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INTRODUCTION

ARISTOTLE WAS BORN IN 384 IN THE SMALL TOWNSHIP OF Stagira, in north-eastern Greece. His father, Nicomachus, was a physician attached to the Macedonian court. At the age of seventeen he moved south to Athens, and joined the Academy, that brilliant band of philosophers, scientists, mathematicians, and politicians which gathered in Athens under Plato's leadership. For twenty years he remained as Plato's pupil and colleague, and made a name for himself as an industrious student, a vigorous polemicist, and an independent thinker, with an early interest in rhetoric, logic, metaphysics, and ethics.

In 359 King Philip II succeeded to the throne of Macedonia. He adopted an expansionist policy, waged war on a number of Greek city-states, and made himself master of Greece. It cannot have been an easy time for a Macedonian in Athens, though Aristotle remained on the warmest terms with Plato, whom on his death in 347 he described as the best and happiest of mortals 'whom it is not right for evil men even to praise'.

Once Plato was dead, however, Aristotle found it prudent to emigrate. He settled in the eastern Aegean, first at Atarneus, then at Assos. Hermias, the ruler of Atarneus, was a graduate of the Academy, and offered an intellectual home to Aristotle and a few fellow-exiles. Aristotle later married his adopted daughter.

During his period in Assos, and during the next few years when he lived at Mytilene on the island of Lesbos, Aristotle carried out extensive scientific research, particularly in zoology and marine biology, whose results remained unrivalled for two millennia. Here Aristotle first worked with Theophrastus, who was to become his successor and greatest pupil.

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In 343 Aristotle was summoned to the Macedonian capital by King Philip as tutor to his thirteen year old son, the future Alexander the Great. We know nothing of the content of his instruction, though forgers later concocted correspondence between the monarch and the philosopher. Within ten years of succeeding his father, Alexander had made himself master of an empire that stretched from the Danube to the Indus and included Libya and Egypt. While Alexander was conquering Asia, Aristotle was back in Athens, where in 335 he established his own school in the Lyceum, a gymnasium just outside the city boundary. Now fifty, he built up a substantial library, and collected around him a group of research students, called ‘peripatetics’ because they walked up and down while discussing philosophy. And for a decade he explored and expounded and taught the entire field of human knowledge—logic, metaphysics, theology, history, politics, ethics, aesthetics, psychology, anatomy, biology, zoology, botany, astronomy, meteorology, and the ancient equivalents of physics and chemistry.

Aristotle’s anatomical and zoological studies gave a new and definitive turn to his philosophy. Though he retained a lifelong interest in metaphysics, his mature philosophy constantly interlocks with empirical science, and his thinking takes on a biological cast. Most of the works that have come down to us, with the exception of the zoological treatises, probably belong to this second Athenian sojourn. There is no certainty about their chronological order, and indeed in the form in which they have survived it is possible to detect evidence of different layers of composition, though no consensus has been reached about the identification or dating of these strata.

In 323 Alexander died in Babylon. When the news reached Athens, Aristotle, unwilling to share the fate of Socrates, left the city lest the Athenians put a second philosopher to death. He went to Chalcis, where he died a few months later. His will, which has survived, is a happy and humane document.

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ARISTOTLE LEFT BEHIND A SUBSTANTIAL CORPUS OF PHILOSOPHICAL writing: although most of it has long been lost, the items which have survived fill two thousand or more modern pages, and they cover almost the whole range of Aristotle's extensive intellectual interests.

In his major works Aristotle's style is very different from that of Plato. The prose he wrote is commonly neither lucid nor polished, though he could write passages of moving eloquence when he chose. His treatises, as we have them, are thought to derive from the lecture courses which he gave during his long teaching career—they are, so to speak, his lecture notes. The notes were not used once and then filed away: rather, they were taken up, year in year out, as the exigencies of lecturing dictated; and they were subject to a series of additions, corrections and refinements. They were later prepared for public circulation; and although the ancient editors doubtless indulged in some ordering and polishing, what we now have before us is essentially what Aristotle had on the lectern in front of him when he addressed his pupils. If we look for a modern parallel for the composition and editing of the treatises, we might think of a twentieth century posthumous publication: *Sense and Sensibilia*, by the Oxford philosopher J. L. Austin, was published after his death by a colleague who put together a text from Austin's own lecture notes which had evolved over the years.

Everything Aristotle wrote is fertile with ideas and full of energy; every sentence is packed with intellectual punch. But effort is needed to decode the message of his jagged clauses: what has been delivered to us from Aristotle across the centuries is a set of telegrams rather than epistles.

HUMAN KNOWLEDGE, ACCORDING TO ARISTOTLE, DIVIDES into disciplines or 'sciences'. These sciences group under three main heads: the contemplative, the practical, and the productive. The major divisions of contemplative science are theology, mathematics, and 'physics' or natural science; and the majority of Aristotle's surviving works, being concerned

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with natural science, fall therefore under the heading of contemplation. Productive sciences are, naturally enough, sciences that have a product. They include weaving and architecture, with products such as garments and houses, but also disciplines such as strategy and rhetoric, where the product is something less concrete, such as victory on the battlefield or in the law-courts. Aristotle's ethical treatises are works of practical science. What that means is that the characteristic aim of studying ethics is not the acquisition of knowledge about action but action itself—we study ethics, according to Aristotle, not in order to know what good men are like, but in order to act as good men act.

Ethics is only one of the practical sciences. Another is politics. The two sciences are continuous with each other, and Aristotle's *Politics* is in a manner a complement to his ethical writings. The practical sciences cannot easily be studied in isolation, either from one another or from the theoretical sciences: a student of ethics is unlikely to discover how a good man will act unless he has some knowledge of the general capacities and characteristics of human beings. One of the most familiar utterances of Aristotelian anthropology is the claim that man is a 'political animal': distinctively human activity is carried on in a political setting.

Aristotle often addressed ethical topics, but much of what he wrote is lost or survives only in fragments. The standard corpus of his works contains three substantial treatises of moral philosophy: the *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE), the *Eudemian Ethics* (EE), and the *Magna Moralia* (MM). In addition there is a pamphlet *On Virtues and Vices* (VV). The titles of the first two treatises have been variously interpreted. In antiquity the adjectives 'Nicomachean' and 'Eudemian' were taken to refer either to the authors of the works or to their dedicatees (though one does not normally dedicate one's lecture notes). French scholars refer to the *Éthique à Nicomaque* and the *Éthique à Eudème*; but the adjectives are generally taken to indicate that the former work was edited by Aristotle's son Nicomachus and the latter by his pupil Eudemus.

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As for the *Magna Moralia* or *Large Ethics*, which is in fact by far the smallest of the three treatises, the commonest explanation of the title invokes the fact that the two ‘books’ into which it is divided are each much larger than any of the ‘books’ of the other two treatises.

The status of the three treatises and the relationship among them is complex and controverted. Between Aristotle’s death and the second century AD a dozen authors cite Aristotle’s ethical writings: all but one of them take their quotations from books that form part of the *Eudemian Ethics*. But this early primacy of the Eudemian over the Nicomachean treatise comes to an abrupt end in the second century AD with the work of Aspasius, who wrote a line-by-line commentary on several books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Since that time it has been almost universally agreed that the NE is not only a genuine work but also the most important of the three treatises. In the nineteenth century, indeed, the EE was treated as spurious, and published under the name of Aristotle’s pupil, Eudemus of Rhodes. In the twentieth century scholars came to regard it as a genuine but immature work, superseded by an NE written in the Lyceum period. Throughout the Middle Ages, and since the revival of classical scholarship, it is the NE that has been treated as *the Ethics of Aristotle*, and it is indeed the most generally popular of all his surviving works.

But there is a twist to the story. The EE—in the modern editions—has a large gap in the middle: it contains nothing corresponding to Books 5, 6, and 7 of the NE. But at the end of Book III of the EE, the mediaeval manuscripts indicate that Books IV, V, and VI have not been copied out since they are the same as the three Nicomachean books. It has become clear, on both stylistic and philosophical grounds, that the three ‘common’ books began their career in the EE and were later added to fill a gap in the NE. (The most obvious sign of this is that modern editions of the NE contain two distinct accounts of pleasure in Books 7 and 10—the transplantation created an otherwise inexplicable duplication.)

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Once the common books are restored to the EE the case for regarding the EE as an immature and inferior work collapses: nothing remains, for example, of the argument that the EE is closer to Plato, and therefore earlier, than the NE. Moreover, internal historical allusions suggest that the disputed books, and therefore the EE also, belong to the Lyceum period. But the similarities and dissimilarities between the two treatises are perhaps to be explained not by any simple chronological hypothesis, but rather by differences in audience and editorship.

What of the MM? Both style and content make it most unlikely to be an authentic work of Aristotle, and internal historical references have been taken to suggest a date in the late fourth century. However, it never explicitly discusses Aristotle in the third person, and its author appears to refer to Aristotle's works as his own. In general the MM follows closely the line of thought of the EE, but it contains a number of misunderstandings of its doctrine. Some scholars regard it as an independent construction of the time of Theophrastus; others surmise that it consists of notes made by a student at the Lyceum during Aristotle's delivery of a course of lectures resembling the EE. In the latter case, a modern parallel may be found in the posthumous publications by pupils of Wittgenstein of their notes of his Cambridge lectures.

As for VV, it is a trifle, and if it is Aristotelian in its ultimate inspiration, rare is the scholar who has ever thought that it came from Aristotle's own hand.

THE TEACHING OF THE THREE ETHICAL TREATISES IS, IN general, very similar. The ground covered by them overlaps with that covered by Plato's *Republic*, though Aristotle's rejection of the Theory of Ideas makes for substantial differences between the moral teaching of the two philosophers. The Idea of good, Aristotle says, cannot be the chief good of which ethics treats, if only because ethics is a practical science, about what is within human power to achieve, whereas

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an everlasting and unchanging Idea of good could only be of theoretical interest.

In place of the Idea of good Aristotle offers happiness (in Greek, *eudaimonia*) as the supreme good with which ethics is concerned; for, like Plato, he sees an intimate connection between living virtuously and living happily. In all the ethical treatises a happy life is a life of virtuous activity, and each of them offers an analysis of the concept of virtue and a classification of virtues of different types. One class is that of the virtues of character, or the 'moral' virtues, such as courage and temperance, that constantly appeared in Plato's ethical discussions. The other class is that of intellectual virtues: here Aristotle makes a much sharper distinction than Plato ever did between the intellectual virtue of wisdom, which governs ethical behaviour, and the intellectual virtue of understanding, which is expressed in theoretical endeavour and contemplation. The principal difference between the NE and the EE is that in the former Aristotle regards perfect happiness as constituted solely by the exercise of a single intellectual virtue in the activity of theoretical contemplation, whereas in the latter it consists of the harmonious exercise of all the virtues, both intellectual and moral.

At the beginning of each of his treatises Aristotle reduces the possible answers to the question 'What is a good life?' to a short-list of three: wisdom, virtue, and pleasure. All thinkers, he says, connect happiness with one or other of three forms of life, the philosophical, the political, and the hedonistic. This triad provides the key to his own ethical inquiry. All the treatises contain detailed analyses of the concepts of virtue, wisdom and pleasure. And when Aristotle comes to present his own account of happiness, he can claim that it incorporates the attractions of all three of the traditional forms of life.

A crucial step towards achieving this is to apply the distinction between layers of potentiality and actuality that is ubiquitous in Aristotle's thought. The most relevant layer in this ethical area is that between a state and its use or

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exercise. Virtue and wisdom are both states, whereas happiness, Aristotle claims, is an activity, and therefore cannot be simply identified with either of them. The activity that constitutes happiness is, however, a use or exercise of virtue or virtues.

In each treatise, to fill out this conclusion takes many pages of analysis and argument—and analysis and argument of a particular kind. Aristotle warns us that the method of ethics is not the same as that of the contemplative or productive sciences. The sciences, he emphasizes, cannot all aspire to an equal degree of ‘precision’ or *akribeia*: different subject matters make different demands, and the subject matter of ethics in particular allows only a modest amount of precision. This notion remains somewhat obscure; but one important feature of it seems to be that of generality as opposed to universality: ethical judgements, like other judgements about sublunary matters, are lacking in precision because they hold ‘only for the most part’. This does not mean that Aristotle held that there are no absolutely valid moral rules: he tells us that there are—for instance there is no such thing as committing adultery with the right person at the right time in the right way, because adultery is always wrong. However, the observance of such absolute prohibitions will not get one very far towards the good life, and Aristotle, unlike his later Christian disciples, does not spend much time on them.

In any event, Aristotle does not attempt to establish rules which determine what is to be done in any specific concrete situation. Among the contemplative sciences mathematics offers precise measurement in every case; and the movement of the heavens can in principle be determined accurately. That is not so with the productive sciences, of which Aristotle’s favourite example is medicine: medical science alone will not determine the treatment to be given to an individual patient in a particular case—there is need of the judgement of the practised and practising doctor. Moreover, the reasoning that lies behind the doctor’s judgement will

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use the formal rules of deduction in a different manner from the contemplative sciences, arguing not from axiomatic principles to theoretical conclusions, but from the end to be achieved to the action to be undertaken. Ethics, in its turn, is one stage further removed from the contemplative sciences: the action to be done on a particular occasion will only be an expression of virtue if it springs from the experience and judgement of the individual moral agent.

Any work of practical philosophy is liable to contain judgements of two different sorts. It will contain, on the one hand, substantive moral judgements, to the effect that certain men or types of men, or actions or types of action, *et cetera*, are (at least for the most part) good or bad, right or wrong, virtuous or vicious, obligatory or impermissible, and so on. On the other hand, a work of moral philosophy will contain judgements about such substantive moral judgements, to the effect that they are or are not factual or objective or prescriptive, *et cetera*; that the concepts they use are to be elucidated in such and such a way; that they are logically interrelated in such and such a manner, and so on. In short, it will contain adversions on what is sometimes called the ‘logic’ of moral discourse.

Aristotle does not draw a distinction between these two kinds of judgement (termed by some modern philosophers ‘ethical’ vs. ‘meta-ethical’ judgements). Nor is it easy to apply the distinction to individual propositions in his treatises. Perhaps indeed it is not always helpful to try to do so, since what he is up to often cuts across the distinction. To illustrate this, consider the famous doctrine of the virtuous mean.

The doctrine in fact has two parts or aspects. First, the actions and emotions which express moral virtue will, Aristotle tells us, avoid excess and defect. A temperate person, for instance, will avoid eating or drinking too much; but he will also avoid eating or drinking too little. Virtue chooses the mean, or middle ground, between excess and defect: eating and drinking the right amount. Aristotle goes through a

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long list of virtues, beginning with the traditional ones of courage and temperance, but including others such as liberality, candour, dignity, and conviviality, and sketches how each of them is concerned with a mean. It should be stressed that this part of the doctrine of the mean is not intended as a recipe for mediocrity or an injunction to stay in the middle of the herd. Aristotle warns us that what constitutes the right amount to drink, the right amount to give away, the right amount of talking to do, may differ from person to person, in the way that the amount of food fit for an Olympic champion may not suit a novice athlete.

Secondly, the virtues, besides being concerned with middle amounts of action and emotion, are themselves means in the sense that they occupy a middle ground between two contrary vices. Thus courage is in the middle, flanked on one side by over-confidence and on the other by cowardice; generosity treads the narrow path between miserliness and prodigality. But while there is a mean of action and passion, there is no mean of virtue itself: there cannot be too much of a virtue in the way that there can be too much of a particular kind of action or emotion.

Aristotle's account of virtue as a mean seems to many readers to be truistic in its first aspect and false in its second. After all, Aristotle himself allows that, in some cases at least, the virtuous mean is surrounded by more than a pair of vices; and in addition he says that it is 'true but unilluminating' to state that a temperate man will drink neither too much nor too little. Nonetheless, the doctrine of the virtuous mean is part of a distinctive ethical theory which contrasts with other influential systems of various kinds. Religious ethical theories, such as traditional Jewish or Christian doctrine, give the concept of a moral law (natural or revealed) a central role. Because most of the Ten Commandments begin with 'thou shalt not', this led historically to an emphasis on the prohibitive aspect of morality. Aristotle does believe that there are some actions that are altogether ruled out, as we saw earlier; but he stresses not the minimum

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necessary for moral decency but rather the conditions of achieving moral excellence. Nor is it only religious systems that contrast with Aristotle's account. For a utilitarian, or any kind of consequentialist, there is no class of actions to be ruled out in advance. Since the morality of an action, on this view, is to be judged by its consequences there can, in a particular case, be the right amount of adultery or murder.

Aristotle's teaching on the mean thus contains both ethical and meta-ethical elements. On the one hand he offers specific ethical injunctions, while on the other he sketches out the general structure of a moral system, which is a meta-ethical activity.

ARISTOTLE'S ETHICAL SYSTEM HAS HAD A PROFOUND AND lasting effect: by later philosophers it has been warmly embraced and hotly repudiated, never coldly ignored; and in various ways it has helped to mould the common moral consciousness. Thus modern readers who take up the ethical works for the first time will find themselves already familiar, at least to some degree, with several of its leading notions. They will also find much of it surprising—the dozens of pages on friendship, with scarcely a word about sex; or the appearance of pride and conviviality as virtues, and humility and diffidence as vices. Moreover, it can actually be questioned whether his ethical writings are works of moral philosophy at all, in the sense in which the word 'moral' was understood by later philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mill.

Certainly, one of Aristotle's aims is to help us understand what it is to be a good human being. But do his treatises examine the *morally* good man? This is not explicit in Aristotle's texts, which introduce the moral virtues at a later stage in the argument—and when he speaks of moral virtue the adjective is to be understood in a mildly archaic sense and means 'to do with character'. If we drop the assumption, we might suppose that Aristotle is dealing, primarily, not with moral goodness but with human expertise, or the

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technique of being a good man. A good man, according to Aristotle's initial suppositions, is a man who does well the things that are the uniquely characteristic activities of human beings. Moral conduct is part, but only a part, of such activities.

To see the difference between Aristotle's ethical system and the moral systems of later philosophers we should focus on the role played by happiness. Aristotle holds that happiness or *eudaimonia* is the supreme end of life. He does not maintain that happiness is the immediate aim of every action, but rather that it is the ultimate aim. What this amounts to may be put, dramatically, as follows: Suppose you are doing X. I ask you why, and you reply 'In order to achieve Y'. I then ask you why you are aiming at Y, and you say 'In order to achieve Z'. Our conversation may go on as long as you please; but, Aristotle argues, if your doing X is a purposeful action and not a pointless frivolity, then there must eventually come a point at which you reject my questioning and say: 'I am not aiming at that in order to achieve any further aim—that is my ultimate aim'. Aristotle also maintains that your penultimate line in any complete dialogue of this sort must be 'In order to achieve my own happiness'.

At different points in his ethical treatises, Aristotle presents two theses about happiness. One is that every considered human action does, as a matter of fact, aim at the agent's happiness. The other is that every considered human action ought, if it is to be rational, aim at the agent's happiness. (It is not clear whether he ever held these two propositions simultaneously.) Both these theses appear to be false. A woman may well map out her life in the service of others—staying in an unhappy marriage, perhaps, for the sake of her children; and surely in some cases she may be rational to do so.

Nevertheless, the belief that one's own happiness is and ought to be the ultimate end of one's actions was dominant throughout antiquity and survived into the Christian era. Augustine and Aquinas, no less than Aristotle, thought of

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individual happiness as the supreme good: however, according to them it could only be fully realised in an afterlife, and it was not to be achieved by one's own actions but was in the gift of God.

The thesis that happiness is as a matter of fact the aim of every fully human action was called into question in the middle ages by Anselm and Duns Scotus. Scotus agreed that human beings have a natural tendency to pursue happiness; but in addition he postulated another natural tendency—the tendency to pursue justice, no matter what the consequences may be for our own welfare.

The thesis that one's own happiness ought rationally to be the aim of every action was called into question in the age of enlightenment. Thus Jeremy Bentham maintained that the real standard of morality was the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and Immanuel Kant dethroned happiness itself from the central position it had held since Plato and Aristotle. Like Scotus, Kant thought that morality needed a different basis: he called it the sense of duty. But where Scotus had placed the appetite for justice on equal terms with the pursuit of happiness, Kant regarded duty as the supreme motive which must trump every other.

Earlier the question was raised whether Aristotle, Bentham, and Kant were all engaged in the same activity of moral philosophy. The answer is yes, if moral philosophy is the study of the ultimate reasons determining what we ought and ought not to do. The supreme position is assigned by Kant to duty, and by Aristotle to individual happiness, and by Bentham to general happiness. But were Aristotle and Bentham talking about the same thing? Bentham equated happiness with pleasure, which was a single indefinable feeling—produced, no doubt, in many different ways—and this feeling was the one thing that was good in itself and was the point of doing anything whatever. Aristotle on the other hand made a sharp distinction between the two concepts. Indeed, he thought it unhelpful to talk about pleasure in the abstract: there were pleasurable experiences and pleasurable

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activities, and the evaluation of a pleasure depended simply on the evaluation of the activity or experience enjoyed.

In everyday modern English, the sense of the word ‘happiness’ seems closer to Bentham than to Aristotle: it means a mental or emotional state or attitude. *Eudaimonia*, on the other hand, is not simply a mental state. To call a man *eudaimon* is to say something about how he lives and what he does. The notion of *eudaimonia* is closely tied, in a way in which the notion of happiness is not, to success. It would indeed be a mistake to replace ‘happiness’ by ‘success’ as a translation of the Greek word, since the success which ‘*eudaimonia*’ denotes is a very specific project, that of living a good life. But these considerations mean that the traditional English translation is not a perfect fit to Aristotle’s concept.

Happiness, Aristotle tells us early in each of his treatises, is activity of soul in accordance with virtue, in a complete life. Given that ‘activity of soul in accordance with virtue’ means the excellent performance of whatever activities are typical of living creatures, we can paraphrase Aristotle’s definition of human happiness as follows: A man is happy if and only if, over some considerable period of time, he frequently performs with some success the most perfect of typically human tasks.

Well, what, if anything, is typical of humans? The Aristotelian answer is that man is a rational animal and that his typical task is therefore rational activity. According to Aristotle, men may be said to be rational on two counts, and the notion of rational action is correspondingly twofold: I act rationally either in so far as I base my actions in some way upon reasoning, or in so far as I indulge in some sort of ratiocinative exercises. Selling my shares in the expectation of a drop in the market, and following out the Euclidean proof of Pythagoras’ theorem, are both rational acts, but rational in different ways; in the first case I might be said to be following or obeying my reason, in the second case simply to be exercising it.

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Aristotle's account of the moral virtues provides a description of rational activities of the first kind. He sums up his account of moral virtue by saying that it is a state of character expressed in choice, lying in the appropriate mean, determined by the prescription that a wise person would lay down. The role of reason appears in this definition in the reference to the prescription of the wise person. In order to complete this account, Aristotle has to explain what wisdom is, and how the wise person's prescriptions are reached. This he does in a book in which he treats of the intellectual virtues, whose exercises exhibit rationality of the second kind.

The two principal intellectual virtues are wisdom (or *phronesis*) and understanding (*sophia*): the first is the virtue of practical reason, concerned with human affairs, and the second is the virtue of theoretical reason, concerned with unchanging and eternal truths. The intellectual virtue of practical reason is inseparably linked with the moral virtues of the non-rational part of the soul. It is impossible, Aristotle tells us, to be really good without wisdom, or to be really wise without moral virtue. Virtuous action must be based on virtuous purpose. Purpose is reasoned desire, so that if purpose is to be good both the reasoning and the desire must be good. It is wisdom that makes the reasoning good, and moral virtue that makes the desire good. Aristotle admits the possibility of correct reasoning in the absence of moral virtue: this he calls 'cleverness'. He also admits the possibility of right desire in the absence of correct reasoning: such are the naturally virtuous impulses of children. But it is only when correct reasoning and right desire come together that we get truly virtuous action.

Readers of Aristotle are sometimes puzzled by this. If we have to acquire virtue in order to become wise, and we cannot become wise without virtue, how can we ever become wise or virtuous? The difficulty is spurious. It is as if one were to ask 'How can one become a husband? To be a husband you need to have a wife, but a woman can't be a wife unless she

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has a husband'. Just as a single union makes a man a husband and a woman a wife, the wedding of wisdom and virtue makes intelligence into wisdom and natural virtue into moral virtue.

In both of Aristotle's ethical treatises the virtue of theoretical reasoning takes higher rank than the virtue of practical reasoning. Indeed, in the *NE* happiness itself is identified with the exercise of understanding. Happiness, it has been stated, is the activity of soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are several virtues, in accordance with the best and most perfect virtue. We have, in the course of the treatise, learnt that there are both moral and intellectual virtues, and that the latter are superior; and among the intellectual virtues, understanding, which concerns eternal truths, is superior to wisdom, which concerns human affairs. Supreme happiness, therefore, is activity in accordance with understanding, an activity which Aristotle calls 'contemplation'.

What is contemplation? Aristotle does not offer any wholly satisfactory answer to this question, but two things are clear. First, an Aristotelian contemplator is no ascetic, denying the body for the good of his mind: Aristotle insists that a moderate supply of 'external goods' is a precondition of 'happy' intellectual activity. Secondly, Aristotelian contemplation is not, as we might be tempted to imagine, an exercise in discursive reasoning: it is not a matter of intellectual questing or research. As an argument for the thesis that a contemplator enjoys himself Aristotle observes that 'it stands to reason that those who possess knowledge pass their time more pleasantly than those who are still in pursuit of it'. Looking at a painting and listening to a piece of music, rather than producing a landscape or composing a sonata, are analogues of whatever it is that Aristotle has in mind.

In the *EE* happiness is identified not with the exercise of a single dominant virtue but with the exercise of all the virtues. Nonetheless, contemplation has a dominant position in the life of the happy person. For Aristotle says that the standard for measuring virtuous choices is set by their rela-

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tionship to contemplation: ‘What choice or possession of natural goods . . . will most conduce to the contemplation of god is best, and this is the noblest standard’.

Activity in accordance with the virtues is pleasant, and so the truly happy man will also have the most pleasant life. For a virtuous person will find things pleasant if and only if they are actually good: if goodness and pleasantness do not thus coincide then a person is not virtuous but is in an inferior state which Aristotle calls ‘continence’. The bringing about of this coincidence is the task of ethics. The EE ideal of happiness, therefore, given the role it assigns to contemplation, to the moral virtues, and to pleasure, can claim, as Aristotle promised, to combine the features of the traditional three lives, the life of the philosopher, the life of the politician, and the life of the pleasure-seeker. The happy man will value contemplation above all, but part of his happy life will be the exercise of political virtues and the enjoyment in moderation of natural human pleasures of body as well as of soul.

AN ETHICAL SYSTEM LIKE ARISTOTLE’S, WHICH MAKES the agent’s happiness the ultimate aim of his actions, must appear impossibly self-centred; and the attempt to make one’s own happiness the foundation stone of ethics is surely a fundamental defect in the Aristotelian theory. Within this egocentric framework Aristotle did devote much careful thought to the individual’s relationships to others. His reflections on these matters are to be found primarily in the chapters on justice and on friendship in each of the ethical treatises. In addition, a number of the other virtues are essentially social—for example, generosity and conviviality. But the ultimate point of these virtues—and indeed of justice itself—is the agent’s own happiness.

Aristotle makes a distinction between universal and particular justice. Universal justice, he tells us, is complete virtue, considered not in the abstract but in relation to one’s neighbour. Each of the virtues he has considered in the earlier books is incomplete unless this relation to others is

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incorporated in it. Many people can exercise virtue in their own affairs, but not in relation to their neighbour.

Particular justice is a specific virtue in its own right. Among other things, it concerns the matters that would nowadays be the province of the criminal and civil courts. Aristotle offers us several subdivisions: there is distributive justice (governing the allotment of the proceeds of military or commercial ventures, for instance) and rectificatory justice (the compensation for losses incurred either through defaults on contracts or as the result of crimes). Distributive justice involves taking into account the worth of the individuals between whom the goods are to be distributed—though it is not clear whether a person's 'worth' depends on his original contribution to the project or on his social status within a particular constitution. The consideration of distributive justice leads Aristotle into a disquisition on the nature of money and the purposes of commercial exchange. He adumbrates theses that later developed into the mediaeval doctrine of the just price, the economists' concept of the free market, and the Marxist labour theory of value. In treating of rectificatory justice Aristotle does not offer any theory to justify the institution of punishment, but devotes his attention to methods of restoring the *status quo* between wrongdoer and victim. In treating of political justice, he endeavours to sort out the relation between the natural and conventional elements in the constitution of a just society.

For Aristotle, justice and friendship are closely connected. His word for friendship also covers love, and his discussions of friendship treat of many kinds of loving relationships: those between husband and wife and between parents and children as well as those with comrades and business partners. In the relationship between husband and wife the husband is always presented as the superior partner, and commonly as the clear master of the household. Children, in Aristotle's view, should be seen and not heard, and not even seen too often: there can be friendship between father and son, but the two cannot be friends. Among the relationships

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which are more normally thought of as friendships Aristotle distinguished three different kinds: those based on virtue, those based on utility, and those based on pleasure. At times this tripartite division seems to operate as a strait-jacket confining his empirical observations, and it leads to a complex and implausible account of why a virtuous man has any need for friends at all. But the books are full of psychological insights on such matters as the factors that put a strain on relationships of different kinds and lead to their break-up.

THE TEXTS CONTAINED IN THIS VOLUME ARE NOT NEW translations of the Aristotelian ethical treatises. They are revised versions of the translations contained in the *The Complete Works of Aristotle* published by Princeton University Press in 1984, which was in its turn a revision, by Jonathan Barnes, of the eleven volumes of the Oxford Translation of Aristotle which had been published between 1908 and 1954. The Oxford Translation was undertaken under the auspices of the Jowett Copyright Trustees, a body set up under the will of Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol College, Oxford, from 1870 to 1893. The original Oxford translation of the NE was made by W. D. Ross, and later lightly revised by J. O. Urmson. The translation of the MM was by St G. Stock, and that of the EE and the VV by J. Solomon. The translations were made on the basis of Bywater's Greek text of the NE (and the common books), which was first published as an Oxford Classical Text in 1894, and of Susemihl's Teubner editions of the EE, the MM, and the VV, which were printed in Leipzig in 1883 and 1884. The translations presented here use the same editions of the Greek texts: in those few places in which we have preferred a different reading the fact is signalled in a footnote.

Innovations in the present revision are of various kinds. First, a few plain mistakes of translation have been corrected. Secondly—following a principle enunciated by Ross in the preface to his version of the NE—, we have imposed a greater homogeneity in the translation of several key words.

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Thirdly, one or two of the earlier translations of technical or semi-technical terms have been altered (the new versions are all noted in the Glossary).

A few examples may indicate where we have replaced the earlier versions of technical terms. For *'arete'* we have reverted to the traditional 'virtue' in place of the 'excellence' introduced by Barnes in the Revised Oxford Translation. We have preferred 'correct reasoning' to 'right reason' for *'orthos logos'*. As for *'phronesis'* and *'sophia'*, for centuries the standard translations were 'prudence' and 'wisdom'. But 'prudence' now means something like 'caution', and the expert knowledge of scientists and philologists is no longer called 'wisdom', which has acquired an overwhelmingly practical sense. So we have opted for 'wisdom' for *'phronesis'* and 'understanding' for *'sophia'*. It goes without saying that neither of those two translations is an exact fit—not even for the most part or in the majority of cases. The same is true of 'virtue' and *'arete'*, of 'happiness' and *'eudaimonia'*, and of any number of other pairings.

There are several cases where it is not possible to render a single Greek word by a single English counterpart—not even for the most part. Two salient examples are *'arche'* and *'ergon'*. The first of these can mean 'beginning', 'source', 'origin', 'axiom', 'principle', and also 'rule' or 'office'. For the second, different sentences call for 'function', 'task', 'job', 'work', 'output', 'product', 'deed', . . . In such cases, where it would be absurd to insist on homogeneity of translation, we have tried to reduce to a minimum the number of English equivalents.

As a result of the changes that have been mentioned, the revised translations differ from the original ones in something like twenty places a page. Nonetheless, the general style has not been greatly modified and the present version is recognizably the Oxford Translation.

It differs more visibly from the original Oxford Translation in two further respects. First, and unlike almost all other translations of Aristotle, it presents in the correct form the EE and what remains of the NE: that is to say,

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the ‘common books’ are printed in the EE and it is the NE which has a gap in it. Secondly, and again unlike almost all other translations of Aristotle, we have abandoned the traditional division of the texts into ‘books’ and ‘chapters’: the chapters were invented in the Renaissance, and have nothing to recommend them; the books are ancient, but they are primarily determined not by the content of the text but by its length. Thus in the NE the account of friendship fills Book 8 and Book 9 (it was too long to fit into a single ancient book-roll), and conversely Book 7 contains two quite distinct discussions, of incontinence and of pleasure. The revised translation divides the text into modern chapters, which are fixed by their content—the division being based, often enough, on explicit indications in Aristotle’s text.

The loss of book and chapter divisions should not hamper reference to particular passages, since nowadays citations are invariably made by reference to the page, column, and line of the edition by Immanuel Bekker. The present version sets the relevant Bekker indications in the margins of the text.

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