

3/25/2020

TOK Day 53

Area of Knowledge: Ethics

Knowledge questions: How do we decide what is right? What are the different approaches to ethical knowledge?

1. Do Now: The Corona Virus pandemic is causing disruptions around the world but particularly in hospitals. The main reason for the extreme measures being taken (closing schools and nonessential businesses, social distancing etc.) is obviously to avoid the spread of the virus. Beyond that, though, is that those who contract the virus with serious symptoms often require the help of a ventilator to help them breathe while their bodies recover. These are large and expensive machines. Hospitals are only equipped with enough ventilators for normal circumstances. They are not set up for a pandemic in which many people will get sick at the same time and require the aid of such devices. Though it hasn't happened yet, one ethical question hospitals have to figure out is, if there are more sick people than there are ventilators, who will get to use the ventilators and who won't? In other words, whose life will be saved and whose won't?

I want you to brainstorm some of the different ways that we could make this decision. What factors should doctors consider? Come up with as many different ways to approach this as possible, don't worry about how practical or good each idea is, just come up with a variety of ideas.

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2. Directions: Read and annotate the following article.

Who Should Be Saved First? Experts Offer Ethical Guidance (adapted)

Well before rationing caused by coronavirus, protocols were established about “who lives and who dies.”

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How do doctors and hospitals decide who gets potentially lifesaving treatment and who doesn't?

A lot of thought has been given to just such a predicament, well before critical shortages from the coronavirus pandemic.

In layman's terms, a utilitarianism approach would maximize overall health by directing care toward those most likely to benefit the most from it. If you had only one ventilator, it would go to someone more likely to survive instead of someone deemed unlikely to do so. It would not go to whichever patient was first admitted, and it would not be assigned via a lottery system. (If there are ties within classes of people, then a lottery — choosing at random — is what ethicists recommend.)

In addition, they say prioritizing the health of front-line health care workers is necessary to maximize the number of lives saved. We may face a shortage of such workers, and [some have already fallen ill](#).

In a [recent article](#) in The New York Times, a British researcher said, “There are arguments about valuing the young over the old that I am personally very uncomfortable with,” adding, “Is a 20-year-old really more valuable than a 50-year-old, or are 50-year-olds actually more useful for your economy, because they have experience and skills that 20-year-olds don't have?”

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Dr. Emanuel disagreed with that interpretation: “The 20-year-old has lived fewer years of life; they have been deprived of a full life. If they have roughly comparable prognoses, then the fact that the 20-year-old has not had a full life counts in their favor for getting scarce resources.”

“Key is to be transparent about the principles, save as many lives as possible, and ensure that there are no considerations such as money, race, ethnicity or political pull that go into allocation of lifesaving resources such as ventilators,” said Dr. Tom Frieden, president and C.E.O. of Resolve to Save Lives and former director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Answer: The disagreement discussed above asks whether the healthcare system should save a 20 year old or 50 year old. Assuming both are healthy, whose life should be prioritized?

3. Homework

We never properly wrapped up our art unit. I want you to work on writing a journal focused on a topic related to art. I want you to submit it to Turnitin as we have in the past. Here are some reminders about what to do in a journal. I will also post a good example of an art journal from one of my students last year.

In your response, you should:

- briefly explain what it is that you are responding to.
- pose a relevant *knowledge question* and include a discussion of that question.
- discuss the connections to TOK. You can discuss the *implications* of your thoughts or talk about *perspective, personal or shared knowledge, culture, the definitions of truth, knowledge, or belief.*
- Connect your discussion back to your real life situation.

Briefly discuss a specific real life situation → Raise knowledge question → Discuss knowledge question → connect discussion back to real life situation

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- write around 600 words per entry.
- submit to turnitin.