Morals for your story

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Dilemma #1

While I was driving back from Christmas break I encountered an icy spot and accidentally slid into a guardrail. At the time I was OK, and so was the guardrail. When I checked the damage it was minimal, however, the dent has gotten a lot bigger recently. I don't know what happened to make the dent bigger, but I want it fixed. Like many students who live in the dorms, I park my car for a week or so at a time. In that time frame it would be easy to be hit in the parking lot. If I were to tell my insurance company that someone hit me but didn't leave any contact information, they would cover the cost of repairing the dent. Would it be morally permissible for me to tell a white lie, especially since I've paid enough in insurance bills to cover the cost of repair on my own?

--Dent Out of Shape

Responses to Dilemma #1

It would not be morally responsible for you to "lie" to your insurance company. You can't really tell if somebody hit your door, or if weather fluctuations have caused the dent to get bigger. My suggestion would be to tell your insurance company the truth about you hitting the guardrail. If you scraped any paint off they will know it wasn't from a car door, especially if they send someone out to take a look at it. However, believe it or not, they are people too and make mistakes as much as everyone else. They tend to be pretty understanding. If they won't fix it then you can always try to use a plunger to get out the dent, or dry ice applied to the dent may pop it out. If none of these remedies work then you can always call your insurance company back later and tell them that someone hit your door in the parking lot. Hope this helps!

--The Geico Gecko

According to utilitarian ideals, you should do whatever would cause the greatest happiness overall. Telling a little white lie would discomfort you, perhaps; but then again, getting the dent fixed would cause you a lot of happiness as well. The only one realistically affected by this decision is you; the insurance company probably won't be terribly unhappy with paying you money for a damaged car; that's what you pay them for. So, the main choice is this: if you think that being discomforted by the fact you told a small lie would cause more unhappiness than the happiness caused by having the dent fixed, then you shouldn't tell the lie. If the opposite is true, it is ethically acceptable to tell the lie (under the utilitarian theory).

--How Painful Will this White Lie Be?

According to Kantianism it is wrong to lie in all situations. In your case we have a dent that you were initially responsible for. Your proposition is to tell the insurance company that somebody else hit you and caused it in full. Let's universalize this maxim. If everybody who had a dent lied and told their insurance company that somebody else caused the dent, then the insurance companies would cease to believe that any dents were caused by a stranger and may end up no longer being responsible for dents. According to Kant you cannot wish this to be a universal law because if you were ever put in the situation where a dent was caused entirely by somebody else, and you told the insurance company this, they would not believe you, and would therefore not cover the cost.

--Quinlan

Honestly, I am not sure how the dent would get bigger without somebody hitting it. I believe that in this case, you most likely have a reason to say that somebody did increase the size of the dent. However, as you said, allowing the insurance company to pay for the damages is still a lie. Even if the dent was made bigger by another car, the original damage came from you, and if the insurance company paid for the entire dent, they would be paying for the damage you caused. The best way to evaluate this decision is simply to use your virtues, the main one applying to this situation being honesty. If you go to the insurance company, you must tell them the whole truth and hope for the best.

--Boy Who Has Hit a Few Guardrails

Even though it may be tempting to tell your insurance company that another car hit yours and have the company pay for the damage, it would be ethically wrong. Based of virtue ethics, you must do the action that a moral person would do in the same situation. A moral person would not put their integrity on the line just to have a dent in a car fixed. Although there is a possibility that another car hit yours and did not leave any information, there was no evidence to prove that is true. Let your conscience by your guide.

--Jiminy Cricket

If you want to do the moral thing in this situation, then it would be not to lie. When has it ever been moral to lie for one’s own benefit? "Truth is the most valuable thing we have, so I try to conserve it," said Mark Twain. I think you know it would be bad to lie because you know that it would be easy to lie to your insurance company to cover the dent, and you would have already done so without writing to the paper if you did not care morally. You should stick with what you think is right. And if a dent is bothering you that much, you can always talk to security to see the tapes from parking lot during the time the dent got worse to see if maybe someone else did do it.

--Eli

If you are considering this situation from a personally ethical standpoint, then it is not morally permissible to tell the white lie to get the money to cover the repair. If your personal goal is to be an ethical person, then the motivation behind your actions should simply be to be a virtuous person. A virtuous person
would not lie, even though it is a small lie and it can be justified by reminding yourself that you have paid the insurance company lots of money already. A person motivated by being a virtuous person, often called a "virtue ethicist," is not concerned with justifications for immoral actions, he/she will simply perform a virtuous action because it is virtuous. If you still want to see if the insurance company will cover part of the cost, you could report the incident to them, but according to virtue ethics it would not be morally permissible to lie and say that the dent was completely caused by someone hitting you in the parking lot.

-Aristotle Said So

I'm sure you are not the first to think of this "brilliant" scheme and you are certainly not the last. As it is, insurance agencies deal with hundreds of these cases every day and I can bet they're not easily fooled. Most likely they will send a representative to examine the damage and estimate the cost of repair. Right now you're paying for insurance on your vehicle either monthly or annually. If you decide to have insurance cover what seems to be a small dent at what seems to be no price may be a good idea. But, what you don't see now and what you will likely see in the near future is a rise in price you pay for insurance. Because there is no information on "who" hit you, the agency will resort to charging you (and likely others) over a period of time to cover these sorts of costs.

--You'll End Up Paying Either Way

Getting your car repaired while knowing that the likely situation is that the dent is entirely your fault is not only lying, but aims to use other people as means (another thing Kant's deontology prohibits), pulling the wool over their eyes to have them repair the damage to your car at little cost to you. Indeed, lying for your own benefit is not only wrong in itself, but it abuses the dignity of those with whom you would be negotiating. Own up to your mistake and pay the full fee to repair the dent.

--Honesty's Champion

This is a tough situation, and I can see how it would be very tempting tolie to your insurance company, but when looking at the situation morally, it would not be acceptable. When you entered into a contract with your insurance company, you gave your word in some way that you would be honest and truthful with them. Although you have paid enough bills over the years, it doesn't give the right to breach the company's trust, even with a white lie. I know paying insurance companies on a monthly basis can seem pointless when you're not getting any of it back. But be thankful! Avoiding accidents should always be a good thing. Plus, you wouldn't want karma to make its way around. Dents are one of the cheapest things to fix on a car when you're coughing up the money yourself. It could be a lot worse.

--Just a Dent

The fact that you think the dent grew all by itself is a little worrisome in itself. Moving on from that, there are a few things to consider before you decide what you're going to do. First, even if you turn it in to the insurance company you will still have to pay a deductible (I don't know how much yours is.) Second, most insurance companies send an estimator that works for them to look at the damages to the vehicle. If it is obvious that another car did not hit your vehicle it is not worth the company finding out that you are attempting fraud. Is it ethical for you to report this to your insurance company? Absolutely not, but given the right situation it could be done. Although I do not recommend it.

--Jamie

Dilemma #2

I have a problem that I need help with: it has to do with academic honesty and what would be considered cheating. I am in a programming class which generally has weekly assignments due. I also have a friend who took this class previously, who offered me his versions of the programming assignments, some of which are being repeated this semester. I turned him down at first, figuring it out for myself, but as the difficulty in the course ramps up, I am considering seeking help from this peer of mine and seeing how he went about creating his code. It wouldn't be unlike having the answers in the back of the book, like in calculus, so I'm wondering if it would be ethical to accept his copies of the programs and swear not to just copy. With that in mind, though, would it really be ethical for me to accept these solutions? Is it technically a breach of academic honesty/cheating? I'm hoping outside opinions will help me solve this dilemma.

--Struggling Programmer

Responses to Dilemma #2

As a fellow programmer, I feel like writing code is like any other form of writing. To use someone else's code as an example would require you to cite your sources much like you might for NHV, and it is more frowned upon in a coding class. Also, as a programmer, you have a certain style, and using his code might drown out your voice. As Kant would say, if you universalize your maxim, and everyone started using old code to help them, there would be no new innovation, so this would be morally wrong. However, you have the advantage of having a friend that has taken this class before, and I feel that that can be a valuable resource, just used in a different way. Don't use your friend's code, but when you have trouble with a problem, ask for help. Collaboration is always a good way to go about doing homework for any class, so that you can get second opinions and people can point out your mistakes or help each other with tricky parts.

--Kevin

Thankfully your dilemma can be easily answered with utilitarianism! Basically, if you using your friend's code will cause greater good than hurt, you should undoubtedly use the code. If you use the exact code, you could get caught for cheating, which might get you kicked out of school, causing a great displeasure to you and the people who love you. Additionally, you could get "blacklisted" for cheating, and other schools may not accept you if you apply there. However, if you simply look at some of the basic concepts of the code but reform it and make it better—which is what many programmers do anyway—you should do it. It will help you get a better grade without cheating by completely copying the code, and you will learn how to code better in the process.
You will also pass the class, which gives you even more happiness. Therefore, based on utilitarianism, you should take a peek at your friend's code.

--David

I know how you feel, programming is not my thing and it was difficult to understand, so personally, I think that you should use your resources. Using the old assignments could be beneficial to you to help understand the material, which is the ultimate goal. As far as school policy on academic dishonesty, I am not sure if this qualifies as cheating, so you should look into that. According to utilitarianism, happiness is what is important; therefore you should use the old assignments in order to achieve the highest possible grade which will leave you the happiest. However, if this is in fact cheating, and you get caught, then you will be very unhappy. Therefore, I think your best option is to determine whether using the old assignments is a form of academic dishonesty and then go from there.

--Tory

When questioning whether an act constitutes academic dishonesty, one must consider the motive of the parties involved. Your professor assigns weekly assignments to force you to practice programming so that you learn the skill. Your motive should also be to learn the skill. Therefore, if you are utilizing your peer's work to enable you to learn the skill better, deontology claims that it is morally permissible. That being said, you shouldn't just copy the code. You should view the code to see what each piece does so that you know how it works in the future. It is permissible if you have the pure motive to learn, however if your motive is informed by a grade then it would be immoral.

--Motive Matters

The best solution to your problem would be to approach your teacher and ask for help. This coincides with the beliefs of Aristotle, who recommends acting in a way that makes you feel like a good person. Talking to your teacher will eliminate any uneasiness that you would have otherwise felt from using your friend's program, and also help you better learn the material. With any luck, your teacher will be more than willing to help you.

--Andrew

There is nothing wrong with seeking help with your programming problems- it's why we go to study at an institution like Mines. However, it is important to understand that homework is supposed to help you learn. So, it is acceptable to borrow your friend's work to see what is correct, so long as you commit yourself to intellectually discovering why it is the correct answer. Thus, the purpose of the homework is accomplished; you have learned the material outside of class by committing time to studying it. This path of thought is consistent with Aristotelian virtue ethics; by committing your time to understanding the concepts of the problem, whether you figured out the answer initially or not, is the manner in which a virtuous person would act. So, it is okay to be shown the correct answer, so long as you make the effort to truly understand the material; otherwise, you are simply being lazy.

--Use All Tools Available to You

If you accept your friend's assignments, and you promise to not copy them, then you will end up breaking your promise. I can guarantee you that. You will just be more tempted to copy them directly. There is going to be one night where you have a lot of other homework to do, you have a test the next day, and your friends want to go out. What are you going to do that night? You will probably most likely just copy the program and turn it in as your own to save yourself time. After that you start to come up with excuses to copy the programs. It's a never ending cycle and is nearly impossible to escape. I'm speaking from experience. Trust me the best way to solve this problem is to not accept the programs at all. Hope this helps!

--A Friend Upset Over Pluto's Planetary Status

Next Week’s First Dilemma

Two friends of mine are big sports fans. I am not. They both purchased season passes to their favorite team. However for the first game one of my friends was out of town. So he let me borrow his ticket to go with the friend that was still in town. I did and it was great fun, but what I didn't expect was to win an iPod touch while there. Now technically I won this as the person occupying the seat. I know that neither my friend nor I own an iPod already. So, I'm torn as to whether I tell him I won it or just keep it for myself. Help.

--What's an iPod Between Friends?

Next Week’s Second Dilemma

I have something which has been bugging me for a while. I'm on a meal plan, meaning I eat at Slate for most of my meals. Recently I've started taking 2-4 of the peanut butter packs they keep there on my way out, for later consumption with crackers or something. I didn't think much of it, but just recently a friend of mine told me that it was probably wrong and that it could be considered theft; buffet food is usually meant to stay in the buffet, after all. I hadn't really thought about it, but my friend might have a point. Is it okay for me to walk out with and save Slate food when I can just go buy peanut butter on my own? I can't decide what would be right in this situation.

--Potential Peanut Butter Pilferer