

## “The Cider House Rules”

Read the article and the respond to the constructed response questions below; please follow the directions, as you will have to email your response.

*Director: Lasse Hallström*

*Book author / Screenwriter: John Irving*

*Released: 1999*

The first part of the story takes place at the orphanage of St. Cloud’s in rural Maine. St. Cloud’s is a somewhat gloomy place. The introductory images of the place show us the muddy yard of the small railroad station, a dark landscape covered by an early snow, and the somewhat dilapidated Victorian buildings of the orphanage and clinic that could easily serve as the location for a conventional horror movie. By voice-over we are informed that this is a place of abandoned children and unhappily pregnant women. Once in a while visitors stop by—either to leave yet another orphan behind, or to adopt one. Neither event is necessarily a happy affair. Women who leave an infant behind are often tortured by contradictory feelings, and when potential adoption parents walk along the row of youngsters to make their selection, we see the desperation in the eyes of the children who try hard to look attractive, but who know that most likely they will not be the ones who are chosen.



If St. Cloud’s is a place that inspires the desire to leave, it is not because it is badly run. Dr. Wilbur Larch (Michael Caine) is in charge of the institution, and he administers it as best as he can within the limits of rather scarce resources—with the help of two nurses who are lovingly devoted to the children and their boss. These three staff members care sincerely for every youngster—comforting them in distress, consoling them in disappointments, and arranging for their entertainment and happiness whenever that is possible. Dr. Larch insists that the vulnerable orphans are treated as if they came from royal families. That is why he ends every day by cheerfully telling his wards: “Good-night you princes of Maine, you kings of New England.”

Work at the orphanage is exhausting. Some of the staff members do it out of a sense of moral duty, others, it seems, because they see their work as part of a religious life. Nurse Edna (Jane Alexander), for example, always ends the day with Cardinal Newman’s famous prayer: “O Lord, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in thy mercy grant us safe lodging and a holy rest, and peace is at last.” Dr. Larch, by contrast, seeks comfort and relaxation by occasionally inhaling moderate amounts of ether. To enhance the experience he sometimes plays a wobbly phonograph record of a song about some Ukulele Lady from Honolulu Bay. Nothing underlines the melancholy atmosphere of St. Cloud’s more vividly than this longing invocation of a distant, exotic paradise.

Early on we are also introduced to a special orphan: Homer Wells (Tobey Maguire). Homer is one of the orphans who could not be permanently placed with any parents. The first couple who adopted him brought him back because as a baby he “never made any sounds.” “Homer was too happy a child to ever cry,” Dr. Larch commented at the time. The second couple had to be relieved of Homer because with them he never stopped crying—because he was savagely beaten by them. After that Homer stayed at the orphanage, and a sort of father-son relationship developed between him and Dr. Larch. By the time the viewer gets to know Homer Wells he has become an accomplished young man who is thoroughly trained as an obstetrician and gynecologist, even though he never attended as much as a high school. “He has learned to take care of abandoned children and to deliver unwanted babies,” we are informed by voice-over, and he takes care of his share of bed time reading at night in the dormitory for boys. “Homer, if you are going to stay at St. Cloud’s,” Dr. Larch had told him, “I expect you to be of use.” Homer definitely is of use at the orphanage. He conscientiously fulfills his sundry duties, and the rest of the staff is as fond of him as the flock of the orphans.

While their relationship is generally one of respect and deep love, Homer and Dr. Larch disagree on one important point. Dr. Larch, as a result of having been confronted with the misery of countless women and orphans, is a physician who performs abortions if asked by women to do so—even though the procedure is strictly illegal at the time of the story, 1943-1945. Dr. Larch has encountered too many painful fatalities as a result of back-alley abortions, and he is too keenly aware of the fate of unwanted children, to obey a law that is followed by an uninformed and usually thoughtless majority. Homer, however, after once looking at a fetus that he was asked to carry to the incinerator, has decided not to engage in that practice. While Dr. Larch entirely concedes to him the right to make up his own mind about the matter, he nevertheless tries to persuade his student (and potential successor at the orphanage) to reconsider his stand. There is something like a running argument between the two. When once two women needed their attention—one for a delivery, the other for an abortion—Dr. Larch with a tinge of sarcastic reproach remarks to Homer: “I presume you’d prefer handling the delivery.” “All I said was that I don’t want to perform abortions. I have no argument with you performing them,” Homer remarks. “You know how to help these women,” Dr. Larch replies. “How can you not feel obligated to help them when they can’t get help anywhere else?”

Homer justifies himself by reminding Dr. Larch that abortions are illegal, and that he had not really asked to be taught the problematic procedure. “What else could I have shown you, Homer? The only thing I can teach you is what I know,” Dr. Larch tells him. Then he announces, as many times before, one of the basic principles by which he lives: “In every life you’ve got to be of use.” “Of use, of use, of use,” Homer mutters as he walks away.

One day the orphans find an extremely young and sick woman (Kaysey Berry) crouched beside the warm incinerator. She is shivering, delirious, and in great pain. When she is brought to the operating room, Dr. Larch can see that the girl is dying: Her uterus is punctured; there is an unexpelled fetus, and an object that looks like a crochet hook. She is suffering from acute peritonitis. Before she loses consciousness she informs them that someone who had pretended to be a doctor had attempted an abortion.

“Homer, I want you to see this,” Dr. Larch tells his student. Homer gets sick at the sight of the suffering girl and the result of the botched abortion. “If she had come to you four months ago and asked for a simple D and C, what would you have decided to do?” Dr. Larch shouts at him. “Nothing? This is what

doing nothing gets you, Homer. It means that somebody else is going to do the job—some moron who doesn't know how!" For a moment Homer seems shaken in his principled conviction, but there is no indication that he is changing his mind.

While they are burying the girl in the orphanage's cemetery, Buster (Kieran Culkin), one of the orphans who helps with the digging, asks: "What did she die of?" "She died of secrecy, she died of ignorance..." Dr. Larch rants. After a while he adds for the benefit of Homer: "If you expect people to be responsible for their children, you have to give them the right to decide whether they want to have children or not. Wouldn't you agree?" "How about expecting people to be responsible enough to control themselves to begin with?" Homer replies. "How about this child?" Dr. Larch shoots back, pointing to the coffin. "Do you expect her to be responsible?" "I don't mean her. I am talking about ... adults," Homer replies. "You know who I mean."

When they get back to the orphanage they meet a handsome young couple who have just arrived: Candy (Charlize Theron) and Wally (Paul Rudd). They are here to get Candy an abortion. Their appealing appearance and their luxurious convertible remind Homer of a life that he has never lived, and that occasionally he dreams about. During the hours of the couple's stay Homer decides to leave the orphanage, and to start a new existence somewhere "in the world." He has never laid eyes on the ocean; he has, in fact, never left St. Cloud's since the failed adoption attempts. Wally and Candy agree to give him a ride to the coast, where they live.

Homer's sudden decision comes as a shock to the orphans, many of whom feel abandoned by him. For some it even feels like a betrayal. For Dr. Larch Homer's departure is so painful that he is unable to see his student to the car. To assuage his disappointment Nurse Angela (Kathy Baker) has to point out to him that this was bound to happen one day: Homer is a young man who has to find his own life and station in the world. Suppressing his tears Dr. Larch insists that at this point Homer is still just "a boy."

The second part of the story depicts Homer's new life as a picker in the apple orchards of Wally's mother. He lives in the cider house, together with the regular black pickers who migrate from the South to Maine every year. The arrangement is unusual for the time. "I believe we are making history," Mr. Rose (Delroy Lindo), the crew boss, remarks as he welcomes the only white picker to the cider house community.

When it is discovered that Homer is the only one in the cider house who can read, he is asked by one of the hands to read aloud a set of typewritten rules that are pinned to a post in the bunkroom. Homer reads that there is no smoking in bed, and that persons who have consumed alcohol are not to operate the cider press. The pickers laugh at the rules. Some of them are smoking in bed while listening to Homer's reading, and they all find the rules "outrageous." Before Homer can continue his reading, Mr. Rose gruffly tells him to stop it: "They aren't our rules. We didn't write them. I don't see no reason to read them."

While Homer learns during the next weeks, under the guidance of Mr. Rose, to be a diligent apple picker, a warm friendship develops between him and Candy and Wally. Wally, however, is scheduled to fly 24 B Liberator planes between India and China; he has volunteered for this especially dangerous service in the Army Air Corps out of a sense of adventure. When he finally leaves for Asia, the relationship between Homer and Candy intensifies. "I am not good at being alone," Candy remarks.

“Why did Wally volunteer?” It is only a matter of time before Homer and Candy become sexually intimate.

Homer enjoys his new life. In spite of being considerably “overqualified” as an apple picker, he is happier at the orchards than he has ever been before. He keeps up a correspondence with Dr. Larch, who urges him to come back to the orphanage—because at St. Cloud’s he has a moral obligations to be useful, and because he would have significantly more fulfilling work among the needy women and children than among the apple trees. But Homer is deeply in love where he is; and he seems to have lost all desire to work as a doctor.

There are important developments at St. Cloud’s. The medical board that supervises the institution is intent on finding another doctor for the orphanage. Dr. Larch senses correctly that this new doctor will eventually be his replacement. Some board members want a doctor who adheres to a more Christian code of ethics than the present free spirit in charge. Although not mentioned directly, the abortion issue looms large in the back of some board members’ minds.

Dr. Larch handles the situation in his own way. He has produced a set of false records that will one day provide Homer Wells with enough diplomas and recommendations to make it possible for him to assume the top position at the orphanage. Dr. Homer Wells, according to these records, is a highly accomplished obstetrician who at present works as a Christian missionary in India. Dr. Larch presents these records to the assembled board, but also pretends that he does not like the holder of these diplomas. He knows very well that his very opposition to Homer Wells as a candidate for the position will prompt the board to overrule him. At the end of Dr. Larch’s machinations nothing is needed for Homer to take over at St. Cloud’s except his willingness to give up his happy life on the coast and his return to the orphanage.

The nurses are somewhat aghast at the unconventional procedures of their boss. “But the records are illegal,” Nurse Angela exclaims at one point. “Don’t you be holy about the law to me,” Dr. Larch tells her. “What has the law ever done for us around here?” In the end the nurses’ play along with Dr. Larch’s game. They know that their boss is a good man that his work and purposes help desperate people; and they know that Homer is as well trained in medical matters as the best of medical students. They have, after years of work with Dr. Larch and his student, hard evidence for the conclusion that their own unorthodox practice is morally better than that prescribed by existing law.

For Homer a second season at the orchards has begun. The old crew from the South is back, but something grave seems to have happened. Homer and Candy gradually find out that Rose Rose (Erykah Badu), the daughter of the crew bass, is pregnant, and that her own father is the father of the child. Homer confronts Mr. Rose with these facts, but the crew boss tells him in no uncertain terms to mind his own business. “You have your own mess to take care of, Homer. Don’t you?” The entire crew is aware of Homer’s problematic relationship with Candy, and Mr. Rose does not think that Homer is in any position to preach morals. Did Homer not “break the rules” by betraying his friend Wally, the man who took him in, and who is now risking his life for their country, while his fiancée is having an affair?

One night Rose Rose tries to leave. Her father discovers her and begs her to stay. Homer overhears their desperate quarrel, and he offers his help. Rose Rose is in desperation. She does not want the incestuous baby, and Homer decides to part with his old principles and to perform the abortion. Dr. Larch had sent

him a doctor's bag with the necessary instruments—as a standing invitation, as it were, to eventually assume his proper role in life by becoming the head of the orphanage. Homer performs the procedure successfully. It is this act that propels him into adulthood.

Once more the cider house rules come into view. They are pinned to a post in the bunkroom every year, and they remain an object of curiosity and irritation to the illiterate crew. “Why don't you put them damn rules in the wood stove?” Muddy (K. Todd Freeman) suggests to his fellow-picker Peaches (Heavy D). “I want to hear what they say, first,” Rose Rose demands. Thus Homer reads again about not smoking in bed, not sitting on the roof for lunch, not climbing on the roof while under the influence, and so forth. Once more Mr. Rose angrily denounces their irrelevance: “Who live here in this cider house, Peaches? Who grind them apples, who press the cider, who clean up the mess, and who just plain live here... just breathin' in the vinegar? Somebody who don't live here made them rules. Them rules ain't for us. We the ones who make up them rules. We makin' our own rules, every day. Ain't that right, Homer?” “Right,” Homer replies, and he burns the sheet with the rules in the stove.

Homer and Candy never knew what to do about their affair. They are in love with each other, but it is also clear that Candy is Wally's when Wally comes back. Homer and Candy have taken a “wait and see” attitude: They just do not know what to decide in the matter, and they have deliberately lived from day to day. But the day comes when they have to make a decision. Major Winslow of the Army Air Corps (Colin Irving) informs the family that Wally's plane has crashed, and that Wally will soon return as an invalid; the daring flier is paralyzed from the waist down. Candy feels it to be her duty to stay with her fiancé, even though she also loves Homer. The carefree happiness of the lovers has come to a painful end.

Around the same time a letter arrives from St. Cloud's. When, after some delay, Homer reads it, he learns that Dr. Larch has died from an accidental overdose of ether. Nurse Angela, who wrote the letter, hopes that Homer will take over Dr. Larch's vacant post. While Homer is thus pushed toward making important decisions, the story of the incest in the Rose family comes to a conclusion as well. Homer finds Mr. Rose huddling under a blanket, slowly bleeding to death. Rose Rose has stabbed her father and taken to the road. Instead of calling for an ambulance and the police, Mr. Rose accepts his demise as punishment for his incestuous transgression. He wants Rose Rose to get away to start a new life, and he urges the agreeing pickers to tell the police that he killed himself—in desperation over the loss of his daughter.

The film ends with the arrival of “Dr. Homer Wells” at St. Cloud's. The other pickers had invited Homer to come with them to the warm South, and thus to experience yet another part of the world. But Homer now knows what his life is to be. Everything he has learned will be of use and come to fruition among the staff and the orphans who are most happy to see their former helper and fellow-orphan come back.

### **Moral Autonomy**

“The Cider House Rules is a didactic novel,” John Irving writes in his *My Movie Business: A Memoir*. The story, in other words, is not just a piece of entertainment, but is intended to teach the reader a lesson—a moral lesson at that. The same can be said about the movie. During the transformation of the story into a film Irving tried to impress on the director that the argument concerning abortion was to remain the primary focus of the drama, that the moral discussion should, for example, not be drowned

out by the love story between Homer and Candy. What, then, is the moral drama around which the movie turns? And what is the philosophical lesson that emerges from it?

At first sight the main theme of the film seems to be, of course, the specific problem of abortion. Dr. Larch is in favor of having the procedure available to women who want it, while Homer does not want any part of it. The two men argue about it for a long time. “Dr. Larch’s argument with Homer Wells is polemical, and Larch wins the argument in the end,” Irving writes in the above memoir. “Larch is a polemicist raging against an entrenched doctrine of his day.” Upon closer inspection, however, the discussion offered by the story is about more than just abortion. It is about morality in general, about the ultimate basis and validity of all moral judgments.

The aspect of Dr. Larch’s ethics that stands out most clearly is his moral autonomy—autonomy in the Kantian sense. The head of St. Cloud’s is obviously no obedient and automatic follower of rules. He is, in fact, a deliberate breaker of the law—an outright criminal in the eyes of many. He also violates any number of ordinary ethical rules if he finds it necessary. He performs, that is, not only illegal abortions, but also falsifies medical records, creates false documents, deceives his board of supervisors, lies to the orphans, and regularly uses a medical substance as a recreational drug. At first sight, in other words, the free-wheeling doctor is anything but a plausible representative of sound ethical conduct.

Yet, few people will get the impression, by watching the film, that Dr. Larch is a morally reprehensible person. On the contrary, most people will probably be inclined by his portrait in the film to believe that he holds the moral high ground in his unorthodox dealings with the world. And this is not without good reason. To start with his lying to the orphans: When young Fuzzy Stone (Erik Sullivan) succumbs to the many infections that constantly besiege him, Dr. Larch tells the other orphans that the boy has been adopted by a family that can take care of him better than the financially strapped orphanage. This version of what happened will be less depressing for the youngsters than the announcement of the death of an orphan. (“They will believe it because they want to believe it,” Dr. Larch explains to the somewhat skeptical Buster.) Dr. Larch’s lying, in other words, serves a benevolent purpose. The peace of mind of the orphans, in Dr. Larch’s compassionate judgment, is more important than following an abstract moral rule of the “never tell a lie” sort. Or: Telling a lie is not always bad. It can actually be good if the circumstances are appropriate.

The same presumably holds true with respect to Dr. Larch’s other violations of moral rules and established laws. By making Homer Wells a certified physician he only helps people who desperately need help—without doing any noticeable harm to anyone. He knows that Homer is as competent as he is himself, and he has reasons for hoping that Homer will eventually use his skills to benefit the women and children at an orphanage that does not attract many or any other qualified candidates. Whether the diplomas are genuine is simply not particularly relevant as far as giving effective help to the people at St. Cloud’s is concerned.

With regard to the main point of contention, abortion, Dr. Larch clearly has the delivery of women from excruciating pain and extensive suffering in mind, as well as the long-term well-being of their children. In a society where unwanted pregnancies inevitably lead to botched operations in back-alleys, and where unwanted children meet a most uncertain fate as far as their proper care and upbringing is concerned, it seems outright cruel and immoral to make abortions illegal. And should, the film asks, a young woman like Rose Rose be forced to carry a child that is the result of incest and rape? Dr. Larch knows from his

daily experience that the opinion expressed in established law is to a large extent based on ignorance or a willful disregard of the enormous suffering that this law creates under the circumstances in question.

In the course of human history, laws have often been stupid, cruel, or blatantly unjust, and with hindsight law-breakers have often been celebrated as trail-blazers and heroes once a new era was ushered in. The head of St. Cloud's has pressing reasons for disagreeing with the anti-abortion laws of his time, and he is by no means mistaken if he assumes that most informed and thoughtful persons would eventually agree with his stand. Considering the circumstances under which Dr. Larch labors, breaking the law could, indeed, well be seen as the duty of any moral person, and obeying the law the equivalent of moral cowardice (just as being a law-abiding citizen under Hitler often was a sign of moral cowardice). In the novel Dr. Larch describes a candidate for his position in just such terms: "One of the usual cowards who does what he's told, one of your typically careful, mousy, medical men—a little law-abiding citizen who will be of absolutely no use."

The film is called "The Cider House Rules." This means that the secondary story of the apple pickers and their relation to rules and the law is taken to be a guiding metaphor for the primary story of Dr. Larch and his relation to law and morality. The main point that Mr. Rose made with regard to the cider house rules is that they are irrelevant because they were written by people who do not live in the cider house. Obviously it is the idea of autonomy that is the issue here: People should not live by rules made by others, but only by rules that they make for themselves—rules based on their own will and reasoning. It is the Enlightenment principle of self-determination, in other words, that connects the part of the film that deals with Dr. Larch and that which deals with the pickers in the orchards.

That it is the principle of self-determination that emerges as the highest value in the ethics of "The Cider House Rules" is indirectly emphasized by the fact that the rules pinned up in the bunkhouse are not necessarily senseless in themselves. Smoking in bed is not infrequently the cause of fires that claim innocent lives, and operating a cider press while being drunk may be dangerous and costly in terms of material damages. Climbing on the roof may not be good for the shingles, and falling off that height because of drunkenness may cause injuries and plenty of legal hassles. It may, in other words, not be stupidity or gratuitous authoritarianism that led to the posting of the rules in the bunkhouse. If Irving's story nevertheless treats the rules as "outrageous" and "irrelevant," then the plausibility of the pickers' attitude can be understood only on the basis of the democratic principle that no person or group of persons should ever be required to live by rules that are not made or agreed to by themselves. Even sensible rules are not good if they are imposed on people without their explicit consent.

It is clear that this has implication for the anti-abortion laws that were in effect in the 1940s. Those laws had been passed by almost exclusively male legislatures, and then imposed on that part of the population that had to bear the main consequences of their enforcement. They represented a case of legislation without representation, and thus a flagrant case of undemocratic procedure.

It is also worth noting that the cider house crew's disregard for the cider house rules does not indicate irresponsibility or lawlessness. When during the first year of the story one of the crew members did manifest irresponsibility and destructive behavior by throwing a cigarette butt into the cider mash, Mr. Rose came down hard on him, and eventually made sure that this particular worker would not work anymore at the orchards. And when Mr. Rose finally confronted his own inexcusable conduct and the immense pain he had created for his daughter, he punished himself as severely as any official law might

have done. The crew that worked for Wally's mother was not a gang of reckless scofflaws, but a self-governing body that basically did not need any outside governance to function rationally and effectively.

There are other, more subtle, ways in which the idea of autonomy is placed into the center of the story as well. Both Dr. Larch and Homer like to read to the boys in the orphanage the story of Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*—particularly the weighty words at the beginning of that novel: "Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show." The hero of a story is its protagonist, its most important actor. If in the course of the story this central figure does not really take any decisive action, if he or she is weak, passive, only reacting to others and external events, and in the end incapable of assuming control of his or her life, then the central person of such a story is not a genuine hero or heroine. Someone or something else than the protagonist will play that role, someone or something that makes all the important decisions and that effectively controls the failed hero's life. Most classic novels live, indeed, out of the tension that exists between the protagonist's attempt to become the hero of his or her life and the possible failure of that attempt.

To become the hero of one's life is much the same as becoming an autonomous person. The decisions that Homer makes at the end of the film both make him the hero of his own life, and change him into the kind of autonomous person that Dr. Larch was. Throughout Homer's coming of age years the abortion issue had remained an open question for him. He had no objection to Dr. Larch's performing "the procedure," because he clearly saw that his mentor was helping people in desperate need. But he also could not bring himself to do likewise, because he knew how closely a fetus resembles a newborn infant. His encounter with the case of Rose Rose forced him out of his ambiguous attitude; it prompted him to make a fundamental decision. By making that decision, by performing the abortion, he assumed an adult person's responsibility—his moral autonomy. He also set an end to his years of wandering and growing up: he actively and consciously determined his basic station in life and thus defined himself as the genuine hero of his own story.

Some viewers of "*The Cider House Rules*" may balk at the suggestion that Dr. Larch's position is Kantian. Kant did, in one of his less plausible arguments, not only maintain that one should never lie under any circumstances, but also followed the habit of most Western philosophers by generally thinking about morality in terms of following rules. It is the rule of not lying, or the rule of helping fellow-humans in need, that Kant mostly discusses, not individual acts of lying or helping. And it is maxims (personal rules) that are tested by the Categorical Imperative. Morality as such, in this way of thinking, is basically a set of positive and negative rules, a system of dos and don'ts, that are all based on some ultimate principles—principles being themselves rules of a most general kind.

Dr. Larch, by contrast, does not seem to think much in terms of rules; his approach to ethical decisions is much more ad hoc. He almost comes off as a representative of the school of thought that is known as "situational ethics," a school that emphasizes making the right decisions according to specific and often complex circumstances, rather than mechanically following abstract rules. What Dr. Larch tries to teach Homer is, indeed, not so much a set of general principles and rules, but the compassionate understanding of concrete situations.

There are a number of serious problems with thinking of morality as following rules, problems that weaken Kant's reflections on morality considerably. If one wants to teach children to be honest, for

example, one would be raising moral idiots if one taught them just an abstract rule against lying—without also teaching them about the consideration of circumstances and consequences of lying. Liars can usually be shown to be reprehensible persons, and their lying often has manifestly ugly consequences. But if an enraged killer asked a person about the hiding place of an intended innocent victim, would the asked person act morally if he truthfully revealed the hiding place—in order to avoid telling a lie? Kant (ultimately because of his habit of thinking about ethics as a matter of rules and principles) concluded that a moral person always has to tell the truth, regardless of circumstances or consequences.

But this conclusion is hardly plausible. It seems clear that no mature person can rely simply on a set of clear-cut rules when making moral decisions. Rules and principles have to make sense, and they have to be applied meaningfully and without producing morally absurd consequences. Rules and their application have to make sense to persons who can think and who are capable of compassion. An individual who has nothing to go on than a set of abstract rules is highly deficient as a moral agent—if not as a human being altogether. A person who refrains from murdering others only because the Bible says so—that person is a psychopath rather than a moral individual. A person needs a good deal more than the ability to obey rules to be a mature and genuinely moral adult.

The following of moral rules by moral idiots is akin to the behavior of certain soldiers who will do anything as long as they are “just following orders.” Such thoughtless or uncomprehending following of rules is the very opposite of what Kant implied by insisting on moral autonomy and personal responsibility. Delegating responsibility to rules, instead of making thoughtful decisions oneself, is exactly the sort of self-degradation that renders a person a passive object, not a human individual characterized by self-determination and autonomy. Kant himself points out in the *Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals*: “Man was seen to be bound to laws by his duty, but it was not seen that he is subject only to his own, yet universal, legislation, and that he is only bound to act in accordance with his own will, ...” And it is clear that only this kind of self-legislation lives up to the idea of the enlightenment that Kant describes as “release from self-incurred tutelage” and as the “courage to use one’s own reason.”

If Dr. Larch is described here as a Kantian, it is on the assumption that the idea of moral autonomy and personal responsibility is far more important and more basic in Kant’s philosophy than the traditional habit of conceiving of morality as a system of principles and rules that are to be obeyed. Dr. Larch is not the dubious kind of Kantian who defines his morality by a rigorous adherence to seemingly unambiguous rules, laws, and principles, but the autonomous Kantian who knows, through compassionate and intelligent understanding of complex situations, where rules have their place, and where they must be broken. In “*The Cider House Rules*” Dr. Larch proves himself as a moral person by courageously defying the law.

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### **Directions for your Constructive Response to *Cider House Rules***

- After you have read the article above, read each of the constructed response questions below and select one to answer. The constructed response verbiage is listed below to assist you in this process.
- Responses are graded on quality not quantity, looking for thinking in your writing, and reflection on the article above.

- Use the film *Cider House Rules* and this article to explore the characters and storyline in order to provide support for your answers and to properly address the questions.
- You may compose your response in a *Microsoft Word document*. Make sure to include your name and hour attached to your work.
- Email your assignment as an attachment or within the email to your instructor. Subject line: Cider House Assignment

1. Do you believe in the basis of the democratic principle that no person or group of persons should ever be required to live by rules that are not made or agreed to by themselves? Even sensible rules are not good if they are imposed on people without their explicit consent. Explain your answer? Are you forced to live with rules that you do not agree with or want to abide with? Why are those rules in affect? In the course of human history, laws have often been stupid, cruel, or blatantly unjust, and with hindsight law-breakers have often been celebrated as trail-blazers and heroes once a new era was ushered in. The head of St. Cloud's has pressing reasons for disagreeing with the anti-abortion laws of his time, and he is by no means mistaken if he assumes that most informed and thoughtful persons would eventually agree with his stand. Considering the circumstances under which Dr. Larch labors, breaking the law could, indeed, well be seen as the duty of any moral person, and obeying the law the equivalent of moral cowardice (just as being a law-abiding citizen under Hitler often was a sign of moral cowardice). Consider some of today's laws, such as; gay marriage, marijuana possession, three-strikes law, drinking age, recreational drug use, abortion, capital punishment, etc., do you see a duty as a moral person to stand for or against them, do you see any similarities to the situation Dr. Larch found himself?

2. The aspect of Dr. Larch's ethics that stands out most clearly is his moral autonomy--autonomy (independence or freedom, as of the will or one's actions) in the Kantian sense (Kantian believed that no one should ever lie under any circumstance). The head of St. Cloud's is obviously no obedient and automatic follower of rules. He is, in fact, a deliberate breaker of the law--an outright criminal in the eyes of many. He also violates any number of ordinary ethical rules if he finds it necessary. What six ethical rules are violated by Dr. Larch?

3. With regard to the main point of contention in the story, abortion, Dr. Larch clearly has the delivery of women from excruciating pain and extensive suffering in mind, as well as the long-term well-being of their children. In a society where unwanted pregnancies inevitably lead to botched operations in back-alleys, and where unwanted children meet a most uncertain fate as far as their proper care and upbringing is concerned, it seems outright cruel and immoral to make abortions illegal. And should, the film asks, a young woman like Rose to be forced to carry a child that is the result of incest and rape? Considering both Rose and Homer's situation, what are your views on Homer's assistance with the abortion of the child that Rose is carrying?

### **Key Verbs and Tasks used in Constructive Response**

- Analyze - Examining carefully by looking at the different parts of the whole and figuring out how they are related to each other.
- Apply - Using what you have learned to demonstrate show, or relate something.
- Compare - Using examples to show how things are similar.
- Contrast - Using examples to show how things are different.

- Evaluate - Making a judgment backed up with support.
- Infer - Making an educated guess or hypothesizing... reading between the lines.
- Interpret - Explaining a possible meaning of a text
- Paraphrase - Putting the author's ideas into your own words
- Predict - Using information available to make an educated guess about future events
- Summarize - Presenting the author's main ideas in a shortened form
- Support - Using specific facts to "back up" your answer, utilize details and examples from the text.
- Synthesize - Combining several ideas and making something new