Bebop, Rocksteady, & Professor Krang
An Honor Council Academic Trial
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Abstract Discussion Times:
Tuesday, February 3rd at 12:30 and 6:30, Sunken Lounge

Introduction

Bebop and Rocksteady were students in Professor Krang's class. Professor Krang gave a two-part exam; the first part was given in class, the second part was an un-timed, open-note, take-home exam. After receiving Bebop and Rocksteady's take-home exams, the professor noticed striking similarities between the two. After consulting two of his colleagues, who agreed that collaboration was likely, Professor Krang confronted Bebop and Rocksteady.

Statements

Professor Krang's Statement

Professor Krang said that he had encouraged collaboration on assignments throughout the course. He knew that Bebop and Rocksteady were friends, and had noticed parallels between the two students' work. This led him to issue a warning to both students about excessive collaboration during the semester. Professor Krang's suspicion of cheating in this particular incident stemmed from the fact that the two students chose the same questions, made many of the same mistakes, and received the same grades on much of the exam. Krang consulted two departmental colleagues, who both corroborated his suspicion. He went on to outline the parallels between the two exams. On section 1, the two students made the same mistake, and were the only two people in the class to do so. On section 2, the two exams had three identical errors; the professor allowed for the possibility that any one of these three mistakes could have been made independently without collaboration, but making all three in succession was extremely unlikely. On section 4, the students both used a strange approach that Krang had never seen in his years of teaching. On section 6, the professor noted similar usage of computer data required for the answer. On section 7, Krang noticed that Bebop and Rocksteady had used the same incorrect notation. The professor stated that with the evidence at hand, and given Bebop's poor performance on the in-class portion of the exam, there was some reason to believe specifically that Bebop had cheated off of Rocksteady, though this did not take the form of an explicit accusation. Professor Krang mentioned that this case was particularly important to him, because of his reliance on take home exams as a teaching tool.
Rocksteady’s Statement

Rocksteady re-read the personal statement she had submitted to Honor Council. In it, she noted that she and Bebop had taken a total of eleven courses together, that they lived together, and that they had studied extensively together, which Rocksteady said could explain similarities in their thought processes. She said one particular course she had taken with Bebop in the past could explain the similarities in their use of notation. Rocksteady said that she took the exam early on Saturday morning, with the exception of section 7, and she left the exam in a notebook on her desk until returning to complete it on Sunday night. She said that she felt confident that she could explain her performance on the exam, and provide previous assignments to help demonstrate that her reasoning on particular problems was consistent with her work throughout the semester. After being confronted by Professor Krang, she had informally confronted Bebop, who assured her that he had not looked at her exam in her absence. She also met with another professor with whom she and Bebop had taken two courses previously. This professor said that he would be willing to submit a personal statement that would testify to the two students’ strength of character and academic integrity.

Bebop’s Statement

Bebop said that he and Rocksteady had studied intensively together in the week preceding the exam. He had studied on Friday morning as a final review, then took the test on Friday afternoon and evening. He said that he had taught Rocksteady how to do the material presented in section 1 earlier in the week, that he had misread section 2, and that his mistakes on other sections of the exam could be explained by approaches taken on previous homework assignments throughout the semester. He felt confident that he could explicate his reasoning at the time of taking the exam.

Fact Finding I

Professor Krang mentioned that there had been an atmosphere of collaboration throughout the course, and the degree of difficulty of the material presented had led students to work together frequently. When the jury asked whether this atmosphere of collaboration could have explained the similarities between the two students’ exams, he responded that while his instructions on the issue of collaboration may have lacked lucidity, he still believed that Bebop and Rocksteady could not have arrived at the same solutions on the exam solely on the basis of their working together during the course. Bebop and Rocksteady presented previous homework assignments to the jury, and explained how the methods they had employed on their assignments were consistent with those employed on the exam. The two students said that they were convinced that their collaboration on homework throughout the course could fully justify their independent but strikingly similar conclusions on the exam.
Jury Deliberations I

The jury was more suspicious of Bebop than of Rocksteady, because of the latter’s detailed explanation of her reasoning on the exam, and because of the window of opportunity Bebop had to copy off of Rocksteady’s exam. Bebop’s answers to questions concerning particular parts of the exam seemed erratic and contradictory in places. However, since the jury was not well acquainted with the subject matter that had been presented, the jury felt that another fact-finding session was necessary to further investigate the matter.

Fact Finding II

The jury recalled the three parties, and asked them to explain the subject matter in more accessible terms. On section 4, Bebop said he had never known how to correctly do the problem, and had approached Professor Krang before the exam to seek help on that material. His meeting with the professor did not clarify the matter for Bebop, and his incorrect approach on the exam reflected that confusion. Rocksteady said that she had made the same mistake on the in-class part of the exam that she made on section 4, and because she had not gotten the in-class exam back yet, she assumed her logic was correct. Both Bebop and Rocksteady said they were bad with notation, and that through doing the homework together they had collaboratively developed an incorrect system of notation, which explained the identical notational errors on section 7. Professor Krang remained unconvinced by the students’ explanations, and steadfastly maintained that collaboration must have occurred.

Jury Deliberations II

The jury still felt uncomfortable absolving Bebop of any wrongdoing, but were by now completely convinced that Rocksteady had taken her exam independently due to her clear explanations of how she arrived at her answers on the test. However, the jury had to accept that there was still reasonable doubt regarding an Honor Code violation on the part of Bebop. The jury was moved by the professor’s unwavering belief that a violation had occurred, despite his students’ testimony to the contrary. The jury, however, did not believe that similarities between the two exams constituted incontrovertible evidence of a violation. The jury concluded that it was not in a position to come to a statement of guilt without irrefutable evidence to substantiate that guilt.

The jury reached unanimous consensus on the following statement:

Though there is validity in the professor’s concerns, the students’ circumstances and rules of prior collaboration led the jury to believe that a violation may have occurred, which cannot be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. The collaboration on notes while studying prior to the exam was within the bounds of the professor’s
instructions. This pre-exam preparation and collaboration compels the jury to end the case with no statement of violation.

The jury recommends the following:
1) That the professor be more explicit with his policy regarding collaboration in the future.
2) That the students and the professor work towards repairing the breach of trust that occurred between them.

Questions raised by this trial:

1) To what extent should a jury defer to a professor’s judgment when trying to determine whether a violation has occurred?
2) What is the role of a jury in uncovering the truth? To what extent should a jury “play detective,” and how much faith should a jury invest in the testimony of the confronted party?
3) What should the jury do when they are unable to comprehend the subject matter in question?