Moral Lessons/ Questions (Can relate to Shooting an Elephant)

Moral- of or relating to principles of right and wrong in behaviour

A moral question is a question that has to do with the principles of right and wrong or gooness and badness of human behavior.

An example of a moral question might be:

Should I lie to my mother so that my brother can elope with his girlfriend?

A lie is considered bad behavior. But loyalty to one's brother is also considered good behavior. This is a moral dilemma that the asker must deal with. This is a complex question since it deals with more than one problem. In fact, it might be dealing with 4 seperate moral questions. A lie, loyalty to one's mother, loyalty to one's brother and whether or not eloping is a good idea. The asker has to deal with all of this on a moral level and weigh the good and bad of everything.

Moral situations are tricky because they are often subjective. Perhaps the mother is not a kind person and is purposefully trying to stop the marriage out of selfish reasons. Then again, maybe the eloping brother is selfish and doesn't know what he is getting into and is in fact marrying a woman who wants to take advantage of him. Few things are as simple as the question itself.

A simple moral question might be something like:

Is it good to kill during war?

Again, this is a subjective question. Your country would say it is a good thing. Your enemy might have a different opinion of course. Pacifists would argue that killing is never good. Some people say that killing for a good cause is the only time that it is acceptable.

Moral questions are never easy to answer. This is because the definition of good and bad and right and wrong are so hard to understand. These definitions can change so quickly depending upon perspective. That is why if you are ever faced with a moral question or dilemma, then I suggest you think long and hard if given the time and get as much information as you can. But in the end you must make up your own mind.

**A Few Moral Dilemmas**

**A Callous Passerby**

Roger Smith, a quite competent swimmer, is out for a leisurely stroll. During the course of his walk he passes by a deserted pier from which a teenage boy who apparently cannot swim has fallen into the water. The boy is screaming for help. Smith recognizes that there is absolutely no danger to himself if he jumps in to save the boy; he could easily succeed if he tried. Nevertheless, he chooses to ignore the boy's cries. The water is cold and he is afraid of catching a cold -- he doesn't want to get his good clothes wet either. "Why should I inconvenience myself for this kid," Smith says to himself, and passes on. Does Smith have a moral obligation to save the boy? If so, should he have a legal obligation ["Good Samaritan" laws] as well?

**The Last Episode of *Seinfeld***, not in Grassian.

The cast of *Seinfeld*, Jerry, Elaine, George, and Kramer, have a layover in a small New England town. They witness a robbery in broad daylight. The robber has his hand in his pocket, and the victim shouts that the man has a gun. As soon as the robber runs away, a policeman appears on the scene; but instead of pursuing the robber, he arrests Jerry, Elaine, George, and Kramer for having violated the new "Good Samaritan" law of the town. Since the four of them spent the time of the robbery making fun of the victim, who was fat, their role in the matter doesn't look good, and at their trial everyone who has ever felt wronged by them in the course of the television series testifies against them. They are convicted. Is this just? What were they supposed to do during the robbery? Should they have rushed the robber, just in case he didn't really have a gun?

**The Principle of Psychiatric Confidentiality**, cf. the 1997 movie, *Devil's Advocate*, and the 1993 movie, *The Firm*, on confidentiality between lawyers and clients.

You are a psychiatrist and your patient has just confided to you that he intends to kill a woman. You're inclined to dismiss the threat as idle, but you aren't sure. Should you report the threat to the police and the woman or should you remain silent as the principle of confidentiality between psychiatrist and patient demands? Should there be a law that compels you to report such threats?

**The Partiality of Friendship**

Jim has the responsibility of filling a position in his firm. His friend Paul has applied and is qualified, but someone else seems even more qualified. Jim wants to give the job to Paul, but he feels guilty, believing that he ought to be impartial. That's the essence of morality, he initially tells himself. This belief is, however, rejected, as Jim resolves that friendship has a moral importance that permits, and perhaps even requires, partiality in some circumstances. So he gives the job to Paul. Was he right?

**The Overcrowded Lifeboat**

In 1842, a ship struck an iceberg and more than 30 survivors were crowded into a lifeboat intended to hold 7. As a storm threatened, it became obvious that the lifeboat would have to be lightened if anyone were to survive. The captain reasoned that the right thing to do in this situation was to force some individuals to go over the side and drown. Such an action, he reasoned, was not unjust to those thrown overboard, for they would have drowned anyway. If he did nothing, however, he would be responsible for the deaths of those whom he could have saved. Some people opposed the captain's decision. They claimed that if nothing were done and everyone died as a result, no one would be responsible for these deaths. On the other hand, if the captain attempted to save some, he could do so only by killing others and their deaths would be his responsibility; this would be worse than doing nothing and letting all die. The captain rejected this reasoning. Since the only possibility for rescue required great efforts of rowing, the captain decided that the weakest would have to be sacrificed. In this situation it would be absurd, he thought, to decide by drawing lots who should be thrown overboard. As it turned out, after days of hard rowing, the survivors were rescued and the captain was tried for his action. If you had been on the jury, how would you have decided?

Mad Man

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?