

## RSVP Ethics: Rules, Sympathy, Virtue and Piety

For a summary of how RSVP work in concert see pages 125 to 126.

<b>Rules</b>		
<b>(Personality)</b>	Kant's categorical imperative (111):	"[W]e are to treat rational beings as ends, and never as means only; we are to act with a view to the 'kingdom of ends' in which all rational goals are reconciled" (111).
	The categorical imperative implies certain procedures (111):	We rationally strive to resolve our conflicts (112).
		We are free beings who take responsibility for our decisions (112).
		We possess rights that only we can cancel (112).
		We are bound by duties that we must perform (112).
		We acknowledge that "... each person is an irreplaceable and self-sufficient member of the moral order" (111).
		To treat a person as an end in himself we acknowledge his rights against us and our duties towards him, and we recognize that neither right nor duty can be cancelled by some other good (112).
	Rationally resolving important conflicts raises deep and complex issues:	"We weigh rights against each other, and give precedence to the one which we believe to be more serious -- as when we take food that belongs to John in order to save the life of the starving Henry. Henry's right to help takes precedence over John's right to his property; nevertheless John's right remains, and John is wronged by the act which succors Henry" (112).
		Since there must be penalties should one not adhere to these moral laws, "[p]ersons who do not respect the rights of others, forfeit rights of their own" (120).
	"But the prominence of the moral law in our daily negotiations should not lead us to suppose that morality is merely a system of rules" (113).	"A society ordered entirely by the moral law, in which rights, duties and justice take precedence over all interests and affections, would alienate the mere human beings who compose it, and soon fall apart. For it would make no distinction between neighbors and strangers, between the alien and the friend. People need the safety promised by the moral law, and by the habit of negotiation. But they also need something more: the nexus of affection and sympathy which binds them to their neighbors, which creates a common destiny, and which leads people to share one another's sorrows and joys" (113).
<b>Sympathy</b>	"But affection requires us to bend the rules, to set aside our rights in the interest of those we love, to do that which is beyond the call of duty, and sometimes to dispense our favors unjustly" (113)	"And the same is true of sympathy -- that generalized affection which spreads from the self in dwindling ripples across the world of others. Actions which spring from sympathy may resemble those commanded by the moral law; but they spring from another motive, and one that is just as necessary to the moral life. The moral being is not merely the rule-governed person who plays the game of rights and duties; he has a distinctive emotional character, which both fits him for the moral life and extends and modifies its edicts" (113-114).
		"He is a creature of extended sympathies, motivated by love, admiration, shame and a host of other social emotions" (114).

<b>Virtue</b>	". . . social order is a precarious thing, which cannot be sustained by law alone" (114).	"Internal and external threats to [the law] can be deterred only if people have the mettle to resist them -- the force of character, the emotional equilibrium and the live human sympathies that will prompt them to persist in a cause, to make sacrifices, and to commit themselves to others. This is the origin of the vital distinction that we make, between vice and virtue." (114).
		"In addition to the moral law, therefore, morality involves the pursuit of virtue, and the avoidance of vice" (114).
		"The antique virtues of courage, prudence, wisdom, temperance and justice, amplified by Christian charity and pagan loyalty, still form the core idea of human excellence" (114).
		Virtue is not a solipsistic achievement. "Only in the context of human admiration and contempt does the virtuous character emerge, and only in the condition of society is virtue properly exercised and rightly understood" (115).
		"Two of our sympathetic feelings are of great moral importance: pity towards those who suffer, and pleasure in another's joy. Both feelings are held to be part of human virtue. Pitiless people and joyless people alike awaken our disapproval" (116).
		"But rights and duties can conflict. The result is a dilemma, and the distinguishing mark of a dilemma is that, while only one of two things can be done, you have a duty to do both" (125).
<b>Piety</b>	"There is another component in our moral thinking, in addition to the moral law and the sympathy which extends the scope of it . . ." (117).	This is " . . . the component which I shall call, borrowing from Roman usage, piety, meaning the respect for sacred things. Pietas requires that we honor our parents and ancestors, the household deities, the law and the civil order, that we keep the appointed festivals and public ceremonies -- and all this out of a sense of the sacred given-ness of these things, which are not our invention, and to which we owe an unfathomable debt of gratitude" (117)
		"[Piety] is a feeling which does not depend explicitly on religious belief, and which no moral being can really escape . . ." (117)
		". . . Piety means the deep down recognition of our frailty and dependence, the acknowledgement that the burden we inherit cannot be sustained unaided, the disposition to give thanks for our existence and reverence to the world on which we depend, and the sense of the unfathomable mystery which surrounds our coming to be and our passing away" (117).
		"The three forms of moral life that I have described -- respect for persons, the pursuit of virtue and natural sympathy -- all depend, in the last analysis, on piety" (117-118).

#### Work Cited

Scruton, Roger. "Morality." *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Philosophy*. New York: Penguin Books, 1996. 111-126.