

Aristotle

Aristotle, son of Nicomachus and Phaestis, was a native of Stagira. His father, Nicomachus, as Hermippus relates in his book *On Aristotle*, traced his descent from Nicomachus who was the son of Machaon and grandson of Asclepius; and he resided with Amyntas, the king of Macedon, in the capacity of physician and friend. Aristotle was Plato's most genuine disciple; he spoke with a lisp, as we learn from Timotheus the Athenian in his book *On Lives*; further, his calves were slender (so they say), his eyes small, and he was conspicuous by his attire, his rings, and the cut of his hair. According to Timaeus, he had a son by Herpyllis, his concubine, who was also called Nicomachus.

He seceded from the Academy while Plato was still alive. Hence the remark attributed to the latter: "Aristotle spurns me, as colts kick out at the mother who bore them."¹ Hermippus in his *Lives* mentions that he was absent as Athenian envoy at the court of Philip when Xenocrates became head of the Academy, and that on his return, when he saw the school under a new head, he made choice of a public walk in the Lyceum where he would walk up and down discussing philosophy with his pupils until it was time to rub themselves with oil. Hence the name "Peripatetic." But others say that it was given to him because, when Alexander was recovering from an illness and taking daily walks, Aristotle joined him and talked with him on certain matters.

In time the circle about him grew larger; he then sat down to lecture, remarking:²

It were base to keep silence and let Xenocrates³ speak.

He also taught his pupils to discourse upon a set theme, besides practising them in oratory. Afterwards, however, he departed to Hermias the eunuch, who was tyrant of Atarneus, and there is one story that he was on very affectionate terms with Hermias; according to another, Hermias bound him by ties of kinship, giving him his daughter or his niece in marriage, and so Demetrius of Magnesia narrates in his work on *Poets and Writers of the Same Name*. The same author tells us that Hermias had been the slave of Eubulus, and that he was of Bithynian origin and had murdered his master. Aristippus in his first book *On the Luxury of the Ancients* says that Aristotle fell in love with a concubine of Hermias, and married her with his consent, and in an excess of delight sacrificed to a weak woman as the Athenians did to Demeter of Eleusis;⁴ and that he composed a paeon in honour of Hermias, which is given below; next that he stayed in Macedonia at Philip's court and received from him his son Alexander as his pupil; that he petitioned Alexander to restore his native city which had been destroyed by Philip and obtained his request; and that he also drew up a code of laws for the inhabitants. We learn further that, following the example of Xenocrates, he made it a rule in his school that every ten days a new president should be appointed. When he thought that he had stayed long enough with Alexander, he departed to Athens, having first presented to Alexander his kinsman Callisthenes of Olynthus. But when Callisthenes talked with too much freedom to the king and disregarded his own advice, Aristotle is said to have rebuked him by citing the line:⁵

Short-lived, I ween, wilt thou be, my child, by what thou sayest.

And so indeed it fell out. For he, being suspected of complicity in the plot of Hermolaus against the life of Alexander, was confined in an iron cage and carried about until he became infested with vermin through lack of proper attention; and finally he was thrown to a lion and so met his end.

To return to Aristotle: he came to Athens, was head of his school for thirteen years, and then withdrew to Chalcis because he was indicted for impiety by Eurymedon the hierophant, or, according to Favorinus⁶ in his *Miscellaneous History*, by Demophilus, the ground of the charge being the hymn he composed to the aforesaid Hermias, as well as the following inscription for his statue at Delphi:⁷

This man in violation of the hallowed law of the immortals was unrighteously slain by the king of the bow-bearing Persians, who overcame him, not openly with a spear in murderous combat, but by treachery with the aid of one in whom he trusted.

At Chalcis he died, according to Eumelus in the fifth book of his *Histories*, by drinking aconite, at the age of seventy. The same authority makes him thirty years old when he came to Plato; but here he is mistaken. For Aristotle lived to be sixty-three, and he was seventeen when he became Plato's pupil.

The hymn in question runs as follows:

O virtue, toilsome for the generation of mortals to achieve, the fairest prize that life can win, for thy beauty, O virgin, it were a doom glorious in Hellas even to die and to endure fierce, untiring labours. Such courage dost thou implant in the mind, imperishable, better than gold, dearer than parents or soft-eyed sleep. For thy sake Heracles, son of Zeus, and the sons of Leda endured much in the tasks whereby they pursued thy might. And yearning after thee came Achilles and Ajax to the house of Hades, and for the sake of thy dear form the nursling of Atarneus too was bereft of the light of the sun. Therefore shall his deeds be sung, and the Muses, the daughters of Memory, shall make him immortal, exalting the majesty of Zeus, guardian of strangers, and the grace of lasting friendship.

There is, too, something of my own upon the philosopher which I will quote:⁸

Eurymedon, the priest of Deo's mysteries, was once about to indict Aristotle for impiety, but he, by a draught of poison, escaped prosecution. This then was an easy way of vanquishing unjust calumnies.

Favorinus in his *Miscellaneous History* affirms that Aristotle was the first to compose a forensic speech in his own defence written for this very suit; and he cites him as saying that at Athens⁹

Pear upon pear grows old and fig upon fig.¹⁰

According to Apollodorus in his *Chronology* he was born in the first year of the 99th Olympiad.¹¹ He attached himself to Plato and resided with him twenty years, having become his pupil at the age of seventeen. He went to Mitylene in the archonship of Eubulus in the fourth year of the 108th Olympiad.¹² When Plato died in the first year of that Olympiad,¹³ during the archonship of Theophilus, he went to Hermias and stayed with him three years. In the archonship of Pythodotus, in the second year of the 109th Olympiad,¹⁴ he went to the court of Philip, Alexander being then in his fifteenth year. His arrival at Athens was in the second year of the 111th Olympiad,¹⁵ and he lectured in the Lyceum for thirteen years; then he retired to Chalcis in the third year of the 114th Olympiad¹⁶ and died a natural death, at the age of about sixty-three, in the archonship of Philocles, in the same year in which Demosthenes died at Calauria. It is said that he incurred the king's displeasure because he had introduced Callisthenes to him, and that Alexander, in order to cause him annoyance, honoured Anaximenes¹⁷ and sent presents to Xenocrates.

Theocritus of Chios, according to Ambryon in his book *On Theocritus*, ridiculed him in an epigram which runs as follows:¹⁸

To Hermias the eunuch, the slave withal of Eubulus, an empty monument was raised by empty-witted Aristotle, who by constraint of a lawless appetite chose to dwell at the mouth of the Borborus [muddy stream] rather than in the Academy.

Timon again attacked him in the line:¹⁹

No, nor yet Aristotle's painful futility.²⁰

Such then was the life of the philosopher. I have also come across his will, which is worded thus:

“All will be well; but, in case anything should happen, Aristotle has made these dispositions. Antipater is to be executor in all matters and in general; but, until Nicanor shall arrive, Aristomenes, Timarchus, Hipparchus, Dioteles and (if he consent and if circumstances permit him) Theophrastus shall take charge as well of Herpyllis and the children as of the property. And when the girl shall be grown up she shall be given in marriage to Nicanor; but if anything happen to the girl (which heaven forbid and no such thing will happen) before her marriage, or when she is married but before there are children, Nicanor shall have full powers, both with regard to the child and with regard to everything else, to administer in a manner worthy both of himself and of us. Nicanor shall take charge of the girl and of the boy Nicomachus as he shall think fit in all that concerns them as if he were father and brother. And if anything should happen to Nicanor (which heaven forbid!) either before he marries the girl, or when he has married her but before there are children, any arrangements that he may make shall be valid. And if Theophrastus is willing to live with her, he shall have the same rights as Nicanor. Otherwise the executors in consultation with Antipater shall administer as regards the daughter and the boy as seems to them to be best. The executors and Nicanor, in memory of me and of the steady affection which Herpyllis has borne towards me, shall take care of her in every other respect and, if she desires to be married, shall see that she be given to one not unworthy; and besides what she has already received they shall give her a talent of silver out of the estate and three handmaids whomsoever she shall choose besides the maid she has at present and the man-servant Pyrrhaeus; and if she chooses to remain at Chalcis, the lodge by the garden, if in Stagira, my father’s house. Whichever of these two houses she chooses, the executors shall furnish with such furniture as they think proper and as Herpyllis herself may approve. Nicanor shall take charge of the boy Myrmex, that he be taken to his own friends in a manner worthy of me with the property of his which we received. Ambracis shall be given her freedom, and on my daughter’s marriage shall receive 500 drachmas and the maid whom she now has. And to Thale shall be given, in addition to the maid whom she has and who was bought, a thousand drachmas and a maid. And Simon, in addition to the money before paid to him towards another servant, shall either have a servant purchased for him or receive a further sum of money. And Tycho, Philo, Olympius and his child shall have their freedom when my daughter is married. None of the servants who waited upon me shall be sold but they shall continue to be employed; and when they arrive at the proper age they shall have their freedom if they deserve it. My executors shall see to it, when the images which Gryllion has been commissioned to execute are finished, that they be set up, namely that of Nicanor, that of Proxenus, which it was my intention to have executed, and that of Nicanor’s mother; also they shall set up the bust which has been executed of Arimnestus, to be a memorial of him seeing that he died childless, and shall dedicate my mother’s statue to Demeter at Nemea or wherever they think best. And wherever they bury me, there the bones of Pythias shall be laid, in accordance with her own instructions. And to commemorate Nicanor’s safe return, as I vowed on his behalf, they shall set up in Stagira stone statues of life size to Zeus and Athena the Saviours.”²¹

Such is the tenor of Aristotle’s will. It is said that a very large number of dishes belonging to him were found, and that Lyco mentioned his bathing in a bath of warm oil and then selling the oil. Some relate that he placed a skin of warm oil on his stomach, and that, when he went to sleep, a bronze ball was placed in his hand with a vessel under it, in order that, when the ball dropped from his hand into the vessel, he might be waked up by the sound.²²

Some exceedingly happy sayings are attributed to him, which I proceed to quote. To the question, “What do people gain by telling lies?” his answer was, “Just this, that when they speak the

truth they are not believed.” Being once reproached for giving alms to a bad man, he rejoined, “It was the man and not his character that I pitied.”²³ He used constantly to say to his friends and pupils, whenever or wherever he happened to be lecturing, “As sight takes in light from the surrounding air, so does the soul from mathematics.” Frequently and at some length he would say that the Athenians were the discoverers of wheat and of laws; but, though they used wheat, they had no use for laws.

“The roots of education,” he said, “are bitter, but the fruit is sweet.” Being asked, “What is it that soon grows old?” he answered, “Gratitude.” He was asked to define hope, and he replied, “It is a waking dream.” When Diogenes offered him dried figs, he saw that he had prepared something caustic to say if he did not take them; so he took them and said Diogenes had lost his figs and his jest into the bargain. And on another occasion he took them when they were offered, lifted them up aloft, as you do babies, and returned them with the exclamation, “Great is Diogenes.” Three things he declared to be indispensable for education: natural endowment, study, and constant practice. On hearing that some one abused him, he rejoined, “He may even scourge me so it be in my absence.” Beauty he declared to be a greater recommendation than any letter of introduction. Others attribute this definition to Diogenes; Aristotle, they say, defined good looks as the gift of god, Socrates as a short-lived reign, Plato as natural superiority, Theophrastus as a mute deception, Theocritus as an evil in an ivory setting, Carneades as a monarchy that needs no bodyguard. Being asked how the educated differ from the uneducated, “As much,” he said, “as the living from the dead.”²⁴ He used to declare education to be an ornament in prosperity and a refuge in adversity. Teachers who educated children deserved, he said, more honour than parents who merely gave them birth; for bare life is furnished by the one, the other ensures a good life. To one who boasted that he belonged to a great city his reply was, “That is not the point to consider, but who it is that is worthy of a great country.” To the query, “What is a friend?” his reply was, “A single soul dwelling in two bodies.” Mankind, he used to say, were divided into those who were as thrifty as if they would live for ever, and those who were as extravagant as if they were going to die the next day. When some one inquired why we spend much time with the beautiful, “That,” he said, “is a blind man’s question.” When asked what advantage he had ever gained from philosophy, he replied, “This, that I do without being ordered what some are constrained to do by their fear of the law.”²⁵ The question being put, how can students make progress, he replied, “By pressing hard on those in front and not waiting for those behind.” To the chatterbox who poured out a flood of talk upon him and then inquired, “Have I bored you to death with my chatter?” he replied, “No, indeed; for I was not attending to you.” When some one accused him of having given a subscription to a dishonest man – for the story is also told in this form²⁶ – “It was not the man,” said he, “that I assisted, but humanity.” To the question how we should behave to friends, he answered, “As we should wish them to behave to us.” Justice he defined as a virtue of soul which distributes according to merit. Education he declared to be the best provision for old age. Favorinus in the second book of his *Memorabilia* mentions as one of his habitual sayings that “He who has friends can have no true friend.” Further, this is found in the seventh book of the *Ethics*.²⁷ These then are the sayings attributed to him.

His writings are very numerous and, considering the man’s all-round excellence, I deemed it incumbent on me to catalogue them:²⁸

- Of Justice, four books.
- On Poets, three books.
- On Philosophy, three books.
- Of the Statesman, two books.
- On Rhetoric, or Grylus, one book.

- Nerinthus, one book.
- The Sophist, one book.
- Menexenus, one book.
- Concerning Love, one book.
- Symposium, one book.
- Of Wealth, one book.
- Exhortation to Philosophy, one book.
- Of the Soul, one book.
- Of Prayer, one book.
- On Noble Birth, one book.
- On Pleasure, one book.
- Alexander, or a Plea for Colonies, one book.
- On Kingship, one book.
- On Education, one book.
- Of the Good, three books.
- Extracts from Plato's Laws, three books.
- Extracts from the Republic, two books.
- Of Household Management, one book.
- Of Friendship, one book.
- On being or having been affected, one book.
- Of Sciences, one book.
- On Controversial Questions, two books.
- Solutions of Controversial Questions, four books.
- Sophistical Divisions, four books.
- On Contraries, one book.
- On Genera and Species, one book.
- On Essential Attributes, one book.
- Three note-books on Arguments for Purposes of Refutation.
- Propositions concerning Virtue, two books.
- Objections, one book.
- On the Various Meanings of Terms or Expressions where a Determinant is added, one book.
- Of Passions or of Anger, one book.
- Five books of Ethics.
- On Elements, three books.
- Of Science, one book.
- Of Logical Principle, one book.
- Logical Divisions, seventeen books.
- Concerning Division, one book.
- On Dialectical Questioning and Answering, two books.
- Of Motion, one book.
- Propositions, one book.
- Controversial Propositions, one book.
- Syllogisms, one book.
- Eight books of Prior Analytics.
- Two books of Greater Posterior Analytics.
- Of Problems, one book.

- Eight books of Methodics.
- Of the Greater Good, one book.
- On the Idea, one book.
- Definitions prefixed to the Topics, seven books.
- Two books of Syllogisms.
- Concerning Syllogism with Definitions, one book.
- Of the Desirable and the Contingent, one book.
- Preface to Commonplaces, one book.
- Two books of Topics criticizing the Definitions.
- Affections or Qualities, one book.
- Concerning Logical Division, one book.
- Concerning Mathematics, one book.
- Definitions, thirteen books.
- Two books of Refutations.
- Of Pleasure, one book.
- Propositions, one book.
- On the Voluntary, one book.
- On the Beautiful, one book.
- Theses for Refutation, twenty-five books.
- Theses concerning Love, four books.
- Theses concerning Friendship, two books.
- Theses concerning the Soul, one book.
- Politics, two books.
- Eight books of a course of lectures on Politics like that of Theophrastus.
- Of Just Actions, two books.
- A Collection of Arts [that is, Handbooks], two books.
- Two books of the Art of Rhetoric.
- Art, a Handbook, one book.
- Another Collection of Handbooks, two books.
- Concerning Method, one book.
- Compendium of the “Art” of Theodectes, one book.
- A Treatise on the Art of Poetry, two books.
- Rhetorical Enthymemes, one book.
- Of Degree,²⁹ one book.
- Divisions of Enthymemes, one book.
- On Diction, two books.
- Of Taking Counsel, one book.
- A Collection or Compendium, two books.
- On Nature, three books.
- Concerning Nature, one book.
- On the Philosophy of Archytas, three books.
- On the Philosophy of Speusippus and Xenocrates, one book.
- Extracts from the *Timaeus* and from the Works of Archytas, one book.
- A Reply to the Writings of Melissus, one book.
- A Reply to the Writings of Alcmaeon, one book.
- A Reply to the Pythagoreans, one book.

- A Reply to the Writings of Gorgias, one book.
- A Reply to the Writings of Xenophanes, one book.
- A Reply to the Writings of Zeno, one book.
- On the Pythagoreans, one book.
- On Animals, nine books.
- Eight books of Dissections.
- A selection of Dissections, one book.
- On Composite Animals, one book.
- On the Animals of Fable, one book.
- On Sterility, one book.
- On Plants, two books.
- Concerning Physiognomy, one book.
- Two books concerning Medicine.
- On the Unit, one book.
- Prognostics of Storms, one book.
- Concerning Astronomy, one book.
- Concerning Optics, one book.
- On Motion, one book.
- On Music, one book.
- Concerning Memory, one book.
- Six books of Homeric Problems.
- Poetics, one book.
- Thirty-eight books of Physics according to the lettering.
- Two books of Problems which have been examined.
- Two books of Routine Instruction.
- Mechanics, one book.
- Problems taken from the works of Democritus, two books.
- On the Magnet, one book.
- Analogies, one book.
- Miscellaneous Notes, twelve books.
- Descriptions of Genera, fourteen books.
- Claims advanced, one book.
- Victors at Olympia, one book.
- Victors at the Pythian Games, one book.
- On Music, one book.
- Concerning Delphi, one book.
- Criticism of the List of Pythian Victors, one book.
- Dramatic Victories at the Dionysia, one book.
- Of Tragedies, one book.
- Dramatic Records, one book.
- Proverbs, one book.
- Laws of the Mess-table, one book.
- Four books of Laws.
- Categories, one book.
- De Interpretatione, one book.

- Constitutions of 158 Cities, in general and in particular, democratic, oligarchic, aristocratic, tyrannical.
- Letters to Philip.
- Letters of Selymbrians.
- Letters to Alexander, four books.
- Letters to Antipater, nine books.
- To Mentor, one book.
- To Ariston, one book.
- To Olympias, one book.
- To Hephaestion, one book.
- To Themistagoras, one book.
- To Philoxenus, one book.
- In reply to Democritus, one book.
- Verses beginning Ἄγνὲ θεῶν πρέσβισθ' ἑκατηβόλε ("Holy One and Chiefest of Gods, far-darting").
- Elegiac verses beginning Καλλιτέκνου μητρὸς θύγατερ ("Daughter of a Mother blessed with fair offspring").

In all 445,270 lines.

Such is the number of the works written by him. And in them he puts forward the following views. There are two divisions of philosophy, the practical and the theoretical. The practical part includes ethics and politics, and in the latter not only the doctrine of the state but also that of the household is sketched. The theoretical part includes physics and logic, although logic is not an independent science, but is elaborated as an instrument to the rest of science. And he clearly laid down that it has a twofold aim, probability and truth. For each of these he employed two faculties, dialectic and rhetoric where probability is aimed at, analytic and philosophy where the end is truth; he neglects nothing which makes either for discovery or for judgement or for utility. As making for discovery he left in the *Topics* and *Methodics* a number of propositions, whereby the student can be well supplied with probable arguments for the solution of problems. As an aid to judgement he left the *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics*. By the *Prior Analytics* the premisses are judged, by the *Posterior* the process of inference is tested. For practical use there are the precepts on controversy and the works dealing with question and answer, with sophistical fallacies, syllogisms and the like. The test of truth which he put forward was sensation in the sphere of objects actually presented, but in the sphere of morals dealing with the state, the household and the laws, it was reason.

The one ethical end he held to be the exercise of virtue in a completed life. And happiness he maintained to be made up of goods of three sorts: goods of the soul, which indeed he designates as of the highest value; in the second place bodily goods, health and strength, beauty and the like; and thirdly external goods, such as wealth, good birth, reputation and the like. And he regarded virtue as not of itself sufficient to ensure happiness; bodily goods and external goods were also necessary, for the wise man would be miserable if he lived in the midst of pains, poverty, and similar circumstances. Vice, however, is sufficient in itself to secure misery, even if it be ever so abundantly furnished with corporeal and external goods. He held that the virtues are not mutually interdependent. For a man might be prudent, or again just, and at the same time profligate and unable to control his passions. He said too that the wise man was not exempt from all passions, but indulged them in moderation.

He defined friendship as an equality of reciprocal good-will, including under the term as one species the friendship of kinsmen, as another that of lovers, and as a third that of host and guest.³⁰ The

end of love was not merely intercourse but also philosophy. According to him the wise man would fall in love and take part in politics; furthermore he would marry and reside at a king's court. Of three kinds of life, the contemplative, the practical, and the pleasure-loving life, he gave the preference to the contemplative. He held that the studies which make up the ordinary education are of service for the attainment of virtue.

In the sphere of natural science he surpassed all other philosophers in the investigation of causes, so that even the most insignificant phenomena were explained by him. Hence the unusual number of scientific notebooks which he compiled. Like Plato he held that God was incorporeal; that his providence extended to the heavenly bodies, that he is unmoved, and that earthly events are regulated by their affinity with them (the heavenly bodies). Besides the four elements he held that there is a fifth, of which the celestial bodies are composed. Its motion is of a different kind from that of the other elements, being circular. Further, he maintained the soul to be incorporeal, defining it as the first entelechy [i.e. realization] of a natural organic body potentially possessed of life.³¹ By the term realization he means that which has an incorporeal form. This realization, according to him, is twofold.

Either it is potential, as that of Hermes in the wax, provided the wax be adapted to receive the proper mouldings, or as that of the statue implicit in the bronze; or again it is determinate, which is the case with the completed figure of Hermes or the finished statue. The soul is the realization "of a natural body," since bodies may be divided into (a) artificial bodies made by the hands of craftsmen, as a tower or a ship, and (b) natural bodies which are the work of nature, such as plants and the bodies of animals. And when he said "organic" he meant constructed as means to an end, as sight is adapted for seeing and the ear for hearing. Of a body "potentially possessed of life," that is, in itself.

There are two senses of "potential," one answering to a formed state and the other to its exercise in act. In the latter sense of the term he who is awake is said to have soul, in the former he who is asleep. It was then in order to include the sleeper that Aristotle added the word "potential."

He held many other opinions on a variety of subjects which it would be tedious to enumerate. For altogether his industry and invention were remarkable, as is shown by the catalogue of his writings given above, which come to nearly 400 in number, i.e. counting those only the genuineness of which is not disputed. For many other written works and pointed oral sayings are attributed to him.

There were in all eight Aristotles: (1) our philosopher himself; (2) an Athenian statesman,³² the author of graceful forensic speeches; (3) a scholar who commented on the *Iliad*; (4) a Sicilian rhetorician, who wrote a reply to the Panegyric of Isocrates; (5) a disciple of Aeschines the Socratic philosopher, surnamed Myth; (6) a native of Cyrene, who wrote upon the art of poetry; (7) a trainer of boys, mentioned by Aristoxenus in his *Life of Plato*; (8) an obscure grammarian, whose handbook *On Redundancy* is still extant.

Aristotle of Stagira had many disciples; the most distinguished was Theophrastus, of whom we have next to speak.