

Ethics of Leadership

Moral Excellence

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

Reading

- Aristotle, "Excellence of Character" (PDF on webpage).
- Joanne Ciulla, "Does Personal Morality Matter?", pp. 68–69.
- Joanne Ciulla, "Innocent or Guilty?", pp. 110.

Background

One common prescription for preventing the corrupt exercise of power is to maintain that leaders ought to have good or otherwise virtuous character. Persons of such dispositions can then be trusted to lead responsibly. This position was certainly advocated by Aristotle, whose *Nicomachean Ethics* provides a sophisticated account of the nature of moral virtue (which is translated here as "excellence of character") and our acquisition of it. Indeed, Aristotle argues that leaders must be very concerned about these things.

Questions

1. In the excerpts from Book I, Aristotle repeatedly refers to the importance of political expertise. What is this expertise and why is it so vital according to Aristotle? What things does he claim a political expert—and by extension, a leader—should know? Do you agree?
2. In Book I, Chapter 13, how does Aristotle divide up the various parts of the human soul and connect their proper functioning to happiness and human excellence?
3. The majority of Book II is a slow burn to Aristotle's final definition of moral excellence or excellence of character, which appears in Chapter 6, right around line 1107a1. This definition has, roughly, five or six parts to it. What are these parts? How does the preceding discussion in Chapters 1–6 of Book II attempt to justify these parts?
4. In Chapter 7 of Book II, Aristotle talks about different excellences of character. Explain these excellences, being sure to clearly state: (A) the name of the excellence, (B) the substrate(s) or continuum(s) of emotion and/or activity connected to that excellence, and (C) the nature of the two bad states associated with that excellence.
5. In several parts of Book II (especially Chapters 1–4), Aristotle discusses moral development, or how we acquire excellence of character. How do we do it?
6. In the two case studies by Joanne Ciulla, why would Aristotle believe that John Deer and Fred Jones have, at best, questionable character? Despite this assessment, should the poor character of Deer and Jones factor into their abilities as leaders within an organization provided that character does not affect their performance? (You might also reflect on the case of Bill Clinton's infidelity here as well.)