

Chapter 2

Reasons for Acting

1. Introduction
 - a. Self-interest and self-sacrifice
 - b. Acting out of prudence
 - c. Doing what is legally permitted or required
 - d. Doing what is standardly done
 - e. Appealing to the Code of Ethics
2. Doing what is ethical
 - a. Getting the facts
 - b. Discounting our biases
 - c. Giving reasons
 - d. Finding true ethical premises
 - i. Tracking harms
 - ii. Ethical theories
 - Introduction
 - (a) Utilitarianism
 - (b) Deontology
 - (c) Virtue theories
 - (d) Comparing ethical theories
 - iii. True ethical premises

Questions

Questions

- (1) Provide an example from your own experience of where you would have engaged in unethical behavior if you had acted in your self-interest.
- (2) Provide an example where someone harmed their self-interest in doing what was ethical.
- (3) Give two examples of when you have acted prudently in your job or in an internship. If you can, give two examples of when you acted imprudently in the same sort of situation or give two examples of when you saw others act in a way you thought imprudent in their job or internship.
- (4) Examine the acts of prudence you provided for the first question and determine why they are acts of prudence. Are they also ethical? If not, why not? If so, why? Distinguish the reasons for which they are ethical (or unethical) from the reasons for their being prudent.
- (5) Look back to 1.3 *Adoptive Children* and sort out among all the things she is doing what is prudent and what is not. You should do this both from her point of view -- what must she think is prudent and what not? -- and from your point of view -- what of the various things she is doing do you think prudent and what not?
- (6) Look back at 1.1 *Death of a baby*. After sorting out what the law required Deborah to do

- and not to do and what she actually did, determine in what ways she acted illegally. Then determine whether she was prudent in breaking the law and whether, given her decision to break the law, she acted prudently to protect herself and/or to protect others.
- (7) Provide an example, preferably from your professional practice, of where, unsure what to do ethically, you did what was legally required as a way to resolve the issue you faced.
 - (8) Lawyers often put their clients through grueling questions in order to ensure that they know exactly where the weak spots in their clients' cases are so that the lawyers can better defend them. Nothing in their code of ethics specifies the manner in which lawyers are to do this and the standard practice varies: some are nice about it, some are not. Provide a similar sort of example about variations in standard practice from social work.
 - (9) Provide an example, if you can, of someone stepping outside the standard practice. What was the reason for doing this? Did the person not know what the standard practice was? Or did the person have an ethical reason for this?
 - (10) Does social work need a code of ethics? Why, or why not?
 - (11) Explain why appealing to a code of ethics does not resolve our problem when we face an ethical dilemma. You may use examples cited in the text.
 - (12) Explain why appealing to a code of ethics does not resolve our problem when we face a problematic case. Again, you may use examples cited in the text.
 - (13) Provide an example, out of your own experience if you can, of how something looked to be one thing but was another -- like the example of the woman who killed her boyfriend. What differences did looking at it differently make?
 - (14) In 1.2 *Dancing a legal dance*, Mary thought that Martha was being defiant in running away from home and staying with friends. She made an inference about why Martha was doing what she was doing based on the fact of Martha's staying with friends. We often make such inferences -- that the mail carrier has come because we hear our mailbox open and close, that there is orange juice in the refrigerator because we left some the last time we had it, and so on. But these are inferences from facts, and though they may be plausible, they may not be true. Give five examples of plausible inferences from facts where the inferences are in fact false.
 - (15) Look back at one of the cases we have examined or to one of your own and provide an example of something in that case that turned out to be relevant to its resolution that you did not pick up in your first reading of it.
 - (16) In 1.3 *Adoptive Children*, what would Dena have had to do to make an objective judgment?
 - (17) Give an example of how you had to discount your biases to render an ethical judgment about a client or a fellow social worker.
 - (18) If it were true horses have wings and winged creatures fly, what conclusion should we draw? Is the conclusion true? Are the premises true? Can we draw the conclusion even though the premises are false? Ought we to believe the conclusion? If so, why? If not, why not?
 - (19) If we know that someone concluded that they had seen a male goldfinch, and when asked they said they saw a small bright yellow bird with black wings, what premise are they assuming?
 - (20) Give an example of a valid argument.
 - (21) What are the two ways in which we can assess an argument?
 - (22) Why do we need to provide reasons for ethical judgments?

- (23) Give an example of tracking harms in a difficult case in your practice with clients or relations with colleagues. How did you decide which course of action to take?
- (24) Someone can harm me and my interests by breaking a pencil I am about to use. They can also harm me by shooting me. List five different harms for each situation and rank them by the degree of severity. Make sure that you have listed harms that differ sufficiently in severity that no disagreement seems possible about the ranking you propose.
- (25) Pick one of the cases we have examined or one of your own and lay out the ethical principles involved.
- (26) Explain why it is a mistake to rely solely on ethical principles to resolve ethical problems.
- (27) Pick one of the cases or a case of your own and examine how principles serve as signposts.
- (28) What are the competing visions of deontological theory, utilitarian theory and virtue theory? That is, what kind of life does each think we ought to lead?
- (29) What tests do the competing theories provide to determine what, according to them, is the right thing to do?
- (30) Suppose that a colleague of yours lies to you regarding something about your job. The colleague thinks that if you knew the truth, you would be upset and thus harmed. Explain how a utilitarian would look at the situation and compare that to how a deontologist and to how a virtue theorist looks at it.
- (31) In regard to your answer to (30), explain how a deontologist thinks that one problem with utilitarianism is that it condones using people for ends they may not share.
- (32) If you were a slave, would you prefer to live in a society of utilitarians or deontologists? Why?