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Ethics in general: ethics, action and freedom



Box 2.1 Activity: Paired discussion

What would you do in the situation described? How would you justify your action?

Do you think the fact that there are different actions that could be counted as *right* in this situation means that nothing could count as wrong in this situation? Describe two actions that you think might be wrong in this situation.

Participants should have 10 minutes for discussion before being asked for feedback.

Hint: a person could act wrongly

- by doing *what* they do (if you told your friend she was stupid for asking you, many would think this was rude),
- by *the way in which they do it* (if you told your friend she looked fine, but in a sarcastic manner many would deem this wrong),
- in *the reason* for doing what they do (if you told your friend the truth, but only out of spite, your action would arguably be wrong).



Box 2.2 Activity: Playing devil's advocate

Imagine an ordering of values that *always* puts kindness before honesty. Can you come up with examples of situations in which this would produce the wrong action?

Variations might include orderings that always put:

- honesty before kindness;
- loyalty before honesty;
- honesty before loyalty.¹



Box 2.3 Activity: Personal reflection

Lying is wrong.

Do you think this statement is always true, sometimes true or never true?

If you think it is sometimes or always true, what do you think *makes* it true (when it is true)? If some sort of fact, *what* sort of fact?

If you think it is never true how would you explain why most people generally think of this statement as true (at least sometimes).

Once participants have had time to reflect on these questions, they could be used to stimulate group discussion.



Box 2.4 Activity: Conceptual analysis

Can you sort the following questions into 'first order' (practical) questions, and 'second order' (theoretical) questions:

- (i) Is reproductive cloning morally acceptable?
- (ii) Should drug addicts be allowed to use IVF?
- (iii) How can we know that a given moral judgement is true?
- (iv) Should clinical trials be run according to different rules in developed and undeveloped countries?
- (v) Could it ever be right to kill an innocent human being?
- (vi) What makes a moral judgement true or false?
- (vii) Is it morally permissible to discard embryos with the gene for Huntington's disease?
- (viii) What sort of evidence can we cite for the claim that something is right or wrong?

Answers:

First order: (i), (ii), (iv), (v), (vii)

Second order: (iii), (vi), (viii).

**Box 2.8 Activity: Conceptual analysis**

1. If the question: 'could there be morality without God?' is a metaphysical question, which epistemological question would be associated with it?
2. If the question: 'How do we justify the claim that lying is wrong?' is an epistemological question, what is the metaphysical question associated with it?

Answers:

1. How do we know there is morality without God?
2. Is lying wrong?