Nicomachean Ethics

by Aristotle

350 BC

translated by W. D. Ross

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Book 1, Chapter 1

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.

Book 1, Chapter 2

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 see even the most highly esteemed of capacities to fall under this, e.g. 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 worth while to attain the end merely for one man, it is finer and more godlike to attain it for a nation or for city-states. These, then, are the ends at which our inquiry aims, since it is political science, in one sense of that term.

Book 1, Chapter 3

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 premisses to indicate the truth roughly and in outline, and in speaking about things which are only for the most part true and with premisses 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 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.

These remarks about the student, the sort of treatment to be expected, and the purpose of the inquiry, may be taken as our preface.

Book 1, Chapter 4

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 honour; 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 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.

Let us not fail to notice, however, that there is a difference between arguments from and those to the first principles. For Plato, too, was right in raising this question and asking, as he used to do, 'are we on the way from or to the first principles?' There is a difference, as there is in a race-course between the course from the judges to the turning-point and the way back. For, while we must begin with what is known, things are objects of knowledge in two senses -- some to us, some without qualification. Presumably, then, we must begin with things known to us. Hence any one who is to listen intelligently to lectures about what is noble and just, and generally, about the subjects of political science must have been brought up in good habits. For the fact is the starting-point, and if this is sufficiently plain to him, he will not at the start need the reason as well; and the man who has been well brought up has or can easily get starting points. And as for him who neither has nor can get them, let him hear the words of Hesiod:

Far best is he who knows all things himself;
Good, he that hearkens when men counsel right;
But he who neither knows, nor lays to heart
Another's wisdom, is a useless wight.

Book 1, Chapter 5

Let us, however, resume our discussion from the point at which we digressed. To judge from the lives that men lead, most men, and men of the most vulgar type, seem (not without some ground) to identify the good, or happiness, with pleasure; which is the reason why they love the life of enjoyment. For there are, we may say, three prominent types of life -- that just mentioned, the political, and thirdly the contemplative life. Now the mass of mankind are evidently quite slavish in their tastes, preferring a life suitable to beasts, but they get some ground for their view from the fact that many of those in high places share the tastes of Sardanapallus. A consideration of the prominent types of life shows that people of superior refinement and of active disposition identify happiness with honour; for this is, roughly speaking, the end of the political life. But it seems too superficial to be what we are looking for, since it is thought to depend on those who bestow honour rather than on him who receives it, but the good we divine to be something proper to a man and not easily taken from him. Further, men seem to pursue honour in order that they may be assured of their goodness; at least it is by men of practical wisdom that they seek to be honoured, and among those who know them, and on the ground of their virtue; clearly, then,

according to them, at any rate, virtue is better. And perhaps one might even suppose this to be, rather than honour, the end of the political life. But even this appears somewhat incomplete; for possession of virtue seems actually compatible with being asleep, or with lifelong inactivity, and, further, with the greatest sufferings and misfortunes; but a man who was living so no one would call happy, unless he were maintaining a thesis at all costs. But enough of this; for the subject has been sufficiently treated even in the current discussions. Third comes the contemplative life, which we shall consider later.

The life of money-making is one undertaken under compulsion, and wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else. And so one might rather take the aforenamed objects to be ends; for they are loved for themselves. But it is evident that not even these are ends; yet many arguments have been thrown away in support of them. Let us leave this subject, then.

Book 1, Chapter 6 (omitted)

Book 1, Chapter 7

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 (e.g. 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 self and never for the sake of something else, but honour, 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 infinite 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.

Presumably, however, to say that happiness is the chief good seems a platitude, and a clearer account of what it 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 an artist, and, in general, for all things that have a function or 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 a 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 'so-and-so-and 'a good so-and-so' have a function which is the same in kind, e.g. a lyre, and a good lyre-player, and so without qualification in all cases, eminence in respect of goodness being idded 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.

Let this serve as an outline of the good; for we must presumably first sketch it roughly, and then later fill in the details. But it would seem that any one is capable of carrying on and articulating what has once been well outlined, and that time is a good discoverer or partner in such a work; to which facts the advances of the arts are due; for any one can add what is lacking. And we must also remember what has been said before, and not look for precision in all things alike, but in each class of things such precision as accords with the subject-matter, and so much as is appropriate to the inquiry. For a carpenter and a geometer investigate the right angle in different ways; the former does so in so far as the right angle is useful for his work, while the latter inquires what it is or what sort of thing it is; for he is a spectator of the truth. We must act in the same way, then, in all other matters as well, that our main task may not be subordinated to minor questions. Nor must we demand the cause in all matters alike; it is enough in some cases that the fact be well established, as in the case of the first principles; the fact is the primary thing or first principle. Now of first principles we see some by induction, some by perception, some by a certain habituation, and others too in other ways. But each set of principles we must try to investigate in the natural way, and we must take pains to state them definitely, since they have a great influence on what follows. For the beginning is thought to be more than half of the whole, and many of the questions we ask are cleared up by it.

Book 2, Chapter 1

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 lyreplayers by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.

This is confirmed by what happens in states; for legislators make the citizens good by forming habits in them, and this is the wish of every legislator, and those who do not effect it miss their mark, and it is in this that a good constitution differs from a bad one.

1 Again, it is from the same causes and by the same means that every virtue is both produced and
2 destroyed, and similarly every art; for it is from playing the lyre that both good and bad lyre-
3 players are produced. And the corresponding statement is true of builders and of all the rest; men
4 will be good or bad builders as a result of building well or badly. For if this were not so, there
5 would have been no need of a teacher, but all men would have been born good or bad at their
6 craft. This, then, is the case with the virtues also; by doing the acts that we do in our transactions
7 with other men we become just or unjust, and by doing the acts that we do in the presence of
8 danger, and being habituated to feel fear or confidence, we become brave or cowardly. The same
9 is true of appetites and feelings of anger; some men become temperate and good-tempered,
10 others self-indulgent and irascible, by behaving in one way or the other in the appropriate
11 circumstances. Thus, in one word, states of character arise out of like activities. This is why the
12 activities we exhibit must be of a certain kind; it is because the states of character correspond to
13 the differences between these. It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one
14 kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather all the
15 difference.

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Book 2, Chapter 2

18 Since, then, the present inquiry does not aim at theoretical knowledge like the others (for we are
19 inquiring not in order to know what virtue is, but in order to become good, since otherwise our
20 inquiry would have been of no use), we must examine the nature of actions, namely how we
21 ought to do them; for these determine also the nature of the states of character that are produced,
22 as we have said. Now, that we must act according to the right rule is a common principle and
23 must be assumed -- it will be discussed later, i.e. both what the right rule is, and how it is related
24 to the other virtues. But this must be agreed upon beforehand, that the whole account of matters
25 of conduct must be given in outline and not precisely, as we said at the very beginning that the
26 accounts we demand must be in accordance with the subject-matter; matters concerned with
27 conduct and questions of what is good for us have no fixity, any more than matters of health. The
28 general account being of this nature, the account of particular cases is yet more lacking in
29 exactness; for they do not fall under any art or precept but the agents themselves must in each
30 case consider what is appropriate to the occasion, as happens also in the art of medicine or of
31 navigation.

32 But though our present account is of this nature we must give what help we can. First, then, let us
33 consider this, that it is the nature of such things to be destroyed by defect and excess, as we see
34 in the case of strength and of health (for to gain light on things imperceptible we must use the
35 evidence of sensible things); both excessive and defective exercise destroys the strength, and
36 similarly drink or food which is above or below a certain amount destroys the health, while that
37 which is proportionate both produces and increases and preserves it. So too is it, then, in the case
38 of temperance and courage and the other virtues. For the man who flies from and fears
39 everything and does not stand his ground against anything becomes a coward, and the man who
40 fears nothing at all but goes to meet every danger becomes rash; and similarly the man who
41 indulges in every pleasure and abstains from none becomes self-indulgent, while the man who

shuns every pleasure, as boors do, becomes in a way insensible; temperance and courage, then, are destroyed by excess and defect, and preserved by the mean.

But not only are the sources and causes of their origination and growth the same as those of their destruction, but also the sphere of their actualization will be the same; for this is also true of the things which are more evident to sense, e.g. of strength; it is produced by taking much food and undergoing much exertion, and it is the strong man that will be most able to do these things. So too is it with the virtues; by abstaining from pleasures we become temperate, and it is when we have become so that we are most able to abstain from them; and similarly too in the case of courage; for by being habituated to despise things that are terrible and to stand our ground against them we become brave, and it is when we have become so that we shall be most able to stand our ground against them.

Book 2, Chapter 3

We must take as a sign of states of character the pleasure or pain that ensues on acts; for the man who abstains from bodily pleasures and delights in this very fact is temperate, while the man who is annoyed at it is self-indulgent, and he who stands his ground against things that are terrible and delights in this or at least is not pained is brave, while the man who is pained is a coward. For moral excellence is concerned with pleasures and pains; it is on account of the pleasure that we do bad things, and on account of the pain that we abstain from noble ones. Hence we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; for this is the right education.

Again, if the virtues are concerned with actions and passions, and every passion and every action is accompanied by pleasure and pain, for this reason also virtue will be concerned with pleasures and pains. This is indicated also by the fact that punishment is inflicted by these means; for it is a kind of cure, and it is the nature of cures to be effected by contraries.

Again, as we said but lately, every state of soul has a nature relative to and concerned with the kind of things by which it tends to be made worse or better; but it is by reason of pleasures and pains that men become bad, by pursuing and avoiding these -- either the pleasures and pains they ought not or when they ought not or as they ought not, or by going wrong in one of the other similar ways that may be distinguished. Hence men even define the virtues as certain states of impassivity and rest; not well, however, because they speak absolutely, and do not say 'as one ought' and 'as one ought not' and 'when one ought or ought not', and the other things that may be added. We assume, then, that this kind of excellence tends to do what is best with regard to pleasures and pains, and vice does the contrary.

The following facts also may show us that virtue and vice are concerned with these same things. There being three objects of choice and three of avoidance, the noble, the advantageous, the pleasant, and their contraries, the base, the injurious, the painful, about all of these the good man tends to go right and the bad man to go wrong, and especially about pleasure; for this is common

1 to the animals, and also it accompanies all objects of choice; for even the noble and the
2 advantageous appear pleasant.

3 Again, it has grown up with us all from our infancy; this is why it is difficult to rub off this
4 passion, engrained as it is in our life. And we measure even our actions, some of us more and
5 others less, by the rule of pleasure and pain. For this reason, then, our whole inquiry must be
6 about these; for to feel delight and pain rightly or wrongly has no small effect on our actions.

7 Again, it is harder to fight with pleasure than with anger, to use Heraclitus' phrase', but both art
8 and virtue are always concerned with what is harder; for even the good is better when it is
9 harder. Therefore for this reason also the whole concern both of virtue and of political science is
10 with pleasures and pains; for the man who uses these well will be good, he who uses them badly
11 bad.

12 That virtue, then, is concerned with pleasures and pains, and that by the acts from which it arises
13 it is both increased and, if they are done differently, destroyed, and that the acts from which it
14 arose are those in which it actualizes itself -- let this be taken as said.

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16 Book 2, Chapter 4

17 The question might be asked, what we mean by saying that we must become just by doing just
18 acts, and temperate by doing temperate acts; for if men do just and temperate acts, they are
19 already just and temperate, exactly as, if they do what is in accordance with the laws of grammar
20 and of music, they are grammarians and musicians.

21 Or is this not true even of the arts? It is possible to do something that is in accordance with the
22 laws of grammar, either by chance or at the suggestion of another. A man will be a grammarian,
23 then, only when he has both done something grammatical and done it grammatically; and this
24 means doing it in accordance with the grammatical knowledge in himself.

25 Again, the case of the arts and that of the virtues are not similar; for the products of the arts have
26 their goodness in themselves, so that it is enough that they should have a certain character, but if
27 the acts that are in accordance with the virtues have themselves a certain character it does not
28 follow that they are done justly or temperately. The agent also must be in a certain condition
29 when he does them; in the first place he must have knowledge, secondly he must choose the acts,
30 and choose them for their own sakes, and thirdly his action must proceed from a firm and
31 unchangeable character. These are not reckoned in as conditions of the possession of the arts,
32 except the bare knowledge; but as a condition of the possession of the virtues knowledge has
33 little or no weight, while the other conditions count not for a little but for everything, i.e. the very
34 conditions which result from often doing just and temperate acts.

35 Actions, then, are called just and temperate when they are such as the just or the temperate man
36 would do; but it is not the man who does these that is just and temperate, but the man who also
37 does them as just and temperate men do them. It is well said, then, that it is by doing just acts

that the just man is produced, and by doing temperate acts the temperate man; without doing these no one would have even a prospect of becoming good.

But most people do not do these, but take refuge in theory and think they are being philosophers and will become good in this way, behaving somewhat like patients who listen attentively to their doctors, but do none of the things they are ordered to do. As the latter will not be made well in body by such a course of treatment, the former will not be made well in soul by such a course of philosophy.

Book 2, Chapter 5

Next we must consider what virtue is. Since things that are found in the soul are of three kinds -- passions, faculties, states of character -- virtue must be one of these. By passions I mean appetite, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, friendly feeling, hatred, longing, emulation, pity, and in general the feelings that are accompanied by pleasure or pain; by faculties the things in virtue of which we are said to be capable of feeling these, e.g. of becoming angry or being pained or feeling pity; by states of character the things in virtue of which we stand well or badly with reference to the passions, e.g. with reference to anger we stand badly if we feel it violently or too weakly, and well if we feel it moderately; and similarly with reference to the other passions.

Now neither the virtues nor the vices are passions, because we are not called good or bad on the ground of our passions, but are so called on the ground of our virtues and our vices, and because we are neither praised nor blamed for our passions (for the man who feels fear or anger is not praised, nor is the man who simply feels anger blamed, but the man who feels it in a certain way), but for our virtues and our vices we are praised or blamed.

Again, we feel anger and fear without choice, but the virtues are modes of choice or involve choice. Further, in respect of the passions we are said to be moved, but in respect of the virtues and the vices we are said not to be moved but to be disposed in a particular way.

For these reasons also they are not faculties; for we are neither called good nor bad, nor praised nor blamed, for the simple capacity of feeling the passions; again, we have the faculties by nature, but we are not made good or bad by nature; we have spoken of this before. If, then, the virtues are neither passions nor faculties, all that remains is that they should be states of character.

Thus we have stated what virtue is in respect of its genus.

Book 2, Chapter 6

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

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

23 If it is thus, then, that every art does its work well -- by looking to the intermediate and judgling
24 its works by this standard (so that we often say of good works of art that it is not possible either
25 to take away or to add anything, implying that excess and defect destroy the goodness of works
26 of art, while the mean preserves it; and good artists, as we say, look to this in their work), and if,
27 further, virtue is more exact and better than any art, as nature also is, then virtue must have the
28 quality of aiming at the intermediate. I mean moral virtue; for it is this that is concerned with
29 passions and actions, and in these there is excess, defect, and the intermediate. For instance, both
30 fear and confidence and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasure and pain may be felt
31 both too much and too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them at the right times, with
32 reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right
33 way, is what is both intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of virtue. Similarly with
34 regard to actions also there is excess, defect, and the intermediate. Now virtue is concerned with
35 passions and actions, in which excess is a form of failure, and so is defect, while the intermediate
36 is praised and is a form of success; and being praised and being successful are both
37 characteristics of virtue. Therefore virtue is a kind of mean, since, as we have seen, it aims at
38 what is intermediate.

39 Again, it is possible to fail in many ways (for evil belongs to the class of the unlimited, as the
40 Pythagoreans conjectured, and good to that of the limited), while to succeed is possible only in
41 one way (for which reason also one is easy and the other difficult -- to miss the mark easy, to hit
42 it difficult); for these reasons also, then, excess and defect are characteristic of vice, and the
43 mean of virtue;

For men are good in but one way, but bad in many.

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.