward. With regard to pleasures and pains—not all of them, and not so much with regard to the pains—the mean is temperance, the excess self-indulgence. Persons deficient with regard to the pleasures are not often found; hence such persons also have received no name. But let us call them "insensible."

With regard to giving and taking of money the mean is liberality, the excess and the defect prodigality and meanness. In these actions people exceed and fall short in contrary ways; the prodigal exceeds in spending and falls short in taking, while the mean man exceeds in taking and falls short in spending. . . . With regard to money there are also other dispositions—a mean, magnificence (for the magnificent man differs from the liberal man; the former deals with large sums, the latter with small ones), an excess, tastelessness and vulgarity, and a deficiency, niggardliness. . . .

With regard to honor and dishonor the mean is proper pride, the excess is known as a sort of "empty vanity," and the deficiency is undue humility; and as we said liberality was related to magnificence, differing from it by dealing with small sums, so there is a state similarly related to proper pride, being concerned with small honors while that is concerned with great. For it is possible to desire honor as one ought, and more than one ought, and less, and the man who exceeds in his desires is called ambitious, the man who falls short unambitious, while the intermediate person has no name. The dispositions also are nameless, except that that of the ambitious man is called ambition. Hence the people who are at the extremes lay claim to the middle place; and we ourselves sometimes call the intermediate person ambitious and sometimes unambitious, and sometimes praise the ambitious man and sometimes the unambitious. The reason of our doing this will be stated in what follows; but now let us speak of the remaining states according to the method which has been indicated.

With regard to anger also there is an excess, a deficiency, and a mean. Although they can scarcely be said to have names, yet since we call the intermediate person good tempered let us call the mean good temper; of the persons at the extremes let the one who exceeds be called irascible, and his vice irascibility, and the man who falls short an inirascible sort of person, and the deficiency inirascibility.[l]

12. Next, Aristotle investigates the intellectual virtues—that is, the virtues that accompany the proper exercise of reason in its various functions. The primary tasks of intellect are first, to give us knowledge of invariable and fixed principles and second, to provide a rational guide for action in daily life. The pursuit and discovery of truth is the aim of *philosophical wisdom,* whereas the purpose of *practical wisdom* is intelligent conduct. The basis for intelligent conduct is the union of true knowledge of what we ought to do and the desire to do it. Aristotle contrasts his view with that of

Socrates on this point. He holds that Socrates was correct in associating virtue with principles discovered by reason but was wrong in assuming that knowledge of the good is necessarily accompanied by a desire to act on this knowledge.

We divided the virtues of the soul and said that some are virtues of character and others of intellect. Now we have discussed in detail the moral virtues; with regard to the others let us express our view as follows, beginning with some remarks about the soul. We said before that there are two parts of the soul—that which grasps a rule or rational principle, and the irrational; let us now draw a similar distinction within the part which grasps a rational principle. And let it be assumed that there are two parts which grasp a rational principle—one by which we contemplate the kind of things whose originative causes are invariable, and one by which we contemplate variable things; for where objects differ in kind the part of the soul answering to each of the two is different in kind, since it is in virtue of a certain likeness and kinship with their objects that they have the knowledge they have.

. . . The virtue of a thing is relative to its proper work. Now there are three things in the soul which control action and truth—sensation, reason, desire.

Of these sensation originates no [moral] action; this is plain from the fact that the lower animals have sensation but no share in [such] action.[1]

What affirmation and negation are in thinking, pursuit and avoidance are in desire; so that since moral virtue is a state of character concerned with choice, and choice is deliberate desire, therefore both the reasoning must be true and the desire right, if the choice is to be good, and the latter must pursue just what the former asserts. Now this kind of intellect and of truth is practical; of the intellect which is contemplative, not practical nor productive, the good and the bad state are truth and falsity respectively (for this is the work of everything intellectual); while of the part which is practical and intellectual the good state is truth in agreement with right desire.

The origin of [moral] action—its efficient, not its final cause[2]—is choice, and that of choice is desire and reasoning with a view to an end. This is why choice cannot exist either without reason and intellect or without a moral state; for good action and its opposite cannot exist without a combination of intellect and character. Intellect itself, however, moves nothing, but only the intellect which aims at an end and is practical; for this rules the productive intellect as well, since everyone who makes makes for an end, and that which is made is not an end in the unqualified sense (but only an end in a particular relation, and the end of a particular operation)—only that which is *done* is that; for good action is an end, and desire aims at this. Hence choice is either desiderative reason or ratiocinative desire, and such an origin of action is a man.

. . . This is why some say that all the virtues are forms of practical wisdom. . . . Socrates in one respect was on the right track while in another he went astray; in thinking that all the virtues were forms of practical wisdom he was

[1] Aristotle's analysis in this passage is directed toward those actions of people of which it may be said, in some sense, that their "moving principle is in the agent himself, he being aware of the particular circumstances of the action"—that is, *voluntary actions*. He ascribes no moral significance to *involuntary actions*—that is, actions for which people are not responsible (for example, actions resulting from external forces, those arising "by reason of ignorance" of the particular circumstances, and those done because of excessive pain or the fear of excessive pain).

[2] Aristotle distinguishes the *efficient cause*, the agent or force that produces an effect, from the *final cause*, the end or purpose "for the sake of which a thing is done." For example, the efficient cause of the mural on the wall of an auditorium is the painter, whereas its final cause is the decoration of the room.

wrong, but in saying they implied practical wisdom he was right. This is confirmed by the fact that even now all men, when they define virtue, after naming the state of character and its objects add "that (state) which is in accordance with the right rule"; now the right rule is that which is in accordance with practical wisdom. All men, then, seem somehow to divine that this kind of state is virtue, viz., that which is in accordance with practical wisdom. But we must go a little further. For it is not merely the state in accordance with the right rule, but the state that implies the *presence* of the right rule, that is virtue; and practical wisdom is a right rule about such matters. Socrates, then, thought the virtues were rules or rational principles (for he thought they were, all of them, forms of scientific knowledge), while we think they *involve* a rational principle.[m]

13. Aristotle maintains that we should not choose activities by how pleasant they are. Rather, although good activities are pleasant, and are choiceworthy because they are pleasant, their pleasantness is a function of their goodness, not vice versa.

Now the activities of thought differ from those of the senses, and both differ among themselves, in kind; so, therefore, do the pleasures that complete them.

This may be seen, too, from the fact that each of the pleasures is bound up with the activity it completes. For an activity is intensified by its proper pleasure, since each class of things is better judged of and brought to precision by those who engage in the activity with pleasure; e.g., it is those who enjoy geometrical thinking that become geometers and grasp the various propositions better, and, similarly, those who are fond of music or of building, and so on, make progress in their proper function by enjoying it; so the pleasures intensify the activities, and what intensifies a thing is proper to it, but things different in kind have properties different in kind.

This will be even more apparent from the fact that activities are hindered by pleasures arising from other sources. For people who are fond of playing the flute are incapable of attending to arguments if they overhear some one playing the flute, since they enjoy flute-playing more than the activity in hand; so the pleasure connected with flute-playing destroys the activity concerned with argument. This happens, similarly, in all other cases, when one is active about two things at once; the more pleasant activity drives out the other, and if it is much more pleasant does so all the more, so that one even ceases from the other. This is why when we enjoy anything very much we do not throw ourselves into anything else, and do one thing only when we are not much pleased by another; e.g., in the theatre the people who eat sweets do so most when the actors are poor. Now since activities are made precise and more enduring and better by their proper pleasure, and injured by alien pleasures, evidently the two kinds of pleasure are far apart. For alien pleasures do pretty much what proper pains do, since activities are destroyed by their proper pains; e.g., if a man finds writing or doing sums unpleasant and painful, he does not write, or does not do sums, because the activity is painful. So an activity suffers contrary effects from its proper pleasures and pains, i.e., from those that supervene on it in virtue of its own nature. And alien pleasures have been stated to do much the same as pain; they destroy the activity, only not to be same degree.

Now since activities differ in respect of goodness and badness, and some are worthy to be chosen, others to be avoided, and other neutral, so, too, are the pleasures; for to each activity there is a proper pleasure. The pleasure proper to a worthy activity is good and that proper to an unworthy activity bad; just as the appetites for noble objects are laudable, those for base objects culpable. But the pleasures involved in activities are more proper to them than the desires; for the latter are separated both in time and in nature, while the former are close to the activities, and so hard to distinguish

from them that it admits of dispute whether the activity is not the same as the pleasure. . . . As activities are different, then, so are the corresponding pleasures. Now sight is superior to touch in purity, and hearing and smell to taste; the pleasures, therefore, are similarly superior, and those of thought superior to these, and within each of the two kinds some are superior to other.[n]

14. Although Aristotle acknowledges the importance of reason as a guide to moral action, he maintains that philosophic wisdom is superior even to practical wisdom. He defends his esteem for contemplation by showing that the life of contemplation comes closest to meeting the conditions for happiness.

If happiness is activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be that of the best thing in us. Whether it be reason or something else that is this element which is thought to be our natural ruler and guide and to take thought of things noble and divine, whether it be itself also divine or only the most divine element in us, the activity of this in accordance with its proper virtue will be perfect happiness. That this activity is contemplative we have already said.

Now this would seem to be in agreement both with what we said before and with the truth. For, firstly, this activity is the best (since not only is reason the best thing in us, but the objects of reason are the best of knowable objects); and, secondly, it is the most continuous, since we can contemplate truth more continuously than we can *do* anything. And we think happiness has pleasure mingled with it, but the activity of philosophic wisdom is admittedly the pleasantest of virtuous activities; at all events the pursuit of it is thought to offer pleasures marvelous for their purity and their enduringness, and it is to be expected that those who know will pass their time more pleasantly than those who inquire. And the self-sufficiency that is spoken of must belong most to the contemplative activity. For while a philosopher, as well as a just man or one possessing any other virtue, needs the necessaries of life, when they are sufficiently equipped with things of that sort the just man needs people towards whom and with whom he shall act justly, and the temperate man, the brave man, and each of the others is in the same case, but the philosopher, even when by himself, can contemplate truth, and the better the wiser he is; he can perhaps do so better if he has fellow workers, but still he is the most self-sufficient. And this activity alone would seem to be loved for its own sake; for nothing arises from it apart from the contemplating, while from practical activities we gain more or less apart from the action. And happiness is thought to depend on leisure; for we are busy that we may have leisure, and make war that we may live in peace. Now the activity of the practical virtues is exhibited in political or military affairs, but the actions concerned with these seem to be unleisurely. Warlike actions are completely so (for no one chooses to be at war, or provokes war, for the sake of being at war; anyone would seem absolutely murderous if he were to make enemies of his friends in order to bring about battle and slaughter); but the action of the statesman is also unleisurely, and—apart from the political action itself—aims at despotic power and honors, or at all events happiness, for him and his fellow citizens—a happiness different from political action, and evidently sought as being different. So if among virtuous actions political and military actions are distinguished by nobility and greatness, and these are unleisurely and aim at an end and are not desirable for their sake, but the activity of reason, which is contemplative, seems both to be superior in serious worth and to aim at no end beyond itself, and to have its pleasure proper to itself (and this augments the activity), and the self-sufficiency, leisureliness, unweariedness (so far as this is possible for man), and all the other

attributes ascribed to the supremely happy man are evidently those connected with this activity, it follows that this will be the complete happiness of man, if it be allowed a complete term of life (for none of the attributes of happiness is *in*complete).

But such a life would be too high for man; for it is not insofar as he is man that he will live so, but insofar as something divine is present in him; and by so much as this is superior to our composite nature is its activity superior to that which is the exercise of the other kind of virtue. If reason is divine, then, in comparison with man, the life according to it is divine in comparison with human life. But we must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things, and, being mortal, of mortal things, but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us; for even if it be small in bulk, much more does it in power and worth surpass everything. This would seem, too, to be each man himself, since it is the authoritative and better part of him. It would be strange, then, if he were to choose not the life of his self but that of something else. And what we said before will apply now; that which is proper to each thing is by nature best and most pleasant for each thing; for man, therefore, the life according to reason is best and pleasantest, since reason more than anything else *is* man. This life therefore is also the happiest.[o]

Questions

1. In the context of Greek philosophy, what is virtue?
2. What are the essential features of a suitable goal for humanity, in Aristotle's view?
3. "Happiness is an activity of soul in accordance with virtue." Explain and expand this definition, and show how it leads to the conclusion that the contemplative life is the happiest.
4. Outline Aristotle's psychological theory. How does it bear on his ethical theory?
5. What arguments can you offer either for or against Aristotle's contention that not all studies admit of the same degree of precision?
6. What differences exist between Aristotle's "golden mean" and an "absolute mean"? Provide illustrations that make the contrast clear.
7. Distinguish between the *moral* and *intellectual* virtues, defining and illustrating each type. What are the means by which they are acquired?
8. In what respects do the ethical theories of Plato and Aristotle stand in sharp contrast? In what respects are they alike?
9. What is Aristotle's judgment of the Socratic thesis "virtue is knowledge"? How does Aristotle conceive the relationship between virtue and knowledge?
10. Do you regard the ideal of the "life of reason" as out of date? Discuss.

Key to Selections

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* tr. W. D. Ross, from *The Works of Aristotle,* vol. IX, W. D. Ross, ed., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1925. With the kind permission of the publishers.

[a]Bk. X, 1179b31–1180a4.
[b]Bk. I, 1094a1–18.
[c]Bk. I, 1094a18–1094b10.
[d]Bk. I, 1094b12–1095a11.
[e]Bk. I, 1095a13–29.
[f]Bk. I, 1097a15–1097b22.
[g]Bk. I, 1097b23–1098a19, 1099a31–1099b6.
[h]Bk. 1, 1102a5–1103a3.
[i]Bks. I & II, 1103a4–1103b2.
[j]Bk. II, 1106a14–1106b8.
[k]Bk. II, 1106b36–1107a26.
[l]Bk. II, 1107a27–1108a8.
[m]Bk.VI, 1138b35–1139b5, 1144b17–29.
[n]Bk. X, 1175a27–1176a2.
[o]Bk. X, 1177a12–1178a8.

Guide to Additional Reading

Primary Sources

The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. R. McKeon, New York, Random House, 1941.