

Ethical Reasoning Workshop WS 8-1 May 17, 2011

I. A. In small groups discuss the following issues discussed in Rachels Chapter 13

1. Review R&R's position in Chapter 1 concerning the issue of reason in ethics and the importance of impartiality. They present an argument (p. 175) that impartiality in ethical reasoning springs from the very concept of reason in ethics. What is his argument? Do you accept it?
2. Discuss R&R's position that there are two (apparently conflicting) concerns in ethical reasoning (p. 177f): promoting the interests of everyone alike (a version of impartiality) and treating people according to their just deserts.
3. What is Rachels' multiple-strategies utilitarianism. What does he mean by living a life according to the "best plan" (p. 179-80) How does it differ from classical forms of utilitarianism. How does it deal with the two (apparently conflicting) concerns discussed item (2) above? How would it deal with this case we discussed earlier

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 Discussion

- 1 R&R conclude (p. 183) that the moral theory he proposes is "plausible"—that it is a satisfactory moral theory? Discuss his account of fairness and being "born lucky" p. 182) Do you accept it? If so, why? If not, what is your alternative. Can any moral theory be satisfactory?
- 2 Discuss whether Rachels' multiple-strategies utilitarianism might apply to a central decision in *Gone Baby Gone*.

II. Discussion of Handout on Deontological Ethics . Note Deontological Ethics including contractarianism and Kantian Approaches

A. In small group discuss the four criticisms of consequentialism listed at the bottom of the first page in the handout.

How telling do you find each of them. Can Rachel's multiple-strategy utilitarianism (a form of consequentialism handle them)? Is it a version of a mixed theory (handout p. 5)

B. Plenary Discussion

C. In small group (1) discuss the four advantages of deontological ethical theories presented at the bottom of p2 and top of p3 and (2) the way "threshold deontology" might handle the weaknesses of such ethical theories (bottom p3, p4)

D. Plenary Discussion

- ## III. Some philosophers emphasize, perhaps more than R&R, that the main conflict in moral philosophy is between two broad types: Consequentialism and deontological ethical theories. The former includes act and rule utilitarianism, and the latter includes social contract theories, Rawlsian contract theory and Kantian approaches. What R&R call "radical virtue theory" would be a third alternative. How would you fill in the table "Radical Virtue Ethics"?

Consequentialism including Utilitarianism	Deontological Ethics including Contractarianism "Justice as Fairness" and Kantianism	"Radical Virtue Ethics"
Concern for Consequences Doing Good	Concern for Commitments: Keeping your agreements, Doing your fair share, Respecting persons as autonomous	
Important Traits (virtues?) you should cultivate: Benevolence Knowledge of how acts affect others Knowledge of what makes others happy	Important Traits (virtues?) you should cultivate: Fidelity Fairness Respect for Persons	

A. In small group apply each of these two alternatives to the following decision making case

Jason is very talented. He is a great student in lot of areas, he's a good musician and loves to work with his hands. Until recently, he thought about working in one of the helping professions. He volunteered as a drug counselor and found that he was very good at it. He was a little afraid of the "burn out" he saw among the professionals with whom he worked, but he was also aware of the good work they did in helping people turn around their lives. Within the last few months he became very interested in small scale, organic gardening. He spent some time working on a small farm that supplied the local farmers market. He saw the hard work needed to be successful, but for the first time in a number of years he felt calm and personally fulfilled. His parents owned a piece of land that could be used for his own farm. What should he do? Continue to build on his success as a counselor of some type, or pursue something that would be more personally satisfying.

B. Plenary

- ## IV In small group. As time permits discuss the strengths and weakness of the three types of moral theory (consequentialism, deontological ethics, and virtue ethics) we have discussed. Which, if any, of these types of moral theory do you find most satisfactory and why do you say so?



Assignment for Friday May 20, 2011 Read the Ruggiario handout on applied ethics.