

Ethical Theory

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.

Readings

- *Nicomachean Ethics*, book VI, entire (pp. 176–189).

Questions

1. In chapter 1 of book VI, Aristotle says that there are two parts of the rational part of the human soul. What are they, and what is the difference between them? What various excellences are associated with them (see especially, chapters 3–7 of book VI)? How are these excellences different from each other?
2. How is practical wisdom [“wisdom” or *phronesis*] connected to and yet different from political expertise (chapter 8 of book VI), deliberative excellence (chapter 9 of book VI), understanding [*sunesis*] (chapter 10 of book VI), and good sense [*gnômê*] (chapter 11 of book VI)?
3. In the last two chapters of book VI (chapters 12 & 13), Aristotle raises and then seeks to resolve three puzzles concerning theoretical wisdom [“intellectual accomplishment” or *sophia*] and practical wisdom. What are these puzzles and how does he try to address them? In doing this, Aristotle makes a distinction between practical wisdom and cleverness (in chapter 12), and a distinction between natural virtue and virtue (in chapter 13). What are these distinctions and why do they help solve one of his puzzles?