



## Postcard

*Writing a postcard is a personal way of expressing the essence of one's thoughts, insights or experiences. It can be done as an exercise on its own, or as a conclusion of a conversation, or even as an intermission in an inquiry which will be continued*

*A postcard is a short, personal text, written from a place where there is 'free space', like on holiday, but now you will write it to a person whom you have to tell a difficult message. It is not easy to find the correct form. The more the message is a burden to you, the more your emotions will make it difficult to find to proper tone. The one will sound too blunt, the other will be too subtle. You make think you have been clear, but actually your message has not come across at all.*

*In this inquiry you will not focus upon your feelings as such but upon the underlying beliefs and your way of dealing with them. The aim of this inquiry is to find excellence, which is to deal with a difficult situation and your feelings in such way that – despite everything – you can flourish and are at your best. That requires a lot from you, in terms of self discipline, courage, prudence, in other words the classical virtues. The inquiry is about what these virtues amount to in a specific situation.*

*It is crucial for flourishing that you keep your freedom, that you do not become a slave to your emotions. It should also feel pleasant. In all classical philosophy a pleasant life is undeniably connected to a prudent and a balanced life. Epicurus says it this way, 'It is not possible to lead a pleasant life without living in a prudent, beautiful and just way; and for the same reason it is not possible to live in a prudent, beautiful and just way without living a pleasant life'. And Aristotle reminds us, that 'The joy is greatest if the act is most perfect'.. The correct form for a difficult message can be found, according to Aristotle's guideline, by determining the correct middle by an explicit inquiry in both the 'too much' and the 'too little'. His guideline is contained in his definition of excellence, that 'Excellence is the state of mind that leads a person to taking the correct decisions, decisions that keep the middle between what would be a too much and a too little. These decisions are based upon a reasonable principle, that is the principle that a person with practical wisdom will follow.*

### Approach

Think of a message you have to convey to someone and that has some burden in it, for example it about something you don't like at all, about an incident that has caused your anger or about a moment that you did not feel noticed. You are not sitting opposite this person, but you are where you are now, you are here 'on holiday'. Now you decide to send that person a postcard which will convey your message.

1. Expand your message and write in a tone that is overdone; your message is too much. How does it sound? Which words do you choose? Write your first postcard.
2. Move to the opposite side of your feeling. How does your message sound when you cover up your feeling of being hurt and your tone is appeasing? Write your second postcard.
3. The correct middle lies somewhere between the 'too much' and the 'too little', but where? Which text on your postcard would show that middle path, where you refrain from





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both the 'too much' and the 'too little'? This is a subtle process, as the correct middle is not a compromise, nor a point half way. It not a text like 'on the one hand ..., but on the other hand ...'. The text should represent prudence and balance. Take your time to write the third postcard.

4. Read the three postcards to one another. What message comes across? Is the expanded version indeed too much, or does your audience think differently? And does the third postcard indeed show the middle path?
5. Conclude by asking yourself, 'What is the principle or general guide line that underlies the message on the third postcard? What is it that – according to you – determines the good life, that at the same time is a pleasant life?'

