

INTRODUCTION

THE MAN WHO STATED HIS OPINION IN THE GOD'S PRE-
cinct in Delos made an inscription on the propylaeum to the
temple of Leto, in which he separated from one another the
good, the noble and the pleasant as not all properties of the
same thing. He wrote: Book A, 1214a

Most noble is what is most just, but best is health,
and pleasantest the getting what one longs for. 5

Let us disagree with him; for happiness is at once the most
noble and best of all things and also the pleasantest.

About each thing and kind there are many considerations
that raise problems and need investigation. Of these some 10
concern knowledge only, some the acquisition of things and
the performance of acts as well. About those which involve
contemplative philosophy only we must when occasion
arises say what is appropriate to that study. But first we must 15
consider in what the good life consists and how it is to be ac-
quired, whether all who receive the epithet 'happy' are so by
nature (as we are tall, short, or of different complexions), or
by learning (happiness being a kind of knowledge), or by
some sort of training—for men acquire many qualities nei-
ther by nature nor by learning but by habituation, base quali- 20
ties if they are habituated to the base, good if to the good. Or
do men become happy in none of these ways, but either—
like those possessed by nymphs or deities—through a sort of
divine influence, being as it were inspired, or by fortune? For 25
many declare happiness to be identical with good fortune.

That men, then, possess happiness through all or some or
one of these causes is not obscure; for practically all events
can be traced back to these originating principles; for all acts
arising from thought may be included among acts that arise

30 from knowledge. Now to be happy and to live blissfully and
nobly must consist mainly in three things, which seem most
desirable; for some say wisdom is the greatest good, some
virtue, and some pleasure. Some also dispute about the mag-
1214b nitude of the contribution made by each of these to happi-
ness, declaring the contribution of one to be greater than
that of another—some regarding wisdom as a greater good
than virtue, some the opposite, and others regarding plea-
sure as a greater good than both. And some consider the
5 happy life to be compounded of all these, some of two, and
others hold it to consist in one.

First then about these things we must enjoin everyone
that has the power to live according to his own choice to set
up for himself some object for a noble life to aim at (whether
honour or reputation or riches or education), with reference
to which he will then do all his acts, since not to have one's
10 life organized in view of some end is an indication of much
folly. Then above all he must first define for himself neither
impetuously nor carelessly in which of our belongings the
good life is lodged, and what are the indispensable condi-
15 tions of its attainment. For health is not the same as the in-
dispensable conditions of health; and so it is with many
other things, so that the noble life and its indispensable con-
ditions are not identical. Of such things some are not pecu-
liar to health or even to life, but common to pretty well all
20 states and actions—for instance, without breathing or being
awake or having the power of movement we could have nei-
ther good things nor bad; but some are peculiar to each kind
of thing, and these it is important to observe: for instance,
the eating of meat and walking after meals are not appropri-
ate in the same way as the things mentioned above with re-
gard to being in a good condition. For herein is the cause of
25 the disputes about happiness, its nature and causes; for
some take to be parts of happiness what are its indispensable
conditions.

To examine all the beliefs about it is superfluous; for
30 children, sick people, and the insane all have views, but no

intelligent person would raise problems about them; for such persons need not reasons but years in which they may change, or else medical or political chastisement—for medicine, no less than whipping, is a chastisement. Similarly we have not to consider the views of the multitude (for they talk at random about practically everything, and especially about happiness); for it is absurd to apply reason to those who need not reason but experience. But since every study has its own problems, plainly there are such relating to the best life and the best existence: it is well to examine these beliefs; for a disputant's refutation of the arguments contrary to his own is a demonstration of the argument itself. 1215a
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Further, it pays not to neglect these considerations, especially with a view to that at which all inquiry should be directed, namely the causes that enable us to share in the good and noble life—if anyone finds it invidious to call it the blessed life—and with a view to the hope people have of attaining what is upright. For if the noble life consists in what is due to fortune or to nature, it would be something that many cannot hope for, since its acquisition is not in their power, nor attainable by their care or activity; but if it depends on the individual and his personal acts being of a certain character, then the good would be both more general and more divine, more general because more would be able to possess it, more divine because happiness would then be open to those who make themselves and their acts of a certain character. 15

Most of the doubts and problems raised will become evident if we define well what we ought to think happiness to be—whether it consists merely in having a soul of a certain character (as some of the older philosophers thought) or whether the man must indeed be of a certain character but it is even more necessary that his actions should be of a certain character. 20
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If we make a division of the kinds of life, some do not even pretend to this sort of well-being, their business being done for the sake of what is necessary—for instance, those

concerned with vulgar crafts, or with commercial or servile
30 occupations (by vulgar I mean crafts pursued only with a
view to reputation, by servile those which are sedentary and
wage-earning, by commercial those connected with markets
and selling in shops). But there are three things directed to a
happy employment of life, those which we have above called
35 the three greatest of human goods: virtue, wisdom, and
pleasure. We thus see that there are three lives which all
those choose who have power: the lives of the political man,
1215b of the philosopher, and of the voluptuary. For of these the
philosopher intends to occupy himself with wisdom and
contemplation of truth, the political man with noble acts
(which are those springing from virtue), the voluptuary with
5 bodily pleasures. Therefore each calls a different person
happy, as was indeed said before. Anaxagoras of Clazo-
menae, being asked who was the happiest of men, said:
'None of those you suppose, but one who would appear an
absurd being to you'. He answered in this way because he
10 saw that the questioner assumed that it was impossible for
one not great and beautiful or rich to deserve the epithet
'happy', while he himself perhaps thought that the man who
lived painlessly and pure of injustice or else engaged in some
divine contemplation was, as far as a man may be, blessed.

15 In many other cases it is difficult to assess things well, but
most difficult where it seems to all to be easiest and knowl-
edge to be in the power of any man—namely, the question of
what of all that is found in living is desirable, and what, if at-
tained, would satisfy our appetite. For there are many con-
20 tingencies that make men fling away life, such as disease, ex-
cessive pain, storms, so that it is plain that, if one were given
the power of choice, not to be born at all would, as far as
at least as these reasons go, have been desirable. Further, the
life we lead as children is not desirable;¹ for no one in his
senses would face returning to this. Further, many incidents

1 Omitting τίς (an addition to the received text proposed by Casaubon and printed by Susemihl: 'Further, what is the life we lead as children?').

involving neither pleasure nor pain or involving pleasure but 25
not of a noble kind are such that non-existence is preferable
to life. And generally, if one were to bring together all that all
men do and experience but not voluntarily because not for
its own sake, and were to add to this an infinity of time, one
would none the more choose on account of these experi- 30
ences to live than not to live. But further, neither for the
pleasure of eating or that of sex, if all the other pleasures
were removed that knowing or seeing or any other sense
provides men with, would any man value life, unless he were
utterly servile; for it is plain that to the man making this 35
choice there would be no difference between being born a
brute and a man: at any rate the ox in Egypt, which they hon-
our as Apis, in most of such matters has more power than
many monarchs. We may say the same of the pleasure of
sleeping. For what is the difference between sleeping an un-
broken sleep from one's first day to one's last, for a thousand 5
or any number of years, and living the life of a plant? Plants
at any rate seem to possess this sort of life, and similarly chil-
dren; for children, too, have a continuous natural life from
their first coming into being in their mother's womb, but
sleep the entire time. It is plain then from these consider- 10
ations that men, though they look, fail to see what is well-
being and what the good in life.

They say that Anaxagoras answered a man who was rais-
ing problems of this sort and asking why one should choose
to be born rather than not by saying: 'For the sake of con-
templating the heavens and the whole order of the universe'.
He, then, thought the choice of life for the sake of some sort 15
of knowledge to be valuable. Those who felicitate Sardana-
pallus or Smindyrides the Sybarite or any other of those who
live the voluptuary's life, these evidently all place happiness
in the feeling of delight. Others would rather choose virtu- 20
ous actions than wisdom or bodily pleasures—at any rate
some choose these not only for the sake of reputation but
even when they are not going to win credit by them. But
most political men are not truly so called: they are not in

25 truth political; for the political man is one who chooses noble acts for their own sake, while most take up the political life for the sake of wealth and from covetousness.

From what has been said, then, it is evident that all connect happiness with three lives, the political, the philosophical, and the voluptuous. Now among these the nature and quality and sources of the pleasure of the body and sensual enjoyment are plain, so that we have to inquire not what such pleasures are but whether they tend to happiness or not and how they tend, and whether—supposing one should attach to the noble life certain pleasures—one should attach these, or whether some other sort of engagement in these is a necessity but the pleasures through which men reasonably think the happy man to live pleasantly and not merely painlessly are different.

About that let us inquire later. First let us consider virtue and wisdom, the nature of each, and whether they are parts of the good life either in themselves or through the actions that arise from them, since everyone—or at least everyone worth considering—connects them to happiness.

Socrates the elder thought knowledge of virtue to be the end, and he used to inquire what justice is, what courage and each of the parts of virtue; and it was reasonable for him to do so, for he thought all the virtues to be kinds of knowledge. So to know justice and to be just come simultaneously; for the moment that we have learned geometry or building we are builders and geometers. Therefore he inquired what virtue is, not how or from what it arises. This is right with regard to the contemplative sciences; for there is no other part of astronomy or physics or geometry except knowing and contemplating the nature of the things which are the subjects of those sciences—though nothing prevents them from being coincidentally useful to us for much that we cannot do without. But the end of the productive sciences is something different from science and knowledge—for instance, health is different from medicine, law and order (or something of the sort) from political science. Now to know anything that

is noble is itself noble; but regarding virtue, at least, it is not 20
to know what it is but to recognize out of what it arises that
is most valuable. For we do not want to know what courage
is but to be courageous, nor what justice is but to be just—as
we want to be in health rather than to know what being in
health is, and to be in good condition rather than to know 25
what being in good condition is.

About all these matters we must try to get conviction by
arguments, using people's perceptions as evidence and illus-
tration. It would be best that all men should clearly concur
with what we are going to say, but if not, then that all should 30
do so in a sort of way at least—and this if converted they will
do. For every man has some contribution to make to the
truth, and it is on this basis that we must give some sort of
proof about these matters. For by advancing from true but
unilluminating judgements we shall arrive at illuminating
ones, always exchanging the usual confused statements for
more perspicuous ones. 35

In every inquiry there is a difference between philosophi-
cal and unphilosophical remarks: therefore we should not
think even in political inquiry that the sort of consideration
which makes not only the nature of the thing evident but
also its cause is superfluous; for such consideration is in
every inquiry philosophical. But this needs much caution.
For there are some who, through thinking it to be the mark 1217a
of a philosopher to make no random statement but always to
give a reason, often unawares give reasons foreign to the
subject and empty—this they do sometimes from ignorance,
sometimes because they are boasters—by which reasons
even men experienced and able to act are trapped by those 5
who neither have nor are capable of having practical and
constructive thought. This happens to them from want of
education; for inability in regard to each matter to assess
which reasons are appropriate to the subject and which are
foreign to it is want of education. And it is right to assess 10
separately the explanation and the conclusion both because
of what has just been said (namely, that one should attend

not merely to what is inferred by argument but often more to people's perceptions—whereas now when men are unable to answer the argument they are compelled to believe what
15 has been said), and also because often that which seems to have been shown by argument is true indeed but not for the cause which the argument assigns; for one may prove truth by means of falsehood, as is plain from the *Analytics*.