

Quotations from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*
(Trans. by Terence Irwin, Hackett Publishing Co., 1985)

1. "Every craft and every investigation, and likewise every action and decision, seems to aim at some good; hence the good has been well described as that at which everything aims." NE 1094a1
2. "Suppose, then, that there is some end of the things we pursue in our actions which we wish for because of itself, and because of which we wish for the other things; and (b) we do not choose everything because of something else, since (c) if we do, it will go on without limit, making desire empty and futile; then clearly (d) this end will be the good, i.e., the best good. Then surely knowledge of this good is also of great importance for the conduct of our lives, and if, like archers, we have a target to aim at, we are more likely to hit the right mark." NE 1094a18-22
3. "[F]or though admittedly the good is the same for a city as for an individual, still the good of the city is apparently a greater and more complete good to acquire and preserve." NE 1094b7-8
4. "As far as its name goes, most people virtually agree [about what the good is], since both the many and the cultivated call it happiness, and suppose that living well and doing well are the same as being happy. But they disagree about what happiness is, and the many do not give the same answer as the wise." NE 1095a17-21
5. "[T]here are roughly three most favoured lives—the lives of gratification, of political activity, and third, of study. The many, the most vulgar, would seem to conceive the good and happiness as pleasure....Here they appear completely slavish, since the life they decide on is a life for grazing animals; and yet they have some argument in their defense....The cultivated people, those active [in politics], conceive the good as honour....This, however, appears to be too superficial to be what we are seeking, since it seems to depend more on those who honour than on the one honoured, whereas we intuitively believe that the good is something of our own and hard to take from us....The third life is the life of study...." NE1095b17-1096a5
6. "The money-maker's life is in a way forced on him [not chosen for itself]; and clearly wealth is not the good we are seeking, since it is [merely] useful, [choiceworthy only] for some other end." NE 1096a6-8
7. "Now happiness more than anything else seems unconditionally complete, since we always [choose it, and also] choose it because of itself, never because of something else." NE 1097b1
8. "[T]he complete good [i.e., happiness] seems to be self-sufficient. Now what we count as self-sufficient is not what suffices for a solitary person by himself, living an isolated life, but what suffices also for parents, children, wife and in general for friends and fellow-citizens, since a human being is a naturally political [animal]....[W]e regard something as self-sufficient when all by itself it makes a life choiceworthy and lacking nothing; and that is what we think happiness does." NE 1097b9-16

9. “[P]erhaps we shall find the best good if we first find the function of a human being. For just as the good, i.e., [doing] well, for a flautist, a sculptor, and every craftsman, and, in general, for whatever has a function and [characteristic] action, seems to depend on its function, the same seems to be true for a human being, if a human being has some function....What, then, could this be? For living is apparently shared with plants, but what we are looking for is the special function of a human being; hence we should set aside the life of nutrition and growth. The life next in order is some sort of life of sense-perception; but this too is apparently shared, with horse, ox and every animal. The remaining possibility, then, is some sort of life of action of the [part of the soul] that has reason.” NE 1097b24-1098a3
10. “We have found, then, that the human function is the soul’s activity that expresses reason [as itself having reason] or requires reason [as obeying reason].” NE 1098a7-8
11. “Each function is completed well when its completion expresses the proper virtue. Therefore the human good turns out to be the soul’s activity that expresses virtue.” NE 1098a15-17
12. “[H]appiness is an activity of the soul expressing complete virtue.” NE 1102a5
13. “Virtue, then, is of two sorts, virtue of thought [e.g., wisdom, comprehension, intelligence] and virtue of character [e.g., generosity, temperance, courage, justice]. Virtue of thought arises and grows mostly from teaching, and hence needs experience and time. Virtue of character [i.e., of ethos] results from habit [ethos]; hence its name ‘ethical’, slightly varied from ‘ethos’. Hence it is also clear that none of the virtues of character arises in us naturally.” NE 1103a14-19
14. “A state [of character] arises from [the repetition of] similar activities.” NE 1103b21
15. “[V]irtue of character is concerned with pleasures and pains. For it is pleasure that causes us to do base actions, and pain that causes us to abstain from fine ones. Hence we need to have had the appropriate upbringing—right from early youth, as Plato says—to make us find enjoyment or pain in the right things; for this is the correct education.” NE 1104a9-13
16. “[N]either virtues nor vices are feelings.” NE 1105b29
17. “Virtue, then, is (a) a state that decides, (b) [consisting] in a mean, (c) the mean relative to us, (d) which is defined by reference to reason, (e) i.e., to the reason by reference to which the intelligent person would define it.” NE 1107a1-5
18. state (hexis): a condition of the soul by which one is well off or badly off in relation to feelings (cf. NE 1105b26); a tendency to act in a certain way, formed through training, and involving one’s desires, feelings, and decisions (cf. Irwin 426).
19. “Do we choose life because of pleasure, or pleasure because of life? Let us set aside this question for now, since the two appear to be yoked together, and to allow no separation; for pleasure never arises without activity, and, equally, it completes every activity.” NE 1175a18-22