Alan Gewirth on Conflicts of Rights

1. What if A (agent A) is threatened by agent B that unless A coerces or does violence to R (recipient) agent B will then harm agent A? A should not harm B.
2. What should A do if, in order to act in accord with his own right to basic well-being, he must violate B’s right to basic well-being? A should not harm B.
3. What if A can save R’s life without endangering his own life? A should save R.
4. What if A can strive to save R’s life but only with great endangerment to A’s own life?

A need not save R but may choose to do so.

1. What should A (for example, a country which is a democracy) do if, in order to act in accord with his (or the country’s citizens) own right to basic well-being (for example, health), he has to violate R’s right to nonsubtractive well-being (for example, raise taxes on those with higher levels of income or who own large amounts of property)?

A should raise taxes on those with higher levels of income or who own large amounts of property in order to act in accord with his (or the country’s citizens) own right to basic well-being (for example, health).

1. What should A do if, in order to act in accord with his own right to nonsubtractive well-being, (for example, A’s property)he has to violate R’s right to basic well-being (for example, R’s life)? A should not violate R’s right.
2. What should A do if, in order to act in accord with his own right to free exercise of choice, he has to violate R’s right to one of the levels of well-being (basic, nonsubtractive, and additive)? For example, what if, in order to avoid being imprisoned, A must kill R in order to remain able to have free choice? (What if R is an innocent bystander?) A should not violate R here unless R is an unjust attacker.
3. What if A, in order to save R, must let B drown? (or let B starve?)

A ought to save at least one and, if possible, both.

1. What should A do if, in order to act in accord with a nonsubtractive right of R, he has to violate a nonsubtractive right of another agent S? For example, in order to avoid lying to R (who has asked him whether S has had an abortion), A would have to break his promise to S (whom he has promised that he will not reveal that she has had an abortion)? Assume first that R is a comparative stranger. Next case: assume that R is a medical doctor concerned with S’s health. First case: A should lie; second case: A should tell the truth.
2. What should A (a country) do, if in order to act in accord with a basic right of R (health, for example), he has to violate a nonsubtractive right of S (have higher taxes on S)? A should have higher taxes on S. For example, in order to prevent R from being murdered, he has to lie to S. A should lie. Next case, if A needs to steal a loaf of bread from S in order to feed her child R? As last resort, A should steal.
3. What should A do if he is confronted with a choice between harming one person and harming twelve? In this tragic choice, A should choose to avoid the greater harm.