



NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL
ETHICS BOWL

REGIONAL CASE SET

2025-2026

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* POSSIBLE DIVISIONAL PLAYOFFS CASE (6)

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FROM THE EDITORIAL BOARD

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

The cases in this set were compiled for affiliated Regional Competitions during the 2025-2026 National High School Ethics Bowl season. Authored by a diverse group of community members, cases have been edited for content, clarity, and pedagogical focus by an Editorial Board composed of NHSEB's Executive Committee and Case Advisory Committee. More information on NHSEB personnel is available at nhseb.org/people.

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Cases designed for use in the National High School Ethics Bowl are often directly based on or otherwise inspired by real-world events, debates, etc. Throughout this case set, citations and references are included to provide further context on these events and issues where appropriate. Source materials cited in this document will only be identified once per case, though may be referenced more than once within a given case.

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1: Whose Germline is it Anyway?

While some forms of human genetic modification have been in use since 1989 to prevent genetic diseases, known as “gene therapy”, these modifications are somatic, meaning they exist only in the targeted individual, and cannot be inherited. However, in November 2018, biophysicist He Jiankui unexpectedly announced the birth of twin girls, pseudonymously named Lulu and Nana, he had genetically modified with the intent to confer partial immunity to HIV. Unlike past modifications, these were germline modifications using CRISPR, which directly modified the entire genome, creating heritable changes.

Detractors of human germline engineering claim that the modifications introduce unnecessary risk to offspring without their consent. In Lulu and Nana’s case, safer means of preventing HIV were available, and the genes altered likely play other roles, such as brain function. Additionally, successful germline modifications run the risk of exacerbating class disparities, as medical procedures only available to the wealthy may grant generations of children anything from disease resistance, to altered physical features like height and eye color.

Of course, germline engineering offers permanent solutions to otherwise heritable and debilitating diseases. Children born with germline edits preventing things like Huntington's Disease and Cystic Fibrosis can have their own children freely without risk of passing on the condition. In addition, non-preventative genetic enhancements could provide benefits to individuals, like improved eyesight, which would eventually become dispersed throughout the human population.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Should doctors prioritize patient safety, or medical breakthrough? In the case of Lulu & Nana does the benefit outweigh the fact that there were safer, proven ways to achieve the same result?
2. What role does patient age and consent play in medical decisions? Do we ever have the obligation to perform medical procedures without the consent of a patient?
3. Is there a moral distinction between therapeutic edits (e.g., removing disease) and enhancements (e.g., altering intelligence or appearance)?

2: Paving the Way

Jeremy and Evie just read a news article about how a local national park plans to pave one of their hiking trails to make it more accessible and prevent injuries. Jeremy reacted with sadness, while Evie expressed surprise at his reaction.

As Evie sees it, access to nature is an important element to wellbeing. People with mobility issues, who have been unable to access that trail, ought to be able to experience the beauty of the waterfall at its end. Furthermore, even for those without mobility issues, it's the responsibility of the park managers to ensure the safety of hikers. More hikers are accessing the park, including those without prior hiking experience who are at more risk for injury on standard trails. Increased interest in nature is a good thing, Evie argues, and paving the trail ensures that new hikers can safely explore the outdoors.

Jeremy, on the other hand, is concerned about the environmental impact of paving the trail. While he's confident the park managers will handle construction in the most environmentally sound way they can, there's no getting around the fact that the paved trail will be more disruptive. Erosion caused by runoff, and the splitting of natural habitats are detrimental to local wildlife. Furthermore, the paved trail will encourage more people to take the hike. While he recognizes the value in people enjoying and appreciating nature, increased foot traffic further disrupts the wildlife who make the woods their home.

Jeremy also strongly believes that everyone has a right to be able to access public life, and therefore we have a duty to make public spaces like schools, workplaces, and public gathering spaces accessible. However, he is not sure whether people have a right to access nature in the same way. For Jeremy, part of the appeal of hiking is the challenge of navigating across rugged, natural, terrain.

Evie challenges Jeremy's perspective by pointing out that the national park is a government organization providing a public service. The fact that the government sets aside public land for preservation and use, keeps the old, dirt trails clear, and provides parking is all in service of making nature available to the citizens. Furthermore, Evie speculates that providing a paved trail might help lessen the impact of hikers on the environment, noting that inexperienced hikers would often leave the old, less distinct dirt trail, trampling in places they were not supposed to trample. Perhaps they are more likely to stay on the trail once it is paved.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Should public land managers prioritize inclusivity and safety for visitors, even if it alters the character of natural environments?
2. How would your thinking change if the paved road negatively impacted human lives? Would a park ranger's obligations be different if runoff from a paved trail flooded a human home instead of destroying an animal's habitat?
3. Should some natural spaces remain difficult to access, preserving their wildness and solitude for those able to reach them, or is making them accessible to all always the greater moral good?

3: Public Record, Private Lives

Clare was charged with a pretty serious speeding citation. She was regretful, but very fearful as to how the situation would play out. To ease her anxieties, Clare looked up, via public records, the outcome of her friend Ian's similar speeding citation from a couple of years ago. Clare was shocked to discover that he had a very recent court case involving Ian's failure to pay child support.

Clare was surprised that Ian had a child, especially as he had been going on dates with her roommate Emma for a couple of months and never shared that he had a child. Ian, Emma, and Clare are all in their early 20s, so she understood the desire to keep fathering a child out of wedlock private.

However, since Ian was not being transparent with Emma about his child, as their relationship has become more serious, Clare doesn't know what to do next. She did not look up his court records with ill intent but feels a strong desire to alert Emma about Ian's child and his failure to pay child support. She isn't sure about whether Ian has a right to privacy in this case, or if it's her job to keep Emma informed.

Clare thinks that, maybe, by breaking the law in the first place, Ian forfeited his right to privacy. With that said, missing a child support payment doesn't strike her as being of equivalent severity to the kinds of crimes that would obligate a person to notify the community of their past. Still Emma is her roommate, and maybe that relationship precludes any implicit privacy rights that Ian has.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Does a person forfeit their right to privacy when they choose to commit a crime?
2. Does Clare's original motive for searching records matter when deciding whether to share the information? If she had originally checked public records in order to help her friend or her roommate, would her obligations change?

4: No Hugging Zone

Across the United States, hundreds of county jails have discontinued traditional in-person visits, replacing them exclusively with video calls. Marketed as safer, more efficient, and modern, these digital visitation systems are largely controlled by private technology companies, which frequently secure exclusive, profit-sharing contracts with correctional facilities.

Critics highlight numerous shortcomings of virtual visits. Video calls, often expensive and plagued by poor connectivity, severely limit emotional connection, depriving families of vital physical interactions such as hugging, holding hands, and other comforting gestures. The absence of these intimate moments can have profound psychological impacts, particularly for children, who require physical affection for their emotional and developmental well-being. Advocates point to research demonstrating the critical role family ties play in reducing recidivism, enhancing rehabilitation efforts, and supporting smoother reintegration into society.

The emotional distress of virtual visitation disproportionately impacts vulnerable groups, including economically disadvantaged families. High fees for video calls impose a financial burden that restricts frequency and duration of contact. Technical difficulties further diminish the quality of interactions, often leaving families frustrated and discouraged from participating, and for some elderly relatives there are challenges navigating unfamiliar technology. In some cases, the impersonal nature of video calls exacerbates feelings of isolation and emotional disconnection among inmates, potentially increasing mental health challenges within an already stressful prison environment.

Supporters of video visitation systems contend they significantly enhance institutional safety by dramatically reducing opportunities for contraband smuggling and physical confrontations during in-person visits. They also argue these systems streamline administrative responsibilities and staffing requirements, leading to cost savings and operational efficiencies unattainable through traditional Visitation, while also creating new revenue streams for jails. Furthermore, proponents claim video visitations can offer logistical advantages, such as alleviating travel burdens for families who live far from correctional facilities or have mobility limitations.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is prison safety more important than the experience of prisoners and their families? Where does the line lie?
2. Are in-person visits and physical contact fundamental human rights for incarcerated people, or are they privileges the state may restrict for safety and cost reasons?
3. Should prisons be allowed to profit from video visitation fees, or does monetizing family connection cross an ethical line?

5: Grade Expectations

Ella Stapleton, a senior at Northeastern University, was shocked when she discovered her professor had used ChatGPT to generate lecture notes for a class in organizational behavior. The notes—shared via the university's online platform—contained awkward phrasing and bizarre images, leading Ella to recognize the telltale signs of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) use. Her syllabus forbade students from using GenAI without permission, so Ella found it troubling that her professor appeared to violate the same policy. She filed a formal complaint with the university and requested a partial refund of her tuition.¹

Ella is not alone. Across the country, students have begun to push back against professors who rely on GenAI tools like ChatGPT to create slide decks, answer questions, and—most controversially—grade assignments. One student discovered her anthropology professor had copied and pasted her paper into ChatGPT and used the tool to generate comments and assign a grade. The professor accidentally left the full exchange with the chatbot visible in the grade book. Though the professor claimed to have read the paper first, the student felt hurt and devalued.

Some students argue that using GenAI in this way is hypocritical—especially at institutions where they are forbidden to do the same. Others emphasize the cost: if students are paying thousands of dollars to be taught by humans, it seems unfair for their professors to outsource part of that work to free software. Professors counter that GenAI tools help them manage large course loads and free up time for more meaningful interactions, like office hours or mentoring. They compare the tools to calculators or spellcheck—useful assistants, but not substitutes for judgment or expertise.

Faculty members are divided on best practices. Some say transparency is essential: students should be told when and how GenAI is used. Others fear that disclosure would create unnecessary distrust. Meanwhile, universities are scrambling to craft coherent GenAI policies that balance innovation with integrity. As its use becomes more widespread, a new set of questions has emerged: What is the proper role of artificial intelligence in teaching and learning? Can a GenAI comment ever truly replace a teacher's thoughtful feedback? And does using GenAI in grading compromise fairness, honesty, or the teacher-student relationship?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If professors use AI to grade or provide feedback, should this undermine the trust central to the teacher-student relationship?
2. Should students and professors be held to the same standards regarding A.I. use in academic work?
3. What obligations do educators have to be transparent about their use of A.I. in the classroom?

¹Nolan, Beatrice. 2025. "Northeastern College Student Demanded Her Tuition Fees Back after Catching Her Professor Using OpenAI's ChatGPT." *Yahoo News*, May 15, 2025. <https://www.yahoo.com/news/northeastern-college-student-demanded-her-112924481.html>

6: Mission: Admission

Erin, a 17-year-old high school junior from Palo Alto, California, is no stranger to the pressure of college admissions. After scrolling through countless TikToks of Ivy League admits discussing their extracurricular activities that they believed strengthened their applications, Erin notices a common theme among them all — the passion project.¹ These passion projects ranged from students launching nonprofits, businesses, and youth-led community initiatives. The hope was to appear as strong, compassionate, and determined leaders to their dream school's admissions officers.

After volunteering at a local elementary school and noticing a lack of books, Erin creates StoryShare, a youth-led book donation program. With her classmates, she hosts book drives and raises \$5,000, donating over 10,000 books to libraries and schools across California. Librarians, teachers, and families across the state express gratitude for StoryShare's help in providing them with literary materials. But Erin found herself wondering if her excitement was from helping others or from imagining how good it might look on her Common App.

Erin's success doesn't come without criticism. James, a classmate who had also volunteered at the same school, feels uneasy. He has witnessed many of these projects being abandoned once college decisions are released, suggesting that the students who created these initiatives never intended that they would continue long-term. He worries that she and other such "try hards" are fueled by college applications rather than by genuine regard for good of their community. He feels that these "passion projects" turn activism into a transaction — trading good deeds for acceptance letters, ultimately, diminishing the true value of activism.

Mr. Jacobs, Erin's school counselor, sees the situation differently. He views StoryShare as an inspiring example of compassion and growth sparked by the college admissions process. He points to the 2024 United Way NCA's "The Gen Z Activism Survey,"² which showed Gen Z is notably more engaged in activism than millennials, with nearly one in three (32%) participating regularly, compared to just 24% of millennials. He believes the "passion project" phenomenon is a force of good, cultivating a generation of more aware, sensitive, and entrepreneurial leaders.

In March of Erin's senior year, she opens her Yale application portal. She was greeted with blue confetti falling from the top of her screen and a "Congratulations!" She knows that StoryShare played a critical role in the outcome of her application. The next week, when underclassmen ask about her motivation and her plans for StoryShare in the future, she pauses. Was the reason for her creating the organization actually about helping her community, or was she just more committed to getting into a top school? Is it wrong for her to stop working on StoryShare now that she has been admitted to Yale? If she said it was all for college, did that make her impact any less significant? Is it wrong for ambition to be the spark if the outcome is real change? Or, did intention matter more than the impact created?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is there something wrong with doing good only because it's personally profitable?
2. Does the focus on extracurricular activities in college admissions encourage negative character traits in students?
3. In competitive admissions, are students morally responsible for participating in a system that rewards performative activism?
4. Is it deceptive for Erin to present her project as altruistic if her main motive was college admission?

¹ Hernholm, Sarah. 2025. "4 Ways Teens Can Stand Out In College Admissions." *Forbes*, March 5, 2025. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/sarahhernholm/2025/03/05/4-ways-teens-can-stand-out-in-college-admissions/>

² United Way NCA. 2024. "The Gen Z Activism Survey." *United Way NCA Blog*, March 5, 2024. <https://unitedwaynca.org/blog/gen-z-activism-survey/>

7: Healthy Profits

GLP-1 drugs like Ozempic, Wegovy, and Mounjaro were originally developed to treat type 2 diabetes but are widely used to aid weight loss in individuals who aren't diagnosed with diabetes. These medications mimic a natural hormone that slows digestion and reduces appetite so, of course, many users eat less. Surprisingly, though, they also report losing interest in junk food, sugary drinks, and other calorie-dense snacks. Some even describe their cravings as "rewired".¹ Currently, an estimated 1 in 10 Americans have taken GLP-1 drugs and usage is expected to rise dramatically.

For decades, large corporations who specialize in convenient and calorie dense foods have relied on carefully engineered flavors, portion sizes, and marketing campaigns to encourage people to eat more than they otherwise would. If millions of consumers no longer crave chips, soda, or fast food, entire business models could be at risk. Rather than giving up, though, the industry is adapting. Companies like Mattson, a California-based food and beverage developer, have started promoting foods they describe as "GLP-1 Optimized." These are products specifically designed for people taking appetite-suppressing drugs: high in protein, smaller in size, and easy to digest. On the one hand, this seems like a normal market response to a new kind of consumer. The big food industry has helped solve issues of hunger and made food convenient for decades and this may be another iteration of that legacy. On the other hand, though, some worry that "optimization" might really mean finding ways to make food just as irresistible to medicated eaters as junk food once was. In other words, "Big Food" companies may simply be learning how to engineer new cravings for a population whose old ones have been diminished.²

On one hand, "GLP-1 Optimized" foods could be seen as a genuine innovation that improves public health. If people with suppressed appetites are still getting necessary nutrition, through smaller, protein-rich snacks or meals, then these products might help them eat well without feeling overwhelmed. Food providers might have a responsibility to their shareholders and to their customers to adjust to changing consumer needs and, in this case, may even support people in leading healthier lives.

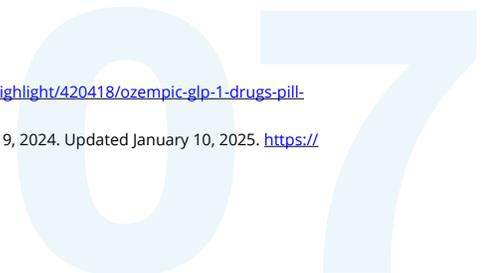
On the other hand, skeptics argue that food corporations haven't traditionally been motivated by health, but rather by profit. For decades, critics have accused food companies of designing products to be hyper-palatable and addictive, exploiting psychological and biological vulnerabilities to maximize consumption. Why should this time be any different? If companies can engineer junk food to override satiety signals, why wouldn't they now try to engineer "GLP-1 Optimized" foods that bypass even the appetite suppression of these drugs? If so, rather than truly helping, these companies may simply be repackaging old strategies of manipulation under a new label.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. To what degree do Big Food companies have a responsibility for public health?
2. If 'GLP-1 optimized' foods exploit drug-altered appetites, is that manipulation wrongful even when the products are nutritious?
3. Is it permissible to rebrand old profit-driven tactics as 'health innovation' if outcomes (e.g., better nutrition, portion control) improve?

¹ Scott, Dylan. 2025. "The One, Big Unanswered Question about Ozempic." *Vox*, August 25, 2025. <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/420418/ozempic-glp-1-drugs-pill-forms-science>.

² Chung, Jamie. 2024. "Ozempic Could Crush the Junk Food Industry. But It Is Fighting Back." *The New York Times*, November 19, 2024. Updated January 10, 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/19/magazine/ozempic-junk-food.html>.



8: Fido as Feed

Pet owners will form strong emotional bonds with their animals similar to if they were human family members. When a pet dies, the grief can be profound; organizations like the RSPCA and services like Paws to Listen exist precisely to support people through pet bereavement. Owners often view pets as much more than property, seeing animals as loved ones.¹

Recently, this norm of deep attachment to pets fueled conflict between pet owners and Denmark's Aalborg Zoo when they announced an initiative to help keep their animals fed. Through an Instagram post, the zoo invited people to donate unwanted but otherwise healthy animals, such as chickens, rabbits, or guinea pigs to be euthanized and used as whole prey for its carnivorous residents like the zoo's lynxes. The post explains that captive predators thrive when their diet resembles what they would eat in the wild, including bones, fur, skin, and organs. The program aims to reduce waste and support the welfare of the captive animals. In the face of intense backlash, the zoo quickly disabled comments on their post.² The zoo emphasized that donated animals are humanely euthanized by trained staff and not released into predator enclosures. Still, many people, particularly pet owners, find the idea disturbing: even if a forfeit animal would be put down either way, offering its body as food for another animal feels unsettling.

Defenders of the policy argue that disposing of a pet via cremation or burial only serves human emotional needs, whereas using the body to nourish another creature generates a positive outcome. After all, in theory the animals donated to the zoo in this program are unwanted and would otherwise be returned to an overtaxed shelter system that may opt to put them down anyway. Isn't it better that they serve a greater purpose? By feeding a pet to a hungry zoo animal, waste is minimized and predator health is supported.

Still, as pet owners, it seems that we may have some responsibility to protect, or at least respect, the animals that belong to us. Turning beloved companions into food might diminish the respect we owe them and reduce pets to simple commodities. Biologist Clifford Warwick, remarked, such a practice "devalues the lives of pets" and raises the question: should something deemed too precious to eat in life become acceptable to eat in death? Respect for the dead is valuable. As family members, shouldn't we afford our pets the same honors in death that we would want for the humans in our lives?

Notably, the zoo clarified that they were *not* asking people to donate certain species, like dogs or cats. By excluding these animals, the zoo drew a moral distinction that reflects an unconscious view that many people hold. Some animals, like rabbits or chickens, are acceptable for use as food while others are special and off-limits. Why do we treat some species of animals as beloved companions while others are seen as food? Does our grief over how a pet's body is used indicate a legitimate ethical concern, or is it an irrational bias that obscures more rational considerations?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do we owe dead pets posthumous respect similar to that owed to humans, and does that respect bar using their bodies as food?
2. Is there a morally relevant difference between dogs and cats, and other pets like rabbits? What about between dogs and cats, and farm animals?
3. What do we owe the animals that are kept in zoos? Do our obligations to these animals change if they are captive for the purpose of rehabilitation?

¹ Gibson, Richard. 2025. "From Pet to Predator's Plate." *The Prindle Institute for Ethics*, August 13, 2025. <https://www.prindleinstitute.org/2025/08/from-pet-to-predators-plate/>

²Pendrill, Sophie. 2025. "Denmark Zoo Invites People to Donate Pets as Predator Meals." *ABC7 Amarillo*, August 5, 2025. <https://abc7amarillo.com/news/offbeat/denmark-zoo-invites-public-to-donate-pets-as-predator-meals-pet-guinea-pig-chicken-rabbit-horse-pet-donation-august-5-2025>



9: Pulled To Protect

After their children graduated from the eighth grade, Jonas Yoder, Wallace Miller, and Adin Yutzy stopped sending their children to school. Yoder, Miller, and Yutzy were subsequently sued for violating a Wisconsin law, which required that all children attend public or private school until the age of sixteen.¹ In response, the parents petitioned, arguing that Wisconsin's compulsory school attendance law violated their right against laws that would prohibit them from freely exercising their religion.² Sending their children to school, the parents argued, was contrary to their Amish religion and way of life. After making its way to the U.S. Supreme Court, the parents' petition prevailed. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the parents and against Wisconsin's interest in maintaining its compulsory school attendance law.³ Setting the legal rights of parents aside, however, one might wonder whether parents have a *moral* right to withhold their children from school for religious reasons.

We tend to practice the religion we were raised in. But some children either do not adhere to the religion of their parents or would not adhere to their parents' religion if they were exposed to alternative ways of life. For many children, school provides an open opportunity for forming their own beliefs about religion and other ways of life. Considering this, some argue that parents who withhold their children from school on religious grounds impede upon the rights of their children to freely and fairly decide whether to adopt their parents' religion. When children are not granted adequate exposure via school to alternative ways of life, their right to an open future is violated.

In response, defenders of the claim that parents have a moral right to withhold their children from school for religious reasons may draw attention to the fact that children aren't fully autonomous agents. It's perfectly legitimate for parents to make their children eat their vegetables, attend piano lessons, and finish their homework, despite their children's protests. Why? Because parents have a moral right to require their children to participate in certain ways of life—including ways of life that their children wouldn't otherwise be motivated to participate in—when parents have reason to believe that participation in those ways of life is in the best interest of their children. But is withdrawing from school the same? Those who deny that parents have a moral right to withhold their children from school for religious reasons may argue that there's a limit to how much we can defer to parents' beliefs about what's in the best interest of their children. Even though some parents believe that allowing their children to interact with fire at a young age is in the best interest of their children, few of us would be willing to admit that those parents have a moral right to allow their children to do so. We would be within our rights to prevent those parents from allowing their children to play with fire.

Defenders of the moral right of parents to withhold their children from school for religious reasons, however, may deny that withholding their children from school is dangerous in the same way that allowing their children to play with fire would be. After all, religious ways of life are often seen as valuable because they emphasize the importance of not placing one's children in harm's way. So, perhaps, parents who withhold their children from school for religious reasons are justified in doing so on the grounds that they want to protect their children from harm.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What minimum educational outcomes should be required for every child? Might communities meet these in non-school settings?
2. Does parental intention to protect children from perceived harm justify restricting exposure to alternative ways of life, or should outcomes for the child carry more weight?
3. When parents sincerely judge that continued schooling would compromise their religious upbringing, what recourse should they have?

¹ "Wisconsin v. Yoder." Oyez. Accessed September 14, 2025. <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1971/70-110>.

² Congress.gov. 2025. "Overview of Free Exercise Clause." *Constitution Annotated*. August 5, 2025. https://constitution.congress.gov/browse/essay/amdt1-4-1/ALDF_00013221/.

³ Yoder, Jonas, Wallace Miller, and Adin Yutzy. 1972. *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205. Supreme Court of the United States. <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/406/205/>.



10: The Cyborg Games

Joe, a tech consultant at a cybersecurity firm, loves playing video games in his free time. He and his friends have been playing Rainbow Six™ together for years and are always looking for ways to improve their performance. One day, Joe notices that his friend Rob has become significantly better—he reacts faster to in-game dangers, his accuracy has improved, and his movements are more precise. Curious, Joe asks Rob about his newfound skills. Rob reveals that he recently had a brain-computer interface (BCI) chip implanted in his brain. This coin-sized device is attached to his cerebral cortex and picks up neuronal signals, allowing him to control his cursor and movements wirelessly through a Bluetooth™ connection.¹

Joe is immediately concerned. Is this fair? He realizes that brain implants like Rob's are being developed to help people with medical conditions such as Parkinson's disease.² But in Rob's case, the implant isn't being used for medical necessity—it's an elective enhancement used to gain a competitive advantage in gaming. Joe also wonders about security risks. If the device can be controlled wirelessly, could it be hacked? Additionally, is there a risk of long-term brain damage? Most importantly, is it ethical to use a brain implant to outperform others in a competition? If more players adopt BCI, will those without it be left behind? As Joe contemplates getting an implant himself, he remains uncertain about the risks and ethical implications of using nonessential neural enhancements in gaming and beyond.³

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between BCIs and other forms of assistive medical technology, like cochlear implants?
2. Should we prioritize access to games, even if accessibility technology may put some participants at a disadvantage?
3. How do we decide when a technology constitutes cheating?
4. Do competitive events have a responsibility to prevent competitors from making use of dangerous enhancements by banning them?

¹ Capitol Technology University. 2024. "Neuralink's Brain Chip: How It Works and What It Means." *Capitology Blog*, February 9, 2024. <https://www.captechu.edu/blog/neuralinks-brain-chip-how-it-works-and-what-it-means>.

² Kan, Michael. 2025. "First Human to Receive Neuralink Implant Says It Lets Him Play Civilization." *PCMag*, March 20, 2024. <https://www.pcmag.com/news/first-human-to-receive-neuralink-implant-says-it-lets-him-play-civilization>.

³ Meskó, Bertalan. 2025. "The World's Most Famous Real-Life Cyborgs." *The Medical Futurist*, January 7, 2025. <https://medicalfuturist.com/the-worlds-most-famous-real-life-cyborgs/>.

11: Calling Dr. Alexa

Grace, a high school senior, has been grappling with anxiety and stress due to academic pressures and social dynamics. Seeking support, she discovers an AI-powered therapy app offering cognitive-behavioral techniques and mindfulness exercises. Attracted by its accessibility and affordability, Grace begins using the app regularly.

The rise of AI therapy platforms represents a new direction of mental health care. Proponents argue that such technology democratizes access to support, especially for those who may face barriers to traditional therapy due to cost, stigma, or scheduling. It's plausible that AI therapy apps could fill a crucial gap by providing immediate assistance to people who might otherwise go without help. Even the American Psychological Association mentions that cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) "places an emphasis on helping individuals learn to be their own therapists".¹

However, concerns arise about the efficacy and ethics of relying on AI for mental health. Critics point out that AI lacks the empathetic understanding of human therapists. An algorithm may not be able to replace the nuanced understanding of human connection and there's a risk of oversimplifying complex emotional issues, not to mention the potential for unhelpful (or even harmful) advice or directives.

Grace notices improvements in her mood and appreciates the convenience that AI therapy offers. The app's exercises help her manage stress, and the 24/7 availability fits her busy schedule. However, she sometimes wonders whether the responses from the app truly address her individual needs or if they're generic solutions that dilute her individual perspective. Privacy is another concern; the app collects personal data to tailor its services and she wonders about how this sensitive information is stored and used.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is it appropriate for technology to play such a significant role in something as personal as mental health?
2. What level of clinical evidence and oversight should be required before an AI app may present itself as 'therapeutic'?
3. If an AI system reliably outperforms average therapists on key outcomes, is there still a moral reason to prefer human care for some patients?

¹ American Psychological Association. 2017. "What Is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy?" *APA PTSD Guideline*. <https://www.apa.org/ptsd-guideline/patients-and-families/cognitive-behavioral>.



12: A Pound of Flesh ¹

In early 2023, Massachusetts lawmakers proposed a bill that would allow incarcerated individuals to donate organs or bone marrow in exchange for sentence reductions ranging from 60 days to one year.² One of the bill's sponsors, Representative Judith Garcia, argued that the bill was a step toward addressing health inequities disproportionately impacting Black and Hispanic communities. These communities experience higher rates of conditions, such as diabetes and heart disease, that require organ or marrow transplants, and yet face longer wait times.³ These communities are also more likely to be imprisoned than their White counterparts. Black adults were imprisoned at more than four times the rate of White adults in 2022, and hold longer average stays.⁴

There are over 100,000 people in the U.S. needing life-saving organs, nearly a third of whom are Black, Hispanic, or Latino.⁵ Members of these communities have less than a 50% chance of finding a bone marrow match, whereas 2 out of 3 White people find a match.⁶ One factor contributing to their longer wait times is a lack of donors with compatible blood types and tissue markers. Organs are not matched via race and ethnicity, and it's common for a donor organ to be matched to a recipient of different ethnicity. However, blood and tissue types - as well as immune system markers - are more likely to be matched among members of the same ethnicity. Individuals in need of an organ transplant with rare genetic markers are also more likely to find a compatible match among donors with the same ethnic background. The more diverse the pool of organ donors, the greater the potential access to lifesaving transplants for everyone - and the greater potential for a successful transplant.

The Uniform Anatomical Gift Act of 1987 (UAGA) allows for an individual to authorize an organ donation after their death, or have a legal surrogate do so. Only a few states within the U.S. allow for posthumous organ donations by incarcerated persons, but Massachusetts aimed to become the first state to provide incentive for living organ donation. However, the bill immediately drew scrutiny. Critics of the proposal argued that incarcerated individuals are in an inherently constrained environment, which some argue limits their autonomy and gives them fewer choices than free citizens. Some suggest the offer of a reduced sentence can be considered a bribe, or coercion. Under this view, even if the offer appears voluntary, the nature of incarceration impairs one's ability to make fully informed and rational decisions, especially when incentivized with a reduced sentence. In contrast, some suggest that characterizing incarcerated individuals as irrational can be condescending and reinforce harmful stereotypes that undermine their agency.

There is, however, precedent for medical interventions in exchange for sentence reduction. Individuals are sometimes offered parole or reduced sentences if they undergo methadone therapy, chemical castration, or neurocorrectives. These medical interventions are typically reversible, but are aimed at modifying an individual's behavior or desires.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Does offering sentence reductions in exchange for organs count as coercion in a prison context?
2. Is trading reduced time for body parts an impermissible commodification that violates dignity, or a permissible incentive akin to other sentence-linked medical conditions?
3. Is there a decisive moral difference between incentivizing posthumous donation and incentivizing living donation that carries medical risk?

¹ A version of this case appears in the APPE Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl's® 2025-2026 Regional Case Set. It is reproduced here with permission. For more information about APPE IEB®, please visit [appeieb.org](https://www.appeieb.org).

² "Organs in Exchange for Freedom? Bill Raises Ethical Concerns." 2023. The Independent. February 8, 2023. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ap-massachusetts-bill-hispanic-boston-b2278576.html>.

³ "Race, Ethnicity & Donation." n.d. *Donate Life America* (blog). Accessed May 9, 2025. <https://donatelife.net/donation/organ-donation-race-ethnicity/>.

⁴ "Racial Disparities Persist in Many U.S. Jails." 2023. May 16, 2023. <https://pew.org/44DtVUh>.

⁵ "Organ Transplants and Black/African Americans | Office of Minority Health." n.d. Accessed May 29, 2025. <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/organ-transplants-and-blackafrican-americans>.

⁶ Rosanwo, Tolulope O. 2024. "Rates of Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation, Racism, and the Aging Face of America." *JAMA Network Open* 7 (9): e2433124. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.33124>.

13: Whose House is This Anyway?

A Homeowners Association (HOA) is a group of property owners in a neighborhood formed to make and enforce rules for the community. People who buy property in the area are made aware of any HOAs because they will automatically become members once they move in and will be required to pay monthly or yearly fees to cover shared services like landscaping, trash pickup, or pool maintenance. HOAs can also set standards for how homes look and what residents can or cannot do with their property. These limits might decide what are approved paint colors, mandate lawn care, assign parking, or set limits on holiday decorations.

For some, HOAs represent mini-tyrannies, analogous to modern company towns, where families face excessive punishments for the most minor of infractions, including parking one's truck in front of one's own house,¹ failing to promptly mow the lawn, using chalk on the sidewalk, or using the wrong color of paint—this is to say nothing of the dues required.²

For others, however, HOAs represent a highly particular sphere of governance wherein each individual can have legitimate influence. City governments often serve very diverse populations and communities, and with this in mind, it may make sense to allow for a degree of regional autonomy and flexibility. While HOAs may seem onerous, they can promote local engagement and solve collective action problems, offer social gathering spaces and other amenities, raise the value of one's home by ensuring that the neighborhood is orderly and appealing, and provide a more local realm for conflict resolution before escalating to a district court.³ Moreover, given the small scale on which they operate, prospective home-buyers may be able to evade more intrusive HOAs,⁴ and thereby positive incentives are instantiated for proper governance by HOAs in order to attract housing demand.

A similar dialectic to the one above has taken place with respect to zoning laws. Such ordinances, while implemented to protect one's way of life from the intrusiveness of, say, a busy industrial zone or new highway, has, some protest, artificially constrained housing supply—e.g., by mandating many areas as single-unit housing only or prohibiting mixed-use zoning—thus undermining people's prospects for safe, walkable living, de facto mandating car ownership.⁵ While, in its present form, zoning has had its hand in turning many major metropolitan areas into a sea of roads and parking lots, some hold out hope that laws could be modified in order to promote healthy living and uplift the unique charm of communities.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Does the benefits of having a voice in local governance justify the stronger cultural control exerted by an HOA, or is it outweighed by the risk of wrongful exclusion and conformity?
2. What limits should exist on HOA control of private property for collective goods? Consider solar panels, drought-tolerant yards, and religious or political displays.
3. Is the acceptance of HOA rules binding when membership and consent to those rules is a condition of buying a home in that neighborhood?

¹ Day, Lewin. 2022. "Rivian R1T Owner Targeted by HOA for Parking in Their Driveway." *The Drive*, December 20, 2022. <https://www.thedrive.com/news/rivian-r1t-owner-targeted-by-hoa-for-parking-in-their-driveway>.

² Stewart, Emily. 2023. "When Your Neighbors Become Your Overlords." *Vox*, April 20, 2023. <https://www.vox.com/money/23688366/hoa-condo-board-john-oliver-real-estate-coop>.

³ Perry, Nick. 2021. "Pros and Cons of HOAs." *Orchard Blog*, May 3, 2021. <https://orchard.com/blog/posts/pros-and-cons-of-hoa>.

⁴ Hirschman, Albert O. 1970. *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

⁵ Not Just Bikes. 2022. "Why We Won't Raise Our Kids in Suburbia." *YouTube*, June 6, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHlpmxLTxpw>.



14: Too Young to Rent a Car¹

In April 2025, the Michigan Supreme Court declared that life sentences without parole were unconstitutional for individuals who are ages 19 or 20 at the time of their crime. The justification for this decision: individuals at this age are not able to fully control their impulses or understand long-term consequences. One justice behind this decision, Justice Elizabeth Welch, cited neurological immaturity, a claim that the human brain isn't fully developed until age 25.² While some neuroscientists caution that this is an oversimplification, many agree that areas of the brain are not fully mature until the mid-twenties. These areas are specifically responsible for regulating emotions, evaluating consequences, and inhibiting impulsive behavior.

Individuals currently sentenced to life without parole who were aged 19 or 20 at the time of their crime would have their cases re-evaluated. This may result in reduced sentences or the possibility of parole. Opposition argues that the families of victims of these individuals would be forced to reopen old wounds. Resentencing hearings may require them to testify again, revisit graphic case details, and face the prospect that individuals convicted of serious crimes could be released earlier than expected. Some critics further argue that legal responsibility should not be contingent on brain development or age, but rather on the severity and intentionality of the crime. From this view, adjusting punishment based on age could be seen as undermining justice and equal accountability under the law.

At the same time, neuroscientists warn against drawing legal conclusions from broad developmental trends. Brain development is not uniform across individuals, and the 25-year threshold may obscure as much as it reveals. Nevertheless, science has informed legal norms in the past. For example, medical and psychological research influenced the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Roper v. Simmons* (2005), which banned the death penalty for crimes committed before age 18. Research indicated that juveniles are less culpable than adults for their actions, as the areas of their brains responsible for impulse control and decision-making are still developing. Similarly, *Miller v. Alabama* (2012) relied on medical research in developmental psychology and neuroscience to support the conclusion that children are fundamentally different from adults and thus less culpable for their actions. The Supreme Court case ruled that mandatory life sentences without parole for offenders under 17 were unconstitutional.

Like Michigan, Illinois, Washington, and Massachusetts have adopted or considered similar policies, recognizing that the developmental stage of early adulthood is different from later in adulthood.³ Supporters of these policies argue that they are more humane and scientifically informed. By acknowledging that the brain continues to mature into early adulthood, such laws allow for greater emphasis on rehabilitation and future reintegration into society.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Age is a crude proxy for maturity. Would it be more just to use individualized assessments of development and risk, even if they are costly and imperfect?
2. If young adults have reduced impulse control, does that lessen their culpability enough to bar life without parole altogether?
3. We restrict high-risk privileges like car rentals by age. Should similar age-based judgments about risk and maturity reduce the harshest criminal punishments for 19 and 20-year-olds?

¹ A version of this case appears in the APPE Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl's® 2025-2026 Regional Case Set. It is reproduced here with permission. For more information about APPE IEB®, please visit appeieb.org.

² LeBlanc, Beth. 2025. "Michigan Supreme Court Nixes Mandatory Life Sentences for 19-, 20-Year-Old Murderers." *The Detroit News*, April 10, 2025. <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/michigan/2025/04/10/michigan-supreme-court-mandatory-life-sentence-19-20-year-olds-unconstitutionally-cruel-punishment/83028141007/>.

³ Schoonover, Nika. 2023. "Bill Aims to Guarantee Youth Sentenced to Life in Prison a Chance at Parole after 40 Years." *Capitol News Illinois* (blog). March 14, 2023. <https://capitolnewsillinois.com/news/bill-aims-to-guarantee-youth-sentenced-to-life-in-prison-a-chance-at-parole-after-40-years/>.

"Massachusetts First State to Ban Life without Parole for People Under 21." 2024. *The Sentencing Project* (blog). January 18, 2024. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/newsletter/massachusetts-first-state-to-ban-life-without-parole-for-people-under-21/>.

Schoen, Arthur. n.d. "Washington State Supreme Court Finds Mandatory Life Without Parole Sentences Unconstitutional for Offenders Younger Than 21 – Columbia Journal of Law & Social Problems." Accessed May 29, 2025. https://jlsplaw.columbia.edu/2021/05/12/washington-state-supreme-court-finds-mandatory-life-without-parole-sentences-unconstitutional-for-offenders-younger-than-21/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

15: Dead Men DO Tell Tales

In May 2025, an Arizona courtroom heard a voice from beyond the grave. At the sentencing of Gabriel Horcasitas, convicted of fatally shooting Army veteran Chris Pelkey in a 2021 road rage incident, the court played a video in which Pelkey, who had been dead for around four years, appeared to deliver his own victim impact statement.¹

The video was an AI-generated deepfake created by his sister, Stacey Wales, using photos, home videos, and voice samples. She wrote the script herself, believing it reflected Chris's intentions. Wales described the project as a "Frankenstein of love," designed to honor her brother and let him "speak" for himself in the courtroom.²

The video depicted Pelkey reflecting on his life, offering forgiveness, and urging others to cherish time with loved ones. Judge Todd Lang was visibly moved, remarking afterward: "I love that AI ... I felt like that was genuine." He ultimately sentenced Horcasitas to 10.5 years in prison, a year more than prosecutors had recommended.

Supporters of this use of AI emphasized that victim impact statements already aim to communicate the human cost of crime. If technology can enhance the resonance of these statements, courts should welcome it. They argue that sentencing is about determining appropriate punishment, for which emotion has long been considered relevant. For grieving families, AI memorials can offer comfort, closure, and the preservation of a loved one.

Horcasitas's defense attorney filed an appeal, claiming that the deepfake introduced improper emotional manipulation into sentencing. Others noted that Pelkey never consented to being digitally recreated, and that the words he "spoke" were not authentically his own. Legal scholars argued that if courts permit AI-generated victim statements, what would prevent the digital recreation of defendants or witnesses? Such practices risk distorting genuine testimony and artificial simulation, threatening the integrity of the justice system.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In a courtroom that aspires to impartiality, what role should emotion play at sentencing? Does allowing a victim statement to manufacture emotion undermine fairness? Does using AI to create this statement go too far?
2. Does it violate the dignity of the deceased to create a posthumous AI video without explicit prior consent, or can family legitimately consent on their behalf?
3. Does having a survivor write the script put words in the mouth of the dead in a way that is ethically different from reading letters or showing photos at sentencing?

¹ Martin, Saleen. 2025. "Dead Man's AI Replica Speaks to Shooter in Court: 'We Probably Could Have Been Friends.'" *USA Today*, May 9, 2025. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2025/05/09/chris-pelkey-gabriel-horcasitas-ai-replica-court/83533978007/>.

² Krasean, Nicole. 2025. "Arizona Road Rage Victim Speaks to Killer Through Artificial Intelligence." *FOX 10 Phoenix*, May 5, 2025. <https://www.fox10phoenix.com/news/arizona-shooting-victim-speaks-killer-through-artificial-intelligence>.



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