

Aristotle

Ethics

circa 355 BCE

INTRODUCTION TO Nicomachean Ethics

Aristotle, son of a physician, was born in Stagira and sent as a teenager to seek an education in Athens. There he studied under [Plato](#), and, after twenty years at the school of Academe, by way of a spell as tutor to the future Alexander the Great, he returned to Athens to found his own school of philosophy at the Lyceum, whose colonnades, the 'peripatos' gave Aristotle's followers their name of the 'Peripatetics'.

Although deeply influenced by [Plato](#), Aristotle is far from uncritical. He abandons his mentors' concept that absolute truth is 'out there' in the shape of 'The Forms of Reality' in favour of a much more down-to-earth approach to understanding based on observation more than on reasoning. This empirical rather than idealist approach runs through all his huge output of works on logic, politics, biology, physics, medicine, and, here in one of his most famous works, the *Ethics*.

There is little of Plato's precise step-by-step reasoning here, but rather an attempt at precise observation of the human condition with the entirely practical hope of making that condition better. Aristotle's approach is clear and it is straightforward. He does not so much open the world up to investigation as say 'this is the way things are'. No wonder the medieval church took Aristotle to their hearts as The philosopher, the fount and the measure of all knowledge about the universe for the Christian West.

ABOUT THIS SQUASHED EDITION

This text is largely based on WD Ross's translation of 1908 and DP Chase's of 1911. The original is a rather rambling, repetitive text which may well constitute lecture notes rather than a coherent essay. Tidying it up has shrunk the book from 85,000 to 9,500 words, but may give the impression of greater coherence than is actually present in the original. The section numbers are no part of Aristotle's work, but the addition of later editors'

GLOSSARY

Much of the traditional analysis of Aristotle's ethics centers on the subtleties of the language he uses, made more complex by the fact that many of the central concepts simply cannot readily be expressed by a single English word

Akrasia: Weakness of will, lack of self-control. Incontinence.

Episteme: Science

Eudaimonia: Literally 'having good demons'. Translated here as 'happiness', but often thought closer to the English 'flourishing'.

'Golden Mean': Aristotle's doctrine that right action lies in the middle position between the extremes of excess and deficit.

Phronimos: The good man of practical wisdom and virtue.

Book One

I: Every art, every enquiry, every pursuit, is thought to aim at some good. Medicine aims at health, shipbuilding, a vessel and economics, wealth. In each case, the end is always thought greater than the activity.

II: So, will not the knowledge of whatever 'the good' is have great influences on life? Shall we not, like archers aiming at the mark, be more likely to hit that which is right?

III: Now, truth and goodness are subject to much variation of opinion, so we cannot speak of them with mathematical precision. Furthermore, men judge best the things they have long experience of, so the young, (whether young in years or youthful in passions), will profit little from what is taught here.

IV: Both philosophers and common men agree that by 'good' we mean happiness. But some think happiness is wealth, others honour, and the same man will think it different at different times- as when he is ill he will call health the greatest good. All we can do, like Plato, is ask 'are we travelling towards, or away from, the first principles?'

V: The vulgar, like beasts, identify happiness with pleasure. Superior, refined, people tend to identify it with honour and virtue. We can be certain, though, that moneymaking is not the good, as it is merely a means to gain other things.

VI: Dear Socrates made finding the 'good' an uphill task by talking about the 'Form of the Good'. But we must honour truth above our friends. He forgot that 'good' is not one single thing. Even eternity cannot be the good, for that which lasts long is no whiter than that which perishes in a day, while it would be empty to claim that only goodness is good. Let us then consider good things rather than useful things, and consider whether they are called good by reference to one single Idea.

VII: Good is the end we aim at in life. But even horses have life, man is made different by his rational soul. We can say that, as a lyre-player plays the lyre, and a good player plays it well, so the function of a good man is noble use of his rational abilities. Let this serve as a rough first sketch of the good. To have begun is to have the task half finished.

VIII: There are three types of goods- those external, those of the soul and those of the body. Those of the soul are most important, and include a person's actions.

IX: We must ask if happiness can be learned, or comes from divine providence, or by chance. Certainly, even if happiness is not god-given, it seems a godlike thing, while to say it is chance would be to demean it. Neither the ox nor the horse nor any animal, nor even the untutored child can share in this, so we may say that happiness requires a full human life.

X: Can we, then, only call a life happy after it has ended? Though a man may have many changes of fortune, the best man makes good use of what chance throws at him.

XI: Happiness depends, somewhat, on one's friends.

XII: Is happiness a thing praised or prized? Things are praised for their relationship to something else; we praise the good man, the good athlete etc because their actions relate to something we call good. Likewise, when we praise the gods it cannot be by our petty standards. Eudoxus was right to say that pleasure, like god, is not praised but prized.

XIII: We can say that happiness is an activity of the soul according to virtue, the student of politics must examine human virtue, for his duty is to perfect it. Just as man has body and soul, so the soul has a rational and an irrational principle. So, likewise, ethics has its intellectual and its moral principle.

Book Two

I: Intellectual virtue comes largely from learning, while ethical virtues come mainly from habit. Neither is born in us, but we are adapted by nature to receive them. Moreover, by practising virtue we learn it, just as the builder learns to build.

II: However, we wish to know not what virtue is, but how to practice it. First, we know that things are destroyed by deficiency and by excess. Just as the body needs food and exercise, yet too much or too little can damage it, so temperance and courage need to be practiced in the right quantity.

III: A sign of character is the pleasure or pain that follows from acts. For instance, he who delights to stand his ground against terrors is brave, while he who is pained by them is a coward. Such things, as Plato says, we should have learned from youth. So it seems that for every virtue there is a vice, which fall into three classes:

1: The noble and the base 2: The advantageous and the injurious 3: The pleasant and the painful

IV: We become just by doing just acts, temperate by temperate acts. But what does this mean? Consider craft skills; a grammarian does something grammatically when he does it in accord with grammatical knowledge. His products, like all craft skills, have goodness in themselves, but acts are done for a purpose. It is clear that he who acts must have knowledge, he must choose his act, and his act must proceed from his character. So, just actions are those the just man does, but most people do this only in theory, like listening to their doctor, but not following his advice.

V: We must consider virtue. The soul consists of three things- passions, faculties and character, so virtue must be in one of these. Passions are feelings accompanied by pleasure or pain if they are too little or too great, such as appetite, fear, confidence or joy. We are not called good because of our passions, for we do not choose them, but virtue is by choice. Further, virtue cannot be a faculty, because we are not praised or blamed just for feeling a particular way. If, then virtue is neither a passion nor a faculty, it must be found with character.

VI: But what state of character is virtue? Every virtue brings about excellence in some thing. By the excellence of the eye we see well, by the excellence of a horse it runs well, so the virtue of man is that which makes his work good. Everything that is variable can be more or can be less, and there is always a middle way between excess and deficit. Six is the middle between ten and two, but if ten pounds of food is too much and two pounds too little, it does not follow that the trainer will order the athlete to eat six pounds. That might be too much for the beginner, but too little for our friend Milo. The master of any art avoids excess, avoids deficit and seeks the middle, the intermediate, not in the object, but in the person. Yet there are many ways to fail, but only one way to succeed, for evil, as Pythagoras taught, is limitless, while good is limited. So we can say that virtue, is a state of character, gained by rational choice, lying in a middle way relative to the man. But not every action has a mean way. Adultery, spite, envy and such are bad, whether they are done a little or much, just as temperance and courage are forever good.

VII: Let us apply this to individual facts. Too much confidence is rashness, too little is cowardliness. Too much liberality is prodigality, too little is meanness. Too much honour is vanity, too little is undue humility. Too much wittiness is buffoonery, too little is boorishness. Righteous indignation is the mean between envy and spite.

VIII: There are, then, three kinds of disposition- towards excess, towards deficiency and the virtuous mean. Each is, in a sense opposed to the others, as when the brave man seems rash to the coward, and cowardly to the rash man. But the mean is not necessarily the middle, for rashness is nearer to courage than is cowardice.

IX: It is not easy to be good, as it is no easy task to find the middle. Even finding the middle of a circle takes skill. Anyone can get angry, or be generous, but to do so to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time with the right motive in the right way is not easy. It is best to aim at the mean by avoiding

the vice which is most contrary to it, and guard against the vices to which we are more inclined. Especially, we must guard against pleasure, because pleasure cannot be judged impartially.

Book Three

I: Only voluntary actions are praised or blamed, while involuntary actions receive pardon or pity. Involuntary actions are those done by compulsion or ignorance, that is, where the moving force is outside the person so that he is carried as if by the wind. But things done from fear, say if an evil tyrant orders men to do evil things, or bad things done for some noble end, are somewhat mixed, but perhaps nearer to the voluntary.

II: We must discuss choice, for it shows up character better than actions do. Both children and animals share voluntary action, as they share appetite and anger, but they cannot be said to make rational choices. A choice is not merely a wish or an opinion, for one might wish for immortality, or for a particular athlete to win in the stadium. Wishes relate to the ends, choice to the means, and opinion precedes them both.

III: Do we always deliberate about things? No one makes decisions about the reality of the material universe, or about chance events like the weather, for none of these can be caused by our efforts. The doctor does not deliberate whether he shall heal, nor the orator that he persuades, nor the statesman that he brings order. Decision-making, it seems, is concerned with means, not ends.

IV: A wish is for an end, either for the good, or the apparent good. Those who say that a wish is always for the good must admit that this cannot be so, for many will wish for bad things. Those who hold that a wish is for the apparent good will admit that there is thus no good but what each man chooses. So it seems that each type of character has its own ideas of the noble and the pleasant.

V: If the end is what we wish for, the means must be what we deliberate about. Our virtue is of means, so if it is in our power to act nobly, it is also in our power to do evil. To say 'no-one is voluntarily wicked or unhappy' seems unsure, for no one is voluntarily unhappy, but wickedness is voluntary. And this is accepted by both the magistrates and the people when they punish voluntary wickedness, they pardon involuntary mistakes and they honour noble acts. We do not punish ignorance, unless the man is the cause of his own ignorance, as when we double the penalty for crimes committed while drunk, since man has the power not to get drunk. Yet, some men voluntarily make their own ignorance, by being unjust or self-indulgent. Likewise, we do not reproach, but rather pity, vices of the body such as being blind or disabled. But every one would blame a man who was blind from drunkenness. In all cases, the vices that are blamed must be in our own power. Let us consider the several virtues, beginning with courage.

VI: Courage is the mean between fear and confidence. The brave man should always fear disgrace, he who does not is shameless. Poverty and disease we perhaps ought not to fear, for they are not due to man himself. The truly brave man has conquered the greatest fear of all, fear of death. But which death? Surely the noblest; death in battle, which is honoured by the state.

VII: The brave man is he who nobly faces what he fears for the right reason, in the right manner and at the right time. But to do this to excess is rashness, to do it too little is cowardice.

VIII: Courage is within the realm of bravery, as are five other things. First is the courage of citizen-soldiers. This is nearest to true courage, for it comes from virtue, desire for honour and fear of disgrace, which is noble. So noble that we may, to some extent, include even conscripted soldiers.

Second, there is Socrates' idea that courage is knowledge. This is not entirely correct, for a knowledgeable soldier may be still a coward.

Third, passionate enthusiasm is often thought a form of courage. But even wild beasts have such.

Fourth, the sanguine man resembles the brave man. But his willingness to face sudden alarms comes only from his nature, and not from any noble deliberation.

Fifth, men who are ignorant of danger appear to be brave, but only by their ignorance.

IX: The brave man fears death and wounds, yet still choose the noble deeds of war, for it is not the exercise of virtue, which is pleasant, but its end. So much for courage.

X: Now, temperance is concerned with bodily pleasures. But we do not call the music-lover, the art-lover or the lover of perfumes intemperate. The grossest pleasures are those of touch and taste, for even dogs enjoy the taste of the hare.

XI: Some desires seem to be universal, such as desire for food and sex. But different people desire different foods and have differing sexual preferences. Such natural appetites err only when they are done to excess, like the "belly-mad" glutton. But individual pleasures can go wrong in several ways. People may delight in the wrong things, with too great an intensity, or in the wrong way. To do all three is plainly culpable self-indulgence. The temperate man finds the middle position, he desires the right things in moderation.

XII: Self-indulgence is a more voluntary fault than cowardice, for the first is actuated by pleasure, the second by pain. Self-indulgence is childish, and just as the obedient child should live as his tutor directs, so the temperate man should be guided in his passions by his rational intellect.

Book Four

I: Let us now speak of liberality, or generosity. Liberality is concerned with the use of wealth, prodigality is an excess of liberality, while meanness is its deficiency.

II: Next, we will discuss magnificence, which is also concerned with wealth, but on a grander scale. A deficiency in magnificence is niggardliness, excess is tasteless vulgarity. Giving grandly requires artistic skill to choose the fitting expenditure that will bring honour without seeming to show-off. It is always honourable to pay for services to the gods, or furnish one's house well, but each case the greatness is relative to the cause; even a simple oil-flask can be a great gift to a child. To err in magnificence is a vice, if a harmless one.

III: Proper pride and self-respect seems a worthy thing. He who thinks himself worthy of greatness, being unworthy is vain. The man who thinks himself worthy of less than his real worth is unduly humble. The man with proper pride has nobility and goodness of character. He will react with moderation to good or evil fortune and seems somewhat disdainful of power and wealth. He readily confers benefits on others, but is ashamed to receive them. He is a man of few deeds, but great ones, who speaks and acts openly and quickly forgets wrongs. He avoids gossip, and is sparing of praise and blame. Finally, a measured step, a deep voice and unhurried speech all tell of proper pride, while shrillness and speed show up a man as over-hasty. The vain man, on the other hand, will adorn himself in fancy clothes and expect praise for mere good-luck. The man of undue humility robs himself of what he truly deserves, but cannot be thought bad, only mistaken.

IV: As with liberality, it seems that honour may be desired more than is right, or less. We blame both the ambitious man for seeking honour more than is right, and the unambitious man as not willing to be honoured even for noble reasons. But in this case, the extremes seem to be contradictories because the mean does not have a name.

V: Good temper is the mean with respect to anger. The man who is angry at the right things, with the right people, in the right way, is praiseworthy. If he errs at all, it is to have too little anger at things worthy of anger. Hot-tempered people get angry too hastily, but, being in the open, their anger ceases just as quickly, which is the best thing about them. Bitter, sulky people, repress their angry passions, making them troublesome to themselves and to their friends. But, to err a little from the path of righteous anger is not blameworthy. In fact, we sometimes praise a deficiency of anger as 'patience', and a slight excess as 'manly'. Enough, now, of anger.

VI: In daily life, some people obsequiously agree with everyone, while others churlishly oppose everything. Such behaviour is plainly culpable. The middle way here has no name, though it closely resembles friendliness. Such an amiable person is kindly, not only to his friends, but also without regard to whether he likes or dislikes someone.

VII: The mean between boastfulness and understatement has no name. Truthfulness is noble, but is only praiseworthy when a man practices it equally regarding tiny things as well as when much is at stake. The boaster, on the other hand, seems futile rather than bad as long as he seeks only reputation. But when he boasts of valuable skills he has not, such as the powers of a clairvoyant or physician, he becomes a very ugly character. The mock-modest man seems more attractive. He disdains the things that bring reputation, as Socrates used to do.

VIII: In the art of conversation, too, there is a mean. Those who will carry any joke too far and are willing to commit slander for the sake of a laugh are vulgar buffoons. Those who can neither tell a joke nor accept one are boorish and dull. The man who finds the middle state can listen well and talk with cultured wit. This is like comparing the jolly ribaldry of old comedies with the smutty innuendo of today.

IX: Shame, the fear of dishonour, is not a virtue but more a kind of feeling. It is worthy only in the young, who live too much by desires and need the restraint of shame. Let us discuss justice.

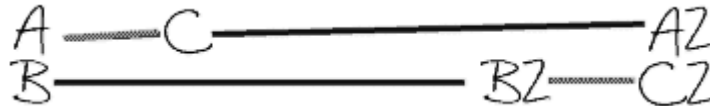
Book Five

I: By justice, men generally mean that character that disposes men to act justly, and injustice the opposite. Faculties, or abilities, grant skill that can be used either good or ill. But a state of character, such as health, does not produce its opposite, illness. Thus, it is useful to know of character by knowing of its contrary. Lawlessness and avarice are thought unjust, so that law-abiding and fairness is thought just. Since avarice is though unjust, so, to some extent, justice is concerned with goods. Men pray for good things, but they should not- they ought rather to pray for that which is good for them, for different things are good for different people. Justice itself is complete virtue in its fullest sense, and alone of the virtues, is directed towards others.

II: It is clear that a man who commits adultery from desire is merely licentious, but one who does so for gain is unjust. Equally, the wickedness of violence is caused by anger, and of desertion in battle by cowardice, but these, too, only become unjust when done for gain. We see that particular injustices are concerned with gain of money or honour, while universal justice is found in the virtuous conduct. It can be said that injustice equates to unlawfulness, but the two do not always correspond. Particular acts of justice are concerned with the division of money or honour, or with rectifying relations between men. The rectifying sort begins in two ways: voluntarily (as with sale, loans or letting), or involuntarily and secretly (as with theft, adultery, enslavement, robbery or murder).

III: That justice is a sort of middle way hardly needs argument to support it. Justice is a sort of proportion, an equality of ratios where $A:B$ is equal to $B:C$. This, what mathematicians call 'geometric proportion', is one kind of justice.

IV: The remaining kind of justice is rectificatory, in that it corrects errors of distribution. This happens in transactions. When someone has received injustice, such as a blow or some inequality of division, then the judge, like a personification of justice, tries to restore equality by imposing a penalty, to take from the greater to give to the less. If the line $A-A_2$ is unequal to the line $B-B_2$, then the segment $A-C$ can be taken from it and added to $B-B_2$.



V: Some, like the Pythagoreans, think that simple reciprocity is justice, but this does not fit with either distributive or rectificatory justice. For example, if someone were hit by an official, it would be wrong to hit back, but if they strike an official it is right that they be hit back and punished as well. But it is true that fair exchange depends on reciprocity, that is why we have the temple of the Graces. Proportional return requires 'cross-conjunction': let A be a builder, B a shoemaker and C a house and D a shoe. For the shoemaker to get a house it is necessary that there be some agreed proportion of the value of a house in a shoe. Without this, there can be no fair exchange. There must be one standard by which all commodities are measured. This is money, which does not exist in nature, but by our custom. So much for our account of justice.

VI: It is possible to act unjustly without being an unjust man? A man may lie with a woman knowing she is not out of choice, but under the influence of passion. Stealing does not make a man a thief, nor adultery an adulterer. Our enquiry is of political justice, which is found only among those whose mutual relations are controlled by law. The ruler is the guarantor of justice, and it is when he is dissatisfied with honour and dignity as his reward, but takes more than he merits that he becomes a despot. There cannot be injustice against ones own chattels or children, or towards oneself. There can be justice between husband and wife, and within families. But this is not political justice.

VII: Political justice is either natural or legal. The natural is that which is the same everywhere, independent of people's opinions, while laws can differ greatly. Among the gods, all justice is presumably immutable, but in our world, all things are subject to change, but there is only one natural form of government, namely the best.

VIII: If a man seized the hand of another and used it to strike a third man, then the second man would not have acted voluntarily. Thus, there are three kinds of injury. One that happens contrary to reasonable expectation is a misadventure. That which might be expected but is done without malice is a mistake. Those who commit these have done wrong, but may not be unjust or wicked. Only the wrong done on purpose is unjust and wicked. Mistakes committed in ignorance and from ignorance are pardonable; but those committed in ignorance but through some unnatural passion are inexcusable.

IX: Consider Euripides' lines:

*I slew my mother, that's my tale in brief,
By will of both, or both unwilling?*

Is it possible to suffer injustice willingly? At first this seems an odd notion, but people can be treated justly when they do not will it. So, to the formula 'doing harm to another, with knowledge of the other, of the instrument and of the manner', must we add 'against the will of the other'? But no-one wills what he does not think to be good. Even if he gives his goods away, it is he who chooses so. It is clear that being treated unjustly must be involuntary. There remain two problems- is the person who gives too large a share or the one who receives it the guilty one? True, the equitable man tends to take less than his due, but he may gain in status and nobility. Also, can an inanimate object, or a slave at his master's command, 'do' what is unjust without acting unjustly? But legal and natural justice differ. To commit adultery or assault or pass a bribe is clearly wrong. But as in medicine, where anyone can know what hellebore is and what surgery is, the skill lies in using them in a particular way.

X: Sometimes we commend the equitable as 'good', but at other times it seems unjust. But, at least in laws, there is no contradiction here, for the error lies not in the law but in the nature of the case. So when an exception case arises, which the law-maker has not anticipated, then it is right that the judge act as the law-maker would have, had he known the circumstances. Equity, though just, is not better than natural justice, but, like the flexible rulers Lesbian architects use, it allows laws to be framed to fit the circumstances.

XI: Whether a man can treat himself unjustly should now be evident. If a man kills himself, he is acting unjustly. But towards whom? It is towards the State that man owes duty, so if he takes his own life the State properly dishonours him. But no one can commit adultery with his own wife, or burgle his own house. It is clear that both being treated unjustly and acting unjustly are evils, for the first is to have less and the second to have more than the mean. But acting unjustly is the worse, for it is voluntary. This completes our analysis of justice.

Book Six

I: We have already said that one should aim at the mean between deficiency and excess, as right principle dictates. But if you grasped only this, you would have no knowledge of how to apply it. Hence, we must discover what the right principle is. Let us begin by noting that the soul has a rational and an irrational part. And we may likewise divide the rational into the scientific, which deals of things invariable, and the calculative, which deals with the variable.

II: In the soul three things control actions; sensation, intellect and appetite. Since moral virtue involves choice, and choice is deliberate appetite then, if the choice is to be good, the reasoning behind it must be true and the desire right. The origin of action is choice, and the origin of choice is appetite and purposive reasoning. But no process is set going by mere thought- only by practical thought. Anyone who makes anything makes it for a purpose relative to a particular end. But action is an end in itself, and man is the causative union of reason and appetite. No past event is an object of choice; hence, Agathon was right to say:

*One thing is denied even to God
To undo what has been already done*

III: To look further back, we can say that there are five ways in which the soul arrives at truth by affirmation or denial; by art, science, prudence, wisdom and intuition. Judgement and opinion need not be included as they can often err. Science aims at knowledge of the eternal and is supposed to be teachable. But all teaching starts from what is known either by induction of first principles or by deduction from those first principles. This is our description of scientific knowledge.

IV: Art, or craft skill, is concerned with bringing something into existence, the cause of which is reasoned in the producer not the product. Since production is different to action, art is not concerned with action but has an element of chance, as Agathon says: *Art loves chance, and chance loves art.*

V: To understand prudence, or practical wisdom, we may consider what type of person we call prudent. A prudent man is able to deliberate rightly, not just about particular things like health, but about the good life generally. As prudence is not a fixed thing, then it cannot be a science. It does not aim at production, so it is not an art. Prudence, then, is a virtue, and one which is of the calculative, reasoning part of the soul. But it is not merely a rational state, for such can be forgotten while prudence cannot.

VI: Let us consider intuition. All science comes from certain first principles, so it follows that those principles cannot themselves be comprehended by science, or by art, or prudence or even by wisdom. The state of mind which apprehends first principles is intuition.

VII: When we call Phidias a wise sculptor or Polyclitus a wise portraitist we mean that they have artistic wisdom. But some people are not wise 'at something' but wise without any qualification. Wisdom, therefore, seems the most finished form of knowledge. Wisdom is scientific and intuitive knowledge of what is by nature most precious. That is why a wise person can often be more effective in action than one with specialist knowledge.

VIII: Prudence and political science are the same state of mind, but they are realised differently. The man who knows and provides for his own interests is called prudent, but politicians are considered meddling busybodies. However, it is impossible to secure one's own good without a sound political structure around

you. Prudence is not science, as we have said, because it apprehends the last step, while intuition apprehends the first definitions.

IX: We must try to grasp the nature of deliberation, for it is not the same thing as enquiry. Neither is it conjecture, for that is a rapid thing while deliberation takes some time. It is true that one who deliberates badly makes errors, but a wicked person can deliberate well to achieve an evil end. So good deliberation is that which succeeds in relation to a particular end.

X: There is also understanding, which is not the same as scientific knowledge or opinion. Nor is it like prudence, which deals of what one should or should not do. Understanding only makes judgements, for there is no difference between good and bad understanding.

XI: What is called judgement is the faculty of judging correctly what is equitable. And equitable judgement is sympathetic judgement. All these states of mind naturally tend to converge so that we call a person understanding, prudent or intelligent more or less indifferently. We should, however, give more attention to the opinions of older, more experienced people, even without demonstrations of fact, because age brings with it intuitive reason and judgement.

XII: What is the use of the intellectual virtues? They are concerned with the just and the admirable and the good, but knowing them does not mean that they are put into practice. Just as it is possible to know medicine or physical training without practising it. First, wisdom and prudence, being virtues, must be desirable in themselves, even without any result. Next, they do, in fact, produce a result- wisdom is a virtue which makes a person happy by the possession of it. We ought also to consider cleverness, which is the ability to achieve an aim. The aim can be noble or base, which is why we may call both prudent and unscrupulous people clever. Prudence is not quite the same, for insight cannot lead to prudence without some virtue.

XIII: We must now reconsider virtue. If we have a disposition towards justice or temperance or courage, then we have it from our birth, but moral qualities are acquired. Some people, including Socrates, claimed that all the virtues are forms of prudence. But we must go further and say that virtue is not merely a state conforming to the right principle, but one that is inseparable from it. At the same time, prudence does not use wisdom, but allows it to be realised. To say otherwise would be like saying that the State controls the gods because it directs rituals.

Book Seven

I: There are three states of character to be avoided: vice, incontinence and brutishness. The contrary of vice is virtue and of incontinence is continence. The opposite of brutishness is something like superhuman virtue, as Homer says of Hector: *Nor did he seem, Son of a mortal sire, but of a god.*

But as divinity is rare among men, so is true brutishness, though it is commonest among non-Greeks. We must now discuss incontinence, effeminacy and endurance.

II: Socrates said that nobody consciously acts against what is best, other than through ignorance. This is inconsistent with the evidence, for we see that men often act out of the impulse of desire and against their knowledge and judgement. Again, the sophists trap people by knotty arguments into believing what is good is bad.

III: We must consider whether incontinent people act knowingly or unknowingly- whether the incontinent man is so because of his circumstances or his attitude. Firstly, for a man to do wrong without reflecting on his own knowledge is very different from acting with that knowledge. Secondly, there are two types of practical knowledge that act as the starting-point to actions. These are the universal and the particular premises. The universal is knowledge about things and the particular is knowledge about how they should be acted upon. But a man may know both without drawing the correct conclusion. For instance, he might know that "savory food is more wholesome than sweet" and also "wholesome food should be eaten" but

he may not put the two together and actually choose to eat savoury foods. Thirdly, we may assume that incontinent people are like those asleep, or drunk, or mentally disturbed or in the grip of temper or sexual craving, who speak and act without knowledge. Fourth, even if a man knows both the universal and particular premises his natural desires may sway his scientific judgement.

IV: Is anyone absolutely incontinent, or only in certain respects? It is obvious that continence or incontinence are concerned with pleasures and pains. Now, certain pleasures, such as food and sex, are necessary, others, like victory or honour or wealth are merely desirable. Those who are incontinent in the second type we do not call simply incontinent, but add "in respect of money" or some other qualification. People are not blamed for liking them, only for doing so to excess, like those who pursue some good end in the wrong way, like Satyrus' excessive infatuation with his father.

V: Some things are not naturally pleasant, but can become so through injury, habit or congenital depravity. And for each unnatural pleasure there is an abnormal state of character. There is the brutish character, as in those tribes around the Black Sea who eat human flesh. Also, morbid states, like nail-biting or homosexuality, may come naturally to some people, or may have been acquired by habit, for instance if someone has been sexually misused as a child. Where nature is the cause, we do not blame people as incontinent. But those congenitally incapable of reason we call brutish, and those troubled by illness we call morbid.

VI: Let us consider if incontinence of temper, which is anger, is different to incontinence of desire. Unlike desire, temper seems to have some reason to it, but to, as it were, listen imperfectly- like the over-eager servant who rushes off before his master has finished giving instruction. When reason informs someone that they are being insulted, temper sees such a person as an enemy. It is partly pardonable to be guided by the natural appetites we all share. But incontinence of desire is a vice, for it is led by pleasure. We do not condemn the brutes as intemperate or licentious because they possess neither choice nor calculation. So, though brutishness is frightening it carries no corruption of the highest reasoning. A bad man can do much more harm than a brute.

VII: We have noted that some pleasures are necessary, but only up to a point. The man who pursues excessive pleasures is licentious, because he is unrepentant. On the other hand, the man deficient in the appreciation of pleasures is the opposite of licentious, while the temperate man is between the two. The difference is between those who yield from choice and those who do not. Anyone would think worse of someone who thrashed another having thought about it carefully, than of someone who acted in a moment of passion. The man who fails to endure everyday pains is soft and effeminate, unless his weakness is due to some congenital defect, like the hereditary effeminacy of Scythian aristocrats. The lover of amusement is also thought licentious, but he is really soft, for amusement is excessive indulgence in relaxation.

VIII: In general vice is unconscious, incontinence is not. So incontinence is not vice and the incontinent are not wicked, though they do wicked things. The incontinent man is one who is impelled by his feelings to deviate from the right principle, but is not so completely mastered as to pursue such pleasures unrestrainedly.

IX: We must ask whether virtue consists of abiding by any choice or principle, or only by following the right one. Some people cling doggedly to their opinion, whom we call obstinate. They can be divided into the opinionated, the ignorant and the boorish. The opinionated are motivated by pleasure and pain and enjoy a sense of superiority. Thus they resemble the incontinent. The incontinent and the licentious man both pursue bodily pleasures, but the first thinks it is wrong while the second does not.

X: The prudent man is morally good. But simply knowing what is right does not make a man prudent, he must be inclined to actually do it. The incontinent man is not so disposed. He is like a State which has good laws, but fails to implement them, while the bad man is like a State that actually does implement its bad laws.

XI: So is pleasure good? Some say that pleasure is not a good because it hinders thinking. Others that

some pleasures are disgraceful or harmful, and others that pleasure cannot be the supreme good because it is not an end but a process.

XII: This does not prove that pleasure is not a good.

I) Things are called good either absolutely, or good for somebody.

II) A good may be an activity or a condition.

III) The argument that there must be something better than pleasure because the end is better than the process is not conclusive because pleasures are a species of activity, and therefore an end.

The argument that pleasures are bad because some pleasant things are injurious is no better than saying that healthy things are bad because some of them are bad for the pocket. But, clearly, the pleasures of brutes and children are not good.

XIII: Pain is clearly an evil to be avoided. Now, the opposite of pain is pleasure, so it must be good. When Speusippus argued that good is contrary to both pleasure and pain, he cannot be correct, for he refused to allow that pleasure is an evil. Different people may pursue different pleasures, but it is always pleasure which they pursue.

XIV: Those who think that some noble pleasures are highly desirable, but bodily pleasures are not, ought to consider why, in that case, the pains which are contrary to them are bad, for the contrary of a bad thing is a good one. Everyone enjoys tasty food and wine and sex to some degree, but not everyone to the right degree. With pain, it is the opposite. The bad man shuns, not just excessive pain, but all pain. Now, pleasure drives out pain. But it is not possible for the same thing always to give pleasure for our nature contains different elements which are rarely in balance. Only God could enjoy one simple pleasure forever.

Book Eight

I: Friendship is a kind of virtue, or implies virtue. It is necessary for living, for nobody would choose to live without friends. When we are young, friends keep us from mistakes. When we are old they care for us. In the prime of life, they encourage us. Friendship is the bond that holds communities together. Some say with Empedocles that 'like is drawn to like', others with Heraclitus that 'opposition unites'. But these matters can wait.

II: It might help if we could define what an object of affection is. Is it the good that people love, or only what is good for them? These sometimes conflict. We do not speak of friendship about our affection for inanimate objects, because there is no return of affection. It would be absurd for a man to wish for the good of his wine.

III: There are three kinds of friendship. Some, especially the old or the ambitious, love from utility, to derive benefit from the friendship. Sometimes such people do not even like each other, as with friendship with foreigners. Those who love on the grounds of pleasure are motivated by their own pleasure. This is commonest among the young and with erotic friendship. Such can rise and fall very quickly. Only the friendship of those who are similarly truly good is perfect, but it is rare, as good men are rare.

IV: With friendship for the sake of pleasure, as beauty wanes, so often the friendship wanes too. Pleasure or utility friendship is possible between two bad men, but obviously only good men can be friends for their own sakes.

V: Friends who spend their time together confer mutual benefit. When they are asleep or apart, they retain the disposition to do so. But if the absence long it often makes men forget their friendship; hence the saying 'out of sight, out of mind'.

VI: Friendship arises less readily among sour and elderly people. Young men become friends much more quickly and easily than older men, although the latter may still be well-disposed toward others. On the other hand, to have many perfect friends is no more possible than to be in love with many people at once,

for love is a kind of excess of friendship.

VII: Another kind of friendship involves superiority, as the affection of father for son, husband for wife or master for servant. In such cases, affection is proportionate to merit; the better person must be loved more than he loves. There is a great gulf in the form of affection between ordinary people and gods or royalty. This raises a problem as to whether friends do actually wish each other the greatest of goods, i.e. to be a god, because they will no longer have them as friends. It seems, then, that a friend will wish for the best for a human being, but presumably will reserve the very best of these for himself.

VIII: Most people seem to want to be loved rather than to love. For honour is men's confirmation of their own opinion of themselves. But people enjoy being loved for its own sake, so it may be supposed that being loved is better than being honoured. Friendship seems to consist more in giving than in receiving affection, as we see in the joy that mothers show in loving their children. A friendship of utility occurs between unequals, such as the poor and the rich, or the ignorant and the scholarly man, but only inasmuch as each can get something in return. We might add here the sort of lovers who make themselves look ridiculous by demanding to be loved as much as they love. This may be connected with the attraction of difference, but it is irrelevant to our enquiry.

IX: There is some similarity, as we have said, between friendship and justice, as is seen in the wider community. The whole State community, we presume, was originally formed for mutual advantage, just as sailors join together to run the ship or businessmen to make money, or soldiers look to plunder or conquest.

X: There are three kinds of political constitution, and an equal number of perversions of them. Monarchy is the best form, but can degenerate into tyranny when the ruler begins to pursue his own interests above those of his subjects. Aristocracy can degenerate into rule according to property ownership, which we call timocracy, where corrupt officials share the resources of the state. Timocracy itself can disintegrate into democracy, which is not nearly so bad. There are analogies in the household, where the relationship of fathers and sons is a sort of monarchy, though the way in which Persians treat their sons more resembles tyranny. The association of husband and wife is clearly aristocratic, while of brothers is like to timocracy. Democracy is like a household with a weak head so that everyone can do as they wish.

XI: In each of these political constitutions there is a sort of friendship to the same extent as there is justice. There is the friendship of a king for his subjects. There is the friendship between brothers, like the timocracy which unites the members of a social club. In perverted constitutions, where there is nothing in common between ruler and ruled, friendship and justice are rarely found.

XII: Friendship between relatives appears to be derived from parental affection. Parents love their children from the moment of birth, but children only come to understand this later. Hence mothers love their children more than fathers do. This love of children for parents, or of men for the gods, implies a relation to an object superior to oneself. Friendship between brothers is not unlike that between comrades, while friendly feelings between other relations are proportionate to the closeness of the relationship. Man is by his nature a pairing rather than a social creature and the family is an older and more necessary thing than the state. Humans cohabit not merely to produce children, but, as the functions of husband and wife are different they supply each other's deficiencies to secure the necessities of life. Children, too, form a bond between parents, which is why childless marriages so often break up.

XIII: Quarrels occur most of all in friendships based on usefulness because each is only using the other for his own benefit, but in friendships based on virtue, quarrels are rare because the friends are eager to treat each other well.

XIV: In friendships based on superiority quarrels often arise because the person who is superior thinks he should receive more by virtue of his superiority, and the one who is inferior thinks he should receive more because of his greater need. This is especially true of honours paid to parents or to the gods. So much for our discussion.

Book Nine

I: In all dissimilar friendships, there is equitable exchange. When the shoemaker receives something of equal value for his shoes, there is common currency- money. But in emotional matters the lover often complains that his love is not reciprocated, or the lover who used to promise everything, now gives nothing. Quarrels occur when the outcome of the friendship differs from the parties' desires. Like the story of the harpist who played well but was refused his fee because he had already been rewarded with the joy of playing to an audience. If both wanted pleasure, all would be satisfactory. But if one wants pleasure, and the other gain, all fails, for it is what a man actually needs that he is anxious to get, and it is only for its sake that he is prepared to give what he has.

II: Ought one invariably to defer to one's father? Should one trust the physician when you are ill? When voting for a general, should one choose someone with military experience? It is not easy to lay down firm guidelines, but surely no one person is entitled to deference in everything? As a general rule, it is more important to repay benefits than to make spontaneous presents. Not even a father, it seems, is entitled to everything, just as Zeus does not get all the sacrifices. Parents do have a special claim upon their children for support, and one should certainly honour older persons by rising to receive them, finding seats for them and so on. As for relations, members of the same clan, comrades and others we ought to consider the different relationships with care. This is not easy, but we must do the best we can.

III: When should we break off a friendship? When the association was one of utility or pleasure there seems nothing odd in dissolving it if they no longer have the attributes we sought. When a person is mistaken in thinking he has been loved for his character, though his friend has done nothing to suggest it, he has only himself to blame. But to deceive another in such matters is worse than uttering forged coins, for it is of something more valuable than money. But what when one friend remains the same, but the other rises above him in virtue? To remain friends would seem impossible. Perhaps, as often with boyhood friendships, one should show a little more favour to former friends for old time's sake.

IV: Friends: *I) Wish good for each other. II) Hope each other will thrive. III) Spend time with each other. IV) Share similar tastes. V) Grieve and rejoice together.*

V: Goodwill differs somewhat from either friendship or affection, for we can feel it towards people we do not even know. But goodwill can be the beginning of friendship, just as seeing a person is the beginning of love. It is love when one longs for someone who is absent. In general, goodwill is aroused by merit, in the way in which we might feel towards an admired sportsman.

VI: Concord also seems to be a friendly feeling. It is not the same as agreeing about, say, the way the stars move, but is more a political feeling, where citizens put their common resolves into effect. But bad men rarely share the same thoughts because wants more than his own share; thus they often end up in a state of discord.

VII: Benefactors seem to love those they have benefited more than beneficiaries love their benefactors, this curiosity requires some explanation. Most people would think that it is like the situation of debtors and creditors where the creditor is self-interestedly concerned for the welfare of one who owes him money. Epicharmus said that this is 'taking the dim view', but there is some truth that people prefer to be well treated than to treat others well. But every craftsman or poet loves his own works, just as everyone feels stronger affection for things which cost them pains.

VIII: We censure 'self-lovers', but is it actually bad that a person love himself more than others? If anyone made it his practice to do just or virtuous acts, no-one would call him a self-lover. Yet he might well be so, for he who assigns to himself that which is honourable and good, who does fine deeds, is surely enjoying the best for himself.

IX: Does a happy man need friends? So why do some hold Euripides' view that: "When fortune smiles, what need of others?" But a man who sees is aware that he is seeing, if thinking, we are aware of our own existence. To be conscious that one is alive is a good thing in itself, and a good man wishes the same joy for others. Thus, for a good man, the existence of virtuous friends is almost as desirable as his own

X: How many friends should one have? Hesiod's principle that "neither let many share thy table, or none" may be true for friends through utility, and a few friends for amusement are enough, like a pinch of seasoning in food. But, with friends of good character, they must also be friends of one another, if they are to live together, and this is difficult if the numbers are large. Equally, it is difficult to fully sympathise with all the joys and sorrows of many simultaneously. It is not possible to find many worthy of such love, so we must be content with a few.

XI: Do we need friends the more in good times or in bad? Those who are in misfortune need help, while in good times they need companionship. Thus friendship is more needed in adversity, where friends can lighten one's grief. But a resolute man will invite friends to share success, but hesitate to involve them in misfortunes. It is true that girls enjoy sharing their moanings, but their example may be ignored.

XII: Just as lovers delight in the sight of each other, so the finest thing for friends to do, is to spend time with each other. Everyone wishes to share their pleasures, be it in drinking, playing dice, or going in for athletics or hunting, or philosophy. In such a way they improve each other. So much for friendship.

Book Ten:

I: Next, we must discuss pleasure, for it is very closely bound up with human nature. Now, some philosophers say that pleasure is the Good. Those who claim it is wholly bad probably do so, not from conviction, but to encourage self-restraint. Let us examine these views.

II & III: Eudoxus thought that pleasure is the ultimate Good. But this view has been more accepted out of admiration for Eudoxus' character than the soundness of the argument. He also said that the addition of pleasure to a good thing makes it more desirable. But this argument only shows that pleasure is a good thing, not the ultimate good. Plato refutes the view that pleasure is the ultimate Good by pointing out that a pleasant life is more desirable with wisdom than without, and that if the mixture is better, pleasure is not The Good, for the good cannot become more desirable by adding anything to it. It would seem that our aim is to discover what thing we all share, and which cannot be made better by the addition of some good. If only irrational creatures sought pleasure, there might be some truth in the idea that what creatures seek is not a good, but as thinking men are attracted to it also, then plainly those who hold such a view are talking nonsense. Some say that pleasure is not a good as its opposite, evil, can be opposed as well by another evil as by a good. This argument has some merit, but need not concern us here. Others claim that the good and pleasures cannot be the same thing for pleasures vary in degree, which the ultimate good cannot. They take pleasure to be a process, like a form of motion, which can be quick or slow. Yet, however quickly or slowly it comes on pleasure is complete at every point during the time in which one is pleased. Again, they claim that pain is a deficiency and pleasure its replenishment. This might be true of food, but the pleasure of, say, learning, is not preceded by any pain. Some people take pleasure in disreputable things, but we may be sure this only applies to people of an unhealthy disposition.

IV: Let us make a fresh start at discussing pleasure. Like the act of seeing, pleasure is something that is complete at any particular moment. It is not like the building of a temple, where separate columns and carvings must be brought together to make the whole. There are pleasures for each of the senses, and the pleasure seems to be keenest when the eyes, or ears or whatever, are at their best. Probably, we cannot feel pleasure continuously because the senses become fatigued.

V: Pleasures of the intellect differ from those of the senses. Those who work with pleasure show better judgement and greater precision. This is clear when we see how activities are hindered by competing pleasures. Thus flute players will be diverted from following a discussion if they catch the sound of their instrument being played, just as people who eat sweets at the theatre do so most when the acting is poor. Since activities differ in goodness, each has a pleasure proper to it. The pleasure proper to a worthy activity is good and that proper to an unworthy activity bad. Equally, sight is superior to touch, and hearing and smell to taste, so their pleasures differ in the same way. Further, intellectual pleasures are superior sensual ones. Clearly, disgraceful pleasures are not really pleasures, except to the depraved. But what are the good pleasures of a good man?

VI: Happiness is not a state, but an activity of some sort which is chosen for its own sake and is self-sufficient. Happiness is not to be found in mere amusement, for even children are capable of it. Rather, amusements are, as Anacharsis said, a way of 'playing that we might work harder', for no-one can work without rest. We know that serious things are better than comical ones, and we know that anyone, even a slave, can have bodily pleasures. But to say that a mere slave could appreciate happiness would be as ridiculous as treating him as a full human being!

VII: If true happiness is an activity in accordance with virtue, it must be in accordance with the highest virtue and with the very best part of man. Now contemplation is the highest thing in us, and philosophical wisdom is the most pleasant and the most virtuous activity, marvellous in its purity and permanence. It is also the most self-sufficient of activities, requiring nothing more to be complete.

VIII: Life lived with moral virtue is happy in a secondary way, since justice and bravery are purely human concerns. But it is in contemplative activity that the truest happiness exists. The gods, as we know them, are supremely blessed and happy, and their only activity is contemplative.

IX: Finally, we must ask how this knowledge can be put into practice. Some hold that people can be good by nature, others that it must be taught. Clearly, the divine bestows our nature, and teaching does not always succeed. A temperate way of life is not easy for most people, which is why the State should encourage goodness by appealing to finer feelings, and discourage evil by penalties. Few states seem to do this, leaving it very much for fathers to promote goodness in the ruling of their own households. Where can he acquire the skill to do this? He needs knowledge of legislation, which is certainly not got from the sophists, nor will he learn it from politicians, nor by just studying books.