

1. Identify and thoroughly explain your definition of ethics.

Simply put, ethics is doing the "right thing" in any given situation. To put the concept of ethics into perspective, it is necessary to understand that it lies within a subset of overall core values. Free will, reason, integrity, and productivity are examples of core values. Ethics belongs to the realm of integrity. Within this realm are synonymous concepts, like morality, honesty, loyalty, and accountability. It can be said that an ethical person who maintains integrity, has strong morals, and can be counted on for honesty. Ethics form the nature of a person's character, making the ideal a uniquely human concept. Animals are not ethical by nature. Certainly, there are those who would argue that animals have the capacity to act in an ethical manner. Animals, however, are guided by instinct and their need to survive. Ethics requires judgment, as it is a group of values that have evolved over time. Ethics must be taught, as babies are born without an instinctive set of ethics. Indeed, many people believe that religion and ethics are partners. For example, in the *Holy Bible*, it states, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." (Psalm I) This Christian passage establishes that avoiding unethical behavior is also preferred religious behavior. Ethics, however, is also a philosophy all its own, with culture playing a role in shaping it as well. What is considered ethical in the Middle East is not necessarily the case in the United States. For example, the Middle East has a reputation of upholding laws that severely restrict women's rights that would be unethical and illegal in America. Within each culture, particular behaviors are ethical while other behaviors are not. It is commonplace for people to disagree about what constitutes

ethics. Sometimes, those disagreements have become lawsuits, which have led ethics to form the basis for lawmaking, justice, and politics. The idea of doing what's right and fair for people are common among the words of public servants, including politicians, judges, and legislators.

2. Give an example of an ethical question that you heard about recently on television or in the newspaper.

In a recent *Wall Street Journal* article, in which the book *The Life You Can Save* is reviewed, the question is asked, if you would save a drowning child, would you also try to save the "world's extremely poor children"? This ethical question first of all assumes that saving a drowning child is a foregone conclusion. It infers that only a heartless person would ignore a drowning child. The second part of the question asks whether a person is willing to help the poorest children in the world. The author of the book presents the problem as though both situations are ethically comparable. An argument can be made that people should attempt to save as many children as possible, regardless of whether they are drowning or dying from illness due to poverty. Although billions of dollars are given each year by individuals and businesses to the cause of saving poor children, the problem remains. The organizations that are supposed to be battling the problem often perpetuate it by their incompetent management of funds, internal politics, and bureaucratic nature. The ethical question of saving grossly impoverished children is much more complex than that of rescuing a drowning child, according to the author of the article, William Easterly. "The most important [difference] is that you know exactly what to do to save the child, whereas it is not at all clear that you (or anyone else) knows exactly what to do to save the lives of poor children or how to get them out of extreme poverty," states Easterly. Moreover, the ethics with saving an individual

child are vastly different than those of saving nations of children with complicated afflictions.

3. Why is the study of ethics necessary for graduate students?

In order to understand the necessity for graduate students to study ethics, it is first important to establish why people pursue graduate studies in the first place. The decision to pursue an advanced degree is completely voluntary and is not made lightly. Graduate students have chosen additional higher education in order to fulfill personal and/or professional goals, often least of which is to improve career prospects. The completion of a master's degree indicates that an individual has gained extensive knowledge and is expected to be a professional and a leader. With leadership comes the responsibility to behave ethically. Thus, the study of ethics is necessary for graduate students, because it keeps them grounded in principles. It causes a professional to think more carefully before engaging in unethical behavior.

4. Using Case #4 as your reference, answer the following: (remember that you are not being asked for "right and wrong" answers here—you are being asked to discuss the issues involved in each of the viewpoints.)

a. Why would it be just for John to drink the water? Because he had merited it—he had gone and gotten it?

It would be just for John to drink the water, because it is in his self-interest to do so. John wants water, and it has not been brought to him. By obtaining water, John is pursuing his self-interest and is not interfering within anyone else doing likewise. John is not physically harming anyone in his pursuit of the water. In addition, no one has assisted John by getting the water for him to drink.

b. Defend why it would only be proper that John should give the water to those who needed it most since he could always get more?

It would only be proper that John gives the water to those who needed it most, because it is his will to do so. If John determines it to be more ethical that other soldiers get the water before him, then he is pursuing the just and moral action. John could also consider that if the situation were reversed, other soldiers would give the water to John first. Perhaps in battle, one or more soldiers acted bravely in a manner that saved John or prevented a more damaging injury. Their sacrifice certainly warrants John's minor sacrifice of the water. In addition, the bucket of water is most likely for more than one soldier and not only John. In this situation, John would be behaving ethically not to hoard the water.

c. Discuss why it would be equitable for him to share with everyone who wanted water?

It would be equitable for John to share with everyone who wanted water, because it is also his will to do so. By taking this action, John would be getting water and the other soldiers would also be receiving water. The soldiers would most definitely be grateful for John's ethical behavior, and they would be indebted to reciprocate the favor once they were healthier. In this manner, the soldiers are all looking out for one another. If John were to hoard the water, then the other soldiers might wonder about John's potential behavior on the battlefield. They might view him as selfish and possibly untrustworthy. Thus, it might be in John's self-interest to share the water with everyone.

d. What then is justice and how is it defined

Justice is synonymous with ethics, meaning that justice is doing what's right in any given situation. Justice is ensured by the law and administered by those who uphold the law. It could also be said that justice is fairness, in that those who have wronged others will be forced to accept the consequences of their actions as set forth by the law. In his book, *Ethics*,

Aristotle describes justice as being, "universal" and "complete virtue". (Aristotle, 173) Thus, justice is universal for all individuals in a civilization. In the philosophy of Objectivism, justice is defined as "the virtue of judging men's character and conduct objectively and of acting accordingly, granting to each man that which he deserves." (Peikoff, 276) According to Objectivism, justice must be decided, by the law, and also carried out, not simply proclaiming that an individual has broken the law. Just behavior in society is countered by unjust behavior. According to Aristotle, it is unjust to acquire gains at the expense of others. It is also unjust to cause harm to others. Justice exists to see that what's right prevails in the end.

5. Describe the lesson taught by the "Calf Path" about human behavior.

The lesson about human behavior that is taught by the "The Calf-Path" is that people are prone to repeat the pursuits of those before them. Toward the end of the poem, people traveled down the path that people and animals had previously traversed long ago. An interesting aspect of the path is that it always remained crooked since the calf walked on it. Nothing was preventing people from straightening out the path. It was just the way it had always been. Thus, it is human behavior not to question long-established traditions, even if they are crooked. The calf path, in other words, is the status quo. If someone had suggested that the crooked path be straightened, they might have been punished for going against the status quo.

References

- Warner, Douglas W. The Basis for Ethical Conduct/Ethics for Decision-Making Case Studies. 5th ed. 1984.
- Holy Bible, King James Version, Psalm I
- Easterly William. "Affluence and Ethics." Rev. of The Life You Can Save, aut.
- Peter Singer. The Wall Street Journal 5 Mar. 2009. CCLIII:52
- Aristotle. Ethics. Trans. J. A. K. Thomson. Aylesbury, 1980.
- Peikoff, Leonard. Objectivism: the Philosophy of Ayn Rand. New York: Meridian, 1991.