

Third Short Paper: Final Paper, Part II

When Ted finishes explaining his recommendation there is a long, awkward silence. Finally, he turns to Alice and asks her to say what she thinks they should tell the physicians. “Well... I...I,” she stammers, and begins to cry. Alice and her mother have been particularly close, having had common experiences that neither of Elsie’s two sons could share. Elsie took a particular interest in Alice’s handicapped son, and was very sympathetic and supportive until suffering her stroke. This situation is more difficult for her than for Ted or Ron.

“Perhaps it would help if I were to speak before you do,” Ron offers, putting his arm around his sister. Alice readily accepts his considerate offer.

Unlike Ted and Alice, Ron has had a course in ethics: in fact, he had two, a general introduction to ethics in which he read Mill, Kant and Aristotle, and a business ethics course. He took the first course only because it was required, and did not like it, just as he expected. He thought that Mill was right about the chief good, but didn’t like his intellectualism. Kant was particularly distasteful for him, though the only thing he remembered well from the course was part of a line from Kant, “...the stern command of duty.” “Just what you would expect from a German,” he had thought at the time. Business ethics had made much more sense to him because the basic theme of the course had been that doing the right thing is good for business.

Ron went into the military to earn enough money to go to a good school for an MBA, and to build his resume for a future business career by traveling internationally and perhaps picking up some knowledge of a foreign language. He expected to dislike the military culture intensely, but believed that he could put up with it for four years in peacetime. Unfortunately, shortly after his enlistment the Iraq war began and Ron has spent most of the last year in Iraq as a forward observer for naval air operations.

Ron’s military experience--his experience in Iraq, especially--has changed him. Whereas he formerly doubted the existence of real right and wrong, and good and evil (he always put these terms in quotation marks in his college papers), and he had been confident that moral and political problems were easily solved by simply being reasonable, he had now become a morally serious man. His year at life’s raw edge had brought him face to face with undeniable wrongs, and shown him, too, some undeniably good things. He has suffered moral anguish over calling in air strikes from his carrier, knowing that it was likely that innocent people would often be injured or killed, but that his own comrades and other innocent parties would likely suffer the same fate if there were no air support. He has also gained a healthy respect for “...the stern command of duty.”

As it happened, one of Ron’s fellow officers, Elaine, was a philosophy graduate who had written a senior thesis on Kant’s ethics. When he confessed his moral anguish to her she loaned him a copy of *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* and they have been reading and discussing it together. Ron has become a Kantian.

Write Ron’s recommendation and supporting argument for him.

DUE: Friday, May 1, 2009
c. 600 words, t.w., d.s.