

Mary Gentile re-frames the parable “practice makes perfect”, for ethical situations. During her presentation, took a somewhat opposing view from what we’ve discussed in class. Rather than approaching right vs. right situations, she mentions that the tough situations may be right vs. wrong situations, and that an individual will already know what is right, but needs to figure out how to voice their ethical concern. Gentile highlighted that those who are capable of speaking up in ethical situations are those who have discussed their ethical views beforehand. This prevents these individuals from feeling like “a deer in the headlights,” and defaulting to a response that might not encompass their true feelings just to say something. Gentile emphasized that these conversations could have been with parents or mentors, in educational courses, or with friends. She also explained that it does not matter if the conversations have been purely as a theoretical exercise, or in another ethical dilemma. This means, based on Gentile’s presentation that an ethics course has inherent ethical value by forcing reflection and practice by students. Additionally, based on Gentile’s work, when facing an ethical conflict, talking through your thought process with a friend or relative in order to determine possible solutions to the issue, even immediately before broaching the topic may help.

During high school I participated in FIRST robotics, a large scale robotics competition modeled after athletics. The program is meant to teach values as well as technology. The key value taught in the program is known as “Gracious Professionalism.” A team is expected to compete to win the game, but they are also expected to be polite and help other teams in need. During my junior year of high school, we had a robot that utilized two motors that were known for burning out in the heat of the competition. Our team had brought many spare motors to the competition. Another team visited our pit and asked our coach if we had a spare motor. The coach responded that we did not, she was sorry, and they’d just have to compete with a broken robot. I was initially stunned, and felt that this violated gracious professionalism. We had extra motors, and it was very unlikely that we would need all of them. I had very little time to respond while my friend was in our pit area, but I could have talked to my coach after she left to try to address the situation. I felt like it was hopeless to approach her, because she would have maintained that it was unwise to help a competitor. In retrospect, it may not have been as helpless as I thought. While I may not have succeeded in convincing our team to help the other team, I would have at least been able to remind the team of the meaning of Gracious Professionalism. Since the team did take this concept very seriously, they may not have considered the situation as in conflict with the ethical value, because the motors may have been necessary. If I had brought up my concerns we could have discussed if the action was against gracious professionalism. From having taken leadership and ethics, I’m more comfortable raising ethical concerns to a superior just from having had discussion with the issues and would have no issue raising this concern now, but at the time it was a huge struggle. I did not raise my concern because I felt I might be treated meanly for the suggestion, or viewed as “weak” in the face of competition. If I’d talked through this issue with a team members I trusted rather than the coach, I may have had support in broaching the issue. I also could have talked to someone unrelated from another team to see their perspective on the idea. If I knew another individual had values aligned with mine and felt the situation was an ethical problem, I would have felt more comfortable raising my concern. Thus, while this would not be so challenging now, if I’d had Mary’s lesson soon, I would have been more comfortable finding someone to talk to about my concern, and eventually raising it to my coach. One of the main merit from taking an applied ethics class is simply practice discussing ethical issues.