

# Ethical Theory

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## The Flourishing Life

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 I, entire (pp. 3–32).

### Questions

1. What central claim does Aristotle make in the two opening sentences of book I, chapter 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*? (The argument for this claim will be spread out over the first seven chapters of book I.)
2. What division of ends does Aristotle make in book I, chapter 1? How are these ends related to one another? Why do ends, more generally, compose a hierarchy? If there is a highest end at the top of the hierarchy, what will it be like, according to book I, chapter 2? What benefit is there to understanding this highest good?
3. In book I, chapter 5, we return to the main argument that we left off in chapter 2. What do most people take to be the highest good? Why does Aristotle think that these things cannot be the highest good?
4. In book I, chapter 7, we resume the argument from chapter 5, where Aristotle says that the highest good must be both complete and self-sufficient. What does Aristotle mean by these?
5. According to book I, chapter 7, what is the proper function of the human being? Can you explain his argument for this conclusion? What does this lead Aristotle to conclude is the highest good for humans? In book I, chapter 13, how do the divisions of the human soul connect to this highest good?
6. How does Aristotle argue, in sections 8–12 of book I, that his definition of this highest good conforms to various commonsense notions of it?