



# **SHANGHAI INTERSCHOLASTIC ETHICS BOWL**

Case Set for 2020

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## 1. A Grave Dilemma

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

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

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

### STUDY QUESTIONS

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



## 2. Forced Chemotherapy

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

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

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

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

### STUDY QUESTIONS

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

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

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



### 3. Billionaire Backfire

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

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

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

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

#### STUDY QUESTIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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



## 4. Fake Followers

Think of some of the athletes, musicians, actors, political figures, or businesses you most admire. Chances are, at least some of them have paid companies to generate followers, “likes,” and comments for their social media accounts. So claims Dan Leal, who, in a recent New York Times exposé on “follower factories,” readily admitted to having purchased over 150,000 followers for his Twitter account, @PornoDan, from Devumi, one of the many companies that sells social media followers in bulk. Leal bragged that his investment in fake followers had more than paid for itself, and that he was confident that he would not be penalized by Twitter, despite the fact that buying followers is against Twitter’s terms of service. Why? “Countless public figures, companies, music acts, etc. purchase followers,” Leal told the Times. “If Twitter was to purge everyone who did so there would be hardly any of them on it.” Some of Devumi’s corporate records obtained by the Times lent credence to Leal’s claims: among Devumi’s clients were a number of celebrities and corporations, including former Baltimore Ravens linebacker Ray Lewis, singer Clay Aiken, and celebrity baker Paul Hollywood. So were the political campaign of Ecuador’s current president, Lenín Moreno, and China’s state-run news agency, Xinhua. Even a member of Twitter’s board of directors and a travel writer for the New York Times were customers.<sup>1</sup>

Followers and other forms of social media engagement are generated by follower factories in a variety of ways. In some cases, likes, retweets, and follows come from real people in “click farms,” who make as little as \$120 per year to sit at computers and click “like” for hours on end.<sup>2</sup> In other cases, automated fake accounts (often called “bots”) are created. Higher quality (and more expensive) bots look “authentic,” often by closely imitating the accounts of real users. For example, a Minnesota teenager named Jessica Rychly was dismayed to discover that a Twitter account using her name and likeness, along with a username nearly identical to hers, was being used to promote cryptocurrency, Canadian real estate, and more. If it hadn’t been for the Times investigation, she would never have known.

In an “influencer economy” in which billions of advertising dollars are spent every year promoting goods and services through influential social media accounts, it’s difficult to know where to lay the blame. Are the companies who promise to generate followers for a price to blame, or are the people and organizations who pay them? Is the primary obligation on social media platforms to better enforce their own terms of service? Critics point out that, just as “influencers” get higher advertising revenues for having more followers, Facebook and Twitter garner higher stock prices by having more users, and so have a disincentive to crack down too hard on bots. Some influencers admit that buying followers is wrong, while others regard it as merely a tool of the trade. Some corporations who advertise through influencers have vowed to take responsibility by cracking down on influencers who buy followers. “This is a deep and systematic issue, an issue of trust that fundamentally threatens to undermine the relationship between consumers and brands,” declared Unilever’s Chief Marketing Officer, Keith Weed. “Brands have to play their role in resolving it . . . As one of the largest advertisers in the world, we cannot have an environment where our consumers don’t trust what they see online.”<sup>3</sup>

### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Is it wrong to buy followers and likes on social media? Does it matter if they are real people, such as those employed by click farms?
2. Who bears the primary moral responsibility for widespread use of fake followers?
3. Unilever vowed not to do business with influencers and platforms who pay for followers and users, because they say they don’t want “an environment where our consumers don’t trust what they see online.” Yet Unilever pays “influencers” to use their social media accounts to promote Unilever products to their friends and followers. Is Unilever’s advertising strategy different in any morally relevant way from the influencers who buy followers to make themselves look more influential? Why or why not?

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1 <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/01/27/technology/social-media-bots.html>

2 <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/aug/02/click-farms-appearance-online-popularity>

3 <https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/unilever-to-crack-down-on-influencers-who-buy-fake-followers-and-use-bots/>



## 5. Love Drugs

Romantic love has long been considered an emotional experience that arises in mysterious and unpredictable ways between people who are attracted to one another naturally. It can be overwhelming, fleeting, star-crossed, or long-lasting—but we typically think of it as outside of our control. What if we could control it?

In the United States, approximately 40% to 50% of marriages end in divorce.<sup>1</sup> With new scientific interventions, we may be able to reduce this number by increasing or prolonging feelings of love. “We treat depression, anxiety and other emotion-based responses with drugs. If love isn’t working for us, why not add a chemical?” asks Rich Wordsworth.<sup>2</sup> Current research shows that oxytocin is key to the experience of love. MDMA, various psychedelics, and some pharmaceutical drugs all prompt release of oxytocin and so also have an influence on the initiation and persistence of feelings of attraction and love.<sup>3</sup> There is anecdotal evidence suggesting that these substances are linked with increased bonding that happens more quickly than usual and lasts beyond the chemicals, thereby potentially deepening and strengthening romantic relationships. However, in other cases, the use of such substances gives a false sense of love so that when a person is not taking it anymore, the feelings of love disappear, which can lead to unexpected emotional separation and pain.<sup>4</sup>

Other substances have been linked with deadening the experience of love. SSRIs are commonly used to treat depression and anxiety, but some of them have side effects that include blunting a person’s ability to connect with others emotionally as well as sexual dysfunction. If this line of research were extended, we could imagine using substances to manipulate who and how people love, either willingly or unwillingly.<sup>5</sup>

So-called love drugs could help strengthen or stabilize long-term relationships; they could help people get over difficult break-ups; or they could help individuals to leave abusive relationships.<sup>6</sup> As scientists continue to study the effects of chemicals on love, significant ethical concerns arise. Under ordinary circumstances, we use emotion as our guide. But if we can change our emotions, then how do we know when we should? Is there anything wrong with using an artificial or external stimulation for love if participants are willing? Would the resulting relationship be in some way less real or authentic as a result?

### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What, if anything, makes loving relationships (including romantic relationships) valuable or important? How, if at all, would “love drugs” add to or detract from that value or importance?
2. What does it mean for a feeling or relationship to be authentic? Would love drugs make the resulting feelings or relationships less authentic? Why or why not?
3. What are the morally relevant similarities and differences between using some chemical help to end the pain of romantic heartbreak and using chemical help to strengthen one’s romantic feelings toward another?

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1 <http://www.apa.org/topics/divorce/>

2 <http://www.wired.co.uk/article/love-drugs-how-to-control-love-with-drugs>

3 <https://qz.com/953217/love-drugs-will-soon-be-a-reality-but-should-we-take-them/>

4 <http://www.wired.co.uk/article/love-drugs-how-to-control-love-with-drugs>

5 <http://www.wired.co.uk/article/love-drugs-how-to-control-love-with-drugs>

6 <http://www.wired.co.uk/article/love-drugs-how-to-control-love-with-drugs> and <https://qz.com/953217/love-drugs-will-soon-be-a-reality-but-should-we-take-them/>