

Book II [Virtue of character]

1

[How a virtue of character is acquired]

Virtue, then, is of two sorts, virtue of thought and virtue / of character.¹ Virtue of thought arises and grows mostly from teaching; that is why it needs experience and time. Virtue of character <i.e., of *êthos*> results from habit <*ethos*>; hence its name ‘ethical’, slightly varied from ‘ethos’.² 15

§2 Hence it is also clear that none of the virtues of character arises in us naturally. / For if something is by nature in one condition, habituation cannot bring it into another condition. A stone, for instance, by nature moves downwards, and habituation could not make it move upwards, not even if you threw it up ten thousand times to habituate it; nor could habituation make fire move downwards, or bring anything that is by nature in one condition into another condition. §3 And so the virtues arise in us neither by nature nor against / nature. Rather, we are by nature able to acquire them, and we are completed through habit.³ 20 25

§4 Further, if something arises in us by nature, we first have the capacity for it, and later perform the activity. This is clear in the case of the senses; for we did not acquire them by / frequent seeing or hearing, but we already had them when we exercised them, and did not get them by exercising them. Virtues, by contrast, we acquire, just as we acquire crafts, by having first performed the actions. For we learn a craft by producing the same product that we must produce when we have learned it; we become builders, for instance, by building, and we become harpists by playing the harp. Similarly, then, we become just / by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions.⁴ 30 1103b

§5 What goes on in cities is also evidence for this. For the legislator makes the citizens good by habituating them, and / this is the wish 5

of every legislator; if he fails to do it well he misses his goal.⁵ Correct habituation distinguishes a good political system from a bad one.

§6 Further, the sources and means that develop each virtue also ruin it, just as they do in a craft. For playing the harp makes both
 10 good and bad harpists, and it is analogous in the / case of builders and all the rest; for building well makes good builders, and building badly makes bad ones. §7 Otherwise no teacher would be needed, but everyone would be born a good or a bad craftsman.

It is the same, then, with the virtues. For what we do in our deal-
 15 ings / with other people makes some of us just, some unjust, and what we do in terrifying situations, and the habits of fear or confidence that we acquire, make some of us brave and others cowardly. The same is true of situations involving appetites and anger; for one or another
 20 sort of conduct in these situations / makes some people temperate and calm, but other people intemperate and irascible. To sum it up in a single account: a state <of character> results from <the repetition of> similar actions.⁶

§8 That is why we must perform the right actions, since differences in these imply corresponding differences in the states.⁷ It is not unimportant, then, to acquire one sort of habit or another,
 25 right from our youth. On the contrary, it is / very important, indeed all-important.

2

[Habituation]

[c2] Our present discussion does not aim, as our others do, at study; for the purpose of our examination is not to know what virtue is, but
 30 to become good, since otherwise the inquiry / would be of no benefit to us.¹ And so we must examine the right ways of acting; for, as we have said, the actions also control the sorts of states we acquire.

§2 First, then, actions should accord with the correct reason.² That is a common <belief>,³ and let us assume it. We shall discuss it later, and say what the correct reason is and how it is related to the other virtues.

1104a §3 / But let us take it as agreed in advance that every account of the actions we should do⁴ has to be stated in outline, not exactly. As we also said at the beginning, the type of accounts we demand should accord with the subject matter; and questions about actions and expediency, like questions about health, have no fixed answers.⁵

§4 / While this is the character of our general account, the account 5
of particular cases is still more inexact. For these fall under no craft
or profession; the agents themselves must consider in each case what
the opportune action is, as doctors and navigators do.⁶ §5 / The 10
account we offer, then, in our present inquiry is of this inexact sort;
still, we must try to offer help.⁷

§6 First, then, we should observe that these sorts of states natu-
rally tend to be ruined by excess and deficiency. We see this happen
with strength and health (for we must use evident cases as witnesses
to things that are / not evident).⁸ For both excessive and deficient 15
exercise ruin bodily strength, and, similarly, too much or too little
eating or drinking ruins health, whereas the proportionate amount
produces, increases and preserves it.

§7 The same is true, then, of temperance, bravery, and the / other 20
virtues. For if, for instance, someone avoids and is afraid of every-
thing, standing firm against nothing, he becomes cowardly; if he is
afraid of nothing at all and goes to face everything, he becomes rash.
Similarly, if he gratifies himself with every pleasure and abstains from
none, he becomes intemperate; if he avoids them all, as boors do,
he becomes / some sort of insensible person. Temperance and brav- 25
ery, then, are ruined by excess and deficiency, but preserved by the
mean.⁹

§8 But these actions are not only the sources and causes both of
the emergence and growth of virtues and of their ruin; the activities of
the virtues also consist in these / same actions.¹⁰ For this is also true 30
of more evident cases; strength, for instance, arises from eating a lot
and from withstanding much hard labour, and it is the strong person
who is most capable of these very actions. §9 It is the same with the
virtues. For abstaining from pleasures makes us become temperate, / 35
and once we have become temperate we are most capable / of abstain- 1104b
ing from pleasures. It is similar with bravery; habituation in disdain
for frightening situations and in standing firm against them makes
us become brave, and once we have become brave we shall be most
capable of standing firm.

3

[The importance of pleasure and pain]

But we must take the pleasure or pain that supervenes on his / actions 5
to be a sign of the state <of character>.¹ For if someone who abstains

from bodily pleasures enjoys this <abstinence> itself, he is temperate; but if he is grieved by it, he is intemperate.² Again, if he stands firm against terrifying situations and enjoys it, or at least does not find it painful, he is brave; but if he finds it painful, he is cowardly. For virtue of character is about pleasures and pains.³

10 / For pleasure causes us to do base actions, and pain causes us to abstain from fine ones. §2 That is why we need to have had the appropriate upbringing—right from early youth, as Plato says⁴—to make us find enjoyment or pain in the right things; for this is the correct education.

§3 Further, virtues are about actions and feelings; but every feel-
15 ing and every action implies pleasure or / pain;⁵ hence, for this reason too, virtue is about pleasures and pains. §4 Corrective treatments also indicate this, since they use pleasures and pains; for correction is a form of medical treatment, and medical treatment naturally operates through contraries.

§5 Further, as we said earlier, every state of soul is naturally related
20 to and about whatever naturally makes / it better or worse; and pleasures and pains make people base, from pursuing and avoiding the wrong ones, at the wrong time, in the wrong ways, or whatever other distinctions of that sort are needed in an account. These <bad effects of pleasure and pain> are the reason why people actually define the
25 virtues as ways of being unaffected / and undisturbed <by pleasures and pains>.⁶ They are wrong, however, because they speak of being unaffected without qualification, not of being unaffected in the right or wrong way, at the right or wrong time, and the added qualifications.

§6 We assume, then, that virtue is the sort of state that does the best actions concerning pleasures and pains, and that vice is the contrary state.

30 §7 The following will also make it evident that virtue / and vice are about the same things. For there are three objects of choice—fine, expedient, and pleasant—and three objects of avoidance—their contraries, shameful, harmful, and painful.⁷ About all these, then, the
35 good person is correct and the bad person is in error, and especially /
1105a about pleasure. For pleasure is shared with animals, and implied / by every object of choice, since what is fine and what is expedient appear pleasant as well.

§8 Further, pleasure grows up with all of us from infancy on. That is why it is hard to rub out this feeling that is dyed into our lives. We

also estimate actions <as well as feelings>, some / of us more, some 5
less, by pleasure and pain. §9 For this reason, our whole discus-
sion must be about these; for good or bad enjoyment or pain is very
important for our actions.

§10 Further, it is more difficult to fight pleasure than to fight
spirit—and Heracleitus tells us <how difficult it is to fight spirit>.⁸
Now both craft and virtue in every case are about / what is more 10
difficult, since a good result is even better when it is more difficult.
Hence, for this reason also, the whole discussion, for virtue and polit-
ical science alike, must consider pleasures and pains; for if we use
these well, we shall be good, and if badly, bad.

§11 To sum up: virtue is about pleasures and pains; the / actions 15
that are its sources also increase it or, if they are done badly, ruin it;
and its activity is about the same actions as those that are its sources.

4

[Virtuous actions contrasted with virtuous character]

[c3] Someone might be puzzled, however, about what we mean by
saying that we become just by doing just actions and become tem-
perate by doing temperate actions.¹ For <one might suppose that> if
we do grammatical or musical actions, we / are grammarians or musi- 20
cians, and, similarly, if we do just or temperate actions, we are thereby
just or temperate.

§2 Or are actions insufficient in the case of crafts as well?² For it
is possible to produce a grammatical result by chance, or by follow-
ing someone else's instructions. To be grammarians, then, we must
both produce a grammatical result and produce / it grammatically— 25
that is to say, produce it in accord with the grammatical knowledge
in us.

§3 Moreover, in any case, what is true of crafts is not true of
virtues.³ For the products of a craft determine by their own qual-
ities whether they have been produced well; and so it suffices that
they have the right qualities when they have been produced.⁴ But for
actions in accord with the virtues to be done temperately or justly
it does not suffice that / they themselves have the right qualities.⁵ 30
Rather, the agent must also be in the right state when he does them.
First, he must know <that he is doing them>⁶; secondly, he must
decide on them, and decide on them for themselves; and, thirdly, he
must also do them from a firm and unchanging state.

1105b As conditions for / having a craft, these three do not count, except for the bare knowing.⁷ As a condition for having a virtue, however, the knowing counts for nothing, or <rather> for only a little, whereas the other two conditions are very important, indeed all-important. And
 5 we achieve these other two conditions / by the frequent doing of just and temperate actions.

§4 Hence actions are called just or temperate when they are the sort that a just or temperate person would do. But the just and temperate person is not the one who <merely> does these actions, but the one who also does them in the way in which just or temperate people do them.

10 §5 / It is correct, then, to say that a person comes to be just from doing just actions and temperate from doing temperate actions; for no one has the least prospect of becoming good from failing to do them.

§6 The many, however, do not do these actions. They take refuge in arguments, thinking that they are doing philosophy, and that this is
 15 the way to become excellent people. They / are like a sick person who listens attentively to the doctor, but acts on none of his instructions. Such a course of treatment will not improve the state of the sick person's body; nor will the many improve the state of their souls by this attitude to philosophy.⁸

5

[Virtue of character: its genus]

20 [c4] Next we must examine what virtue is. Since there are three / conditions arising in the soul—feelings, capacities, and states—virtue must be one of these.¹

§2 By feelings I mean appetite, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, love, hate, longing, jealousy, pity, and in general whatever implies pleasure or pain. By capacities I mean what we have when we are said
 25 to / be capable of these feelings—capable of being angry, for instance, or of feeling pain, or of feeling pity. By states I mean what we have when we are well or badly off in relation to feelings.² If, for instance, our feeling is too intense or slack, we are badly off in relation to anger, but if it is intermediate, we are well off; the same is true in the other cases.

30 §3 First, then, neither virtues nor vices are feelings.³ For / we are called excellent or base insofar as we have virtues or vices, not

insofar as we have feelings. Further, we are neither praised nor blamed insofar as we have feelings; for we do not praise the angry or the frightened person, and do not / blame the person who is simply angry, but only the person who is angry in a particular way. We are praised or blamed, however, insofar as we have virtues or vices.⁴ §4 Further, we are angry and afraid without decision; but the virtues are decisions of some kind, or require decision.⁵ Besides, insofar as / we have feelings, we are said to be moved; but insofar as we have virtues or vices, we are said to be in some condition rather than moved. 1106a

§5 For these reasons the virtues are not capacities either; for we are neither called good nor called bad, nor are we praised or blamed, insofar as we are simply capable of feelings. Further, while we have / capacities by nature, we do not become good or bad by nature; we have discussed this before.⁶ 5 10

§6 If, then, the virtues are neither feelings nor capacities, the remaining possibility is that they are states. And so we have said what the genus of virtue is.

6

[Virtue of character: its differential]

[c5] But we must say not only, as we already have, that it is / a state, but also what sort of state it is.¹ 15

§2 It should be said, then, that every virtue causes its possessors to be in a good state and to perform their functions well.² The virtue of eyes, for instance, makes the eyes and their functioning excellent, because it makes us see well; and similarly, / the virtue of a horse makes the horse excellent, and thereby good at galloping, at carrying its rider, and at standing steady in the face of the enemy. §3 If this is true in every case, the virtue of a human being will likewise be the state that makes a human being good and makes him perform his function well. 20

§4 / We have already said how this will be true, and it will also be evident from our next remarks, if we consider the sort of nature that virtue has.³ 25

In everything continuous and divisible we can take more, less, and equal, and each of them either in the object itself or relative to us; and the equal is some intermediate between excess and deficiency. §5 / By the intermediate in the object I mean what is equidistant from 30

each extremity; this is one and the same for all. But relative to us the intermediate is what is neither superfluous nor deficient; this is not one, and is not the same for all.⁴

§6 If, for instance, ten are many and two are few, we take six as
 35 intermediate in the object, since it exceeds <two> and is exceeded /
 <by ten> by an equal amount, <four>. §7 This is what is interme-
 1106b diate by numerical proportion. But that is not how / we must take
 the intermediate that is relative to us. For if, ten pounds <of food>,
 for instance, are a lot for someone to eat, and two pounds a little, it
 does not follow that the trainer will prescribe six, since this might
 also be either a little or a lot for the person who is to take it—for Milo
 <the athlete> a little, but for the beginner in gymnastics a lot; and the
 5 same is / true for running and wrestling. §8 In this way every scien-
 tific expert avoids excess and deficiency and seeks and chooses what
 is intermediate—but intermediate relative to us, not in the object.

§9 This, then, is how each science produces its product well,
 by concentrating on what is intermediate and making the product
 10 / conform to that.⁵ This, indeed, is why people regularly comment
 on well-made products that nothing could be added or subtracted;
 they assume that excess or deficiency ruins a good <result>, but the
 mean preserves it. Good craftsmen also, we say, concentrate on what
 15 is intermediate when they produce / their product. And since virtue,
 like nature, is better and more exact than any craft, it will also aim at
 what is intermediate.⁶

§10 By virtue I mean virtue of character; for this is about feelings
 and actions, and these admit of excess, deficiency, and an interme-
 diate condition. We can be afraid, for instance, or be confident, or
 have appetites, or get angry, or feel pity, and in general have plea-
 20 sure / or pain, both too much and too little, and in both ways not
 well. §11 But having these feelings at the right times, about the
 right things, towards the right people, for the right end, and in the
 right way, is the intermediate and best condition, and this is proper to
 virtue. §12 Similarly, actions also admit of excess, deficiency, and
 an intermediate condition.

25 / Now virtue is about feelings and actions, in which excess is in
 error and deficiency is blamed,⁷ whereas the intermediate condition
 is praised and is correct, which are both proper to virtue. §13 Vir-
 tue, then, is a mean, insofar as it aims at what is intermediate.

§14 Moreover, there are many ways to be in error—for badness / 30
 is proper to the indeterminate, as the Pythagoreans pictured it, and
 good to the determinate. But there is only one way to be correct. That
 is why error is easy and correctness is difficult, since it is easy to miss
 the target and difficult to hit it. And so for this reason also excess and
 deficiency are proper / to vice, the mean to virtue; ‘for we are noble in 35
 only one way, but bad in all sorts of ways.’⁸

§15 [c6] Virtue, then, is a state that decides, consisting in / a mean, 1107a
 the mean relative to us, which is defined by reference to reason, that is
 to say, to the reason by reference to which the prudent person would
 define it.⁹ It is a mean between two vices, one of excess and one of
 deficiency.

§16 It is a mean for this reason also: Some vices miss what is right
 because they are deficient, others because they are / excessive, in feel- 5
 ings or in actions, but virtue finds and chooses what is intermediate.

§17 That is why virtue, as far as its essence and the account stating
 what it is are concerned, is a mean, but, as far as the best <condition>
 and the good <result> are concerned, it is an extremity.

§18 Now not every action or feeling admits of the mean.¹⁰ For / the 10
 names of some automatically include baseness—for instance, spite,
 shamelessness, envy <among feelings>, and adultery, theft, murder,
 among actions.¹¹ For all of these and similar things are called by these
 names because they themselves, not their excesses or deficiencies, are
 base. Hence in doing these things we can never be correct, but / must 15
 invariably be in error. We cannot do them well or not well—by com-
 mitting adultery, for instance, with the right woman at the right time
 in the right way. On the contrary, it is true without qualification that
 to do any of them is to be in error.

§19 <To think these admit of a mean>, therefore, is like thinking
 that unjust or cowardly or intemperate action also admits / of a mean, 20
 an excess and a deficiency. If it did, there would be a mean of excess,
 a mean of deficiency, an excess of excess, and a deficiency of defi-
 ciency. §20 On the contrary, just as there is no excess or deficiency of
 temperance or of bravery (since the intermediate is a sort of extreme),
 so also there is no mean of these vicious actions either, but whatever
 way anyone does them, he is in error. For in general there is no mean / 25
 of excess or of deficiency, and no excess or deficiency of a mean.

7

[The particular virtues of character]

[c7] However, we must not only state this general account but also
 30 apply it to the particular cases. For among accounts / concerning
 actions, though the general ones are common to more cases, the specific
 ones are truer, since actions are about particular cases, and our
 account must accord with these.¹ Let us, then, find these from the
 chart.²

1107b §2 First, then, in feelings of fear and confidence the mean is / brav-
 ery. The excessively fearless person is nameless (indeed many cases
 are nameless), and the one who is excessively confident is rash. The
 one who is excessive in fear and deficient in confidence is cowardly.

5 §3 / In pleasures and pains—though not in all types, and in pains
 also, <but> less than in pleasures—the mean is temperance and the
 excess intemperance. People deficient in pleasure are not often found,
 which is why they also lack even a name; let us call them insensible.

10 §4 In giving and taking money the mean is generosity, / the excess
 wastefulness, and the deficiency ungenerosity. Here the vicious peo-
 ple have contrary excesses and defects; for the wasteful person is
 excessive in spending and deficient in taking, whereas the ungener-
 ous person is excessive in taking and deficient in spending. §5 At
 15 the moment we are speaking in / outline and summary, and that is
 enough; later we shall define these things more exactly.

§6 In questions of money there are also other conditions. Another
 mean is magnificence; for the magnificent person differs from the
 generous by being concerned with large matters, while the generous
 20 person is concerned with small. The / excess is ostentation and vul-
 garity, and the deficiency is stinginess. These differ from the vices
 related to generosity in ways we shall describe later.

§7 In honour and dishonour the mean is magnanimity, the excess
 something called a sort of vanity, and the deficiency pusillanim-
 25 ity. §8 / And just as we said that generosity differs from magnif-
 icence in its concern with small matters, similarly there is a virtue
 concerned with small honours, differing in the same way from mag-
 nanimity, which is concerned with great honours. For honour can
 be desired either in the right way or more or less than is right. If
 someone desires it to excess, he is called an honour-lover, and if
 30 his desire is deficient / he is called indifferent to honour, but if he is
 intermediate he has no name. The corresponding conditions have

no name either, except the condition of the honour-lover, which is called honour-loving.

This is why people at the extremes lay claim to the intermediate area. Moreover, we also sometimes call the intermediate person an honour-lover, and sometimes call him indifferent to honour; and sometimes we praise the honour-lover, sometimes the person indifferent to / honour.³ §9 We will mention later the reason we do this; for the moment, let us speak of the other cases in the way we have laid down.

1108a

§10 / Anger also admits of an excess, deficiency, and mean. These are all practically nameless; but since we call the intermediate person calm, let us call the mean calmness. Among the extreme people let the excessive person be irascible, and his vice irascibility, and let the deficient person be a sort of inirascible person, and his deficiency inirascibility.

5

§11 / There are also three other means, somewhat similar to one another, but different. For they are all concerned with common dealings in conversations and actions, but differ insofar as one is concerned with truth-telling in these areas, the other two with sources of pleasure, some of which are found in amusement, and the others in daily life in general. Hence we should also discuss these states, so that we can better / observe that in every case the mean is praiseworthy, whereas the extremes are neither praiseworthy nor correct, but blameworthy. Most of these cases are also nameless, and we must try, as in the other cases also, to supply names ourselves, to make things clear and easy to follow.

10

15

§12 / In truth-telling, then, let us call the intermediate person truthful, and the mean truthfulness; pretence that overstates will be boastfulness, and the person who has it boastful; pretence that understates will be self-deprecation, and the person who has it self-deprecating.

20

§13 In sources of pleasure in amusements let us call the intermediate person witty, and the condition wit; the excess / buffoonery and the person who has it a buffoon; and the deficient person a sort of boor and the state boorishness.

25

In the other sources of pleasure, those in daily life, let us call the person who is pleasant in the right way friendly, and the mean state friendliness. If someone goes to excess with no <ulterior> aim, he will be ingratiating; if he does it for his own advantage, a flatterer. The deficient person, / unpleasant in everything, will be a sort of quarrelsome and ill-tempered person.

30

§14 There are also means in feelings and about feelings. Shame, for instance, is not a virtue, but the person prone to shame as well as <the virtuous people we have described> receives praise. For here also one person is called intermediate, and another—the person excessively prone to shame, who is ashamed about everything—is called excessive; the / person who is deficient in shame or never feels shame at all is said to have no sense of disgrace; and the intermediate / one is called prone to shame.

§15 Proper indignation is the mean between envy and spite; these conditions are concerned with pleasure and pain at what happens to our neighbours. For the properly indignant person feels pain when someone does well undeservedly; the / envious person exceeds him by feeling pain when anyone does well, while the spiteful person is so deficient in feeling pain that he actually enjoys <other people's misfortunes>.⁴

§16 There will also be an opportunity elsewhere to speak of these.⁵ We must consider justice after these. Since it is spoken of in more than one way, we shall distinguish its two types and say how each of them is a mean. / Similarly, we must also consider the virtues that belong to reason.

8

[Relations between mean and extreme states]

[c8] Among these three conditions, then, two are vices—one of excess, one of deficiency—and one—the mean—is virtue. In a way each of them is opposed to each of the others, since each extreme is contrary both to the intermediate condition and to the other extreme, while the intermediate is contrary / to the extremes.

§2 For, just as the equal is greater in comparison to the smaller, and smaller in comparison to the greater, so also the intermediate states are excessive in comparison to the deficiencies and deficient in comparison to the excesses—both in feelings and in actions. / For the brave person, for instance, appears rash in comparison to the coward, and cowardly in comparison to the rash person; the temperate person appears intemperate in comparison to the insensible person, and insensible in comparison with the intemperate person; and the generous person appears wasteful in comparison to the ungenerous, and ungenerous in comparison to the wasteful person.¹ §3 That is why each of the extreme people tries to push the intermediate / person to the other extreme, so

that the coward, for instance, calls the brave person rash, and the rash person calls him a coward, and similarly in the other cases.

§4 Since these conditions of soul are opposed to each other in these ways, the extremes are more contrary to each other than to the intermediate. For they are further from each other than from the intermediate, just as the large is further from / the small, and the small from the large, than either is from the equal. 30

§5 Further, sometimes one extreme—rashness or wastefulness, for instance—appears somewhat like the intermediate state—bravery or generosity. But the extremes are most unlike one another; and the things that are furthest apart from each other / are defined as contraries. And so the things that are further apart are more contrary. 35

§6 / In some cases the deficiency, in others the excess, is more opposed to the intermediate condition. For instance, cowardice, the deficiency, not rashness, the excess, is more opposed to bravery, whereas intemperance, the excess, not insensibility, the deficiency, is more opposed / to temperance. 1109a 5

§7 This happens for two reasons: One reason is derived from the object itself. Since sometimes one extreme is closer and more similar to the intermediate condition, we oppose the contrary extreme, more than this closer one, to the intermediate condition.² Since rashness, for instance, seems to be closer and more similar to bravery, / and cowardice less similar, we oppose cowardice more than rashness to bravery; for what is further from the intermediate condition seems to be more contrary to it. This, then, is one reason, derived from the object itself. 10

§8 The other reason is derived from ourselves. For when we ourselves have some natural tendency to one extreme more than to the other, this extreme appears more opposed to the intermediate condition. Since, for instance, we have more of a natural / tendency to pleasure, we drift more easily towards intemperance than towards orderliness. Hence we say that an extreme is more contrary if we naturally develop more in that direction; and this is why intemperance is more contrary to temperance, since it is the excess <of pleasure>. 15

9

[How can we reach the mean?]

[c9] / We have said enough, then, to show that virtue of character is a mean and what sort of mean it is; that it is a mean between two vices, 20

one of excess and one of deficiency; and that it is a mean because it aims at the intermediate condition in feelings and actions.

§2 That is why it is also hard work to be excellent. For in each case
 25 / it is hard work to find the intermediate; for instance, not everyone, but only one who knows, finds the midpoint in a circle. So also getting angry, or giving and spending money, is easy and everyone can do it; but doing it to the right person, in the right amount, at the right time, for the right end, and in the right way is no longer easy, nor can
 30 everyone do it.¹ Hence / doing these things well is rare, praiseworthy, and fine.

§3 That is why anyone who aims at the intermediate condition must first of all steer clear of the more contrary extreme, following the advice that Calypso also gives—‘Hold the ship outside the spray and surge.’² For one extreme is more in error, the other less. §4 Since, therefore, it is hard to hit the intermediate extremely accurately,³ the
 35 second-best tack, as they say, is / to take the lesser of the evils. We shall
 1109b succeed best in this / by the method we describe.

We must also examine what we ourselves drift into easily. For different people have different natural tendencies towards different
 5 goals, and we shall come to know our own tendencies / from the pleasure or pain that arises in us. §5 We must drag ourselves off in the contrary direction; for if we pull far away from error, as they do in straightening bent wood, we shall reach the intermediate condition.

§6 And in everything we must beware above all of pleasure and its sources; for we are already biased in its favour when we come to judge
 10 it. Hence we must react to it as the elders / reacted to Helen, and on each occasion repeat what they said; for if we do this, and send it off, we shall be less in error.⁴

§7 In summary, then, if we do these things we shall best be able to reach the intermediate condition. But presumably this is difficult,
 15 especially in particular cases, since it is not easy to / define the way we should be angry, with whom, about what, for how long. For sometimes, indeed, we ourselves praise deficient people and call them calm, and sometimes praise quarrelsome people and call them manly.

§8 Still, we are not blamed if we deviate a little in excess or deficiency from / doing well, but only if we deviate a long way, since then
 20 we are easily noticed. But how great and how serious a deviation receives blame is not easy to define in an account; for nothing else

perceptible is easily defined either. Such things are among particulars, and the judgment depends on perception.⁵

§9 This is enough, then, to make it clear that in every case the intermediate / state is praised, but we must sometimes incline towards the excess, sometimes towards the deficiency; for that is the easiest way to hit the intermediate and good condition. 25

Book II

1

1. §1–8. *Virtues of character do not belong to us by nature, but are acquired by habituation.*

1. §1 1103a14 **Virtue, then . . . character:** This continues from i 13. As we saw (1102a5–7), a new book really begins with i 13, and not here.

2. 1103a17–18 **Virtue of . . . ‘ethos’:** Aristotle plays on the similarity between *êthos* (character) and *ethos* (habit). On habit, see EDUCATION #1. Etymological speculations: 1112a16, 1132a30, 1140b11, 1152b7; they are part of the appeal to ordinary language, which in turn is part of Aristotle’s appeal to APPEARANCES.

(a) §2–4. Virtue of character is not a natural condition, since a natural condition is not changed by habituation.

3. §3 1103a25–6 **Rather, we are . . . habit:** NATURE is not neutral, equally suited for virtue or vice, but appropriately completed by virtue. See COMPLETE.

(b) §4. We acquire crafts and virtues by practice, but we do not acquire natural conditions in that way.

4. §4 1103a34–b2 **we become just . . . actions:** We do not exercise the virtues before we possess them. We do the virtuous actions before we possess the virtues. See ii 4.

(c) §5. Legislators are concerned with virtue, and hence with habituation.

5. §5 1103b3–5 **For the legislator . . . his goal:** The proper role of the legislator, see LAW.

(d) §6–8. We acquire virtues by learning to do the actions that are required by the virtues.

6. §7 1103b21–2 **To sum it up . . . similar activities:** ‘Similar’: I.e., ‘similar to each other’. Habituation involves the repetition of the same sort of activity in the same conditions. [Or ‘similar’ might mean ‘similar to the state resulting from them’, assuming that, e.g., brave actions are similar to bravery.]

7. §8 1103b22–3 **That is . . . in the states:** The account of moral training strongly stresses habituation. The actions required by the virtues (e.g., a brave action such as standing firm) must be practiced, if we are to acquire the right STATE of character. Habituation is needed because we need more than mere instruction, 1103a15; non-rational desires must also be trained. While we are being trained, our virtuous actions are not caused by the virtue. See EDUCATION #2–3.

2

2. §1–9. *The right method of habituation.*

(a) §1. The aim of ethical theory is practical.

1. §1 1103b26–9 **Our present . . . benefit to us:** Practical results: ETHICS #1. Aristotle says that finding true theories is not our end; he does not deny, but assumes, that they are a means to our end. True theories are all the more important when the practical purpose of ethics is considered; see note to x 1. §3.

(b) §2. Virtuous actions must accord with the correct reason. This general formula needs to be explained in more detail if it is to be practically helpful.

2. §2 1103b31–2 **First, then, . . . correct reason:** Aristotle begins with an APPEARANCE, a common belief about virtue, which he gradually explains and defends; see 1107a1, 1138b18, 1144b21. Correct reason: REASON #3.

3. 1103b32 **a common <belief>:** [Or ‘common <to all the virtues>’].

(c) §3–5. Ethics is inexact both at the universal and at the particular level, but we must give as much practical help as we can.

4. §3 1104a1 **actions we should do:** Read *prakteôn*.

5. 1104a2–5 **As we also . . . fixed answers:** Aristotle refers back to the discussion of inexactness in i 3. §1–4. The lack of fixed answers reflects the fact that ethics requires us to rely on usual principles.

6. §4 1104a5–10 **While this . . . navigators do:** This is a new source of inexactness in addition to the source mentioned in §3. Not only are some ethical principles merely usual, but they are also impossible to apply in practice by any systematic craft.

7. §5 1104a10–11 **The account . . . offer help:** Aristotle suggests that this treatise will offer help in dealing with practical questions. See ii 9; 1126a32–b10; 1164b27–1165a14.

(d) §6–7. Habituation must avoid excess and deficiency and must aim at a mean in the actions that promote a virtue.

8. §6 1104a13–14 **(for we must . . . not evident):** For this maxim, cf. *MM* 1185b15; Anaxagoras, DK 59 B 21a.

9. §7 1104a22–7 **Similarly, if he gratifies . . . by the mean:** The doctrine expounded in ii 6 is anticipated here. So far, however, Aristotle only argues that virtue is acquired by a mean—neither total repression (‘insensibility’: 1107b4–8) nor total indulgence of a natural desire or FEELING. He later argues that virtue also consists in an intermediate condition.

(d) §8–9. We must also aim at a mean in the actions that actualize the virtue.

10. §8 1104a27–9 **But these actions . . . same actions:** In §6–7 Aristotle has been concerned with finding the mean in the actions through which we acquire a virtue. He now extends his claim about the mean to the actions that we perform after we have acquired the virtue.

3

3. §1–11. *The importance of pleasure and pain in moral training.*

(a) §1. Virtue is about pleasure and pain.

1. §1 1104b3–5 **But we must take . . . state:** In ‘But . . .’ Aristotle corrects a possible misunderstanding of his emphasis on actions in c2. Virtue does not consist simply in the correct actions, but also requires the appropriate attitudes. The right kind of pleasure (1099a7) must also supervene (cf. 1174b33). Virtuous persons do not simply get pleasure from virtuous action, but they also take pleasure in the very fact that the actions are virtuous—hence ‘enjoys this <abstinence> itself’. See 1175a18–31.

2. 1104b6–7 **if he is grieved . . . intemperate:** The person who is grieved at being denied the intemperate satisfaction of bodily appetites is intemperate, not continent (see 1102b27, INCONTINENT). The intemperate person may find that he has to refrain from an improper pleasure (e.g., if he sees that he cannot avoid detection if he commits adultery), and will be grieved and resentful if he has to deny himself such pleasures. The continent person, however, has been trained to have some of the virtuous person’s desires, and hence he does not resent abstinence from improper pleasures. He is continent rather than virtuous because he also has strong appetites for these pleasures.

3. 1104b8–9 **For virtue . . . and pains:** This is the general thesis of this chapter. It is defended by the series of points that follow in the rest of the chapter. §6 and §11 repeat the thesis.

(b) §1–2. Pleasure and pain turn us in the right or wrong direction.

4. §2 1104b11–12 **as Plato says:** Plato, *Rep.* 401e; *Laws* 653e.

(c) §3–4. Feelings imply pleasure and pain.

5. §3 1104b14–15 **but every feeling . . . pain:** FEELINGS: 1105b21–3.

(d) §5–6. Pleasure and pain lead us into error.

6. §5 1104b24–5 **These <bad . . . pleasures and pains>:** This may refer to the views of SPEUSIPPUS (cf. Plato, *Phil.* 42e–51a; 1153a31) or the CYNICS.

(e) §7. Pleasure is involved in every sort of choice.

7. §7 1104b30–2 **For there are three . . . and painful:** On these three possible objects of choice, cf. 1126b29, 1155b18, FINE. These are three types of goods. The fine and the pleasant are goods that are chosen for their own sakes.

(f) §8–9. Pleasure is our earliest motive.

(g) §10. It is difficult to resist pleasure.

8. §10 1105a8 **Heracleitus . . . spirit>**: Probably Aristotle alludes to a remark by Heracleitus on resisting spirit (see DESIRE). See DK 22 B 85.

4

4. §1–6. *Our account of habituation requires us to distinguish doing the virtuous actions from having the virtuous character.*

(a) §1. Puzzle: How can we do the right actions without being in the right state? Examples from the crafts.

1. §1 1105a17–19 **Someone might be . . . temperate actions**: The puzzle arises because 1104a26–b3 emphasized the similarity between the actions that we learn to do when we are being habituated and the actions that we do when we are virtuous. We might suppose that if the actions are the same, their motive must be the same too, so that we can learn to be virtuous only if we already have the motive of the virtuous person. This is a practical analogue of the puzzle about learning that Meno raises at Plato, *Meno* 80a–e, discussed by Aristotle in *APo* 71a20–b8. Aristotle replies that the objector's argument (1) rests on an alleged feature of the crafts, and hence (2) assumes that virtues are analogous to crafts in the relevant ways.

(b) §2. A parallel between virtues and crafts.

2. §2 1105a21–2 **Or are . . . crafts as well**: Aristotle's first reply challenges (1), and argues that the crafts do not support the objection.

(c) §3–5. A contrast between virtues and crafts.

3. §3 1105a26–7 **Moreover, . . . virtues**: The second reply is independent of the first, and challenges (2), insisting on an important difference between virtues and crafts. It contrasts the value of acting from craft knowledge—purely instrumental value, simply a means to the right product—with the value of acting from virtue.

4. 1105a27–8 **For the products . . . have been produced**: Lit. 'the things coming to be by crafts have the well in themselves . . .'. Aristotle is not taking back the point he has made in the first reply, that someone might produce a good product accidentally. He means that the goodness and badness of production is determined by its usefulness for producing the product; a better method of production is better because it is better at producing the right sort of product.

5. 1105a28–30 **But for actions . . . right qualities**: The value of acting virtuously, as opposed to a craftsman's production (the process), is not simply determined by its efficiency in producing a product; it also has its characteristic motive. The value of virtue is intrinsic; acting virtuously is not valuable simply as a means to some further result (e.g., acting kindly is not simply a means to making someone feel better). The intrinsic value of virtue reflects the virtuous person's motive, shown by the second condition in a32. The demand for a specific motive differentiates virtue from craft, and hence differentiates the training required for each of them; this is Aristotle's answer to the puzzle raised in the chapter. On virtuous action v. production, see 1106b14–16; ACTION #3.

6. **1105a31 <that he is doing them>**: I.e., that he is doing virtuous actions. [Or he must know what he is doing, and not be acting because of ignorance. See 1111a22–4.]

7. **§5 1105a33–b2 As conditions . . . knowing**: Aristotle passes from (a), the contrast between products produced well and actions done well, to (b), the contrast between good craftsmen and virtuous agents. The two contrasts are connected, because an action is done well only if it a good agent does it from the right state (whereas a product can be produced well even if a good craftsman does not produce it).

(d) §6. The importance of habituation.

8. **§6 1105b14–18 They are like a sick . . . philosophy**: Aristotle sometimes cites MEDICINE to illustrate people's lazy and unrealistic attitude to moral theory and instruction. Cf. 1114a15–16.

5

5. §1–6. *The genus of virtue of character: it is a state.*

(a) §1–2. The difference between feelings, capacities, and states.

1. **§1 1105b19–21 Next . . . one of these**: Aristotle sets out to define virtue by elimination. The three 'conditions' are the different conditions of soul concerned with action. Neither FEELINGS nor CAPACITIES are the same as virtues, because they are the raw material of virtue; they require training and organization, as 1104a20 implied. In this chapter Aristotle gives the genus of virtue; in c6 he gives the differentia (see DEFINE).

2. **§2 1105b25–6 By states I mean . . . to feelings**: 'STATE', *hexis* (lit. 'having'), is formed from *echein*, 'to have'. 'Well (badly) off' translates *echein* with the adverb, lit. 'have well (badly)'. (Greek says 'How do you have?' for the English 'How do you do?' or 'How are you?'.) Aristotle argues that a state is not *merely* a capacity. He does not deny, but indeed believes, that a state is a *type* of capacity; see, e.g., 'able to' in 1104a32–b3, indicating the type of capacity that is included in the state of character.

(b) §3–4. Virtues are not simply feelings.

3. **§3 1105b28–9 First, then, . . . are feelings**: Aristotle offers four arguments for this claim: (1) 'For we are . . . have feelings.' (2) 'Further, we are neither . . . have virtues or vices.' (3) 'Further, we are angry . . . require decision.' (4) 'Besides, insofar . . . rather than moved.'

4. **§3 1105b31–1106a3 Further, we are . . . have virtues or vices**: Praise and blame are proper to VOLUNTARY actions; here Aristotle introduces a question that he discusses further in iii 1. In iii 5 he considers whether praising virtue and blaming vice is ever justified.

The contrast between being 'simply (*haplôs*; see UNQUALIFIED) angry' and being 'angry in a particular way' is also connected to issues about voluntariness. Aristotle assumes that it is up to us to modify our feelings so that they are appropriate; that is why we are praised for being angry appropriately.

5. §4 1106a3–4 **but the virtues . . . require decision**: After introducing praise and blame, and hence questions about the VOLUNTARY, Aristotle mentions DECISION, already introduced in 1105a31, and discussed in iii 2–4.

(c) §5. Virtues are not capacities.

6. §5 1106a10 **we have discussed this before**: See 1103a17–b2.

(d) §6. Hence they are states.

6

6. §1–20. *The differentia of virtue of character: it is an intermediate state.*

(a) §1–3. Human virtue realizes the human function.

1. §1 1106a14–15 **But we must . . . what sort of state it is**: ‘What’ often marks the genus, and ‘what sort’ the differentia; DEFINITION #3.

2. §2 1106a15–17 **It should be . . . functions well**: The connexion between virtue and FUNCTION was urged in 1098a7; cf. 1139a16; Plato, *Rep.* 352d. As i 13 argued, a virtue requires the right relation among different parts of the soul, so that someone’s actions are guided by reason. Here Aristotle expands his earlier suggestion (in 1104a26) that guidance by reason requires neither total repression nor total indulgence of non-rational desires. Hence the connexion between virtue and function leads directly into the doctrine of the mean.

(b) §4–8. The numerical mean must be distinguished from the mean relative to us, which is the aim of the expert in athletic training.

3. §4 1106a24–6 **We have . . . virtue has**: Aristotle does not intend his appeal to the MEAN and to the EQUAL to offer a precise, quantitative test for virtuous action that we can readily apply to particular cases—as though, e.g., we could decide that there is a proper, moderate degree of anger to be displayed in all conditions, or in all conditions of a certain precisely described type. The point of the doctrine, and of Aristotle’s insistence on the ‘intermediate relative to us’, is that no such precise quantitative test can be found. It cannot be found because virtue accords with correct reason, as its relation to the FUNCTION of a human being requires; correct reason may require extreme anger at extreme injuries and slight anger at trivial offences; in both cases moderate anger would be wrong. To find the mean relative to us is to find the state of character that correct reason requires, neither suppressing nor totally indulging non-rational desires. This mean state cannot be identified in purely quantitative terms, however. The conditions that define it are ineliminably normative.

4. §5 1106a31–3 **the same for all . . . not the same for all**: The mean ‘relative to us’, is not relative to different people, but relative to human beings (as opposed to other sorts of things), i.e., appropriate for human nature. This aspect of the doctrine of the mean spells out Aristotle’s claims about the human function.

[Or we might take ‘the same for all’ as ‘the same for everyone’. The Greek ‘all’ might be masculine or neuter.]

(c) §9–14. The virtuous person, like the expert in a craft, aims at the mean. The special concern of virtue is the mean in feelings and actions.

5. §9 1106b8–9 **This, then, . . . product conform to that:** ‘Product’ translates *ergon*, translated ‘FUNCTION’ in 16–24. Here Aristotle argues, as he often does, from crafts to virtues—from the way in which a craft achieves its *ergon*, product, to the way in which virtue achieves its *ergon*, function.

6. 1106b14–16 **And since virtue, . . . intermediate:** Nature and craft: *PA* 639b19; *Phys.* 194a21. Though in certain respects virtue is less EXACT than some crafts (cf. 1104a7–10), it differs from craft insofar as a craft is a CAPACITY that can be used well or badly, whereas virtue is the direction of a capacity to the right use (1105a25–6). Hence we may expect virtue to aim more precisely on the right end, and therefore (since this aim requires aiming at the mean) to aim at the mean.

7. §12 1106b25–6 **deficiency is blamed:** Read *hē elleipsis psegetai*.

8. 1106b35 **‘for we are noble . . . sorts of ways’:** Author unknown.

(d) §15–17. The definition of virtue: it is a mean, guided by prudence.

9. §15 1106b36–1107a2 **Virtue, . . . define it:** Parts of this definition have been anticipated at 1105a31, 1103b21. The reference to the PRUDENT person might be derived from 1106b8–16, by taking the prudent person to correspond to the craftsman finding the mean. But the defence of the definition mostly comes later. See 1111b5, 1138b18, 1144b21.

(e) §18–20. Clarification of the definition; some descriptions of actions imply vice, and therefore preclude any mean.

10. §18 1107a8–9 **Now not every . . . the mean:** §17, indicating that we need to be careful about the sense in which virtue is a mean and an extremity, prompts this clarification. (In §20, ‘since the intermediate is a sort of extreme’, Aristotle repeats the point of §17.) We cannot find a virtue by taking just any description of a type of action or feeling, and claiming that there is a virtue in finding the mean in that; for the action or feeling may be a vicious one. Aristotelian virtues include mean conditions of natural desires and tendencies. They also include mean conditions of desires and tendencies (e.g., love of honour) that develop in normal forms of social life. In these cases we can find a mean only in the case of desires that do not inherently involve an excessive or deficient cultivation of feelings and desires. To decide whether they are excessive or deficient we need to know whether they do or do not conform to what we ought to do, when we ought to do it, and so on. The various conditions that determine what is RIGHT are not defined by reference to the mean, but, on the contrary, the mean is determined by these different aspects of the right.

11. 1107a9–12 **For the names . . . among actions:** Aristotle asserts that some types of action, in any circumstances, are always wrong. What does he mean by this? We might say that we would not *call* anything theft or murder unless we thought it wrong. Aristotle might say the same of adultery (it is the unjust use of a wife who justly belongs to another man). Cf. 1135b27–1136a1.

7

7.§1–16. *The definition of virtue as a mean applies to the specific virtues of character.*

1. §1 1107a28–32 **However, . . . accord with these:** See PARTICULAR. Aristotle looks for accounts of virtues that are more ‘particular’ in the sense of describing specific virtues; these virtues are not themselves token actions (Leonidas’ last stand at Thermopylae) or states (Leonidas’ bravery). But when Aristotle adds ‘since actions are about particular cases’, he seems to refer to token actions. He intends his account of specific virtues to be helpful in practical questions, as he promised in 1104a10–11.

2. 1107a32–3 **Let us, . . . chart:** Aristotle probably has a table of the different means and extremes on a chart in his classroom. Cf. *EE* 1220b37, *DI* 22a22. This chapter anticipates the detailed argument of iii 6–v, and in some ways makes its aim clearer: (1) The virtues are classified into groups. (2) Aristotle seeks to show that for every genuine virtue of character the doctrine of the mean explains why it is a virtue. (3) In some cases this is fairly easy, where (as with bravery) Aristotle can find a trio of mean, excess, and deficiency already recognized in ordinary beliefs. But sometimes it is hard, where we do not naturally think of a trio, and have no names for some of the alleged members. This is why Aristotle’s remarks on the ‘nameless’ virtues are important (see 1107b2, VIRTUE). He wants to show that his doctrine applies here too, and hence that the trio is recognizable even where common beliefs have not yet recognized it.

(a) §2–3. Virtues concerned with feelings.

(b) §4–9. Virtues concerned with external goods.

3. §8 1107b31–1108a1 **This is why . . . indifferent to honour:** This comment explains why Aristotle thinks it important to identify virtues that have no name to distinguish them clearly from the extremes. The absence of a clear way to distinguish them from the extremes leads to two mistakes: (1) The person at the extreme claims to have the virtue. When Aristotle says the extreme people lay claim to the intermediate area, he means not (a) they agree that virtue is a mean and claim, ‘We have the mean state’, but (b) they claim that the virtue (which Aristotle takes to be a mean state) is the state (in fact extreme) they have. (2) We (not the extreme people) refer to the intermediate person by the name of one of the extremes. In case (1) the speaker does not correctly identify the genuinely virtuous state. In case (2) we correctly identify it, but we use a misleading name. Cf. 1126a17–18.

(c) §10–13. Virtues concerned with social life.

(d) §14–16. Mean states that are not virtues.

4. §15 1107b35–1108a6 **Proper indignation . . . <other people’s misfortunes>:** These mean states are not discussed further in the *EN*. Cf. *EE* iii 7; *Rhet.* ii 6, 9–10.

(e) §16. Justice.

5. §16 1108b6–7 **There will . . . elsewhere . . . these:** ‘These’ might be the states mentioned in §15 (in which case Aristotle might refer to *Rhet.* ii) or all the virtues of character mentioned (looking forward to Books iii–iv).

8

8. §1–8. *Different virtues involve different relations between the mean state and the extremes.*

(a) §1–3. The mean state is opposed to each extreme.

1. §2 1108b19–23 **For the brave . . . wasteful person:** The doctrine of the mean explains disputes and errors about the virtues, as a good theory should (1154a22). Those who do not fully understand the requirements of the virtue identify it with one extreme, which is legitimately criticized by the other extreme; cf. 1125b4–18; *Rhet.* 1367a32–b7.

(b) §4–5. Each extreme is more opposed to the other extreme than to the mean state.

(c) §6–8. In some cases one extreme is more opposed than the other is to the mean state.

2. §7 1109a7–8 **Since sometimes one extreme . . . intermediate condition:** How is one extreme nearer to the mean? Perhaps, e.g., the rash person has the same sort of attitude to fears that the brave person has, but goes too far with it, whereas the coward has not developed the right sort of attitude at all. Cf. 1121a20, 1122a13, 1125a32, 1127b31.

9

9. §1–9. *Since it is difficult to reach the mean, we must try to give practical advice, even though it is imprecise.*

1. §2 1109a28–9 **is no longer . . . do it:** The difficulty of acting virtuously: 1137a4–26.

(a) §3–4. We must avoid the extreme that is more opposed to the mean.

2. §3 1109a30–2 **That is why . . . spray and surge.:** Aristotle offers practical advice, as he promised (1104a10), stressing that his doctrine does not offer precise answers to particular questions. See ETHICS #9, PERCEPTION. He quotes Homer, *Od.* xii 219, inaccurately (Circe’s advice, not Calypso’s).

3. §4 1109a34 **extremely accurately:** (*akrôs*). A pun on *akrôs* = ‘extremely’ and *akron* = ‘extreme’ (as opposed to intermediate); cf. 1107a8, 23 (the mean is, in one sense, an extremity).

(b) §4–5. We must avoid the extreme that we drift into more easily.

(c) §6. We must be especially careful with pleasures.

4. §6 1109b9–12 **Hence we must react . . . less in error:** In Homer (*Il.* iii 156) the Trojan elders comment on Helen's beauty: 'Her face is uncannily like the faces of the immortal goddesses. But, beautiful though she is, let her depart in the ships; may she not be left behind to cause grief to us and our children' (158–60).

(d) §7–9. This advice is necessarily inexact; in particular cases we must rely on perception.

5. §8 1109b22–3 **Such things . . . perception:** Lit. 'Such things are in particulars and the judgment (or 'discrimination') is in perception.' 'Such' might refer back to 'nothing else perceptible' just mentioned, or it might include the circumstances and degrees mentioned just before that. See PERCEPTION.