



New Jersey Middle School Ethics Bowl

Round 2, Case 1

(Adopting) A Dog's Purpose

Frankie has always wanted to adopt a dog but doesn't feel confident about having the time or money to properly care for a canine family member. Although Frankie could probably make time to run and play with a dog multiple times a week, for at least a few days a week Frankie would only have time to take the dog out to relieve itself. This wouldn't even approach the thirty minutes of daily exercise recommended as a bare minimum for most dogs and Frankie hates the idea of constantly feeling guilty about this. Frankie could afford to feed the dog and get it vaccinated but doesn't have much savings should unexpected medical expenses arise. Visits to the veterinarian for the most common ailments typically cost a few hundred dollars and it isn't unusual to spend \$1,000 or more for an emergency. Millions of animals are surrendered to shelters every year, many of whom are euthanized, and many of whom might have been kept by their families if affordable veterinary care were available. Frankie doesn't know how they would pay extra veterinary bills, but can't imagine choosing to bring a dog back to the shelter for lack of ability to afford veterinary care. Frankie doesn't want to have to make a hard decision like this. This makes adopting a dog seem like an irresponsible choice.

Sam is the proud parent of Ellie, an adopted shelter dog. Sam doesn't always have as much time to play with Ellie as they'd like but reasons Ellie is still better off bored living with Sam than she would be in a stressful shelter environment. Sam doesn't have a lot of extra money, and so doesn't take Ellie to the vet unless it is a true emergency. The owner of the house Sam rents won't allow pets inside, so Ellie lives in the back yard. Sam feels bad knowing Ellie gets cold and wet sometimes but can't seem to find an affordable house without these kinds of restrictions. Worrying about Ellie can be stressful and Sam often feels guilty about not being able to better care for her. Still, Sam can't imagine waiting for perfect conditions to adopt a dog when there are millions who need a home. In Sam's opinion, people like Frankie are selfish because by avoiding responsibility for a needy dog they force others (like shelter workers and volunteers) to shoulder a heavier burden, and the dogs are probably no better off.

Question: Is it ethical to own a pet if you can only provide the bare minimum of care?