

Reading Guide #12

Hursthouse's "Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*"

Marquis, "An Argument that Abortion is Wrong" (E: 786-797)

1. Hursthouse argues that our lives go better on the whole with the virtues than without these virtues.
 - a. Explain why she thinks this is true using the virtue of honesty as an example.
 - b. But isn't it just true that sometimes, at least, being honest could ruin your life and telling a lie can avoid this ruin? Does Hursthouse acknowledge this possibility? [Hint: yes she does acknowledge this.] What is her response to this possibility?**
 - c. Suppose that telling a lie will most likely save Andre's career whereas telling the truth will most likely ruin it. Suppose further that Andre has the virtue of honesty but that at least one of the reasons that Andre has cultivated this virtue is that he has been convinced by Aristotle and Hursthouse that an honest life will lead to a flourishing life. Will Andre lie to save his career? [Hint: the answer is 'no'. Now explain why this is the right answer given that Andre has only cultivated this virtue because he wants his life to prosper?]
- 2. Hursthouse considers the possibility that it is not virtue but power that secures a good life. She claims that even if this is so, very few of us would prefer to live a powerful but vicious life over a life of virtue with limited power.**
 - a. What about the few people who don't prefer this life? What according to Hursthouse can we say to them? [Hint: we can't say anything to them, now explain why not!]**
 - b. But if virtuous people already agree that the virtues lead to the best life and vicious people cannot be convinced that the virtues lead to the best life, then to whom, according to Hursthouse, is Aristotle's theory addressed?
3. According to Marquis, in what does the wrongness of killing consist (i.e. what's so bad about losing your life?) According to this view when is it permissible to kill a biologically alive adult human being? (Hint: the answer is not "never".)
- 4. Suppose that someone argues as follows: "Creatures have rights not in virtue of what they will IN THE FUTURE be able to do, but what they can do right now. A fetus is not capable of X, Y, and Z and only creatures currently capable of X, Y, and Z have a right to life." [where X, Y, and Z are some features of adult human beings that this theorist thinks are important, perhaps, it is self-consciousness, having sentience, being able to take an interest in their future, reason, or something else]. Explain Marquis' objection to this sort of thinking NO MATTER what X, Y, and Z are. [Hint: construct a person who now lacks X,Y, and Z but clearly has rights!]**
5. What is the contraception objection? How does Marquis respond to this objection?