

# Thinking Straight Ethical Reasoning WS 6-2, May 6, 2011

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

1. Discuss how a theory of virtue differs from a theory of rightness or obligation according to R&R. Review the four theories presented on p. 159. Put each into standard form for a conceptual theory. What might an equivalent version of virtue theory look like? (See p. 170) How can the “ethics of care” discussed in chapter 11 be “a part” of such a virtue theory as R&R suggest p. 157?

### Plenary Discussion

2. What according to R&R, is a virtue? Go through the “partial” list of 24 virtues on p. 161. R&R concentrate on only 4 (courage, generosity, honesty and loyalty) which they suggest are “needed by all people at all times.” Do you agree that these four all belong in the category of “universal virtues?” How compelling do you find his discussion of these specific virtues. Do any of the others on the list of 24 (or others not mentioned) belong on this list. If so, provide a justification for the new items along the lines that R&R give for the four.

### Plenary Discussion

3. Go through the list of virtues p. 161 (plus any you have added). Which of these traits (if any are likely to be especially prized more by the for theories presented p. 159 (egoism, contractarianism, utilitarianism and Kantian ethics?

### Plenary Discussion

4. How do R&R characterize “radical virtue ethics?” How does it differ from alternative versions on virtue ethics. What are the advantages of virtue theory as R&R sees them (be sure to discuss R&R’s approach to the Smith hospital visit example p. 168, and the issue of impartiality p. 168) What are the disadvantages (problems) that R&R see with virtue ethics. Discuss R&R’s ultimate approach to virtue theory? Do you agree with them? Why or why not?
5. Discuss how virtue theory might apply to the following case (what are the most relevant virtues, and how would they manifest themselves in this particular case, what action would seem to be required by virtue ethics?

(a) *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?*

### Plenary Discussion

(b) *A Kindergarten boy from a poor family rides the school bus to and from school. On the half-hour ride, many of the other children on the bus entertain themselves by teasing him about his plain clothes, his unkempt hair, his worn shoes. Day after day the abuse continues, becoming more and more cruel. The 11 year-old girl, sensitive to the feelings of others, notices the boy suffering in silence, unable to understand why the other students want to make him feel bad. The girl is repulsed by his appearance and is not at all eager to alienate her friends. What should she do, assuming she wants to be a good person? Adapted from Vincent Ruggiero, Thinking Critically about Ethical Issues*

### Plenary Discussion

(c) *Patrick Kenzie’s decision to return Amanda in “Gone Baby Gone”*

### Plenary Discussion



**Assignment for next Tuesday, May 10: Read:** Handout: Mark Timmons on *Virtue Ethics* AND “*Virtue Ethics*” entry from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* – also available through the “Link” button on our program Web Site