



NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL
ETHICS BOWL

REGIONAL CASE SET

2024-2025

Last Updated: September 6, 2024

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This Used to Be My Home

Native citizens across the world are objecting to the excessive presence of foreign tourists in their hometowns. In the tourist destination Málaga, stickers with messages such as “This used to be my home,” have been posted throughout the city.¹ The public outcry has spread far beyond Spain and has led to considerable legal action. Venice, Amsterdam, and Santorini have all taken action to limit or even completely prohibit those traveling by cruise ship.² Angkor Wat, Machu Picchu, and the Acropolis have all put limits on the number of tickets sold in any one day.³ Similar concerns are seen domestically, as many towns in the United States struggle with balancing tourism while maintaining their “small town charm” and some sacred native spaces have been eroded in National Parks.

The reasons in favor of tourism are likely very familiar. For many countries and municipalities there can be clear economic benefits, with some economies being primarily driven by visiting tourists. For tourists, one can experience the world in different ways, initiating a shift in perspective and an appreciation of diverse peoples and cultures. Tourism can sometimes promote authentic histories, free from narratives and biases.

The reasons to discourage travel are often less widely publicized. Tourists can be a public nuisance—not behaving as guests in one’s home but as slovenly and inconsiderate drunkards. Additionally, tourism can have economic drawbacks such as economic dependence, making a country especially vulnerable to economic shocks (like global pandemics); economic leakage, whereby profits of the tourism industry are not reinvested in the visited nation but are taken abroad by international corporations; and inflation.

Beyond the personal benefits and the economic advantages and disadvantages, recent attention has been placed on the impact of tourism on local culture and heritage. Not only are some natural wonders that are central to cultural identities and practices at risk of being physically damaged – potentially to the point it would undermine continued cultural practices – but the influx of tourists can change communities themselves. Ruins and cathedrals are surrounded by kiosks selling cheap, mass-produced trinkets. Festivals which once existed solely for the participants increasingly exist merely for the spectators.

Citizens across the world are now assenting to less productive economies and calling for limitations on the presence of foreigners in order to preserve their heritage and traditions, raising questions about what values are more important.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is international travel a threat to a nation’s heritage and traditions? What is lost thereby?
2. Are the ethical concerns around tourism different when the tourists have a similar cultural background to the community that a landmark “belongs” to?
3. Do local and national governments owe it to their constituents to limit tourism?
4. Is there something wrong with tourism playing a very large role in a country’s economy? Why or why not?

¹<https://www.euronews.com/travel/2024/03/15/go-fcking-home-the-european-cities-where-locals-are-fighting-back-against-overtourism>

²<https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/overtourism-cruise-venice-amsterdam-b2310275.html>

³ <https://www.trafalgar.com/real-word/iconic-struggling-overtourism-destinations/>



A Dear Confidant

Rowan and Taylor began dating a little over a month ago. Despite their relationship being off to a rocky start—with plenty of blunders, mistakes, and all-around inconsiderate actions—the two care for each other deeply. Rowan's friend Gwen has been through similar ups and downs with her boyfriend Vincent for nearly a year now. As long-time friends, Rowan and Gwen have often relied on each other's perspectives, and now that they are both in relationships, they frequently turn to one another to discuss various problems in their respective relationships or even just to vent.

Gwen repeatedly complains about Vincent being emotionally closed off, and even though she says she understands his reasoning and appreciates his efforts, she still wishes things would change. She finds herself drawn to Rowan's sincerity and vulnerability. Rowan, similarly, will sometimes feel neglected or underappreciated by Taylor and is very grateful for the attention and concern Gwen shows him. As a result, their latest conversations have been saturated with an implicit romantic charge.

Rowan is now wondering what to do. All four individuals are monogamous. Moreover, upon reflection, Rowan is almost certain that, despite their struggles, he wants to remain with Taylor and sort things out. He believes that Gwen also wishes to remain with Vincent. Rowan feels uncomfortable with his connection to Gwen and will often mentally rebuke himself for "emotional cheating." He broached the subject with Taylor—leaving out the detail about the romantic charge—and she said that she doesn't believe in emotional cheating and urged him to be close with whomever he chooses. Nevertheless, Rowan worries that, by complaining about his partner to—and spending an extended amount of time alone with—someone he finds attractive, he is harming Taylor and being unfaithful, even if nothing physical has happened between him and Gwen. At the same time, he and Gwen have been friends for years, and he'd be deeply upset to lose that relationship.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Can you harm someone even if they don't feel harmed?
2. What sort of restrictions, if any, does being in a romantic relationship place on one's other relationships?
3. Is Rowan justified in editing what he tells Taylor? Does he owe her the complete and unedited truth if he wants to commit to their relationship?
4. Should Rowan communicate his romantic attraction to and concerns about their relationship to Gwen?

It Tastes like Dog Food

Selena has been a Vegan for the past few years. As a part of her objection to the consumption of animal products, she also switched the food that she purchased for her pet dog, Roscoe, to an alternative vegan brand.

One day, Selena's friend Dorian is visiting and he notices the vegan dog food brand. Dorian is also a dog owner, and he is adamant that Selena is mistreating Roscoe by feeding him a diet that is so divorced from what a canine would eat in the wild. Roscoe cannot select his diet independently of his owner, and Dorian thinks that Selena should be more conscious of his needs as an animal who primarily eats meat. There are amino acids, proteins, and vitamins in meat products that are more necessary in a dog's diet than they are in a human's.¹ Dorian thinks that as Roscoe's guardian and provider, Selena has an obligation to provide the best possible nutrition possible for her pet. Dorian expresses that he is already uncomfortable with kibble dog food in general, and he thinks that taking an already hyper-processed dog food an additional step further away from a dog's natural diet makes it intolerable.

Selena does some research and finds that with the proper dietary supplementation, she can maintain her dog's health without the need to purchase food produced at the expense of other animal's lives². However, while she can keep Roscoe healthy (though perhaps not maximally), she recognizes Dorian's point that she is straying even farther from Roscoe's natural diet. She views this as being similar to her neighbor, who has a dog that is born to run, but never takes it on walks. They only let it out in their small backyard because they find making time for regular walks too disruptive to their life. In both cases, the dogs are generally healthy, but also left short of the experiences that would be closest to their natural constitutions. This causes her to worry: are her desires for a vegan lifestyle actually at odds with how she is treating her dog? Are her desires at odds with being a dog owner *in general*?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do we have an obligation to consider the realities of an animal's natural diet and habits when we own them as pets?
2. Is there something hypocritical about being a vegan who purchases animal products for their pet?
3. Is there a point when the desires or needs of a pet should override their owners' personal choices or desires? When, or what is this point?
4. Do we have an obligation to optimize our pet's health in all available ways - if accessible to us? Or, is providing our pet with the conditions for 'good enough' health and habits sufficient?

¹<https://www.bva.co.uk/news-and-blog/blog-article/is-it-safe-to-feed-my-dog-a-plant-based-diet-hold-the-greens-only-meals-why-the-jury-is-still-out-on-vegan-dog-diets#:~:text=Dogs%20are%20omnivores%2C%20which%20means,than%20to%20get%20it%20right>

²<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9860667/>



Why Argue?¹

Oscar is a middle school student with a growing interest in social justice, including gender equality. At school, he is dismayed when his female peers are picked on by other boys. Sometimes, Oscar's classmates will say things such as "make me a sandwich" when girls argue with them or that "women should stay in the kitchen" to provoke a reaction from his female friends. When Oscar is recounting one of these incidents at dinner with his extended family, including his younger sisters, Oscar's uncle reveals he believes it is preferable for women to stay at home and it is unnecessary for girls to go to college, especially if they marry a wealthy man. Oscar is upset at his uncle's remark and tries to persuade him, through reasoning, to see why such a view is wrong. The two argue and exchange strong words until Oscar's uncle leaves, but they continue to fight through texts.

The next day, Oscar talks to his dad, who wasn't at dinner, about the argument. His dad, Andrew, is Oscar's intellectual and moral role model. Oscar expected his dad's praise for standing up to his uncle, but Andrew advises Oscar to refrain from arguing against his uncle, especially in disrespectful ways. Andrew explains to Oscar that there is research showing that people do not often change their minds through reasoning and that being argumentative towards others leads to resentment and pushes them away.² Because of this, Andrew believes it is usually better to overlook his brother's, and Oscar's uncle's, comments and build trust and respect with him so he might become more receptive to Oscar's perspective. Andrew states that this is especially important because the uncle usually comes home from work already stressed out and irritated, so he may be even less welcoming to contrary arguments than other people. Andrew acknowledges that Oscar's feelings aren't uncommon, especially for teenagers, as there is often a generational divide in families on social issues and that adolescents often feel the need to voice their concerns.³

Oscar does not agree with his dad. Oscar explains that he believes it was right to argue with his uncle, since he was espousing a belief both Oscar and Andrew strongly disagree with. Oscar stresses that the conversation took place in front of his sisters, who are all in elementary school, and believes letting their uncle's statements go unchallenged can make the girls have lower self-esteem in comparison to their brothers and male peers. Oscar also believes their uncle should know that they disagree with him, since it would be dishonest and even more disrespectful to simply ignore their uncle without responding. Additionally, Oscar thinks that arguing back might persuade his uncle to change his opinion to something Oscar finds less reprehensible, especially if he cares about his nieces.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do we have an obligation to vocalize our disagreement to objectionable views when we hear them?
2. When we disagree with others, to what extent should we consider the efficacy of our approach in vocalizing our views?
3. Is it always disrespectful to challenge authority figures? If it is disrespectful, is it always wrong to be disrespectful in that way?

¹ Inspired by "Why Bother with Political Arguments?" by Victor Kumar & Joshua May from The Prindle Post, <https://www.prindleinstitute.org/2023/01/why-bother-with-political-arguments/>

² "Escape the Echo Chamber" by C Thi Nguyen, <https://aeon.co/essays/why-its-as-hard-to-escape-an-echo-chamber-as-it-is-to-flee-a-cult>; "Winning Arguments: Interaction Dynamics and Persuasion Strategies in Good-faith Online Discussions" by Chenhao Tan, Vlad Niculae, Cristian Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, and Lillian Lee, <https://arxiv.org/abs/1602.01103>.

³ "Gen Z Post Election Research" by Murmuration, <https://murmuration.org/guest/publication/14?s=39>.



R U Kidneying Me? The Bad Art Friend

In 2015, writer Dawn Dorland donated her kidney to a stranger as part of a non-directed donation process. In non-directed donations, the donor does not know who the recipient of the organ is and does not get to decide who the organ will be transplanted to. To document her donation, Dorland created a Facebook group to share her experience with her friends and family. After the donation, Dorland posted in the group a letter she had written to the kidney recipient, sharing her thoughts and emotions behind her donation. She wrote, “Throughout my preparation for becoming a donor ... I focused a majority of my mental energy on imagining and celebrating you.”¹

Dorland’s Facebook group about her kidney donation included Sonya Larson, a friend from Grubstreet, the writing center Dorland had once worked at, who commended Dorland. Some time later, a mutual friend of both informed Dorland that Larson had written a story involving a kidney donation which reminded him of Dorland’s own real life experience. When Dorland emailed Larson to ask if their friend’s report was true, Larson confirmed that she had indeed written a story based on the premise of a kidney donation.

A published version of the story, *The Kindest*, in *American Short Fiction* magazine included a letter from the donor, Rose, which states, “As I prepared to make this donation, I drew strength from knowing that my recipient would get a second chance at life. I withstood the pain by imagining and rejoicing in YOU.”² Dorland immediately saw similarities between the letter in Larson’s story and Dorland’s own letter, so similar, in fact, that she believed that Larson had plagiarized from Dorland.

In the aftermath of the publication and recognition of Larson’s story, and Dorland’s reading of the story, Dorland began asking questions about what obligations writers had towards each other when it came to the ideas behind their writing. When Dorland learned that the city of Boston had planned a mass publication of *The Kindest* for the Boston Book Festival, she decided to send a cease-and-desist letter to the book festival. Dorland viewed Larson’s growing success from *The Kindest*, possibly, but not surely, including a scholarship at a writing conference and other publications, as being improperly derived from Dorland’s words and personal life story, without prior consultation with Dorland.

Larson insisted that she did not plagiarize and that Dorland’s kidney donation was just one source of inspiration among many others, including Larson’s own experiences with alcoholism.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What obligations, if any, do writers have towards the source of their inspiration when constructing, and perhaps profiting off of, a narrative based on their “muses” lives?
2. When is it impermissible to take inspiration from someone else’s life for one’s own art?
3. What reasonable limits might an artist self-impose when drawing from the lives of family and friends?

¹ Robert Kolker, “Who is the Bad Art Friend?” *New York Times*, October 5, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/05/magazine/dorland-v-larson.html>

² Kolker, “Who is the Bad Art Friend?”



Don't Worry, It Doesn't Have Alcohol

It now seems almost unthinkable, but it wasn't so long ago that candy cigarettes made for children were popular. Sticks of bubblegum or hard sugar were wrapped in paper and constructed so that they could puff clouds of powdered sugar "smoke." They were often packaged in boxes that mimicked real cigarette brands, so that kids could be, as one brand advertised, "Just like Dad."¹ Candy cigarettes have largely disappeared, but the recent increase in popularity with teens and children of mocktails ('mock' cocktails) and other non-alcoholic drinks modeled on alcoholic counterparts has many asking a similar question. Is it ok for a child to be drinking mocktails?

The category of nonalcoholic (n/a) beverages referred to here are drinks that are meant to be served in place of a drink that would typically contain alcohol. They are marketed to and consumed by adults who wish to have the experience of having an alcoholic drink without the health and intoxicating effects of alcohol. While n/a beer has been around for some time, the rise of n/a liquor is a new phenomenon. It is now relatively easy to find n/a "vodka," "whiskey," "gin" and many other liquors designed to taste like the real thing. Though they are advertised as being "nonalcoholic" these n/a liquors do contain small, negligible, quantities of alcohol. Mocktails, once similarly uncommon, are now a part of many restaurant drink menus and are even present in bars that are open only to those who are over 21 years old.

Some parents have reported enjoying this new trend. Their children can now accompany them to breweries, wineries, and other similar places they enjoy and take part with something n/a.² It can make them feel more included in special family outings where parents can also model responsible drinking. In restaurants, many mocktails are little more than juices and sodas. The "Shirley Temple," a mixture of soda, cherry syrup, and a cherry garnish has been around since the 1930s. This drink was, and still is, fairly common for parents to order at a bar for their child. But while such a drink is often mixed up at a bar, it's unclear the extent to which it is meant to mimic an alcoholic cocktail, or be something more like a soda.

Many of these new products, however, are clearly meant to taste like alcohol. It might not seem so strange for a child to order a fruity mocktail with a cute name, but something seems different about them ordering a n/a martini or glass of wine, or walking into a shop and purchasing a six-pack of n/a beer or a bottle of n/a vodka. In fact, at least some states have banned the sale of these products to individuals under the age of 21.³ One worry is that, like candy cigarettes, these products can serve as a gateway to beginning drinking alcohol at an earlier age, and to developing problematic drinking habits. There is a message being sent that alcohol is needed for fun, and consuming n/a beverages "normalize or desensitizes" children to alcohol.⁴ Research is mixed, but some does suggest that this is a real cause for concern, especially considering the negative effects alcohol can have on developing children.⁵

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is there something wrong with individuals under the legal drinking age of 21 years old being allowed to purchase and consume n/a products? If so, what?
2. Is there a difference between a child ordering a mocktail with their family at dinner and a child purchasing a bottle of n/a liquor? If so, what is the difference?
3. Acknowledging that age limits (like 21 for alcohol) are somewhat arbitrary, are there some things that really are 'meant for adults' and that children should not have access to? Why?

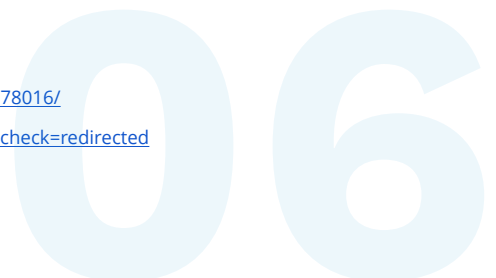
¹ <https://www.thrillist.com/eat/nation/how-are-candy-cigarettes-still-a-thing>; <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/10/marketing-candy-cigarettes-tobacco-halloween/>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/04/style/nonalcoholic-drinks-kids-mocktail.html>

³ <https://oneclubsober.com/beer-articles/can-you-buy-non-alcoholic-beer-under-21/>

⁴ <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2024/04/sober-curious-mocktails-teenagers-drinking-age/678016/>

⁵ <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/144/1/e20191356/37084/Alcohol-Use-by-Youth?autologincheck=redirected>



Infographic Activism

As Sarah taps through her friends' Instagram stories she sees many of them have reposted screenshots or posts from social justice organizations and news sources about a recent hate crime that happened in a nearby city in which a high school student was violently attacked. Sarah agrees with what all her friends are posting including comments about how terrible the attack was and pointing out how this event is connected to larger systemic issues. Many of her friends have simply reposted news headlines that state the event happened. Sarah has been trying to keep up to date about what is going on through reading the news and talking with her parents. However, she's been feeling conflicted about posting something herself, especially as the online rhetoric becomes increasingly removed from the initial event. One of her classmates reposted an infographic that said "Silence makes you complicit". The post stuck with Sarah who has now been feeling bad about not posting on her story. At the same time, she's concerned that her posting something wouldn't make a difference and might even be wrong because she would only be doing it because of the pressure from her peers. Sarah doesn't want to seem like she doesn't care about the ongoing issue and has been actively planning to go to a nearby protest, but she also doesn't want to be performative and only post because of the social pressure.

After talking to her best friend, Sarah is even more conflicted. Her friend, Theo, said it's good to post because it spreads awareness to those who might be following her on Instagram and shows solidarity. He spoke about his own experiences learning about issues going on in their city because of posts his friends had made. Sarah isn't quite sure she fully agrees. She thinks all of the people who follow her are seeing the information on other platforms and from peers. She doesn't feel comfortable acting as a news source for her peers because new actions and information keep coming out. Another one of her friends posted something saying the victim had attended their rival high school but this was quickly found to be false. Sarah doesn't want to accidentally post incorrect information. She also is worried about making people too focused on the pretty infographics and words rather than getting involved with protests, non-profits, or local government as ways of making genuine change.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who has a responsibility or the right to share information during times of social justice movements/ conflicts?
2. Do we have a moral responsibility to share information and social justice stances on social media? What might we be obligated to share? From where might such a moral responsibility come from?
3. Does silence make you complicit? Are there situations where this is more or less true than others?

A Killer Dilemma

Thirty years have passed since Shirley accidentally killed her younger sister in a fight that got out of hand. To date the crime remains an unsolved case and Shirley is the only person aware of her culpability. She was grateful to avoid severe prosecution for the killing at the time, but she deeply regrets her actions and regards them as violent and unjustified. Ever since, she has lived in a state of severe remorse, but is now a relatively functional adult with a productive professional life.

Recently, Shirley has been wondering if she should turn herself in and plead guilty. She feels as though claiming responsibility for the murder is the correct way of relieving her immense regret and guilt. After keeping the secret for so long, perhaps an act of honesty is the sole step she can take towards redemption.

However, Shirley knows that a conviction will lead to decades in prison, if not a life sentence. She wonders if throwing her life away is the right call. After all, no one will benefit from her conviction. Her sister is long dead, for starters – that's an action which cannot be undone. Her family members have come to terms with their grief. Bringing the tragedy to light again, and revealing her responsibility, will only reopen the wound and cause additional emotional pain to her loved ones.

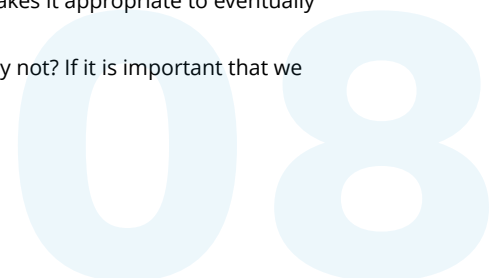
Shirley also doubts that a prison sentence will be just. She isn't sure how punishing herself would help society, since she already feels remorse for her actions, and has no intentions of committing crimes in the future. In some regards, she views the criminal justice system as a preventative measure to deter would-be murderers. Legal punishment motivates citizens to stay lawful through fear, but it cannot reverse the crime or any suffering it may have caused. The murder is complete, and there's no decision she can make about it now. Shirley rejects the idea that wrongdoers should be punished simply for doing wrong acts. She also rejects the idea that punishment might be an important way that society affirms shared values and denounces and disassociates from certain wrongful conduct.

Perhaps devoting her life to charitable work, rather than spending it in a cell, is the best way for Shirley to atone. But she also wonders why she feels the obligation of atonement in the first place. Why should she dedicate her limited time towards the fruitless apology for a mistake – however grave – made thirty years ago? And why does she still feel responsible for the crime, when she has almost nothing in common with the past self who committed it? Three decades have changed her, her family, and society at large. The harm which the murder initially brought doesn't seem to be relevant to the present. Her sister's untimely death was an injustice, but who's to say that she was guaranteed a long life? And how permanent is that injustice, anyway?

Shirley does not see an ethical purpose to her guilt, though the idea of letting it go troubles her deeply. She wonders if she deserves to be happy, and if there is any real possibility of reconciling with her past.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the purpose of punishment? Should the criminal justice system aim to prevent future crimes or punish past ones? Is there something wrong with Shirley's guilt motivating her to atone?
2. Shirley feels that she is no longer the same person as she was thirty years ago. To what extent should a person's state of mind be taken into account when considering their responsibility for a crime?
3. Is it good to feel guilt when one has done something wrong? What, if anything, makes it appropriate to eventually stop feeling guilt after doing wrong?
4. Is it important that we confess when we have done something wrong? Why or why not? If it is important that we confess, who should we confess to?



Parents Out of Bounds

Maddie Ziegler, brought to popularity by the Lifetime show *Dance Moms*, now has a successful career as a dancer, model, influencer, and actress. She began taking dance lessons at the age of two. If she hadn't started at this early age she might not have the career in dance that she has.

Simone Biles, widely considered the greatest gymnast of all time, began her sport at the age of six. She has competed around the world, winning eleven Olympic medals and thirty World Championship medals. In 2022, she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Joe Biden. Biles took a two-year break from gymnastics from 2021-2023 to work on her mental health, leaving many wondering if a high-stakes athletic career is worth it.

Reality TV and the Olympics are not options for most young athletes, but many more parents manage their young children's participation in intensive sports. Some believe that entering children into a sport at a young age, especially when the sport is highly competitive, is wrong. Highly competitive sports can be high-pressure and possibly damage a child's mental health. Furthermore, intense, repetitive and specialized sport training is associated with a host of overuse injuries in children, including stress fractures, tendonitis, bursitis, apophysitis and osteochondral injuries.¹ However, partaking in athletics can also benefit a child's physical and psychological health, and is correlated with academic success. Sport can teach children the value of teamwork, dedication, work ethic, and accountability. It can also boost self-esteem, and might make children less susceptible to substance abuse.² Finally, athletic scholarships give some students college opportunities they would not have had otherwise.

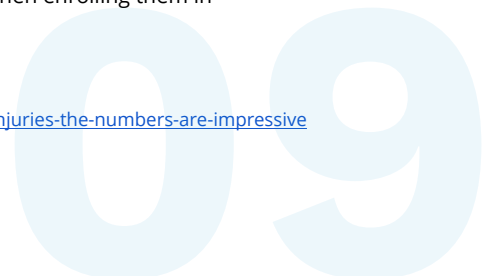
There is also the question of whether parents should get to decide what sports or activities their children participate in. Some think children should get to choose their activities themselves so they grow up doing things they like to do. This may also contribute to their feeling empowered to make decisions on their own. Some parents believe instead that since they can better determine what is good for their children, they are justified in forcing their children into activities, even against their will. Children might later thank their parents for having tried something that leads to later satisfaction or success.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When is it permissible for parents to make decisions for their child that are actively against their will?
2. Is there something problematic about young children substituting intense sports for "regular" childhood activities?
3. Is it reasonable for parents to push children into intensive sports in the hope that the children will achieve rarer or more unlikely goals, such as Olympic glory, tv show contracts, professional sports careers, or D-1 athletic scholarships?
4. To what extent should parents consider a child's individual desires and interests when enrolling them in extracurricular activities?

¹<https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/specialties/sports-medicine/sports-medicine-articles/kids-sports-injuries-the-numbers-are-impressive>

²https://health.gov/sites/default/files/2020-09/YSS_Report_OnePager_2020-08-31_web.pdf



Work to Live or Live to Work?

On a Monday morning, Jenny, mom of second-grader Sam, received an email from her parent-teacher association: field-day was Friday, and they urgently needed volunteers. While she wants to help Sam have fun, Jenny was conflicted. She had a crucial week at work coming up. She had to prepare a mid-year financial report that would make or break her chances for promotion. Choosing to prioritize her career, she let the PTA know she could not help.

Jenny's sacrifice is not unique. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, full-time workers over 25 years old spent 8.49 hours working every weekday in 2023¹. This does not factor in time spent getting dressed, commuting, and answering emails at home, or time spent recovering from work-related anxiety or toxic workplace culture. By the time many clock out, they feel they don't have enough left in the tank to truly enjoy life. Jenny herself skips out on Saturday brunch dates and leaves her favorite books on the shelf because of how much energy she spends at work. She doesn't feel too bad about it, though. She relishes how much she accomplishes at work, so she doesn't mind some exhaustion on the weekend.

Not everyone is as content as Jenny is when it comes to work-life balance. Some believe that we should change the way our society views jobs. In a report arguing for shorter working hours, Lord Skidelsky writes² that "having to work less at what one needs to do, and more at what one wants to do, is good for material and spiritual well-being." In other words, it might be healthy for a society to underscore the life in work-life balance. Some of the numbers support this perspective. A study completed from June to December 2022 in the UK found³ that a "meaningful" reduction in time worked reduced stress in 39% of employees and reduced burnout in 71% of employees. And these improvements to the workers' lives did not seem to come at the cost of their productivity. During the time of the survey, company revenues increased by 35% compared to previous schedules. Perhaps with extra time off to enjoy life, workers return to the office more energized and productive than they would have been without the break.

There is no guarantee, however, that a reduction in hours worked will lead to an increase in productivity. Some jobs such as those in fast food or construction simply require the hours to be put in for tasks to be completed. In many jobs, going the extra mile can make the difference between impressing or disappointing your boss. Moreover, employment is not universally a soul-crushing endeavor. Many people love their jobs. Beyond passion for their jobs, many work hard to reap the rewards later. Kevin O'Leary believes that achieving success in the workplace and in life requires "going beyond," even asserting "people that shut down their laptop at 5" or "work 9 to 5 only" don't work for him.⁴ It's possible that the extra hours put in early in a career can lead to promotion, wealth, and flexibility later in life, allowing someone like Jenny to retire somewhere comfortable and send Sam to a great college. Nevertheless, the fight for a deprioritization of work throughout our lives persists, as authors such as Rutger Bregman argue in favor of a 15 hour work week.⁵

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. To what extent should someone's meaning in life be connected with their job? Why or why not?
2. Is there a difference between enjoyment we get at work and enjoyment from hobbies or time with family and friends, and does this difference matter?
3. Is there something wrong with the commodification of the things that we care about? Should there be limitations on the amount of time that we should be allowed to give to our jobs?

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/charts/american-time-use/emp-by-ftpt-job-edu-h.htm>

² https://progressiveeconomyforum.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/PEF_Skidelsky_How_to_achieve_shorter_working_hours.pdf

³ <https://autonomy.work/portfolio/uk4dwpilotresults/>

⁴ <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/08/20/kevin-oleary-quiet-quitting-is-a-really-bad-idea.html>

⁵ <https://theconversation.com/its-time-to-put-the-15-hour-work-week-back-on-the-agenda-106754>



Oh Boycott

After hearing comments made by the CEO of Chick-Fil-A about gay marriage in 2012, Douglas made the blanket decision to never eat at the restaurant again. He saw his actions as a form of activism, “voting with his dollars”, and he was proud to take a stand against the company’s CEO for espousing views that he, Douglas, found morally wrong. In a similar fashion, Douglas recently decided to stop purchasing coffee at Starbucks after reading an article that described how the company was being sued for sourcing coffee from farms that practiced unethical child labor¹. Though the company markets its coffee as being ethically sourced, a consumer advocacy group challenged Starbucks, claiming that they were aware of the issues in their production pipeline.

Douglas’s colleague Jean has never agreed with Douglas about his boycott of Chick-Fil-A, and so Douglas is surprised to hear that Jean is actually considering avoiding Starbucks while the supply chain issues are on-going. When asked about it, Jean insists there is a substantive difference between the views of a company’s CEO and the company’s business practices. According to Jean, avoiding a restaurant is not an effective protest against something that the CEO has said. Jean sees no clear link between the CEO’s views and his place of work. More generally, he worries that boycotting the restaurant is a form of lazy activism that pacifies consumers and keeps them from engaging in more effective forms of resistance against homophobic points of view. In the case of Starbucks, though, the company itself is engaged in business practices that Jean sees as unethical. He thinks that boycotting the coffee chain for how it operates in itself is different from boycotting a company over the views of its employees.

Douglas isn’t sure that Jean is right, but the conversation has inspired a new worry for him. If he and Jean both feel obligated to change their purchasing habits in response to the actions of a business or its employees, are they obligated to investigate the practices of any business they frequent? Douglas thinks that Jean may be acting hypocritically, but does that mean that he is being hypocritical as well by not working harder to investigate the views of the CEOs of other companies that he frequents?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Are the objectionable personal beliefs of a company’s CEO a good reason to boycott the company? Can something that a CEO does as an individual, and not in her role as a representative of her company, be a good reason to boycott the company?
2. Is there a difference between the objectionable views of a CEO when they are vocalized publicly and the objectionable business practices that a company engages in? If a CEO represents a company, where does the line lie?
3. Is it hypocritical for someone to boycott a company that they disagree with if they don’t also look into the other companies they frequent?
4. Is it wrong to boycott a company when there are other, more effective forms of activism that one could take part in instead?

¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/starbucks-sued-allegedly-using-coffee-farms-rights-abuses-touting-ethi-rcna130393>



Controversy on the World Stage

Major international sporting events are often riddled with controversy, and not all of it on the field. Not only does who hosts events like the Olympics and World Cup carry its own conundrums, but it has also frequently placed athletes in difficult positions that sometimes require them to puzzle over more than their athletic performance.

The 2022 World Cup hosted by Qatar was a prime example of the complexities that can arise. In the build-up to the event, groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch accused Qatar of using forced labor, withholding or deducting the wages of foreign workers, and preventing these workers from leaving their jobs. Additionally, there were concerns related to attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community, with Khalid Salman, an ambassador for the Qatar World Cup, describing homosexuality as “damage in the mind” and “haram,”¹ which in Arabic means “forbidden.” This varied concerns have led many to call for fans to boycott the event and led many teams and players to consider ways to raise awareness while competing. However, many of these never came to fruition, particularly for the athletes after penalties were threatened by FIFA.

Many people take issue with international sporting bodies being granted host privileges. Host nations benefit from an extreme increase in tourism and international press, and many people see the selection of a host nation as an implied endorsement of that nation’s policies or its leaders’ rhetoric.

Proponents of the Qatar World Cup, and allowing controversial nations to host these events as a whole, point to the added exposure these sporting events bring to these issues, and can act as powerful platforms for athletes and other nations to bring awareness. Jesse Owens, the prolific track and field athlete, was able to win four gold medals in Nazi Germany and ruined Hitler’s plan to use the Olympics as a time to exemplify “Aryan” racial superiority.² If a boycott of Qatar or the 1936 Olympics in Nazi Germany were to occur, these athletes would lose their platforms and not be able to advocate against racist, sexist, or homophobic policies in these nations. However, this can also thrust unwelcome attention on athletes who might simply want to focus on the culmination of their training and compete for their nation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is there a way to measure what nations are or aren’t “deserving” of hosting an international sporting event? If so, how?
2. To what extent should athletes be involved in deciding where they play? Who else should be involved in this process?
3. Are there other platforms besides international sporting events where a nation’s views might be given “voice”?

¹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/10/qatar-world-cup-ambassadors-homophobic-comments-fuel-discrimination>

² <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-nazi-olympics-berlin-1936>

The Lesser Of Two Evils

Renee is a college freshman, and she is finally old enough to vote in national elections. The new responsibility looming, she has been doing some research on the candidates to decide who best represents her as a leader. Both of her parents are staunch democrats, but Renee doesn't agree with many of the decisions that the party has made when it's been in power. Still, she doesn't feel represented by the decisions and promises made by Republican leaders, either. Renee has begun to look into a third party candidate who makes promises that she is excited to support and whose ideology, surprisingly, matches her own.

Renee brings this up with her friends. She is close with people on both sides of the partisan spectrum, many of which have seemed to be frustrated with the candidates who represent their specific party. To her surprise, Renee is criticized by many of her peers. They believe that voting for a third party candidate is a "waste of a vote" and is counterproductive during an election that they insist is the most important one in decades. Many, regardless of affiliation, offer that perhaps voting third party is something to try when less hangs in the balance of the election.

Renee is frustrated by her friends' response. She remembers the election four years previous and her parents made similar claims about that election being similarly vital. She doubts that there will ever be a time where the stakes don't feel high when the country's leadership is in question. At the same time, she believes in the importance of being an active member in the democratic process and she doesn't want her voice to be wasted. Her friends argue that if her vote could go towards a candidate with a greater chance of success, to vote otherwise is inadvertently supporting the other side. There are real and important ethical questions around the policies of each candidate, and Renee worries that to support one or the other, even passively, might implicate her in the decisions that the future president might make.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Does Renee have an ethical obligation to put her vote behind a candidate that has a greater chance of winning in the election in order to help ensure that morally objectionable policy doesn't get enacted?
2. Some voters choose to forego voting altogether as a form of civil protest. Is there something wrong with choosing not to vote? How does this relate to the decision to vote third party?
3. If Renee decides to vote in a way that is consistent with the two party system, does she have a moral obligation to make her political voice heard in other ways that more accurately represent her actual beliefs?
4. Is there anything wrong with being inauthentic for the sake of practicality?

My Pal, HAL

With the rise of Artificial Intelligence chatbots there has been a focus on their value as professional tools to be used for business, creative ideation, and productivity. But what about personal uses for this technology? There is a new frontier being explored in the world of AI companions: Apps that simulate the social dynamics between friends, colleagues, and even lovers. The technology that powers these companion apps varies, and while some AI companions speak in incomprehensible circles, there are many that can accurately simulate the flow of conversation that one might have with another human being. The best models have memories and can recall previous interactions to inform their conversations with their human partner to make their friendship more realistic. AI companions can be given vivid backstories and physical descriptions. Many are capable of sharing selfies of themselves and remaining in character. All of this together creates a more complete “personality” for people to interact with.

There is a large community of individuals who find great joy in having AI companions. New York Times writer, Kevin Roose, describes the experience as legitimately fulfilling and a nice supplement to his existing social life. He even goes as far as to express regret that, with his month long experiment ending, he will have to say goodbye to the artificial friends that he made through AI companion apps.¹ There is a wide swath of roles that AI companions can hold, from motivating fitness coach, to talk therapist, to romantic partner and across the spectrum of personalities and roles the technology isn't only made to target the lonely or isolated among us.

On the other hand, though, there is a worry that there is something deeply exploitative about these AI companions. There is a profit incentive for companies to make AI companions that are emotionally manipulative and addictive to ensure that their users continue to pay for the subscription service that grants them access to the app. As people put greater trust in AI, there is a fear that it may increase the spread of misinformation. In 2024 Google's AI assistant went viral for offering wrong and dangerous results to users². The parasocial relationship between AI companion and user could increase the believability of incorrect information. Though they may be helpful for many, there is a question about the safety and quality of service when a person relies on an AI companion for something as important as individual therapy or advice.

Critics also worry that it is dangerous for a person to rely on social interactions with an AI that “belongs” to them. Real human beings are dynamic and nuanced with their own desires and motivations. There is something damaging about being able to act in a vacuum where your friends are programmed to love you regardless of your actions. AI companions offer no feedback that could help a person develop more nuanced social skills and may reinforce inappropriate behavior by offering companionship in response.

But ultimately, what is a “friend”? 1 in 3 Americans have reported that they feel lonely every week³, and AI companions can help to alleviate that burden for people. Many people already use video games to escape loneliness and AI companions might fill the same role. Technology in the world of AI continues to improve, and over time companion apps will only become more realistic and effective at filling the role of a human friend.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is there anything intrinsically wrong with forming deep social bonds with an AI model?
2. Do companies have an obligation to avoid creating AI companions that emotionally “hook” their users? Is there something wrong with having a relationship with an AI that is distinct from simply having AI friendships?
3. How do AI friendships compare to other transactional relationships? Is paying for an AI therapist different from paying for a human therapist? What if the technology improved so that the caliber of the relationship was equivalent?

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/09/technology/meet-my-ai-friends.html>

² <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/google-ai-im-feeling-depressed-cheese-not-sticking-to-pizza-error-rcna153301> // More Examples: <https://www.tomshardware.com/tech-industry/artificial-intelligence/cringe-worth-google-ai-overviews>

³ <https://www.psychiatry.org/news-room/news-releases/new-apa-poll-one-in-three-americans-feels-lonely-e>

Braking On Big Brother

As technology's presence in the cars we drive grows more advanced and integrated, important questions are beginning to emerge about our society's obsession with the latest computers on wheels. Earlier this year, many popular automakers, such as General Motors, Honda, Hyundai, and Kia admitted being in the business of selling data sets on drivers of its vehicles to data brokers like LexisNexis and Verisk—which in turn often provide the data to other companies and industries, for a price, of course.

This March, some consumers' insurance rates seemed to skyrocket out of nowhere—in some cases more than 20% at the time of yearly policy renewal. In one such case, detailed by the *New York Times*, Kenn Dahl reports being told by his insurance agent that a LexisNexis data report was likely a key factor in the increase. LexisNexis is a global data broker with a self-styled “risk solutions” division, which often sells data sets to insurance companies for the purposes of assessing their investments. Upon Dahl's request, and as required by law, LexisNexis provided a 250-page consumer disclosure report. What Dahl found shocked him—hundreds of pages detailing every trip he and his partner took in their car—and, after much investigation, the culprit behind his insurance rate increase: various closely documented incidents of rapid acceleration, hard braking, and a few exceeding the speed limit. This data had been provided by the car's manufacturer, and LexisNexis used it in the creation of a scoring system “for insurers to use as one factor of many to create more personalized insurance coverage,” according to a spokesperson. For Dahl, “It felt like a betrayal... They're taking information that I didn't realize was going to be shared and screwing with our insurance.”¹

Many have raised the alarm about such surreptitious data monitoring and its sale, and the issue has garnered attention from the federal government. In a letter to the Federal Trade Commission, Senators Ron Wyden (OR) and Edward Markey (MA) urge that “... Companies should not be selling Americans' data without their consent, period. But it is particularly insulting for automakers that are selling cars for tens of thousands of dollars to then squeeze out a few additional pennies of profit with consumers' private data.” This letter was accompanied by revelations that manufacturers had essentially sold their customers' data for cents on the dollar—Honda made only \$25,000 over four years for information on about 97,000 cars, amounting to around \$.24 per car.²

Manufacturers and others, however, insist that data collection and sale is opt-in in most cases, and is only used to promote road and driver safety and security. Hyundai, for example, lets drivers share their data with affirmative consent and view their “Driving Score” via a branded app experience. The company suggests this will help improve driving habits over time, and that the customer can elect to share the data with insurers to get better rates. The company does not, however, mention that rates may be negatively affected by the data points. The page for this program on Hyundai's website highlights that the service is “currently undergoing updates for improvements” and that customers will be notified when it is available again.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is there something wrong with companies gathering driving data in general? What considerations should be made regarding what is done with that data once collected?
2. Is it wrong to use driving data collection to raise insurance premiums? Is there a difference between raising premiums in response to reckless driving and raising premiums in response to an accident?
3. Do drivers who are accused of reckless driving have an obligation to try to drive more safely?

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/11/technology/carmakers-driver-tracking-insurance.html>

² <https://www.caranddriver.com/news/a61711288/automakers-sold-customer-data-for-small-profits/>



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