1. Lately in the news there has been a lot about letting refugees from multiple countries in or out of another country. Should these people in need be helped? What affect would this have on the country and its economy or society? Letting immigrants or refugees in would most likely drastically improve their life – depending on what environment they are leaving and what environment they wish to be in. Would it make other countries want to go to war or put sanctions on countries that let their refugees in? How would that look politically?
2. Should people be allowed to lie? Lying is involved in every day to day conversations. I.e. asking a stranger how they are and they respond “oh I’m good”, to lying about seeing another person while in a committed relationship. If lying is ok up to some point, at what point is too much? If lying is never ok, then the world would be a very different place. Sometimes it is better for people not to have certain information. Would it be mentally healthy for someone to find out that a previous lover cheated on them?
3. In the United States there are people that use the welfare system in order to sustain their everyday life, like paying basic bills and getting food for their family. Although there are some people that really do need the system to survive, others use it to their advantage and abuse the system. The question is whether we should still provide welfare if there are always a certain percentage of people that will abuse it. Is it ethical to cut people off from a supply that they desperately need in order to force those who don’t need it to start working for it? A utilitarian would say no; we should not just remove an entire system, because the benefits (for the community) would under weigh the costs. But could the system be changed? Should the welfare system be stricter? Or would that just cause even more suffering?
4. In the Stanford Prison Experiment of 1971, average day people were put in a situation where they were supposed to play their part either as a prisoner or guard of the fake prison. Each and every one of the volunteers began to forget that they were part of an experiment and was either a victim or perpetrator of violent acts. Meanwhile the experiment could have been stopped long before these acts of psychological torture took place, but a lot was learned about human nature. Should we keep people in the experiment if we know we will gain valuable information? Or is it too much? What if it would help the human race in the future because of such findings? Is equality and peaceful state of mind valuable?
5. In the opening scene of Ghostbusters. A man performs an experiment with two volunteers. The person performing the study allows the woman, whom he has a crush on, to always win the test. That way he doesn’t have to shock her, and can possibly seduce her. While at the same time he always shocks the boy, even when correct. Is it right to let somebody go through pain in order to get some personal gain? Is it ethical to use electrical shocks in the name of science? Back then there were no or little restrictions on this, but modern laws do not allow suffering in the name of science. What if the subject agreed to be shocked? What if a scientific breakthrough was made because of the study?
6. In an episode of the office, the employees hold an ethics meeting only to uncover that Meredith is sleeping with another man in order to give the company discounts on supplies. This is an important question because of how Meredith should be treated. “What is right, what is wrong? Who’s to say in the end, it is all unknowable.” Is it right to blend personal life with work life? Is it really just work, or is it actually personal? Is it ethical of the company not to terminate Meredith? Is it ethical that Meredith is even given the discount in the first place? Is it ethical that the boss followed corporates orders to not report Meredith’s actions?
7. The birth control pill came about because of an ethically questionable study that involved the scientists lying about what they were really trying to create. Why should “new” or “controversial” science be shamed upon? Why did they deem having sex for fun as a problem? Should abstinence and lack of information be used to suppress an action? Should we test drugs that have unknown effects on humans or animals? What about if there was a major breakthrough because of the experiments? They went to Puerto Rico in order to perform the study, and in the “slums” of Puerto Rico they found people who were willing to take the pill; mainly because the side effects were not as bad as what they were going through because of overpopulation. Should birth control be used? Or should we work more on controlling human impulses? Should “loopholes” be used in science in order to make a breakthrough?
8. In the United States there are crimes that result in the death penalty. Is it “right” or ethical to end someone’s life because they took another (or many others)? What if they had a mental illness? Should we try therapy treatment and medication as an alternative? Or would that jeopardize the safety of others? This is a big issue and will be for some time because it is questionable whether killing someone is ever ethical. Even the way in which they are killed could be debated on: hanging, poison, electric chair, firing squad, etc. How should one be killed? Should it be painful or painless?
9. There are many woman out there that are unintentionally pregnant. Should that person be able to have an abortion and essentially kill another potential being? What if the woman was raped? Would that change the situation? What about if the woman did not have the finances to care for that child, and therefore the child will either live an impoverished life or be adopted by another? Would the woman really be killing a child or is there a specific “point” at which the child is living/should not be aborted. What if abortions could vastly decrease overpopulation where poverty is at a high?
10. In an episode of the Big Bang Theory Leonard and Sheldon are stuck in a debate about whether Sheldon should enter a competition in order to help them out by using his intelligence. Sheldon says no at first but Leonard then states Spoc’s last words “The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few”. This is essentially Utilitarian it is core. But do we really know that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few? What if what the majority of what people think they need is wrong? Are people actually knowledgeable of what they need?
11. In an episode of the Big Bang Theory, Sheldon attempts to control Penny’s behavior by rewarding her with chocolate whenever she behaves in a way Sheldon likes. Is it right of Sheldon to mess with Penny’s autonomy even if it is for the greater good? Is autonomy and free will worth something? Should we deem it valuable? Sheldon is trying to convince Leonard that it will be good for the both of them, but it really only benefits Sheldon. Sheldon matches Bentham’s idea in that everyone is selfish and only interested in their own pleasure. This is synonymous with the birth control pill in that people may be harmed but benefit may come of it.
12. In the United States there is much talk of gun violence and gun laws, especially when a school shooting occurs. Do we need stricter gun laws, or should we let people make moral decisions for themselves on how they should and should not use a gun. Should we abide by the second amendment? Or is the amendment old and outdated and should be ignored in this situation. Should people be trusted with firearms? Do all people that commit violent acts of mass murder have mental disabilities or are there other issues at stake?
13. In some cases there are two countries (or groups) that are at war with one another. Many times there are Prisoners of War (POWs) that are captured from each side. If it is known that one or many of those POWs have sensitive information that is crucial to the outcome of the war then is it ethical to torture the POW(s) in order to retrieve the information? The question then turns to “Who should win the war?” Because nobody would want the “bad” side to win the war. But even that is up to debate. Kant would argue that the prisoner should not be tortured regardless of the outcome. But from a Bentham point of view the lines are more blurred – do we want one specific side to win the war?
14. Sometimes there are people that get into severe accidents that permanently scars them either physically or mentally. It could be bad enough that the person in question has to be put on life support. Is it ethical to end that person’s life as a way of mercy if they wish to go? What if that person was so incapacitated that they could not communicate whether they wish to keep living? What if the person did want to live, should they still be kept on life support? If they are kept alive, how long is ok until euthanasia is performed?
15. Should we steal? Is stealing always wrong? There are times where an item is stolen from an innocent person, but should that person then try to steal that item back since it is ultimately theirs? Kant would say no it is not ethical because stealing is bad. Bentham would try out find out if stealing would make society better off. It would benefit the victim that had the item stolen from them if the item was returned, but obviously not the person who stole in the first place. It would also depend on the item stolen and how much it meant to each person. Then you would have to take into account if it affected any other people as bystanders and how much it mattered to them to come to a decision.