Passage 1: *Nicomachean Ethics* 1126b

Those on the contrary who object to everything and do not care in the least what pain they cause, are called Surly or Quarrelsome. Now it is clear that the dispositions described are blameworthy, and that the middle disposition between them is praiseworthy—that is, the tendency to acquiesce in the right things, and likewise to disapprove of the right things, in the right manner. But to this no special name has been assigned, though it very closely resembles friendship; for he who exemplifies this middle disposition is the sort of man we mean by the expression ‘a good friend,’ only that includes an element of affection. It differs from friendship in not possessing the emotional factor of affection for one’s associates; since a man of this character takes everything in the right way not from personal liking or dislike, but from natural amiability. He will behave with the same propriety towards strangers and acquaintances alike, towards people with whom he is familiar and those with whom he is not—though preserving the shades of distinction proper to each class, since it is not appropriate to show the same regard or disregard for the feelings of friends and of strangers.

Translation by H. Rackman

Older men and those who have passed their prime have in most cases characters opposite to those of the young. For, owing to their having lived many years and having been more often deceived by others or made more mistakes themselves, and since most human things turn out badly, they are positive about nothing, and in everything they show an excessive lack of energy. They always “think,” but “know” nothing; and in their hesitation they always add “perhaps,” or “maybe”; all their statements are of this kind, never unqualified. They are malicious; for malice consists in looking upon the worse side of everything. Further, they are always suspicious owing to mistrust, and mistrustful owing to experience. And neither their love nor their hatred is strong for the same reasons; but, according to the precept of Bias they love as if they would one day hate, and hate as if they would one day love. And they are little-minded, because they have been humbled by life; for they desire nothing great or uncommon, but only the necessaries of life.

Translation by J.H. Freese
ἐν δὲ ἵσως ἡμαρτον, ὡστε τὸν ἀπάντον φόμην αὐτὸς αὐτὸν ῥάρκης τις εἶναι καὶ δεισιδεσθ’ οὐδένος. (715) νῦν δὲ ἱδὼν οὐσαν ἁσκοπὸν τὲ τοῦ βίου τὴν τελείωσιν, εὐθὺν οὐκ εὐ κακότατα γνῶσκον τότε. δεῖ γὰρ εἰ προτείνειν τὸν ἐπικοινώνηστι· ἀεὶ ἀλλὰ μᾶ τὸν Ἱμαστην—οὕτω σφόδρα διεφθάρησθε ἐγὼ τοῖσ βίοις ὅριν ἐκάστους τοὺς λογισμοὺς θ’ ὂν τρόπον (720) πρὸς τὸ κερδαίνειν ἐχοῦσιν—οὐδὲν εὐνοῶν φόμην ἐτερον ἐτέρῳ τὸν ἀπάντον ἄν γενέσθαι τόυτο δὴ ἐμποδὸν ἦν μοι. μόλις δὲ πείην εἰς δέδοκε λόγον Γόργιας, ἔργον ποίησαι ἀνδρὸς εὐγενεστάτου.

τὸν γὰρ οὐκ ἔδωσθ’ ἤπαυς προσέπνει πρὸς τὴν θύραν, (725) οὐ βοηθῆσανθ’ ἐκατ’ ὄσποτ’ εἰς οὐδὲν μέρος, οὐ προσεπνοντ’, οὐ λαλήσανθ’ ἰδέας, σέσων’ ὑμώς. εἰπ’ ἄν ἄλλος, καὶ δικαίως, “οὐκ ἔξο Με προσέπνεια’ οὐ προσέρχομαι’ οὐδὲν ἡμῖν γέγονεν αὐτός χρήσιμος’ οὐδ’ ἔγχω σοι νῦν.” τί δ’ ἐστι, μειράκων: ἐὰν τ’ ἔγω (730) ἀποθάνω νῦν—οἴμαι δὲ, καὶ κακῶς ἵσως ἔχω—ἀν τε περισσοθα, ποοῦμα ν’ ὑμῶν, ὃ τ’ ἔχον νυχτίναρ πάντα σαυτοῦ νόμισον εἰμι, τίνος σοι παρεγγυτ’ ἀνώρα δ’ ἀυτή πόρισσον. εἰ γὰρ καὶ σφόδρ’ ὑγιάινοιμ’ ἔγχω, αὐτός οὐ δυνήσομαι εὑρέφην’ οὐ γὰρ ἀρέσει μοι ποτε (735) οὐδ’ εἰς. ἀλλ’ ἔμε μέν, ἄν χοῦ, χῆν εἶδ’ ὡς βούλομαι·...

ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ γὰρ βούλομαι εἰπεῖν ολίγα σοι καὶ τοῦ τρόπου. εἰ τιούτου πάντες ἦσαν, οὔτε τὰ δικαιστήρια ἦν ἄν, οὐδ’ αὐτοῦ ἄπτην εἰς τὰ δεσμωτήρια, (745) οὔτε πόλεμος ἦν, ἔχον δ’ ἄν μέτρι’ ἐκαστος ἤγασα. αὐτὸς δὲ ταῦτ’ ἐστ’ ἀρέστα μᾶλλον οὕτω πράττετε. ἐκποδῶν οἵμην ὁ χαλεπὸς δύσκολος τ’ ἔσται γέρων.

Translated by Matthew McDonald

But perhaps I made one mistake, I supposed myself the one of all who was self-sufficient and needed no one. But now having seen that the end of life is sudden and unexpected, I’ve found I did not understand this well then. For there is always need for a helper to be at hand. But by Hephaestus, so exceedingly distorted I’ve become watching each man’s life and their calculations how they are disposed to profit, I thought that no one at all had good intentions toward each other. This was my obstacle. But just now one man has put this to the test Gorgias, doing the deed of a truly noble man. For the very man who did not allow him to approach my door, not help him in any amount, did not greet him, did not chatter pleasantly, he saved nonetheless. Another man might have said, and rightly, “You don’t let me approach, I’m not coming. You have been no use to us, and I won’t be one to you now.” What is it boy? Whether I die now, and I think I might, perhaps I am doing poorly, or if I survive, I adopt you as my son, everything which I happen to have consider yours. I entrust her to you. Find her a husband. For even if I become much better, I would not be able to find one; for no one will ever please me. But as for me, if I live, let me live as I please;

I wish to tell you a little about myself and my character. If everyone were such, there wouldn’t be lawcourts, they wouldn’t send each other to prisons, there would be no war, and each man would be content having enough. But perhaps these things are more pleasing; act thus. This difficult and grouchy old man will be out of your way.

Select Bibliography


