

POLITICAL & SOCIAL THOUGHT

Excellence of Intellect

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 1, 2, 5, and 7–13 in Book VI.*)

[*Courage and the 9/11 Hijackers*]. (2001, September 17).

[Television series episode]. In B. Maher (Creator), *Politically Incorrect*. United States: American Broadcasting Company. (D. E. Gray, transcription).

Questions

1. In chapters 1 and 2, Aristotle discusses the two parts of the human soul that possess reason. What are these two parts, and what are the differences between them?
2. In chapter 5 (and most of the following chapters), Aristotle discusses the nature of wisdom.

What do you think Aristotle means by wisdom? What are its characteristics? Of which part of the human soul is wisdom the associated excellence? Why might Aristotle believe that wisdom is difficult to possess, and yet something extremely essential to political leadership?

3. Aristotle also discusses a lot of intellectual traits similar to, yet not precisely the same as wisdom.

What does he mean by the following:

- Political expertise (chapter 8),
- Excellence in deliberation (chapter 9),
- Comprehension (chapter 10), and
- Good sense (chapter 11)?

Why might Aristotle believe that all of these are essential for good and effective leadership?

4. In chapters 12 and 13, Aristotle raises and then seeks to resolve some puzzles concerning wisdom. One such puzzle is explaining why wisdom and excellence of character are essential to each other. In solving this puzzle, Aristotle makes a distinction between wisdom and cleverness (in chapter 12), and a distinction between natural excellence and excellence (in chapter 13).

What are these distinctions, and how are they supposed to help resolve that puzzle?

How might the *Politically Incorrect* discussion about whether the 9/11 hijackers were courageous help illustrate the distinction between natural courage and true courage?

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.