

Thinking Straight Ethical Reasoning Workshop 7-1 May 13, 2008

I. What is virtue ethics?

A. In small groups discuss the following issues concerning *The Ethics of Virtue*.

1. What is a virtue according handout (second xeroxed page=embedded page numbered 212, Rachels p. 175)? Rachels examines some specific virtues: courage, generosity, honesty and loyalty. How well does his account accord with your notion of these virtues?
2. What is Aristotle's "classical" account of virtues (handout xeroxed page 2-6=embedded page number 212-220). In particular what does Aristotle mean by "eudaimonia" or flourishing (handout xeroxed p. 3= 214-215, Rachels p. 182)? Examine the argument presented (handout xeroxed page 4=embedded page s 215-217). What is the doctrine of the mean? (handout Xeroxed page 5= 218-219). What according to the handout is the "reciprocity of virtues thesis" and the "single-virtue thesis" (handout xeroxed page 5= embedded p. 219).
3. Discuss how virtue ethics differs in general from a theory of rightness/obligation/duty according to the authors. (Rachels p. 174, handout xeroxed page 6-8 = embedded pp 220-228). Do the two sources differ in their comparison?

B. Plenary

II Strengths and Weaknesses of Virtue Ethics.?

A. In small group discuss the following:

1. What is the relationship of virtue ethics and the ethics of care according to the authors?
2. What are the advantages of virtue theory (Rachels p, 184-186, handout Xeroxed p. 10-11 =embedded p. 233-235). Be sure to talk about the hospital visit example (Rachels p.185). What are the disadvantages (remainder of both sources)?
3. What position do the two sources ultimately take on virtue ethics and the end of the assigned reading? To what extent are the positions similar and how do they differ.

B. Plenary

III Application of Virtue Ethics


A. In small group Discuss how virtue theory might apply to the following case

A good friend calls you and is very depressed. As the conversation progresses you become increasingly concerned about the friend's mental state. You fear that the friend may be contemplating suicide or some other drastic action (though they don't say this outright). You ask the friend where he is, and he says that he will tell you only if you promise not to tell others nor find him yourself. What do you do?

B. Plenary

C. In small group discuss how virtue ethics as you understand it might apply to a central decision in *Gone Baby Gone* and how it would be different (or similar) to decision suggested by alternative ethical theories such as utilitarianism, Kantianism or Contractarianism. Does pluralistic virtue ethics suggest anything different than the ethics of care (that is, a single virtue account)?

D. Plenary

 **Assignment for next Tuesday, May 20: Read Rachels Ch 13.. Come prepared to discuss** what version of ethical reasoning you find most attractive and why. **Due Tuesday May 27:** a paper (2-5 pages) that presents the ethical theory you find most attractive among the following: religious based ethical theory, ethical egoism, utilitarianism, Kantian Ethics, Contractarianism, and Virtue ethics (including ethics of care) This paper should contain a **clear exposition** of some version of the theory, a discussion of **arguments in favor** of it and a discussion (perhaps a refutation) of **arguments against** it. Use the techniques of reconstruction and criticism discussed in the critical reasoning component of the program whenever possible. This paper should include **reference to at least one (preferably more) outside sources** (say entries from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy or other items linked to our program web site) and reflect a close reading of Rachels and the handouts as appropriate.