

PRACTICE ETHICAL DILEMMAS 2010 (culled from previous years)

1) Ann, a field biologist in Brazil, is studying the effects of deforestation on local flora and fauna. On a trip to town for supplies, she chances upon a local man selling a baby gorilla. Fully aware that traffic in endangered species is illegal, she questions the vendor who assures her that he is not a poacher: he simply found the orphaned gorilla by the roadside. Although Ann is not convinced the man is telling the truth and does not want to support trade in exotic animals, she is certain that if she does not buy the gorilla, someone else will-- probably for its hands which, ground up, are reputed to have aphrodisiac qualities.

What ought Ann to do?

2) Mr. White is the editor of a newspaper serving a diverse metropolitan region. His paper has been closely following the story of the Danish paper that published political cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammad in a variety of unflattering lights, including as a terrorist with a bomb in his turban. To depict Mohammad at all is sacrilege to Muslims—let alone to depict him as a terrorist.

The reporters covering the story and the ongoing violence it has spawned believe it is necessary to publish the cartoons in order to fully inform the public and let the paper's readership make its own decisions. Moreover, they feel not to publish them is to give in to the violence. The editorial staff, on the other hand, believes it would be irresponsible, insensitive, and unnecessary to publish the cartoons.

Should Mr. White publish the cartoons or not?

3) Benjamin lives across the street from an elderly woman who has recently been very ill. She is house-bound and reliant on an oxygen tank due to complications from emphysema. Every other day, she calls to Benjamin, asking him to get her pack of cigarettes for which she reimburses him, always adding something extra for his trouble. Because none of her relatives will comply with her wishes and because she has always employed Benjamin with odd jobs (leaf raking, snow shoveling, etc.) when he needed the money, Benjamin complies. She is, after all, a grown woman.

Should Benjamin continue to buy her the cigarettes?

4) At William Howard Taft High School, officials have been working up a sweat combating childhood obesity. Recently, They've really thrown their weight around banning soda, candy, fried foods, and bake sales in the cafeteria and mandating physical education. However, the high school's famous annual eating contest is approaching. The contest is a venerated town tradition that invokes the hallowed memory of Taft himself. It draws huge crowds and raises substantial sums for cancer research.

Should the eating competition be discontinued due to its glorification of an unhealthy diet?

5) For centuries, the smallpox virus was one of the worst scourges of humankind. It killed more people over the world than any other infectious disease, particularly in non-immune populations such as Native Americans. The World Health Organization's (WHO) campaign against smallpox, launched in 1967, was highly successful and resulted in WHO's formal declaration of the eradication of this disease by 1979. The WHO is currently considering destroying the two remaining stocks of smallpox virus, located in two high security laboratories in the USA and Russia.

While there may be compelling reasons to do so, the purposeful eradication of entire biological systems or species from the face of this Earth has never been proposed before and carries great weight in the scientific community. Do we have the right to deliberately and directly cause the extinction of any life form? Some say that each biological entity of the planet is the unique product of a long evolutionary history, which makes it precious and irreplaceable.

Should smallpox be destroyed or preserved?

6) James Allen Selby raped and assaulted at least 12 women. In October 2004, he was convicted on 27 counts, which included armed robbery, rape, kidnapping and attempted murder (for slitting the throat of one of the women). Hours before his sentencing, he hanged himself in a Tuscan, Arizona jail.

James Allen Selby was also a Persian Gulf War veteran. Therefore, in accordance with to Pentagon policy, he was buried with full military honors. Outraged, several of Selby's not unprecedented. In 1997, after Army veteran Timothy McVeigh was sentenced to murder and sentenced to death or life in prison from being buried with full military honors. Veterans convicted of rape or any other violent crime, however, encounter no such restrictions.

Should Congress deny veterans convicted of rape military honors?

7) Leading internet company Google is censoring its search services in China in order to gain greater access to China's fast-growing market. Google has offered a Chinese-language version of its search engine for years but users have been frustrated by government blocks on the site. The company is setting up a new site - Google.cn - which will censor itself to satisfy the authorities in Beijing. The new version could restrict access to thousands of sensitive terms and web sites. Such topics include independence for Taiwan and banned spiritual movements. The Chinese government keeps a tight rein on what users can access on the Internet. The BBC news site is inaccessible, while a search on Google.cn for the 1989 massacre of pro-democracy students in Tiananmen Square directs users to a string of condemnatory articles.

Free speech advocates argue that allowing search results to be removed or altered is inconsistent with Google's mission of providing full access to information. Google contends that it would be more inconsistent with its mission to provide no information at all. The company argues it can play a more useful role in China by participating than by boycotting it, despite the compromises involved.

Should Google continue to concede to Beijing's demands or pull out of China entirely?

8) After years of controversy, Yale University has taken down a painting of Elihu Yale that shows the wealthy merchant being waited on by a black man with a silver collar around his neck - an unmistakable symbol of slavery. Elihu Yale did not own slaves but critics over the years have objected to the painting's racist overtones and the significant place it is displayed at the university named for him. The portrait hangs over an ornate fireplace in the Corporation Room in Woodbridge Hall, meeting place for the university's board of trustees.

Many in the Yale community are relieved and delighted that the painting is no longer in sight, but others feel simply removing evidence of the legacy of slavery is misguided [?? word here]. Says one professor, "That Yale would have been waited on by a slave is lamentable fact of history, some argue, but a fact nonetheless that should not be swept under the rug. There are museums in this country that have painted over slave collars in similar paintings to render the portraits more appropriate to hang in public. This is one step away from such whitewashing of history."

Should Yale remove the painting from display?

9) Recently, scientific studies have shown that the roots of hair from adolescent girls in an isolated region near Chernobyl have a unique property resulting from the Chernobyl nuclear power meltdown in 1986. The chemical make-up of the follicles has been shown to slow memory loss in Alzheimer's patients.

A Ukrainian boarding school for orphaned girls aged 12-15, and the owners of the school are forcibly collecting the hair from their students to sell to American drug companies. Because only the roots contain this hormone, the girls must have their hair forcibly yanked out every six to eight weeks. Since the school offers the girls an excellent free education, they believe it's a fair trade.

Glaspere Pharmaceuticals is looking for a breakthrough drug; should they buy the adolescent hair from the school in the Ukraine?

10) Shortly before his death in 1977, Vladimir Nabokov, one of the premier novelists of the twentieth century, asked his wife to burn his last unpublished work. She did not. The manuscript now sits in a Swiss bank vault, and its fate has fallen to Nabokov's only surviving heir, his son Dmitri, who is now 73 years old.

Dmitri has been torn for years between his father's unequivocal request and the demands of the literary world to view the final fragment of his father's genius, a manuscript known as *The Original of Laura*. Although Vladimir Nabokov, a perfectionist, would never have allowed an unfinished work to be made public, Dmitri, who alone has read the manuscript, calls it "the most concentrated distillation of [my father's] creativity," and scholars of Nabokov believe the work would shed invaluable light on one of the greatest writers of the English language.

Should Dmitri burn *Laura*, per his father's request or preserve the manuscript for posterity as the literary world demands?(source: slate.com)

