



**Aristotle**

*Nicomachean Ethics*

# NICOMACHEAN ETHICS I.1

1094a1 - 16

Key terms  
in N. Ethics

ART = ΤΕΧΝΗ (τεχνη)

ACTION = ΠΡΑΞΙΣ (πραξις)

CHOICE = ΠΡΟΑΙΡΕΣΙΣ  
(προαιρεσις)

GOOD = ΑΓΑΘΟΝ / ἄγαθον)

END = ΤΕΛΟΣ (τελος)

ACTIVITY = ΕΝΕΡΓΕΙΑ  
(ἐνεργεια)

PRODUCT = ΕΡΓΟΝ (ἐργον)

**EVERY ART** and every inquiry and likewise every **ACTION** and **CHOICE** seems to seek some **GOOD**; 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; and of strategy, victory; that of economics, wealth. But where such arts fall under a single capacity... 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.

\* Compare **PLATO** -  
e.g. **PHAEDO**, 97c

# NICOMACHEAN ETHICS I.2

1094a19 – b12

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**.

...And POLITICS appears to be of this nature...

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 **HUMAN GOOD**.

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...

The word translated here as "COMPLETE" TELEION, is derived from TELOS, "END."

These, then, are the ends at which our inquiry aims, since it is POLITICAL SCIENCE, in one sense of that term.

In the Greek, the word here is just POLITIKĒ again.

POLITICS = POLITIKĒ (πολιτική)

STATE = POLIS (πολις)

# POLITICS

## I.1 1252a1

STATE = POLIS (πολις)

**EVERY STATE** IS A COMMUNITY OF SOME KIND, and every community is established with a view to **THE GOOD**; for everyone always acts in order to obtain that which they think good. But, if all communities aim at some good, the **STATE**, or **POLITICAL COMMUNITY**, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the **HIGHEST GOOD**.

## I.2 1252b27

...When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly, or quite **SELF-SUFFICING**, the **STATE** comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a **GOOD LIFE**. And therefore, if the earlier forms of society are **NATURAL**, so is the state, for it is the **END** of them, and the nature of a thing is the end.

For what each thing is when **FULLY DEVELOPED**, we call its nature, whether we are speaking of a man, a horse, or a household. Besides, the **FINAL CAUSE** and end of a thing is the best, and to be self-sufficing is the end and the best.

# POLITICS

I.2 1253a2

**HENCE IT IS EVIDENT** that the **STATE** is a creation of **NATURE**, and that **MAN** is by nature a **POLITICAL ANIMAL**.

And whoever (by nature, and not by mere accident) is without a **STATE**, is either a bad man, or else above humanity; he is like the "tribeless, lawless, heartless one" whom Homer denounces...

Now, it is evident that man is more of a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animal. Nature, as we often say, makes nothing in vain, and man is the only animal with the gift of **SPEECH**.

And whereas mere voice is but an indication of pleasure or pain, and is therefore found in other animals (for their nature attains to the perception of pleasure and pain, and the intimation of them to one another, and no further), the **POWER OF SPEECH** is intended to set forth the **EXPEDIENT** and the **INEXPEDIENT**, and therefore likewise the **JUST** and the **UNJUST**.

And it is a characteristic of **MAN** that he alone has any sense of **GOOD** and **EVIL**, of **JUST** and **UNJUST**, and the like; and the association of living beings who have this sense makes a household, and a **STATE**.

**SPEECH** = **LOGOS** (λογος)

*The Greek word 'LOGOS' here was traditionally translated as 'REASON'. Modern translators prefer 'SPEECH' to emphasize the communicative dimension suggested by the context.*

# NICOMACHEAN ETHICS I.3

1094b13 – 1095a13

Depending on the context,  
the same word, ἔθος, is  
translated either  
'CHARACTER',  
or 'MORALS.' –  
It is the root word  
for 'ETHICS' - ἠθικῆ  
(ἠθικη)

character = ἔθος (ἦθος)

incontinence = ΑΚΡΑΣΙΑ  
(ἀκρασία)

reason = ΛΟΓΟΣ (λογος)

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...

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 – the incontinent – knowledge brings no profit; but to those who desire and act in accordance with reason, knowledge of such matters will be of great benefit.

# NICOMACHEAN ETHICS I.4

1095a14 - 28

**HAPPINESS = ΕΥΔΑΙΜΟΝΙΑ**  
(εὐδαιμονία)

*The Greek term eudaimonía  
encompasses more than the word  
'happiness' generally does today.  
It might also be translated as  
"well-being" or "flourishing."*

PLATO

LET US RESUME our inquiry, and state, in view of the fact that all knowledge and every pursuit aims at some good, what is it that we say **POLITICAL SCIENCE** aims at, and what is the **HIGHEST OF ALL GOODS** achievable by **ACTION**.

Verbally, most people agree; for both the multitude and the refined say that it is HAPPINESS, and identify living well and faring well with happiness. But they disagree about what happiness is, and the multitude do not give the same answer as the wise.

For the multitude think that it is something obvious and plain – for instance, pleasure, wealth, or honor. They differ, however, among themselves – and often even the same man identifies it with different things, with health when he is ill; with wealth when he is poor. And when they are conscious of their own ignorance, they admire anyone who proclaims some great thing that is above their comprehension.

Now, some have thought that besides those many goods, there is also some other good that is good in itself, and that causes the goodness of all of them, as well.

# NICOMACHEAN ETHICS I.4

1095a30-b9

PRINCIPLE = *archē* (ἀρχή)  
The word *archē* can  
mean 'RULE'  
and also 'BEGINNING'

**WE MUST NOTICE**, however, the difference between arguments *from* principles and arguments *toward* principles....

For while we must begin with what is evident, things are evident in two ways -- some to us, some without qualification. Presumably, then, we must begin from things known to *us*.

This is why anyone 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 a starting-point [*archē*]; if this is sufficiently plain to him, he will not need the reason as well; and the man who has been well brought up can easily get starting-points.

NOBLE = *kalos* (καλός)

This word means both  
'noble' and 'beautiful'

HABIT = *ethos* (ἦθος)

The word *ETHOS* (ἦθος)  
is closely related to  
*ēthos* (ἦθος),  
the term translated  
as 'CHARACTER,'  
and 'MORAL..'

(See II.1, 11035a17)



# NICOMACHEAN ETHICS I.5

1095b15-1096a2

## 3 KINDS OF LIFE:

Enjoyment

Political

Contemplative

‘THEŌRETİKOS’  
(θεωρητικός)

Aristotle postpones  
discussion of the  
contemplative life  
until Book X.

PRACTICAL WISDOM = *phronēsis*  
(φρονησις)

VIRTUE = *aretē* (ἀρετή)

The word *aretē* can be  
translated as  
"EXCELLENCE"

**TO JUDGE** from the lives most men lead, **MOST MEN** – and men of the most vulgar type – seem (not without some ground) to identify the **GOOD, 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 – the one just mentioned [*i.e.*, the life of **ENJOYMENT**]; second, the **POLITICAL** life; and third, the **CONTEMPLATIVE** life.

Now the mass of mankind are evidently quite slavish in their tastes, preferring a life suitable to beasts...

People of superior refinement and of active disposition identify happiness with **HONOR**; for this is, roughly, the end of the **POLITICAL LIFE**.

But it seems too superficial for what we are looking for, since it is thought to depend on those who bestow **HONOR** rather than him who receives it, but the good we suppose to be something of one's own, and not easily taken from one. Further, men seem to pursue honor in order to be assured of their merit, at least it is by men of **PRACTICAL WISDOM** that they seek to be honored, and among them 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 honor, the end of the political life.

# NICOMACHEAN ETHICS I.6

1096a12 – 1097a9

We had better consider the universal good and discuss thoroughly what is meant by it, although such an inquiry is made an uphill one by the fact that the **FORMS** have been introduced by friends of our own...

PLATO!

...Let us separate, then, things good in themselves from useful things, and consider whether the former are called good by reference to a single **IDEA**. What sort of goods would one call good in themselves? Is it those things that are pursued even when isolated from others, such as intelligence, sight, and certain pleasures and honors? ...Or is it nothing other than the Idea of good good in itself? In that case the Form will be empty. ..

Even if there is some one good which is universally predicable of all goods, or is capable of separate and independent existence, clearly it could not be achievable or attained by man; but we are now seeking something attainable....

It is hard, too, to see how a weaver or a carpenter will be benefited in regard to his own craft by knowing this 'good itself', or how the man who has viewed the Idea itself will be a better doctor or general thereby...

# NICOMACHEAN ETHICS I.7

1097a15 – b22

REASON = LOGOS (λογος)

'LOGOS' is given here as  
'RATIONAL PRINCIPLE' in  
the translation by W.D. Ross.  
It might instead  
be rendered as 'SPEECH',  
(in light of Aristotle's argument  
from POLITICS II.2.



**BUT LET US RETURN** once again to the **GOOD** we are looking for, and consider what it could be.

...The best good is evidently something **COMPLETE**...

Now **HAPPINESS** more than anything else, seems complete without qualification. For we always choose it because of itself, never because of something else... **HAPPINESS**, then, is something complete and self-sufficient, and is the **END** of **ACTION**.

A clearer account might be given, if we could first ascertain the **FUNCTION** of man.

**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 **REASON**...

Now, if the function of man is an activity of soul in accordance with (or not without) **REASON**, and we say a 'so-and-so' and a **GOOD** 'so-and-so' have a function which is of the same kind, then...

**HUMAN GOOD** turns out to be **ACTIVITY OF SOUL** exhibiting **VIRTUE**, and if there are more than one virtue, in conformity 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; so too, one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed or happy.

**VIRTUE**  
aretē (ἀρετή)

# NICOMACHEAN ETHICS II.1

1103a15

INTELLECTUAL = *dianoētikēs* (διανοητικῆς)

MORAL = *ēthikē* (ἠθικῆ)

HABIT = *ethos* (ἦθος)

MORAL virtues =  
virtues of CHARACTER

**VIRTUE** then, is of two kinds, INTELLECTUAL and MORAL.

**INTELLECTUAL VIRTUE** arises and grows mostly from teaching; that is why it needs experience and time.

**MORAL VIRTUE** results from HABIT, hence its name is a variation of the word 'habit.'

Hence it is clear that none of the moral virtues arises in us naturally. For if something is by nature in one condition, habituation does not bring it into another condition... And so the virtues arise in us neither by nature nor against nature.

Rather we are by nature able to acquire them, and we are completed through habit.