

POLITICAL & SOCIAL THOUGHT

Excellence of Character

Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What premises, assumptions, reasons, evidence, and other important considerations 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 and justify accepting the author's conclusions as opposed to other ones.

Reading

Aristotle. (2002). *Nicomachean Ethics* (C. Rowe, Trans.; S. Broadie, Ed.). Oxford: Oxford University. (Original work from c.350 BCE). (*Excerpts are from chapters 2, 3, and 13 in book I; chapters 1, 2, and 4–7, in book II; and chapter 9 in book X.*)

Questions

1. In books I and X, Aristotle repeatedly refers to the importance of political expertise.
What is political expertise, and why is it so vital according to Aristotle? What things does he claim a political expert should know? Why should they know these things?
2. In book I, chapter 13, how does Aristotle divide up the various parts of the human soul, and then connect their proper functioning to happiness and human excellence?
3. The majority of book II is a slow burn to Aristotle's final definition of moral excellence or excellence of character, which appears in chapter 6, right around line 1107a1. This definition has, roughly, five or six parts to it.
What is Aristotle's definition of excellence of character? What does each part of it mean? How does the preceding discussion in chapters 1, 2, and 4–6 of book II attempt to justify each of these parts?
4. In chapter 7 of book II, Aristotle talks about different excellences of character. Explain these excellences, being sure to clearly state:
 - The name of the excellence,
 - The substrate/continuum of emotion and/or activity connected to that excellence, and
 - The nature of the two bad states associated with that excellence.
5. In several parts of book II (especially chapters 1, 2, and 4) and book X (chapter 9), Aristotle discusses moral development, or how we acquire excellence of character.
According to Aristotle, how exactly do we acquire excellence of character?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses (unless you miss or are late to class, and must then submit a written reading question review).

You do need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting. You may, during the following class, be randomly selected to present answers to these if selected to do so for a verbal reading question review.