

## **Area of Knowledge:** Ethics

**Knowledge question:** How do we decide what is ethical?

- How do you know?
- What are the important factors to consider?
- What are the key questions to ask yourself?
- Try to consider from multiple ethical perspectives

#1

Many years ago, when I was a new university teacher in the Anthropology department, I taught an introductory class which had mostly freshman and some older students who needed credits to graduate. At the end of that first semester, a student came to me and asked whether I could change his grade from a C, which he earned, to a B because he was going to medical school the following semester and a C on his transcript would make that school take back his admission. He told me his life would be ruined. I felt bad for the student and gave him a grade he didn't earn so he could go on to go to medical school. I heard from him recently and he told me he successfully completed school, became a doctor, and has opened up a clinic in a poor neighborhood and helps many people in need. He thanked me for helping him out all those years ago. I can't help but feel like I did the wrong thing by giving him a grade he didn't deserve even though he has gone on to do many good things.

Did I do the right thing?

#2

You are accidentally cc'd on an email from the head boss to human resources that your boss is going to be fired soon. You know that your boss is about to buy a new home. What do you do? What should you do?

#3

My son was dropped from our family's employee-sponsored health insurance shortly after graduating from college in May. While filling out the application for a new policy, he asked me how to answer a question about his marijuana use in the past year. I said, "Honestly." He checked a box indicating he smoked very occasionally and was denied coverage. Now he is uninsured while countless pot-smoking liars have coverage. My husband thinks I gave our son foolish advice. Do you agree?

#4

I am a new university teacher. After I assigned final grades last semester, two students asked me to reconsider the Cs I gave them. One got just what his test scores indicated. The other was close to a B-minus, and while he did poorly early on, he worked hard, sought help and improved significantly. I raised his grade to a B-minus but did not alter the other student's. Nowhere in my course description do I state that improvement can be a factor in grading. Did I unfairly treat these students differently?

#5

I am a professor at a University who assigns many written assessments. I suspected that plagiarism was common in my class so I had the students submit their papers to me electronically and then I uploaded their papers to turnitin.com without letting my students know I would be doing so. I caught two students plagiarizing whom I confronted. The students claimed that I acted unfairly by not letting them know I would be uploading their work to the website. Did I act unethically by uploading my students' work without telling them?

#6

A teacher, while supervising an IB exam, sees someone indisputably cheating. Read all pieces of information carefully, and then decide what you think is the right action for the teacher to take. The conclusion you reach is less important than your reasons for reaching it so I encourage you to think from different perspectives.

- The student needs to pass the exam in order to get his IB diploma
- The student is predicted to pass the exam
- The student is very popular, so his friends will be upset over the incident if his cheating is exposed.
- The teacher really likes the student.
- No one else sees the student cheating, and at this moment, he is not aware that the teacher has seen him.
- No one else taking the exam is cheating.
- The teacher has taken on the prevention of exam irregularities of any kind as part of her professional responsibility.
- The student is under pressure to succeed from his family and his community, who expect him to bring them pride.
- The teacher has heard it said that the student has cheated in the past in minor ways, but cannot recalled the details.
- The IB system of examinations is a means of comparing student performance worldwide with identical examination conditions.

Answer: What is the right action for the teacher to take? Explain your thinking. Consider different perspectives.

#7

You are a well-respected doctor in a hospital and you have five patients waiting for you. Four are in critical condition and are in desperate need of different vital organ transplants. Each of those four are well liked, contributing members of society. One is a notable scientist who has won a Nobel Prize, one is a teacher, one is a doctor and the last is a paleontologist. Your fifth patient is suffering from a mild cold and shouldn't have come to the hospital for treatment. This person is also a career criminal who has never worked a job for more than a few months at a time and was recently released from prison. The doctor, knowing that his first four patients will likely die while waiting for organs, decides to secretly kill the fifth patient, harvest his organs, and save the other four patients. The four surviving patients go on to live very productive and healthy lives that would otherwise have not been possible if you had not done what you did.

- Did the doctor do the right thing?

Judge the doctor's actions against the following four of the philosophical schools of thought listed. You don't have to come up with a definitive answer for each but you should explain your thinking for each.

- In your own opinion, did the doctor do the right thing? Explain your thinking and relate it to one or more of the schools of thought listed above.

#8

a. You are a healthy 25 year old who grows his own marijuana and smokes occasionally. You don't ever sell the plants you grow. This is for personal use. Growing and smoking are illegal in your state.

b. You work for a pharmaceutical company that develops drugs that potentially can save human lives with the medicine you produce. In order to develop your medicine, you routinely test drugs on mice. These mice are often infected with various diseases to help test the medicines you develop. Each year your company experiments on tens of thousands of mice who are bred for this purpose and who can die painful deaths.

c. You see a child standing in the middle of the road about to be hit by a car. You try to save the child by running across the street and pushing the kid off the way, willing to sacrifice your own

life. The car swerves into the direction you pushed the child and the child gets hit by the car and dies and you survive. The car most likely would have avoided the child if you had not acted.