

ETHICAL THEORY

The Life of Reflection

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 I & X: "True Happiness and the Life of Reflection".

This reading assignment does have some overlap with previous ones. However, you are now being asked to focus on different aspects of it, so please do re-read the relevant sections.

Questions

1. Aristotle argues (in book I, chapter 5 and book X, chapter 6) that happiness is not a disposition. So, by implication, happiness cannot be excellence, since excellence is a disposition (recall this comes from his definition of excellence in book II, chapter 6). What is Aristotle's argument here that happiness is not a disposition like excellence?
2. However, Aristotle's *ergon* argument (in book I, chapter 7) claims that happiness is acting in accordance with excellence over a complete life. Aristotle recognizes that this seems like a contradiction. So he attempts to show (in book I, chapter 8 and book X, chapter 6) that happiness is not a disposition and yet it is a complete life of excellence. How does he try to show that?
3. Aristotle also considers (in book I, chapter 8 and book X, chapter 6) the argument that pleasure is really the chief good we all seek. What is this argument? What is Aristotle's response? (Once more, the *ergon* argument from book I, chapter 7 may help here.)
4. After that (in book X, chapters 7 and 8), Aristotle argues that the greatest happiness for humans is the life of reflection and intellectual achievement. What reasons does he give for this position? (Yet again, his argument may seem familiar in light of the *ergon* argument from book I, chapter 7.) Do you find Aristotle's argument compelling? Or is Aristotle now contradicting his earlier claims about happiness as the life of excellence?