

# ETHICAL THEORY

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## Moral Excellence

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*, Books II & III: "The Excellences of Character".

### Questions

1. The majority of book II is a slow burn to Aristotle's final definition of moral excellence or "excellence of character" (in chapter 6, around 1107a1). This definition has, roughly, five or six parts to it. What are these parts? How does the preceding discussion (in book II, chapters 1–6) attempt to justify each part?
2. After that (in book II, chapter 7, and book III, chapters 6–9), Aristotle talks about different moral excellences. Explain these, being sure to clearly state the following:
  - A. The name of the excellence,
  - B. The continuum(s) of emotions and/or activities on which that excellence is the intermediate, and
  - C. The deficiency and excess related to that excellence.
3. In several places (especially book II, chapters 1–4), Aristotle discusses moral development, or how we can acquire the dispositions of moral excellence. How do we do it? What problems does this account seem to raise and how does Aristotle try to address them?