



UNC
PARR CENTER FOR ETHICS



National High School Ethics Bowl

National Bowl Case Set

April 10-11, 2015

Case Writing Team:

Sam Reis-Dennis

Jason Fishel

Katelin Kaiser

Chris Ng

Daniel Pigeon

Abby Reimer

Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl Case Committee

1. Giving to Panhandlers

One chilly autumn evening as Vicky is walking home from a restaurant she is approached by a disheveled man who introduces himself as Tom. Explaining that he does not have anywhere to sleep, Tom asks if she has any money to spare. Tom says he needs the money for a warm meal and a bed at the local homeless shelter. It is not an unlikely story, as many homeless shelters charge a small fee to their patrons.¹

Vicky has a few extra dollars in her pocket. Despite being sympathetic to Tom's situation, she is worried about how Tom might use the money. Might he use it to get drunk or take drugs? If so, she wonders, would that mean she should not give him the money? She also finds herself wondering how he became homeless in the first place, and whether he is responsible for his current situation. Not wanting to start a long dialogue, Vicky apologizes to Tom, wishes him luck, and continues on her way home.

Study Questions:

- (1) Was Vicky's choice to not give money to Tom morally justified? Why or why not?
- (2) What moral duties do we have, if any, to the less fortunate?
- (3) When, if ever, are we morally obligated to make sacrifices for the well being of another person?
- (4) If Vicky could buy Tom a meal, rather than just give him money, so that there was no issue about him using the money for drink or drugs, should she?

¹ http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/2010-03-25-homeless_N.htm

2. Ethical Consumerism

Maria often feels conflicted when she is making purchases—at clothing stores, at pharmacies, even at supermarkets—since she knows that many of the products she buys are manufactured by people working for low wages in poor, perhaps even dangerous, conditions. In extreme cases, these products may well be manufactured with the use of child labor. She worries that she is benefitting only because others are being exploited. At the same time, she realizes that often the jobs offered in such places are, despite being terrible, actually the best jobs available to people living in severely impoverished countries.

Although Maria wants to be a conscientious shopper, she does not have the time to research every purchase she makes. Even if she did, it isn't likely that information is available on every product for sale. Maria has no desire to support practices she finds unethical, but it seems downright unrealistic to expect her to avoid making purchases that contribute to them. On top of all that, she realizes that goods that are labeled "organic," "environmentally-friendly," or "Fair Trade" are generally more expensive than similar products without those specifications. Are the extra costs ones that she has a moral responsibility to bear?

Maria strives to be a good person—even if it is not always clear what that means. She genuinely doesn't want to live her life in a way that causes suffering for others. She wonders whether it is acceptable to buy products produced under such bad conditions; or perhaps it might even be required, in order to help those who, without the jobs, will suffer even more.

Study Questions:

- (1) What moral obligations do we have, if any, to consider how things are produced, and the effects of our purchasing them, in deciding what we buy?
- (2) Are we morally obligated to ensure that none of our actions are indirectly harmful to others?
- (3) Is it morally relevant that the factories producing the merchandise often offer better jobs (despite how bad they are) than other opportunities open to the workers?
- (4) Do we have a moral obligation to ensure that working conditions for everyone meet certain minimum conditions? If so, what conditions?

3. Cheerleading and Disability

Callie Smartt was a freshman cheerleader at Andrews High School in Andrews, Texas. But she was not the same as the other cheerleaders: she was confined to a motorized wheelchair because she had cerebral palsy.

Originally, Callie was allowed to join the cheerleading squad and cheered for her freshman year without incident. By all accounts, she did an admirable job. Before her sophomore year began, however, the school urged her mother to sign an agreement that would restrict Callie to the sidelines away from the possibility of injury; cheerleaders have, after all, often been injured by falling players when the play of the game is pursued out of bounds. Some of the cheerleaders and their parents backed the agreement saying that Callie puts both herself and other cheerleaders at risk, and that her teammates were burdened and distracted by having to attend to Callie's personal needs resulting from her disability. Callie's mother fought for the inclusion of Callie in all cheerleading activities.¹ Eventually, though, Callie opted to stop fighting to join the cheerleading squad, and instead joined a newly formed pep-squad that would cheer from the stands, with no performance component.

Some have argued that Callie should not have had to make such a decision; she should have been allowed to be on the cheerleading squad and allowed as well to participate in whichever activities she could, even at some risk to herself. Supporters of the school's decision argue that the school has a responsibility to protect the safety of Callie and others, and they contend that the increased risks associated with having Callie and her wheelchair on the field justify requiring her to stay on the sidelines.²

Study Questions:

- (1) What is the purpose of cheerleading? How might consideration of this purpose affect the debate about Callie's eligibility for the squad?
- (2) Do safety concerns outweigh Callie's wishes to join the squad and participate according to her abilities?
- (3) What responsibilities does a school have to protect its students from risks posed by other students when they engage in school sanctioned activities?
- (4) Should it be considered discrimination if people with disabilities are not allowed to participate in the same activities as other students? Why or why not?

¹ http://www.oaoa.com/article_29ca5cda-e937-501c-92b5-e7f39c3c6de3.html?mode=jqm

² <http://lubbockonline.com/news/042397/andrews.htm>

4. Offensive Lyric Sing-Along

Nate is riding in a car with some of his friends when a popular song comes on the radio. A fan of the song and its artist, Nate knows all of the words and feels the urge to belt them out. Soon after he begins to sing, however, Nate remembers that the song has some sexist lines and could plausibly be construed as endorsing an objectionable attitude toward women.

Now he doesn't know how to proceed. Nate sees himself as a nice person, sensitive to the cares of others. If his singing the lyrics could hurt someone, then maybe it would be best for him not to sing the possibly offensive lines. Additionally, Nate wonders if perhaps his singing the song amounts to a kind of approval of the sentiments the song reflects, even if none of his friends would be offended.

On the other hand, Nate knows that *he* doesn't endorse the sexism expressed in the song, and thinks it unlikely that any real harm could come from his singing it out loud. Plus, he reasons, it's the artist, and not him, who wrote the objectionable lyrics. He questions whether it really reflects badly on him to sing these catchy lines when they are already being blasted on the radio. Moreover, Nate feels slightly uncomfortable with having to censor himself. After all, alone, he would sing the song.

Study Questions:

- (1) Is it morally permissible for Nate to sing the song?
- (2) Does the presence of women in the car affect the moral status of Nate's singing? Why or why not?
- (3) What sorts of harms might singing along cause?
- (4) When is self-censorship morally appropriate? When not?

5. Gifts from Questionable Donors

Many organizations—including universities, non-profit groups, charities and political campaigns—depend heavily on donors for funding. Gifts often provide essential financial assistance for morally good organizations. Yet not all donors are untainted morally, some having acquired their resources through questionable practices and some engaging in projects or practices not approved of by the organizations in question. As a result, many organizations that rely on gifts for financial stability find themselves wondering whether it is morally permissible for them to accept contributions from such donors.

Consider George, an alumnus of State U, who has made a fortune in manufacturing by taking advantage of lax child labor laws overseas. Suppose he offers a multi-million dollar charitable gift to State U to provide financial aid to students in need. The University's President worries about whether accepting George's donation makes her and the University complicit in his business. And she wonders whether by refusing his donation she might be making an important moral statement, perhaps one that might lead either to other University's taking a similar stand or even to other donors stepping forward to support financial aid. Of course, without the gift, it is very likely that many fewer students will be able to afford State U. And whether the University accepts the money or not George will continue with his business, as will others so long as it is profitable. Moreover, if State U rejects the gift, George will be offended and will probably never offer the University other support for academic projects, whereas he is likely otherwise to continue as a generous donor. Indeed, the President might think, in accepting the funding, and using it to support students who could not afford a State U education without financial aid, she would be turning "bad" money into "good," not thereby redeeming George but at least working to make the world a better place.

Similarly, one can easily imagine a student who might be offered aid from a program established with George's support having concerns along the same lines. Does accepting the aid mean that she is in some way condoning George's behavior or absolving him of responsibility for what he has done? At the same time, though, such a student is not herself exploiting workers or in other ways supporting such an activity. Rather, she is pursuing an education she probably would not otherwise be able to secure. She might well be torn about whether it is morally permissible for her to accept the fellowship.

Study Questions:

- (1) Under what circumstances, if any, is it morally wrong for an individual to accept a gift from a morally bad agent or group?
- (2) When, if ever, should nonprofits and universities turn down donations that could help them realize morally good ends?
- (3) What might the fact that a person is either too willing or too unwilling to accept gifts from morally dubious sources say about his or her character?
- (4) Is there a moral difference between the individual and organizational cases? If so, what is the difference and what explains it?

6. NFL Fandom

The National Football League has come under fire in recent months, leading some to suggest that it is morally wrong to watch and be a fan of professional football. These critics argue that enthusiasm for the league is founded on a way of seeing players as, on some level, sub-human, and note that the league has a financial interest in encouraging this way of understanding the game. As these detractors see it, the hugely popular “fantasy” football games only make things morally worse: What we would normally consider a proper level of concern for the well-being of others is incompatible, they argue, with the kind of dedication and investment encouraged for fans of such a brutal game.¹

Critics have focused especially on the league’s handling of the mounting scientific evidence of a relationship between degenerative brain conditions and football-related head trauma, as well as its ongoing promotion of youth football despite these scientific findings. In a recent article, ESPN.com’s Dan Le Batard suggested that head trauma may even be contributing to the recent rash of domestic abuse incidents involving NFL players.² Making matters worse, some critics have suggested that the league’s response to these off-field episodes (which they see as inconsistent, excessively lenient, and slow) confirms the perception that the NFL is interested in its players only as faceless commodities.

Supporters of the league, on the other hand, stress the importance of the players’ consent: Players voluntarily sign multi-year contracts; no one is forcing them to play. In his defense of watching football in the *New York Times Magazine*, Chuck Klosterman argues:

If you think it’s fundamentally barbaric to watch such an endeavor, I’m not going to try and convince you otherwise. But you’re not ethically required to hold that view. Yes, you are financially subsidizing a profession that involves elective physical risk. But on a smaller scale, the same could be said for taking your child to the circus; while there might be “big picture” problems with the enterprise, the risks associated with the work are taken on by free people.³

Study Questions:

- (1) Is being a fan of NFL football morally defensible? Why or why not?
- (2) If being a fan of the NFL is morally wrong, does that mean we shouldn’t be football fans? Could we ever be all-things-considered justified in knowingly doing something immoral?
- (3) Does the fact that a participant consents to a potentially dangerous and degrading activity always make that activity morally permissible?

¹ Carter, C. (2013, October 26). Living in a world of fantasy can be dehumanizing. *The New York Times*.

² Le Batard, D. (2014, September 20). Is NFL an accomplice to all this off-field violence? *The Miami Herald*.

³ Klosterman, C. (2014, September 5). Is It Wrong to Watch Football? *The New York Times Magazine*.

7. Food Desert

A traditionally low-income, urban neighborhood in which residents have to walk more than a mile to the nearest supermarket chain is known as a food desert. Under the USDA definition, residents in a food desert do not have access to fresh, healthy and nutritious food. Typically, these neighborhoods have many fast food restaurants and convenience stores selling cheaper, unhealthy foods, instead.

Food deserts correlate with higher rates of chronic health conditions like obesity and diabetes. Some cities, like Los Angeles and New York City, have attempted to address the problems of food deserts by limiting the number of fast food restaurants or offering businesses financial incentives for serving healthier foods.¹

In the past five years, one such neighborhood has started to become gentrified. Recently, a specialty grocery has opened and is the only grocery in the area. Its prices are on average twenty percent higher than a regular grocery store.²

Sally, a low-income mother of three young children, cannot afford to shop in the new store. She does not have a car and purchases most of her groceries at a nearby convenience store that carries packaged foods. Sally and other members of the community have complained that the new, specialty grocery is too expensive for the majority of neighborhood residents. Residents have suggested the grocery store should subsidize, or lower, its prices. They argue that low-income residents need healthy options available at price points that match those charged by local fast-food restaurants and convenience stores.

The grocery store managers believe that the store will be profitable by targeting the higher-income residents and that they are responsible for alleviating the food desert. One manager of a New York store argued “Our only responsibility is to make the most money for our company and its stockholders” said one manager. “We cannot sell food to everyone at different income levels; the grocery store would not make any money.”

Study Questions:

- (1) Do owners of stores located in food deserts have a responsibility to sell lower-cost items?
- (2) Do for-profit businesses have a responsibility to maximize their community’s well being as well as their profits?
- (3) Just because businesses have the right to charge what they like, is it always morally right for them to do so?

¹ <http://www.foodispower.org/food-deserts/>

² http://www.slate.com/articles/life/food/2014/11/whole_foods_detroit_can_a_grocery_store_really_fight_elitism_racism_and.html?wpsrc=sh_all_dt_tw_bot

8. G.M.'s Failure

Marie Sachse lost control of her 2004 Saturn in 2009, striking a tree head-on. The air bags should have deployed, but they didn't.¹ Sachse died eight hours later from internal injuries. G.M. has been forced to recall over 26 million cars because faulty ignition switches caused engines and airbags to shut off during driving. The flawed switches were linked to 32 crashes and 13 deaths. Currently, G.M. is facing a congressional investigation and criminal probe.² G.M. engineers knew about the problem as far back as 2001, and although the problem was linked to crashes as early as 2008, the company did not recall any cars at that time. Released company emails showed that the ignition switches were not originally replaced because doing so would have cost 90 cents more per unit.

In the aftermath, Mary Barra, G.M.'s new CEO, has fired 15 employees. According to Barra, the failure to act was caused by a "pattern of incompetence and neglect" and a cost-based corporate culture.³

One fired engineer, Raymond DeGiorgio, defended his work. He approved the faulty switch in 2001 and secretly ordered new parts in 2006. While he eventually fixed the problem, his decision not to tell his company that the parts were faulty in the first place left many unsafe cars on the road.

"All I can say is that I did my job," he said. "I didn't lie, cheat or steal. I did my job the best I could."⁴

Many people within the company, from low-level engineers to managers, knew there was a problem with the switches. But no one took full responsibility. Those involved, like DeGiorgio, could attempt to justify their actions by saying they did not have authority to act or were not ultimately responsible.

Many have called for G.M. as a company to be held responsible for the deaths, either through criminal charges or fines. But how much responsibility falls on the employees involved?

Study Questions:

- (1) When many workers collaborate to manufacture a product, as was the case at G.M., what extent is each worker responsible to address a moral problem?
- (2) What is the moral difference between deliberate action and deliberate inaction? Should an individual be held responsible for failing to act? Under what circumstances?
- (3) What responsibility do companies have to address the possibility that their products will fail in a way that causes death?

¹ <http://www.detroitnews.com/article/20140411/AUTO0103/304110092>

² <http://www.vox.com/cards/gm-car-recall/why-didnt-gm-replace-the-faulty-switches-earlier>

³ <http://online.wsj.com/articles/gm-ceo-probe-found-pattern-of-incompetence-1401973966>

⁴ <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/14/business/a-fatally-flawed-switch-and-a-burdened-engineer.html>

9. HIPAA and Mentally Ill Adult Children

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) is meant to protect patients' and consumers' privacy rights. HIPAA ensures a patient has control over how their health care information is used and disclosed by their health care providers¹. HIPAA allows health care providers fully to disclose patient information and mental health treatment to a parent or guardian only if the patient is 18 years old or younger. Patients above the age of majority must give their consent before medical information can be disclosed to third parties.

Some argue HIPAA presents a bind for families of people with serious mental illness, such as those suffering major depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and borderline personality disorder. By restricting disclosure of health information, HIPAA can leave family members in the dark when their loved one will not share treatment details. HIPAA makes no exceptions, even in the case of adult children whose parents are still considered the primary care-givers. In these situations, parents cannot access their child's health care information unless the adult child consents. Sharing health care information with parents can be crucial to stabilizing a mentally ill adult child's treatment and daily life. Disclosure of health information may help minimize failures to follow medication or therapy guidelines and improve communication with law enforcement and school administration in ways that could prevent crises.

Dr. E. Fuller Torrey, a psychiatrist and founder of the Treatment Advocacy Center, a mental health advocacy group, explains that HIPAA was not written with mental illness in mind: "When someone has cancer, you can make the assumption that their brain is working normally so that they can make an informed decision as to whether or not they want their loved ones to know exactly what the details of the cancer is...you can't make that assumption about people with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder."²

In December 2013, the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act³ (H.R. 3717) was proposed. This bill would make available needed psychiatric, psychological, and supportive services for individuals diagnosed with mental illness and families in mental health crisis.⁴ H.R. 3717 would also allow families to access health information about their adult children with serious mental illnesses. Some opponents of this bill argue that patients with mental illnesses have as much of a right to keep their health information private as patients suffering from other types of illnesses. Moreover, opponents are concerned that weakening confidentiality protections in this way would make some patients less willing to seek psychological treatment, thereby doing more harm to patients than good.

Study Questions:

- (1) Do we have a right to keep our health care information private? If so, what are the limits of this right? If not, why not?

¹ <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/hipaa/understanding/special/mhguidance.html>

² <http://www.npr.org/blogs/health/2014/06/04/318765929/privacy-law-frustrates-parents-of-mentally-ill-adult-children>

³ <http://murphy.house.gov/helpingfamiliesinmentalhealthcrisisact>

⁴ <http://murphy.house.gov/uploads/HR3717%20Bill%20Text.pdf>

Study Questions (continued):

- (2) Should concerns about a patient's right to privacy outweigh considerations about their mental competency?
- (3) When, if ever, do adults have an obligation to disclose personal health information to their family members?
- (4) Should information about a patient's mental health care be protected from disclosure in the same way that information about other types of patient care are?

10. Alternative Beliefs in School

Krystal Myers was a noteworthy student at Lenoir City High School in east Tennessee for many reasons. As Knoxville's *News Sentinel* reported, she was an honors student, the captain of the swim team, and editor of the *Panther Press*—her high school newspaper; Myers was also an atheist at a predominantly Christian public school.¹ In 2012, a controversy arose when school administrators decided not to allow the *Panther Press* to print an editorial Myers wrote, entitled “No Rights: The Life of an Atheist.”

In this editorial, which was ultimately printed by the *News Sentinel*, Myers wrote, “As a current student in government [...] I have realized that I feel that my rights as an atheist are severely limited when compared to other students who are Christians.”² The editorial went on to question the way that atheists are perceived by many Christians, and to criticize school officials for sponsoring sectarian prayer and other religious activity at school events. She writes, “Not only are there multiple clubs featuring the Christian faith, but youth ministers are also allowed to come onto the school campus and hand candy and other food out to Christians and their friends. However, I feel like if an atheist did that, people would not be happy about it. [...] My question is, ‘Why? Why does atheism have such a bad reputation?’ And an even better question: ‘Why do Christians have special rights not allowed to nonbelievers?’ Myers cites a number of other examples of religious activity on campus that she believes amounted to an unconstitutional violation of the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause.

Critics of the Administration’s decision not to print the editorial contend that this is an unjustified restriction of Myers’s freedom of speech. However, school officials felt justified in the censorship, citing the potential for disruption in the school as too great to permit publication. “We have the right to control the content of the school paper if we feel it is in the best interest of the students,” says Schools Director, Wayne Miller.

According to University of Tennessee law professor Glenn Reynolds, as far as the law is concerned, “There’s not much of a free speech issue here because, for better or for worse, the Supreme Court has basically decided, No. 1, that high school students don’t have much in the way of free speech rights on campus, and No. 2, when it comes to press freedom stuff and school newspapers, the school is the publisher of a school newspaper, the only one with the First Amendment rights is the school, not the students who want to write for it.”³ In the end, students cannot decide what is run in the school paper because school administrators are responsible for what content runs and what repercussions there are from the content. We may ask the question, however, of whether schools have the right to censor students. Critics warn that it is problematic to censor students for material that is not defamatory or otherwise illegal.

Study Questions:

- (1) Should prayer be allowed at public school meetings and events? Why or why not?

¹ <http://www.knoxnews.com/news/local-news/lenoir-city-high-school-wont-publish-atheist-on>

² <http://www.knoxnews.com/opinion/columnists/krystal-myers-school-promotes-religion-and-of>

³ <http://www.wbir.com/news/article/207385/2/Lenoir-City-atheist-teen-says-school-wont-publish-her-editorial>

Study Questions (continued):

- (2) Should the school be able to censor Krystal Myers' editorial in the school paper? What role (if any) should students have in deciding what gets printed in a school newspaper? What rights and responsibilities do school officials have regarding this decision?
- (3) Should one religious group enjoy privileges in school denied to other religious groups on the basis of tradition, or on the basis of what is believed by the majority of the school population?
- (4) Are school administrators justified in censoring students when student speech is not otherwise defamatory or illegal?

11. Breaking Subway Norms

Kelly is a freshman in college, and she takes the subway across the city during the morning work rush hour to get to her 8 am class. The ride is quiet and peaceful: passengers don't talk to one another, and people are busy reading the newspaper or on their smartphones. Sometimes, Kelly can even squeeze in a much-needed nap. However, once in a while, someone will ruin Kelly's peaceful ride by talking loudly on a cell phone.

There are no official rules about talking on a cell phone, and Kelly understands that sometimes it's important to make a call, for example if a passenger needs to inform his boss he'll be late for work, or to make last-minute date plans. It's another thing, however, to have a long conversation on the subway. Kelly thinks to herself, "I don't want to hear about your fight with your bestie, how your sister should call the CPS on her baby daddy, or your travel plans to Hawaii in the summer." In a quiet subway car, one voice can carry across the entire car, especially when no one else is talking or making any noise. "Don't they notice that no one else is talking on their cell phone on the subway? Or are they just ignoring it?" Kelly wonders. "Why must they have the conversation now? It doesn't seem like the content of the conversation is urgent."

Study Questions:

- (1) To what extent is it permissible to talk on your cell phone on the subway, bus, or in other public spaces?
- (2) Is it appropriate to be upset over someone talking on their cell phone in public spaces?
- (3) To what extent are we obligated to follow social norms, when there are no laws enforcing those behaviors?

12. The Status of Animals in Denmark

In the past year, Denmark has been in the spotlight for its conflicting policies on animal rights and welfare.

First, Denmark attracted global attention from animal rights activists and worldwide criticism when the Copenhagen Zoo euthanized a healthy two year-old giraffe named Marius.¹ The scientific director of the Copenhagen Zoo, Bengt Holst, euthanized the giraffe because “this giraffe’s genes are well represented in the breeding programme and as there is no place for the giraffe in the Zoo’s giraffe herd, the European Breeding Programme for Giraffes has agreed that Copenhagen Zoo euthanize the giraffe.”² The Zoo received several public and private offers to purchase the giraffe, but declined, afraid transferring the giraffe put it at risk of spending “the next 20 years suffering.”³ After Marius was euthanized, zoo scientists performed a public autopsy for educational purposes and later fed parts of the giraffe to the lions.⁴

Second, and in contrast to euthanizing a healthy animal, Denmark has taken the position that animal rights have precedence over religious freedom. In April, Denmark signed legislation mandating that all food animals must be stunned before being slaughtered.⁵ The new rule bans ritual slaughter methods required by both Muslim and Jewish tradition, on the grounds that such methods are inhumane. According to both traditions, animals must be conscious when killed in order to be considered kosher (Jewish law) or halal (Islamic law). Denmark’s Agriculture and Food Minister has publicly stated, “...animal rights come before religion.”⁶ Muslim and Jewish leaders argued that there is scientific evidence to suggest that ritual slaughter can be just as humane as conventional slaughter.⁷ The Agriculture and Food Minister has invited local leaders to submit proof of their claim. The Danish Halal and Jewish Congregation in Copenhagen are circulating a petition to retract the ban on ritual slaughter regardless of whether the government accepts that the kosher and halal methods are humane. They reject the idea animal rights at stake should take precedence over religious rights.

Citizens of Denmark have used social media to voice their opinions about the conflicting status given to animals in Denmark. One Twitter user wrote, “In Denmark butchering a healthy giraffe in front of kids is cool but a kosher/halal chicken is illegal.”⁸

¹ <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2014/02/10/274750447/copenhagen-zoos-scientific-director-defends-killing-giraffe>

² <http://zoo.dk/BesogZoo/Nyhedsarkiv/2014/Februar/Why%20Copenhagen%20Zoo%20euthanized%20a%20giraffe.aspx>

³ <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2014/02/10/274750447/copenhagen-zoos-scientific-director-defends-killing-giraffe>

⁴ <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2014/02/09/274197918/copenhagen-zoo-euthanizes-giraffe-despite-online-protest>

⁵ <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thesalt/2014/04/09/291887381/banning-traditional-animal-slaughter-denmark-stokes-religious-ire>

⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/andrewbrown/2014/feb/20/denmark-halal-kosha-slaughter-hypocrisy-animal-welfare>

⁷ <http://www.grandin.com/ritual/kosher.slaugh.html>

⁸ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/denmark-bans-halal-and-kosher-slaughter-as-minister-says-animal-rights-come-before-religion-9135580.html>

Study Questions:

- (1) What is the difference in moral status between zoo animals and animals raised for consumption?
- (2) Is it justifiable to promote non-human animal welfare at the expense of certain religious practices?
- (3) Should non-human animals be afforded the consideration and moral status of humans?

13. Losing Tradition

In an increasingly globalized economy, cultural diversity is at risk. Western corporations like McDonalds and Starbucks have vast overseas operations and actively look to garner a greater market share in offshore economies by displacing traditional local businesses. When the first Starbucks opened in Paris, some became concerned with the possibility of cultural homogeneity in the sphere of café culture. “Many French...do not want France to be just like the rest of the world: with standardised disposal cups of coffee—identical in 7,000 branches around the world.”¹

The destruction of cultural traditions expands well beyond food culture. Chinua Achebe’s novel *Things Fall Apart* deals with the effects of the encroachment of Western culture and religion in Nigeria. In the novel, the traditional culture of Nigerian groups is presented as technologically unsophisticated but complex, rich with many positive (and non-Western) qualities.² Over the course of the novel, the presence of Christian missionaries and their new traditions causes violent rifts between local groups.

Culture loss of the kind expressed in *Things Fall Apart* is of great concern to the international community. UNESCO asserts that, “the defense of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity.”³ Nevertheless, the international community actively fights to eradicate some forms of traditional culture. Female Genital Cutting (FGC), the cutting and destruction of vaginal tissue associated with sexual pleasure, has been a cultural norm for many peoples in Africa and the Middle East. The World Health Organization and other international advocacy groups actively work to end FGC as a cultural practice, arguing that FGC is oppressive to women.

Study Questions:

- (1) Is it worth giving up technological and economic advancements in favor of maintaining traditional practices?
- (2) Should efforts be made to preserve traditional cultures in the face of globalization?
- (3) How do we distinguish between a cultural practice or tradition worth saving and a practice that should be eradicated?

¹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3401637.stm>

² Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Anchor, 1994. Print.

³ <http://www.unesco.org/bpi/eng/unescopress/2001/01-120e.shtml>

14. A Child's Right to Die (an Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl Case)

A law recently passed in Belgium allows certain terminally ill children to choose euthanasia. For the law to apply, a child must not only be terminally ill but also close to death and in great pain. The child must be able to show that he or she understands the consequences of his or her decision, the child's parents must consent, and the child's medical team must approve.¹ The Belgian law is the first of its kind without an age limit, though the Netherlands has a similar law that applies to children over twelve. And even though euthanasia for adults has been legal in Belgium for over a decade, some people believe the new law goes too far.

Protestors argue that children simply cannot make such difficult decisions and that modern medicine can alleviate much of an ill child's pain. As one newspaper put it, "Belgium has allowed the killing on demand of terminally ill children and has headed for the ethical abyss. A state which allows something like this is a failing state."² Religious leaders believe the law is immoral: "The law says adolescents cannot make important decisions on economic or emotional issues, but suddenly they've become able to decide that someone should make them die," one Belgian archbishop commented.³ And backlash has been especially harsh abroad: for example, the chairman of Forbes Media went so far as to suggest that allowing euthanasia for children would put us "on the malignantly slippery slope to becoming a society like that envisioned by Nazi Germany, one in which 'undesirables' are disposed of like used tissue."⁴

Supporters point to stories like that of Danny Bond. Bond was born with a bowel disease that caused him excruciating pain. At thirteen years old, he started talking about killing himself. Indeed, he did try to kill himself three times. When his mother resuscitated him after his third suicide attempt, he told her that she had let him down by saving him. His condition worsened shortly after he turned twenty-one, and he told his parents that he wanted to die and that he wanted their help. But they knew that assisting him would be a crime. Ultimately, he starved himself to death and asked his parents to stay by his bedside to make sure that his doctors did not treat him. "All he wanted was the privilege to be given an injection that would kill him instantly in seconds, and I had to watch him die in days," his mother lamented.⁵

Study Questions:

- (1) Is the new law in Belgium morally defensible? Why or why not?
- (2) What criteria should we use to decide who ought to have "the right to die?"
- (3) Can you ever make someone's situation worse by offering him or her an additional choice? If so, under what circumstances?

¹ <http://time.com/7565/belgium-euthanasia-law-children-assisted-suicide/>

² <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/14/us-belgium-euthanasia-idUSBREA1C0UF20140214>

³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26181615>

⁴ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/steveforbes/2014/01/06/hitlercare/>

⁵ <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/health-news/child-euthanasia-too-hard-to-live-too-young-to-die-9131089.html>

15. Batkid (an Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl Case)

On November 15, 2013, Ed Lee, mayor of San Francisco, declared the day “Batkid day forever.” On this day, Miles Scott, a 5-year old boy who was suffering from leukemia, fulfilled his dream of being Batman for a day with the help of the Make-a-Wish Foundation and the city of San Francisco. The story quickly went viral, warming the hearts of Americans; even President Barack Obama publicly congratulated Miles for “saving Gotham.”¹

Bringing Miles’ dream to life, involved printing fake newspapers, staging crime scenes, closing roads, and was costly, around \$105,000. Though the city of San Francisco originally footed the bill, two philanthropists reimbursed the city for its costs. While \$105,000 brought happiness to a child who was experiencing a life-threatening illness, the same amount of money could have perhaps been used to much greater effect: such as buying bed nets for thousands of people in malaria-stricken regions, or preventing blindness in 100 children by providing treatment for trachoma, as Peter Singer has suggested. Given that we live in a world of limited resources, so the argument goes, shouldn’t we allocate our money to produce the greatest good for the greatest number? Or, as Singer puts it, “[i]t’s obvious, isn’t it, that saving a child’s life is better than fulfilling a child’s wish to be Batkid?”²

Many readers did not find the answer to be obvious. Some claimed that, after going viral, the Batkid event likely resulted in hundreds of unexpected donations to the Make-a-Wish Foundation, and inspired people to donate to other charitable causes. Moreover, as the number of donors to charitable causes continues to decline, it might be misguided to criticize those who donate at all.³ While some people, like Singer, may choose their charities based on a utilitarian calculus, most Americans give to charity as an expression of deeply held values and relationships, such as “family, neighborhood, and voluntary associations.”⁴

Study Questions:

- (1) Was the city of San Francisco’s involvement with “Batkid Day” morally permissible? Why or why not?
- (2) Should we always try to maximize overall happiness when we give to charity? Why or why not?
- (3) To what extent, if any, should Miles’s family members feel guilty about the special attention Miles enjoyed on “Batkid Day?” Explain your answer.

¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/15/batkid-san-francisco_n_4283772.html

² http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/heartwarming-causes-are-nice-but-lets-give-to-charity-with-our-heads/2013/12/19/43469ae0-6731-11e3-a0b9-249bbb34602c_story.html

³ Rob Reich, "Charitable Giving and the Great Recession" October 2012. https://web.stanford.edu/group/recessiontrends/cgi-bin/web/sites/all/themes/barron/pdf/CharitableGiving_fact_sheet.pdf

⁴ <http://www.philanthropydaily.com/the-coming-showdown-between-philanthrolocalism-and-effective-altruism/>