

Book 1

1.1.1 The poet¹ who declared his opinion at the god's site in Delos, 1214a
 inscribing it on the gateway of the Temple of Leto, distinguished the
 good, the fine and the pleasant as not all belonging to the same thing.
 He wrote: 'Finest is what is most just, best is being healthy, most 5
 pleasant of all is to attain what one desires.' We should not agree with
 him. For happiness, being finest and best, is the most pleasant of
 all things.

1.1.2 There are many points of interest concerning each kind of object
 and nature that create difficulty and need examining. Some of these 10
 pertain only to our knowing, others pertain to the acquisition of the
 object and to actions as well. 1.1.3 Regarding those that involve only
 theoretical philosophy, we must state, when the right opportunity pre-
 sents itself, whatever is appropriate to the field of enquiry. 1.1.4 First,
 however, we must examine what living well consists in and how it is to be
 achieved. 15

Do all who acquire this label get to be happy by nature, as with
 tallness and shortness and differences in skin colour? Or is it through
 learning, happiness being a kind of knowledge? Or is it through some
 sort of practice? After all, people acquire many qualities not by nature or
 learning but by habituation; bad qualities if they are badly habituated, 20
 good qualities if they are well habituated. Or is it in none of these ways,
 1.1.5 but in one or other of the following: by the influence of some divine
 force, like those people possessed by nymphs or gods, as if inspired; or

¹ Theognis 255–6, also quoted by Aristotle at *Nicomachean Ethics* 1099a27–8.

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by luck, since many people claim that happiness and good fortune are
 25 the same thing? 1.1.6 Evidently it comes to be present in people in all or
 some or one of these ways. For pretty much everything one gets can be
 attributed to these sources, since actions based on thought can be
 30 grouped together with those that result from knowledge.

1.1.7 Happiness and the fine and blessed life might be found in three
 things above all, namely those that are thought to be the most choice-
 worthy: some say that the greatest good is wisdom, others that it is
 virtue, and others that it is pleasure. 1.1.8 Some disagree about the
 1214b respective importance of these with regard to happiness, claiming that
 one of them contributes more to it than another, some saying wisdom
 does this as it is a greater good than virtue, others vice versa, and others
 that pleasure contributes more than both of them. Also, some think that
 the happy life is a product of all three, others of two, and others that it
 5 consists in just one of them.

1.2.1 Focusing our attention on these matters, everyone capable of
 living by their own decision ought to lay down² some aim for living
 finely, be it honour or reputation or wealth or education, which they will
 look to in the performance of all their actions, since not organizing one's
 10 life in relation to some goal is a mark of great foolishness. 1.2.2 We must,
 then, first and above all, determine, without haste or sluggishness, in
 which of our goods living well consists, and which by their absence
 prevent its attainment. The necessary conditions of health are not the
 15 same as health itself. 1.2.3 And the same point applies in many other
 cases. Hence living finely is not the same as that without which living
 finely is impossible. 1.2.4 Some of these kinds of conditions are not
 peculiar to health or even to life but are common to pretty much
 everything, both states and actions. For example, without participation
 in breathing or being awake or movement nothing either good or bad
 20 would accrue to us. Some things, though, are more peculiar to the
 nature of the individual case, and one must not overlook these. Eating
 meat and taking a walk after dinner are appropriate for maintaining good
 physical condition in a way different from the items just mentioned.

1.2.5 These are the causes of dispute about happiness, its nature and
 25 the means to attain it. Some think that its necessary conditions are

² Reading *dei thesthai*, following a marginal annotation accepted by Gigon.

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themselves constituents of happiness. 1.3.1 It would be useless to scrutinize every view that anyone holds about it. Many ideas occur to young children and the sick and the mad that no sensible person would bother 30 to challenge. What they need is not argument but either the maturity that comes with age, or medical or civic correctives, medicine being no less of a corrective than physical punishment. 1.3.2 Similarly there is no need to investigate the views of the many. They speak arbitrarily about 1215a pretty much everything, and in particular about happiness. On this topic one should heed only the views of the wise. It would be strange to bring argument to bear on people who have no need of argument but rather need to suffer. 1.3.3 And since there are puzzles appropriate to each field of enquiry, evidently there are those concerning the greatest and best life as well. So these are the views that are worth examining, since a 5 refutation of a disputant is proof of the opposing argument.

1.3.4 Moreover it is advantageous to be aware of such issues, in particular with regard to the matters on which every investigation needs to focus, namely what are the possible sources of the fine and good life (if it is too presumptuous for one³ to speak of the ‘blessed’ life), and 10 with regard to the expectations of attaining it that decent people may have in each case. 1.3.5 For if living finely depends on things that come about by chance or by nature then many could not hope to achieve it, since its acquisition is not up to them through their engagement or effort. If on the other hand it depends on one having a certain character 15 and on the corresponding actions, then the good life would be more widespread and more divine, more widespread because more can share in it, more divine because happiness will be the province of those who bring about certain qualities in themselves and in their actions.

1.4.1 Most of the disputes and puzzles will be cleared up if one 20 properly defines how happiness ought to be conceived. Is it just a matter of one’s soul having a certain quality, as some of the older sages have thought? Or is it that one must indeed have a certain quality oneself, but more importantly so must one’s actions? 1.4.2 Let us distinguish among 25 lives. Some lives do not compete for this kind of success, but are pursued merely for the sake of the necessities,⁴ as, for example, those

³ Reading Bekker’s *tōi* (differing from the accented MSS *tōi*, the definite article) for the *to* of the OCT.

⁴ Retaining the text deleted by the OCT but reading Spengel’s *allōs* for the MSS *hōs*.

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occupied with the vulgar arts, the arts concerned with money-making and the mechanical arts. (By ‘vulgar’ I mean those practised only with
 30 an eye to reputation, by ‘mechanical’ I mean sedentary and waged labour, and by ‘money-making’ I mean retail trades related to buying and selling.)

Since there are three things that rank as conducive to happiness, the ones that were earlier described as the greatest possible human goods,⁵ namely virtue, wisdom and pleasure,⁶ we see also that there
 35 are three lives, chosen by all who have the means to do so – that of
 1215b politics, that of philosophy, and that of enjoyment. 1.4.3 Of these, the life of philosophy tends to be occupied with wisdom and contemplation of the truth, the political life with fine actions (these being the products of virtue), and the life of enjoyment with bodily
 5 pleasures. That is why, as was said earlier, different people recognize different people as happy. 1.4.4 Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, when asked who was the happiest, said, ‘none of those that you would suppose, but one who would appear strange to you’. He replied in this manner because he saw that the questioner assumed it was
 10 impossible for someone who was not grand and handsome or rich to come by that title, whereas he himself perhaps thought that someone who lived a life that was without pain and unblemished in matters of justice, or who partook in some divine form of study, was as blessed as any human can be said to be.

15 1.5.1 There are many other topics about which a good judgement is difficult, but none more so than the very topic that most people think is easiest and understood by everyone, namely which of the things in life should be chosen and would satisfy our appetite if we managed to obtain them. After all, many things come about that make people give
 20 up their lives, for example disease, extreme pain or calamity; evidently, in the face of these one might have chosen not to have been born in the first place, if one had had that choice. 1.5.2 In addition there is the life one lives while still a child; no one of good sense could bear to regress
 25 to that. 1.5.3 Moreover many things that involve no pleasure or pain, or involve pleasure that is ignoble, are such as to make non-existence better than living. 1.5.4 In general, if one included everything that

⁵ Retaining the MSS text deleted by the OCT. ⁶ See 1.1.7.

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everyone does and submits to, but does and submits to unwillingly (because not for its own sake), and added on an unlimited amount of time, one would not on account of these elements choose living over not living.

1.5.5 Nor indeed would anyone who was not completely slavish prefer 30
 life merely for the pleasure of nourishment or of sex, if deprived of the
 other pleasures that knowledge or sight or any of the other senses
 provide people with. 1.5.6 It is evident that whoever makes this choice 35
 might just as well have been born a beast as a human being. At any rate 1216a
 the ox in Egypt, which is worshipped as the god Apis, is lavished with a
 good deal more of those sorts of things than many monarchs.⁷ 1.5.7
 Similarly, one would not choose life just for the pleasure of sleeping.
 What is the difference between an uninterrupted sleep from first day till
 last, for ten thousand years or any period you like, and living as a plant? 5
 That at any rate is the kind of life that plants seem to partake in, as do
 babies too. In fact, once they first come into being in their mother they
 carry on with their growth process, but sleep the whole time. 1.5.8 So it
 is clear from these sorts of cases that what constitutes living well and the
 good of life is eluding our investigation.

1.5.9 They say that Anaxagoras, when confronted with these kinds of 10
 worries, and the question what would make coming into existence better
 than not, replied, ‘contemplating the heavens and the order of the whole
 universe’. So he considered that it was for the sake of scientific know- 15
 ledge that life was worth choosing. 1.5.10 Those who regard
 Sardanapallus as blessed, or Smindyrides the Sybarite,⁸ or any of the
 others who live the life of pleasure, apparently place happiness in the
 category of enjoyment. 1.5.11 Others would choose virtuous actions over
 any wisdom or bodily pleasure. Certainly there are some who do not simply 20
 choose such actions to get a good reputation – they act even if they are not
 going to win esteem. 1.5.12 But the majority of politicians do not really
 deserve the name; they are not politicians in strict truth. The politician 25
 is one with the propensity to decide on fine actions for their own sake,
 but most people take to this kind of life because of money and greed.

⁷ Omitting Russell’s supplement *mallon*, accepted by the OCT.

⁸ Two bywords for luxurious living, the first a legendary king of Assyria, the second a notable pleasure-seeker from the city of Sybaris whose inhabitants became synonymous with the pursuit of luxury.

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1.5.13 From what we have said it is clear that everyone conceives of happiness by reference to three lives, that of philosophy, that of politics, and that of pleasure. Of these, the pleasure that is associated with bodily enjoyments is far from obscure as regards its nature, its character and the ways it is acquired. Hence there is no need to investigate what these pleasures are, but instead whether or not they contribute anything to happiness, how they do so, and whether these are the pleasures that should be connected with living finely, if in fact any pleasures should be connected with such a life; or is it rather that one must share in pleasures in some other way, and that the pleasures reasonably supposed to give the happy person a life of pleasure, and not merely an absence of pain, are different ones.

1.5.14 These matters must be examined later. But let us first consider virtue and wisdom, the nature of each of them, and whether they are constituents of the good life, they or the actions arising from them. For if not everyone, then at least everyone worthy of mention, connects them with happiness. 1.5.15 Now Socrates the elder⁹ thought that the goal was knowledge of virtue, and he would further enquire into what justice is, and courage, and each of the parts of virtue. It was reasonable that he did this, since he thought that all the virtues were kinds of knowledge, so that one turns out simultaneously both to know justice and to be just. After all one only has to have learned geometry and building to be a geometer or a builder. Hence Socrates used to investigate what virtue is, but not how and by what means it comes about. 1.5.16 His approach is applicable to the theoretical sciences, since there is nothing more to astronomy or to natural science or geometry than knowing and studying the nature of the objects of these sciences. Of course there is no reason that they should not also incidentally be useful to us for many of the necessities of life.

1.5.17 But with the productive sciences, the goal is distinct from knowledge and understanding. For example, health is the goal of medicine, and good order or something of that sort the goal of political

⁹ The Socrates of Plato's and Xenophon's dialogues. Investigations of the virtues listed are found in Plato's *Republic* and *Laches*; the general issue of the parts of virtue is explored most clearly in the *Protagoras* though it arises in many dialogues including the *Meno* and the *Republic*. The thesis that virtue is a form of knowledge is aired in *Protagoras* and *Meno* above all.

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science. 1.5.18 Now it is indeed a fine thing to know each fine thing. 20
 Nonetheless, when it comes to virtue, knowing what it is is not the most
 valuable point, but understanding what brings it about. For we do not
 want to know what courage is, but to be courageous, nor to know what
 justice is, but to be just, as we want to be healthy rather than understand
 what being healthy is, and be in good physical condition rather than
 understand what being in good physical condition is. 25

1.6.1 In all these matters we must try to seek conviction through
 argument, using the appearances as witnesses and examples.¹⁰ The best
 situation is that everyone be in manifest agreement with what we are
 going to say; failing that, that everyone should in some fashion agree, as 30
 they will do when they have had their minds changed. Each person has
 some affinity with the truth, and it is from this that one must prove
 one's case on these issues in one way or another. If we start from what is
 truly but not clearly spoken, clarity will be won as we make progress,
 continually substituting what is more intelligible for what is usually
 spoken of confusedly.

1.6.2 In every field of enquiry, arguments made philosophically differ 35
 from those made non-philosophically. Hence one should not, even when
 it comes to politics,¹¹ regard as superfluous the kind of study that makes
 clear not only what something is but also its cause. For such is the
 philosophical¹² approach in every field of enquiry. This does, however, 40
 require a good deal of caution. 1.6.3 Because it is the mark of the 1217a
 philosopher to speak on the basis of an argument but never at random,
 some people can get away with arguments that are extraneous to the
 subject and empty. 1.6.4 Some do this through ignorance; others are just
 frauds. These arguments end up taking in even those who possess 5
 experience and practical ability, at the hands of people who neither
 possess, nor are capable of, systematic or practical thought. 1.6.5 This
 happens to them through lack of education, which is just the inability
 to distinguish arguments proper to a subject from those that are
 extraneous.

¹⁰ Cf. the methodological remarks at VI.1.5.

¹¹ Or perhaps, 'even for those who pursue politics'. Aristotle has already identified in 1.5.13 the political life as one of the candidate good human lives, along with that of philosophy and pleasure. Here he stresses that politics can itself be studied philosophically, or as we might say scientifically, an enterprise to which he regards his own ethical writings as contributing.

¹² Retaining the MSS *philosophon* for Fritzsche and Allan's *philosophou* accepted by the OCT.

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- 10 1.6.6 It is also a good idea to distinguish the causal explanation from the fact that is being demonstrated, both because of what we recently said, that one should not attend unconditionally¹³ to points that are made by arguments but rather, in many cases, to the appearances (as things are, whenever people are unable to refute an argument, they are
 15 compelled to put their trust in what has been asserted); and because, in many cases, what seems to have been shown by argument is true, but not for the reason that the argument claims. For it is possible to demonstrate a truth through falsehood, as is clear from the *Analytics*.¹⁴

- 17.1 Having made these introductory remarks, let us begin, as we
 20 said, first things first, from what is not clearly stated, looking subsequently¹⁵ to discover clearly what happiness is. 1.7.2 Now happiness is agreed to be the greatest and best of human goods. We say ‘human’ because happiness might perhaps also belong to some other being superior to human, for example god. 1.7.3 None of the other creatures
 25 that are inferior in nature to humans has any claim to this title; no horse or bird or fish is happy, nor any other being that does not, as the name suggests, partake of something divine in its nature.¹⁶ Rather, one creature lives better, another worse, in accordance with some other kind of participation in good things.

- 30 1.7.4 That this is how things are must be considered later.¹⁷ For now let us state that some good things are achievable by human action, others not. We put it this way because some things that exist have no share in change, neither therefore do some goods.¹⁸ These perhaps are the things that are best by nature. And some things are achievable by action, but
 35 only by beings superior to us. 1.7.5 Now the term ‘achievable by action’ has two senses. Both the things for the sake of which we act, and the things we do for the sake of these, involve action. For example, we place

¹³ We accept the emendation *pantōs* by Langerbeck for the MSS *panta*.

¹⁴ See *Prior Analytics* II.2–4, *Posterior Analytics* I.32.

¹⁵ We accept Solomon’s emendation *epeita* for *epi to*.

¹⁶ The Greek term for happiness (*eudaimonia*) is derived etymologically from words that mean roughly ‘having a good guardian spirit’. The Greek term *daimōn* means both a guardian spirit and, more generally, a divinity.

¹⁷ It is unclear which passage Aristotle refers to here, but for some relevant remarks on animal lives see III.2.9–12, V.7.4, VI.5.1, VI.12.7, VI.13.5–6, VII.1.12–13, VII.2.17.

¹⁸ These goods would not be achievable by human action since acting involves imparting change. Good things that are exempt from change for Aristotle would include god and (in a polemical context, as at I.8.17–19 below) Platonic Forms. Here we retain the MSS *tōn agathōn* for Russell’s *praktōn agathōn* accepted by the OCT.

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health and wealth among the things that are achievable by action, and also the things we do for the sake of these, the healthy and the lucrative. Clearly, then, happiness is also to be set down as the best of the things 40 that are achievable by human action.

1.8.1 So we must examine what the best is and how many senses it has. 1217b
 There appear to be three main views about this.¹⁹ They²⁰ say that the good itself is best of all things and has the property of being both the first of goods and the cause, by its presence, of other things being good; 5
 1.8.2 and that both these properties belong to the Form of the Good. (By ‘both’ I mean being first among goods and being the cause, by its presence, of other good things being good.) Goodness, they say, is especially predicated truly of the Form, since it is by participation in it and similarity to it that the other things are good; and it is first among 10
 goods. For if you eliminate that which is participated in, you eliminate also the things that participate in the Form, which are called good by participating in it; what is first bears this relation to what is posterior.
 1.8.3 So, they conclude, the good itself is the Form of the Good, and is in 15
 fact separate from the things that participate in it, as are the other Forms as well.

1.8.4 A thorough examination of this view belongs to a different kind of undertaking, one that is in the main necessarily more concerned with dialectic, since arguments that are both destructive and general pertain to no other science than that. 1.8.5 But if one must speak succinctly about these matters, let us say, first, that the notion that there is a Form 20
 not only of Good but of anything else whatsoever is dialectical and empty. This has been examined in a variety of ways both in the exoteric and in the philosophical works.²¹ 1.8.6 Second, even if one completely granted the existence of Forms and a Form of Good, it would be of no use either for the good life or for action.

1.8.7 What is good has many senses, the same number of senses as 25
 what exists has. As we have discussed elsewhere,²² what exists signifies

¹⁹ The three views are most likely that what is best is the Form of the Good; that it is the common good; and that it is the goal of human action. Aristotle summarizes his rejection of the first two views at 1.8.19 below and then moves on to advocate the third in the remainder of the chapter.

²⁰ Aristotle most likely refers to Platonists.

²¹ What exactly Aristotle intends by this contrast is unclear, but it may indicate a division between what is more popular and more specialized.

²² Chiefly in the *Categories*.

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what a thing is, or quality, or quantity, or time, as well as what consists in
 30 undergoing change or causing change. What is good is found under each
 of these headings. Under substance²³ we find intellect and god, under
 quality justice, under quantity due measure, under time the right
 moment and, in the realm of change, what teaches and what is taught.
 1.8.8 Hence, just as what exists is not some one thing in the cases
 35 described, so too what is good is not one thing either; nor is there a
 single science either of what exists or of what is good. Nor is it even the
 job of a single science to study things that are called good in the same
 category. Take, for example, the right moment or due measure. Different
 sciences study different sorts of right moment, different sciences study
 different sorts of due measure. For example, the right moment and due
 measure in food are studied by medicine and gymnastics; in the practice
 40 of war they are studied by generalship. In this way different spheres of
 action are the subject of different sciences, so it would scarcely be the
 province of a single science to study the good itself.

1218a 1.8.9 Moreover, among things that are prior and posterior there is no
 common thing over and above these, and one that is separate at that.
 1.8.10 For then there would be something prior to what is first. For what
 5 is common and separate is prior, because when what is common is
 eliminated what is first is also eliminated. For example, if the double is
 the first multiple, it will be impossible for there to be some separate
 multiple predicated in common. For this will be prior to the double, or it
 will turn out that the Form is the common thing – for example, if one
 10 were to make the common thing separate. For if justice is good, and
 courage, then there is, they say, something good itself, 1.8.11 the ‘itself’
 being attached to the common account. And what would this be except
 what is everlasting and separate? Yet something that is white for many
 days is no more white than something that is white for a single day.
 Hence the good is no more good by being everlasting. Nor indeed is the
 15 common good the same as the Form. For what is common belongs to all
 things.

1.8.12 They ought actually to demonstrate the good itself in a contrary
 manner to the way they do at present, which is to start from things that
 are not agreed to possess the good and use these to demonstrate the

²³ The same category that Aristotle called ‘what a thing is’ a few lines earlier.