

## 24. THE NICOMACHEAN ETHICS \*

*Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)*

### A. HAPPINESS, THE SUPREME GOOD

We may now return to the Good which is the object of our search, and try to find out what exactly it can be. For good appears to be one thing in one pursuit or art and another in another: it is different in medicine from what it is in strategy, and so on with the rest of the arts. What definition of the Good then will hold true in all the arts? Perhaps we may define it as that for the sake of which everything else is done. This applies to something different in each different art—to health in the case of medicine, to victory in that of strategy, to a house in architecture, and to something else in each of the other arts: but in every pursuit or undertaking it describes the end of that pursuit or undertaking, since in all of them it is for the sake of the end that everything else is done.

Now there do appear to be several ends at which our actions aim; but as we choose some of them—for instance wealth, or flutes, and instruments generally—as a means to something else, it is clear that not all of them are final ends; whereas the Supreme Good seems to be something final or perfect. Consequently, if there be some one thing which alone is a final end, this thing will be the Good which we are seeking.

Now happiness above all else appears to be absolutely good in this sense, since we always choose it for its own sake and never as a means to something else; whereas honor, pleasure, intelligence, and excellence in its various forms, we choose indeed for their own sakes (since we should be glad to have each of them although no extraneous advantages resulted from it), but we

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also choose them for the sake of happiness, in the belief that they will be a means to our securing it. But no one chooses happiness for the sake of honor, pleasure, etc., nor as a means to anything whatever other than itself.

Happiness, therefore, being found to be something final and self-sufficient, is the End at which all actions aim.

#### B. FALSE VIEWS OF THE WAY TO HAPPINESS

To judge from the recognized types of Lives, the more or less reasoned conceptions of the Good or Happiness that prevail are the following. On the one hand, the generality of men and the most vulgar identify the Good with pleasure, and accordingly look no higher than the life of Enjoyment; for there are three specially prominent Lives, the one just mentioned (the Life of Pleasure), the Life of Honor, and, thirdly, the Life of Contemplation. The generality of mankind then show themselves to be utterly slavish, by preferring what is only a life for cattle; but they get a hearing for their views as reasonable because many persons of high position share their belief that the Life of Pleasure is the highest life.

Men of refinement, on the other hand, and men of action think that the Good is honor—for this may be said to be the end of political life. But honor after all seems too superficial to be the Good for which we are seeking; since it appears to depend on those who confer it more than on him upon whom it is conferred, whereas we instinctively feel that the Good must be something proper to its possessor and not easy to be taken away from him.

The third type of life is the Life of Contemplation, which we shall consider in the sequel.

The Life of Money-making is a life of constraint; and it is clear that wealth is not the Good we are in search of, for it is only good as being useful, a means to something else.

#### C. THE LIFE OF CONTEMPLATION, THE TRUE WAY TO HAPPINESS

To say, however, that the Supreme Good is happiness will probably appear a truism; we still require a more explicit account of what constitutes happiness. Perhaps, then, we may

arrive at this by ascertaining what is man's function. For the goodness or efficiency of a flute-player or sculptor or craftsman of any sort, and in general of anybody who has some function or business to perform, is thought to reside in that function; and similarly it may be held that the good of man resides in the function of man, if he has a function.

Are we then to suppose that, while the carpenter and the shoemaker have definite functions or businesses belonging to them, man as such has none, and is not designed by nature to fulfil any function? Must we not rather assume that, just as the eye, the hand, the foot, and each of the various members of the body manifestly has a certain function of its own, so a human being also has a certain function over and above the functions of his particular members? What then precisely can this function be? The mere act of living appears to be shared even by plants, whereas we are looking for the function peculiar to man; we must, therefore, set aside the vital activity of nutrition and growth. Next in the scale will come some form of sentient life; but this appears to be shared by horses, oxen, and animals generally.

There remains, therefore, what may be called the practical life of the rational part of man. If, then, the function of man is the active exercise of the soul's faculties in conformity with rational principle, or at all events not in dissociation from rational principle, and if we acknowledge the function of an individual and of a good individual of the same class (for instance, a harper and a good harper) to be generically the same, the qualifications of the latter's superiority in excellence being added to the function in his case (I mean that if the function of a harper is to play the harp, that of a good harper is to play the harp well): if this is so, and if we declare that the function of a man is a certain form of life, and define that form of life as the exercise of the soul's faculties and activities in association with rational principle, and say that the function of a good man is to perform these activities well and rightly, and if a function is well performed when it is performed in accordance with its own proper excellence—if then all this be so, the Good of man proves to be the active exercise of his faculties in con-

formity with excellence or virtue, or if there be several human excellences or virtues, in conformity with the best and most perfect among them.

Moreover, to be happy takes a complete lifetime. For one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one fine day; and similarly one day or a brief period of happiness does not make a man supremely blessed and happy.

Also, the warning given above must not be forgotten; we must not look for equal exactness in all departments of study, but only such as belongs to the subject matter of each, and in such a degree as is appropriate to the particular line of inquiry. A carpenter and a geometrician both try to find a right angle, but in different ways; the former is content with that approximation to it which satisfies the purpose of his work; the latter, being a student of truth, seeks to find its essence or essential attributes. We should, therefore, proceed in the same manner in other subjects also, and not allow side issues to outbalance the main task in hand.

#### D. HABIT, THE BASIS OF MORAL VIRTUES

Virtue being, as we have seen, of two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual virtue is for the most part both produced and increased by instruction, and, therefore, requires experience and time; whereas moral or ethical virtue is the product of habit, and has indeed derived its name, with a slight variation of form, from that word. And, therefore, it is clear that none of the moral virtues is engendered in us by nature, for no natural property can be altered by habit. For instance, it is the nature of a stone to move downwards, and it cannot be trained to move upwards, even though you should try to train it to do so by throwing it up into the air ten thousand times; nor can fire be trained to move downwards, nor can anything else that naturally behaves in one way be trained into a habit of behaving in another way. The virtues, therefore, are engendered in us neither by nature nor yet in violation of nature; nature gives us the capacity to receive them, and this capacity is brought to maturity by habit.

Moreover, the faculties given us by nature are bestowed on

us first in a potential form; we develop their actual exercise afterwards. This is clearly so with our senses; we did not acquire the faculty of sight or hearing by repeatedly seeing or repeatedly listening, but the other way about—because we had the sense we began to use them, we did not get them by using them. The virtues, on the other hand, we acquire by first having actually practiced them, just as we do the arts. We learn an art or craft by doing the things that we shall have to do when we have learnt it: for instance, men become builders by building houses, harpers by playing the harp. Similarly we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts. This truth is attested by the experience of states: lawgivers make the citizens good by training them in habits of right action; this is the aim of all legislation, and if it fails to do this, it is a failure; this is what distinguishes a good form of constitution from a bad one.

Again, the actions from or through which any virtue is produced are the same as those through which it also is destroyed; just as is the case with skill in the arts, for both the good harpers and the bad ones are produced by harping, and similarly with builders and all other craftsmen: as you will become a good builder from building well, so you will become a bad one from building badly. Were this not so, there would be no need for teachers of the arts, but everybody would be born a good or bad craftsman, as the case might be.

The same, then, is true of the virtues. It is by taking part in transactions with our fellow-men that some of us become just and others unjust; by acting in dangerous situations and forming a habit of fear or of confidence we become cowardly or courageous. And the same holds good of our dispositions with regard to the appetites, and anger; some men become temperate and gentle, others profligate and irascible, by actually comporting themselves in one way or the other in relation to those passions. In a word, our moral dispositions are formed as a result of the corresponding activities. Hence, it is incumbent on us to control the character of our activities, since on the quality of these depends the quality of our dispositions. It is, therefore, not of small moment whether we are trained from childhood in

one set of habits or another; on the contrary, it is of very great, or rather supreme, importance.

But it is not enough merely to define virtue generally as a disposition; we must also say what species of disposition it is. It must then be premised that all excellence has a twofold effect on the thing to which it belongs: it not only renders the thing itself good, but it also causes it to perform its function well. For example, the effect of excellence in the eye is that the eye is good and functions well, since having good eyes means having good sight. Similarly, excellence in a horse makes it a good horse, and also good at galloping, at carrying its rider, and at facing the enemy. If, therefore, this is true of all things, excellence or virtue in a man will be the disposition which renders him a good man and also which will cause him to perform his function well. We already indicated what this means, but it will throw more light on the subject if we consider what constitutes the specific nature of virtue.

#### E. MORAL VIRTUE FOUND IN THE MEAN; MODERATION IN ALL THINGS

Now of everything that is continuous and divisible, it is possible to take the larger part, or the smaller part, or an equal part, and these parts may be larger, smaller, and equal either with respect to the thing itself or relatively to us; the equal part being a mean between excess and deficiency. By the mean of the thing I denote a point equally distant from either extreme, which is one and the same for everybody; by the mean relative to us, that amount which is neither too much nor too little, and this is not one and the same for everybody.

For example, let 10 be many and 2 few; then one takes the mean with respect to the thing if one takes 6, since  $6 - 2 = 10 - 6$ ; this is the mean given by arithmetical proportion. But we cannot arrive by this method at the mean relative to us. Suppose that 10 pounds of food is a large ration for anybody and 2 pounds a small one: it does not follow that a trainer will prescribe 6 pounds, for perhaps even this will be a large ration, or a small one, for the particular athlete who is to receive it; it is a small ration for Milo (a wrestler), but a large one for a man

just beginning to go in for athletics. And similarly with the amount of running or wrestling exercise to be taken.

In the same way, then, an expert in any art avoids excess and deficiency, and seeks and adopts the mean—the mean, that is, not of the thing but relative to us. If, therefore, the way in which every art or science performs its work well is by looking to the mean and applying that as a standard to its productions (hence, the common remark about a perfect work of art, that you could not take from it nor add to it, meaning that excess and deficiency destroys perfection, while adherence to the mean preserves it)—if, then, as we say, good craftsmen look to the mean as they work, and if virtue, like nature, is more accurate and better than any form of art, it will follow that virtue aims at hitting the mean.

I refer to moral virtue, for this is concerned with feelings and actions, in which one can have excess or deficiency or a due mean. For example, one can be frightened or bold, feel desire or anger or pity, and experience pleasure and pain in general, either too much or too little, and in both cases wrongly; whereas to feel these feelings at the right time, on the right occasion, towards the right people, for the right purpose, and in the right manner, is to feel the best amount of them, which is the mean amount—and the best amount is of course the mark of virtue. Now feelings and actions are the objects with which virtue is concerned; and in feelings and actions excess and deficiency are errors, while the mean amount is praised, and constitutes success; and to be praised and to be successful are both marks of virtue. Virtue, therefore, is a mean state in the sense that it aims at hitting the mean.

Virtue, then, is a settled disposition of the mind as regards the choice of actions and feelings, consisting essentially in the observance of the mean relative to us, this being determined by principle, that is, as the prudent man would determine it.

#### F. EXAMPLES OF MORAL VIRTUES AS MEANS BETWEEN EXTREMES

And it is a mean state between two vices, one of excess and one of defect. The observance of the mean in fear and confi-

dence is Courage. The man that exceeds in confidence is Rash; he that exceeds in fear and is deficient in confidence is Cowardly. In respect of pleasures and pains, not all of them, and to a less degree in respect of pains, the observance of the mean is Temperance; the excess, Profligacy. Men deficient in the enjoyment of pleasures scarcely occur, and hence this character also has not been assigned a name, but we may call it Insensible. In regard to giving and getting money, the observance of the mean is Liberality; the excess and deficiency are Prodigality and Meanness, and these exceed and fall short in opposite ways: the prodigal exceeds in giving and is deficient in getting, whereas the mean man exceeds in getting and is deficient in giving.

Enough has now been said to show that moral virtue is a mean, and in what sense this is so; namely, that it is a mean between two vices, one of excess and the other of defect; and that it is such a mean because it aims at hitting the middle point in feelings and in actions. This is why it is a hard task to be good, for it is hard to find the middle point in anything: for instance, not everybody can find the center of a circle, but only someone who knows geometry. So also anybody can become angry—that is easy, and so it is to give and to spend money; but to be angry with or give money to the right person, and to the right amount, and at the right time, and for the right purpose, and in the right way—this is not within everybody's power and it is not easy; so that to do these things properly is rare, praiseworthy, and noble.

#### G. ON FRIENDSHIP

Our next business after this will be to discuss Friendship. For friendship is a virtue, or involves virtue; and also it is one of the most indispensable requirements of life. For no one would choose to live without friends, though possessing all other good things. Friends are an aid to the young, to guard them from error; to the elderly, to tend them, and to supplement their failing powers of action; to those in the prime of life, to assist them in noble deeds, for two are better able both to plan and to execute.

To be friends men must (1) feel good-will for each other,

that is, wish each other's good, and (2) be aware of each other's good-will, and (3) the cause of their good-will must be one of the three lovable qualities, i.e., the goodness, or pleasantness, or usefulness of their friend.

#### H. THREE TYPES OF FRIENDSHIP

Now these lovable qualities differ in kind; hence, the affection or friendship they occasion may differ in kind also. There are accordingly three kinds of friendship, corresponding in number to the three lovable qualities.

Thus friends whose affection is based on utility do not love each other in themselves, but in so far as some benefit accrues to them from each other: [for instance, the insurance salesman who makes "friends" to sell insurance policies or the politician who makes "friends" just before an election to get votes]. And similarly with those whose friendship is based on pleasure: for instance, we enjoy the society of witty people not because of what they are in themselves, but because they are agreeable to us.

Hence, in a friendship based on utility or on pleasure men love their friends for their own good or their own pleasure: they love him not for what he is, but for being useful or agreeable. And, therefore, these friendships are based on an accident, since the friend is not loved for being what he is, but as affording some benefit or pleasure as the case may be. Consequently, friendships of this kind are easily broken off, in the event of the parties themselves changing, for if no longer pleasant or useful to each other, they cease to love each other. And utility is not a permanent quality; it differs at different times. Hence, when the motive of the friendship has passed away [as when the insurance salesman has sold his "friend" an insurance policy], the friendship itself is dissolved, having existed merely as a means to that end.

#### I. THIRD TYPE, THE ONLY TRUE FORM OF FRIENDSHIP

The perfect form of friendship is that between the good, and those who resemble each other in virtue. For these friends wish each alike the other's good in respect of their goodness and they

are good in themselves; but it is those who wish the good of their friends for their friends' sake who are friends in the fullest sense, since they love each other for themselves and not accidentally. This kind of friendship is an end in itself, and not as the other two kinds, a means to some other end. Hence, the friendship of this kind lasts as long as they continue to be good; and virtue is a permanent quality.

Such friendships are, of course, rare, because such men are few. Moreover, they require time and intimacy: as the saying goes, you cannot get to know a man till you have consumed a peck of salt in his company; and so you cannot admit him to friendship or really be friends, before each has shown the other that he is worthy of friendship and has won his confidence. People who enter into friendly relations quickly have the wish to be friends, but cannot really be friends without being worthy of friendship, and also knowing each other to be so; the wish to be friends is a quick growth, but friendship is not.

This form of friendship is perfect both in point of duration and of the other attributes of friendship; and in all respects either party receives from the other the same or similar benefits, as it is proper that friends should do.

#### J. FRIENDS NEEDED BOTH IN PROSPERITY AND ADVERSITY

But do we need friends more in prosperity or in adversity? As a matter of fact men seek friends in both. The unfortunate require assistance; the prosperous want companions.

Also, the mere presence of friends is pleasant both in prosperity and adversity. Sorrow is lightened by the sympathy of friends. In prosperity, again, the company of friends sweetens our hours of leisure, and also affords the pleasure of the consciousness of their pleasure in our welfare.

Hence, it may be thought that we ought to be forward in inviting our friends to share our good fortune (since it is noble to wish to bestow benefits), but backward in asking them to come to us in misfortune (since we should impart to others as little as possible of what is evil). We should summon our friends to our aid chiefly when they will be of great service to us at the cost of little trouble to themselves.

So, conversely, it is perhaps fitting that we should go uninvited and readily to those in misfortune (for it is the part of a friend to render service, and especially to those in need, and without being asked, since assistance so rendered is more noble and more pleasant for both parties); but to the prosperous, though we should go readily to help them, we should be slow in going when it is a question of enjoying their good things (for it is not noble to be eager to receive benefits). But doubtless we should be careful to avoid seeming churlish in repulsing their advances, a thing that does sometimes occur.

It appears, therefore, that the company of friends is desirable in all circumstances.

As, then, lovers find their greatest delight in seeing those they love, and prefer the gratification of the sense of sight to that of all the other senses, that sense being the chief seat and source of love, so likewise for friends the society of each other is the most desirable thing there is. For friendship is essentially a partnership. And a man stands in the same relation to a friend as to himself; but the consciousness of his own existence is a good; so also, therefore, is the consciousness of his friend's existence; but this consciousness is actualized in intercourse; hence, friends naturally desire each other's society.

And whatever pursuit it is that constitutes existence for a man or that makes his life worth living, he desires to share that pursuit with his friends. Hence, some friends drink or dice together, others practice athletic sports and hunt, or study philosophy, in each other's company; each sort spending their time together in the occupation that they love best of everything in life; for wishing to live in their friends' society, they pursue and take part with them in these occupations as much as possible.

Thus the friendship of inferior people is evil, for they take part together in inferior pursuits, and by becoming like each other are made evil. But the friendship of the good is good, and grows with their intercourse. And they seem actually to become better by putting their friendship into practice, and because they correct each other's faults, for each takes the impress from the other of those traits in him that give him pleasure; whence the saying: Good lessons from the good.

## K. THE PLACE OF PLEASURE IN ETHICS

Our next business after this is doubtless to discuss Pleasure. For pleasure is thought to be especially congenial to mankind; and this is why pleasure and pain are employed in the education of the young, as means whereby to steer their course. Moreover, to like and to dislike the right things is thought to be a most important element in the formation of a virtuous character. For pleasure and pain extend throughout the whole of life, and are of great moment and influence for virtue and happiness, since men choose what is pleasant and avoid what is painful.

It would, therefore, seem by no means proper to omit so important a subject, especially as there is much difference of opinion about it. Some people maintain that pleasure is the Good. Others on the contrary say that it is altogether bad; some of them perhaps from a conviction that it is really so, but others because they think it to be in the interests of morality to make out that pleasure is bad, even if it is not, since most men (they argue) have a bias towards it, and are the slaves of their pleasures, so that they have to be driven in the opposite direction in order to arrive at the due mean.

Possibly, however, this view is mistaken. In matters of feeling and action, words are less convincing than deeds; when, therefore, our theories are at variance with palpable facts, they provoke contempt, and involve the truth in their own discredit. If one who censures pleasure is seen sometimes to desire it himself, his swerving towards it is thought to show that he really believes that all pleasure is desirable; for the mass of mankind cannot discriminate. Hence, it appears that true theories are the most valuable for conduct as well as for science; harmonizing with the facts, they carry conviction, and so encourage those who understand them to guide their lives by them.

That pleasure is the Good was held by Eudoxus on the following grounds. He saw that all creatures, rational and irrational alike, seek to obtain it; but in every case that which is desirable is good, and that which is most desirable is the best; therefore, the fact that all creatures "move in the direction of"

the same thing reveals that this thing is the Supreme Good for all; but that which is good for all, and which all seek to obtain, is the Good.

## L. MANY KINDS OF PLEASURE

Since activities differ in moral value, and some are to be adopted, others to be avoided, and others again are neutral, the same is true also of their pleasures: for each activity has a pleasure of its own. Thus the pleasure of a good activity is morally good, that of a bad one morally bad; for even desires for noble things are praised and desires for base things blamed; but the pleasures contained in our activities are more intimately connected with them than the appetites which prompt them, for the appetite is both separate in time and distinct in its nature from the activity, whereas the pleasure is closely linked to the activity, indeed so inseparable from it as to raise a doubt whether the activity is not the same thing as the pleasure. However, we must not regard pleasure as really being a thought or a sensation; indeed, this is absurd, though; because they are inseparable, they seem to some people to be the same.

As, then, activities are diverse, so also are their pleasures. Sight excels touch in purity, and hearing and smell excel taste; and similarly the pleasures of the intellect excel in purity the pleasures of sensation, while the pleasures of either class differ among themselves in purity.

And it is thought that every animal has its own special pleasure, just as it has its own special function: namely, the pleasure of exercising that function. This will also appear if we consider different animals one by one: the horse, the dog, man, have different pleasures, as Heraclitus says; an ass would prefer chaff to gold, since to asses food gives more pleasure than gold. Different species, therefore, have different kinds of pleasures.

On the other hand, it might be supposed that there is no variety among the pleasures of the same species. But as a matter of fact in the human species at all events there is a great diversity of pleasures. The same things delight some men and annoy others, and things painful and disgusting to some are pleasant and attractive to others. This also holds good of things sweet

to the taste: the same things do not taste sweet to a man in a fever as to one in good health; nor does the same temperature feel warm to an invalid and to a person of robust constitution. The same holds good of other things as well.

#### M. HOW DISTINGUISH DESIRABLE FROM UNDESIRABLE PLEASURES

But we hold that in all such cases the thing really is what it appears to be to the good man. And if this rule is sound, as it is generally held to be, and if the standard of everything is goodness, or the good man, as good, then the things that seem to him to be pleasures are pleasures, and the things he enjoys are pleasant. Nor need it cause surprise that things disagreeable to the good man should seem pleasant to some men; for mankind is liable to many corruptions and diseases, and the things in question are not really pleasant, but only pleasant to these particular persons who are in a condition to think them so. It is, therefore, clear that we must pronounce the admittedly disgraceful pleasures not to be pleasures at all, except to the depraved.

But among the pleasures considered respectable, which class of pleasures or which particular pleasure is to be deemed the distinctively human pleasure? Perhaps this will be clear from a consideration of man's activities. For pleasures correspond to the activities to which they belong; it is, therefore, that pleasure, or those pleasures, by which the activity, or the activities, of the perfect and supremely happy man are perfected, that must be pronounced human in the fullest sense. The other pleasures are so only in a secondary or some lower degree, like the activities to which they belong.

#### N. THE HIGHEST GOOD IS THE LIFE OF CONTEMPLATION

But if happiness consists in activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be activity in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be the virtue of the best part of us. Whether, then, this be the intellect, or whatever else it be that is thought to rule and lead us by nature, and to have cognizance of what is noble and divine, either as being itself also actually

divine, or as being relatively the divinest part of us, it is the activity of this part of us in accordance with the virtue proper to it that will constitute perfect happiness; and it has been stated already that this activity is the activity of contemplation.

And that happiness consists in contemplation may be accepted as agreeing both with the results already reached and with the truth. For contemplation is at once the highest form of activity, since the intellect is the highest thing in us, and the objects with which the intellect deals are the highest things which can be known; and also it is the most continuous, for we can reflect more continuously than we can carry on any form of action.

And, again, we suppose that happiness must contain an element of pleasure; now activity in accordance with wisdom is admittedly the most pleasant of the activities in accordance with virtue; at all events it is held that philosophy or the pursuit of wisdom contains pleasures of marvelous purity and permanence, and it is reasonable to suppose that the enjoyment of knowledge is a still pleasanter occupation than the pursuit of it.

Also the activity of contemplation will be found to possess in the highest degree the quality that is termed self-sufficiency: for while it is true that the wise man equally with the just man and the rest requires the necessities of life, yet, these being adequately supplied, whereas the just man needs other persons towards whom or with whose aid he may act justly, and so likewise do the temperate man and the brave man and the others, the wise man on the contrary can also contemplate by himself, and the more so the wiser he is; no doubt he will study better with the aid of fellow-workers, but still he is the most self-sufficient of men.

Also the activity of contemplation may be held to be the only activity that is loved for its own sake; it produces no result beyond the actual act of contemplation, whereas from practical pursuits we look to secure some advantage, greater or smaller, beyond the action itself.

Also happiness is thought to involve leisure; for we do business in order that we may have leisure, and carry on war in order that we may have peace. Now the practical virtues are exercised in politics or in warfare, but the pursuits of politics

and war seem to be unleisured; those of war indeed entirely so, for no one desires to be at war for the sake of being at war, nor deliberately takes steps to cause a war; a man would be thought an utterly blood-thirsty character if he declared war on a friendly state for the sake of causing battles and massacres. But the activity of the politician also is unleisured, and aims at securing something beyond the mere participation in politics: positions of authority and honor, or, if the happiness of the politician himself and of his fellow-citizens, this happiness conceived as something distinct from political activity.

If, then, among practical pursuits displaying the virtues, politics and war stand out preeminent in nobility and grandeur, and yet they are unleisured, and directed to some further end, not chosen for their own sakes: whereas the activity of the intellect is felt to excel in serious worth, consisting as it does in contemplation, and to aim at no end beyond itself, and also to contain a pleasure peculiar to itself, and therefore augmenting its activity: and if accordingly the attributes of this activity are found to be self-sufficiency, leisuredness, such freedom from fatigue as is possible for man, and all the other attributes of blessedness: it follows that it is the activity of the intellect that constitutes complete human happiness, provided it be granted a complete span of life, for nothing that belongs to happiness can be incomplete.

#### O. THE JOYS OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE

Such a life as this, however, will be higher than the human level: not in virtue of his humanity will a man achieve it, but in virtue of something within him that is divine; and by as much as this something is superior to his composite nature, by so much is its activity superior to the exercise of the other forms of virtue. If, then, the intellect is something divine in comparison with man, so is the life of the intellect divine in comparison with human life.

Nor ought we to obey those who enjoin that a man should have man's thoughts and a mortal the thoughts of mortality, but we ought so far as possible to achieve immortality, and do all that man may to live in accordance with the highest thing

in him; for though this be small in bulk, in power and value it far surpasses all the rest.

It may even be held that this is the true self of each, inasmuch as it is the ruling and better part; and, therefore, it would be a strange thing if a man should choose to live not his own life but the life of some other than himself.

#### 25. STOICISM: VIRTUE, THE HIGHEST GOOD \*

*Epictetus (circa 90 A.D.)*

##### A. THE WISE MAN SEEKS ONLY WHAT IS WITHIN HIS CONTROL

Of things some are in our power, and others are not. In our power are opinion, choice, desire, aversion; and, in a word, whatever are our own acts; not in our power are the body, property, reputation, offices, and, in a word, whatever are not our own acts. Remember, then, that if you think the things which are by nature slavish to be free, and the things which are in the power of others to be your own, you will be hindered, you will lament, you will be disturbed, you will blame both gods and men; but if you think what is another's, as it really is, belongs to another, no man will ever compel you, no man will hinder you, you will never blame any man, you will accuse no man, you will do nothing involuntarily, no man will harm you, you will have no enemy, for you will not suffer any harm.

Remember that desire contains in it the hope of obtaining that which you desire; and the hope in aversion is that you will not fall into that which you attempt to avoid; and he who fails in his desire is unfortunate; and he who falls into that which he would avoid, is unhappy. If, then, you attempt to avoid only the things contrary to nature which are within your power, you will not be involved in any of the things which you would avoid. But if you attempt to avoid disease or death or poverty, you will be unhappy. Take away, then, aversion from all things

\* *Encheiridion* (trans. by George Long; London: G. Bell & Sons, Ltd., 1912), pp. 379-403. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.