

Ethics of Leadership

Intellectual 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, "Intellectual Excellence" (PDF on webpage).

Background

While virtuous character may be necessary for a morally responsible leader, Aristotle certainly did not believe it to be sufficient. In Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle returns to his divisions of the human soul and focuses now on the excellences associated with its rational parts. (Recall that Aristotle's account of the excellences of character focus on the excellences associated with the "appetitive and generally desiring" part of the soul). Of particular interest here is Aristotle's account of wisdom, which suggests that the wise leader is not only effective (Aristotle might say "clever") at getting things done but also morally good in doing so. Ultimately, Aristotle maintains that it is impossible to have true excellence in character without wisdom and vice versa. The two are necessarily conjoined.

Questions

1. In Chapters 1 & 2 of Book VI, Aristotle discusses the two parts of the human soul that possess reason. What are these two parts, and what are the differences between them?
2. In Chapter 5 (and most of the following chapters) of Book VI, Aristotle discusses wisdom. What do you think does Aristotle mean by this? What are its characteristics? Of which part of the human soul is wisdom the associated excellence? Why might Aristotle believe that wisdom is difficult to possess, and yet something extremely essential to leadership?
3. Aristotle also discusses a lot of intellectual traits similar to, yet not precisely the same as wisdom. What does he mean by the following:
 - Political expertise (Chapter 8 of Book VI),
 - Excellence in deliberation (Chapter 9 of Book VI),
 - Comprehension (Chapter 10 of Book VI), and
 - Sense (Chapter 11 of book VI)?

Why might Aristotle believe that these are also essential to leadership?

4. In Chapters 12 & 13 of Book VI, Aristotle raises and then seeks to resolve some puzzles concerning intellectual accomplishment and wisdom. One such puzzle is explaining why wisdom and excellence of character are essential to each other. In solving this puzzle, Aristotle makes a distinction between wisdom and cleverness (in Chapter 12), and a distinction between natural excellence and excellence (in Chapter 13). What are these distinctions, and how are they supposed to help resolve that puzzle?