Morals for your story

The Oredigger, vol. 91, issue 24 (Apr. 25, 2011), p. 10

Written by Steven Wooldridge

Dilemma 1
I am currently in the process of applying for a scholarship. However, when looking over the scholarship application, there is a section asking if I have a Facebook page or not. I know there is a committee that reviews these applications and will most likely browse my Facebook page if I answer yes. My Facebook, while not stooped in feces, is not necessarily "clean," nor is it something I wish to have an outside group look at. I believe I should be allotted privacy, and therefore I want to answer "no," informing them I do not use Facebook. Am I morally required to answer yes on this question, or can I employ a sort of vigilantism, and respond "no" on the grounds that I believe it wrong for them to ask it of me?

--Needs Money for College

Dilemma 1 Responses
Immanuel Kant would tell you that lying is wrong--regardless of the reasons for the lie. This is because a lie "always harms another, even if not another individual, nevertheless humanity generally, inasmuch as it makes the source of right unusable." By lying, you not only attack the institution of "truth", but you jeopardize your credibility. You could just tell the scholarship committee that you have a Facebook, and put them on a limited profile or refuse to add them as a friend if they try to add you. You don't have to lie to get yourself out of this dilemma.

--Seeker of Truth, the non-Goodman kind

In the case of the scholarship, I would put yes that I do have a Facebook page. My reasoning behind this is you can control your privacy settings so even if the scholarship committee wants to check it out they won't be able to see photos or wall posts depending on the setting. Secondly, by putting yes you are not lying on the application therefore the moral issue of lying is taken care of. Something to consider would be what a person is putting on Facebook for the "public" to see. If there is something in question, I believe a person should remove it to portray a self image through their Facebook page that agrees with their moral standing not only because a scholarship committee may see it but also to portray him or her self accurately in all cases.

--Fellow Facebook User

Facebook is used by a substantial number of people so when examining this dilemma you have to take into consideration that even though you may say you do not use Facebook the scholarship committee could look you up anyway. According to virtue ethics you need to say that you have a Facebook because it is the honest thing to do. Virtue ethics also says that a decision is moral when your intentions are for the right reasons. In this case the reason for saying you do not use Facebook is only for personal gain. My opinion would be to clean up your Facebook to insure that the scholarship committee has no reason not to give you the money.

--Facebook Inhibits

According to utilitarianism values of achieving happiness, the reviewing committee would be happy to discover that your Facebook is clean and you would also be happy to receive the scholarship. Therefore, it is in your best interest to clean up your Facebook. Also, according to virtue ethics, lying is not a very virtuous act. Setting ethical theories aside, I would feel guilty if the only thing that prevented me from earning a scholarship was a few inappropriate photos on my Facebook page. Another point to consider is just because you say that you don't have a Facebook doesn't mean that they can't search for you and discover that you lied in the first place. I think that your best option is to clean up your Facebook and make it viewable to only your friends. Applying for this scholarship will probably not be the only time that Facebook could come back to bite you. It is likely that future employers will also search your Facebook, and you do not want Facebook to be the reason why you don't get a job or a scholarship.

--Victoria

You could do one of two things: answer yes, you have a Facebook, and allow them to perform this background check of your personal files, and possibly form biases that affect the selection process. Remember Facebook is a "social" network, and therefore has little to no representation of your professional life. OR you could answer no and interpret it as no you are not interested in sharing this site with them. I mean you have a bank account right? Does that mean they "should" have the right to look at it?

--Don't Give them Your Bank Account Number, Either

Lying can be considered moral in some cases, but I do not believe this is one of them. First of all, think deeply about your motivation. It may be easy to convince yourself you are considering marking "no" because you believe it is wrong of them to ask, but make sure you are not doing it to benefit yourself. Even doing the right thing for the wrong reasons can be considered unethical. Second, if this organization is going to invest in you, then you owe it to them to be honest. My suggestion is to tell the truth to mark "yes." If you do not want an outside group to look at it, change your privacy settings to be hidden. Otherwise, just spend a little time and clean it up. You are a college student headed in to the professional world and will need to do this at some point anyway, if you are going to keep your profile public.

--Logan

According to Kant, there are categorical imperatives that are the core of morality. You should only act the way you would will everyone else to. If you don't want everyone else to lie, you shouldn't lie on your application. The morality stands in the intent of your actions, not the consequences. You are acting
immorally by lying, even if it is to get the scholarship. The foundation granting your scholarship deserves to invade your privacy. It is their scholarship, so you must play by their rules. If there is something on your Facebook page that you wouldn't want people to see, you probably shouldn't have it on your page.

--Anything Less than Honesty is Immoral

Dilemma 2
So I live in a two bedroom/two bathroom apartment with two other people and we have a fair amount of space distributed between the three of us. Just a couple months ago, my roommate told one of her close friends that he could move in with us so he can get back on his feet. Now a month ago, I was okay with idea because I assumed that my roommate’s friend (we’ll call him New Guy) would have a job by now and would be able to help pay for rent, electricity, gas, etc. the basic dues of living in an apartment. I also assumed that we would have moved into a larger apartment by now so that there would be enough rooms for the 4 of us (New Guy currently sleeps on the couch in the living room). But it's been a couple of months, we still haven't been able to move into a larger apartment, and New Guy still doesn't have a job.

The problem here is that New Guy doesn't really seem like he’s making an effort to find a job to pay for his part of rent. He’s taking up a lot of space (the entire living room, utility closet, linen closet), and he’s eating all the food we buy. I’ve talked this over with my two roommates and one wants to kick him out and the other (the one who is good friends with New Guy) wants to let him stay which means the decision is up to me. Should I kick him out and cause him to live on the streets with no food, water, or place to stay? Or should I continue to allow him to live here for free and continue to let him take what we pay for?

--Looking Out for Whom?

Dilemma 2 Responses
Looking at the situation from a virtue ethics point of view, the best solution would be to find a median between the two proposed options: kick him out and let him continue to mooch. My suggestion for this median would be to give him an ultimatum. Confront New Guy, and let him know that it's time to really start looking for a job because he needs to start chipping in on expenses. You can be realistic, and give him a couple months to build up the payments to a full ¼ of the rent, as long as he is pitching in something. With this process, you can be assured that he is actually trying to change his circumstances, and is working towards being financially dependable.

--Dannielle

In making a decision about what to do about New Guy, I think it is important to consider all those involved and the social contract that has been agreed upon. I am sure this is a very difficult time for New Guy and it is respectful and generous to allow him to stay with you, but what were the terms agreed upon to allow him to crash at your place? Did you and your roommate discuss the details of him staying there? Has he been searching for the job? Has he been participating in house chores? These are all considerations that need to be made in deciding on New Guy’s fate. If the original agreement included the necessity for him to seriously search for a job and he has in effect stopped doing this, he has broken his social contract with you. It also seems that by stepping outside of his bounds and using other goods, New Guy again breaks the social contract. Being generous is one thing, but once one breaks the terms of a social contract they are accepting the social consequences that come with it. You then have the right to kick him out, but a little warning and reasoning would not hurt. This may allow him to prepare himself and seriously find a job.

--Social Contract

If I were you I would kick the new guy out. He is living in your house without contributing to it. If he is eating your food and taking up space without paying for his own piece of the house then he should not be there. According to deontology, an action is not moral unless every other person can do the same action. In this situation it is not possible for every person to mooch off their friends and live in their house without paying for his share. Therefore it is not moral for him to live in your house "for free," and you should kick him out.

--Tucker

I think it is time for an ultimatum in this situation. Give New Guy a deadline to find a job and start chipping in towards living expenses. I understand that it is important to help friends out in times of need, but you also don't want to be taken advantage of. I think it is in everyone's best interest to have a meeting and set a deadline for New Guy. Taking virtue ethics into consideration, you want to be the best person that you can, and while helping others in need is important, you may not actually be helping New Guy by letting him mooch off of you and your roommates all the time. He obviously needs someone to enforce a deadline. This is easier said than done, but it will be beneficial to New Guy in the long run.

--Tory

You are in a very classic situation, one that has plagued countless annoyed parents and at least one episode of Spongebob Squarepants. I am not entirely sure if you have noticed the constant nods to Kantianism, virtue ethics, and utilitarianism in past responses in this ethics column, but I'm going to give you a different perspective than these. There was once this great man named Adam Smith, who surmised that people are fed meat not by the butcher’s grace, but by the butcher’s want for something the meat purchasers had. If you are not benefitting from this guy staying in your apartment, you are a butcher giving out meat without receiving anything in return. It may be hard to tell him to leave, but it is necessary.

--The Voice of Capitalism

To find the ethical thing to do, you must consider the reasons for doing so. If you let him stay, it seems it would be purely out of charity because the only reason you provided was implying you didn't want him to be out on the streets. If you kick him out, you will benefit. However, this would mean using him as the means to your end, which can be considered immoral. I think you should let him stay, but be in open communication with him. In George Thorogood's song, "One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer," the landlady confronts the singer because she thinks he is not trying to find a job. It all worked out in the end.

--Jammin out
Loyal readers, my dilemma this week is of the romantic type, and I need your help. About one year ago to the day, I was working as assistant in a pottery studio minding my own business, just cleaning up the dirt, when I met a gorgeous young lady struggling with her clay on the wheel. Trying to be an honest, good working citizen I gave her a few pointers, and her cup eventually took shape. I finished mopping and didn't see her again until seven months later when I got a new job and went to a coworker's apartment to help him assemble his new TV stand. To my surprise, there in his apartment was that cute armature potter taking care of their newborn child. It turns out they had been married for just over a year.

Well, that co-worker and I would hang out during lunch and after work and he would often tell me that he was unhappy with his marriage, and that she had cheating on him, and blah, blah, blah. I jokingly told him one day that I would like to cheat with his wife. Instead of getting mad like I thought he would, he simply said "please do, so I can have a good reason to get a divorce." Well, he quit his job, and I haven't seen either of them for about four months. Last week out of the blue, she hit me up on Facebook, and informed me that they are no longer living together however they are still married. We talked for a long time and the next day she flooded my new phone with naked photos of herself. She has been sexting all week and I don't know what to do. Honestly, I would like to be Utilitarian and maximize pleasure by making all three of us happy, but am not convinced it is the ethical thing to do.

--Bewildered.

Dilemma 3 Responses

When finding someone you like instantaneously it is hard to let them go. In this situation a relationship with a woman who is still married and has a child is morally wrong. Even though the woman and her husband are not living together, it does not give you the right to assist in splitting up the family. Your intentions need to be examined when considering what is morally right according to virtue ethics. If your intentions are purely to bring happiness to the members of the family then there could be a chance that having a relationship with the women is right. However if your intentions are purely to satisfy yourself or the two of you then the decision to have a relationship is morally wrong.

--Love at First Sight

The couple is no longer a couple, so if you were to get with the woman, it would not be cheating. As you mentioned, it would utilize happiness for everyone, but I caution you to look at this carefully. The ratio of women to men here at Mines is sad, at best, but that is no reason to make rash decisions. How loyal a girl would your friend's wife be if she is so quick to attempt an affair while married? If you are looking for a long-time girl friend, she is probably not the best option for you. On the other hand, if you aren't looking for commitment, maybe she is the girl for you.

--Voice of Reason

"Ethically speaking" they are still married. Try very hard NOT to think with the wrong organ. So many things scream a red flag here. She is a young mother who obviously has had many sexcapades. This could be your one opportunity to truly have a FATAL ATTRACTION: HIV, Herpes, Gonorrhea, HPV...good luck!

--Brain or Bleep?

You are correct in your utilitarian ideals if this is the approach that you wish to take. It sounds as though their marriage truly isn't working which is very unfortunate, but in today's society, not uncommon. Going along with the utilitarian ideals I feel as though you should talk to both parties and see what they think about divorce. If they could go through therapy and fix the relationship, that's awesome. I do not want to encourage divorce, but I feel as though a divorce might work out the best for all parties. Especially since she has been sexting you, it seems as though she wouldn't be against cheating on her husband which is quite awful. This dilemma really doesn't come down to you though. Until they decide what they are going to do with their marriage, you cannot make a well thought out decision. I hope everything works out for you man.

--Love Hurts

I am far from a relationship expert, but to be blunt, the way I see it, you have three options: 1.) One Night Stand, 2.) Attempt to form a long term relationship, 3.) Do nothing/tell her you're not interested. However, it seems that if you wanted Option 1, you wouldn't have even bothered submitting an ethical dilemma and just gone ahead with it. Option 2 also seems leery to me; not to be judgmental of this woman, but I would be intimidated to try to form a relationship with someone so seemingly promiscuous, especially considering she has cheated before on someone she vowed under law and God to be faithful to! However attractive she may be, Option 1 is not necessarily the most utilitarian; if all it does is put you in an ethically uncomfortable and overly awkward situation, then you are certainly not maximizing happiness, as utilitarianism dictates.

--Chris Cowdin

The situation that you have found yourself in is very complicated, further complicated, by having your friend's permission, as well as the affection of his wife. If you look at this issue from the standpoint of utilitarianism, by acting upon your desires to pursue this woman, you would be increasing your happiness, as well as the happiness of all involved. Also as by Man code, you have gained permission from your coworker making it ok. I feel that you should go for it. Have fun.

--Relationship Expert.

The thought on utilitarianism is good but in this life you can only truly know your own desires and control your own actions and emotions. Therefore it would be best to act in your own self interest and not worry about what you think other people want. In other words practice ethical egoism. So if you want to have an affair with a married woman go for it, but please think about if this is what you truly want. It sounds to me like this girl is carrying some emotional baggage and you would not be the first person she has cheated on her husband with. So if you are looking for a monogamous relationship, ignore this girl. If you are just looking for a casual sex partner and don't care who else she is having sex with have a blast, start sexting back. Just be sure you know what you truly want before you act.
What you should do is take your phone to the husband and show him the pictures of his naked wife. This will give him enough reason to divorce her. After that is done, if you still want to get with her this is the appropriate time. This prevents you from getting in the middle of anything you don’t want to.

--Romance is Confusing

My advice to you is not to do anything. It is not up to you to convince the girl and the guy to get a divorce. If they are living separately but still have not gotten the divorce, then the facts speak in saying that they will eventually end up getting back together. I know you may think that this girl could be the one for you, but do not believe as much. She is trying to get attention, because she feels neglected and lonely. Her sexting is the desperate attempt to convince you to go to her to solve the problem of her body being an attention whore. Some girls are complicated like that in that they will do whatever it takes to get your attention, only because they want to be comforted. Plus the fact that she is so desperate could spell out some future trouble, especially if you were to have a relationship with her.

If you feel like you do need to try to do something, then maybe try to subtly tell the girl to talk to her husband. Beauty and desperation are not a good combination though so be warned that craziness has just been dumped on you.

--Thoughts from a Girl

Next Week’s Dilemmas

1) This last summer, I completed an internship for a Petroleum Company. I had two different supervisors, depending on whether I was working in the office or in the oil field for the week. When I was working in the oil field, I heard rumors from “pumpers” that my supervisor had been selling old pipe from the field that belonged to the company as scrap metal and pocketing the cash. I never saw it done, and I didn’t know how valid the claims were. However, I learned this semester that an investigation is being done on the specific oil field I worked in focusing on missing equipment. I don’t know if this includes the pipe or not. I got to know my field supervisor very well and do not want to cause any unnecessary grief. Am I morally obligated to call the company and let them know the rumors I heard, or if they contact me, should I play dumb or tell them the claims that were made against my supervisor? How do I decide what to do?

--Play Dumb?

2) My parents have been divorced since I was in middle school. I, along with my two older siblings stayed with my mom after the divorce, and my dad moved out. My dad was not really my favorite person, because the way he acts sometimes embarrasses me to call him my dad, especially when he is being a jerk to people. My mom has been there for me, and she has provided everything that my siblings and I need. Now though with all three of her children in college (two of us at Mines), my mom is beginning to have a lot of financial trouble. Also I have noticed that since coming to college, not only does my mom tell me more about things that stress her like her finances, but also my dad has been making strong attempts to get me to spend time with him.

Now here is where the dilemma comes in. I feel like I have a responsibility to be helping my mom out with her finances, but all of the money that I am making goes toward my car payments and buying gas, and the small extra amount is used for the random outings with my friends. But then I thought about daddy. I always am joking with my friends that when I need money, I just go to daddy for some. This time though, I am contemplating whether or not I should ask my dad to pay my car payments, and give the money that I used for car payments to my mom. Should I go to my dad for money? Should I even be worrying about giving money to my mom? Do I really have an obligation or responsibility to be helping my mom out financially?

--Financial Burden

3) So there is a girl on my floor that has been dating a guy for the whole first semester. Her boyfriend and I have met a few times and I would say we are good friends. Lately I have been seeing the same girl with a different boy going in and out of our hall. Yesterday I was just casually walking by and I saw the girl with the other boy kissing. I do not want to get involved but I feel bad for the boyfriend. Am I obligated to tell him as a friend or not?

--Snitch or Ditch

4) My friend became sick for a week and he was falling behind on our group project. Besides a page and a half of an underdeveloped analysis, I ended up doing most of the 45 page project by myself. Peer evaluations will be handed out after the project is over and a large part of our grade is based on that evaluation. How should I answer when I’m asked, “Did your partner do his share of the work?” If I tell my professors the truth, they might dock off his grade. To be fair, he is a good friend of mine and he has helped me out in many instances in the past over non-school related issues. Should I help him out since he has been a great friend to me and because he was sick? Or should I tell the truth and be a disloyal friend?

--Disloyal Friend or Lying Doormat