

THE MEANING OF ETHICS

1. Describe mind tyrants and explain their significance to the study of ethics. Identify two original examples of mind tyrants

Mind tyrants are thoughts that people have that they allow to be controlled by outside forces, such as expectations in society. Their significance to the study of ethics involves the choices that people weigh in their minds. Mind tyrants represent the values that people have inherited from others. They serve to indicate to a person whether he or she is going to behave ethically or not. Mind tyrants also help to evaluate whether others are acting in an ethical manner. One example of a mind tyrant is the peer pressure a person might feel to echo the life choices of those around them. In her mind, she might feel that she has to get married soon, because all of her friends are already married with children. Instead of enjoying her life, she allows the norm of those around her to be a mind tyrant. Another mind tyrant is the idea that a person may not be very religious despite most members in their family being such. They may feel like they are expected to attend church frequently even though they would rather be elsewhere. They may feel guilty if they consider not attending church.

2. Referring to the story about virtue, what did Socrates' answer to Mento mean relative to Sir Thomas More's belief in virtue?

Socrates and Sir Thomas More held opposite views of ethics, virtue, and morals. While More believed that virtues were fundamental and should be consistent across situations, Socrates

was of the view that virtue was relative. Depending on the situation, what is moral could be different from other situations, according to Socrates. From this perspective, Socrates did not have a definition of virtue, as it could change at any time. Socrates is more of the deontological theory of ethics, while More is about the teleological theory of ethics. Teleological theory requires people to base moral judgments on the outcome of decisions according to some higher values, while deontological theory allows people to base moral judgments on intentions of individual decisions. (Frankena, 1973, 14)

CHOOSING A MAP FOR LIFE:

3. Explain Peck's analogy of life being like a map.

Peck's analogy of life being like a map is that planning is essential if you want to know where you are going. In addition, maps have routes, just like life has a route to reality. A map can be poorly designed or well designed. Similarly, life can be planned carefully or left to flow without any direction. Even when life does have direction, it must be periodically re-evaluated to adapt to the changes that life brings. Likewise, maps are re-evaluated to account for changes in the physical and political landscapes.

4. Define "transference" and explain how Peck applies this term to the "map of life".

Transference is a concept that means people hold on to backwards perceptions of reality long after those perceptions have lost their relevance. It causes individuals to judge

current situations and gage potential situations based on past experiences that are not necessarily comparable. Transference can be damaging to a person's life as it ruins opportunities to grow as a human being. It can also hurt those around a person who gravitates to transference. Peck applies transference to the map of life by relating the story a man who trusted nobody other than his own children. From his childhood through adulthood, he was never able to trust anyone, which is a case of transference. He transferred his distrust from past situations to later situations and suffered for it. This man set forth his map of life with his transference problem. His map of life was a series of situations where he felt he could not trust anyone.

5. Identify ways as individuals that we can improve our "reality of life."

There are different ways that we as individuals can improve our reality of life. One way to improve the reality of life is to try to consciously stop worrying about things that are out of our control. For instance, every day, people worry about whether they will lose their jobs. If a person is a poor performer or gives their company reason to fire them, then they have reason to be concerned. However, if a person is a good employee and is prepared for the loss of a job, then they can control the reality of their life. They can work harder and improve their skills to make themselves more marketable for the next job. Another way to improve the reality of life is to make conscious decisions that benefit one's own life. A person can be selective in who he or she dates in order to find a mate that they are compatible with.

A person can improve their reality of life by choosing the friends that they spend time with. If their current friends are troublesome, then they have the choice to move on. An additional way to improve the reality of life is the approach to difficult situations. If a situation has very stark choices, a person can deal with it by imagining the worst possible outcome. By doing so, he or she can be mentally prepared to deal with the circumstance. In this way, they are improving the reality of their life.

LIVING IN A CAVE:

6. Plato suggests in this article that we are all prisoners of some sort. Identify some things that tend to "imprison" people.

Different things tend to imprison people. Unhappy marriages can make a person feel that they are imprisoned in a situation and cannot get out. Although divorce is available to people, they may feel like it's not an option. Perhaps in their circle of family and friends, they would feel as though they would be considered a failure if they chose divorce. Ultimately, they are allowing themselves to feel imprisoned. Poor financial decisions can tend to imprison people as well. If a person has accumulated a massive amount of debt and have no discernable way of eliminating it without declaring bankruptcy, then they might feel imprisoned. Perhaps that person went to an expensive university, bought an expensive house and car, and ran up enormous credit card debts. Now this person feels trapped, or imprisoned, and has no easy way out. Another thing that can imprison people is health problems. Health problems can be

inherited or they can be caused by poor decisions. A person may be born with a disease. A person may have neglected their health over the years and developed heart disease. Either way, health problems trap people in a manner that makes them feel imprisoned.

7. Plato claims it is often easier to live with falsehoods than with truth. Once the individual left the cave and saw the (reality) truth, then returned to tell the people in the cave, how did they react?

When the individual returned to the cave, the people reacted negatively. They didn't want to be influenced by the individual and don't want to know what is outside the cave. They would prefer to remain ignorant of the outside world. They give the impression that, if necessary, they would resort to violence if the individual attempted to influence them. If the individual tried to inform them of the world outside the cave, they would be taken outside of their comfort zone, which is inside the cave. Many people are of the same mind in reality, in that they want to remain comfortable in their own surroundings.

8. How does Plato show that ignorance of our prejudices predisposes one to reject reality?

Plato shows that ignorance of our prejudices predisposes one to reject reality when he discusses the return of the individual to the cave. The people in the cave are ignorant of the world outside the cave. Thus, they are also ignorant of their own prejudices against that which they lack knowledge. By holding on to their ignorance, the people in the cave reject the reality of the world outside. The people in the cave believe

it's a waste of time to outside, as their world is inside the cave.

CUSTOM VS. MIND:

9. Write a 2-4K (1-2 typed pages) response answering the question, "Is the mind or is custom the primary source of moral conduct?" In your response you should identify the relationship of the mind and custom to moral conduct, then choose which you think is of more importance and defend your answer.

The question asks whether the mind or custom is the primary source of moral conduct as though one takes precedence over the other. Both the mind and custom serve important roles in terms of moral conduct. When an individual is growing up and finds their place in society, it is necessary that they understand the norms. If they are religious, there are certainly customs that are set forth. The individual is expected to respect and obey those customs. The law sets forth customs that must be abided by if one wants to avoid fines or prison time. Within an individual's family certain customs are established. Even a person's employer has specific customs that must be adhered to if one wants to keep their job. Thus, all these customs are established by others in order for many individuals to function properly within societal systems. When individuals break from customs, they are deviating from the systems that are in place. It might seem obvious, then, that custom is the primary source of moral conduct. Individuals who break from custom are, in other words, conducting themselves immorally. According to custom, moral conduct is accepting and living up to the customs that have been set forth by society, the law, family, etc.

The argument can certainly be made that custom is the most important and primary source of moral conduct. Those people in favor of this argument, however, deny or belittle the importance of the mind in its relationship to moral conduct. Customs are relevant, because individuals choose to abide by them. Thus, choice is the key to understanding moral conduct. Customs can be dictated by others, but it is up to the individual to choose whether or not to abide by those customs set forth. Customs are established by society, but they are not necessarily moral. People can decide whether or not a custom truly is moral. For instance, slavery was once a custom, and many people accepted it as moral, because it was a norm and the way things had always been. Some individuals questioned the morality of slavery and decided that this custom was not moral conduct. They used their minds to reason that forcing human beings to work was a violation of their basic human rights. Slavery is now considered a universal evil and is no longer a custom. Thus, custom serves as a framework, or template, for moral conduct, but it is not the primary source of moral conduct. The ability to reason, or the mind at work, is the source of primary conduct and is much more important than custom. When a person makes a decision based on reasoning and takes action, they are exercising their willpower. Intentionally harming others is immoral conduct. Knowing that the consequences of decisions will harm others, yet going through with those decisions, is immoral conduct. In the past, with slavery, it was considered moral to harm slaves if they did not work hard. Yet, through reason, individuals understand that harming others is not moral. It is how a person exercises their

willpower that determines whether or not they are exhibiting moral conduct. Willpower is the product of the mind reasoning.

10. Explain what is meant by the socialization process then identify how this process relates to ethics using an original example---not one of the examples in your readings.

The socialization process means that there is a method by which individuals are incorporated into society. It involves teaching them the customs, norms, traditions, and laws that citizens are obligated to accept. As these instruments of moral conduct are taught to individuals, it is expected that each person learn, accept, and abide by these expectations as soon as possible and at all times. When an individual goes along with these societal expectations, he or she is described as being a functioning member of society. This socialization process relates to ethics, because when individuals do not abide by what is expected of them, they are behaving unethically. An example of how the socialization process relates to ethics can be witnessed through pre-marriage process. When two people decide to get married, it is expected that they go through an engagement and ceremony. No specific time period is established as an appropriate amount of time for engagement. However, if a couple is only engaged for a matter of months, they are considered to be in a hurry. If a couple is engaged for a matter of many years, they are considered to be waiting too long. Either way, the couple is not abiding by the expectations of society. They are not behaving ethically according to the socialization process. If the couple makes it through the engagement, but one of them breaks it off immediately prior to the actual ceremony, that person is considered to be breaking from the socialization

process and can be considered unethical. If an individual gets engaged a number of times and breaks off the engagement each time, then they are considered to be especially unethical according to the socialization process. The socialization process expects individuals to be engaged for an appropriate amount of time and not to break off that engagement or to get divorced after they are officially married.

11. Explain the major point of emphasis for ethical conduct discerned from the reading of "The Stanford Prison Study" and "If Hitler Asked You..."

The major point of emphasis for ethical conduct discerned from the two readings is that actual ethical conduct is dependent on the situation within which individuals are placed. In the reading about electrocuting people, individuals were told that it was their responsibility to electrocute others. If they disobeyed, then they would be considered unethical. In reality, electrocuting anyone, other than prisoners sentenced to death by law, is very unethical and cruel. However, if individuals are told what is ethical by authorities, they are expected to obey. If they object, then they are considered immoral. The same understanding about ethics can be gleaned from "The Stanford Prison Study". People, both mock prisoners and guards, are expected to behave in a certain manner, which is very harsh and punishing. The ethics of prison are very different from the ethics outside prisons. Within prison walls, ethical conduct is determined by very authoritative standards.

12. After reading Case #12 "Illegal Behavior" answer the questions at the end of the case. Answer the questions as discussion responses.

1. Do you think that the behavior is serious? Do you think these persons are likely to be dishonest in other ways that would be more serious?

Yes, the behavior is very serious, unless they were not carrying the appropriate amount of money on them at the time. Yes, these persons are likely to be dishonest in other more serious ways, unless they were not carrying the necessary money at the time. The reason that this behavior is very serious is that if these individuals are cheating the government out of a small fee, then what other ways are they cheating in life? By neglecting to pay a small toll charge, they are implying that it's very possible they are dishonest in other matters, including more serious ones. The only excuse for not paying the toll charge is if these individuals were not carrying the appropriate amount of change at the time. This problem, however, does not excuse any of them from short-changing the machine or putting invalid objects into the toll machine. Individuals who intentionally cheat the toll machines are possibly not paying their taxes or committing tax fraud. Perhaps they take shortcuts at their jobs that are unethical. Each specific case may be different.

2. Under what circumstances might you have been caught?

I might have been caught under certain circumstances. If I were not carrying the appropriate amount of change at the time, I might have been caught. If there were an emergency and I was

in a hurry to get to a certain destination, then I might be inclined to short-change the toll machine. Ethical arguments can be made in those cases. However, short-changing or defrauding the machine for no reason other than being cheap or being dishonest is very unethical. It's really no different than cheating on taxes or being dishonest to individuals that people deal with on a daily basis.

References

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