ETHICAL THEORY GRID · SAMPLE 1

The Diary and the Birthday Present

Columns = theories. Rows = pro and con.
Pick the strongest box against you as your counterargument.

THE CASE

Your girlfriend's birthday is coming up and you have no idea what to get her. She writes in her diary every day, and you are fairly sure she has written down what she wants. The diary is sitting on her desk.

THE QUESTION

Should you read her diary to find a birthday present idea?

	Utilitarianism Consequentialism *Which choice creates the most happiness and least suffering overall?*	Deontology from Greek *deon* = duty *Which duties, rules or rights hold, whatever the consequences?*	Virtue Ethics Aristotle; aims at *eudaimonia* = flourishing *What would a person of good character do?*	Care Ethics optional 4th column *What do the relationships and the vulnerable people here need?*
PRO Yes, read it	The goal is a happy girlfriend and a great birthday. If she never finds out, she gets the perfect gift, nobody is hurt, and net utility goes up.	This is the weakest box, and that is useful to know. You could argue you are acting from a duty of kindness to your partner, and a quick look for her own benefit is not the kind of intrusion the right to privacy is meant to stop.	A thoughtful, generous partner goes out of their way to find a gift that shows they really know the other person. Wanting to get it right shows care.	Care ethics looks at the relationship. Wanting to meet her needs and make her feel truly known is a caring motive.
CON No, don't	If she finds out, the hurt and broken trust far outweigh one good present, and you may feel guilty too. Simply asking her, or a friend, gets a good gift with none of that risk.	Reading it violates her right to privacy, whatever the happiness outcome. A diary is written for herself alone, and good intentions do not give you permission to cross that line.	Secretly reading someone's diary is not what an honest, trustworthy person does. The golden mean here is being attentive and asking, not snooping.	A caring relationship rests on trust, including respect for the parts of her life she keeps to herself. Listening to her protects the relationship better.

STRONGEST COUNTERARGUMENT If your thesis is **"No, don't read it"**, the strongest box against you is **Utilitarianism / Pro**: if she never finds out, nobody is hurt. Discharge it: you can never guarantee she won't find out, and asking her gets the same gift with no risk.

From Video 1: Introduction to Ethical Theories.