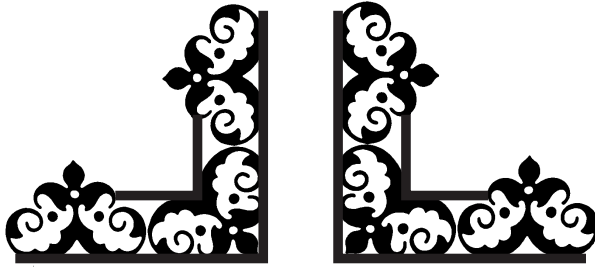


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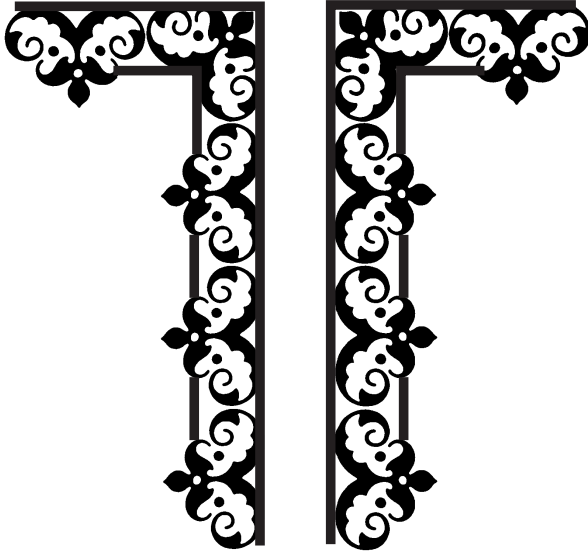
Commentary
on Aristotle's
Nicomachean Ethics



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COMMENTARY ON
Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics



Peter Martyr Vermigli

Edited by
Emidio Campi and Joseph C. McLelland
with introduction and annotations by Joseph C. McLelland

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INTRODUCTION BY PETER MARTYR VERMIGLI¹

[1] All our knowledge is either revealed or acquired. In the first instance it is theology, in the other philosophy.² The word *philosophia* is a compound. Some say that wisdom is the knowledge of everything that exists; but since wisdom consists only of certain and firm knowledge, it can by no means include everything, for particulars are unknown—accidents and contingencies cannot be known because of their impermanence.³ Others hold that philosophy is the knowledge of things divine and human. But among divine and human we find great variety: celestial bodies, constellations, elements, minerals, plants, and animals. Now, they ascribe heaven to God because it is eternal, while they say that lesser things—as being corruptible—are suited to humans. But where will they locate mathematics?⁴

So it seems that it should be defined as a disposition given by God to human minds, increased through effort and exercise, by which all existing things are perceived as surely and as logically as possible, which would enable men to attain happiness.

There are all kinds of causes there:⁵ the form that is a disposition, the matter in which it resides, namely, the human mind and reason, and whatever it apprehends as objects, namely, all that exists that is knowable not simply and absolutely, but as certainly as possible; agent is also involved there, since God is clearly the author. He endowed our minds with light and planted the seeds from which the principles of all knowledge arose. That is why Cicero said in book 1 of the *Tusculanae Disputationes* that “philosophy is the gift and invention of the gods.”⁶ This is also conceded by Lucretius, although he was an Epicurean.⁷ Since certain knowledge of all things is more to be desired than expected and is more easily loved than

¹Vermigli's introduction, which is printed on folios 1–10, appears in *Common Places of Peter Martyr Vermigli*, translated and partly gathered by Anthony Marten (London, 1583), 2.3.5–11. This translation was included in Vermigli, *Philosophical Works*, ed. McLelland, “Philosophy and Theology.”

²On the twofold knowledge (*duplex notitia*), see also Rom. 1:19; 1 Cor. 1:21; Vermigli, *Sacred Prayers Drawn from the Psalms of David*, trans. and ed. John Patrick Donnelly. Peter Martyr Library 3 (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1996), 21; and Vermigli, *Commentary on Judges* 6, in *Philosophical Works*, ed. McLelland, 138–54.

³Plato *Resp.* 6.484–85, 500C; and Aristotle *Eth. nic.* 6.6.1139b31–33.

⁴That is, mathematics deals with objects that are (probably) “immovable and separable from matter.” In *Metaphysics* 6.1.1026a18–20, Aristotle writes, “There must, then, be three theoretical philosophies, mathematics, physics, and what we may call theology.” Cf. [3] (p. 9) below.

⁵For Aristotle's concept of complex causality (formal, material, efficient, and final), see *Phys.* 2.3; and *An. Post.* 71b9–12.

⁶Cicero *Tusc.* 1.21.

⁷Lucretius *De rerum natura*, prologue to book 5.

possessed, and since the more we reach toward it the more we are inflamed with it, for this reason it is called “desire of wisdom,” *philosophia*. The author of this term was Pythagoras, who had come to Phlius and conversed with Leo, its tyrant. [2] Marveling at Pythagoras’s genius and eloquence, Leo asked which art or science he professed. Pythagoras would not say that he was “wise,” but that he was “devoted to wisdom,” that is, that he was a “philosopher.”⁸

Thus defined, philosophy is divided into active and contemplative, both of which Aristotle investigated as the subject required.⁹ They differ inasmuch as contemplation [*theōretikon*] only observes, while action [*praktikon*] does what is known. Therefore they are distinguished as to their ends: theory reposes in the very contemplation of things since it cannot create them. Likewise, practice observes, but only inasmuch as it may express what it knows in action.¹⁰ Clearly, we see two operations in man, for he thinks, then acts. Just as God not only understands himself and is happy and perfect in himself, but also creates by his providence and rules what he has created, so man’s happiness is considered twofold. The one we may call active, of which Aristotle writes in book 1. The other, far more perfect and admirable, is contemplation, which he discusses in book 10. Thus it is obvious that man may approach to a small degree the likeness of God, if this is accomplished through this double felicity. That is why Plato in his *Phaedo* said that philosophy is “likeness to God, according to human capacity.”¹¹ Nor, as some think, is the distinction between practice and speculation the same as that between the operations of our will and intellect, respectively.¹² This is not admissible, since the sciences are distinguished through objects. If anyone examines the matter more diligently, he will see that it must be taken in regard to the objects of understanding. For they have God and nature as a cause, and so would pertain to the speculative genus, since we cannot create them by our own will. Those other things of which we are the cause, which we are able to will and to choose, belong to the practical faculty.

Which of the two is superior remains to be seen. The common and accepted belief is to prefer the speculative to the active, for action is subjected to contemplation and not the reverse. And whatever is subjected to something else, no one

⁸Pythagoras of Samos (fl. 530 BCE), Greek philosopher; one of the so-called seven sages of ancient Greece; he left no written record; stories of his travels are apocryphal, but a Peripatetic colony was established at Phlius; Plato’s *Phaedo* is set there and dedicated to its leaders. Heracleides Ponticus had Pythagoras invent the word “philosopher” in conversation with Leon. See Simmias in Plato *Phaed.* 64B; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, trans. Hicks, 1.12; and Cicero *Tusc.* 5.3.8.

⁹See Aristotle *Metaph.* 6.1.1025b25; and *Top.* 6.6. Vermigli has similar material in *Epistolam S. Paul: Apostoli ad Romanos Commentarij doctissimi* (Basel: P. Perna, 1558), 2:1.11.

¹⁰In the introduction to his commentary on Samuel, Vermigli writes that prophecy corresponds to theory, history to practice. In *duos Libros Samuelis* (Zurich: Froschauer, 1564).

¹¹Plato *Theaet.* 176B: “homoiōsin theō kata to dynamou anthrōpō” (the way of escape lies in becoming as like God as possible). Cf. Plato *Tim.* 90D.

¹²Vermigli discusses this distinction further [8] (p. 13) below.

doubts to be less worthy. They also object that the theoretical genus belongs to action, since we behold nature so that we may love its author and we seek to perceive God that we may honor him. For this reason some call our theology practical. But those who reason so are wrong.¹³ A science is called practical not because it is accompanied by some act, but because the very same object is attained as [3] was known beforehand. When we contemplate nature and heaven, even if worship and love of God follow, we cannot call such knowledge active, inasmuch as what we contemplate is not produced. No one can create heaven and nature, and so all the results of such contemplation are said to happen by accident. Not all who contemplate these things love or cherish God; on the contrary, they are most often alienated from him. Thus the works that result from that knowledge and our theology itself, seek to know God more and more so that we can look closely at him face-to-face in heaven. Christ our Savior confirmed this belief, saying: "This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."¹⁴

This division applies not only to philosophy but also to our minds; hence some minds are called practical and others contemplative. But it is not as if there were two powers or faculties of mind, for they are called so depending on whether they concern themselves with action or contemplation, respectively.

Speculative philosophy is divided into three parts:¹⁵ when things are averse to and quite separate from matter, such as God or intelligence, they constitute *metaphysica*; when they are so closely connected with matter that they cannot be defined without it, they are accordingly *physica*; or, they take a middle course when they cannot exist without matter—iron or wood etc.—yet can be defined and understood without it, such as mathematics.

Such matters may be further defined, but I shall refrain from doing so, and distinguish practical philosophy¹⁶ by providing the rules referring to the life and the upbringing of either one man or many. If one man is concerned, it is ethics; if more than one man is concerned, it is of importance whether they are many or fewer. If fewer, the subject is domestic economy; if many, it is civics.¹⁷ But where do we put the arts? These are comprehended under the third kind of practical philosophy and pertain to politics, and are not to be excluded from the category of wisdom. For art is "a system of devices exercised for some end that may be useful in anyone's life."¹⁸ Two things are clear in this definition. First, that art is a device that relates to knowledge through which some things are understood with certainty, through

¹³Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1.Q4 Resp. "Yet sacred doctrine includes both . . . Still, it is speculative rather than practical"; and Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio in laudem Basilii*, 20.12 (PG 35:1080B): "*Praxis* is the ladder to *theōria*."

¹⁴John 17:3.

¹⁵See Vermigli's opening paragraph [1] (p. 7) above.

¹⁶Vermigli uses the Greek *ta praktika*.

¹⁷Vermigli uses the Greek *politeia*.

¹⁸Aristotle *Metaph.* 1.1.981a5.

exercise and experience. Thus it cannot be removed from wisdom. Nor can we doubt that [4] those who invented these arts or excelled in them were called wise by the men of old. Thus Bezeleel and Aoliab are called wise in scripture.¹⁹ Second, we say that this knowledge is practical because its objects are known through practice and through its devices, something is provided and effected that leads to a pleasant life. Wherefore ropedancers, jugglers, and others of this sort who provide nothing useful for human life are not masters of an art, but should be called impostors and triflers.

Arts may be divided into those that produce some work and those that are fulfilled by their own act. From this follows what is to be judged concerning dialectics, for it should be considered among the arts and brings about most useful things in life. Hence, it is not to be separated from wisdom, since it is the method, the instrument, and the way by which we claim wisdom for ourselves—and the way should not be cut off from its goal. In this manner Cicero, in his *Academica priora*, made distinctions within philosophy, so that in part it concerns life and morals, in part nature and abstruse matters, or else the art of discussion, which idea he owes to Plato.²⁰ Nor does Galen differ from this opinion. Also, it should be noted that from these authors of philosophy more is gained for the world than from Ceres who gives us fruit, or Bacchus from whom we receive wine, or Hercules, who rid the world of monsters. They have to do with aspects of physical life, but philosophy nourishes and instructs the very soul.

In these books of practical philosophy, the first that we have at hand, namely, *Ethics*, stands out from the entire corpus like the book *De audibilibus*;²¹ in the latter the fundamentals of the natural sciences are described; in the former you will find the first principles of economics and politics. Therefore we will interpret this book before any other treatise. We may acknowledge that ethics has borrowed something from physics; for instance, the discussion of the parts of the mind, or the rule that the same effects are found in the same minds, and that it bases many of its premises and draws many conclusions on the principles of physics. Yet it cannot be considered to be an auxiliary science, because physics and ethics are quite unlike in kind and this is not characteristic of auxiliary sciences, where the subject of a superior science must include that of an inferior science.

Ethics takes its name from *to ethos*, that is, “custom.” And *ethos* comes from the verb “to be accustomed” with *epsilon* changed to *eta*; for the only way for us to acquire morals and good habits is by custom.²² That whole book is concerned,

¹⁹Exod. 36:1.

²⁰Cicero *Acad.* 1.5. Cf. Plato *Soph.* 253.

²¹*De audibilibus* is now ascribed to Strato (d. ca. 269 BCE), Greek Peripatetic philosopher and polymath; “nicknamed ‘the Physicist’ for his innovative ideas in natural science.”

²²*Eth. nic.* 2.1.1103a16ff: “moral virtue comes about as a result of habit, whence also its name *ēthikē* is one that is found by a slight variation from the word *ethos*.”

moreover, with man: [5] how one becomes endowed with virtues, and attains the happiness that may be acquired in this life. Hence Plato in *Theaetetus* called this part of philosophy “the greatest harmony”²³—not because it dealt with sounds, voices, or lyres, but because it is concerned with the harmony of the parts of the mind with reason. It is not difficult to see what method of teaching Aristotle uses. He distinguishes and defines, and uses almost every kind of argument. Sometimes he uses examples, sometimes induction, occasionally enthymeme, at times that perfect form of reasoning called syllogism, and even demonstrative syllogism, although rarely, since the nature of morals is shaky and uncertain.²⁴ Frequently he uses comparisons and sometimes explanations, but these—*a posteriori* and almost never or very rarely *a priori*—are used as causes.

The discoverers of this part of philosophy are said to have been Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato, while all the philosophers of earlier times—Parmenides, Melissus, Anaxagoras, Democritus, Empedocles, and Hippocrates—were wholly preoccupied with the examination of nature. Socrates was the first to have focused in earnest on establishing principles of moral life. Before him, the seven Greek sages at times spoke reasonably of what constitutes the good life—Solon, Pittacus, and others, but what they had to say were merely aphorisms, which, although elegant and famous, yet contained nothing elaborate or complete. After Plato came Aristotle, a man of singular genius, who subjected the whole relevant material to methodical analysis and arranged it with the greatest accuracy. He was born seven years after Rome had recovered from the Gauls. His place of birth was Stagira in Thrace, an otherwise obscure village except that he was its citizen. His father was Nicomachus, by profession a physician who, on account of that profession, was cherished by King Amyntas, the father of Philip. For a time, Aristotle was a pupil of Socrates, and of Plato for a full twenty years.²⁵ Alexander of Macedon was educated as Aristotle’s pupil; he used to say that he owed more to Aristotle than to King Philip, his own father, for Philip merely made him live, whereas Aristotle made him live well and happily. In thanks to his teacher, he restored Stagira, which Philip had destroyed, raising it to better political shape than it had before it was overthrown. The school of Peripatetics sprang from Aristotle: it had fewer errors than any other school and flourishes to this day.²⁶

²³Actually in Plato *Phaedo* 61.

²⁴Aristotle analyzes these types in his two *Analytica*; see Richard McKeon, “Introduction,” in *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1966), xvi. On Aristotle’s method in the various disciplines, cf. Vermigli, *Ep. Rom. Comm.* 8:38: “Probable arguments cannot by themselves persuade completely, but when joined to firm and demonstrative reasons make something more evident.”

²⁵Vermigli is mistaken. Aristotle (384–322 BCE) spent twenty years (368/7–348/7 BCE) at Plato’s academy in Athens. He was never a pupil of Socrates, who died in 399.

²⁶Aristotle taught in an Athenian school featuring a covered walking place (*peripatos*), hence the school name Peripatetic. The Renaissance revival of Aristotelianism was marked at Padua where Vermigli studied under Pomponazzi’s successor, Genua.

[6] This *Ethics* is called Nicomachean, because it was dedicated to Nicomachus, the author's son, just as was Cicero's book *De officiis*. Both of them were great writers, yet neither of their sons matched the parent in teaching and fame. There were several people who thought that Nicomachus, Aristotle's son, wrote these books, having been the first to receive the teaching from his father, and afterwards collecting the writings and putting them in one volume. Suidas holds that Nicomachus wrote ten books on morals, but whether these are one and the same is most doubtful. Cicero also (in book 5 of the *De finibus*) seems to assume that Nicomachus composed these books. The *Magna moralia* are extant, and so is what is called the *Ethica eudemia*, but they are not to be compared with this treatise.²⁷

The rank of this moral teaching in relation to other sciences was so determined by the ancients that he who had already gone through grammar, rhetoric, and dialectics would then turn to moral subjects. For if the mind is inflamed with desire and overwhelmed by vice, it is not suitable for mathematics or divine and human contemplation, since these things require a calm and peaceful mind. Among these moral subjects, the first place is surely held by ethics, then economics, and finally politics. I see this order as circular. Through ethics, those who are its students will, one by one, become good men. If they prove upright, they will raise good families; if the families are properly established, they will in turn create good republics. And in good republics, both law and administration will aim at nothing less than each man becoming a good citizen, for they have eyes not only for the body but also for the spirit, and they will take care that citizens live according to virtue.²⁸

Therefore, as far as our method of analysis is concerned, let us accept the following outline of these ten books. First, the goal of human life is discussed, defined in book 1, where it is taught that happiness is the carrying out of perfect virtue.²⁹ This requires a consideration of the nature of virtue, which occurs in book 2 in which the virtues are first dealt with—not yet those of the intellect, but those that pertain to moderate desires—and then it is asserted that virtue is the state between excess and defect.³⁰ In book 3, the principles of virtue are taught:

²⁷Suidas, *Lexicon*. Suidas (tenth century BCE), Greek grammarian and lexicographer; his *Lexicon* contains valuable extracts from ancient authors. Modern opinion suggests that Nicomachus edited a course of ethics and either Aristotle or his friend Eudemus is responsible for *Ethica eudemia* (Edwards, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 161; and Ross, *Aristotle*, 14). Confusion arises because the *Ethica nicomachia* and *Ethica eudemia* share three books, probably originally from the former. The *Magna moralia* is probably a later Peripatetic compilation based on the *Ethica eudemia*.

²⁸See Aristotle *Pol.* 1.2 for these distinctions. Thomas Aquinas followed Eustratius in naming the three *monastica*, *oeconomica*, and *politica* (Schmitt and Skinner, *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, 304).

²⁹*Eth. nic.* 1.8.1098b30.

³⁰“affectus moderandos.” Aristotle's doctrine of *metriopatheia* tempered the Stoic *apatheia*. See Vermigli, *Ep. Rom. comm.*, 1:24: “The Peripatetics judged that the wise man should not completely lack affections; they allowed those that were moderate.”

voluntary, involuntary, choice, and that sort of thing. A detailed discussion of particular virtues begins specifically with courage and the entire books 4 and 5 are devoted to this matter. After that, in book 6, Aristotle examines those dispositions that enrich the reason or the intellect, that is, prudence, industry, skill, and many others of this order. [7] Book 7 is about the virtue of heroism, which far surpasses those already mentioned, and about temperance and intemperance, neither of which truly belongs to the category of virtue or vice. Books 8 and 9 treat friendship. Book 10 contains an elaborate discussion of pleasure. The book ends with a discourse on true and absolute happiness, which is based on contemplation, especially of things divine. For my part, I will apply the following reasoning and form of interpretation: first, I will dissect the text of Aristotle; second, I will explain the scope and proposition of a chosen passage with its proof; third, I will study its meaning and comment on terms which may require exegesis; fourth, I will expose to view any doubts that have arisen; and last, I will note and discuss those passages that agree or disagree with scripture.

Now I can easily proceed to the exposition of Aristotle, except that a certain hindrance must first be removed. It consists of what Paul said in Colossians 2: “Beware lest anyone prey on you through philosophy.”³¹ Truly, with such words he seems to frighten Christians away from the study of philosophy, but I am sure that if you grasp the meaning of the apostle’s statement properly, you will not be disturbed. Since true philosophy derives from the knowledge of created things, and from these propositions reaches many conclusions about the justice and righteousness that God implanted naturally in human minds, it cannot therefore rightly be criticized: it is the work of God and could not be enjoyed by us without his special contribution. But Paul censured that philosophy that is corrupted by human invention and by the bitter disputes of philosophers. If they had remained within limits and had discussed only what creaturely knowledge has revealed about God and nature by the most certain reasoning, they would not have strayed from the truth. Hence, the apostle says: “By this philosophy,” that is, by exegesis “empty deceit”;³² he then adds: “which has its origin in human tradition and is inspired by cosmic forces.” That the universe is eternal was taught by human beings, not by lower creatures. Nature did not show that the universe is composed of the random conjunction of atoms; this was conceived by empty speculation. Stoic fate and impassibility, the perpetual doubt of the Academics, the motionless and idle deities of the Epicureans—who would question that such ideas are “empty deceit”? They dreamed of community of property, of wives traded openly, of pleasure as the highest good, and of gods worshiped in the manner of the vulgar; yet they did not learn such things by any natural illumination or [8] practical principles known in themselves by sure reasoning. Surely these things are poisons and

³¹Col. 2:8.

³² “per exegesis.” Vermigli mixes Latin and Greek to render this phrase from Col. 2:8.

corruptions by which the devil, through evil men, perverts that gift of God, philosophy. This polluted and spoiled philosophy is what Paul wishes to avoid.

Now we must see how what we have so far discussed agrees with holy scripture. There also we have active and contemplative knowledge. The things in which we believe and that are contained in the articles of faith pertain to contemplation (*theoretikon*) since we perceive them but do not create them, and although they are not included within knowledge they are nonetheless understood. What is contained in laws, deliberations, and exhortations should be referred to as practical knowledge (*praktikon*). So far these matters agree, yet they also differ, for in philosophy the active precedes the contemplative because, as it is said, we can contemplate neither God nor nature by human powers unless our emotions are first at rest.³³ But in scripture, speculation occurs first, inasmuch as we must first believe and be justified through faith. Afterwards good works follow, which occur more abundantly the more frequently we are renewed by the Holy Spirit. That is what Paul shows in his letters, for first he deals with doctrines, only afterwards coming to moral instruction and principles for living. So also the children of Israel were first gathered in Egypt under the faith of one God the Deliverer. Afterwards in the desert, they received laws that refer to practical knowledge. And in the Decalogue the same order was kept. First it is said: "I am the Lord your God," which belongs to faith or theoretical knowledge. Afterwards there follow precepts that look to the works commanded by God. The cause of this difference is that human contemplation is gained by study and diligent reflection; therefore moderation of emotion is required. But what we believe is received by the inspiration of God; therefore, there is no need of those preparations. According to human reason, men should first do righteous deeds before there is justification. But the order of divine sanctification is established far otherwise; first we believe, and afterwards are justified, and then the powers of our minds are restored by the Holy Spirit and by grace, and finally just and honest deeds follow.

The goal of philosophy is that we reach that beatitude or happiness that can be acquired in this life by human powers, while the goal of Christian devotion is that the image in which we are created in righteousness and holiness of truth be renewed in us, so that we grow daily in the knowledge of God until we are led to see him as he is, with face uncovered. From [9] these *Ethica nicomachea* we will not learn about the remission of sins, about fear and faith towards God, nor justification through faith, nor yet about Christ and similar things. Such matters are brought to light by God's will; they cannot be produced by natural knowledge from anything created. We do not deny that it often happens that the same things are commended in these *Ethica nicomachea* as are commanded by God in holy scripture. In such cases the topic is the same but not its form, properties, and principles;

³³*Eth. nic.* 10.7–8: contemplation reduces bodily necessities to a minimum, as close as possible to the impassive deity whose likeness is sought.

for in these, the rationale is different, as are the properties and principles, just as water from rain and from a spring is the same in substance while its powers, properties, and principles are far different. For one comes from the heat of heaven and the clouds and cold of the middle regions of the air, while the other is drawn through the subterranean channels of the earth and from the sea and is so filtered that it comes out sweet—or else by converting air to water from the cold of the place where the spring arises. Thus what Christians do is done by the impulse of the Holy Spirit of God, for those who act according to the Holy Spirit are sons of God. What philosophers do about ethics is done under the guidance of human reason; they are urged to action according to what they judge to be honest and correct. But for Christians, it is because God judges so. The former think that they improve and perfect themselves if they act in this way; the latter think that if they act it is because one should be obedient to the divine. The former believe in themselves, the latter in God and the words of the law that he himself gave. The former labor from self-love while the latter are driven by the love of the one God. From these many differences it happens that substantially the very same thing may be pleasing to God or damned by his judgment. Let this suffice concerning these differences and agreements between divine scripture on the one hand and human philosophy on the other.

Let us return to the point from which we digressed, namely, whether this discipline is repugnant to piety. I say that it is no more against it than astrology or the nautical or military arts, or else fishing and hunting, and also knowledge of human law that everyone understands as necessary for public administration. Jurisprudence forms its own laws and institutions out of propositions concerning the justice and goodness innate in our minds; moral philosophers analyze the same propositions and probe them most closely, so that not only might they themselves know them thoroughly, but also transmit them to others with great clarity. Thus among the Greeks wisdom is called *sophia* as if it meant “clarity” and “wise” is *sophos* as if it meant “clear,” no doubt because it clarifies its subject matter and makes it obvious. Therefore those learned in the law may easily regard their own science as part of philosophy, even if concerning virtue, honesty, and justice, they pass less severe judgments through their legislation [10] than philosophers do in their disputes. For example, philosophy detests ingratitude in any human condition, but the laws do not punish it unless committed by children against parents or by freedmen against their patrons. Human laws compel no one to give his goods to the needy; but philosophy commends liberality and generosity towards all. What more should be said? In praise of this kind of philosophy Cicero exclaimed in *Tusculanus* 5: “O philosophy, thou guide of life, O thou explorer of virtue and expeller of vice! Without thee what could have become not only of me but of the life of man altogether? Thou hast given birth to cities, thou hast called scattered human beings into the bond of social life, thou hast united them first of all in joint

habitations, then in wedlock, then in the ties of common literature and speech, (thou hast discovered law), thou hast been the teacher of morality and order," and so forth.³⁴ Everyone acknowledges how splendid it is to know the power of herbs, rocks, metals, and medicines, and we do not deny this in the least. But does it not follow from all this that it is a worthwhile faculty by which human acts, choices, arts, methods, skills, virtues, and vices are to be perceived? What could be more noble than to know oneself?—and this we know in the first place through philosophy. We should also keep in mind what Plato said, that it may easily happen that ardent love for virtue is aroused in us if now and then its likeness meets our eyes.³⁵ On the other hand, the chief cause of our vices is that we could never see virtue with our own eyes.

The pleasure derived from this science is not small, to know within what bounds the illumination that nature sheds should confine itself, and how far it may extend itself in its own right. Moreover, the Christian religion is inflamed by knowledge of pagan ethics, for we understand through comparison how far those things taught in scripture surpass philosophy. For it is a common saying that when opposites are compared with one another they become clearer. Errors cannot be easily avoided unless they are first understood. Therefore, whoever knows both faculties will more easily avoid the mistakes of the one, namely, of human philosophy, especially when properly demonstrated.

Now let us approach the matter more closely by introducing another shorter division of Aristotle's treatise. Firstly, it deals with the concept of the end, secondly, with what pertains to the end, and near the close of the work the end itself is once again discussed, but more thoroughly. Many reasons are given why the end [11] is dealt with before all else. First, because from its knowledge arises the substance of all the things that are written later. Also, because it is necessary that people have a goal set before them toward which they direct all their actions, like arrows at a target. We will see Aristotle bring this argument not far below. Next, as Eustratius adds: "To attain virtue is very hard work: consequently, some reward for it should be proposed."³⁶ Granted that we may reach the end at last, it is still appropriate first of all to know what this reward will be. Aristotle introduces many matters to be discussed concerning the end: first, whether it exists; second, the form in which he decided to discuss it and the value of the current opinions concerning it; third, what it is and in what kinds of good it is contained; fourth, the way to reach such an end; and last, what kind of end it is.

³⁴Cicero *Tusc.* 2.5.2.

³⁵Plato *Symp.* 210B–E.

³⁶Eustratius of Nicaea (ca. 1050–ca. 1120), Byzantine commentator on *Ethica nicomachea* 1 and 6. Vermigli's commentary on book 1, chapter 4, contains forty-six references to his *Enarratio in Primum Aristotelis Moralium ad Nicomachum*. The copies of Eustratius in the Geneva academy, which had acquired Vermigli's library, were probably his. See Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism*, 20, 59.