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Host: Welcome to our talk show, “Campus Connections.” Today our guest is Muna Assiri, a professor in the philosophy department. Thank you for coming.

Prof. Muna Assiri: My pleasure.

Host: On this show, we interview professors in different fields and Professor Assiri, you are a professor of ethics. So, our first question is: What exactly is the field of ethics? What do you study?

Prof. Assiri: Ethics is a set of rules that we can use to decide what is right and wrong.

Host: Can you give an example?

Prof. Assiri: Take the issue of stealing. Let me ask you—do you think stealing is right or wrong? Is it right or wrong to take something from a store without paying?

Host: Wrong, of course.

Prof. Assiri: So that’s an ethical rule: “Stealing is wrong.”

Host: OK.

Prof. Assiri: OK. But let’s say you have a child. Your child is very sick and needs medicine. She needs medicine, or she’s going to die. OK? But the medicine, it’s very expensive. And you don’t have enough money. So is it right or wrong to go to the store and steal the medicine? In order to save your child?

Host: Well, I think I’d steal the medicine.

Prof. Assiri: Why? Why is that OK? If stealing is wrong?

Host: Well, it’s wrong to steal. But it’s worse to let my child die.

Prof. Assiri: OK then. So your ethical rule has changed because the situation is not so simple. The situation is more complicated. Now your rule is this: “Stealing is wrong *except* if my child is dying. Then it’s OK for me to steal.”

Host: You’re right—it changed.

Prof. Assiri: So that’s an example of the kind of issue we discuss in ethics.

Host: That’s so thought-provoking ...

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Speaker: Every day, we have to make many ethical decisions—many decisions about right and wrong. Let’s look at a real-world example: Maybe this has happened to you? Let’s say that you are buying something in the store. And the clerk at the store makes a mistake and gives you too much change.

What do you do? You have an ethical decision: Do you keep the money? Or do you tell the clerk about the mistake and give the money back? Interesting situation, hm? Well, through this example, we can see that ethics is something we can use in our everyday lives ...

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Professor Robert Myers: E01 Every day, we have to make decisions—we have to ask ourselves, What’s the right thing to do and what’s the wrong thing to do? But how do we make these decisions? How do we know what’s right and wrong? The study of ethics can give us some answers. Today I’d like to talk about two different approaches, two different ways to make ethical decisions: the rights approach and the utilitarian approach. So, first I’ll explain each approach, and then we’ll see how these work in real-world examples. **(COACHING TIP 1) E02** First let’s talk about the rights approach. We use the idea of rights to talk about many ethical problems. This idea of rights comes originally from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher in the 18th century. The principle says that each individual has the freedom to make choices, and that other people must respect those choices. **E03** Let’s take the right to free speech as an example. Freedom of speech means two things: first, that I have the right to say whatever I want, and second, that other people must respect my right to speak. **(COACHING TIP 2) E04** So according to the rights approach, an ethical action must respect an individual’s choices—the power of the individual to make his or her own decisions. To decide if an action is ethical using the rights approach, we must always ask: How does this action affect the individual’s freedom to make choices? **E04** Now, let’s look at another approach—the utilitarian approach. That’s u-t-i-l-i-t-a-r-i-a-n. The utilitarian approach was made popular in the 19th century by British philosopher John Stuart Mill. In this approach, the most important thing is not individual rights. The most important thing is making the world a better place. So here an ethical action is one that creates the greatest amount of good. **E05** Let’s take, for example, paying taxes. The government collects taxes from individual people. Now, most people don’t like paying taxes because they have less money to spend on other things. However, taxes help the community as a whole, paying for things like hospitals, roads, schools, parks—things that benefit everyone. So, even though paying taxes is bad for some people individually, it’s good for the majority—for most people in the community. So to decide if an action is ethical following the utilitarian approach, we must ask: What action will cause the

greatest good for the most people? **E06** Now, let's take a real-world example and look at how to make a decision using these two approaches—that is, the rights approach and the utilitarian approach. Let's look at the question of public smoking. Starting in the late 1990s, this became an issue in many places when smoking was banned in office buildings, schools, restaurants, and so on. The question is, how do we make a decision about whether to ban smoking or not? **E07** When you look at the problem from the rights approach, we have to ask: How does smoking in public affect individual rights? And we have to look at the rights of two groups of people: smokers and nonsmokers. So, first let's look at the rights of smokers. Smokers will say that they should be free to smoke wherever they want, and that other people should respect that right, even if they don't like it. But, what about nonsmokers? Nonsmokers say that they should be free to breathe clean air, and that smokers should respect that right. Smokers shouldn't force people to breathe their cigarette smoke. This, however, shows us one of the problems of using the rights approach because when you have two groups, how do you decide whose rights are more important: smokers' or nonsmokers'? **(COACHING TIP 3) E08** For another point of view, let's take the utilitarian approach. Following that approach, we have to ask: What creates the greatest amount of good? Allowing smoking in public places? Or banning it? So, what's good about allowing smoking in public places? Well, smokers will be happy. But, that's pretty much it. But it causes a lot of harm. **E09** So overall, you can argue that the ethical choice is to impose a ban on smoking in public places because it creates the greater good: Public places will be healthier, and we'll save money on health costs because fewer people will get sick. Through this example, we can see the differences between looking at an ethical problem from the rights approach and from the utilitarian approach. **E10** So, until next time, I'd like you to think of some other real-life examples and consider them in the context of the two ethical decision-making approaches we discussed today. **(COACHING TIP 4)** That's all.

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- 2 Freedom of speech means two things: first, that I have the right to say whatever I want, and second, that other people must respect my right to speak.
- 3 To decide if an action is ethical using the rights approach, we must always ask: How does this action affect the individual's freedom to make choices?
- 4 The utilitarian approach was made popular in the 19th century by British philosopher John Stuart Mill.

- 5 In this approach, the most important thing is not individual rights.
- 6 Now, most people don't like paying taxes because they have less money to spend on other things.
- 7 Now, let's take a real-world example and look at how to make a decision using these two approaches—that is, the rights approach and the utilitarian approach.
- 8 When you look at the problem from the rights approach, we have to ask: How does smoking in public affect individual rights?
- 9 This, however, shows us one of the problems of using the rights approach because when you have two groups, how do you decide whose rights are more important: smokers' or nonsmokers'?
- 10 Following that approach, we have to ask: What creates the greatest amount of good?

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Yhinny: You know, I'm still a little unclear on how the rights approach compares to the utilitarian approach.

May: Well, we're supposed to create our own example, so maybe that'll help?

Michael: OK, well, I've got an example: if we think about using cell phones while driving. So, from a rights approach, we would look at the rights of the person driving, yeah?

May: Uh-huh.

Qiang: Well, personally, I believe I should have the right to talk on the phone while I'm in my car. Because it's my car and my phone.

May: So, you're saying, you're like the smoker having the right to smoke wherever.

Qiang: Yeah, but there's a huge difference. I mean, talking on the phone doesn't really hurt anyone's health.

May: Oh!

Michael: Oh, I disagree!

Yhinny: I don't think so.

Michael: Drivers using cell phones have something like four times more accidents.

Qiang: Where'd you hear that?

Michael: I don't know, some government study or something.

Yhinny: OK. Anyway, what about the, the utilitarian side?

May: OK, well, lots of drivers pay more attention to their phone conversations than the road, which is dangerous, right?

Michael: Right. So society in general suffers.

May: Exactly.

Qiang: OK, OK! Cell phone use should be prohibited while driving.

[Phone rings.]

Yhinny: And in study groups!

Qiang: Sorry!