

Questionable Reasoning in Ethics Bowl

Directions:

- Read through the following case and discussion question.
- Then, on the back of this paper, read through the example presentation made by a team from Pinecrest Academy.
- You have 2 goals:
Goal #1: Annotate and define the spots where Pinecrest Academy uses *questionable reasoning* to defend their argument.

Goal #2: Pretend you are on a team going up against Pinecrest. Brainstorm and write a respectful, non-combative commentary response that deepens the response of the Pinecrest team and provides them with 2-3 meaningful questions to consider.

Forget Me Not

2022-2023 Regional Case Set

Joan has been married to Roy for 60 years. They have three children and seven grandchildren. While their marriage had its ups and downs, Joan and Roy loved each other, and remained deeply committed to each other throughout this time. Roy, unfortunately, has developed Alzheimer's. While Joan and the rest of his family provided care for him for a number of years, Roy's Alzheimer's has progressed to the point where he no longer recognizes them. Due to the severity of Roy's condition, Joan placed him in a nursing home. Roy settled into his new home, and is well cared for. Joan visits him regularly, but Roy rarely recognizes her. These visits are often emotionally difficult for her. Even when Roy is having a good day, and is relatively lucid, she is forced to confront the way in which their relationship has irrevocably changed.

Through the painful process, Joan encountered an old friend of hers, Dennis. Dennis has been supportive of Joan and her family throughout this time. Dennis, after a few months, confessed his love for Joan, and Joan has started to realize her feelings for him as well. Joan, however, feels conflicted. She still loves her husband, and feels as though she still owes it to him to remain faithful. Even though Joan recognizes that their marriage will never be the same, divorce feels out of the question. In her mind, this would be like abandoning Roy. She feels guilty for developing feelings for Dennis because of the marriage vows she made to Roy.

Her children think she should proceed to date Dennis because Roy would not know and it could give her a better, happier life. Some of her siblings and in-laws, however, do not feel the same way. They argue that Roy is still her husband and deserves to be treated as such until his death. They feel it would be disrespectful to Roy if she dated another man, and Roy has done nothing to deserve that disrespect.

COMPETITION QUESTION:

1. What moral obligations, if any, does Joan have to Roy at this point? What are these obligations based on?

Goal #1: Annotate and define the spots where Pinecrest Academy uses *questionable reasoning* to defend their argument. The first example is done for you.

Goal #2: Pretend you are on a team going up against Pinecrest. Brainstorm and write a respectful, non-combative commentary response that deepens the response of the Pinecrest team and provides them with 2-3 meaningful questions to consider.

Primary Presentation Transcript From 2023 Regional Ethics Bowl

Team A: Pinecrest Academy

First, we would like to thank the judges and Team B for being here to discuss this case with us today. The question posed was “What moral obligations, if any, does Joan have to Roy at this point? What are these obligations based on?”

False comparison.

We believe that Joan has no moral obligations to Roy. Think about it. Alzheimer's disease slowly erases marriage just like deleting a phone contact erases a friendship. Also, most people would agree that relationships only matter when both people remember them, so Joan's lack of responsibility here should be obvious. It just makes more sense that forgetting someone cancels out your responsibility to them.

If Joan were expected to still be responsible for Roy, this would eventually lead to a world where no one would ever feel safe to move on from any past marriage. A world like that seems unfair. Joan should completely abandon all obligations to Roy, or she will be trapped in a life of endless sacrifice with no hope of happiness.

Some people claim that marriage vows still matter even when one spouse has dementia. But those people are just too emotional to think logically about the issue. Their position also suggests that Joan should just go on being unhappy forever—how is that the right thing for her to do? This view is totally unreasonable.

Also, Roy doesn't seem too upset in his current condition, so will he even notice if Joan becomes more distant? Probably not. The fact that Roy seems to be forgetting their relationship clearly shows that it must not have been meaningful in the first place. So, with that said, Joan isn't wrong for moving on.

In conclusion, our team believes that Joan has no moral obligations to Roy. As soon as Roy forgot Joan, it automatically ended all commitments to him. People need to be free to move on like Joan. If not, they'll end up in miserable, loveless relationships filled with guilt. If Joan is wise, she'll put herself first knowing that she's doing the right thing.

OUR COMMENTARY: