Making ethical decisions

A How do we decide what is right or wrong, and which ethical approaches can help us make good decisions? The Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University in California has created a framework based on five approaches to ethical thinking. They have been developed by ethical thinkers and philosophers over thousands of years.

B The first approach is called the utilitarian approach and asks: if I choose this outcome, will it benefit the most people or do the least harm? It is used by politicians to stand by decisions, such as those made during a war. For example, if a country decided to attack another country which was threatening its security, then some people would die but more could be saved.

C There is also the rights approach, which protects people’s right to have freedom of choice, to be told the truth, to have privacy and not to be injured. It is often considered when caring for vulnerable people. An example might be a disabled man who wants to live in his own home with help from carers. This might be more complicated than placing him in a home for disabled people, but it would protect his right to privacy and freedom of choice.

D We must also consider the fairness approach, which says that all people should be treated equally or based on the same standard. This approach is used by businesses to calculate employees’ salaries, or by parents choosing Christmas presents for their children!

E The above approaches are all obvious considerations when trying to make the right decision. Perhaps less obvious is the common good approach, which is about protecting community life. This states that the relationships connecting people within a community are good in themselves. If a council has to distribute money to benefit a town in the best way, it will use this approach to consider options.

F Finally, the virtue approach states that people should make decisions with honesty, compassion, generosity and fairness. The approach is often used by employers. Imagine that an employee has become unreliable, repeatedly turning up late due to her husband’s illness. If her employer sacks her, he will be able to find a better worker, but what about the consequences for the woman and her husband? What sort of person will the employer be if he sacks her?

G This framework doesn’t always give clear answers, as we don’t all share the same views on ethical issues. However, it is a useful tool that can help us to make the right decision in a variety of different situations.

Use of English

3 Complete the second sentence so that it has the same meaning as the first sentence.

1 Jack won’t be independent unless he lives at home.
   If Jack _____________________________.

2 Unless you stop being rude, you’ll get into trouble.
   You’ll _____________________________.

3 We don’t feel safe on the streets because there isn’t a good police force.
   If there _____________________________.

4 Ben sacked Alice and he feels very bad now.
   If Ben _____________________________.

4 Translate the following words into your own language.

1 stand by ____________________________
2 rely on ____________________________
3 fairness ____________________________
4 loyalty ____________________________

Writing

5 Write an opinion essay with the following title: ‘War is never justified. Do you agree?’ Write 100–150 words.
Unit 5  Exam practice

Listening

1  Look at the bold words from the radio interview. Match them to their correct meanings A–E. Then listen to the radio interview and check your answers.

1  a poor or struggling community ...

2  An example of this is visiting orphanages ...

3  tourists spend a few days cuddling children ...

4  ... keep all the profits ...

5  ... check this before you sign up for anything.

A Holding in your arms to show affection.
B Homes for children whose parents are dead.
C Trying very hard to do something when you’re surrounded by problems.
D The money that you make in business after paying all the costs involved.
E Commit yourself to something.

2  Read questions 1–8. Then listen to the radio interview and choose the correct answers.

1  Voluntourism is the practice of:
A  going on holiday after you’ve volunteered in a poor country.
B  arranging holidays for people from poor or struggling communities.
C  helping poor communities in other countries by volunteering.

2  Some people criticize voluntourism because:
A  only wealthy people can afford to do it.
B  it isn’t good for the volunteer.
C  it often fails to help the communities in need.

3  Martin says that projects such as teacher training or education in farming techniques:
A  often fail because poor communities are not self-reliant.
B  never last long enough.
C  can only work if the volunteers have the necessary language and skills.

4  Short visits to orphanages:
A  may be a nice experience for the tourists, but don’t help the children who live there.
B  provide a positive experience for the children living in them.
C  are often unpopular with tourists because they’re too upsetting.

5  Martin advises volunteers:
A  not to travel with tour companies that use local workers.
B  to find out how much of their money will go to the community.
C  to avoid companies that have long-standing relationships with poor communities.

6  Helen says that the building project in Bolivia is:
A  a new school for local children.
B  a new college to train local builders.
C  a new language school for tourists who want to learn Spanish.

7  The tour company Volar uses local workers because:
A  they’re cheaper to employ.
B  they have better skills than British builders.
C  they have the best understanding of what their community needs.

8  Volar arranges for:
A  some of its profits to go to the community.
B  money needed for the projects to be paid directly to the community.
C  its volunteers to stay in the cheapest accommodation possible.

Speaking

1  Look at the photos and answer the questions.

A  B

1  Describe what the people are doing in the photos, the reasons why they are doing this and the locations they are in. In photo A we can see all of the people involved in the situation. In photo B we can only see one of them. Who might he be taking a photo of?

2  How do the people you can see in the photos benefit from each other? In what situations does their relationship with each other come under pressure and who would you defend?

2  With a partner, prepare and practise a role-play in which you are considering the following question: Do celebrities have any right to complain about a lack of privacy? Use the language of exchanging ideas below.

Exchanging ideas

Do you think that ... ?
Would you agree that ... ?
One possibility might be ... 
Maybe we should consider the fact that ...
I would also suggest that ...
That’s a valid point.
I’m not sure that’s really relevant.
You’re right about that.