



National High School Ethics Bowl

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1. In it for the likes?

Leah is active on social media. She has accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. She uses these accounts for many purposes, some personal and others political. In the past, Leah always thought that she struck an appropriate balance between these topics. Now, looking back at her posts over the past year, Leah is surprised by how many of them are political. More often than not (and much more often than in the past), her posts involve her sharing news or commentary about political issues, her own thoughts about these issues, or pictures from marches, protests, or rallies.

Leah asks herself why her social media activity has changed over time and a couple of possible explanations occur to her. One is that Leah has learned more about political issues over the past year and has become more interested in them and concerned about them. Another is that many of her friends (and at least a few of her crushes) have become more politically active over the past year as well; and Leah imagines that at least part of the reason she writes more political posts and attends more marches, protests, and rallies is that she wants to impress these people. These partially self-interested reasons make Leah feel uncomfortable. However, she is not sure what conclusion if any to draw from her discomfort.

One thing that Leah feels uncertain about is how she should think of herself as a person. On one hand, she really does care about these issues for their own sake. And maybe it speaks well of her that she wants to impress the kinds of people who care about them too, and who see political activity as impressive. On the other hand, Leah knows that if she had no self-interested reason to engage in political activity, her overall engagement would decline.

Another thing that Leah feels uncertain about is what if anything she should do differently. For example, the next time she has an opportunity to share an article about an important political issue, should she still share that article even though she knows that part of her reason for doing so is that she hopes that certain people will see and like her post? On one hand, Leah thinks that it would be good to expose more people to this important issue. On the other hand, she also thinks that it would be bad for her to attempt to benefit from the plight of others.

After thinking about it for a minute, Leah decides to share the article. Within minutes, one of the people she was thinking about likes it, which makes Leah feel happy, then guilty, then confused all over again.

Study questions

1. If Leah performs good actions for self-interested reasons, does she deserve praise or blame (or neither)?
2. If Leah performs good actions for self-interested reasons, should she try to change her behavior? Why or why not?
3. If Leah performs good actions for self-interested reasons, should she try to change her motivations? Why or why not?

2. Contributing to overpopulation

The human population has risen dramatically over the past century and it shows no signs of slowing down. In the 19th century there were less than a billion people on the planet. Now, about 200 years later, there are more than seven billion people on the planet. Population experts predict that this number will keep rising until it reaches nine or ten billion by 2050 and, possibly, ten or eleven billion by 2100.¹

Many people believe that this increase in human population is a problem for our planet. We will consume too many natural resources, emit too many greenhouse gases, and generally speaking make the world a worse place for people in future generations.

Not everybody agrees that current population trends are unsustainable. But suppose that they are. In that case we have to ask: What if anything does this mean for our own individual procreative choices? In particular, do we have a moral duty to limit how many children we have as a way of addressing overpopulation?

Many people feel the pull of two different, seemingly conflicting thoughts when they think about these questions. The first thought is that if it would be bad for *all of us* to have, say, more than one child, then it would also be bad for *each of us* to have more than one child. And this makes sense: After all, is it really fair for me to have, say, two or three or four children if I know that it would be unsustainable for everyone who also wanted that many children to have them?

The other, seemingly conflicting thought is that while it might be bad for *all of us* to have, say, more than one child, it is not necessarily bad for *one person in particular* to do so. And this makes sense too: After all, we might think that whereas a lot depends on how many children we all have, not all that much depends on how many children you or I have in particular. And if you or I care a great deal about having a large family, we might find it implausible that morality could require us to sacrifice that goal whether or not our individual procreative choices make a difference.

Then again, maybe our procreative choices do make a difference. And of course, we may or may not think that making a difference is all that matters in this kind of case. Still, the intuition remains that having only one child (or no children at all) is an awfully high price to pay for what might seem to be a merely symbolic gesture.

Study questions

1. Do our individual procreative choices make a difference when it comes to global issues like overpopulation? Why or why not?
2. Does the ethics of limiting how many children we have depend on whether or not our individual procreative choices make a difference? Why or why not?
3. Are there other cases where we seem to make a difference collectively but not individually? If so, what are they, and how if at all should our thinking about this case extend to those cases?

¹ <http://www.unfpa.org/world-population-trends#>

3. Hope for the best or plan for the worst?

Patrick lost his job as a switchboard operator last year and has had a very difficult time finding a new job. There are very few jobs available for someone with his skill set, and meanwhile his bills are piling up. In particular, Patrick has significant medical debt because his daughter has a rare medical condition and he has no health insurance.

Patrick is feeling increasingly anxious about his situation, and his family is too. The last thing that Patrick wants to do is worry his family, however, so he does his best to put on a brave face and tell them that everything will be okay. He says that if he keeps trying, eventually something will work out, and they all need to have faith. Patrick finds that this message of hope helps his family to cope with their situation. Interestingly, he finds that it helps him to cope with this situation as well, at least to a degree. Deep down he knows that this message is overly optimistic: He realizes that no matter how hard he tries, he will probably not find a job anytime soon, and that even if he does, it will probably not pay enough to cover all his expenses. Still, Patrick finds that the more he tells everyone that everything will be okay, the more he believes it too. And the more he believes it too, the more motivated he feels to keep trying, and the more likely he is to succeed.

Nevertheless, at the end of the day Patrick is not able to fully deceive himself. In his moments of honest reflection, he still sees how bad the job market is and how dire his prospects are. This makes him feel torn. When he tells everyone that everything will be okay, this really does seem to benefit everyone (including, to a degree, himself). And maybe allowing everyone to enjoy this benefit for as long as possible is a morally permissible, if not morally required, part of caring for his family during hard times. Yet when he tells everyone that everything will be okay, he is also actively deceiving them. And any resulting false sense of security could have bad effects too; for example it could make everybody (including, to a degree, Patrick) less prepared than they should be for the bad outcomes that are most likely to happen. All things considered, Patrick feels unsure whether he should keep on his brave face or not.

Study questions

1. In cases where false beliefs would have good consequences, is it more important to have true beliefs or to promote good consequences?
2. Morally speaking, is there a difference between deceiving others and deceiving oneself?
3. Generally speaking, is it better to be optimistic or pessimistic in life? If so, which is it better to be and why? If not, why not?

4. Up and down

Naloxone is a medication used to reverse opioid overdoses. It works by reversing the depression of the respiratory and central nervous systems caused by opioids.² Paramedics have carried naloxone for decades, and it is becoming an increasingly common item for police officers and firefighters to carry.³ The drug is prescribed to patients on high doses of opioids as well as to nonmedical opioid users.⁴ In 2015, the FDA approved a pocket-sized naloxone auto-injector, making the antidote even more accessible for use in a nonmedical environment.⁵ As the prevalence of opioid addiction and overdoses continues to rise, questions about naloxone's availability and distribution are made even more significant. Many wonder: Is naloxone enabling opioid addicts, and if so, do the harms outweigh the benefits?

Some argue that naloxone is a safe and effective treatment for opioid overdoses and has the potential to save countless lives. Supporters compare the drug to epinephrine and glucagon injections made available to anaphylactic and diabetic patients.⁶ They argue that, as is the case with those treatments, naloxone should be readily available for treating those with an opioid use disorder. Pennsylvania's Governor Tom Wolf, in support of making naloxone more widely available, said of opioid addiction, "This is a disease, not a moral failing."⁷ Furthermore, since the friends and family of opioid users are often in a better position to respond quickly to an overdose than emergency personnel, one might think the drug should be accessible to them as well.

Others argue that making naloxone readily available gives opioid users a false sense of security, encouraging them to test the limits of their highs and making them more likely to repeatedly overdose.⁸ One opioid user has been revived by naloxone 70 times in a single year.⁹ Maine's Governor Paul LePage, opposing legislation that would increase access to naloxone, said "Naloxone does not truly save lives; it merely extends them until the next overdose... creating a situation where an addict has a heroin needle in one hand and a shot of naloxone in the other produces a sense of normalcy and security around heroin use that serves only to perpetuate the cycle of addiction."¹⁰ One might also worry that having naloxone so readily available may lead to its being administered when not necessary, causing acute opioid withdrawal and putting everyone in the situation at risk.

Study questions

1. Who should have access to naloxone? Emergency personnel? People with opioid prescriptions? Nonmedical opioid users? Should it be available over the counter?
2. Is there anything morally problematic about taking away a large part of the consequences of drug addiction?
3. When it comes to drug-related policies, which is more morally important: promoting the well-being of drug-users, or reducing the rates of drug use?

² <https://www.drugs.com/monograph/naloxone-hydrochloride.html>

³ <http://www.nchrc.org/law-enforcement/us-law-enforcement-who-carry-naloxone/>

⁴ <http://www.nsc.org/RxDrugOverdoseDocuments/Prescription-Nation-2016-American-Drug-Epidemic.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.fda.gov/NewsEvents/Newsroom/PressAnnouncements/ucm391465.htm>

⁶ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2661437/>

⁷ http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/28/us/naloxone-eases-pain-of-heroin-epidemic-but-not-without-consequences.html?_r=0

⁸ <http://wchstv.com/news/local/former-heroin-addict-speaks-out-about-reviving-overdose-patients>

⁹ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/03/22/life-is-hell-after-narcan-heroin-s-miracle-cure.html>

¹⁰ http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/28/us/naloxone-eases-pain-of-heroin-epidemic-but-not-without-consequences.html?_r=0

5. Taking care of parents

Charlotte is a senior in an Ivy League college, and has a job at a top financial firm waiting for her when she graduates. She is extremely bright and motivated, and she is very excited about the next stage of her life. However, her family life in recent years has been troubled. Charlotte is an only child and her parents divorced while she was a first-year in high school. Her father abandoned the family at that time and has not been supportive since, rarely and unpredictably checking in with Charlotte. She and her mother moved in with her mother's parents at the time of the divorce. Since then, Charlotte's mother has been financially irresponsible and emotionally unstable and unavailable. As a result, Charlotte's maternal grandparents became her primary caregivers in high school and her primary financial and emotional supports throughout college. Charlotte's grandparents have also supported her mother financially when she could not make ends meet. While at college, Charlotte drifted apart from her mother, and this has been a relief for Charlotte.

Charlotte's grandparents, whom she loves and respects very much, have begun to express growing concern about Charlotte's mother. They know that Charlotte's mother is irresponsible, both financially and as a parent, but they worry that as they age, they will no longer be able to afford to support her financially. They believe strongly in family loyalty, and they hope that Charlotte might be willing to provide her mother with at least a basic standard of living. Charlotte feels conflicted: She is excited about her new independence and does not want to be burdened by her mother's needs, but she also feels some sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of her mother and feels obligated to take seriously her grandparents' wishes.

Study questions

1. To what degree is Charlotte obligated to provide financial support to her mother?
2. To what degree is Charlotte obligated to obey her grandparents' wishes?
3. Is it morally permissible for Charlotte to refuse help to her mother?

6. Drone strikes

In recent years, the United States has employed drone strikes against targets in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia.¹¹ Individuals targeted by drone strikes are deemed to be terrorist threats and drone strikes have been put forth by the US government as a relatively efficient, cost-effective, and safe way to combat terrorism abroad.¹² However, drone strikes are also controversial for many reasons.

Supporters of drone strikes highlight the benefits of unmanned aircraft for US military personnel. The American soldiers employed by drone strikes are not deployed abroad while they work on these missions. Families can be spared excessive periods of separation and the constant fear of their family member being maimed or killed in active combat. Supporters also cite the benefits for people in the targeted areas who, while still in danger, are plausibly in less danger than they would be in a conventional war.

Others argue that because drone strikes distance soldiers geographically from their attacks, they oversimplify conflicts and provide too wide a psychological gap between the means and consequences of warfare. This could make military personnel too cavalier about taking life, because they do not have to see the consequences of their actions in person. It could also lead to mental health issues for drone pilots who conduct lethal attacks and witness the results on a screen, then leave the room to face an environment far removed from their actions.¹³ Meanwhile, civilians in areas targeted by drone strikes face the intense psychological trauma of the unpredictable possibility of bodily and property harm to themselves and their families and friends.

Study questions

1. What are the most significant consequences of removing soldiers from conflict zones by employing drone strikes?
2. Is it morally better, worse, or the same to engage in violence remotely rather than in person? Why?
3. How should the possible consequences for an American soldier responsible for a drone strike be weighed against the possible consequences for non-Americans?

¹¹ <https://www.propublica.org/article/everything-we-know-so-far-about-drone-strikes> and https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/04/world/middleeast/drone-strike-statistics-answer-few-questions-and-raise-many.html?_r=0

¹² <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/21/opinion/sunday/drone-warfare-precise-effective-imperfect.html>

¹³ <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/the-untold-casualties-of-the-drone-war-20160218>

7. Teaching all sides

Agustina teaches a high school social studies class that discusses many controversial subjects. For example, in this class they discuss topics involving race, gender, disability, the environment, and more. Agustina has a certain amount of freedom to assign topics and perspectives that she thinks will serve her students well. However, she also wants to teach this material in an objective manner, and she wonders what that means when it comes to topics that people can have very different views about. Should she teach all sides of every issue, or should she favor some sides over others?

Agustina thinks that she has good reason to teach all sides of every issue. This would allow her to avoid bias, and it would also create space for people to consider a variety of perspectives about a variety of issues. However, she also has concerns about this approach. One concern is practical: There are too many sides about too many issues for her to teach them all. Another concern is moral. Yes, people disagree about everything. But surely a teacher should treat at least some issues as settled. For example, Agustina should treat it as settled that the Earth is round even though some people still believe the Earth is flat. Similarly, she should treat it as settled that slavery is wrong even though some people still practice slavery. And indeed, Agustina reasons, if she treated these issues as open for debate, then she would be misleading her students about which questions are still worth asking with a fully open mind.

But Agustina feels confused about how to decide what to teach and what not to teach. One option is that she can focus on topics that people are most talking about in society and perspectives that people are most defending in society. That would allow her to narrow things down while still avoiding bias, since she would be deferring to society for guidance about what to teach. Then again, Agustina thinks, society is wrong about many issues too, and therefore this approach might mislead students as well. For example, if 97% of climate scientists believe that human-caused climate change is real¹⁴ but only 65% of the U.S. population agrees¹⁵, should Agustina defer to climate scientists and treat this issue as mostly closed, or should she defer to society as a whole, treat this issue as mostly open, and express neutrality about it?

Another option is that Agustina can focus on topics and perspectives that she thinks will be most instructive based on her own training and best judgment as a teacher. This would have most of the benefits of the previous option, and it would also allow her to make an informed judgment about how to approach controversial topics such as climate change. However, Agustina worries that if she takes this option, then she risks bringing too much of her own personal bias into the classroom. She wonders if it might be best for her to simply leave her own opinions at the door. But is it even possible for her to do that? And if so, is it morally better than her other options?

Study questions

1. Is it morally permissible for teachers to treat some questions as open and other questions as closed in the classroom? If so, how should they determine which is which?
2. Is it morally permissible for teachers to use their own personal judgment about which topics or perspectives are best? If so, how should they mitigate the risk of bias?
3. Should teachers treat questions about facts differently than questions about values in this respect? Why or why not?

¹⁴ <https://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus/>

¹⁵ <http://www.gallup.com/poll/190010/concern-global-warming-eight-year-high.aspx>

8. Nonhuman animals in biomedical research

Biomedical experiments often rely on the use of nonhuman animals as test subjects. This research sometimes leads to important medical and scientific advances, but it also often exposes research subjects to disease, injury, and/or death without the possibility of consent, and without the promise that this research will be used to benefit nonhuman animal populations.

There are many examples of nonhuman subjects experiments that seem to have led to important medical and scientific breakthroughs. For example, experimental surgery conducted on the brains of monkeys led researchers to discover a new treatment for Parkinson's disease, which has now helped as many as 200,000 humans to greatly increase their quality of life.¹⁶ Granted, this kind of research can sometimes lead us astray as well, due to differences between human and nonhuman bodies. And at least some of the progress that we have made as a result of this kind of research might have occurred either way.¹⁷ Still, it is plausible that nonhuman subjects research has done substantial good for humans.

However, there are also many risks and harms that researchers impose on nonhuman subjects that they would never impose on human subjects (even if those humans were cognitively relevantly similar to nonhumans). For instance, in 1987 Mortimer Mishkin and Tim Appenzeller lesioned the brains of monkeys in order to learn how different structures in the brain contribute to forming memories. They did learn new information about memory in the process. However, this study left its research subjects neurologically impaired and unable to form memories.¹⁸ And this outcome is not at all uncommon: The vast majority of nonhuman subjects experience disease, injury, and/or death as a result of their involvement in biomedical research.

Currently in the U.S., the Animal Welfare Act requires all federally funded research facilities that conduct animal research to have an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC).¹⁹ These committees review all research proposals that would use animal models and conduct inspections in research facilities. In particular, IACUCs aim to ensure that researchers use animal models only in worthwhile experiments, that researchers use animal models only when alternatives are unavailable, and that when researchers do use animal models, they avoid causing unnecessary harm (though in practice, many IACUCs treat these criteria as compatible with imposing disease, injury, and/or death on nonhuman subjects since they see these harms as a necessary part of worthwhile experiments).²⁰

However, critics of animal research claim that we need to do more in order to treat nonhuman subjects ethically. In particular, some animal rights advocates argue that we should perform experiments on nonhumans only if we would be willing to perform these experiments on cognitively relevantly similar humans (for example infants or severely cognitively disabled humans) as well. And of course, in the human case, most people believe that we should never knowingly and willingly inflict impairment or death on research subjects without the possibility of consent, no matter what we might learn as a result. In these cases, most people think, these harms are simply too high a price to pay.

Study questions

1. How should we compare the value of scientific knowledge with the wellbeing of research subjects?
2. Are we justified in treating nonhuman subjects differently than cognitively relevantly similar human subjects? Why or why not?
3. Are we justified in treating some nonhuman subjects, such as primates, differently than others, such as mice? Why or why not?

¹⁶ <https://speakingofresearch.com/facts/medical-benefits/>

¹⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4594046/>

¹⁸ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/3589645>

¹⁹ <http://www.nationalaglawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/crs/RS22493.pdf>

²⁰ <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/olaw/Guide-for-the-Care-and-use-of-laboratory-animals.pdf>

9. Standing up to hate

Sam is going over to their friend Jake's house for dinner. They have known Jake and his family for several years, and they get along with Jake's family well. When Sam goes over for dinner, topics are usually lighthearted, ranging from sports to music to local news. This time, however, the discussion takes an unexpected turn. Jake's father launches into a diatribe in which he makes a variety of derogatory remarks about other groups, such as "women should know their place" and "gay people should be ashamed of themselves". Sam is taken aback, as they have always thought of Jake's family as tolerant and accepting. Even worse, before they can think of how to respond, Jake's younger brother chimes in to agree with his father. To Sam's disappointment, Jake simply stares at the table in embarrassment. Sam knows that what is happening is wrong, but is unsure of how they should respond to the situation.

Part of Sam wants to confront Jake's father and brother, as they feel that it is their responsibility to stand up against hate whenever and wherever they see it, and to correct the problematic assumptions that underpin such remarks. They also think that they have an opportunity to educate this family, showing them that such remarks are not only harmful but inaccurate. If they do not take this opportunity, who else will? Additionally, Sam is worried that if they remain silent, Jake's father and brother will feel empowered to continue making such remarks, to the point where it will be too late to change their views, or even change their minds about expressing such views.

Another part of Sam feels that it is not their place to confront Jake's father and brother in their own home. They feel particularly conflicted about confronting Jake's father, as they have been raised to respect their elders. Sam also believes that they have a duty to be polite and show their appreciation for being hosted for dinner. Furthermore, Sam worries that confronting Jake's father and brother will create an uncomfortable situation and put a strain on Sam's relationship with Jake's family. And for all Sam knows, standing up to Jake's father and brother could backfire, causing either or both of them to become defensive and even more convinced that their views are correct.

Study questions

1. To what extent, if at all, should we put aside our moral principles when a guest in someone else's home, and why?
2. How, if at all, would your analysis of this case change if it was Sam's family rather than their friend's family expressing these views?
3. How, if at all, would your analysis of this case change if you learned that Sam was a member of one of the groups being targeted in this discussion?

10. Dirty hands

Lisa is a young woman who has just completed her PhD in mechanical engineering at a reputable university. Lisa decided to become a mechanical engineer because she was fascinated by machinery and wanted to pursue research about new technologies that could help make the world a better place. However, now that she has finished her degree, Lisa is having trouble finding a job where she would be doing research that she thinks would improve the world. The only job offer she has is to be a researcher at a company that is heavily involved in military technology. While taking this job would allow Lisa to earn a living doing research in mechanical engineering, her research would be contributing to the production of guns, tanks, warplanes and other military technology.

Lisa is a committed pacifist, and the idea of her research contributing to military technology that will be used to kill people makes her deeply uncomfortable. While she loves mechanical engineering, she feels that working at this company would be against her principles. Her pacifism is a very important part of her values, so she wonders whether she should simply switch fields rather than compromise her values. Lisa would be devastated to have to switch careers, and she does not want to feel like her degree in mechanical engineering was a waste. Part of her thinks she would not be able to live with herself if she took such a job.

Lisa also worries that not taking the job would be somewhat self-indulgent. She knows there are plenty of other mechanical engineers looking for jobs, many of whom do not share her pacifism. If Lisa does not take this job, somebody else will, and this person will likely pursue that research with greater enthusiasm than she would. Lisa is a pacifist because she thinks it is morally wrong to kill other people. But she reasons that if someone else takes this job and does it with greater enthusiasm, more people will die as a result. Part of her feels that if she is really against other people being killed, then she *should* take the job.

Lisa really does want to make the world a better place, and so she does not want to turn down the job just to keep her own hands clean. Even if she has to contribute to something that is against her values in the process, taking the job and doing it with less enthusiasm might be her best opportunity to make the world a better place. Additionally, she would be able to earn a living using the degree she worked so hard to get. Still, Lisa really would have trouble living with herself if she spent her life contributing to military technology.²¹

Study questions

1. Is Lisa right to worry that she is being self-indulgent by being reluctant to take the job?
2. Are we morally obligated to make the world a better place even if by doing so, we would get our hands dirty in the process?
3. What is the moral significance of personal principles or ideals in our lives more generally?

²¹ This case is inspired by an example from Bernard Williams' critique of utilitarianism in *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge UP, 1973).

11. Gender and sports

Many athletic competitions are divided into men's and women's competitions. One justification for this division is that men have a competitive advantage over women in many sports due to increased testosterone levels and muscle distribution. This is not to say that all men have a competitive advantage over all women – far from it. Still, many people think that the difference between men and women is significant enough to justify gendered categories, since this approach allows more people to participate and have a fair shot at winning.

However, many people are now questioning this binary division between men's and women's competitions. First, we now know that gender is more complicated than this distinction suggests. For example, nonbinary people are neither men nor women, so they do not fit into either category. Transgender men and women (i.e. men who were assigned female at birth and women who were assigned male at birth, respectively) raise questions for these categories as well. If we sort these individuals based on their gender identity, then, some people worry, we risk giving trans women a competitive advantage over cis women (i.e. women who were assigned female at birth). Yet if we sort these individuals based on their assigned sex at birth, then we are erasing their gender identity, which raises further moral questions.²²

We also face questions about what criteria to use to sort people into these categories (even for people who do belong in them). In the past, sports organizations used genital check and chromosome analysis.²³ However, these tests are both invasive and inadequate, since not all men have sex organs or chromosomes traditionally defined as male, not all women have sex organs or chromosomes traditionally defined as female, and many people, including many intersex people (whose “reproductive or sexual anatomy [do not] seem fit the typical definitions of male or female”), have neither.²⁴ There are also moral questions involved with requiring people to have surgery or hormonal treatment in order to compete in the appropriate category, since we do not generally require healthy people to do such things, and since some people might not have the opportunity to take these steps even if they wanted to.²⁵

If these problems prove too difficult to solve, we might also consider moving away from gendered categories altogether. One model is that we place everyone in the same category. After all, there are all kinds of natural advantages people can have in sports, ranging from height to weight to testosterone levels. So maybe we should chalk it all up to luck and let the most athletic person win. But then the fact remains that men would likely have a competitive advantage over women in general. Another model is that we replace gendered categories with, say, testosterone level categories and sort people that way. But then, that might not track everything that traditionally gave men a competitive advantage over women in general, and it would also require a radical reimagining of many sports.

Study questions

1. Is the binary distinction between men's and women's sports justified if not everybody is a man or woman?
2. If the value of respecting a person's gender identity seems to conflict with the value of maintaining an equal playing field in sports, how should we weigh these values?
3. Why, if at all, is it okay for athletic competitions to sort athletes based on some features, such as testosterone levels, that create a competitive advantage but not based on other features, such as height, that do so as well?

²² <https://theconversation.com/do-transgender-athletes-have-an-unfair-advantage-54289>

²³ https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/03/magazine/the-humiliating-practice-of-sex-testing-female-athletes.html?_r=0

²⁴ http://www.isna.org/faq/what_is_intersex

²⁵ <http://www.outsports.com/2016/1/21/10812404/transgender-ioc-policy-new-olympics>

12. Stuck in love

Sarah met her husband Christopher in an outdoors store ten years ago. They hit it off right away. They spent long hours climbing, taking backpacking trips and generally connecting over their mutual love of the outdoors. Eventually, they decided to get married. They were happily married for six years until Christopher had a tragic climbing accident. On one of their excursions, Christopher's harness broke and he fell 50 feet, becoming paralyzed from the waist down. The accident was tragic for both of them, and Sarah did all she could to comfort Christopher during his recovery and adaptation to life as a paraplegic.

Four years later, life has continued for Sarah and Christopher, but Sarah feels as though more has been lost than Christopher's ability to walk. Although they have some other things in common, the core of their relationship had always been their shared love of outdoor activities. Now that many of these activities are off the table for them, Sarah feels as though she and Christopher are drifting apart. She still loves hiking and climbing, and Christopher still supports her interest in these activities. But there is a limit to how much Sarah can enjoy these activities now (especially with Christopher), and when she enjoys these activities without Christopher, she feels guilty for leaving him behind. Meanwhile, Christopher is developing new interests, for example in reading, writing, and painting, that Sarah fully supports but has very little interest in herself. To the degree that she tries to share these new interests, she feels frustrated by her inability to do so. And to the degree that she does not, she worries that this will make her and Christopher grow even further apart.

Sarah tries to make the relationship work for as long as she can, but in spite of her best efforts she feels unfulfilled. So, now that Christopher has largely adjusted to his new life and is relatively independent again (though he does still benefit from her care and support), Sarah starts to wonder if their relationship still makes sense. Yes, Sarah loves Christopher and takes the commitment she made to him very seriously, but the relationship they previously had is gone and she no longer feels happy. Although she vowed to stay with Christopher through sickness and health, she thinks they might both be happier apart (or at least that she might be).

At the same time, Sarah feels ashamed of herself for even considering leaving Christopher. If she vowed to stay with him through sickness and health, how can she now desert him simply because of the consequences of his accident? She thinks about how harshly she would judge people who leave their partners who have been diagnosed with cancer or other illnesses, and wonders whether her situation is any different. When she thinks about such cases, she feels like there is something morally bad about leaving your partner as a result of this kind of development, and that a truly good person would renew their commitment to their partner in such a situation instead of breaking it. And yet, she thinks, she can't help the fact that she feels unfulfilled, and she also can't prevent herself from having these feelings.

Study questions

1. Is Sarah blameworthy for feeling unfulfilled in her relationship with Christopher?
2. Is it morally permissible to break a commitment to your partner in a situation like this?
3. Is it morally permissible to make a commitment that you are not certain you will be able to keep?

13. Risky moral decisions

Faisal is an overseer at a large coal mine in West Virginia, where he oversees a group of 100 coal miners. One day, in the middle of a mining operation, a sudden, unexpected storm hits the area. The storm is far more severe than typical storms in the area, and an overwhelming amount of rain quickly accumulates. Because this level of rainfall is so rare, the coal mine is not designed to drain it all, and the mine begins to flood, trapping some miners. Faisal must act quickly in order to try to rescue the miners before it is too late. The way the mine is constructed, there are two shafts, one large and one small. Ten of the miners are in the small shaft, and the other 90 miners are in the large shaft. Using his equipment, Faisal can either attempt to rescue the miners in the small shaft or the miners in the large shaft, but it is impossible for him to rescue both before the mine floods.

Though any loss of life would be tragic, it seems clear that if Faisal can only rescue one group of miners, it would be better to rescue the group of 90 miners in the large shaft than the group of ten miners in the shallow shaft, assuming that either rescue attempt would be successful. However, in this situation, the chances of success are not equal between the two options. The shape of the large mine shaft makes it much more difficult for Faisal to rescue the miners from that shaft with his equipment, whereas it would be relatively easy for Faisal to rescue the miners from the smaller shaft.

Faisal quickly does the math and calculates that if he were to attempt to rescue the 90 miners from the large shaft, he would have a 15% chance of success, whereas if he were to attempt to rescue the ten miners from the small shaft, he would have a 90% chance of success. He now needs to decide which group of miners to attempt to rescue. One way of deciding is to calculate the number of expected lives saved by multiplying the number of miners in each shaft by the chance of rescuing them. According to these calculations, if Faisal were to attempt to rescue the miners from the small shaft, the number of expected lives saved would be nine. If he were to attempt to rescue the miners from the large shaft, the number of expected lives saved would be 13.5.

Faisal feels conflicted about what to do. These calculations suggest that he should attempt to rescue the miners from the large shaft because the number of expected lives saved is greater. However, there is only a 15% chance that Faisal will succeed if he attempts to rescue the miners from that shaft. That means that if he tries to rescue the 90 miners, there is an 85% chance that all of the miners will die. Whereas if he attempts to rescue the miners from the other shaft, he will almost certainly save ten people.

As Faisal attempts to decide what to do, he increasingly feels like there is no right answer. Doing calculations with human lives feels wrong to him, as it seems to reduce people to numbers. But he knows that he has to decide somehow, or else all of the miners will die.

Study questions

1. All else being equal, it generally better to do something with a high chance of benefiting a small number of people, or something with a low chance of benefiting a large number of people?
2. Is there anything morally problematic about doing calculations with human lives? Why or why not?
3. Besides such calculations, is there any other reasoning that could help Faisal figure out the right thing to do?

14. Responsibility for implicit bias

Implicit bias refers to the psychological associations that subconsciously affect our actions, decisions and judgments toward certain groups of people. According to Ohio State University's Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, implicit biases are "activated involuntarily and without an individual's awareness or intentional control."²⁶ Furthermore, our implicit biases are not generally accessible to us through introspection, and it is possible that our implicit biases about other groups can conflict with our conscious attitudes about them. For example, it is possible to have implicit biases regarding people of other races even if one is an avowed anti-racist.

Because implicit bias is not generally accessible through introspection, social psychologists have developed a test called the Implicit Association Test (IAT). According to Project Implicit at Harvard University, "the IAT measures the strength of associations between concepts (e.g., black people, gay people) and evaluations (e.g., good, bad) or stereotypes (e.g., athletic, clumsy)."²⁷ The IAT is supposed to uncover our implicit biases by testing how we associate certain concepts with certain groups. If we tend to associate certain groups with negative evaluative concepts, this is taken to be evidence that we have implicit biases toward those groups.

According to the results from the IAT, implicit racial and gender biases are widespread.^{28,29} One set of results from the IAT indicates that 70 percent of people have implicit biases against African-Americans.³⁰ This number compares to only 20 percent of people who report having explicit biases against African-Americans. The results of the IAT are often shocking to the many people who test as having these implicit biases despite explicitly disavowing any kind of prejudicial attitude. Often, they are worried that having these implicit biases makes them bad people.

When people explicitly hold racist, sexist, or otherwise prejudicial attitudes, we tend to blame them for developing and maintaining these attitudes and regard them as criticizable for having them. We hold them morally responsible for their ignorance and judge that they ought to educate themselves about other groups in order to remove their prejudices. However, it is less clear what to think about our widespread implicit biases. Implicit biases could have many of the same negative consequences that explicit biases do, but they are also harder to identify and control. So, should we blame people for having or acting on implicit biases, and if so how much?

Study questions

1. What, if any, are the morally relevant differences between explicit biases and implicit biases?
2. If we are not morally responsible for having implicit biases, are we also not morally responsible for acting on them? Why or why not?
3. How should the fact that implicit biases are so widespread influence what we think about them?

²⁶ <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias/>

²⁷ <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/iatdetails.html>

²⁸ <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/06/090617142120.htm>

²⁹ <http://www.aauw.org/resource/iat/>

³⁰ <https://tierneylab.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/11/18/a-shocking-test-of-bias/>

15. Tip of the iceberg

Erica is a senior in high school, and she has also recently become the primary bread-winner in her family. When not in school, she waits tables at a local restaurant. She has picked up all the extra hours that she can while still maintaining her good standing in school. However, even her best efforts are not enough. Erica and her family are out of money and out of options, and they need to find a way to make ends meet.

One way for Erica to save money is to not report her tips as income to the IRS. She makes a significant amount of money through tips, and if she reports this money then it will be taxed, and Erica and her family will fall short of what they need to pay the bills. However, if she does not report this money then it will not be taxed, and Erica and her family will have what they need to pay the bills.

Erica assumes that her chances of being caught are low, since, she thinks, the IRS will probably not bother to audit somebody like her. Still, Erica feels morally conflicted. After all, she thinks, if she did not report the tips, then she would be stealing money from the state and its citizens. Then again, Erica thinks, desperate times call for desperate measures. She did everything that she could to earn money legally, and that turned out to be impossible. So, maybe stealing is justified in this kind of situation.

Erica also worries that if she cheats on her taxes to support her family now, then she might be willing to do other, even worse things to support them in the future, such as stealing food or money from the restaurant. But how likely is that to happen? And if it did happen, would that be such a bad thing?

Study questions

1. Morally, not paying taxes the same as stealing from the state and its citizens? Why or why not?
2. Are we less morally responsible for lying, cheating, or stealing if our economic circumstances coerce us into doing so?
3. Is there a line between illegal activities that can be justified by economic coercion and illegal activities that cannot be justified by economic coercion? If so, where is that line and why?

16. Almost kiss and tell

Juan and his girlfriend Julia have just graduated from college and have been in a committed relationship for about two years. Their relationship is happy and healthy, characterized by mutual respect and excitement about their future together. One weekend, Juan goes on a trip by himself to the wedding of an old friend from high school. The party afterwards is a fun and raucous celebration. Towards the end of the evening, Juan finds himself dancing with Marcela, an old friend that he has not seen in a very long time. At first the dancing is silly, but soon they are dancing suggestively and flirting with each other. When the party is over, Marcela invites Juan back to her hotel room and he accepts.

When Juan and Marcela arrive at the hotel, they are surprised to find that a handful of their old friends have gathered in the common area, continuing to catch up together. They welcome Juan and Marcela, who end up sitting with different clusters of friends scattered around the room, and they all continue talking and laughing until the morning.

The next day, after everyone has parted ways, Juan feels glad the interaction with Marcela went no further than it did, but he also feels guilty about nearly cheating on Julia. He is not sure about what would have happened had his friends not been present. He is also not sure whether or not to tell Julia what happened. Juan thinks Julia deserves to know how close he came to cheating on her and that it would be disrespectful to her and to their relationship to keep it a secret. Yet he also wonders if telling Julia is necessary since in the end all he and Marcela did was dance.

Study questions

1. What constitutes cheating on a partner?
2. Is it morally worse to actually cheat than to almost cheat (but then not do so for lack of opportunity)? Why or why not?
3. Is it morally permissible for Juan to keep this information from Julia?

17. The cases for and against reparations

Below the title of Ta Nehisi-Coates' recent article, "The Case for Reparations," published in *The Atlantic* in June 2014, he writes: "Two hundred fifty years of slavery. Ninety years of Jim Crow. Sixty years of separate but equal. Thirty-five years of racist housing policy. Until we reckon with our compounding moral debts, America will never be whole."³¹ Whether the US government ought to give reparations for slave labor and its legacy and consequences is a deeply contested question. Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich) has introduced the Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act (H.R. 40) to Congress every year since 1989, and it has never passed.³²

Advocates of reparations for slavery argue that something must be done to acknowledge and remedy "the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of slavery in the United States and the 13 American colonies between 1619 and 1865" as well as the subsequent "de jure and de facto racial and economic discrimination against African-Americans, and the impact of these forces on living African-Americans."³³ Among advocates, there is not a consensus about what form reparations should take, but they share the position that without reparations for slavery and various forms of institutionalized discrimination aimed specifically at Black Americans, justice will never be done.³⁴ A separate example of reparations in America's past is Ronald Reagan's Civil Liberties Act, which in 1988 gave a formal apology and \$20,000 to each surviving victim of Japanese-American internment during World War II.³⁵

In debates about reparations for slavery and discrimination against Black Americans, many questions remain. Some critics hold that reparations are not appropriate because those responsible for the institution of slavery in the United States can no longer be held accountable and punished. Additionally, the question of who is to blame for slavery remains unsettled for some people.³⁶ Another worry is that it would be impossible to decide who should pay this money and how much they should pay, given how much time has passed and other factors. Another worry is that policies such as affirmative action and the expansion of welfare programs already play the same role as reparations,³⁷ or that the unjust wealth and advantage produced by slavery for slave-holders and others have not persisted over time so they need not be rectified.³⁸ A final worry is that it would be divisive to focus government resources in this way.³⁹

Study questions

1. What is the moral significance of financial restitution?
2. Should Black Americans receive reparations for slavery and/or continuing discrimination?
3. Does a person need to have caused a harm in order to be morally accountable for that harm, or is it enough that they benefit from the legacy of that harm?

³¹ <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

³² http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/reparations-black-americans-slavery_us_56c4dfa9e4b08ffac1276bd7

³³ <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/114/hr40>

³⁴ <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/06/08/are-reparations-due-to-african-americans/horrific-injustice-of-slavery-must-be-repaired>

³⁵ <http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/08/09/210138278/japanese-internment-redress>

³⁶ <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/23/opinion/23gates.html>

³⁷ <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/06/08/are-reparations-due-to-african-americans/no-consensus-on-need-or-possible-results-of-reparations> and <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/06/08/are-reparations-due-to-african-americans/who-would-pay-for-reparations-and-why>

³⁸ <http://www.hoover.org/research/case-against-reparations-slavery>

³⁹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/01/bernie-sanders-reparations/424602/>