

# An overview of the ethical dilemma in a personal case



Ethics is the result of human interpretation of right and wrong. One's ethical outlook will drive their behavior in a multitude of different situations.

However, not everyone forms their ethical scheme in the same ways. Various viewpoints about religion, society, and good and evil itself will directly impact the creation of ethics in an individual. (Heinrichs, Oser, and Lovat, 2013) Sometimes, the situation will help dictate what kind of ethical theory should be employed. Considering all of this information, the following essay will examine a personal ethical dilemma before explaining how it was resolved, and how the resolution may have been impacted by the application of different ethical theories.

### Ethical Dilemma

The ethical dilemma I will be focusing on for this paper occurred to me about one year ago. I was in Atlanta visiting family for the weekend. Late at night, I was walking down a mostly deserted street with my sister, when we heard a rustling noise in an alley. We looked down the alley and saw a large man repeatedly punching and kicking a woman, simultaneously calling her several terrible names. While my first instinct was to go help her, my sister held my arm and encouraged me to call the police instead. I knew that if we called the police, it would take them time to arrive to our location, and from the intensity at which this woman was being assaulted, she might be dead by that time. I was immediately torn, wanting to help this woman, but also wanting to not put myself, or more importantly, my sister, in any serious danger.

### Outcome

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Ultimately, I told my sister to call the police, while I approached the individuals in the alley quickly. When I was about 30 feet away from the duo, I shouted at the man to stop. The man looked up, saw me standing there, and saw my sister near the street calling the police, and ran down the alley, leaving the woman on the ground. When police arrived, the woman was taken to the hospital, but not before thanking my sister and me profusely.

### Response Analysis

While I made the decision to approach them directly in a short amount of time, I did consider the consequences of my various options. I thought about protecting my sister, should the man decide to assault us as well, and I thought about the other people in my family who rely on me for support who would be devastated if something were to happen to me. However, these thoughts of preservation were drowned out by the notion that this woman likely had family and friends that loved her as well. Furthermore, I thought if this was my sister being beaten, I would certainly want someone to step in and help her. I did consider briefly what was the ethically right and ethically wrong action to do in this scenario, but I did not apply any ethical theory or moral rule, nor think about what a person that I admire would do in this situation. I may have had these thoughts if I had longer to assess the situation.

### Virtue Ethics and My Response

I believe the ethical approach that most resembled how I handled this situation would be virtue ethics. (Heinrichs, Oser, and Lovat, 2013) I stepped into the situation because I believed it was the right thing to do and I wanted <https://assignbuster.com/an-overview-of-the-ethical-dilemma-in-a-personal-case/>

to protect this woman's safety. Were I to walk on by, or simply wait for police to arrive, I would be directly conflicting with the virtues that I hold very high in my own life, such as courage, bravery, and compassion. By stepping into the situation, I was exemplifying my personal values. (Holmes, 2013) If I behaved differently, I would likely feel cognitive dissonance and might even be forced to change my virtues as I did not live up to them.

### Application of Different Ethical Theories

If I had applied a different ethical theory or moral rule, I may have behaved differently. For instance, I believe if I had applied utilitarianism I may have resisted getting involved further than calling the police. If I was trying to maximize the good and minimize the bad, I may have considered the risks of this man hurting me and my sister as too great to maximize the good in this situation. (Heinrichs, Oser, and Lovat, 2013) If I followed this line of thinking, were I to step in and the man brutally beat not only the victim, but also my sister and me, this would be increasing the amount of violence, and minimizing the positive outcomes. As it turns out, however, by actually stepping in, I probably maximized the good in this situation and minimized the harm, aligning my behavior and the outcomes with utilitarianism in a way. (Heinrichs, Oser, and Lovat, 2013)

In the same vein, if I had applied deontological ethics, the outcome may not have been the same. Deontological ethics says that the most ethical decision is the one that follows the set rules and regulations in place. (Heinrichs, Oser, and Lovat, 2013) Thus, applying deontological ethics to this situation would have left me without a clear direction, as there is no law saying that

you must try to defend a victim of violent crime. (Holmes, 2013) Considering this, I believe that applying virtue ethics was the best way to go in this situation, and it resulted in the best outcomes.

## Conclusion

It is difficult to assess whether or not one's ethics are what they should be. Because of all the differing viewpoints on the nature of our existence, and one's role in society, there are numerous ethical perspectives that one can take on. It is important, in my opinion, that when one does decide on an ethical basis, that they stick to it in every situation and do what is most ethical, as this is what defines us as free-thinking and compassionate humans.