

## **Ethical Dilemma**

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### **Pondering the question**

Ethical dilemmas tend to introduce themselves when we are forced to take a difficult decision. They appear often in situations where our principles and values are tested. I encountered this situation during the fall semester of last year. It involved a group project where one of my group members was unable to engage as extensively as the rest of us due to overlapping schedules. The dilemma I encountered was informing the professor about their lack of participation, which might potentially jeopardize their grade, or to stay quiet on the issue and handle the extra work myself. Looking back, I realized that I could have handled this situation in a much more effective way.

### **The Dilemma**

The incident took place in the final weeks of a semester-wide project for my robotics class. The group consisted of four students including myself, each one of us was given specific tasks for the final assignment and presentation that accounted for a substantial part of our grades. Despite this, one of our team members, Issac, had problems with ADHD and some family issues that he could not deal with while simultaneously going to school. As a result, Issac involuntarily limited his ability to contribute, which resulted in the majority of work being done by the rest of the team. We started by allocating certain tasks to Issac, but it was quite clear that he would not be meeting the assignment deadlines. As frustrations grew from all the team members including me, two of the other members recommended that we should inform the professor because it seemed unfair to the rest of us for Issac to receive the same grade as we did, week after week. When I look back, I realize that my decision was primarily led by my empathy for Issac's situation. However, from an ethical point of view, this decision failed to maintain fairness and responsibility to the other members of the team.

One ethical framework in this case is Kantian ethics, which teaches the importance of behaving in ways that are more universally applicable, and it also reinforces the belief that we should treat all individuals with dignity and respect. Kantian ethics teaches that we should behave according to the

principles that can be universally applied. In this specific situation, allowing a person to gain credit for the work that they did not do is not something which would be considered universally acceptable. This behavior tends to completely dismiss fairness and reward a person's dishonesty. I would say that utilitarianism also promotes actions that can lead to the overall benefit for the majority, supports the idea that I should have reported Issac. By allowing Alex to benefit from his lack of contribution to the team I ended up putting more workload and stress on other members of the team.

### **The Correct Course of Action**

As I reflected on the situation, I came to realize that the correct course of action would have been to talk to my professor about Issac's behavior earlier in the semester. If I had chosen to take that course of action, we would have found a solution to this problem earlier. We could have found a solution that would have been in the best interests of Issac and the team. The professor might have handled the situation better than us. I would even say that the professor, being as understanding as he was, would have made adjustments to how our grades were distributed among the team members. One ethical test that confirms this judgement would be the justice test. This test asks us if an action treats everyone fairly and equally. The decision that I made earlier on to remain silent allowed the situation to escalate and cause problems for the rest of us.

### **Conclusion**

Ethical dilemmas tend to force us to balance our compassionate nature with what is fair. When we make decisions based on a certain set principle rather than acting on our personal emotions, we can solve a problem much better. Issac's lack of contribution and letting it slide was an ethically wrong decision. In the future, when I am faced with such challenges, I will approach these dilemmas with a more assertive stance on fairness, respect and responsibility. I hope to solve problems by providing solutions that are more ethical and beneficial for the greater good.



