

# Thinking Straight Ethical Reasoning Workshop 1-1 April 1, 2008

## I. Preliminary Writing Exercise and discussion

**A: Choose One of the following cases and write a brief response** indicating: a) What you should do in this situation, and b) What reasons you would give for your choice.

1. A friend (not a close friend) invites you to go to a movie. You *don't* really want to tie up a free evening going to a movie with this friend; you think you might be able to arrange another activity with other friends that you would enjoy more. Should you: a) tell the friend this (i.e., tell the truth), b) make up an excuse, or c) go ahead and accept the invitation? Explain why this choice is ethically the best one. If you can think of a further alternative that you should choose instead, describe it and explain why it is the right thing to do.
2. You and a friend both work for the same organization, in different offices. You went to school together and have helped each other in your careers. Several times, she has written letters of reference for you that exaggerated your strengths and made no mention of your shortcomings. Now she has an opportunity for a promotion and has asked you to write a letter for her. Should you write an honest letter, stating that she is competent but not outstanding, or should you return her favor and praise her to the skies?

**B Small group discussion of writing exercise** (groups of about 4 students who chose same case)

- Introduce yourselves to each other
- Each take a turn reading what you have written; then discuss
- One of you will be chosen at random to introduce the other members of your group, to state some of your thoughts about the case you chose, and to summarize some of the thoughts of others in your group.

**C. (Plenary—class as a whole)** Presentation of small group results

## TASK II:

**A: (Individually)** read the short selection (from a much longer article).

**B: (Small group)** Discuss the following

1. What is the main point(s) Mylan Engel's is making in the selection
2. What is the contrast he draws between reaction to 9/11 and reaction to hunger and disease
3. Does hunger register on your "moral radar screen?" Should it? Do you have any moral obligation to "take hunger seriously." If so, what should you be doing now.

**C: (Plenary)** Discussion of small group findings.

Penultimate Draft **TAKING HUNGER SERIOUSLY** Mylan Engel, Jr. Final Version published in *Croatian Journal of Philosophy* Northern Illinois University

You probably remember many of the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Nineteen terrorists hijacked four commercial airliners, crashing two of them into the World Trade Center towers, one into the Pentagon, and one in a field in Pennsylvania. Approximately 3200 innocent individuals died needlessly. People around the world stared at their televisions in horror and disbelief as the news media aired clips of the attack 'round the clock. The tragedy immediately roused President Bush to declare

“War on terrorism.” Volunteers from all across America traveled to New York at their own expense to aid in the rescue and clean-up efforts. Charitable contributions poured into the American Red Cross, which in turn wrote checks totaling \$143.4 million in emergency aid (averaging \$45,837 per family). The U.S. government put together a \$5 billion relief package that will provide \$1.6 million to each of the victim’s families. The U.S. has spent billions more on its military efforts to root out Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda terrorist network. As the dust from the 9/11 attacks has finally settled, it is safe to say that Americans are now taking terrorism seriously.

Here are some of the tragic events that took place on 9/11 that you probably don’t recall. On that infamous day, over 33,000 innocent children under the age of five died senseless, needless deaths— 18,000 died from malnutrition and another 15,300 died of untreated poverty-related disease. It must be stressed that almost all of these deaths were unnecessary. They could have easily been prevented. The U.S. alone grows enough grain and soybeans to feed the world’s human population several times over. Given this overabundance of food, the lives of those children who starved to death on 9/11 could have easily been saved, had we only diverted a relatively modest portion of this food to them. As for the disease-related deaths, nineteen percent of the 33,000 children who lost their lives on 9/11 died from the dehydrating effects of chronic diarrhea.<sup>4</sup> Almost all of these 6,350 diarrheal dehydration deaths could have been prevented by administering each child a single packet of oral rehydration salts (cost per packet: 15 cents). Another nineteen percent of these children died from acute respiratory infections, most of whom could have been saved with a course of antibiotics (cost: 25 cents). Most of the 2,300 children who died from measles could have been saved with vitamin A therapy (cost per capsule: less than 10 cents). What makes the deaths of these children particularly tragic is that virtually all of them were readily preventable. They only occurred because otherwise good people did nothing to prevent them.

Despite the fact that the number of innocent children who died needlessly on 9/11 was ten times greater than the number of innocent people who lost their lives in the 9/11 terrorist attack, compassionate conservative President Bush did not declare war on hunger or on poverty. The U.S. Government did not immediately institute a multi-billion dollar relief package for the world’s absolutely poor. People did not make out generous checks to famine relief organizations. The media did not so much as mention the tragedy of so many young innocent lives lost. And, as if 9/11 wasn’t enough for us to deal with, on 9/12 another 33,000 innocent children under the age of five died unnecessarily, and another 33,000 on 9/13. In the twenty-two months that have transpired since the 9/11 tragedy, over 22 million innocent children under the age of five have died needlessly. By any objective measure, the tragedy of the 9/11 attack pales in comparison to the tragedy of world hunger and famine-related disease. Each year the latter claims 3,800 times more innocent lives than the 9/11 attack. Despite the magnitude of the tragedy of global hunger and childhood malnutrition, the overwhelming majority of affluent and moderately affluent people, including most philosophers, send no money to famine relief organizations. Of the 4 million people who receive solicitations from UNICEF each year, less than one percent donate anything at all. For most of us, world hunger doesn’t even register a blip on our moral radar screens, much less present itself as a serious moral problem requiring action on our part.

**Assignment:** For Friday, April 4. Read Chapter 1: “What is Morality?” in the Rachels & Rachel’s text. Write a one-page outline of the chapter, including a very brief statement (in your own words) of the main point of the chapter and a few sentences explaining how this main point is supported. Be prepared to discuss your interpretation of the chapter. You will turn in the statement and the outline.