

ETHICS of LEADERSHIP

Excellence of Character

As you read the material for our 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 reading:

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 about these issues at our next class meeting.

Reading

- Aristotle. (2002). [Excellence of Character]. In S. Broadie (Ed.) & C. Rowe (Trans.), *Nicomachean Ethics* (pp. 95–122). Oxford: Oxford University Press. (D. Gray, supplementary footnotes with alternative typesetting). (Original work written c.350 BCE).

Background

One common prescription for preventing the corrupt exercise of power and ensuring good leadership is to maintain that a leader ought to have good or otherwise virtuous character. Persons with such dispositions can then be trusted to lead responsibly. This position was certainly advocated by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (who also happened to be Plato's foremost student). In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle provides a sophisticated account of excellence of character" and how we acquire it. Indeed, Aristotle argues that leaders must be very concerned about these things for both their own character as well as that of their followers.

Questions

1. In 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?
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:
 - The name of the excellence,
 - The substrate(s) or continuum(s) of emotion and/or activity connected to that excellence, and
 - 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??