Essay 1 – Personal Ethical Dilemma

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I’ve always been reluctant to accept help from other because of how determined I am to figure things out for myself, especially in academics. Because of this, I am truly proud of where I am in my life, as I got to where I am on my own accord. I don’t think I am the best and I always want to improve myself, but I have seen others lie and cheat to get what they want. Personally, I believe that following such a path would only hurt myself in the long run. Despite all of this, in college I started to face a lot of academic struggles and when my friends had given me opportunities to use “study files” for a couple of my classes in a time of intellectual weakness, it was quite the difficult decision for me to make.

My sophomore year of college was the hardest year of school I’ve taken so far. I got a little lazy with my studies and didn’t pay too much attention to my scheduling, which inevitably lead to everything piling up on me. Upon realizing my doom was upon me I went to some friends in the business school for help and advice in the courses I was taking. What I didn’t expect was that the help they were offering were “study files” which consists of old tests, notes, and cheat sheets for the classes I was taking at the time. I had been offered similar things in the past and declined them without even thinking about it, but this was different because of how hard a time I was having in school. Even though my first instinct was to deny them, I couldn’t stop thinking about how easy this would make my life.

The ethical issue at hand made this a huge problem for me. Having these files obviously weren’t allowed and using them would also go against my morals. I had to decide if I should take the easy road for once while facing one of my greatest challenges yet. On one hand I put in the excessive amount of work required to do well in these classes and on the other I just use these materials and make my life far easier than it could be. While my morals stay intact with my first option I began to question if it was really worth all of the work I would have to do. Most of these classes didn’t even directly affect the knowledge I would need for my major and I kept thinking I would regret it too much if I ended up doing poorly in school because I chose to be hard-headed. All of the stress that came with this had me asking myself if it was really worth not cheating. Everything I needed was essentially right in front of me and it was becoming harder and harder to say no to it.

Taking this offer would ultimately affect me, as it was primarily a matter of my grades and personal moral struggles. However, when I think about it, my decisions also impact my professors because if I cheated in their class that’s just as bad as lying to their faces. It could also affect the people who offered it to me in the first place. I didn’t consider doing it at the time, but I could have easily turned them in and got them in trouble for what they were doing. I was primarily concerned with not cheating myself as opposed to doing right by a set rules for the sake of doing the right thing at the time though, so that option didn’t cross me at the time. I was more concerned with doing right by my own moral standards and how my decisions would affect me. I had to consider the repercussions of being dishonest to myself as well as my professors. Also, there was always the possibility of getting caught, which would have made things far worse because my professors would have known what I was doing and I would have had to face consequences outside of my own moral compass. Thinking about possibilities like this forced me to really think about what I was doing and if it would be worth it in the long run.

Ultimately, I decided not to use the study files they were offering me. Doing so would have went against an important part of my moral code and the consequences of getting caught were far too high. I believe I made the best ethical decision possible by not doing so when compared to a lot of ethical frameworks. For example, one of the ways Kant’s categorical imperative challenges moral actions is by asking the individual if their actions would be acceptable if everyone acted that way. In my situation, if everyone were to cheat then nobody would learn anything, which is insulting to the professor for a group of people to decide that the class isn’t worth learning. Also, it’s unfair to anyone who actually does study because they actually put in the hard work for their grade while everyone else coasts by with no regard for the class itself and they still get a good grade. The categorical imperative also ask if people are being treated as an ends rather than a mean. I think that applies to this situation fairly well because if I were to cheat for my classes I’m just doing it to get past them and get closer to my goal of getting a degree. Kant’s method of analyzing moral actions has to do with rights and duties so I think it’s acceptable for me to measure my actions by this standard to determine if it was morally acceptable. My decision to not cheat was morally the right thing to do and although it was hard to say no to the easy route I’m glad I made the decision I did.

It’s obvious to everyone that cheating is wrong, but saying no to something when you feel like it would make your life easier is one of the hardest things you have to do and was the core of my ethical dilemma. In the end, I’m satisfied with my decision not to cheat and that I continued to live by my own moral code in the face of mental weakness and peer pressure.