

ETHICAL THEORY

The Flourishing Life

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, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I: "The Nature of Happiness".

Questions

1. What central claim does Aristotle make in the two opening sentences of book I (in chapter 1)? (The argument justifying 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, chapters 1 and 2)? How are these ends related to one another? Why do ends, more generally, compose a hierarchy? Aristotle postulates (in book I, chapter 2) that there may be a highest end at the top of the hierarchy. If this is true, what does Aristotle think it will be like? What benefit is there to understanding this highest and chief good?
3. According to Aristotle (in book I, chapter 5), what do most people take to be the chief good? Why does Aristotle think that some of these things cannot be the chief good?
4. Later (in book I, chapter 7), Aristotle says that the chief good must be both complete and self-sufficient. What does Aristotle mean by these? Why must the chief good have these properties?
5. After that (still in chapter 7), Aristotle presents his argument, typically called the *ergon* argument, that the chief good must be connected to the function of human beings. (*Ergon* is Greek for "work", "proper function", or "characteristic activity".) What is the function of the human being, and how is it connected to our chief good? Aristotle concludes the argument by saying that happiness is the chief good, but what exactly does he mean by happiness? That is, which theory of well-being (from Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics*, "Well-Being") does Aristotle seem to endorse and label as "happiness"? How is the *ergon* argument supposed to justify this particular conception of happiness?
6. In the last chapter of book I (chapter 13), Aristotle discusses the different parts of the human soul and connects each to happiness. What are these different parts, and what is each of their connections to human happiness?