BOOK I:

HUMAN HAPPINESS AND VIRTUOUS ACTION

Chapter 1: The Good as the Goal of Human Action

Every skill and every inquiry, just as every human action and 1094a1
every choice, seems to aim at some good. Thus, it has been correctly argued that the good is that at which everything aims. Still, there are evident differences in these goals, for in some cases the goal is the activity itself, in others the product of the activity, that is, something over and above the activity.[1] Where the goal is some- 5
thing over and above the activity, the product is naturally better than the activity.

Since there are many different human actions, skills, and forms of knowledge, there are also many different goals: the goal of medicine is health; of shipbuilding, a seaworthy ship; of military strategy, victory; and of household management, wealth. Some of these different pursuits are ordered under one capacity, as, for 10
example, the skill of making horse bridles is subordinate to the skill of riding horses, as are the skills of making all the other parts of horse tackle. Similarly, the skill of riding horses, as well as all other actions of military use, are subordinate to the requirements of military strategy. In this way, some human activities are subordinate to others. Wherever this is the case, the goal of the ruling or architectonic activity is preferable to the goals of the subordi- 15
nate activities, for the latter are pursued for the sake of the former. It does not matter if the goal of the activity is the activity itself

1 The Greek term translated here as 'goal' is *telos*. It can also be translated as 'end,' in the sense of the completion of something, the state in which nothing crucial is missing, or as 'final cause,' namely the good for the sake of which a change takes place. These different uses of the term *telos* are not co-extensive: some final causes are ends but not goals in the sense of consciously pursued goods, and some goals are not ends, namely where the good being consciously pursued does not complete the nature of the agent pursuing it. Where Aristotle emphasizes the role of the *telos* as a consciously pursued good, I translate it as 'goal'; where he emphasizes its role as the completion of an object or activity, I translate it as 'end.' For more on the relation between the goals of human action, on the one hand, and the ends and final causes of human life, on the other, see 'end' and 'goal' in the Glossary of Key Terms.

or something over and above that activity, as we saw in the disciplines mentioned above; in both kinds of activity, some goals are subordinate to others.

Chapter 2: Political Science as the Ruling Science of the Good

If there is a goal in the realm of human action that we pursue for its own sake, and all other goals are pursued for its sake (and we do not pursue every goal for the sake of some other goal, for this process would proceed to infinity, with the result that every desire for a goal would be empty and pointless), clearly this ultimate goal would be something good, indeed, the best and highest good. Would not knowledge of such a goal be of great importance for human life, and like archers with a target, would we not be more likely to reach the goal we need to reach? If this is indeed the case, we must outline what this goal is, and which capacities and kinds of knowledge deal with it.

This ultimate goal seems to belong to the subject matter of the most authoritative and architectonic science, which, in turn, seems to be political science, the science of political communities and their proper governance, for this science determines which of the various forms of knowledge are necessary in political communities, which kinds of knowledge each of us must learn, and to what extent. We also see that the most honored capacities are subordinate to it, for example, skill in military strategy, the management of the household, and the rhetorical art of speaking persuasively. Given that the science of political communities makes use of these other skills when it legislates what must be done and what is forbidden, its goal encompasses all other goals, so that its goal is the human good, what is good for human beings. If this goal is the same in both individuals and in the political community, it is greater and more complete if the goal of the whole political community is realized and preserved, for what is desirable in just one person is nobler and more divine in a clan or a political community. Our inquiry, then, also seeks knowledge of these things since it too is a kind of political, or ruling, science.

Chapter 3: Limits to Political Science and Ethics

Our account is sufficient if it makes things clear in a way that is suitable to the subject matter, for the degree of precision to be sought is not the same in all areas of inquiry, as we also see in the works produced by artisans. Noble and just deeds, which are examined by political science, admit of much difference and variation, so that it seems that what is noble and just exists only by convention and not by nature. Good deeds also have this kind of variability because in many cases harmful consequences follow from them; some people, for example, are ruined by wealth, others by courage. It is enough, then, that the truth of these matters be shown by outlining what is generally the case; the conclusions that are drawn from what holds only for the most part will also hold only for the most part. It is necessary to accept what is said on this subject in the same way, for it is the mark of someone who understands a subject that that person seeks the degree of precision appropriate to the subject matter, which is the degree of precision that the nature of the subject matter allows: it is as inappropriate for a mathematician to lay out a proof in a merely persuasive way as it is to expect a public orator to use rigorous demonstrations.

Each of us correctly judges the things that we know; this is what makes us good judges. What holds of knowledgeable persons in relation to a particular subject matter also holds of persons knowledgeable about the whole. Thus, very young people are not suited to study the science of political communities because they are inexperienced in human affairs, the very topics considered by this science. Moreover, it is pointless and useless for people who simply follow their emotions to try to understand human affairs since the goal here is not knowledge but action. It also does not matter if such people are young in age or immature in character, for the deficiency is not due to the lack of age, but to living according to one's emotions and pursuing whatever comes along. Knowledge of how to live properly is useless to such people, as it is to those who try, but fail, to rule their desires. On the other hand, knowledge of such matters is of great benefit to those who act rationally and exercise their desires accordingly. Having considered who can profitably study this topic, what type of proof it admits, and what we propose to investigate, let these remarks serve as our introduction.

Chapter 4: Happiness as the Highest Goal of Human Action

Since every form of knowledge and every choice aims at some
15 good, let us resume our consideration of what the good is at which political science aims and what the highest good is within the scope of human action. Most human beings agree on at least the name of this good, for both the general population and those who pos-
20 sess some education and taste say that it is happiness, assuming thereby that happiness is equivalent to living well and conducting one's affairs well.[1] On the other hand, people disagree about what happiness is, and here the general population and the wise do not agree, for the former consider it to consist in something clear and obvious, for example, pleasure, or wealth, or honor. Moreover, even here different people pick different goods, and often the same people pick different things at different times: when people are sick,
25 for example, they pick health; when poor, they pick wealth. If they are aware of their ignorance in this matter, they marvel at those who say that it is something quite grand and beyond them. Some people, for example, have thought that, apart from all these many good things, there is something else that is good in itself, which also acts as the cause of goodness in all good things.

It would be rather pointless to examine all these views closely; it
30 will suffice to examine those that are most prevalent or that seem to have some rational justification. In so doing, we must not ignore the fact that accounts that argue *from* first principles differ from those that argue *to* first principles.[2] Plato rightly raised this question and asked whether the path of his inquiry was from or to first
1095b1 principles, as in the stadium there is the path from the starting line, where the judges sit, to the limit of the track, and the path in the opposite direction from the limit back to the starting line. So too it is necessary to start from what is known, but 'what is known' can be understood in two ways: what is known to us or what is known

1 Here Aristotle introduces the term *eudaimonia*, which is traditionally translated as 'happiness.' Literally, it means having one's soul in a good state or condition. On the connection that Aristotle makes between human happiness and moral conduct, see the Introduction, p. 000.

2 Aristotle is distinguishing here between inductive reasoning (arguing *to* first principles) and deductive reasoning (arguing *from* first principles). This distinction is crucial to his epistemology and logic, that is, his account of how we acquire our beliefs about the world in the first place and how we rationally justify them by appealing to first principles. This distinction is discussed further in his account of the intellectual virtues in Book VI below.

simply and without qualification. Presumably, we must start with what is known to us. Thus, someone who is going to consider adequately what is noble and just, and, in general, what the proper order of a political community is, must have been properly raised in a set of moral customs, for the beginning of an inquiry consists in setting out what is the case, and if this is made sufficiently clear, nothing more is required to know why it is the case. Someone properly raised in a set of moral customs will have this knowledge or can easily acquire it. Someone who knows neither what is the case, nor why it is so, should listen to Hesiod's words:

> That person is best of all who ponders all things,
> Good too is someone who trusts those who speak well,
> But someone who neither knows in his own right nor stores in his heart
> What he hears from others, that person is worthless.[1]

Chapter 5: Different Views on Happiness

Let us continue where we left off. Not without some reason, the general population and the most vulgar base their view of the good and human happiness on their own way of life and conclude that it is pleasure. Thus, they delight in a life of enjoyable consumption. The most prominent ways of life are three in number: the life of pleasure just mentioned; the life of public and political affairs; and third, the contemplative life, that is, the life devoted to scientific inquiry and the pursuit of knowledge.[2] The general population seems to be entirely slavish in that it prefers the life of fattened cattle; still, their choice has some justification because many of the powerful live in a way similar to Sardanapallus.[3]

1 Hesiod, *Works and Days* 293, 295–97. Hesiod lived several centuries before Aristotle, around 700 BCE, and was, after Homer, one of the best-known epic poets.

2 The Greek term translated here as 'contemplative' is *theoretikos*. This is the traditional translation of *theoretikos*, but for the rest of this translation I use 'scientific inquiry': as Aristotle makes clear in Book VI, by 'theory' he does not only mean speculation about unobservable objects but the pursuit of all forms of scientific knowledge, including empirical science. See also 'scientific inquiry' in the Glossary of Key Terms.

3 Sardanapallus was an Assyrian king of the seventh century BCE, whose name in Aristotle's time was a byword for a life of vulgar hedonism, i.e., devoted to the pleasures of the body.