 Moral Dilemmas

1. The Accident

You are an emergency worker that has just been called to the scene of an accident. When you arrive you see that the car belongs to your wife. Fearing the worst you rush over to see she is trapped in her car with another man.

She sees you and although barely conscious, she manages to mouth the words “I’m sorry”…

You don’t understand, but her look answers your question. The man next to her is her lover with whom she’s been having an affair.

You reel back in shock, devastated by what her eyes have just told you. As you step back, the wreck in front of you comes into focus. You see your wife is seriously hurt and she needs attention straight away. Even if she gets attention there’s a very high chance she’ll die.

You look at the seat next to her and see her lover. He’s bleeding heavily from a wound to the neck and you need to stem the flow of blood immediately. It will only take about 5 minutes to stop, but it will mean your wife will definitely die.

If you tend to your wife however, the man will bleed to death despite the fact it could have been avoided.

Who would you choose to work on?

2. Spam Filtering

You are the network administrator for a rather large company. You have a young family and need your job to support them. As part of your responsibility as a network administrator is to monitor the emails for the organization. Usually this just means occasionally allow emails for staff members that have been accidentally blocked by the spam filters.

One day you get a helpdesk request from a staff member asking for an email to get released. Normally its standard procedure except this time the request has come from the wife of a very good friend of yours. You recognize the name on the helpdesk request so quickly attend to the problem. As part of the procedure you need to manually open up the email to ensure that it isn’t spam, so you do and you discover that it certainly isn’t spam. You find that it’s actually an email to your friend’s wife from her lover. You scan the rest of the contents of the email and there is no doubt that she has been having an affair for some time now.

You release the email, but you can’t decide what to do. You’re initial reaction is to call your friend up and tell him about the email, however you quickly realize that company policy is very strict about revealing the contents of confidential emails of staff members regardless of the contents and unless someone’s life is in immediate danger, under no circumstances are you permitted to reveal the information.

In any case you know that revealing this information presents great risk, because even if you don’t do it directly, there is a good chance that the dots will be joined somewhere along the line and you will be found out. However you feel that by not telling your friend that you are aiding his wife get away with adultery and this troubles you greatly. What do you do?

3. The Pregnant Woman

A pregnant woman leading a group of people out of a cave on a coast is stuck in the mouth of that cave. In a short time high tide will be upon them, and unless she is unstuck, they will all be drowned except the woman, whose head is out of the cave. Fortunately, (or unfortunately) someone has with him a stick of dynamite. There seems no way to get the pregnant woman loose without using the dynamite which will inevitably kill her; but if they do not use it everyone will drown. What should they do?

4. Nieces and Daughters

You and your family are going away for the weekend. Your daughter is 7 and is best friends with your niece, who is also 7. Your families are very close and your daughter asks if your niece can come with you on your holiday. You have been on holidays together before and don’t see any problem, so you agree.

You arrive at your holiday destination and the house you are staying at backs onto a beach. The girls ask if they can go for a swim. You tell them that they have to wait until you have unpacked the car, but they can play on the sand directly in front of the beach. They run down to the sand, and you begin to unpack the car. After about 5 minutes, you hear screaming coming from the direction of the beach and it sounds like the girls.

You run down to see what the matter is, and you discover that they hadn’t listened to you and have gone for a swim. There is no one else on the beach and the girls are caught in a rip.

The girls are really struggling, particularly your niece who isn’t as strong a swimmer as your daughter.

You swim out quickly, but when you get there, you realize that there is no way you will be able to get both the girls back into shore on your own. You realize that an agonizing decision will need to be made.

You need to decide which of the girls you will rescue first, you have enough strength and energy to rescue them both, but you can only do it one at a time. You look at the two girls, and your niece is really struggling to hold her head above water and you know if you take your daughter back first, there will be little or no chance that she will survive.

Your daughter is struggling also, but is much stronger in the water and you estimate that if you take your niece back to shore first, there’s probably a 50% chance that your daughter will be able to stay afloat long enough for you return, but you simply don’t know how long she will hold on for.

5. Hit and Run

One morning you are driving to work, and as per usual you are running a bit late, so you are driving a touch faster than the speed limit. You reach down to your stereo to change the CD, when all of a sudden your car hits something solid. You spin to a stop, but not before several more cars have run into you and each other in an attempt to avoid the accident.

As you look up and out of your car, you can see that you hit a person, and that the person is not looking very good. In fact, you are sure that they are dead. You shakily get out of your car, and look around at the damage that has been caused. Several cars have been badly smashed up, but more importantly you have killed someone with your careless driving.

As you are standing there in shock, a woman comes up to you, tears running down her face, and obviously very shook up. As a natural reaction, you ask her what is wrong. She gives you a funny look, and then she explains that she just ran over someone. You ask her where this person is, and she points towards the person that you ran over!

You don’t understand why, but for some reason this woman thinks that she caused this accident and killed the person, when in fact you are well aware that you were the cause. Whoever accepts the blame is likely to be placed in jail for a very long time. If you let the woman take the blame, there is a very good chance you will get away with it all. However, there is also the chance that you could be placed in jail for even longer for trying to cover it up.

6. Drug Bust

You are on holiday in Bali with your 18 year old son and wife. You have been there for a week and are ready to head home. All three of you are at the airport getting ready to board your plane, when an armed officer comes around with a sniffer dog. You have all your bags on a trolley, and the dog sniffs at both your wife and your bag, and passes over it, however when he gets to your sons bag, he begins to get a bit more active.

You look over at your son and he’s looking a little nervous. You know he’s smoked a little marijuana in his time, but generally, he’s a good kid, and you certainly didn’t think he’d actually be stupid enough to bring it back on the plane with him. At first you feel angry that he would do such a thing and start planning your responsibility lecture, but then you realize that you are in Bali, and they have a zero tolerance policy on drugs, meaning your son could be jailed for life, or worse, executed, if he does have some illicit materials in his bag.

You look at your wife and realize she has come to the same conclusion and has gone pale with fear.

The armed officer accompanying the dog is beginning to look sterner with every sniff the dog takes and looks directly at you and asks you to open to the bag.

You do, and as the officer begins to take things out of the bag, you see to your horror that there is a small quantity of marijuana stashed in with your son’s belongings.

The officer looks at you and asks “Whose bag is this?”

You realize you have to answer, but the answer won’t be easy. You see your wife in the corner of your eye, and she is about to step forward and claim it as her own; what do you say?

7. The Mad Bomber

A madman who has threatened to explode several bombs in crowded areas has been apprehended. Unfortunately, he has already planted the bombs and they are scheduled to go off in a short time. It is possible that hundreds of people may die. The authorities cannot make him divulge the location of the bombs by conventional methods. He refuses to say anything and requests a lawyer to protect his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination. In exasperation, some high level official suggests torture. This would be illegal, of course, but the official thinks that it is nevertheless the right thing to do in this desperate situation. Do you agree? If you do, would it also be morally justifiable to torture the mad bomber’s innocent wife if that is the only way to make him talk? Why?

8. Lifeboat

You are going on a cruise. 2 days into the cruise your ship experiences technical difficulties and the captain says it needs to make an unscheduled stop. A couple of hours later the captain makes another announcement that the ship’s hull has been breached and that you will all need to start heading to life rafts and abandon ship. The ships life rafts are lowered as people begin to pile in and you get on board one of the life rafts.

As it is lowered however, it hits the side of the ship, putting a hole in the side of the raft, and when it hits the water it begins to sink. There are 10 people in the boat and to prevent it sinking, you quickly work out that by having 9 people working for 10 minutes while 1 person rests you can bail the water out with their hands, quick enough to keep the water at bay and preventing it from sinking, but you have to continually keep it up to ensure that the boat doesn’t sink. By being able to rest one person you are greatly able to increase the length of time you can keep the boat afloat, however if the rescue team doesn’t turn up you calculate that within 5 hours the boat will sink and you will all die.

While taking your break, you glance over to another boat and notice that a friend of yours who you met on the boat is there and has noticed your predicament. He is signalling for you to come over and join them on their boat so you don’t have to continue bailing water out. There is only just enough room for one more person. You also notice that their boat is moving away rapidly with the current, but your boat can’t keep up because the hole is affecting its buoyancy.

You estimate that if you jump ship, you will force all 9 remaining crew members to bail water continuously, which will reduce the total time they can stay afloat to just 2 hours, but will ensure that you will be able to live long enough to be rescued.

If you stay aboard, you will not have another chance to jump ship, and there’s no guarantee that the rescue will arrive in 5 hours, meaning you will drown, however by staying you give everyone a better chance of survival.

As you watch the boat with your friend drift away, you realize you have about 30 seconds to make a decision:

1. Do you stay on your current boat and help keep it afloat as long as possible and hope that the rescue will arrive in 5 hours, or
2. Do you go to your friend’s boat, ensuring your rescue, but reducing the chances of the others on the boat being rescued?