

Chapter 1 -- Discussion Questions

Suggested Discussion and Solutions

Instructor Note: One of the authors of this text, Steven Mintz, writes ethics blogs under the name “Ethics Sage.” He writes three blogs: www.ethicsage.com, www.workplaceethicsadvice.com, and www.higheredethicswatch.com. These blogs are referenced occasionally to support possible solutions.

From time to time students at various universities submit rather elaborate comments and/or a new blog based on an original blog as part of their course assignment. You may want to ask students to find one of Steve’s blogs that is of interest, craft an *opposing view* or extended discussion of the blog issue, and then submit it to me. Steve will post it if it meets certain criteria. Here is a link to a student blog that deals with CSR and gender equality in response to one of my blogs (<https://www.workplaceethicsadvice.com/2020/09/my-entry.html>).

There is a file on the IRD to show you what one student wrote. Here is a link to a blog by a student in response to one of my blogs.

1. Is it ever appropriate to lie to someone? Give one example of when you believe lying might be justified

Lying involves two things: (1) An outright, purposeful false statement to another (lie by commission) and (2) The failure to disclose all the information a person has a right to know (lie by omission).

Recall the 2017 Las Vegas shooting that occurred on the night of Sunday, October 1 when a gunman opened fire on a crowd of concertgoers at the [Route 91 Harvest music festival](#) on the [Las Vegas Strip](#) in [Nevada](#), leaving 58 people dead and 851 injured. Between 10:05 and 10:15 p.m. [PDT](#), 64-year-old Stephen Paddock of [Mesquite, Nevada](#), fired more than 1,100 rounds from his suite on the 32nd floor of the nearby [Mandalay Bay](#) hotel. About an hour after he fired his last shot into the crowd, he was found dead in his room from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. His motive remains unknown. Now, imagine you are a friend of Paddock and he confides in you about the pending shooting. You decide to inform the authorities. The authorities tell you they will have agents swarming over the hotel. In Paddock’s last act before the shooting, he tells you he’s quite certain the authorities have no idea what he is about to do. Should you be honest and tell him you went to the authorities and they will be prepared to cut off his action?

One could argue you are a dishonest person because you outright lied to Paddock about the police’s knowledge of your actions. You also failed to tell him the police would be ready to intercede. We could argue the issue of trustworthiness and loyalty as well. These pillars of character are at risk in your action. So, what justifies doing what you have done in informing the police? Simply put, an ethical person avoids harming others and you have the opportunity to live up to those values. Lying to Paddock (by omission) is justified here to save the lives of others. While Rights Theory holds that the ends do not

justify the means, sometimes the means should dictate what action should be taken to avoid harm. You considered the consequences of your actions, realized lying to Paddock was justified to save the lives of others, and calculated that the benefits of telling the police far outweighed any costs to your friendship.

While it could be argued that Paddock might decide not to go ahead with the shooting once you inform him of the police presence, Paddock still might do the deed in order to make the statement he wants to make. He might move up the time of the attack.

2. Is there a difference between cheating on a math test, pocketing an extra \$10 from the change given to you at a restaurant, and using someone else's ID to get a drink at a bar?

All are examples of lying and affect one's character through honesty and integrity. Many will use many rationalizations to justify their actions. Some may try to split hairs between what is wrong and what is more wrong – an ethical relativistic approach that should not be used. Just imagine a business that decides one improper financial reporting act is not as bad as another, so the former is allowed.

Notice in the first two instances the action harms others. For example, cheating on a math test affects the level playing field so that each student has an equal opportunity to excel on a test. Keeping the change means the waiter/waitress may have to cover the shortfall out of her pocket. Even using someone else's ID to get drunk puts the person whose ID you used at risk if, for example, you drive home in a drunken state and cause a serious accident that harms others.

3. Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832), the Scottish novelist and poet, wrote: “Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive.” Comment on what you think Scott meant by this phrase.

Lies often require explanations that seem simple, but if examined, may call for further lies. In some cases, merely remembering a lie is more difficult than remembering the truth. Fiction is filled with stories of one lie leading to others. You might collect a list of those famous stories. This question provides an opportunity to remind students of the ethical slippery slope and once a lie is told, the person who tells it begins the slide and it is much more difficult to climb back up and regain the moral high ground. The concept of an 'ethical slippery slope' is one that defines behavior when a decision-maker first decides to deceive others by consciously covering up or lying about past behavior. This begins the slide down the proverbial ethical slippery slope where it becomes more difficult to reverse course because the decision maker is committed to the deceitful action; then since most people don't want others (i.e., superiors) to know about the initial, wrongful action over time cover up or lying slowly become untangled and the truth emerges.

Betty Vinson was a victim of the ethical slippery slope. Once she agreed to go along with financial wrongdoing and enter false data into WorldCom's accounting system, it became difficult for her to change direction as future requests were made for her to do the same.

Mark Twain is quoted as saying, “If you tell the truth you don’t have to remember anything,” meaning if you tell a lie you have to remember what lie you told to who.

An interesting angle to this discussion is what appears to be the failure of the media to spend the time to corroborate truthful information. In other words, what steps should journalists take to avoid “fake news.” The following link may be of interest if you choose to extend the boundaries of this question: <http://mediashift.org/2015/02/how-lies-spread-faster-than-truth-a-study-of-viral-content/>.

- 4. One explanation about rights is that “there is a difference between what we have the right to do and what is the right thing to do.” Explain what you think is meant by this statement. Do you believe that if someone attacks your credibility on social media that gives you the right to attack them?**

Having a right to do something allows one to be concerned with one’s self interest only (egoism). Doing the right thing often requires one to consider others besides and before one’s self (at a minimum enlightened egoism, but also utilitarianism, deontology, justice, and virtues). An example is shouting there is a fire in a crowded movie theater. We have the right to do so but it is not the right thing to do.

In virtue ethics, the decision-maker would want to do the right thing and have it become a habit. Deontology would emphasize the duty of doing the right thing and telling the truth, not just when it is convenient or does not intervene with personal desires,

One example students can relate to with respect to having their credibility attacked is trolling. We all spend many hours each day on the Internet so our social media footprint says a lot about who we are. Disturbing behaviors such as hate-speech, cyberbullying, and trolling have made the online experience troubling for many of us.

Trolling defines a highly dysfunctional online user who targets others using cyberbullying, harassment, internet defamation, online deception, and the like. Trolls can hide behind their electronic devices, screen names and avatars when they go out trolling for trouble, and after their all done the target of their offensive behavior is left to pick up the pieces.

A troll might insert him/herself into a conversation on social media and post comments designed to upset or disrupt the conversation. Their sole purpose may be to offend others. It can be a losing battle to attack these folks back to get even or silence the troll. It’s likely to only inflame the rhetoric.

- 5. Do you think it is ethical for a prospective employer to investigate your social media footprint in making a hiring decision? What about monitoring social networking activities of employees while on the job?**

Social media is one of the most popular forms of communication, particularly with millennials. Anyone can connect with anyone else or find information about others that may not otherwise be available. Thus, it should not be surprising if firms use social media