

Ethical Theory

Happiness & The Contemplative 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 X, chapters 6--8 (pp. 286--295).

Questions

1. In chapter 6 of book X, Aristotle argues that happiness is not a characteristic. So, by implication, happiness is not virtue or excellence, since this is a characteristic. What is his argument? (It may help to review the similar argument in chapter 5 of book I). How does Aristotle try to make this argument consistent with his claim that happiness is about a life of virtue? (It may help to review the similar argument in chapter 8 of book I.)
2. In chapter 6 of book X, Aristotle also considers the argument that pleasure is the chief good sought for its own sake. What is this argument? What is his response? (It may help to put this in the context of the arguments made about the nature of happiness in chapter 7 of book I, along with the argument concerning pleasure in chapter 8 of book I.)
3. In chapters 7 and 8 of book X, Aristotle argues that the greatest happiness for humans is the life of contemplation. What reasons does he give for this position? (It may help to review the *ergon* argument in chapter 7 of book I.) Do you find this argument compelling? Or is Aristotle now contradicting his earlier claims about happiness as the practical life of virtue?