

Ethics Case Study: Rating Ethical Situations

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1 Instructions

Read carefully the situations described in Section 2, paragraphs *A* through *E* below.

1. Specifically state the key issue of ethical concern in each of the situations listed.
2. State from each of following ethical categories which best describes each situation sketched below: international, governmental, societal, religious, and personal.
3. Rate the ethical situations described in paragraphs *A* through *F* from least reprehensible to most reprehensible.
4. If you are working with a group, help the group rate the situations from best to worst by attempting group consensus.

2 Situations

- A. “On the evening of March 13, 1964, a young woman was assaulted and stabbed to death in front of her home in the Kew Gardens district of Queens, New York. The victim was twenty-eight years old. Her name was Kitty Genovese... [T]he events took place in the full view (and hearing) of most of the residents of the victim’s immediate neighborhood. Over thirty persons acknowledged, after the event, that they had observed what was going on. The murder itself took well over half an hour to accomplish, during which time the murderer took himself off for a brief interim and then returned some quarter of an hour later to complete the job. The victim’s screams were fully audible for the whole period she was under attack as were her cries for help during the period of the murder’s absence. But no one went to her aid.”¹
- B. “[John B.] Watson and a student of his, Rosalie Rayner, conducted what became one of the most famous experiments in the history of psychology, an attempt to produce a conditioned fear response in an eleven-month-old boy they called, in the report of their work, Albert B. . . . Watson paid a high price for what he had done in the course of the collaboration though not what he had done to Albert. He developed a mad passion for beautiful young Rosalie Rayner and begin an affair with her. He was seen around town with her, was away from home a great deal, and carelessly (or perhaps

¹Geoffrey Brennan and Loren E. Lomasky, *Democracy and Decision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 125.

by unconscious design) left in a pocket a passionate note from Rosalie that his wife, Mary, found. . . . Mary decided to sue for divorce. . . .”²

- C. “A forty-three-year-old seamstress who worked in a downtown Montgomery department store, Rosa Parks was on her way home from work on a December day. Loaded down by bags filled with her Christmas shopping, Rosa Parks boarded a city bus and moved to the back. . . . Finding no seats there, she took one toward the middle of the bus. When the driver picked up more white passengers, he called out . . . an order to vacate the white seats even if it meant standing. Mrs. Parks refused. . . . Unwilling to leave that seat, Rosa Parks was arrested for violating Montgomery’s transportation laws.”³
- D. “In early September 1997, Danny Yatom, the head of Mossad, arranged a special screening for Binyamin Netanyahu, who was then prime minister [of Israel]. The film, shot on the streets of Tel Aviv, presented the plan for the assassination of Khalid Mishal, the Head of Hamas’s political bureau in Amman. . . . Mishal was selected . . . because he made an articulate case of Hamas’s position, in a suit rather than clerical robes: “He was too credible as an emerging leader of Hamas, persuasive even. He had to be taken out.” One agent would shake a can of Coke and pop it open to distract Mishal while another would spray levofentanyl, a chemically modified painkiller, in his ear. . . . 48 hours later the drug would kill him, leaving no trace. . . . [A] blond, bearded man in sunglasses . . . squirted [the poison] into Mishal’s ear . . . As his aides rushed him to hospital, [Mishal] lost consciousness altogether.”⁴
- E. “A 34-year-old uninsured . . . man with a wound from a knife that penetrated his skull was denied emergency neurosurgery at a private hospital. Though the hospital began treatment in the emergency room and had complete neurosurgical facilities, the patient was refused further care. Following transfer to another facility (two other hospitals refused to accept him), the patient died.”⁵
- F. “Preachers, rabbis, priests . . . use religion to cloak and to support impersonal, wholesale [war]—and the preparation for it. They condone the intent to [kill] millions of people by clean-cut young men flying and aiming intricate machineries toward Euro-Asia zeroing in on cities full of human beings—young men who, two years before, were begging their fathers for the use of the family car for a Saturday-night date.”⁶

²Morton Hunt, *The Story of Psychology* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 259-60.

³Kenneth C. Davis, *Don’t Know Much About History* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 426.

⁴Adam Shatz, “Mishal’s Luck,” *London Review of Books* 31, no. 9 (14 May 2009), 15.

⁵Michael J. Holosko and Marvin D. Feit, *Health and Poverty* (New York: Haworth Press, 1997), 104.

⁶Adapted from C. W. Mills, *The Causes of World War Three* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958), 126.

3 Ratings and Justifications

Rating	Situation	Justification
Least Reprehensible <i>(by letter)</i>		
Most Reprehensible <i>(by letter)</i>		