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Society, Ethics and Technology - IDSC 252

The College of New Jersey

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Revised:

Procedures for Analyzing Ethical Dilemmas

Note: The information contained here is generic in nature and is provided as a guide to help you complete this assignment. Your seminar instructor may have additional information about how this assignment is to be completed.

Although the book "Applying Moral Theories", third edition, may not be used in your SET seminar section, it has much information which is valuable in completing this assignment. The four moral standards discussed in the Harris text might sometimes give converging answers to some questions in ethics, however, in dilemmas such as these they tend to give diverging answers. It is up to us, as reflective moral judges, to determine which standard applies and takes priority in each case.

The recommended procedure for analyzing ethical cases is to apply a variant of the design/problem-solving loop. In the process one attempts to reason systematically to a rationally defensible moral judgment using ethical principles and moral rules. The basic steps in the procedure are as follows:

1. Identify the Issues
2. Outline the Options
3. Construct Ethical Arguments
4. Evaluate the Arguments
5. Make a Decision

Step 1: Identify the Issues

1. What are the major moral or ethical issues raised by this case?
2. What are the major factual issues raised by this case?
3. What are the major conceptual issues raised by this case?
4. Who are the major stakeholders in this case? (stakeholders refers to all individuals whose interest could be affected by the decision made in the case).
5. How are the issues in this case related to the application of technology?

Step 2: Outline the Options

1. What are the main alternative actions or policies that might be followed in responding to the ethical issues in this case?
2. What are the major views on the conceptual issues raised by this case?
3. What facts are unknown or controverted that might be relevant to deciding this case (may require research to determine some facts).

Step 3: Construct Ethical Arguments

1. Determine which of the four moral standards discussed by Harris (egoism, natural law, utilitarianism, and respect for persons) apply to this case?
2. Identify the moral principles or high-level rules that can be invoked to support a conclusion as to what ought to be done ethically in this case or similar cases?
3. Determine whether the different moral standards yield converging or diverging judgments about what ought to be done?

Step 4: Evaluate the Arguments for each Option

1. Weigh the ethical reasons and arguments for each option in terms of their relative importance, assigning weights to each consideration where:
 - 3 = very important consideration
 - 2 = somewhat important consideration
 - 1 = a consideration of only minor importance
2. Determine whether there are any unwarranted factual assumptions that need to be examined in each argument.
3. Determine whether there are any unresolved conceptual issues in each argument.
4. Determine whether any of the arguments involve fallacies or logical errors.

Step 5: Make a Decision

1. Decide which of the identified options you would recommend or judge to be the ethically best way to deal with the issue presented in this case based upon which option has the strongest ethical reasons behind it.
2. Determine how a critic of your position might try to argue against it using other ethical reasons, and present a rebuttal or counter-argument in defense of your judgment.

Guidelines For Preparing Ethical Case Analyses

It is useful to discuss your case with at least one other person before you sit down to write up your case analysis. Following your case discussion, students are required to prepare a short analysis of the case that was discussed in which you develop and defend your own ethical analysis of the case. The purpose of these essays/reports is to give you a chance to work out your own view about the issues raised by the case and to practice the procedure for analyzing ethical dilemmas. Students who were not present in class for the discussions of the case are required to submit a written case analysis, but they will not have had the benefit of the discussion.

The papers are due on the date established by your instructor. Because these are short essays/reports, you must be very economical in what you say about the case. We strongly suggest that you organize your essay/report around the procedural steps for ethical analysis used in the class discussion. In evaluating your case analyses instructors will apply the following grading rubric which follows the procedure. In each case, the first bullet represents poor performance, the second bullet represented adequate or average performance, and the third bullet represents superior performance.

Evaluation of Case Analysis

1. Identification of Issues

1. Failed to identify all major ethical, factual and conceptual issues.
2. Identified most but not all of the major issues.
3. Identified all major issues and stakeholders and the relation to technology.

2. Identification of Options

1. Failed to identify all of the relevant and practical options.
2. Identified most of the relevant practical options, but overlooked some related conceptual problems and issues.
3. Correctly identified all of the relevant practical options and all of the related conceptual problems and issues.

3. Construction of Ethical Arguments

1. Failed to apply moral standards and principles correctly.
2. Applied some moral standards and principles correctly, but overlooked others that are also relevant or misapplied some ethical principles.

3. Correctly applied all of the relevant moral standards and ethical principles that are relevant to the case.

4. Evaluation of Arguments

1. Failed to provide weightings of various ethical arguments and reasons.
2. Provided some evaluation of reasons and arguments, but overlooked important factual or logical errors in some reasons.
3. Provided appropriate and defensible evaluations for all relevant arguments noting wherever necessary factual assumptions, logical errors, or conceptual confusions.

5. Ethical Decision

1. Decision reached is not justified by the arguments and reasons used.
2. Decision reached is justified by ethical arguments and reasons, but failed to identify and respond to reasonable ethical counter-arguments.
3. Decisions reached is justified by arguments and reasons used and care is taken in responding to reasonable counter-arguments.

6. Overall Presentation

1. Sloppy presentation with numerous spelling and grammatical errors.
2. Generally competent presentation marred with a few spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors.
3. Craftsmanship and style exhibited throughout the entire essay/report

Remember the object of this essay/report is to lay out and defend a particular decision about a controversial case. Thus, it is important that you take a position, even if you personally remain unsure about what you really think is ethically best. Your papers will be evaluated not in terms of whether your instructor personally agrees with your ethical judgment about the case, but by how well you are able to articulate and argue for a moral judgment about the case using known facts and relevant ethical principles. Your seminar instructor will go over the details of any specific requirement for her/his sections. Make certain to follow their particular directions/instructions for this assignment.

Good luck with this assignment!