



2027 Case Set

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Introduction

We're happy to present the 2026/2027 Ethics Cup case set. We hope you have as much fun exploring these cases as we have had writing them.

For some cases, links to additional study materials have been provided. For other cases, the material contained in the footnotes, or application of other things you know about, should be enough to get you going.

We welcome feedback on the case set. Participating schools will be asked for feedback after their regional tournament, but feel free to contact us directly at ethicscup@st-andrews.ac.uk.

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1. Immoral artists

There are many, many examples of very good artists behaving very badly. Pablo Picasso was awful to women.¹ Abuse allegations against Michael Jackson are well-documented.² Eric Gill did horrific things.³ R Kelly did, too.⁴ So did Roman Polanski.⁵ It's depressingly easy to extend the list (though it's not so easy to add women to it; perhaps Coco Chanel would be a candidate, and certainly Leni Riefenstahl).

Once upon a time, it was perhaps common to think that such behaviour was the unavoidable price to pay for letting genius loose. But nobody thinks that any more. So the question is: what should we do, as appreciators, when we learn that someone whose art we admire was a moral monster?

Perhaps it doesn't matter. Perhaps we can separate the art from the artist entirely. After all, the artist's attitudes might not be part of the content of their artworks, and it's the artworks that we appreciate. But once we know that an artist is morally bad, it becomes more difficult to separate art and artist. For example, once we know that Picasso was awful to women, we might look at his paintings of women in a different way.

And even if we can separate artwork from artist, that might not be enough. Suppose that Michael Jackson's music has no link at all to his wrongs. Some people might still feel that listening to his music expresses a kind of liking for him. Alternatively, some people might insist that liking the music doesn't mean that you like or approve of the person.

Michael Jackson is, of course, dead. The dead can't directly profit from appreciation of their work (and you can't libel them, either). Perhaps the issue with enjoying art by morally bad artists is just that they somehow profit from our enjoyment, and they don't deserve to profit. If that's right, we're free to appreciate Picasso's art and Jackson's music just as we please.

Study questions:

1. Should we stop appreciating art by morally bad people?
2. Can we appreciate art by bad people if the art itself doesn't express their bad attitudes?
3. Does it make any difference if the artist is dead or alive?

¹ <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/11/09/how-picasso-bled-the-women-in-his-life-for-art/>

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/culture/article/20240328-is-michael-jacksons-image-being-cleaned-up>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/apr/09/eric-gill-the-body-ditchling-exhibition-rachel-cooke>. We're deliberately not detailing allegations in the main text, but you can look them up if you like.

⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-40635526>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/oct/23/roman-polanski-rape-allegation-lawsuit-settled>

Further resources:

1. <https://hyperallergic.com/what-do-we-do-with-the-work-of-immoral-artists/>
2. <https://www.artaesthetics.net/publications/2019/5/26/conflicted-art-how-to-approach-works-by-morally-bad-artists>

2. Collateral consequences

When someone is convicted of a crime, their punishment typically involves serving time in prison, paying a fine or being on probation. The purpose of serving a criminal sentence may be: to repay an incurred debt to society, to deter future reoffending, to rehabilitate the offender, because it is what the offender deserves, and so on. Someone who has completed their stay in prison is often considered to have “served their time”.

However, the legal consequences of their conviction do not end with their punishment. The legal consequences of conviction not relating to punishment are known as *collateral consequences*. Collateral consequences in the UK may include ineligibility for certain jobs, the loss of professional, driver or firearms licenses, and deportation. In the US, collateral consequences can extend to loss of voting rights, loss of financial aid, and restrictions on housing. These consequences can be removed, for example, if the conviction is expunged from a criminal record. However, in many cases such consequences remain in place for life.

Courts consistently rule that collateral consequences are not punishments. They are not decided during the sentencing process or issued by a judge. Yet, collateral consequences can be sensible precautionary measures taken for public safety. For instance, serious driving offences might prevent an offender from obtaining a license. That said, they cause harm to the offender and may even pose further risks to the public. The increased difficulty in finding housing and employment, for instance, leads to an increased risk of reoffending.¹

The collateral consequences of conviction are not part of an offender’s punishment and can increase the risk of reoffending. When an offender serves their punishment, upon release, they may have difficulty finding a stable home and in finding employment due not only to their criminal record, but restrictions on the jobs they can have and the licenses they can obtain.

Study questions:

1. Are collateral consequences for conviction justified? Consider whether potential increases to reoffending rates affect your case.

¹ **Employment:** Between May 2024 and March 2025, 20% of offenders were able to find employment within 6 weeks of their release. Within 6 months, this rose only to 37% (for those who served 12 months or more). Unemployed offenders are more likely to reoffend than those who are employed: 37% likely for those who are unemployed, 19% for those in employment (Ministry of Justice, 2026 [Proven reoffending statistics: January to March 2024 - GOV.UK](#)).

Housing: A report by HM Inspectorate of Probation in 2020 found that, in England, 22% of offenders on probation did not have stable housing ([Accommodation and support for adult offenders in the community and on release from prison in England](#)). The Ministry of Justice reports that stable accommodation reduces the risk of reoffending by 50%.

2. Should committing a crime prevent you from having the same rights as non-offending citizens? If punishment is intended to rehabilitate an offender, should punished offenders be treated as posing more of a risk to society than non-offending citizens?

3. If an offender faces lifelong consequences for their conviction, do they ever become an *ex-offender*?

Further resources:

1. Hoskins (2018) Criminalization and the Collateral Consequences of Conviction.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11572-017-9449-2> [Open Access Article]

2. Howard League (2021) [The Collateral Consequences of Criminal Records](#) [Youtube video of Strathclyde panel]

3. Kimble and Grawert (2021) [Collateral Consequences and the Enduring Nature of Punishment | Brennan Center for Justice](#) [Brenan Centre for Justice essay]

3. Compulsory voting

Voter turnout rates in Britain are in decline, with just under 60% of eligible voters participating in the 2024 general elections. Turnout was especially low for younger people, people of colour, and people with lower incomes.¹ Some observers see the low participation rates as a serious problem for the nation's political health, or even the government's legitimacy: how can it claim to democratically represent the will of the people, if a large proportion of the people play no role in political decision-making?² The differences in turnout rates between demographic groups pose an additional problem: if the voting population is disproportionately composed of older and wealthier white voters, politicians may tend to support policies favouring that demographic at the expense of the common good.

Some analysts and politicians propose that voting should be made compulsory in the UK. In compulsory voting systems, such as those in Australia or Belgium, citizens face a civil penalty if they fail to vote in an election and lack a valid excuse (like conflicting religious or political views). The penalty may consist in a modest fine or in the restriction of some other rights, such as the right to hold public employment. Supporters of compulsory voting argue that it would directly address problems of low turnout and unequal demographic representation, and that the restrictions it places on individual freedom would be no greater than those involved in other civic duties, like compulsory jury service.

Opponents argue, however, that making voting compulsory would be an undue expansion of the state's regulation of political participation, which has typically been treated as a legal right but not a legal obligation. They also worry that, in practice, requiring citizens to vote could lead to a less informed electorate: people who would rather not participate may simply cast their votes at random, or without making efforts to understand the issues at stake.

Study questions:

1. Do voters in democratic nations have a moral duty to vote?
2. When is it acceptable for a government to *require* political participation from its citizens, instead of just ensuring that they are able to participate?
3. Should voting be made compulsory in the UK?

Further resources:

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy article on [The Ethics and Rationality of Voting](#) (esp. sec. 4)

¹ <https://post.parliament.uk/election-turnout-why-do-some-people-not-vote/>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/jan/01/turnout-inequality-uk-elections-close-to-tipping-point-ippir>

4. Ice Age Park

Michael Crichton's science-fiction novel, *Jurassic Park*, and its many film adaptations tell a cautionary tale. People should not wield the power to bring extinct species back to life; we will just cause chaos. What was fiction in the 1990s is now possible, as scientists work to bring back Woolly Mammoths and Thylacines,¹ or rather, to create something similar to these animals, since their work includes genome-editing close relatives, or placing the extinct animal's DNA into another animal's egg cell.

So called de-extinction could have ecological benefits, if the animals are released and serve habitats through things like seed-spreading or population control of another species. However, de-extinction takes resources – funding, time, public concern – and there are other ways to benefit habitats, including preserving currently endangered species or re-introducing animals to their natural habitats.² On the other hand, the scientific techniques learned from de-extinction could be the key to helping endangered species.³

Study questions:

1. Given the limited resources, is it ethically permissible to work to de-extinct species?
2. Assuming it is possible and permissible, which species should be prioritised for de-extinction and why?
3. Who should decide if de-extinction should happen, which species to work on, and where the animals go? International coalitions, governments, scientists?⁴

¹ <https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/what-is-de-extinction-really-for/>

² https://www.rsv.org.au/articles/de-extinction?srsId=AfmBOosHnrUoRmLRNYdApCfVmaG7NLHdfM_UqJ42DrAR_z_ub6VwaA2

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c2dwg39px27o>

⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20230113-how-extinct-animals-could-be-brought-back-from-the-dead>

5. Central Bank Digital Currencies: programmable money or financial surveillance?

A Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) is a digital form of a country's official currency, issued, regulated, and backed directly by its central bank. Unlike commercial bank deposits (which are digital claims on a private bank) or cash (a physical claim on the central bank), a CBDC combines both features: it is purely digital and a direct liability of the sovereign state. Central banks around the world, including the Bank of England¹ and the US Federal Reserve,² are actively developing Central Bank Digital CBDCs – digital cash issued directly by the state.³ While traditional physical cash is entirely untraceable, a CBDC operates on a digital ledger managed by the central bank. Questions about whether the implementation of a CBDC is morally permissible have been raised.

On the one hand, critics argue against CBDCs for two primary reasons. First, they argue that CBDCs pose an unprecedented threat to individual privacy and state overreach. Because every digital transaction leaves a footprint, a CBDC grants the government potential real-time oversight of citizens' spending habits, effectively turning currency into an instrument of state surveillance.

Second, critics express deep moral concern over “programmability”⁴ – the ability of a central bank to hardcode conditions into money itself (such as setting expiry dates to force spending, or placing restrictions on what goods can be purchased). They argue that altering the nature of money to dictate human behaviour infringes upon personal autonomy and opens the door to authoritarian financial control.⁵

On the other hand, proponents argue that a state-backed digital currency is a moral imperative in an increasingly cashless society.⁶ Currently, digital payments are entirely controlled by private commercial banks and credit card corporations, which extract high transaction fees

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/markets/currencies/consumers-face-20000-pound-limit-digital-pound-bank-england-says-2023-02-07>

² Jim Rickards Breaks Down Central Bank Digital Currencies: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKqhGW0wYjQ>

³ World Economic Forum: Central Bank Digital Currency? How Money Could Be Redesigned: <https://www.weforum.org/stories/forum-institutional/davos23-central-bank-digital-currency-redesigning-money/>

⁴ <https://www.federalreserve.gov/publications/money-and-payments-discussion-paper.HTM>

⁵ CBDC explained by Rishi Sunak: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zF7R0JapOdk>

⁶ Atlantic Council Central Bank Digital Currency Tracker: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/cbdctracker/>

and retain customer data for private profit. A CBDC ensures that access to risk-free, state-guaranteed money remains a public good available to all citizens equally.

Furthermore, defenders argue that critics conflate potential misuse with inherent wrongness. Just as public roads can be used for state checkpoints, they also provide vital freedom of movement. Plausibly, the potential efficiency, financial inclusion for unbanked populations, and lower transaction costs offered by a CBDC justify its adoption, provided robust legal and technical safeguards are put in place.

Study questions:

1. Does the state have a moral duty to preserve a completely anonymous, untraceable means of exchange (like physical cash), or is privacy subordinate to the public benefits of a modernised financial system?
2. Is it ethically permissible for a central bank to make digital money "programmable" if doing so achieves a clear social or economic good, such as curbing inflation or discouraging harmful consumption?
3. If CBDCs are considered morally risky because they expand state monitoring, does that mean that existing private payment systems - which already collect, analyse, and monetise our financial data - are equally impermissible?

6. Renting out your likeliness to AI - the marketplace for faces

China's micro-drama industry relies heavily upon AI to produce short videos at a minimal cost¹. The industry, however, faces a problem: the similarities between AI generated characters and real people have led to a series of legal cases, and prominent social media platforms such as Hongguo and Douyin have taken down over 85,000 videos for the unauthorised use of people's faces and voices.² Platforms, like ActID and New Claw, claim to offer a more ethical solution to this problem. Users can choose to upload images of their face on these platforms, to be licensed as source material to micro-drama companies, and in return receive the equivalent of \$15 to \$700 USD for their image. Some companies have also set price floors (New Claw's is \$54) to prevent users from undercutting each other.

Advocates of this licensing strategy hold that these platforms give people the agency to consent and allow them to profit from just uploading an image of themselves. These platforms claim to offer micro-drama companies a more ethical way of procuring the data they require consensually and increasing the diversity of the characters they portray. Critics, however, have questioned whether meaningful consent is possible when the platform's users don't know exactly how their image might be used in the future. While users can choose genres, such as comedy, advertisements or thrillers, they cannot control exactly how their image will be used in a licensed production. Once an image is licensed to a micro-drama, neither the platforms nor the users, have control over how their image is modified. If the image is used as source material to train an AI model, it is also not possible to revoke this inclusion in the dataset nor is it possible to predict in advance what new images or personas might be derived from a given image in the future.

Study questions:

1. Do platforms such as ActID and New Claw offer users the opportunity to provide meaningful consent?
2. What are the considerations for consent to be meaningful?
3. If a licensed image of a person's face is used as the basis for developing a novel image that does not resemble or is not identifiable as the original person, should considerations for informed consent still apply?

¹ [In China, You Can Now Rent Your Face to AI - And Maybe Never Get It Back - Gadget Review](#)

² [In China, people are renting out their faces to AI](#)

7. Sex and the state pension

In 2002 Fernando Fernández de Trocóniz, a member of the Toledo Pact Commission, which was charged with recommending changes to Spain's social security system, was forced to resign in the wake of his comment that women should receive lower state pension benefits “because they live longer than men”.¹

Controversial though it may be, there is something to the thought that men should get more out of the state pension than women. Take, for instance, the State Pension Age (SPa). It is natural to think that the right SPa for any group of people depends on their likely lifespan. (A version of this thought used to be endorsed by the UK. government, whose official position was that everyone should have an expectation of living “up to one third” of their life on the State Pension.²) Add the fact that women, on average, live for longer than men, and you get to the conclusion that the SPa for women should be higher than that for men. This would run contrary to the current practice across most developed countries, which is for the SPa to be sex-neutral.³

One argument on the other side is that the sex-neutral SPa is a convenient way of righting other wrongs. Women are subject to various forms of oppression and disadvantage, but getting to live more of their life on the State Pension helps to make up for that.

Another argument on the other side is that the inequality at the heart of the argument for women having a higher SPa is the wrong inequality to care about. Instead of caring about how many years of their lives people spend receiving State Pension payouts we should care how much money in State Pension payouts they receive over their lifetime. And it turns out that despite spending more of their lives receiving State Pension payouts than men, women receive less money in payouts over their lifetime.⁴ Moreover, women are far less able than men to

¹ <https://factorhumana.org/ca/continguts/noticies/5837-Troc%C3%B3niz%20deja%20la%20presidencia%20del%20Pacto%20de%20Toledo%20tras%20el%20esc%C3%A1ndalo%20de%20las%20pensiones>

² See p. 7 of the 2017 “State Pension Age Review”, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82dd6740f0b6230269d1c0/print-ready-state-pension-age-review-final-report.pdf>.

³ See p. 142 of “Pensions at a Glance 2023”, https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2023/12/pensions-at-a-glance-2023_4757bf20/678055dd-en.pdf.

⁴ See pp. 2 and 6 of “The Gender Gap in Pension Saving”, <https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/IFS-REPORT-R250-The-gender-gap-in-pension-saving.pdf>.

supplement their State Pension income with workplace pension income, because women take on more childcare responsibilities than men and therefore spend less time in paid work.⁵

Study questions:

1. Is it right to use the State Pension as way to address injustices that have nothing to do with the State Pension?
2. When thinking about issues of distributive fairness concerning the state pension, what's the salient issue: the amount of time each person spends living off the State Pension, the amount of State Pension payouts each person receives over their lifetime, or both?
3. Should women have a higher SPa than men?

Further resources:

<https://theconversation.com/who-chooses-to-work-and-who-is-forced-to-after-retirement-246214>

⁵ See pp. 2 and 7 of the report linked in the previous footnote.

8. Hazing

In the USA, university campuses have received an immense amount of negative attention following several hazing scandals.¹ In these scandals, new students are subjected to horrible ordeals as condition of joining student societies. Examples of such ordeals include forced binge drinking, humiliation, or extreme risk. This is called “hazing”.

Often hazing is decried as morally impermissible. The idea is simple enough. Hazing harms university students without an adequate justification.² Provided that hazing harms university students, in the sense that they are worse off than they otherwise would be, without a compensating good, hazing is wrong.³

Hazing also undermines the dignity of those who are hazed. Intuitively, it is wrong to treat others in an undignified manner. Just as it would be wrong to treat the elderly as disposable because it fails to treat them as persons worthy of respect, so too is hazing wrong because it fails to treat the hazed as worthy of respect.

Some also feel that one cannot validly consent to hazing. There are three ways to see this. First, a student can have insufficient knowledge about what they are consenting to (e.g., they do know they are going to undergo harsh treatment). Second, a student can have insufficient voluntariness (e.g., a student may be compelled to engage in hazing). Third, a student may have insufficient competence (e.g., a student may not be competent enough to consent to hazing).

However, one may argue that hazing is permissible because it does not involve a rights violation. Just as we can waive our right not to have our legs injured in a wrestling match, so too can we waive our right not to be humiliated in a hazing contest. Plausibly, college students may provide informed consent, allowing them to waive their rights against being harmed in a hazing contest. Now, if this is morally permissible, then colleges should not ban it.

Study questions:

1. Can students validly consent to Hazing?
2. Is hazing impermissible even if everyone consents to it?
3. Should colleges allow all morally permissible activities?

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/sep/16/pi-delta-psi-fraternity-hazing-death-mike-deng-bad-attitude>

² <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/presence-mind/201909/hazing-when-rites-passage-are-harmful-practices>

³ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40441523?seq=1>

9. Is using private investigators ethical?

A private investigation involves surveillance, inquiry or investigation into a person or event. Governments, law firms, corporations, journalists and individuals all use private investigators. They may be used 1) to gain business intelligence, 2) for litigation support, 3) for problem-solving, or 4) to conduct domestic and personal investigations. They can help gather evidence in criminal and civil cases and assist in missing persons cases. The vast majority of private investigators work on fraud cases.

As private investigators are unlicensed in the UK, they are not granted special powers over and above the rest of the population and must act lawfully. Though the use of private investigators is legal, it regularly comes under scrutiny. For instance, it was at the centre of the High Court case against Associated Newspapers, publishers of the Daily Mail. The Daily Mail claimed information was obtained through legitimate journalism. Claimants ultimately lost the case. While the use of private investigators is not illegal, claimants stated that being under surveillance was a highly distressing and an invasion of privacy.

The use of private investigators has also allowed some individuals to circumvent stalking protection orders. The Guardian identified 30 cases of stalkers hiring private investigators to track their victims in a 3-year period.¹ This has allowed them to find addresses, contact details and information about where their victims work. Private investigators may act in a way that would be illegal for the person who hired them to act: it is illegal to break a stalking protection order, but not illegal to hire someone else to follow that individual.

The legal difference between surveillance and stalking is clear. It depends on intent and whether observations cause distress or harm to the individual observed.

Study questions:

1. Intent and actualised harm make the legal difference between surveillance and stalking. Do they make a *moral* difference?
2. Is an individual harmed by being under surveillance? Does your judgement change if that individual *never* finds out?
3. Are those who hire private investigators *responsible* for the investigator's actions?

Further resources:

1. [House of Commons - Private Investigators - Home Affairs Committee](#) [House of Commons report]
2. Radio 4 (2013) [The Report - Private Investigators - BBC Sounds](#) [BBC Podcast]

¹ McClenaghan (2026) '[You feel violated': how stalkers outsource abuse to private investigators | Violence against women and girls | The Guardian](#)' [News article]

10. Job loss for private misconduct

In general, employers are allowed to dismiss workers for misconduct on the job, such as stealing from the company or making sexist comments to coworkers. When an employee is fired for off-duty behaviour, however, the legal and ethical questions can be more complicated. In 2010, for instance, a restaurant employee was dismissed after she posted insulting comments about customers on her personal Facebook profile.² In cases outside the UK, employees have been disciplined or fired after videos shared online showed them making offensive remarks at a sporting event,³ taunting other customers in a grocery store,⁴ or cuddling with extramarital romantic partners at a concert.⁵

In such cases, company spokespersons may explain the decision to dismiss an employee by saying that their behaviour has an effect on the public image of the company: keeping a worker who has become known for bad behaviour or negative attitudes toward their employer may impose costs on the company. Employers may also cite differences between the company's stated values and the values demonstrated by the employee's behaviour, or point to contract clauses or company policies requiring workers not to put the company in a bad light. According to some observers, though,⁶ punishing an employee for actions performed outside their workplace would be an unjust intrusion of the company's power into the employee's personal life.

Study questions:

1. Is it morally permissible for a company to fire an employee for private misconduct?
2. Could it ever be morally required for a company to fire an employee for private misconduct?
3. Would your judgment be any different in cases where the employee's private behaviour is (a) not morally wrong or illegal, but just unpopular or embarrassing? (b) morally wrong, but not illegal? (c) both morally wrong and illegal?

Further resources:

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy article on [Business Ethics](#), especially Section 6.

² <https://www.lra.org.uk/resources/advisory-guide/advice-social-media-and-employment-relationship>

³ <https://abc7chicago.com/post/milwaukee-brewers-fan-loses-job-saying-call-ice-los-angeles-dodgers-during-playoff-game/18027193/>

⁴ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/nebraska-woman-cough-grocery-covid-b1918756.html>

⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c80pnnn0gj3o>

⁶ See e.g. Elizabeth Anderson (2017), *Private Government*, Princeton University Press, ch. 2.

11. MMA as a moral-free zone

Dana White runs the largest Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) competition in the world, called UFC. Participating in the UFC drastically increases one's risk of injury. This is essentially because the aim of the game is to submit your opponent either through strangulation or a potential bone break. In fact, many participants in the UFC have developed chronic traumatic encephalopathy, commonly known as CTE.¹

For this reason alone, many have argued that the UFC is far too harmful to justify its continuance.^{2,3,4} It stands to reason, argue these thinkers, that the scores of concussions, slipped discs, broken bones, and sprained ankles are not justified by the joys of the audience members who watch the fights. On the other hand, one might argue that the critic of UFC is conflating harmfulness and wrongness. A fighter may be harmed by an opponent in a fight, but that does not mean they're actually wronged.

Furthermore, others have argued that Dana White unjustifiably treats fighters in an undignified manner to produce the UFC. Specifically, we may wonder whether treating individuals as mere means to our entertainment is justified. People, after all, are worthy of respect such that disrespecting them in circumstances like these is morally questionable.

On the other hand, one may argue that we are not treating the fighters as a mere means, considering that they are justly compensated for their fight. Besides, it stands to reason that they provide free, informed, and reversible consent to the fight. Plausibly, respecting an individual's consent is part and parcel of treating them as an end rather than as a means.

Study Questions:

1. Is UFC permissible even if we do not know the extent of the medical damage caused by its fights?
2. Can people validly consent to a UFC fight?
3. If UFC is impermissible because it risks great harm, does that mean that other activities such as rugby, American football, parkour, bouldering without gear, escapism, contortionism, and stunt performing should be impermissible as well?

¹ <https://philarchive.org/archive/KERRAC-5>

² <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6352039/>

³ <https://philarchive.org/archive/VEIEOM-2>

⁴ <https://ethicsofsports.wordpress.com/2015/11/23/ethics-in-the-ufc-barbaric-spectacle-or-ethically-permissible-sport/>

12. How should we remember?

Public space in the UK is crammed with reminders of people from the past: statues, street names, dedications, monuments. Some of the people so commemorated did some pretty awful things, and questions thus arise concerning their commemoration. Statues of people involved in the slave trade have come in for particular attention in recent years; the toppling of the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol in 2020 was an especially prominent example of this attention.¹

Colston's statue is now on permanent display in a Bristol museum, as part of an exhibition on the history of protest in the city.² A different approach to removing statues is demonstrated by Budapest's Memento Park, in which stand all the Communist statues that used to occupy prominent places in the city.³

But we might wonder whether removing statues is the right approach to take, and we might wonder how far it ought to go. Some people say that statues of slavers should be left in place, perhaps with some extra contextual information that turns them into historical lessons.⁴ Perhaps, for these people, statues are not necessarily celebrations of their subjects. But others will argue that statues always seem like celebrations, and that you can't cancel that effect just by adding context.

Study questions:

1. Would there be anything inconsistent about removing statues of slavers but not removing statues of racists?
2. Can a statue of someone ever not celebrate them?
3. What is the best thing to do with statues of slavers?

Further resources:

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2023/may/05/how-the-fall-of-edward-colstons-statue-revolutionised-the-way-british-history-is-told>

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ckg4ej8j41yo>

² <https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/blog/new-display-at-m-shed-the-toppling-of-the-colston-statue/>

³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/travel/article/20221214-memento-park-budapests-graveyard-for-communist-statues>

⁴ <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/10/08/city-of-london-u-turn-on-historic-statues>

13. Moral enhancement

Suppose that thanks to a voluntary biomedical intervention, it is possible to enhance morality. Imagine your best friend is deliberating whether to receive this intervention and seeks your guidance. What do you think your best friend should do?

Your friend is living what appears to be a good life. They have meaningful friendships, are in good health, and have a successful job as a physician. Their spare time is spent at the gym, and they visit their family on weekends. Additionally, your friend dedicates two weeks annually to a medical non-profit serving vulnerable populations and is politically active in supporting social causes.

Now, imagine that the biomedical intervention your friend is considering works by intensifying their pre-existing moral beliefs and dispositions. That is, if your friend decides to undergo the intervention, instead of spending just two weeks a year offering free care to vulnerable communities, they will now devote most of their career to humanitarian medicine, keeping only a small private practice. Also, their political activism will very likely be intensified.

Your friend is aware of these consequences, but is undecided about what to do. On the one hand, they are concerned because their life will very likely change drastically. Since their life will be organised around their moral projects, they will have less time to visit their family and friends, thereby affecting their relational intimacy. Additionally, their overall health will likely be somewhat compromised – though not severely – by a lack of rest and diminished exercise. In short, their life would become more challenging and require far deeper sacrifices than before, given their strong dedication to moral projects.

On the other hand, your friend is very interested in helping other people and in political activism. Additionally, they have wanted to commit more deeply to their moral projects for some time, but have not managed to do so on their own and view this intervention as a way to finally do it. Finally, the medical assistance they would offer is urgently needed given the shortage of healthcare personnel and the severe health issues facing the community; if they do not intervene, more people will very likely face serious illness or death. The critical nature of this situation is therefore another reason why your friend is considering undergoing the intervention.

Accordingly, your friend's main struggle is deciding whether to trade away key personal goods – like health, close friendships, and a comfortable lifestyle – for a much deeper dedication to their moral causes.

Study questions:

1. Your best friend desires to be more strongly committed to their moral projects, but they have failed to do so. Is it desirable to undergo such a moral change via the biomedical intervention discussed?
2. Suppose your friend undergoes the intervention and, as a result, shows a greater commitment to their moral projects. Would this change count as a genuine form of moral enhancement?
3. Should your friend undergo the intervention?

Further resources:

Moseley, D. (2025, November 13). Human Enhancement. Retrieved from Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/enhancement/#ShoWePurMorEnh>

14. The cost of life

Three people die in the UK every day waiting for an organ transplant.¹ However, there are many organs, or parts of organs one can donate while still living: kidney, liver, pancreas, lung lobe, intestine. Given the number of people with organs to donate and the number of people who need them, three people – in the UK alone – should not be dying each day.

There are many reasons why people choose not to donate their organs: lack of knowledge about their ability to donate, faith, fear of surgical complications, long-term health concerns – what if one day their other kidney fails or their loved one needs one. There are also financial concerns; it can take months to recover from surgery, and many individuals cannot risk months without income.² Payment for organ donation is illegal in most countries, including the UK.³ The two major reasons supporting illegality are avoiding forced organ donation⁴ and unfair access to organs.

Study questions:

1. If payment for organ donations were legal, where should the money come from? For example, in the UK, should the NHS pay for organs, should individuals buy organs for themselves or ask charities to?
2. If informed consent were secured, is payment for organs ethically permissible?
3. Is it ethical to prohibit individuals in financial need from selling their organs?⁵

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-68765769>

² <https://www.hta.gov.uk/guidance-public/body-organ-and-tissue-donation/living-organ-donation/living-organ-donation-matching>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/introducing-opt-out-consent-for-organ-and-tissue-donation-in-england/consultation-on-introducing-opt-out-consent-for-organ-and-tissue-donation-in-england>

⁴ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3291132/>

⁵ <https://ethics.org.au/thought-experiment-the-famous-violinist/>

15. Post-mortem sperm retrieval

Post-mortem sperm retrieval is a procedure of extracting living sperm cells from the body of a dead man. These cells can be subsequently used to create a healthy child through in vitro fertilisation of a female donor. Requests are usually made by partners or parents of the deceased. Around 12 years ago, a UK couple illegally retrieved the sperm of their deceased son to obtain a grandson through surrogacy.¹ In Israel, the procedure is becoming increasingly popular - and legal - for parents whose sons die at war.² In India, a recent court order granted parents the right to use their deceased son's sperm to have a grandchild.³

The procedure is reported to provide an important source of meaning and comfort to the deceased's family.⁴ However, some worry that it instrumentalises the future child, who might become "a memorial candle to the deceased person".⁵ The child will also never meet their biological parent. Yet, others suggest that it's better than anonymous sperm donation, where the child does not even know their father's identity.⁶ Small studies suggest that the children undergo normal development, but they are far too small to provide reliable evidence.⁷

Moreover, ethical norms around the procedure have yet to be established. In the UK, consent from the deceased is required. In Israel, parents need only prove that the deceased wanted to have children. Some argue it might be a form of preserving the deceased lineage⁸ and family name⁹, and carrying on their son's legacy.¹⁰ This argument might be especially important when the deceased himself wanted to have children. Others observe that a desire to have offspring while one is alive cannot be taken to imply the more specific desire to have one's sperm

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cnvdgv6rejvo>

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cnvdgv6rejvo>

³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c978m6pl99go>

⁴ This is the argument of Justice Singh in the case from India: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cnvdgv6rejvo>

⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/future/article/20160518-the-moral-maze-of-using-a-dead-mans-sperm>

⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c978m6pl99go>

⁷ As observed, for example, by Dr Itai Gat, director of the sperm bank at Shamir Medical Center: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c978m6pl99go>

⁸ This question is inspired by the case of Preet Inder Singh, whose parents sought the right to use his sperm in India <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cnvdgv6rejvo>

⁹ This is the opinion of Harbir Kaur and Gurvinder Singh, who fought for the right to use their son's sperm in India: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cnvdgv6rejvo>

¹⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/future/article/20160518-the-moral-maze-of-using-a-dead-mans-sperm>

retrieved and a child created after one's death.¹¹ When no explicit consent has been given, worries about violating the autonomy of the deceased arise: due both to an invasive intrusion into their bodies, and to the use of their genetic material. In some countries, such as India, a court has argued that the deceased man's genetic material is a form of property belonging to his heirs, which might be parents.¹² However, in other countries, such as the UK, use of the sperm is restricted by the man's prior consent, which means that his parents are not allowed to do whatever they want with it.

These restrictions, however, have their downsides. Parents typically consider retrieval after their son's death, when obtaining consent is no longer possible, and in some situations, such as car accidents, one's death could not have been predicted to grant consent beforehand.

Study questions:

1. Is there a difference between parents using their dead son's sperm for reproduction versus donating his body to scientific research?
2. Imagine a patient is sick and consents to having his sperm retrieved because he knows the illness will destroy the quality of his sperm, and he wants to be able to have children in the future through IVF.¹³ Is consent for this specific procedure enough for his parents to use the sperm for IVF with a surrogate after his death?
3. Does the procedure instrumentalise the future child?

Further resources:

1. <https://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWCOP/2022/48.html>
2. <https://www.progress.org.uk/court-blocks-parents-bid-to-collect-dying-sons-sperm/>

¹¹ This has been observed by Mr Justice Poole in his decision on one of the UK cases (part 11): <https://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWCOP/2022/48.html>

¹² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/future/article/20160518-the-moral-maze-of-using-a-dead-mans-sperm>

¹³ <https://www.progress.org.uk/dead-sons-sperm-used-to-create-grandson-without-consent/>

16. Slavery reparations

Many Black Americans suffered immensely as slaves in North America. Slaves endured extremely harsh treatment and were regarded as property by society at large. The question is whether Black Americans today are entitled to reparations, i.e., financial compensation, for past injustices.

Some believe that Black Americans are entitled to reparations. The thought here is twofold. First, Black Americans are still harmed by the legacy of slavery.^{1,2} Call this the Harm Justification. Second, the descendants of slaves inherited a claim to compensation from their enslaved ancestors. Call this the Inheritance Justification.³

In response, a critic might make a few points. Starting with the Harm Justification, it's unclear whether Black Americans are worse off now than they would be had their ancestors not been enslaved. Had their ancestors not been enslaved, it's unclear whether these particular Black Americans would have existed, let alone benefited from what modern America has to offer.⁴ In other words, if an action explains why a person exists, that person's life goes well for them, then that action can't harm them.

Moving to the Inheritance Justification, even if we grant that some people inherited slavery reparations, it's unclear how we could determine who inherited them. Over generations, people transfer, gain, or lose property, money, and assets. Given all of these gains, losses, and transfers, we might not be justified in inferring that the biological descendants of slaves inherited their ancestors' claims to reparations.⁵

To illustrate this point, take two cases. Consider the writing of Steven's will. When, say, Steven writes a will, he may leave all of his assets to his daughter Mary. Mary may then inherit those assets, but decide to sell them off. As a result, her son, James, does not inherit Steven's assets.

Second, consider Martha's will. Martha, who is black, leaves all of her assets to her friend Edgar, who is white. Supposing that her inheritance-based reparation claim is one of her assets, we may wonder whether Edgar is now entitled to reparations. What these examples show

¹ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/black-reparations/>

² <https://philpapers.org/rec/KAPHDA>

³ <https://philpapers.org/rec/UNDTMD>

⁴ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/josp.12583?af=R>

⁵ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/legal-theory/article/abs/inheritancebased-claim-to-reparations/7024C93DF12C4D6BBF8BBE1344E08590>

is that one can have biological descent without an inheritance claim, and an inheritance claim without biological descent.

Study questions:

1. Do the present harms caused by the legacy of slavery entitle Black Americans to reparations
2. Should we support slavery reparations even if we are not certain who has an inheritance-based claim to those reparations?
3. Should Black Americans be entitled to reparations even if they did not descend from slaves?

17. Surrogacy

In the UK, surrogacy arrangements are legal on an altruistic (i.e. non-paid) basis, but are not legally binding. This means that if the surrogate mother changes her mind after giving birth, she cannot be forced to give the child away.¹ In some rare cases, a conflict between the surrogate mother and intending parents ensues. Such cases are decided in court.²

In some cases, both parties want parental rights over baby. This happens when the surrogate does not want to give the child to the intended parents. In August 2026, a surrogate mother gave birth in Texas after a battle with the intended parents. They asked the surrogate to abort the fetus after it was discovered to have a serious medical condition. The surrogate refused, and now wants to keep the child, even though it was conceived fully of the intended parents' genetic material. Now that the child is born, the parents want to keep the child too. The case is to be decided in court.³

A surrogate mother's right to change her mind is defended as a means of guarding her autonomy. Furthermore, it's supposed to prevent commercialisation and support the child's welfare by handing the decision over to the court.⁴ Finally, pregnancy is often considered a transformative experience⁵: people may find it hard to anticipate the feelings they will develop after the child is born. Yet, this puts intended parents under uncertainty about the arrangement. Given that the embryo is usually created with the gametes from one or both of them⁶, they might not be able to parent the child with their own genetic material.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/08/25/us/texas-surrogate-custody.html>

² <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15265161.2025.2509940>

³ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-14/baby-gammy-twin-must-remain-with-family-wa-court-rules/7326196>

⁴ <https://hanne.co.uk/are-surrogacy-agreements-legally-binding-in-england-wales/>

⁵ Usually, the intended parents provide either the sperm and the egg, or at least one of them, and the surrogate mother carries the embryo created from these two gametes:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/surrogacy-caseworker-guidance/surrogacy-caseworker-guidance-accessible>

⁶ <https://www.ngalaw.co.uk/knowledge-centre/surrogacy-disputes-uk-law/>

In other cases, however, no one wants the baby. This is particularly problematic in international surrogacy, as a child might be left both parentless and stateless. In a case from Thailand, a woman was carrying twins for an Australian couple, and one of them turned out to be congenitally ill. According to the surrogate, the intended parents ordered her to perform a selective abortion, and when she declined, they abandoned the child, taking only its healthy sibling to Australia. According to the parents, however, it was the mother who did not want to hand the child over. This version was subsequently accepted by the court.⁷

When intended parents change their mind due to a child's medical condition, the situation becomes ethically complicated. The surrogate mother can argue that she entered into an arrangement with no intention to raise the child herself. Yet the intended parents can claim that their intention was to raise a healthy child, and it is only because they had no ability to enforce abortion that the child came into existence.

Study questions:

1. Should surrogacy arrangements be legally binding for the surrogate mother?
2. Do intended parents have a right to withdraw from a surrogacy arrangement due to the medical condition of the child? Assume that if they were in a traditional pregnancy, they would legally abort the fetus and are unable to proceed with this option only because the fetus is in the womb of the surrogate mother.

Further resources:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15265161.2025.2509940>

<https://aeon.co/ideas/can-surrogacy-ever-escape-the-taint-of-global-exploitation>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/surrogacy-caseworker-guidance/surrogacy-caseworker-guidance-accessible>