

Clifford Answer

*Below is the **ideal** answer for the Clifford question. It is possible to earn full credit falling short of the ideal answer. Items in red I did not expect anyone to write but incorporate various parts of the overall material.*

Clifford is an evidentialist which means belief formation results from seeking evidence. Belief is a step in the pursuit of knowledge, a step in moving from ignorance to knowing. Without evidence a person has not advanced in the process of knowledge seeking.

The Burundi people “believe” that albino organs and limbs, like rabbit feet and horseshoes for many Americans, are lucky. The Burundi people have no evidence to support such a belief. What evidence could be collected to support luck? **Even if something positive happened after acquiring an albino limb that does not support the claim that the object is lucky as it could just be a false cause fallacy. Albino limbs, like rabbit feet and horseshoes, are the result of culture more than an actual property of “luck”.** The claim that albino limbs are lucky is not formed as a result of acquiring evidence. **Besides, luck is subjective; what is lucky for one person may not be lucky for another person.** Therefore, the claim is epistemically unjustified. The claim is an opinion expressing a cultural preference not a belief claim that is objective.

Beliefs are also guides to action. Some beliefs are private, leading to action for the individual holding the belief only. Other beliefs are public leading to action in others or actions that effect others. The belief about albino limbs is public in that it leads to action in others, people collecting and selling items deemed lucky. Just like with rabbit feet, since people opine (not believe) that they are lucky, others raise and kill rabbits selling their feet as lucky charms. It is immoral to collect albino limbs, **and rabbit feet and horseshoes**, as lucky charms not because the albinos are being murdered (which is immoral for other reasons) but because the “beliefs” were not formed as a result of supporting evidence.

Forming beliefs without relying upon supporting evidence damages a person’s character in three ways: It denies reason. The person is not acting rationally, thinking critically. In doing so, the person has no method available for assessing true from false claims especially if someone is actively trying to deceive her. **It is like snake oil salesmen or trusting a used car salesman without investigating the car’s history on your own.** If it is acceptable for any one person to form beliefs not as a result of evidence then it is acceptable for everyone else to do so, no one is special. The dangers and harms then spread throughout society. **Albinos are treated as an out-group**, and the rest of society may try to murder them in order to acquire items that supposedly bring positive effects. All of society’s knowledge base is corrupted with false, unsupported beliefs leading to public actions. Acting on false beliefs usually results in harm or at least failure. Such “beliefs” are irresponsible; it is negligent to form beliefs without evidence. It violates what we expect of rational people. **It is like passing a law without any evidence for the law.** Moral beliefs or

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beliefs with moral consequences not formulated as a result of seeking evidence are also morally unjustified.

(FYI: France passed a law prohibiting aliens from landing in wine vineyards. Rick Santorum voted against stem cell research based on the opinions of his 11-year-old daughter and stood in front of the Senate trying to convince them to do the same, which they did.)