

## Reading Guide (Updated 1/21/11) The Well-Ordered Soul: Happiness and Harmony

Readings for 25 January 2011

### READINGS

- [A] **REQUIRED:** Plato, *Republic*, Book IV 441c-445b; Book VIII, 588b-592a, (Grube/Reeve, 117-121; 259-263)

**SUPPLEMENTARY:** Plato, *Republic*, Book IV 427e-441c (Grube/Reeve, 103-117)

- [B] **REQUIRED:** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Selections from Books I & II (details below)

[NOTE: The Aristotle selections are the most difficult and longest part of today's reading.]

- [C] **REQUIRED:** Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis*, Chapter 5, pp. 81-106.

**SUPPLEMENTARY:** Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis*, Chapters 8, pp. 155-180

### VIDEOS

- [D] **RECOMMENDED:** Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's TED talk, "Flow" at [http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/mihaly\\_csikszentmihalyi\\_on\\_flow.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/mihaly_csikszentmihalyi_on_flow.html)

### [A] Plato

- **REQ:** Plato *Republic*, Book IV 441c-445b; Book VIII, 588b-592a, (Grube/Reeve, 117-121; 259-263)
- **REC:** Plato, *Republic*, Book IV 427e-441c (Grube/Reeve, 103-117)

### Background

The selections we are reading again come from Plato's work *The Republic*, this time from Books IV and VIII. (See Grube/Reeve pp. 94-5 and p. 213 for information about the context of the discussion.)

Earlier in *The Republic*, Socrates has suggested that in order to understand what makes for a well-functioning human soul, it is helpful to think about what makes for a well-functioning city (or society). In a city, he points out, there three classes of persons: rulers, auxiliaries, and producers. Likewise, he contends, in the human soul there are three classes of psychological attitudes: rational, spirited, and appetitive. (We talked about this in lecture last Tuesday.) Just as we can identify the relations among the parts of a society that are required for a society to be wise, brave,

moderate and just (the four cardinal Greek virtues), so too can we identify the relations among the parts of the human soul that are required for an individual to be wise, brave, moderate and just. (Note that by “just,” Socrates/Plato means something slightly different than the typical modern sense of the term.)

As in our previous selection, the conversation that takes place is between Socrates and Glaucon. As before, you may want to keep track by writing a small “S” where Socrates is speaking and a small “G” where Glaucon is speaking. Don’t worry if you can’t do this in all cases. To help you start:

S: “Well then, we’ve pretty much made our difficult way through a sea of argument...”

G: “That’s true.”

S: “Therefore, it necessarily follows that...”

G: “That’s right”

## Passages to focus on/passages to skim

If you would like to get a running start, you may want to begin your reading at 427e (top of p. 103). It is there that Socrates begins the process of identifying the four cardinal virtues in the context of the city.

He begins by briefly mentioning how a city/person might manifest the virtues of wisdom and courage. The discussion then turns to the question of how a city/person could manifest justice.

It is here (at 441c) that you should begin to pay close attention. In this part of the selection, you should focus especially on the following passages:

- 441e-442b
- 443d-445b

We pick up again in Book VIII, at 588b (at the very bottom of p. 259.) Here Socrates returns to Glaucon’s question (from the first week’s reading.) He begins by providing a vivid image of the multi-part soul, and goes on to describe the ways in which those parts might interact with one another. You should read closely from here through the end of the selection.

NB: Throughout his discussion, Socrates advocates a number of political views that the modern reader is likely to find disturbing. We will return to these issues in Part III of the course.

## Terms, Concepts and Examples

Be sure that you understand and are able to distinguish among the following terms and concepts and examples:

Terms and Concepts: wisdom, courage, moderation and justice (Greek virtues)

Examples: image of the soul as man-lion-beast

## Reading Questions

As you read through the selection, keep in mind the following questions:

- (1) What does Socrates mean when he says that the just person (that is: the person who is in a position to thrive or flourish) is one in whom “each part is doing its own work” (442e)? (See also the paragraph at 443d/e.) What are some of the strategies he suggests for achieving this goal?
- (2) What is Socrates’ answer to Glaucon’s challenge (which begins at 558b and continues through the end of the selection)? How convincing do you find the response?
- (3) What is Plato’s picture of a flourishing human being?

## **[B1] Aristotle – Selections from Book I**

### Background

Aristotle (384-322 BCE) – along with his teacher, Plato – was one of the two most important philosophers of antiquity and among the most important figures in the Western intellectual tradition. It would be difficult to overstate the influence of his work on nearly every aspect of Western thought, including not only all of philosophy, but also biology, physics, political theory, logic and rhetoric.

The selections we are reading for this week are from Aristotle’s book-length *Nicomachean Ethics*, a ten-part treatise, originally written in Ancient Greek, in which Aristotle provides an account of what is required for a life of human flourishing. In the passages we are reading, Aristotle sketches a theory of ethics and moral character that gives pride of place to the notion of virtue. (The name “Nicomachean” – a later title which Aristotle himself did not use in reference to the work – may refer to his son Nicomachus, who served as its editor.)

The numbers that appear in the margins of the text are called Bekker numbers, and they refer to the page numbers of the standard (Prussian Academy) edition of Aristotle’s works, enabling readers who make use of different translations or editions to refer easily to a particular passage. (The name “Bekker” derives from that of the editor, August Immanuel Bekker (1785-1871), who prepared the canonical edition of Aristotle’s works.)

Unlike Plato’s dialogues, which have been passed down to us as Plato composed them, the surviving works of Aristotle are largely in the form of edited lecture notes. As a result, the text may seem somewhat dry and jumpy. (At least, though, you don’t need to keep track of who is speaking...)

You can read more about Aristotle’s life and work in the Preface to the Irwin edition, pp. xiii-xxviii.

### Passages to focus on/passages to skim

- Read quickly through Book I, Chapters 1-3 (pp. 1-3) to get a sense of the context.
- Pay close attention to the first three paragraphs of Book I, Chapter 4 (p. 3), then skim the remainder of that chapter (pp. 3-4)

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- Resume careful reading for the whole of Book I, Chapter 5 (pp. 4-5)
- You may skip or skim Book I, Chapter 6 (pp.5-7)
- Continue reading carefully for the whole of Book I, Chapter 7 (pp. 7-10)
- Read at a steady pace through Book I, Chapters 8 and 9 (pp. 10-12)
- Though Book I, Chapters 10-12 (pp. 13-16) raise interesting puzzles, you may skip or skim these sections
- Read Book I, Chapter 13 (pp. 16-18) closely
- **For each of these passages, the Irwin edition has extensive notes, beginning on p. 172, that should be *extremely* helpful in enabling you to understand the material**

## Terms and Concepts

Be sure that you understand and are able to distinguish among the following terms and concepts:

Terms and Concepts: end (as in: goal); life of gratification/life of political activity/life of study; external goods/goods of the body/goods of the soul

## Reading Questions

As you read through the selection, keep in mind the following questions:

- (1) What are some of the notions of happiness that Aristotle discusses? What is the notion of happiness that he endorses? How does he defend his position?
- (2) What does Aristotle mean when he (famously) claims that the human good/happiness is the “activity of soul in accord with...the best and most complete virtue” (1098a15, and again as the first sentence of chapter 13 at 1102a5)?
- (3) DO NOT WORRY if a lot of this material seems confusing or difficult; just do the best you can.

## **[B2] Aristotle – Selections from Book II**

### Passages to focus on/passages to skim

It would be best if you could read this entire section closely. I realize that it is a lot of material. In exchange, I can assure you that this is one of the most insightful discussions of human psychology from the last 2000 years.

That said, if you are really looking for paragraph-by-paragraph advice:

- Read closely all of Book II, Chapter 1
- Skim the first three paragraphs of Book II, Chapter 2; read the remaining four paragraphs closely
- Read closely all of Book II, Chapters 3 and 4
- Skim (or even skip) Book II, Chapter 5

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- Read closely all of Book II, Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9
- **For each of these passages, the Irwin edition has extensive notes, beginning on p. 192, that should be *extremely* helpful in enabling you to understand the material**

## Terms, Concepts and Examples

Be sure that you understand and are able to distinguish among the following terms, concepts and examples:

Terms and Concepts: virtues of thought/virtues of character; habit; excess/deficiency

Examples: various virtues (bravery, friendliness, magnanimity, etc.)

## Reading Questions

As you read through the selection, keep in mind the following questions:

- (1) What does Aristotle mean when he says that “the virtues arise in us neither by nature nor against nature. Rather, we are by nature able to acquire them, and we are completed through habit” (1103a25)? How does he suggest that such habits can be cultivated?
- (2) Identify the (many) points at which Aristotle appeals to his view that excellence is a mean between two extremes.
- (3) **DO NOT WORRY** if a lot of this material seems confusing or difficult; just do the best you can.

## [C] Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis*

- **REQ: Chapter 5, pp. 81-106**
- **REC: Chapter 8, pp. 155-179**

## Background

[For background information about Jonathan Haidt, see the Reading Guide for 1.18.11]

## Passages to focus on/passages to skim

Our main focus will be on Chapter 5 (pp. 81-106.) You should read this chapter carefully and in full.

In addition, we will give some attention to Chapter 8 (pp. 155-179.) You should at least skim this chapter in full.

The Haidt – particularly after reading the Plato and the Aristotle – should seem straightforward.

## Terms, Concepts and Examples

Be sure that you understand and are able to distinguish among the following terms, concepts and examples:

Terms and Concepts: Progress Principle; Adaptation Principle; Happiness Formula; flow; pleasures/gratifications

Examples: Bob and Mary

## Reading Questions:

As you read through the selections, keep in mind the following questions:

### *Chapter 5*

- (1) What are some of the main factors that contribute to human happiness, according to Haidt?
- (2) In what ways does his account echo themes that arose in the selections from Plato and/of Aristotle?
- (3) In what ways does it raise additional themes, or themes that run counter to those that arose in the Plato and/or Aristotle selections?

### *Chapter 8*

- (4) How would Haidt answer Glaucon’s challenge?

[D] **RECOMMENDED: Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s TED talk, “Flow” at [http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/mihaly\\_csikszentmihalyi\\_on\\_flow.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/mihaly_csikszentmihalyi_on_flow.html)**

## Background

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (born 1934) is a Hungarian-American psychology professor who taught for many years at the University of Chicago. He is best known for his work on happiness and creativity, and for developing the notion of *flow* – a state of complete absorption in and concentration on the activity at hand.

He describes this idea – a modern version of the Platonic “harmonious soul” in this brief and engaging lecture.

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