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1. VT Vaccine

Vaccines have greatly improved human health.¹ Vaccines have prevented many deaths due to polio, measles, and various other illnesses. Part of their success lies in the promotion of ‘herd immunity.’ The idea behind ‘herd immunity’ is that a population must keep a certain number of persons immune to disease in order to protect those most vulnerable. As a result, many states require the vaccination of children before they attend public school. However, in recent years many parents have become concerned about whether or not the benefits of vaccination outweigh the risks. Some parents worry that vaccines cause autism and, as a result, are deciding not to vaccinate their children. In Vermont, until recently, parents could opt out of the vaccination requirement for public school students if they had a philosophical or religious objection. But amidst growing concern about the undermining of herd immunity due to the large numbers of parents taking advantage of the philosophical exemption, Vermont banned the use of the philosophical (but not religious) exemption.²

Proponents of the legislation cite the impact of the myriad diseases that children are susceptible to if they are unvaccinated as a reason to require vaccination. Moreover, they say, these diseases are often highly contagious, so opting out of vaccination increases risk not only for one’s own child, but also for other children, including immunized children who did not develop immunity and children with compromised immune systems due to childhood cancer and other diseases. Proponents also say that vaccines are safe and do not cause autism, and they emphasize that the medical community has reached near consensus on this point.

Opponents of the legislation note that parents have a right to decide how to care for their own children, and they argue that mandatory vaccinations violate this right. Moreover, some critics complain that the legislation draws a distinction between religious belief and secular belief. In the United States, before 1969, one could not avoid military service through conscientious objection unless one cited religious belief.³ Secular opponents of mandatory vaccination contend that this legislation is unfair, insofar as it insists that one can opt out of vaccinations only on the basis of religious belief. Many secular people hold beliefs that are central to their lives, such as a belief that it is wrong to kill or harm someone unnecessarily. Shouldn’t they also be allowed to refuse to participate in activities they see as wrong?

Study Questions:

- (1) Do parents have a moral duty to vaccinate their children?
- (2) Does the state have a moral right to require students who attend public schools to be vaccinated?
- (3) Is there a morally significant difference between a deeply held secular belief and a deeply held religious belief?

¹ <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/86/2/07-040089/en/>

² <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/vermont-says-no-to-the-anti-vaccine-movement>

³ http://www.oyez.org/cases/1960-1969/1969/1969_76

2. Prison Work

The United States has the highest rate of incarceration of any country in the world. In the United States over 1.6 million people are in prison.¹ Many states make use of work prisons. In these facilities, prisoners process foods, manufacture products, engage in hard labor, and more. These prisoners volunteer to work and then receive a wage. The Constitution prohibits cruel and unusual punishment, but it also permits indentured servitude if it is part of punishment for a crime.

Opponents of private work prisons often compare them to slavery.² They argue that prison is inherently coercive, and that prisoners cannot really freely choose to work if their only other option is isolation. Many opponents also argue that private work prisons exploit prisoners since prisoners are not permitted to unionize, are often paid less than a dollar per hour, and are unable to earn a profit from their labor³. Moreover, since prison workers earn much less than non-prison workers, some opponents also worry that the use of private work prisons will mean that fewer jobs are available to non-prisoner workers.

Advocates of private work prisons point out that by working during their imprisonment, convicted offenders gain skills that can improve their chances of gaining employment after they return to their communities. Advocates also argue that working helps inmates escape boredom and improves their mood and morale. Additionally, advocates argue that private work prisons can reduce the high cost of the criminal justice system, and the burden on state budgets.

Another important factor is that over sixty percent of male prisoners are Black or Hispanic⁴. These populations remain economically disadvantaged – in part, in the case of Black prisoners, because of the history and legacy of American slavery – and this background context makes questions about the negative and/or positive impacts of work prisons even more pressing.

Study Questions:

- (1) If prisons give prisoners a choice between work and isolation, is this really a free choice or is it a coerced choice? And what, if anything, follows about the moral permissibility of this practice?
- (2) Is it ethical for a private company to pay workers in prison less than workers outside prison? Why or why not?
- (3) Is it ethical for a private company to earn a profit from prison labor? Why or why not?

¹ <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p10.pdf>

² http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/10/prison-labor_n_2272036.html

³ <http://www.prisonpolicy.org/prisonindex/prisonlabor.html>

3. Religion at the Hospital

Betsy is an emergency room physician, and one of her patients, Steve, is probably going to die in the next day or so. Betsy is an evangelical Christian who believes that unless people have faith in Jesus, they will suffer eternal damnation. Betsy has good reason to believe that Steve is not religious in any way.

The hospital has a strict rule against medical professionals trying to spread their faith among their patients. One argument for this rule is that medical professionals are in positions of power and influence over their patients, who are in many cases captive audiences. Hence, using this position for personal religious purposes seems to constitute an abuse of power.

However, if Betsy's religious beliefs are true, then Steve's eternal wellbeing depends on him coming to have a specific religious faith. On the basis of these beliefs, she reasons that the importance of Steve's eternal wellbeing far outweighs the importance of hospital rules, her own job, or Steve's willingness to be proselytized – after all, what could be more important than helping someone achieve eternal happiness?

Study Questions:

(1) How do one's ethical beliefs relate to one's professional obligations? When, if ever, do the former trump the latter?

(2) When, if ever, is it appropriate for a person with power and influence over others to try to spread their beliefs and values to these other individuals? Explain.

(3) How, if at all, would the case be different if Steve expressed interest in discussing religion with Betsy?

4. Let Them Eat Cake?

Many religious institutions conceive of marriage as a relationship between one man and one woman, and they will only support and bless marriages that fit this traditional model. For example, many churches allow their property to be used only for those events of which they approve.

Recently the United States Supreme Court ruled that same-sex couples have the right to get married.¹ Many social conservatives worry that this ruling constitutes a threat to religious freedom, since, they think, religious organizations should have a right to express and promote their own doctrine regarding sexual orientation.² As a result, law professor Mark Movsesian predicts, “There will be many challenges to religious institutions that continue to hold to a traditional understanding of marriage—religious adoption agencies that place children only with opposite-sex couples, religious universities that decline to provide housing for same-sex married couples, and so on.”³ However, many other people think that institutions supported by the government should reflect government policies regarding discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Relatedly, many bakeries around the country, such as Sweet Cakes by Melissa in Oregon, have refused to make wedding cakes for same-sex weddings, claiming that “their religious beliefs prohibit them from taking part in the celebration.” The owners of Sweet Cakes have gained much financial support on crowdfunding websites to fight the legal battles.⁴ “A 2007 Oregon law protects of the right of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people in employment, housing, and public accommodations. It provides an exemption for religious organizations, but the agency ruled that exemption does not apply to private businesses who discriminate against potential customers.”⁵

Study Questions:

- (1) If a private business owner sells a product to people knowing that they plan to use it in a ceremony that she disapproves of, does that make her complicit in this ceremony? Why or why not?
- (2) If a private business owner refuses to sell a product to people on the grounds that they plan to use it in a ceremony that she disapproves of, is she engaging in (morally unacceptable) discrimination? Why or why not?
- (3) Is it morally acceptable for the state to permit religious organizations but not secular organizations to discriminate against potential customers? Why or why not?

¹ <http://www.scotusblog.com/2015/06/opinion-analysis-marriage-now-open-to-same-sex-couples/>

² <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Education/2015/0701/Same-sex-marriage-Will-conservative-religious-colleges-lose-tax-exempt-status>

³ <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2015/06/after-obergefell-a-first-things-symposium>

⁴ <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/07/oregon-bakery-gay-wedding-sweet-cakes-by-melissa-fundraising-120153>

⁵ <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2015/10/01/oregon-bakery-owners-refuse-to-pay-damages-in-gay-wedding-cake-case/>

5. Warning, Warning, Don't Read All About It!

A trigger warning is a disclaimer about potentially traumatizing material. Trigger warnings originated on the internet, so that people could be prepared for graphic discussion or images involving sexual assault, military combat, and other topics that tend to induce traumatic response, especially for survivors with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).¹

Recently, many students have started to demand trigger warnings in the classroom as well. For example, students at Columbia recently demanded that classical Greek works such as *Metamorphoses* come with a warning about content involving rape.² In some cases, students are also demanding that certain sensitive content not be addressed at all, at least in certain contexts. For example, students at Harvard recently asked that material on rape law not only come with a trigger warning but also not be included on exams. Many students also advise other students not to feel pressure to attend class discussions about material that might be triggering for them.³

Critics of trigger warnings claim that they threaten free speech as well as higher education itself.⁴ In particular, they claim that part of the role of higher education is to train students to challenge their beliefs and values – a process that can often be uncomfortable – and that trigger warnings conflict with this aim. They also claim that trigger warnings shelter students, making them hypersensitive and unprepared for the real world, which will not protect their feelings at every turn. This is especially true for students training for certain professions, such as law enforcement, medicine, or social work, where an ability to deal with potentially triggering material on a routine basis is often essential for success on the job.

However, supporters of trigger warnings argue that these concerns are exaggerated.⁵ They claim that, while part of the role of higher education is to train students to challenge their beliefs and values, another part of the role of higher education is to create a safe, supportive environment in which students can do so as effectively as possible – an aim which trigger warnings help us to achieve. Relatedly, supporters also claim that trigger warnings do not shelter students so much as provide them with a quick “heads up” about potentially triggering material, so that they can prepare themselves to engage with this material in a productive way. Thus, supporters of trigger warnings argue, if anything it would be unfair *not* to provide trigger warnings in higher education, given that many students would experience trauma unnecessarily, and would therefore be set back in their education unnecessarily, without them.

Study Questions:

- (1) When, if ever, do teachers have a moral obligation to warn students about potentially triggering material, and why?
- (2) When, if ever, do teachers have a moral obligation to not include potentially triggering material on exams, and why?
- (3) Is there a difference between the use of trigger warnings on the internet and the use of trigger warnings in education? Why or why not?

¹ <http://www.aaup.org/report/trigger-warnings>

² <http://time.com/3860187/columbia-trigger-warning-greek-mythology-metamorphoses/>

³ <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/trouble-teaching-rape-law>

⁴ <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/09/the-coddling-of-the-american-mind/399356/>

⁵ http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/20/opinion/sunday/why-i-use-trigger-warnings.html?_r=0

6. Family Secrets

When Sybil picked up the phone, it was the first time that she had heard from her older sister Edith in more than five years. But Sybil had been expecting this call—her memoir just hit the *New York Times* Best Seller list, and she knew that Edith would find out about it eventually.

The memoir, which recounted Sybil's difficult childhood, described in painful detail what it was like to grow up with a parent who struggled with drug addiction and untreated mental health issues. In this book, Sybil explained how this unstable and emotionally challenging environment deeply affected her and her family, and contributed to her own life of alcohol abuse, severe depression, and estrangement from the rest of her family. Throughout the memoir, she shared many intimate stories about Edith and their parents. For instance, in one such story, Sybil described how she routinely saw her older sister and her friends experimenting with hard drugs.

"You didn't need to dredge all of that up!" Edith exclaimed on the other end of the phone. "You didn't have the right to trample all over our privacy and share all of those details about our family with the rest of the world! You know that I don't go around advertising my childhood with everyone I meet, and now everyone knows. And now my boss and co-workers know that I have alcoholism and mental health issues running in my family. And they all know that I used to use drugs! You had no right!"

Sybil had expected this reaction. She knew that Edith was a very private person, and that Edith felt ashamed about their family and childhood. But Sybil thought that the book was more important than keeping their family's secrets. "I had to," Sybil insisted. "I am a writer ... an artist ... and I needed to create something that would resonate with people, and would affect readers on a personal level. I needed to explain the things that shaped me ... that brought me to where I am today. I needed to reach out to people who grew up the same way. I needed to tell my story!"

"But that's just it," Edith replied. "It wasn't just your story. It was my story, too! And Mom's and Dad's! You dragged us through the mud, without our permission. You didn't even respect us enough to give us a warning. I can't believe that you would betray us like this ... that you would use us in order to sell books."

Study Questions:

- (1) What value is there in writing a memoir? How does this value weigh against other important values, such as values associated with friendship, family, privacy, etc.?
- (2) Is there a moral difference between Sybil writing about her parents' behavior and her writing about her sister's behavior? Why or why not?
- (3) When, if ever, is it ethically acceptable for one person to disclose another person's struggle with depression or substance abuse?

7. Acting Unnaturally

Jay dropped out of high school and moved to Los Angeles to pursue an acting career. For years he barely survived by working part-time jobs and living in poor conditions. Despite his talent, he found it difficult to get cast, in large part because roles for non-white actors like Jay are limited.

Now, after years of toiling, Jay is close to his big break. He's been offered a major part in a new network sitcom that will air 22 episodes per year. Unfortunately, Jay is uncomfortable with the role: He would be playing the main character's "wacky minority friend," essentially acting out nasty racial stereotypes for easy, lazy laughs. His character will speak in an exaggerated accent, be unable to avoid "hilarious" cultural misunderstandings, and rarely say anything particularly interesting beyond the occasional bit of trite "wisdom." He will, however, have plenty of lines and jokes in what will likely be a hit show.

On one hand, Jay is so disgusted with the role that he finds it difficult to imagine accepting it. How could he sleep at night if he helped to entrench these stereotypes, allowing the world to laugh at his expense? Even worse, he would be enriching himself by embodying this nauseating racial caricature.

On the other hand, Jay needs the money and believes that this role would finally launch the acting career he has so relentlessly pursued. Who knows what kinds of interesting, fulfilling, even socially important roles he could play after spending a few years on this sitcom? Moreover, he assumes that these negative impacts will occur whether or not he takes the role, and he feels that it is unfair that he should have to worry about "selling out" whereas more privileged white actors do not. Should he sacrifice his chance to fulfill his dream because of racism in society?

Study Questions:

- (1) Suppose that Jay knows that the show will be a big hit whether or not he takes the role. How, if at all, should that affect his decision?
- (2) How, if at all, would the case be different if Jay was already successful?
- (3) How, if at all, would the case be different if Jay was white and offered the role of the main character (so that he would perform with, but not as, the "wacky minority friend")?

8. Climate Debt

The world's scientists are nearly unanimous in their agreement that human-caused climate change poses a significant threat to future generations. However, this scientific consensus leaves many important questions unsettled—in particular, science cannot resolve questions about the fundamental moral principles that should guide our response to the threats of climate change. One idea is that the United States and other developed nations have a moral obligation to do much more than developing nations to address this issue. In particular, the idea is that developed nations have a moral obligation to immediately and sharply cut their greenhouse gas emissions, and to provide assistance and reparations to less affluent countries (estimated to be between \$400-\$600 billion annually).¹

Defenders of the climate debt concept argue that developed nations have this moral obligation for multiple reasons. First, these nations are disproportionately responsible for climate change: Developing nations have contributed very little to greenhouse gas emissions, yet they are also some of the most vulnerable to the disastrous effects of climate change. Moreover, developed nations disproportionately benefit from the activities that have put us in this situation: They are much wealthier than developing nations precisely because of past industrial practices, and so they have a moral obligation to do more than developing nations to address the harms caused by these practices (especially since developing nations will now have to avoid many of these practices moving forward).

Critics of the climate debt concept argue that since much of their emissions occurred before we knew about the existence of (or the harms associated with) human-caused climate change, wealthy countries are not morally responsible for the harms caused by their past carbon emissions (especially since the people who originally set us on this path are long gone).² Critics also contend that each country is responsible for promoting the interests of its own citizen, even if this activity conflicts with the interests of other countries. Thus, even if wealthy countries have harmed other countries through their use of greenhouse gasses, they are not morally wrong for having done so.

Study Questions:

- (1) Can individuals or groups ever be morally responsible for what other individuals or groups do, for example their ancestors? Why or why not?
- (2) Can individuals or groups who benefit from a certain harmful practice have a moral obligation to compensate the people harmed by that practice? Why or why not?
- (3) What are the moral principles that govern international competition? For example, to what extent, if any, do individual countries have a moral obligation not to cause harms to other countries?

¹ <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/climate-rage-20091112?page=2>

² <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/10/science/earth/10climate.html>

9. Cultural Artifacts

Starting in the Summer 2014, a United States led military coalition completed a series of air strikes in Iraq and Syria targeting the self-proclaimed Islamic State, also known as ISIL, ISIS, and Daesh. The United Nations reports that over 200 sites have been damaged or destroyed by ISIL alone.¹ This includes the destruction of United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Sites of Mosul, Nimrud, Hatra, Dura-Europos, and Raqqai—Iraq and Assyrian-era antiquities—dating to the 8th century BC.²

The United Nations General Assembly claimed that ISIL attacks on cultural heritage sites is a tactic of war to spread terror and hatred, a form of “cultural cleansing” intended to destroy the past, present, and future of entire cultures.³ Syrian scholar Khaled al-Asaad lost his life when he refused to tell ISIL militants the location of hidden antiquities.⁴ Moreover, in looting irreplaceable antiquities, ISIL is not only destroying history but profiting as a result. The world’s stolen antiquities market is estimated to be worth over 2 billion dollars, and the largest purchases of these antiquities are from the United States and the United Kingdom.⁵ These sales fund ISIL activities of terror.

In a news conference, Adel Shirshab, Iraq’s tourism and antiquities minister, accused the United States coalition of not doing enough to protect the country’s cultural heritage and has urged the military coalition to use air power to protect the country’s antiquities from ISIL fighters. Aircraft could better monitor preparations for possible ISIL attacks and prevent them, especially at UNESCO World Heritage sites or other historical cities. Speaking about the destruction of the ancient city Hatra, Shirshab said, “It was possible to carry out surveillance. Why didn't this happen?”⁶

Rather than using more military force, the United States and UNESCO are co-hosting a series of roundtables with stakeholders – including armed forces, Interpol, the World Customs Organization, museums, and leading auction houses – to discuss how to weaken the selling of looted cultural antiquities. Additionally, a social media campaign has been created called #Unite4Heritage to draw support for the protection of artifacts and sites in areas threatened by extremist groups.⁷

Study Questions:

- (1) What is the value of cultural artifacts? Are we morally permitted and/or required to preserve them? Why or why not?
- (2) Are we morally permitted and/or required to use surveillance and/or air strikes to protect cultural artifacts? Why or why not?
- (3) Are we morally permitted to purchase cultural artifacts that, for all we know, may have been looted? Why or why not?

¹ <http://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2015/06/01/411138497/cyber-archaeologists-rebuild-destroyed-artifacts>

² <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/09/232028.htm>

³ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-v-vlasic/the-tomb-raiders-of-mesop_b_6934682.html

⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/18/isis-beheads-archaeologist-syria>

⁵ <http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/america-tonight/articles/2015/11/19/isil-culture-syria-iraq-artifacts.html>

⁶ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/08/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-hatra-idUSKBN0M400320150308>

⁷ <http://www.unite4heritage.org/>

10. Unpaid Item

Jake is a busy college student – taking classes during the day and working part-time at night to help pay for tuition. Jake has very little free time, so he values his free time a great deal. He also hates to go grocery shopping, and he tries to limit the number of trips he makes to the grocery store by shopping in bulk. One day after class, Jake goes to the grocery store, fills up his cart, goes to the checkout line, and piles the items onto the grocery belt. Jake leaves a 24-case of bottled water on the bottom of the cart, which is normal to do at the grocery store. He tells the checker that the case of water is on the cart, and the checker acknowledges him. Jake pays for his groceries, loads the groceries in his car, and drives home. It takes him 15 minutes to get home.

When Jake gets home, he puts away his groceries, and after cleaning out his paper bags, he finds his receipt and reviews it to check out the savings on the sale items. Then he realizes that the case of water is not on the receipt. He tells his roommate, “They didn’t charge me for the water. Should I go back to pay for it?”

His roommate says, “Of course not! You don’t need to make a special trip to fix their mistake.”

Jake asks, “Well, should I pay for it the next time I shop there then?”

His roommate replies, “I don’t think you need to do that either. They made the mistake, not you. You would have paid for it if they had charged you. Also, you didn’t do it on purpose, and those big chain stores make so much money that a few dollars here or there won’t matter to them anyway.”

Study Questions:

- (1) What should Jake do?
- (2) How, if at all, would the case be different if Jake noticed the mistake while it was happening?
- (3) How, if at all, would the case be different if Jake was shopping at a small independent store rather than at a big chain store? Or if the item in question cost several hundred dollars?

11. See Something, Say Something

Ever since the 9/11 attacks, Susan has feared Muslim extremists. She knows that this fear is unwarranted and that it contributes to an anti-Muslim bias, and she makes an effort not to let this bias affect her judgment. However, she also knows that this bias still does affect her judgment to a degree. For example, she knows that traveling through airports brings out her paranoia, and she recognizes that this is happening right now as she walks into the airport to board a flight. Susan recalls seeing President Obama on news saying, “If you see something, say something,”¹ the slogan for Homeland Security.² She also recalls tips about how to look for suspicious activity that she saw on TV news.

As Susan walks through the security line, she notices that the TSA screener is preoccupied and not paying close attention as a man in a turban makes his way through the line. Susan, despite her best efforts not to, finds herself keeping an eye on this man as he prepares to board his flight. During this time Susan observes the man fidgeting, looking around anxiously, and checking the contents of his bag. When Susan sees the man leave his bag unattended near the gate and disappear around the corner, she starts to worry. She tells herself, “I don’t know if this person is a terrorist, but he might be, and if he is then hundreds of people could be in danger. So maybe I should err on the side of caution and say something.”

Still, in the back of her mind, Susan feels real doubt. She knows that she can’t trust herself to be objective about these matters. If this person dressed differently, Susan might not have noticed him at all. Susan also realizes that racial, ethnic, and religious minorities have greater reason to feel anxious at the airport than she does, and that if she says something, then an innocent man could experience real hardship, perhaps including missing his flight and enduring hours of interrogation as a result.

Study Questions:

- (1) What should Susan do?
- (2) Is Susan blameworthy for having an anti-Muslim bias even though she makes an effort not to? Why or why not?
- (3) Is racial, ethnic, or religious profiling ever morally permissible? Why or why not?

¹ <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/11/25/obama-tries-to-reassure-americans-if-you-see-something-suspicious-say-something/>

² <http://www.dhs.gov/see-something-say-something>

12. Shame on You

America has an obesity problem. The National Institutes of Health defines an obese person as having a body mass index (BMI) 30 or above. “The BMI, a key index for relating body weight to height, is a person's weight in kilograms (kg) divided by their height in meters (m) squared. Since the BMI describes the body weight relative to height, it correlates strongly (in adults) with the total body fat content.”¹ As of September 2015, “rates of obesity now exceed 35 percent in three states (Arkansas, West Virginia and Mississippi), 22 states have rates above 30 percent, 45 states are above 25 percent, and every state is above 20 percent.”² These statistics raise significant health concerns, since obesity can lead to type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and other health risks.¹

Despite diet fads, diet pills, and education efforts in schools, our obesity problem is not going away. As a result, some have turned to “fat shaming,” or shaming people for appearing to be overweight, to get them to lose weight. For example, in September 2015, comedian Nicole Arbour posted a video on YouTube and Facebook called, “Dear Fat People” featuring lines such as, “Fat people parking spots should be in the back... Walk to the doors. Burn some calories,” as well as lines such as, “You have one body... It has to take you all the way to the end... If you want to be positive to your body, work out, eat well.”³ This video received mixed reviews. Critics argued that it would not help people to live healthy lives but would rather only make them feel bad and contribute to a culture that oppresses them. In contrast, supporters argued that there is a link between eating too much, exercising too little, and bad health, and that comedians should be free to “tell it like it is” rather than be politically correct all the time.

Similarly, Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta recently sponsored an advertising campaign called, “Stop Sugarcoating It,” featuring photos of obese children with accompanying taglines such as, “Warning ... It’s hard to be a little girl if you’re not,” and “Big Bones Didn’t Make Me This Way ... Big Meals Did.”⁴ According to Bioethicist Daniel Callahan, this approach can be good when it involves “social pressure combined with vigorous government action,” as with campaigns to stop smoking.⁵ Callahan claims that he quit smoking as a result of social criticism together with heavy taxation. Therefore, he argues, why should we approach obesity any differently? Callahan calls for “mild coercion” by the government, like bans on soda sizes or taxes on sugary snacks, along with what he has termed “stigmatization lite.” This light shaming, he thinks, will motivate people to ask questions like, “Are you happy that your added weight has made many ordinary activities, such as walking up a long flight of stairs, harder?” or “Are you aware that, once you gain a significant amount of weight, your chances of taking that weight back off and keeping it off are poor?” Yet critics worry that these campaigns will not help obese people to live happy and healthy lives, but will rather simply promote negative attitudes about them, as well as about other people who appear to be overweight.

Study Questions:

- (1) Do we have a moral obligation not to cause unnecessary harm or offense? Why or why not?
- (2) Is there a moral difference between a comedian engaging in fat shaming and a hospital doing so? Why or why not?
- (3) If fat shaming has some good effects (such as preventing obesity in some cases) as well as some bad effects (such as causing eating disorders in some cases), how should we weigh these effects?

¹ <http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=11760>

² <http://stateofobesity.org/rates/>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CXFgNhyP4-A>

⁴ <http://www.phillymag.com/news/2012/10/12/solve-americas-obesity-problem-shame/>

⁵ <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/01/a-case-for-shaming-obese-people-tastefully/267446/>

13. Whose Photo Is It Anyway?

“New Portraits,” a 2014 collection from popular visual artist Richard Prince, has recently resurfaced after a print from this collection sold for over \$90,000 at Frieze Art Fair New York.¹ In “New Portraits,” Prince captured screenshots of Instagram pictures uploaded by models, celebrities, and unknown users and added his own comments underneath. He then enlarged the images and printed them on canvas. Prince’s repurposed Instagram images were selected without users’ permission, which is known as appropriation.

This case of appropriation raises important questions regarding art ownership in the digital age. A spokesperson from Instagram told the *Washington Post*, “People in the Instagram community own their photos, period. Off the platform, content owners can enforce their legal rights.”² Yet the Copyright Act of 1976 allows some provisions for artworks that “recast, transformed, or adapted” previous materials, in particular if the end goal is “criticism” or “comment.”³ For previous appropriation cases, courts have argued that a new art work had to do more than casually alter the piece, and that there had to be a reason to use this specific piece of art. Later, it was said that appropriated art need only be aesthetically transformed to be legal under copyright law.

Moreover, this case raises ethical questions as well. For example, the Instagram users involuntarily involved with “New Portraits” have varying responses to Prince’s appropriation. On one hand, Anna Collins, a 19-year-old ballet student from Toronto, was not flattered by Prince, claiming that, “I just think about how I’m a working student in school, I’m extremely broke, and here is a middle-aged white man making a huge profit off of my image. Kind of makes me sick. I could use that money for my tuition.”⁴ On the other hand, Missy Suicide thinks Prince is starting conversations “about what we put out there in the public.” And, for a \$90 donation to charity, she is selling her own reproduction of Prince’s Instagram reproduction.⁵

Study Questions:

- (1) How, if at all, would this case be different if Prince was appropriating images that other people spent months working on, rather than images that they spent only minutes working on?
- (2) How, if at all, would this case be different if Prince was poor and the people whose work he was appropriating were rich?
- (3) In general, how much of a say, if any, should artists have over how others use their work? Explain your answer.

¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/30/richard-prince-appropriation-art_n_7674786.html

² <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/more-richard-prince-instagram-303166>

³ <http://www.theverge.com/2015/5/30/8691257/richard-prince-instagram-photos-copyright-law-fair-use>

⁴ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/27/richard-prince-instagram_n_7452634.html

⁵ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/27/richard-prince-instagram_n_7452634.html

14. What's Your Age Again?

Aubrey and Parker met on a dating website. They both registered on this website as 18 years old or over. However, since Parker looked young in her pictures, Aubrey (19 years old) made sure to ask about her age in their messages to each other. Parker replied that she was actually 17 years old. Since 17 and 19 are only two years apart and 17 is over the age of consent where Aubrey and Parker live, Aubrey was satisfied with this answer. The two arranged to meet for a date, and at the end of their date they kissed in his car for 20 minutes.

However, Aubrey soon learned that Parker was not actually 17 years old. Instead, she was a 14-year-old who was simply presenting herself as 18 or over on the website – and as 17 in their messages – so that she could meet older people. Aubrey learned her actual age through a friend who knew both parties, and who was upset to discover that Audrey had gone on a date with someone so young.

Aubrey was upset to discover what he had done too. For moral as well as legal reasons, he never would have gone out with – much less made out with – Parker if he had known her actual age. And in retrospect, he realized that he did have reason to be skeptical: Parker did appear to be young in pictures, and the age that she listed on the website did conflict with the age that she disclosed in their messages. In light of these issues, Aubrey thought, maybe he should have asked Parker for I.D. to verify her age. Then again, Aubrey also thought that, while Parker appeared to be young, she did not appear to be *that* young. Moreover, Aubrey had already asked for her age. Did he really have a moral responsibility to ask for proof as well? Finally, Aubrey thought, asking for I.D. might not have been fully effective either, since not all adults have a valid I.D. and many minors have a fake I.D.. So maybe Aubrey should have erred on the side of caution and not gone out with Parker at all. But would that be a reasonable or excessive amount of caution to take in his dating life?

Study Questions:

- (1) Was it morally acceptable for Aubrey to not ask for I.D. in this case? Why or why not?
- (2) How, if at all, would the case be different if Aubrey was older than 19?
- (3) How, if at all, would the case be different if Aubrey and/or Parker had a different gender?

15. Support for Paris

On November 13, 2015, Paris, France faced the deadliest attack on its own soil since World War II. Three teams of terrorists attacked in six different locations, including cafes, a concert, and a soccer game. 129 people died, and at least 352 more were wounded, according to French officials.¹

In the aftermath of these attacks, many people from around the world expressed strong support for Paris. For example, many Facebook users changed their profile pictures to include the colors of the French flag.² And President Obama stated, “The attack is not an attack on Paris, it’s an attack on all of humanity.”³ However, many other people expressed frustration that this level of support and outrage is so selective, given the many other tragedies occurring around the world. For example, on the day before the Paris attacks, suicide bombings in Beirut killed 43 and injured 200.⁴ Similarly, on the day of the Paris attacks, a suicide bombing in Baghdad killed 18 and injured dozens of others.⁵ Yet Beirut and Baghdad received relatively little global attention or support in the aftermath of these attacks.

Some people believe that this kind of selective outrage is reasonable. For example, journalist Pamela Hobart notes that many Americans have a personal connection to France that they do not have to Beirut or Baghdad: “There are many Americans who speak French, and even more French who speak English. Many of us, and our friends and family, have visited France... Their culture of baguettes and wine is familiar to us.” She also claims that since we cannot possibly empathize with everyone at all times, “selective outrage is natural.”

However, other people believe that this kind of selective outrage is not reasonable. After all, they argue, the mere fact that many Americans care more about Paris than about Beirut or Baghdad does not make it morally acceptable for Americans to support Paris more than Beirut or Baghdad in times of crisis. If anything, they argue, we should express more support for Beirut or Baghdad, since people in these cities are suffering more overall, and they are also receiving less support overall.⁶

Of course, even if we accept that this kind of selective outrage is not reasonable, it is a further question whether we should be making this point in the immediate aftermath of an international tragedy, when millions of people are grieving.

Study Questions:

- (1) Is it hypocritical for Americans to express support for Paris but not for Beirut or Baghdad? Why or why not?
- (2) If we cannot express support for all people all the time, how should we prioritize? Are we morally permitted to prioritize people we care about more, or are we morally required to prioritize people who are suffering more (assuming these categories conflict)? Explain your answer.
- (3) Is the aftermath of a tragedy a good time or a bad time to raise ethical concerns about common reactions to that tragedy? Explain your answer.

¹ <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/paris-terror-attacks/paris-attacks-isis-claims-responsibility-france-vows-merciless-response-n463441>.

² http://mashable.com/2015/11/14/facebook-paris-filter/#WOQEm4_yGmqH

³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03860lt>

⁴ <https://newmatilda.com/2015/11/14/paris-attacks-highlight-western-vulnerability-and-our-selective-grief-and-outrage/>

⁵ <http://www.bustle.com/articles/123892-selective-outrage-is-natural-after-the-paris-attacks-but-remember-that-horrible-things-happen-elsewhere-too>

⁶ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03860lt>

16. South Korea's New, Young Faces

South Korea currently has the highest rate of plastic surgery per capita in the world. It is estimated that between one-fifth and one-third of the women in Seoul have undergone plastic surgery or other cosmetic procedures, compared to only five percent of American women. For women in their twenties, this number rises to fifty percent. Meanwhile, men make up fifteen percent of the plastic surgery market, including the former President Roh Moo-hyun.¹

Experts attribute these high rates of plastic surgery to multiple factors. First, many people in South Korea believe that they need plastic surgery in order to meet prevailing standards of beauty. For example, a typical high school graduation gift for a Korean teenager is a blepharoplasty, also known as a double-eyelid surgery, which many seek out so that they can look “less Asian.”² As a college student who received this double-eyelid surgery stated, “When you’re nineteen, all the girls get plastic surgery, so if you don’t do it, after a few years, your friends will all look better... we want to have surgeries while we are young so we can have our new faces for a long time.” Indeed, some cosmetic transformations are so radical that the hospitals offer certificates of identity to the patients.

A second and related factor is that many people in South Korea believe that they need plastic surgery in order to compete at school and work – especially since many employers require job applicants to submit pictures with their résumés. Many claim that this requirement is especially burdensome for low-income women in South Korea. For example, a young woman reports that beauty is a big advantage in a job interview: “If the interviewer saw two women who had similar abilities, of course he’d go with the better-looking one.”³ Similarly, plastic-surgery reality show producer Siwon Paek reports that lower-income South Koreans are more compulsive about cosmetic procedures: “[T]hey feel they have no other way to prove themselves to people and lift themselves socially and economically.”⁴

A third factor is that the plastic surgery industry is not regulated in South Korea. As a result, the increase in demand for cosmetic procedures has come along with an increase in unlicensed hospitals and unqualified surgeons, known as “ghost doctors.” These “ghost doctors” enable more people to have cosmetic procedures in South Korea, but they also have an unreliable track record. For example, the Korea Consumer Agency reports that a third of all plastic surgery patients are dissatisfied with the results, and seventeen percent claim to have suffered at least one negative side effect⁵.

Study Questions:

(1) Can it be good for a person to get cosmetic surgery to meet to an unreasonable – perhaps even oppressive – standard of beauty? Why or why not?

(2) Is it morally permissible for an employer to require job applicants to submit photographs with their résumés? Why or why not?

(3) Is it morally permissible for the state to allow “ghost doctors” to treat citizens who are willing to accept higher risk in exchange for lower prices? Why or why not?

¹ http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/24/business/international/plastic-surgery-tourism-brings-chinese-to-south-korea.html?_r=0

² <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-30295758>

³ <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/03/23/about-face>

⁴ <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/03/23/about-face>

⁵ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2015/05/16/stunning-photos-show-why-south-korea-is-the-plastic-surgery-capital-of-the-world/>