

ARISTOTLE

Nicomachean Ethics

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY

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Book I

Chapter 1

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

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

Chapter 2

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

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

Chapter 3

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

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

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

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

Chapter 4

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

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

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

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

Chapter 5

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

¹ Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 293, 295–7.

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 6

It would perhaps be quite a good idea to examine the notion of the universal and go through any problems there are in the way it is employed, despite the fact that such an inquiry turns out to be difficult going because those who introduced the Forms³ are friends. It will

² A mythical king of Assyria.

³ I.e., Plato and his followers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Pythagoreans⁴ seem to give a more plausible account of the good, when they place the one in their column of goods; and Speusippus⁵ seems to have followed them in this. But let this be the topic of another discussion.

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

⁴ Followers in Southern Italy of Pythagoras of Samos, who flourished around 530 BCE.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

That is enough on these issues.

Chapter 7

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

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

Happiness in particular is believed to be complete without qualifica-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 8

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 9

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

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

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

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

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

It is with good reason, then, that we do not call an ox, a horse or any
1100a other animal happy, because none of them can share in such activity. And for this same reason, a child is not happy either, since his age makes him incapable of doing such actions. If he is called blessed, he is being described as such on account of the potential he has, since, as we have said, happiness requires complete virtue and a complete life. For there are many vicissitudes in life, all sorts of chance things happen, and even the most successful can meet with great misfortunes in old age, as the story goes of Priam⁶ in Trojan times. No one calls someone happy who meets with misfortunes like these and comes to a wretched end.

Chapter 10

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

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

⁶ King of Troy at the time of its destruction by Agamemnon.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So much for the distinctions we draw in these areas.

Chapter 11

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

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

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

Chapter 12

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

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

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

And Eudoxus⁹ seems to have been right in pressing the claims of pleasure to supremacy. He believed that the fact that it is not praised despite its being a good indicates that it is better than things that are praised; and he thought that god and the good are like this, because it is by reference to these that other goods are praised. For praise is indeed appropriate to virtue, since it makes us the kind of people to perform noble actions; eulogies, however, are bestowed on what is achieved in the spheres of the body and of the soul alike. But perhaps clarity here is more the job of those who have gone into the subject of encomiums. For
1102a us, anyway, it is clear from what has been said that happiness is something honourable and complete.

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

Chapter 13

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

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

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

⁹ c. 390–c. 340 BCE. Outstanding mathematician and pupil of Plato.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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