



# **NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL ETHICS BOWL**

**Case Set for 2019-2020 Regional Competitions**

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# Contents

## A NOTE FROM THE NHSEB

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## CASES FOR REGIONALS

- 01** Bearing Witness, Bringing Change, or Trauma Porn?
- 02** Plantation Wedding
- 03** A Grave Dilemma
- 04** Forced Chemotherapy
- 05** Old-Fashioned Grandparents
- 06** To Forgive or Not to Forgive?
- 07** Companionship or Commodification?
- 08** Extra! Extra! Don't Read About It!
- 09** Teacher Strikes
- 10** Belief vs. Action
- 11** Billionaire Backfire
- 12** Flying High
- 13** Is it O.K. to Punch a Nazi?
- 14** Project Prevention
- 15** Involuntary Commitment

## 2019-2020 CASE COMMITTEE

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# 1. Bearing Witness, Bringing Change, or Trauma Porn?

In 2019, *The New York Times* received thousands of photographs taken inside an Alabama prison and depicted appalling living conditions, gruesome injuries, and death. *The Times* initially published just five of these photos in an article opened with the question: “Would we fix our prisons if we could see what happens inside them?”<sup>1</sup> In support of the decision to publish the photos, some have argued that showing these horrific images brings attention to the costs of social problems like mass incarceration, which are often hidden from public view and scrutiny.<sup>2</sup> Graphic photos, on this view, have the capacity not only to inform the public, but to make them care about those depicted. Images can elicit a response by making the situation feel more real and urgent to onlookers, resulting in demands for change. Filmmaker and professor Ariella Azoulay goes even further, arguing that photographs of suffering and injustice actually create a moral obligation on the part of the viewer.<sup>3</sup> Azoulay claims that photographers and people who allow their pain and suffering to be photographed assume that one day the pictures will find an audience who will do something about it. If pictures fail to bring about change, it is because audiences have failed to live up to their obligations.

Even if an individual viewer cannot help to bring about change, some suggest there might be value in “bearing witness.” Refusing to push unpleasant realities out of one’s mind might be a sign of moral strength or evidence of compassion. In a 2003 essay, Susan Sontag points out that the existence of the Holocaust Memorial Museum and the lack of a similar museum chronicling slavery in the U.S. enables Americans to conceive of evil as something committed by *other* people in *other* countries.<sup>4</sup> It would be more honest to recognize our own history, even if it cannot be changed. Even if one can do nothing more than observe films or photographs of tragedy and atrocity, paying attention to it is a way of recognizing it as wrong and affirming the humanity of those who suffer. Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, a writer, advocate, and Holocaust survivor said “We tell these stories because perhaps we know that not to listen, not to want to know, would lead you to indifference, and indifference is never an answer.”<sup>5</sup>

Some criticize the publication of images like these, and see depictions of gruesome or tragic events as exploitative. Critics suggest that these depictions may harm a victim of injustice or their family members. One blogger suggests that many view shocking images or share them on social media to feel politically engaged without actually taking action or reflecting on injustice.<sup>6</sup> Others argue that it is unfair for victims of trauma to shoulder the additional burden of sharing their pain publicly in order to garner public concern.<sup>7</sup> To some, the way images of violence and injustice are perpetuated only seems to further dehumanize oppressed groups. These images are shared in ways that seems more like an awful kind of entertainment than something of ethical import.<sup>8</sup>

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What moral value, if any, is there in viewing photos or videos of tragedy and injustice? To what extent does this value depend on whether the viewer can do, or actually does, anything about it?
2. Does viewing an image of pain, suffering, or injustice make a person responsible for doing something about it?
3. What moral considerations ought someone be mindful of when creating, publishing, viewing, or sharing images of tragedy and suffering?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/30/us/inside-americas-black-box.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.motherjones.com/crime-justice/2019/04/2000-leaked-photos-show-the-cruelty-of-an-alabama-prison-should-they-be-published/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.newyorker.com/books/second-read/how-we-should-respond-to-photographs-of-suffering>

<sup>4</sup> [https://monoskop.org/images/a/a6/Sontag\\_Susan\\_2003\\_Regarding\\_the\\_Pain\\_of\\_Others.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/a/a6/Sontag_Susan_2003_Regarding_the_Pain_of_Others.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/elie-wiesel-days-of-remembrance-excerpts>

<sup>6</sup> <https://duckofminerva.com/2015/09/image-voyeurism-trauma-porn-and-doing-something-for-yourself.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.bustle.com/p/why-did-some-women-choose-not-to-post-a-me-too-story-women-share-why-they-didnt-participate-in-the-movement-2961946>

<sup>8</sup> <https://goodmenproject.com/featured-content/stop-sharing-black-pain-wcz/>

## 2. Plantation Wedding

Mallory and Ross are to be married this summer. Both grew up in the South and can trace their family lineages to wealthy plantation owners in pre-Civil War North Carolina. Although the couple takes little pride in their respective families' history, their immediate family members take their heritage very seriously. In fact, Ross's family has offered to pay for the entire wedding on the condition that they hold the wedding on a plantation-turned-wedding-venue that used to belong to one of their ancestors. This, his family claims, would be a way of celebrating the two families' Southern heritage while celebrating their union.

Mallory and Ross are conflicted. On the one hand, the venue is objectively beautiful—in fact, it's the most beautiful venue that the couple has seen in their planning efforts for the wedding. And by agreeing to have the wedding on the plantation, they would be doing two things that would make their lives much easier: first, they would make their family members very happy, and second, they could have a lavish and memorable wedding without spending a dime. Were they to refuse, many (though not all) of their family members would be upset at their decision and take it as a personal affront and a repudiation of their shared identity. They would have to settle for a less beautiful location for the wedding, and would, of course, need to foot the bill without the help of their families.

On the other hand, it is highly likely that the ancestor who owned the property also owned slaves—in which case the plantation they would be getting married on contributed to the institution of slavery, and to the suffering of many people. They want their marriage to be a happy occasion and don't want to begin their new life together on a site of past cruelty and racism. Even on the off chance that this particular plantation never had slaves, Mallory and Ross feel that the association between Southern plantations and slavery is significant enough to potentially put a damper on their wedding day.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Should Mallory and Ross have the wedding on the plantation? Why or why not?
2. Is it possible to separate a place from its historical significance?
3. When making their decision, how much weight should the couple give to their families' preferences? To their own well-being? To their moral concerns about using this venue?

### 3. A Grave Dilemma

The cemetery near Jade's house has a sign posted at its entrance stating that dogs are not allowed on the premises. In fact, according to the sign, this is the law: a city ordinance prohibits residents from using cemeteries for a variety of recreational purposes—including walking or playing with their dogs.

Still, Jade does walk her dog there occasionally. It's the only green space within walking distance of her house, and Jade's dog really appreciates the exercise and the exposure to something besides concrete. She always picks up after her dog, and doesn't allow him to dig up grass or destroy any plants. Besides, the cemetery is a historical one. No one has been buried there for decades. Jade has rarely seen anyone besides herself visiting the cemetery; and the other people she has seen there have all seemed to be walking the grounds to get exercise or to check out the old gravestones and mausoleums. As far as she can tell, she has never seen anyone visiting the cemetery to visit a deceased loved one.

If anyone asked her and her dog to leave, Jade would definitely comply. But given that the law was probably written to respect family members' grief, and to enable them to honor their loved ones in peace, it seems that the spirit of the rule doesn't really apply in this case. Moreover, Jade believes that she isn't being disrespectful to those who are buried there, and she certainly isn't causing any harm. In fact, she figures that it's better that the space gets used and appreciated for something, even if that's walking her dog.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Is there anything inherently wrong with using cemeteries for recreational purposes? Why or why not? If it depends, what does it depend on?
2. Does someone have a moral obligation to obey the letter of the law even when the spirit of the law does not seem to apply? Why or why not?
3. Is Jane right that walking her dog in the cemetery is not causing any harm? Can something harmless also be wrong?

## 4. Forced Chemotherapy

In 2014, 17-year-old Cassandra Callender was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma, a treatable form of immune cell cancer in the lymphatic system. In young adults and children with Cassandra's condition, treatment with chemotherapy and radiation provides an 85% chance of long-term survival.<sup>1</sup> Cassandra, however, objected to undergoing chemotherapy because she did not want "such toxic harmful drugs" in her body and wished instead to explore alternative treatments. She understood that, without chemotherapy, she would most likely die. But in Cassandra's view, the negative side effects of chemotherapy would decrease her quality of life to such an extent that any gain in length of life provided by the treatment would not be worth it.

Although minors cannot make their own medical decisions in most cases, Cassandra's parents agreed with her choice to refuse chemotherapy. However, courts have the authority to overrule parental decisions when those decisions threaten the life of their child. When courts do this, they temporarily remove parental custody and appoint a guardian to make medical decisions for the minor. In 2015, the Connecticut Supreme Court, after consulting with medical professionals, ruled that Cassandra was to undergo chemotherapy against her will.

This ruling was met with controversy. Many supported the decision of the court and the opinion of the medical community. After all, most people would judge that an 85% chance of long-term survival is worth undergoing the temporary suffering caused by chemotherapy. Physicians are morally required to avoid causing harm as well as to act in the best interests of their patients. Allowing Cassandra to decline chemotherapy would more than likely have resulted in her death and therefore, many would argue, was not in her best interest.

Others, however, argue that the judicial ruling violated Cassandra's autonomy. Though she was legally a minor, at 17 years old she was no less well equipped than an 18-year-old to make her own medical decisions. Cassandra appealed to the "mature minor" doctrine, which grants minors the authority to make their own medical decisions if the court deems they are mature enough to do so. This request was denied not because of concerns that Cassandra was too immature, but strictly on the medical advice of health professionals. As a consequence, Cassandra was forced to undergo the chemotherapy against her will. This kind of treatment can require up to six months of intense treatment and care: In Cassandra's case, she first went through surgery to have a port in her chest installed for drug administration. She was then confined to a hospital, with her cell phone taken away, often strapped to her bed and sedated.<sup>2</sup>

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Was it morally right for Cassandra to be forced to undergo chemotherapy in this case?
2. Who should have the power to make medical decisions for minors? Parents? Physicians? Courts?
3. What kinds of medical decisions, if any, should minors be permitted to make for themselves?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://sciencebasedmedicine.org/the-sad-but-unexpectedly-hopeful-cancer-saga-of-cassandra-callender/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://blogs.einstein.yu.edu/the-ethical-dilemma-of-forced-chemotherapy-on-a-teen/>

## 5. Old-Fashioned Grandparents

Sam used to enjoy visiting her grandparents. Recently though, she has become increasingly uncomfortable with many of the differences between their values and hers.

Her grandfather routinely makes racist jokes while watching TV and routinely makes aggressive, insulting comments about LGBTQ people—especially when he sees transgender people represented in the media. Though these issues are important to Sam, she doesn't dare bring them up with her grandfather. Sam's grandmother clearly disapproves of many of her husband's offensive comments but would never directly challenge him. To Sam, this dynamic is problematic, too, and makes her feel less inclined to challenge him.

Sam also objects to her grandparents' apparent lack of concern for the environment. They buy cases of bottled water at a time and never recycle anything. Sam also thinks that they consume way too much meat and waste a ton of food. She is also bothered by the way that they maintain their large lawn—she objects to the water, fertilizer, and lawnmower gas that it takes to keep it looking lush and green. Sam has occasionally tried to do subtle things to get them to be more sustainable—she purchased them reusable grocery bags and water bottles, volunteered to take in their recycling, and offered to help them put in a vegetable garden or some lower-maintenance plantings in their yard. But none of these attempts had any effect. And she has never tried to explain to them why they should be more environmentally conscious.

Sam would love to have an open, respectful discussion with her grandparents about her views, but her parents think it would be rude. "You need to remember to respect your elders", they tell her. "Anyway, any discussion would be pointless; this is how they've always lived, and they are not going to change any time soon. You should just enjoy your time with them and try not to get so worked up about these things."

Sam disagrees. She thinks it is disrespectful to assume that older people are too set in their ways to be able to change. It is even more disrespectful to not even try to talk with them. Sam thinks that her grandparents—especially her grandmother—might be willing to hear what Sam has to say. "My grandparents might be more open-minded and willing to change than my parents give them credit for" she keeps thinking. "But if my parents are right, I don't know if I want to keep visiting my grandparents. Being at their house is not fun. It's actually quite upsetting."

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. When should (or shouldn't) we confront someone else for their behaviors or values that we think are morally problematic? How should (or shouldn't) we go about doing so?
2. If Sam's grandparents don't change, should Sam consider no longer visiting them? What factors should influence this decision?
3. What does it mean to "respect your elders"? Is it disrespectful to argue or disagree with one's elders about their values or behaviors? Why or why not?

## 6. To Forgive or Not to Forgive?

Many people believe that the United States has a student debt crisis. Student loan debt is higher than it has ever been across all demographics and ages, with around 44 million American borrowers owing a collective \$1.5 trillion. Many of these borrowers are struggling to keep up with their loan payments. As a result, more than 10 percent of student loan balances are currently considered seriously delinquent (the borrower has fallen more than 90 days behind in their payments) or in default.<sup>1</sup>

In the lead-up to the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election, several candidates have proposed policies to address the student debt crisis. Perhaps most notably, Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, both Democratic contenders for the Presidency, have advanced ambitious student debt forgiveness plans. Both of these plans seek the widespread cancellation of outstanding loan balances and are projected to have high costs as a result. The Warren plan would cancel up to \$50,000 in debt for every person with household income under \$100,000, and provide substantial (though less) debt cancellation for those with household incomes between \$100,000 and \$250,000.<sup>2</sup> This approach would fully eliminate the debt of up to 75% of borrowers, and provide some relief for over 40 million Americans. Bernie Sanders' plan takes things a step further, seeking to make total debt forgiveness available to all of the nation's federal and private student loan borrowers.

Waiting in the wings, of course, are questions about how to finance such ambitious policy proposals. Both candidates have argued that a tax increase is the ideal way to fund student debt relief. Warren proposes to fund her relief program with an “ultra-millionaire tax” that would include a 2% annual tax on families with at least \$50 million in net worth. Sanders plans to fund his program with a new tax on financial transactions, which would include a 0.5% fee on all stock trades, a 0.1% fee on all bond trades and a 0.005% fee on all derivatives trades.<sup>3</sup>

While most candidates for high office recognize the depth and severity of the debt crisis, other candidates have been more measured in their approach to relief, ranging from the lowering of education costs, the expansion of federal Pell Grant programs, making public colleges “debt-free,” and making improvements to existing public service forgiveness programs.

Proponents of debt forgiveness argue that higher education is a public good which it is in the country's interest to subsidize. Moreover, forgiving student debt would strengthen the middle class by unburdening a generation of Americans—especially those from working class backgrounds—thereby enabling them to more fully participate in the economy. Some critics of debt forgiveness fear that this is a problematic fix that does not address the root causes of the student debt crisis.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, many critics believe that these proposals are unfair. Some people point out, for example, that such plans would help many students who are on their way to becoming well-paid professionals (e.g., doctors, lawyers, etc.), and who might not need this assistance. Others point out that people who took out student loans promised to pay them back, and so using taxpayer money to forgive their loans is unfair to those who are student-debt-free because they chose to avoid taking out loans in the first place, or because they worked hard to pay their student loans off.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What, morally speaking, are the potential costs of the high levels of student loan debt in the U.S.? What, morally speaking, are the potential costs and benefits of these proposals to forgive this debt?
2. Are these student loan forgiveness policies unfair to people who do not currently have this type of debt? Why or why not?
3. Should access to higher education be guaranteed to all? Should it be free?

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.newyorkfed.org/medialibrary/interactives/householdcredit/data/pdf/hhdc\\_2019q2.pdf](https://www.newyorkfed.org/medialibrary/interactives/householdcredit/data/pdf/hhdc_2019q2.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://medium.com/@teamwarren/im-calling-for-something-truly-transformational-universal-free-public-college-and-cancellation-of-a246cd0f910f>

<sup>3</sup> <https://berniesanders.com/issues/college-for-all/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/26/us/warren-student-loans-college.html>

## 7. Companionship or Commodification?

Allison has spent her college years volunteering at a local organization that trains service dogs. As a volunteer, she socializes the dogs she is assigned to care for, provides them basic training, and then teaches more complicated skills that are necessary for service dogs to perform. She has occasionally even brought her service-puppies-in-training to class with her so they could practice certain skills—especially learning to be extremely obedient and well-mannered. When they graduate the program, these dogs (which were all bred to perform years of rigorous service work) are paired with owners who needed their assistance. These dogs go on to become integral parts of their owners' lives, enabling these people to participate in society in ways that would otherwise be incredibly difficult.

Allison recognizes the important role that service animals play in their owners' lives. However, she is not sure what to think about the increased use of so-called Emotional Support Animals (ESAs, for short). As the name suggests, these animals are meant to help people with special needs that arise out of emotional and mental health conditions—such as anxiety, PTSD, depression, or panic attacks. Much like service dogs, when a dog is certified as an ESA, this provides its owner with several public benefits. For example, landlords (including public housing officials) cannot prohibit renters from having ESAs. These animals can also come inside businesses, grocery stores, restaurants, and shops, and can even accompany their owners on flights.

Allison's main complaint is that while ESAs sometimes undergo training, it is more common that their owners purchase certifications online. To her, these animals are primarily pets, rather than service dogs. Given that these dogs rarely have thorough training, they sometimes behave poorly in these situations—barking, defecating, or being destructive. The worry, then, is that these untrained assistance dogs are giving a bad name to well-trained working dogs like the ones Allison has worked with. They also undercut the hard work people like Allison put into training the dogs to be competent, integrated parts of public life. Moreover, it seems to Allison that people are increasingly making use of the ESA certification out of convenience, rather than need. Given this, she is worried that service dog owners with impairments or disabilities are met with more doubt and scrutiny about the legitimacy of their dog and their condition.

On the other hand, Allison recognizes that she might be making snap judgments about ESA owners. Many people have invisible disabilities, and the emotional support these dogs provide can be truly imperative to their owners' wellbeing. The increased presence of ESAs might even help raise awareness of and destigmatize such disabilities. Just because these animals aren't officially trained doesn't mean they can't perform a meaningful service worth recognizing.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Is the distinction between service dogs and ESAs a meaningful distinction to make?
2. What type of training, if any, should dogs be required to have in order to be certified as ESAs? What are the key moral considerations that should shape our answer to this question?
3. What standards should be used to determine whether someone is in need of special accommodation or assistance? What are the key moral considerations that should shape our answer to this question?

## 8. Extra! Extra! Don't Read About It!

The news can be overwhelming. Almost everyone has to take breaks from the unending cycles of breaking headlines. Erik Hagerman has gone even further: he decided to opt out altogether. After the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, Hagerman "swore that he would avoid learning about anything that happened to America after Nov. 8, 2016."<sup>1</sup>

Hagerman, a retired corporate executive from Nike, lives on his Ohio farm, works on art projects, and avoids the news. He's abandoned social media. In his free time he listens to music, relaxes in coffee shops, watches Cleveland Cavaliers games (always on mute), and steers away from any conversation about politics. (He's trained his friends, family members, and even the local baristas never to discuss politics in his presence.) Hagerman's strategy is partly a protest, and partly an "extreme self-care plan." "I'm emotionally healthier than I've ever felt," he says.

But is Hagerman achieving peace of mind at the expense of his ethical obligations? On one hand, you might think that this is entirely Hagerman's prerogative. It is up to him whether or not he engages in the news, particularly if it is distressing to him. After all, many of us avoid things that cause us displeasure.

On the other hand, we live in a democracy, where the policies and institutions which make up our government, and affect people around the world, depend on the actions of ordinary citizens. For a democracy to function, citizens must play an active part, and must therefore be informed about issues of political import. Abdicating this responsibility, you might think, amounts to becoming a civic deadbeat: Hagerman should endure the stress and pain of the news because it is his duty as a citizen. You don't get to just opt out. Hagerman himself sees this side of things: "The first several months of this thing," he admits, "I didn't feel all that great about it. It makes me a crappy citizen." As his blockade continued, however, Hagerman began to think somewhat differently, concluding that being a news consumer does little to enhance society, and that he could make genuinely worthwhile civic contributions by other means.

Even if Hagerman is able to screen himself off from the news in this way, others are not so lucky. Hagerman's sister sees his blockade as an exercise in privilege: "He has the privilege of constructing a world in which very little of what he doesn't have to deal with gets through...We all would like to construct our dream worlds. Erik is just more able to do it than others."

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What value is there in paying attention to the news?
2. Is it ethically permissible to opt out of hearing news about political happenings?
3. Do other people have a moral duty to respect Hagerman's "blockade", by, for example, refraining from political talk in his presence, if he asks them to and explain why it is important to him?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/10/style/the-man-who-knew-too-little.html>

## 9. Teacher Strikes

In the spring of 2018, teachers in Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky, Oklahoma, North Carolina, and West Virginia either performed a walkout or went on strike to protest what they considered to be low salaries and inadequate educational funding. One common complaint is that teachers frequently need to take on extra jobs in order to pay their bills. For instance, Craig Troxell, a full-time high school science teacher, drives a school bus before and after school to make ends meet, in addition to working over the summers mowing lawns and roofing houses.<sup>1</sup>

In several of these states, the strikes had some measure of success. In other places, the outcome was less clear. Regardless of the outcome, the strikes had a big impact on the communities in which they occurred. The most immediate impact is clearly on the children—which is also the group who has the least say, politically. For example, some people argue that teacher strikes are bad for kids, as the strikes disrupt the learning environment and hurt student progress. In 1992, a judge ordered striking teachers in Detroit to go back to work, on the grounds that the strike caused “irreparable harm” to students.<sup>2</sup> These strikes can have important impacts on other community members, as well—in particular on working parents, who now need to make special arrangements for childcare. This can be especially difficult for lower-income families, who might not be able to afford to take time off from work or to pay for additional childcare.

In support of striking teachers, others maintain that strikes are only bad for students in the short term. Good teachers can have a profoundly positive effect on children. The only way to reliably attract and keep good teachers is to compensate them adequately for their hard work. Strikes are a way to achieve that end.

Recent polls show that most Americans support teachers’ right to strike. Nevertheless, in most states (including in some of the states in which striking occurred) it is illegal for teachers to take collective action such as striking.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Is it immoral or unjust for states to make it illegal for teachers to strike?
2. Teachers strikes involve temporarily withholding a vital service from children. Does employing a strategy like this violate an educator’s fundamental duty to her students?
3. Arguments about the morality of teachers’ strikes often focus on the well-being of students. Do teachers have to prove that strikes make *students* better off in order to justify them? Or can strikes be justified on the basis of the interests of the teachers themselves?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/31/us/oklahoma-teachers-profiles/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/1992/09/30/04strike.h12.html>

## 10. Belief vs. Action

Some of Kayla's students have just asked her to be the adviser of their Environmental Club. Kayla is not surprised; she regularly teaches an Environmental Ethics class and incorporates environmental issues in many of her other classes. She also proudly displays environmental stickers on her car, laptop, and office door. She has invited quite a few environmental speakers to campus and helped organized many environmental events.

And yet she sometimes feels like a fraud. If students knew how she lives her daily life, they'd be shocked. She believes in biking and walking, but she rarely does either. In fact, with three kids at home, Kayla and her husband own not one, but two minivans. This way, either one of them can pick up the kids from school and take them (along with their sports equipment and musical instruments) to their after-school activities. Her house, purchased when they were expecting their third child, is very comfortable, but it's also large and energy inefficient. Her yard is big grass lawn which is not environmentally friendly;<sup>1</sup> she'd love to replace it with a big vegetable patch but hasn't got around to it. Kayla also knows that refraining from eating meat and dairy is one of the most effective ways to reduce her negative impact on the Earth.<sup>2</sup> But her husband and kids love these products, and it's difficult for the family to cook two separate meals. Being pressed for time and money also leads them to buy more packaged stuff, more disposable items, and new items rather than used ones. And of course, having three biological children isn't exactly environmentally friendly: for example, while recycling saves 0.21 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent per year and living car-free saves 2.4 tons, having one fewer child saves 58.6 tons.<sup>3</sup> In short, Kayla feels that she is not living up to her principles. She's not even sure if she can call herself an environmentalist. Surely an essential part of being an environmentalist is living like one.

However, Kayla also thinks that it's morally permissible—even praiseworthy—to convince other people to adopt more environmentally friendly practices, even if you don't do that in your own life. After all, we don't expect everyone who advocates for sports or arts in schools to be an athlete or an artist.

Furthermore, Kayla tries to remind herself that advocacy work is also important and might be even more important than personal choices. Her classes, the events she organizes, and even her posts on social media might do more good than the changes she could make in her personal life. Advising the Environmental Club would enable her to do even more good and inspire many more students to advocate for environmental issues and make a difference. Disclosing how she actually lives feels more honest, but it might undermine her work, making people take her arguments less seriously. So, while she's not 100% sure of herself, Kayla plans to accept the students' invitation and to continue advocating for the environmental causes she believes in.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Did Kayla make the right decision in agreeing to advise the Environmental Club?
2. Does Kayla have a duty to tell her students that she engages in a variety of environmentally irresponsible actions in her personal life?
3. How does Kayla compare with Angela, who does no advocacy work but lives an environmentally friendly life?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://earthier.com/lawns-are-an-ecological-disaster-1826070720>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/may/31/avoiding-meat-and-dairy-is-single-biggest-way-to-reduce-your-impact-on-earth?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/may/31/avoiding-meat-and-dairy-is-single-biggest-way-to-reduce-your-impact-on-earth?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jul/12/want-to-fight-climate-change-have-fewer-children>

## 11. Billionaire Backfire

On April 15, 2019, the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris was greatly damaged by a fire.<sup>1</sup> Large donations to help rebuild the cathedral, totaling more than \$1 billion, quickly flooded in from wealthy individuals and major companies. Many people saw these donations as a good thing. After all, it seems important to preserve and protect things with major cultural, historical, and artistic significance.

However, these donations were not universally praised. Critics argued that the wealthy donors should have spent this money on solving larger socioeconomic problems, like homelessness and poverty.<sup>2</sup> Carl Kinsella expresses this sentiment: “With a click of their fingers, TWO French billionaires have given 300 million to restore Notre Dame. Just imagine if billionaires cared as much about uhhhh human people.”<sup>3</sup> Proponents of effective altruism (EA) concur with this assessment. According to effective altruists, resources should be directed to charitable causes that will do the most good. In particular, resources should go toward charitable organizations that focus on an issue that meets three conditions: “It’s important (it affects many lives in a massive way), it’s tractable (extra resources will do a lot to fix it), and it’s neglected (not that many people are devoted to this issue yet).”<sup>4</sup> So, an effective altruist might be inclined to donate to high-impact charities that address homelessness or water quality over rebuilding Notre Dame.

Some people respond that critics are presenting a false choice between donating to the rebuilding of Notre Dame Cathedral and helping the poor, and that it’s reasonable to donate to both. Julia Wise, for example, argues that a person can have many goals: in addition to altruistic goals, we can have personal goals. When it comes to donating to charities, we can donate to causes for personal reasons or altruistic reasons. For example, donating to a friend’s fundraiser for a sick relative serves a personal goal of supporting a friend, rather than the goal to make the world a better place in some bigger, impersonal sense. One should not have to feel bad about donating to something that is personally meaningful.<sup>5</sup>

But still, critics might respond, the fact that these philanthropists made such significant donations toward restoring a building when this money could have made a large impact on (and possibly saving) many people’s lives does demonstrate that their priorities are misplaced.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. When is someone morally praiseworthy for donating money to a charitable cause? What makes this praiseworthy, when it is?
2. How does one compare the value of artistic, cultural, or historical artifacts versus the value of human life or wellbeing?
3. If you had a million dollars to give to charity, how would you spend it? Does someone who is making a charitable donation have a moral obligation to make sure that their donation will do the most good? Why or why not?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/notre-dame-fire-what-was-damaged-n995371>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2019/04/18/notre-dame-cathedral-fire-billionaires-donations-spark-backlash/3514968002/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://twitter.com/TVsCarlKinsella/status/1118062954107342848>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2019/4/20/18507964/notre-dame-cathedral-fire-charity-donations>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.givinggladly.com/2019/02/you-have-more-than-one-goal-and-thats.html>

## 12. Flying High

From a personal standpoint, there are excellent reasons to incorporate travel into one's life. First of all, many people simply enjoy it. For many people, flying to faraway destinations is a fun and exhilarating way to spend one's vacation. For others, first-hand exposure to other cultures is a significant source of personal growth. Many people also travel to see friends and family who live across the country or around the world. And for some people, flying to and fro is simply part of the job. Travel can have a number of important benefits. Psychological research suggests that those who focus on experiences instead of material objects tend to be happier.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, traveling abroad is a great opportunity for learning, for cultural immersion, and for self-knowledge. It can even be life-changing. At many universities, academic advisers encourage students to travel abroad in order to expand their perspectives on the world, open their minds, and create wonderful long-lasting memories.

Yet taking a long flight is, perhaps, an individual's single largest contribution to climate change. According to one estimate, one passenger's share of emissions on a 2,500-mile flight melts 32 square feet of Arctic summer sea ice cover.<sup>2</sup> Taking one round-trip flight between New York and California generates about 20 percent of the greenhouse gases that one's car emits over an entire year.<sup>3</sup> And the problem is likely to increase over time, as passenger numbers are predicted to double to 8.2 billion by 2037.<sup>4</sup> For these reasons, people are increasingly deciding to limit unnecessary air travel. In some parts of Europe, this anti-flying movement is taking off. In Sweden, new words, such as "flygskam" (flying shame) and "smygflyga" (flying in secret) are being coined to express some of these anti-flying sentiments.<sup>5</sup> Out of a concern for her carbon footprint, teen climate activist Greta Thunberg decided to travel from Sweden to North America by boat rather than plane, in order to attend the United Nations Climate Action Summit.<sup>6</sup>

But even if air travel contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, many people do not see anything wrong with flying. Some might argue that climate change is a systemic problem that people have little individual influence over. On this line of thinking, even if someone decides to completely give up flying, this is not going to have any significant long-term impact on climate change. If so, one might argue that individuals do not have a moral duty to give up the benefits that air travel can bring to their lives.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What moral obligations, if any, do individuals have to reduce their carbon footprint?
2. Do the personal benefits of air travel outweigh its environmental costs?
3. Under what circumstances, if any, should people feel guilty about flying for personal enjoyment? What, if anything, would make such guilt appropriate?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/10/buy-experiences/381132/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/03/travel/traveling-climate-change.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/27/climate/airplane-pollution-global-warming.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.airlines.iata.org/news/passenger-numbers-to-hit-82bn-by-2037-iata-report>

<sup>5</sup> <https://skift.com/2019/05/28/the-anti-flying-movement-is-slowly-starting-to-hurt-european-airlines/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2019/08/28/754818342/teen-climate-activist-greta-thunberg-arrives-in-new-york-after-sailing-the-atlan>

## 13. Is it O.K. to Punch a Nazi?

On January 20, 2017, Richard Spencer, a well-known member of the American “alt-right”, was punched in the face by an unknown assailant while he was being interviewed by an Australian journalist. The attack, which was captured on video, was almost certainly a reaction to Spencer’s vocal form of white nationalism, which includes his public support for the establishment of the U.S. as a white ethnostate.<sup>1</sup> Footage of the attack soon became a popular internet meme, accompanied by the question, “Is it O.K. to punch a Nazi?”<sup>2</sup> with some people comparing the masked assailant to Captain America and Indiana Jones.

The punch, and the internet memes that followed it, have spawned vigorous debates about how people should respond to increasingly frequent, public displays of racism. Critics of the assault argue that violence is not the right response to political disagreement. Instead, according to this view, racism and other repugnant attitudes are best combatted with open conversation and rational argument. Such violence, in contrast, seems to be incompatible with treating someone else as a fellow citizen. This seems to be Spencer’s view of the attack: “I kind of like getting into vigorous back and forth with people who disagree with me. ... But punching like that just crosses a line—totally unacceptable.” He admitted that he feared future attacks, saying, “Certainly, some people think I’m not a human being and I can just be attacked at will.”<sup>3</sup>

Some anti-racists, by contrast, maintain that violence and intimidation are perfectly legitimate response—and perhaps even the best response to political views that themselves seem to call for or condone violence against vulnerable groups. They argue that trying to appeal to the better natures of, or try to reason with, those who openly endorse white nationalist and white supremacist ideologies will very likely be futile. Interventions like these, then, seem only to provide the opportunity for hate speech and racist attitudes to flourish without effective opposition. Admittedly, punching a vocal white nationalist (or threatening to do so) might not be a way to reason with them as fellow citizens. But there may be other important values at stake. Rapper B. Dolan, created a line of hats with the slogan “MAKE RACISTS AFRAID AGAIN” in order “to express solidarity with those opposing racism, homophobia, and fascism worldwide.”<sup>4</sup> As Dolan explains his motivation, “If we can’t change their minds, we can at least drive them back into isolation so their targets can be free from harm and harassment. We can make them afraid again.”

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How could one convincingly argue that violence is sometimes a justifiable response to political views that one disagrees with or finds objectionable? What are the best counterarguments to that position?
2. Is making racists afraid a morally good aim? Is it morally better or worse than trying to reason with them, and to convince them through rational dialogue that is unlikely to succeed?
3. How should someone express their solidarity and support for those who oppose or are affected by bigotry?

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard\\_B.\\_Spencer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_B._Spencer)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/21/us/politics/richard-spencer-punched-attack.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/20/politics/white-nationalist-richard-spencer-punched/>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/b-dolan/the-hat-making-trump-supp\\_b\\_10824872.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/b-dolan/the-hat-making-trump-supp_b_10824872.html)

## 14. Project Prevention

Project Prevention is a North Carolina-based nonprofit that attempts to prevent people with addictions from having children.<sup>1</sup> To do this, Project Prevention pays people with drug addictions \$300 to volunteer for long-term or permanent birth control. Ultimately, approximately two-thirds of participants agree to use forms of long-term birth control, such as 5-year IUDs, with the remaining third opting for sterilization.<sup>2</sup> According to Barbara Harris, who founded the controversial organization, the goals are to stop people from having children that they are not in a position to adequately care for, and to reduce the number of babies born with drug-related defects. Ultimately, according to Harris, this program helps people with addictions get their lives back on track while protecting innocent children from the various harms associated with parents' drug use or from being caught up in the foster care system.

Critics say Project Prevention is manipulative, taking advantage of people who are not in a position to make rational, informed decisions about what reproductive choices they may want to make in the future. For this reason, it seems problematic to encourage them to undergo sterilization. Moreover, according to critics, despite Harris's claim about wanting to help these individuals, this program doesn't do anything to address the real problem: their addiction. Additionally, critics argue, this program is based on and reinforces problematic stereotypes about people suffering from drug addiction. According to National Advocates for Pregnant Women, Project Prevention "perpetuates the myth that drug-using parents have a disproportionate number of children."<sup>3</sup> Harris's language reinforces this perception, as she routinely describes addicted women as "having litters of children". Critics also argue that Project Prevention's rhetoric—such as the motto "Don't let pregnancy get in the way of your crack habit"<sup>4</sup>—increases the stigmatization of drug use and addiction, and conveys the message that women who use drugs do not deserve to have children.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Does a sexually-active person who uses drugs have a special moral obligation that a non-drug use does not have to use effective birth control? Why or why not?
2. What are the ethical considerations that may count for, and against, offering people with addiction financial incentives not to have children?
3. Suppose that a doctor learns that their patient is being paid by Project Prevention to undergo sterilization. Does that give the doctor a reason not to perform the procedure? Why or why not? If it depends, what does it depend on?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://content.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1981916,00.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/06/nyregion/sterilization-offer-to-addicts-reopens-ethics-issue.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.advocatesforpregnantwomen.org/issues/crackconcerns.htm>

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project\\_Prevention](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_Prevention)

## 15. Involuntary Commitment<sup>1</sup>

In states like West Virginia, Ohio, and Kentucky, which have seen a significant number of deaths by overdose during the recent heroin/opioid “epidemics,” an increasingly popular solution to protecting the addicts is civil or involuntary commitment. Research suggests that those who are involuntarily committed have outcomes at least comparable to the outcomes for people who make the decision to seek inpatient treatment themselves.

Shows like *Intervention*, *Recovery Road*, and *The Heroin Triangle* depict the frustration often experienced by family and friends of addicts who want only to protect and help their addicted loved one. Some family members of addicts see involuntary commitment as the last and only chance for their survival. “The only hope that many addicted individuals have is that someone will do for them what they are incapable of doing for themselves,” according to Charlotte Wethington, the mother of Casey Wethington, who overdosed from heroin at the age of twenty-three and is the namesake of Casey’s Law in Kentucky, a law that is considered by some recovery advocates to be a model law for involuntary commitment of substance abusers.

Civil commitment which was previously reserved for those diagnosed with some form of mental illness and who were deemed a threat to themselves or others, has been a somewhat controversial mechanism throughout its long history. Most states now allow for involuntary commitment of individuals with substance-abuse disorders or alcoholism and a handful of states include substance abuse and alcoholism in their definitions of mental disorder, making involuntary commitment easier in those states.

In Massachusetts, where approximately 6,500 substance users/abusers were subject to civil commitment in 2017, those civilly committed can be housed not only in treatment facilities but also in prisons. Critics of incarceration for addicts point to the suppression of the rights of the addict, especially when the only available space is in a prison with violent criminals. When addicts are “committed” to prison areas with other prisoners who have actually been convicted of crimes, those other prisoners are resentful of the addicts as they receive special treatment like private cells and extensive therapy.

### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. When, if ever, is it ethically appropriate to interfere with someone else’s autonomy for their own good?
2. Do people who abuse drugs have a moral right to refuse to participate in drug treatment programs? Why or why not?
3. To what extent should drug addiction be treated like mental health conditions in which individuals are deemed to post a harm to themselves or others? How, morally speaking, are these cases similar? How do they differ?

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this case originally appeared in the 2019 Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl Nationals Case Set. Many thanks to the IEB for allowing us to use it! For more information, please visit: <http://appe-ethics.org/ethics-bowl/>