**44-296 Professional Development Seminar**

**Topic: Introduction to Ethics—Part 2**

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**Chapter 2 Part 2 Discussion Questions**

As an initiation into the study of ethics, carefully read each of the following scenarios. After reflection, come up with your own answer to each of the questions.

**Scenario 1**

In an attempt to deter speeders, the East Dakota State Police (EDSP) installs video cameras on all of its freeway overpasses. The cameras are connected to computers that can reliably detect cars traveling more than five miles per hour above the speed limit. These computers have sophisticated image recognition software that enables them to read license plate numbers and capture high-resolution pictures of vehicle drivers. If the picture of the driver matches the driver’s license photo of one of the registered owners of the car, the system issues a speeding ticket to the driver, complete with photo evidence. Six months after the system is put into operation, the number of people speeding on East Dakota freeways is reduced by 90 percent.

The FBI asks the EDSP for real-time access to the information collected by the video cameras. The EDSP complies with this request. Three months later, the FBI uses this information to arrest five members of a terrorist organization.

**Questions**

* Did the East Dakota State Police do anything wrong?

No, they merely abided by the rules given to them by a higher government authority.

* Who benefited from the actions of the EDSP?

Many people benefit from this, including the people saved who could have been potential terrorist victims. All the drivers on the freeway benefit from not having as many people speed.

* Who was harmed by the actions of the EDSP?

Those who were suspected of being terrorists were harmed by these actions.

* What other courses of action could the EDSP have taken to achieve its objectives?

They could have implemented more state troopers to be stationed along the freeway.

* Examine the advantages and disadvantages of these alternative courses of action.

Allocating additional policemen to be stationed along the freeways would mean less policemen possibly in a location where there are needed more.

* What additional information, if any, would help you answer the previous questions?

I would like to be informed the number of speeders that were along the freeways before the camera implementation.

**Scenario 2**

You are the senior software engineer at a start-up company developing an exciting new product that will allow salespeople to generate and email sales quotes and customer invoices from their smartphones.

Your company’s sales force has led a major corporation to believe your product will be available next week. Unfortunately, at this point the software still contains quite a few bugs. The leader of the testing group has reported that all of the known bugs appear to be minor, but it will take another month of testing for his team to be confident the product contains no catastrophic errors.

Because of the fierce competition in the smartphone software industry, it is critical that your company be “first to market.” To the best of your knowledge, a well-established company will release a similar product in a few weeks. If its product appears first, your start-up company will probably go out of business.

**Questions**

* Should you recommend release of the product next week?

Yes, we do not really know how the good the competitor’s software is and our company’s could be better.

* Who will benefit if the company follows your recommendation?

I believe my company would benefit, we would still have a niche in the market.

* Who will be harmed if the company follows your recommendation?

The company could be potentially harmed but I believe unveiling something is better than nothing.

* Do you have an obligation to any group of people that may be affected by your decision?

I would be obligated to advance my company in every decision.

* What additional information, if any, would help you answer the previous questions?

I would like to know exactly how good the competitor’s software is and if they have any bugs as well.

Reflect on the process you used in each scenario to come up with your answers. How did you decide if particular actions or decisions were right or wrong? Were your reasons consistent from one case to the next?

Ethics is the rational, systematic analysis of conduct that can cause benefit or harm to other people. Because ethics is based in reason, people are required to explain why they hold the opinions they do. This gives us the opportunity to compare ethical evaluations. When two people reach different conclusions, we can weigh the facts and the reasoning process behind their conclusions to determine the stronger line of thinking.

It’s important to note that ethics is focused on the voluntary, moral choices people make because they have decided they ought to take one course of action rather than an alternative. Ethics is not concerned about involuntary choices or choices outside the moral realm.

For example, if I am ordering a new car, I may get to choose whether it is red, white, green, or blue. This choice is not in the moral realm, because it does not involve benefit or harm to other people.

Now, suppose I’m driving my new red car down a city street. A pedestrian, obscured from my view by a parked car, runs out into traffic. In an attempt to miss the pedestrian, I swerve, lose control of my car, and kill another pedestrian walking along the sidewalk. While my action caused harm to another person, this is not an example of ethical decision making, because my decision was a reflex action rather than a reasoned choice.

However, suppose I did not have full control of the car because I had been driving while intoxicated. In that case the consequences of my voluntary choice to drink alcohol before driving affected another moral being (the innocent pedestrian). Now the problem has entered the realm of ethics.