

Ethics Cases 1.1 ©2003-2005

Dr. Michael C. LaBossiere

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Introduction

The following provides ethics cases. These cases provide the subject matter for the first paper-you will select and address **one** of the cases when doing the first paper.

Each case consists of a description that provides some basic information about the case. The description is followed by the main issue or issues raised by the case. Next are hints for arguing for one side or another. These hints are intended to assist you in writing the paper. If you have questions about a case, be sure to ask.

Important Note: This document is rather long, so you might want to select your case while reading it on a computer rather than printing the whole thing.

Cases

#1 Lying

It is generally believed that everyone lies and that most people lie fairly often. Ironically, most people also believe (or at least claim to believe) that lying is morally wrong. People typically reconcile their lying with their belief that lying is wrong by breaking lies into various categories, ranging from “little white lies” to betrayals of trust. People also tend to justify their lies by appealing to the consequences. This includes lying to avoid hurting someone’s feelings (“you look great”) as well as lying to gain some advantage (“Of course your credit card number is safe with me”) or to avoid some punishment or difficulty (“my paper was late because I was in an accident”).

Issue: Is lying morally acceptable? Since the topic of lying is rather vast, you will need to pick a particular type of lying or situation to focus on. This needs to be a matter of reasonable controversy and not something with an easy or obvious answer. To be specific, a reasonable person should be able to make a plausible case for both sides.

Examples of unreasonable cases-Do not do any of these: Is it acceptable to tell a small lie to a very evil person to save the lives of thousands of people? Is it wrong to lie when the lie will harm thousands of people and bring no good to anyone? Is it wrong to lie to senior citizens so you can swindle them out of all their savings, causing them to be killed and eaten by their pets when they can no longer buy food?

Examples of reasonable cases: Is it acceptable to lie to professors about such things as late work, excuses, etc. when telling the truth would harm your grade in the class? Is it acceptable to lie to your boss about a coworker or your accomplishments when doing so would help you get a raise? Is it acceptable to lie on your tax return? Is it acceptable for the government to lie to its people when it is a matter of national security? Is it acceptable to lie on a job application or resume to increase your chances of getting a job?

Hints

Arguing in favor of lying: One method, and the most common, is to justify lying on the basis of the consequences. In fact there is an ethical theory, ethical consequentialism, that states that actions are assessed morally in terms of their consequences. The main tasks here are to argue that such lying will tend to have good consequences (at least for the liar) and why this justifies lying.

Arguing against lying: One method is to show that the type of lying at hand is wrong by showing that it would have negative consequences. For example, if a professor is regularly lied to about excuses, she will probably stop accepting them, making things tougher on those with legitimate excuses. In this case, the liars would be harming the people who really deserve a break. Other negative consequences could include the effect on the liar's character. A second common method is to argue by reversing the circumstances. For example, when considering whether it is acceptable to lie to professors, consider whether it is acceptable for professors to lie to students. For example, if professors should not lie about losing papers or tests ("You never turned it in"), then students should not lie about excuses. As another example, if citizens are supposed to be honest with the government, the government should be honest with the citizens. The task would be to defend such claims.

Case #2 Academic Cheating

Academic cheating comes in a variety of forms ranging from sneaking a cheat sheet into an exam to purchasing a paper from a web site and turning it in as one's own. Looked at outside of moral concerns, the main advantages of cheating are that it is typically easier than being honest and it can provide a better grade. The main risk is, of course, being caught and punished—perhaps even expelled. In addition to the pragmatic concerns, there are also moral concerns raised by cheating.

Issue: Is academic cheating morally acceptable? As with lying, the realm of cheating is quite large so you will need to focus the paper. You will also need to find a specific subject that is a matter of reasonable controversy and not something with an easy or obvious answer.

Examples of unreasonable cases-Do not do any of these: Is it acceptable to cheat when the professor actually makes the tests impossible for anyone to pass and you need the class to graduate? Is it wrong to cheat when doing so would give you no advantage but would result in a close friend being expelled from school?

Examples of reasonable cases: Is it acceptable to cheat when the class is critical to your graduation and you have a job waiting for you? Is it acceptable to cheat if the professor is doing a poor job of teaching or is creating tests that seem unfair? Is it acceptable to cheat to boost your GPA so you can keep or acquire a scholarship or remain on an athletic team?

Hints

Arguing in favor of cheating: One plausible method is to consider the consequences of the cheating. The task would be to show that the positive value generated by cheating outweighs the negative value. For example, one might argue that cheating in order to retain a scholarship would be acceptable since the student would be able to remain in school and become a productive member of society.

Arguing against cheating: One plausible method is to consider the negative consequences of the cheating. Such cheating might convince the professor the work is too easy and hence she will make it more difficult, which will harm the honest students. Another harm to consider would be that cheating can become habitual and thus the cheater's character will be impaired.

A second common method is to argue by reversing the circumstances. For example, when considering whether it is acceptable to cheat, consider whether it is acceptable for professors to cheat students. Alternatively, if you were the professor or another student, would cheating still seem morally acceptable?

Third, an argument can be built that takes into account the other students. Is cheating fair to the honest students? For example, if there are only so many scholarships is it right for honest students to be denied a scholarship because they did not cheat?

#3 Copying Music/Movies/Software

With the right hardware and software it is extremely easy to copy music, movies and software. While companies have attempted various copy protection schemes, clever people have always found a way around these restrictions. For example, people can download free software that can be used to rip copy protected DVDs.

While most people copy their own software, music and movies to create back-up copies, many people also make copies to give to their friends. Some people even sell copies, sometimes on a large scale.

Issue: Is copying music, movies and software morally acceptable? Does the intended use (backup, gift to a friend, piracy) make a difference in the morality of the copying?

Hints

Arguing that it is morally acceptable: The easiest case to make is that it is morally acceptable for a person to make backup copies for media she already owns. This can be done by arguing that the person is paying for the right to view/hear/use the media and not just for the physical object. The task is to make the case for this claim. Companies have recently begun to challenge this alleged right and their attacks can be replied to in order to flesh out the paper. It is more challenging to argue that it is morally acceptable for people to make copies and give them away. One way to support this view would be to argue that the companies are morally wrong and that attacking them in this way is morally acceptable. The task is to argue why this would justify such copying. Another way to argue for this is a bit tricky-you could argue that as long as the people who receive the copies would not have bought the media, then no money is actually lost (and hence no harm is done). The task is to make the case for this. The toughest position to argue for is that creating copies to sell is morally acceptable. One possible way to do this would be to

use Robin Hood as an inspiration. For example, it might be argued that such piracy would be morally acceptable as long as the pirate copied the property of “bad” companies and used the money to help the poor. The task is to make the case for this.

Arguing that it is mortally unacceptable: In an attempt to justify their new copy-protection methods, companies are arguing that people do not have any right to make copies of media—perhaps even backups of media they have purchased. Hence, one place to look for ideas is in the arguments presented by these companies. Arguing that it is morally unacceptable to make backup copies of legitimately purchased media would be fairly challenging (if you have a good argument, you might consider selling it to the media companies). Arguing that people should not make copies to give away is easier. Three ways to argue that giving away copies is wrong are as follows. The first approach is to focus on the potential harms created by this activity. For example, every copy given away is a copy that will not be sold, so the owners will be losing money. This loss of revenue would have various consequences and the goal is to argue that these would be negative. The main task is to show that the harms of copying would make the action immoral. The second approach is to use an analogy. The task is to find something that is accepted as being immoral that is similar to copying the media and giving it away. Third, a case can be made based on property rights. The easiest position to argue for is that creating copies to sell is morally wrong. This can be argued for in the same way as the previous one with the addition that the person doing the copying is making money. Part of the task would involve why making money would make it morally worse (legally it would be worse for the copier, which might be something to look into). One analogy that might be worth considering is comparing such pirating to counterfeiting money.

#4 Let the Dead Lie?

“...I fell to thinking that what I was doing would be called grave robbery if it were carried on in a modern cemetery; but if the burying ground is ancient, why, we illogical little microbes called men name our digging ‘archeological excavation.’”

- Kelsey Percival Kitchel, “Mummy”

Until recent years it has been generally assumed that it is morally acceptable for archeologists and similar professionals to engage in what amounts to grave robbery. They enter the tombs of the dead and then disturb their bodies and possessions. In some cases the bodies are subject to scientific examinations and even put on display in museums. While most people think of the ancient pyramids of Egypt when they think of such activities, the same treatment is now being applied to more modern graves, such as the wreck of the Titanic. Once protected by its great depth, modern technology has allowed private individuals to loot the Titanic and other wrecks.

Issue: Is it morally acceptable to disturb the graves/resting places of the dead? When addressing the general issue it can help to focus on more specific matters. First, you can consider the matter of why the grave is being disturbed. To be specific, would it be acceptable to disturb a grave for scientific reasons rather than simply loot the grave for artifacts to sell on the open market? Second, you can also consider the nature of the

intrusion. Would it make a difference if the grave were simply viewed, examined, filmed, restored and then left alone as opposed to a situation in which items or bodies were removed? Third, does it make a difference who disturbs the bodies? Some ethnic, national and religious groups have claimed that it is unacceptable for outsiders to interfere with the graves of their ancestors or fellows and that any archeological investigations must be done by those who are not outsiders.

Hints

Arguing that it is acceptable: One approach is to argue that the advancement of science and history made possible by such intrusions outweighs any harm done to the dead or their descendents. The main task is supporting this claim. A second approach is to argue that it is acceptable only under specific conditions. For example, it might be argued that only the ancestors of the dead have a right to disturb them. As another example, it might be argued that such intrusions are acceptable provided everything is properly restored after the investigation. The task here is to argue why this makes the disturbance acceptable. A third approach is to argue that the dead, being dead, have no rights anymore. At the very least, it could be argued that they have no use for their possessions and, being dead, they cannot be harmed any more (“it’s not like they can get any deader.”) The task here is to argue that the dead either lack rights or cannot be harmed further.

Arguing that is not acceptable: One approach is to, as the character in “Mummy” does, draw an analogy between disturbing the graves of the long dead and the more recently dead. If someone dug up Aunt Jane three days after she died, then put her remains on display in a museum and sold her possessions on eBay, most people would see that as very wrong indeed. The main task here would be making the analogy between digging up poor Aunt Jane and doing the same sort of thing to King Tutankhamen or other long dead individual. One thing to focus on is the matter of time-why should it be wrong to dig up Aunt Jane after three days, but okay to dig up someone who died 3,000 years ago? A second approach is to argue that though the dead are dead and have no use for their possessions, they were people and hence still deserve respect. The main task here is arguing why they deserve such respect. A third approach is to argue that the dead should be left alone out of respect for their descendents who are still living. This can also be supported by an analogy. For example, while digging up Aunt Jane won’t hurt her, it would harm her relatives. Similarly, digging up the long dead ancestors of people would also cause them some harm. The task is to argue that there would be such harm and that it is morally significant.

#5 Obligations to Others

In the 1960s Kitty Genovese was stabbed to death in plain sight of thirty-eight of her neighbors. Her neighbors watched for about thirty minutes as she was attacked, left alone and then attacked two more times. No one came to her aid and no one even called the police until it was too late. The police arrived two minutes after they were called. When the ambulance arrived about an hour later, the neighbors finally left their apartments. When asked why they had not helped, they gave answers such as “I don’t know” or “we were afraid” and even “I was tired.”

While this case is very famous, it is by no means unique. All over the world there are people who are sick, injured, poor or dying who could be greatly helped by a small effort on our part.

Issue: Morally, what, if anything, do we owe other people? Why or why not?

Hints

Arguing that we do owe others: When arguing that we do have obligations to others the first step is to decide what sort of obligations you want to argue for. In general, the more limited the obligation, the easier it is to argue for. For example, it would be easier to argue that people are obligated to take some minimal effort to help people (such as calling the police) rather than extreme effort (such as risking one's own life to save another). One way to argue that we do have obligations is to argue from the perspective of what we would want others to do for us-if we expect others to help us, then we must help them. Another way to argue for these obligations is to argue that it is in our best interest to have such obligations. While these obligations would require you to help others, you would also benefit because others would be obligated to help you. Such obligations can also be defended by considering the consequences of such obligations. For example, it can be argued that more positive value (good) will be created if people accept such obligations and that more negative value (bad) would arise if people rejected such obligations,

Arguing that we do not owe others: If you do not want to abandon all obligations, one way to approach this issue is to argue that people only have negative obligations and not positive obligations. Negative obligations are those that obligate us to not do things to other people, such as not harming them. Positive obligations are those that require us to do things for others, like give money to the poor or defend the helpless. The task is to show that while we should not harm others, we have no obligation to take a positive effort for them. A more extreme approach is to argue that people have no moral obligations at all to others. One way to argue for this is to argue in favor of ethical egoism. For example, it could be argued that you would be happier and safer if you expended your energy on yourself and did not waste it on helping others. This is a form of arguing from the consequences in which only the consequences that affect you are considered.

#6 Surrogate Mothers

Surrogate motherhood takes a variety of forms. The classic method is for a married man to impregnate (typically via artificial insemination) a woman other than his wife. The husband and wife will then adopt the child. Technological advances have enabled a woman's egg to be fertilized and then implanted in another woman for growth and development. In the 1980s surrogate motherhood became a matter of national attention with the case of Baby M. This case raised both legal and moral issues regarding surrogate motherhood. One legal ruling was that surrogate motherhood was acceptable, provided that the surrogate mother received no payment for her services-this was seen as selling the child. Of course, the moral issue still remains.

Issue: Is surrogate motherhood morally acceptable?

Related Issues: Does the method make a moral difference? To be specific, does it make a difference whether the surrogate mother is the actual biological mother or simply a human “incubator” for the fertilized egg of another woman? Does it make any moral difference if the surrogate is paid?

Hints

Arguing that it is acceptable: One approach is to argue that the benefits of surrogate motherhood outweigh the potential harms. The most common argument is that it allows a couple to have children when the wife cannot carry the child herself. The task would be to argue that this would be a good thing. Another approach is to argue that there is a moral right to reproduction, so that couple that cannot have children naturally should be permitted to use this method.

Arguing that it is unacceptable: One way to argue that it is unacceptable is to focus on showing that the harms/negative consequences outweigh the benefits/positive consequences. For example, if the money were good enough, such practices might encourage women to become “baby factories” (there is actually a science fiction story about this). This might seem somewhat farfetched, so part of the task would be to argue that this could happen. The other part would be to argue that this would be unacceptable. A more plausible approach is to argue that allowing the practice could create psychological harms. Giving up “her” child, for example, could harm the surrogate. It is also possible to argue that it is unacceptable if the mother is paid. One way to do this would be to draw an analogy to prostitution. Another approach would be to argue that this would create an unfair situation because then the wealthy would be able to make use of surrogates that the poor could not afford (of course, the wealthy enjoy advantages over the poor all across the board).

Methods: The main task here is focusing on the methods and how the differences have or do not have moral relevance. For example, one could argue that having a married man fertilize the egg of another woman, even artificially, would be adultery. The task would be to show that this would be morally wrong. As another example, one could argue that using a person as a human incubator (even with consent) would be morally wrong because it is inconsistent with respecting her as a person. Alternatively, it could be argued that the incubator option is acceptable while the other method is not because the incubator option would not involve actual or “virtual” adultery.

Money: The main task is focusing on the relevance of money to the morality of surrogate motherhood. One approach that has been taken is to argue that paying a woman to be a surrogate is buying a child. The task is to show why this would be wrong. This could be done by appealing to negative consequences or by arguing that it is simply wrong to sell children. On the other side it could be argued that accepting money is acceptable-the surrogate mother is simply doing a job like anyone else and is just as entitled to get paid as anyone else. She is no more immoral than someone who gets paid for building a house or teaching a class.

#7 Cruel Food

While there is a general issue of whether people should eat meat or not, there is also the specific question regarding the morality of what might be called “cruel food.” The best known example of cruel food is veal. Veal is created by force feeding calves and imprisoning them in small cages to prevent them from moving around. This ensures that the meat has the desired texture and taste. Naturally, the calves suffer horribly under these conditions. Another example of cruel food is the production of chicken meat and eggs. The factory farming of chickens involves packing as many of them as possible into a small area and clipping their beaks to prevent them from harming each other. Needless to say, the chickens suffer terribly.

Issue: Is the creation and consumption of “cruel food” morally acceptable?

Hints

Arguing that it is acceptable: A common approach is to argue that the enjoyment that people receive from eating “cruel food” outweighs the suffering of the animals. Another common approach is to argue that the profits made by those raising “cruel food” outweighs the suffering of the animals. It is also common for people to argue that animals simply do not count, regardless of how they are treated by people. The task here would be to argue that animals have no moral standing. For a less severe approach, it can be argued that while some animals (such as pets) have moral status, those commonly used as food do not. Another approach is to argue that animals are here merely to serve the needs of humans and hence any type of treatment is morally acceptable. Religious arguments are often used to support this view. They would, of course, have to be modified into moral arguments.

Arguing that it is unacceptable: For those who oppose the mistreatment of animals, such as Peter Singer, a standard argument is to contend that the suffering of the animals morally outweighs the pleasure that people might receive from eating them. The tasks would be to show that the suffering outweighs the pleasure and that this shows that the treatment of animals in this way is wrong. Another approach is to argue that mistreating animals has a negative impact on human beings because it can make them crueler and hence more likely to mistreat other people. Another approach is to argue that animals have rights and that using them in this way violates these rights, thus making “cruel food” morally wrong.

#8 Lawyers and Morality

Professions typically have a set of professional ethics that are supposed to guide the behavior of members. In some cases, these professional codes can clash with general ethics. One particularly gruesome example involves the case of Robert Garrow. Garrow was initially indicted for the death of one person. During consultation, he told his lawyers he had also raped and murdered another woman. Following Garrow’s directions, the lawyers went and found the body. They did not reveal the information to anyone. Garrow later told them about another woman he had murdered. Again, the lawyers found the body but did not inform the authorities. Hearing about the case and suspecting his daughter was a victim, a man eventually went to the lawyers and asked them if they knew

anything. Though the lawyers knew Garrow had murdered the man's daughter, they lied and said they knew nothing. The bodies were eventually found and the truth about what the lawyers had done was revealed. The lawyers defended their actions by citing lawyer-client privilege. The rationale behind this principle is that a client must be able to reveal information to his/her lawyer in confidence so the lawyer can provide the best possible defense. This principle is recognized by the law and is regarded, at least legally, as unbreakable.

While the 1973 Garrow case is very extreme, such conflicts arise fairly often. Obviously, most guilty people tell their lawyers about their crimes and in at least some cases harm is done by this concealment. While the law is clear about this matter, the moral question still remains.

Issue: Should the client-attorney privilege override other moral principles?

Related Issue: If it should, are there limits on what principles should and should not be overridden?

Hints

Arguing that it should override: One approach is to consider the consequences and argue that allowing the principle to override other moral principles creates more benefits than harms. For example, if this principle was not accepted, then clients could not trust their lawyer and the defense would suffer—even for the innocent. The task is to show the consequences and argue that they justify the principle overriding other moral principles. Another option is to argue that when one joins a profession one is obligated to obey its principles even when they come in conflict with other principles. An analogy to the military could be used—when one becomes a soldier, one agrees to obey the military rules even when they conflict with other rules and principles. Naturally, the analogy would need to be developed.

Arguing that it should not override: One option is to focus on the consequences of sticking with the principle, perhaps using examples such as the Garrow case. The task is to show that allowing the principle to override other moral principles would create more harm than benefits and then concluding that the principle should not override other principles. Another approach is to argue that there are moral principles that are more important than professional confidentiality and hence these principles should not be overridden. A third option is to argue that while lawyers have professional obligations, they also have moral obligations as people and as members of society and these obligations can override the client-attorney privilege principle.

Limits: You might want to take a position that is a bit more flexible than simply claiming the principle should always or should never override other principles. In this case the task would be to present and defend the standards that should be used to judge whether or not the principle should override other principles. It is acceptable, and probably a good idea, to focus on particular types of situations and address those. One type of situation would be cases in which the client informs the lawyer that something harmful is going to be done at some future date. For example, suppose the lawyer of Buffy “Weasel” Smythe is told by Smythe that her associates are going to kidnap the judge's husband. Is the lawyer

morally obligated to warn the authorities? If taking this approach, be sure to focus on cases that are not obvious. For example, arguing that a lawyer should not walk up and tell the judge that her client is guilty would not be much of a paper. Also, it is preferable to stick to cases that are fairly plausible. For example, arguing that a lawyer should warn the authorities if his client told him she had planted twenty nuclear weapons in twenty major cities would not be much of a paper (although this could be used to argue that the principle is not absolute).

#9 Euthanasia

While not as common as ethics textbooks would indicate, there are cases in which a person is in terrible pain and wishes to die. There are also cases in which the body is so badly damaged or so defective that it cannot live without artificial support. And there are also cases in which a person wishes to die but is unwilling to kill himself (killing yourself would be suicide).

Issue: Is euthanasia morally acceptable?

Related issues: If euthanasia is acceptable, are there moral limits on the conditions under which it is acceptable?

Hints

Arguing that it is acceptable: A common approach is to argue that allowing euthanasia creates more benefits than harms by reducing the amount of pain and suffering. For example, on utilitarian grounds, reducing the pain by allowing the person to die (or killing him/her) would be good, since the total pain would be reduced. The task would be to defend this view. Another approach is to argue for the value of human dignity and that being kept alive on a machine is an undignified existence. The task would be arguing that the right to have a dignified existence overrides the principle that requires people to stay alive. Another approach is to argue that just as people have a right to life, they also have a right to death. The task would be to argue for this right,

Arguing that it is unacceptable: One common approach is to argue that allowing euthanasia would have consequences that would be both negative and serious. For example, people have argued that this would reduce the respect for life. The task is to present the negative consequences and show that they justify rejecting euthanasia on moral grounds. Another common approach is to argue that killing people or allowing them to die is always wrong. One way to do this is to argue that life has absolute worth or that people are obligated to remain alive regardless of the quality of their life. It can also be argued that people have a right to life and this right overrides other moral considerations, such as reducing their pain.

Limits: It is common for people to accept euthanasia in some cases while rejecting it as immoral in others. The general task here would be to consider and defend the limits of permissibility. One way to focus the paper would be to consider a particular type of situation in which euthanasia would (or would not) be permissible. For example, you might focus on the type of situation in which a person will live for quite some time, but be in terrible pain or drugged into a stupor most or all the time. Another way to focus the

paper would be to consider who should, morally, make the decision regarding euthanasia. If you take one of these approaches, be sure to pick reasonable and plausible types of situations. For example, arguing that people cannot have a family member put to death against her wishes so they can inherit her wealth would not be much of a paper.

#10 Cyber Vigilantes

The development of peer-to-peer networks has allowed internet users to swap files with each other in an easy and convenient manner. As should come as no surprise, a fair number of the swapped files (typically music and movie files) are exchanged in violation of copyright laws. Unlike the famous Napster case, there is no main organization for law enforcement officials to target, only a multitude of users linked in networks.

In response to this situation a member of the United States Congress, Howard Berman, has proposed a bill that will allow copyright holders to attack, via computer hacking, computers owned by those who violate (or allegedly violate) such copyrights. Such attacks could involve infecting the copyrighted files with viruses designed to make them useless or inserting programs to track the use of files to make sure the copyright is not violated. There are, of course, some restrictions: the US Department of Justice must be notified of such an attack, the attacks must be limited to those engaged in copyright violations and must cause no more than \$50 in damage. While this proposed law seems to be clearly intended to benefit the major players in the entertainment industry, it would open the hacking door to anyone who holds a copyright.

While the legal issues will be settled in the courts, the moral issues still remain.

Issue: Is it morally acceptable for a copyright holder to hack the computers of those who violate his/her copyright?

Related Issues: Is there a moral limit on the extent to which the copyright holder can attack the copyright violator by hacking? Are there moral limits on the conditions under which a copyright holder should be permitted to engage in retributive hacking?

Hints

Arguing that such hacking is acceptable: One way to argue is to make use of John Locke's theory of rights. He claims that in the state of nature people are permitted to judge their own cases and seek retribution against those who have done them wrong because there is no higher authority to resolve these cases. The main task would be to argue that the situation on the internet is like the state of nature in that there is no higher authority to resolve conflicts.

Another way to argue that it is acceptable is to argue for a moral right to defend one's rightful property. This could be done by arguing via an analogy to self-defense or using an analogy to cases of property defense that are acceptable.

A third way to argue would be to take a consequentialist approach and argue that allowing this would create more benefits than harms.

Arguing that such hacking is not acceptable: Locke argues that when people leave the state of nature and enter into political society, they give up their right to punish others and seek retribution. This right is transferred to the state which is to act on behalf of its

citizens. Thus, private citizens do not have the right to launch such attacks. The task is to argue for this.

Another way to argue for this view is to make use of an analogy between cyber vigilantism and other type of vigilante activities. For example, most people believe that is not morally acceptable for the victim of a theft to break into the thief's home or for people to simply shoot down an alleged murderer without a trial.

A third way to argue for this position is to consider the consequences if such hacking were morally acceptable. If a company can hack individuals' computers to right perceived wrongs, individuals could hack into company, individual and government computers for the same reason. Would this be a step backwards into the moral equivalent of a digital wild west? Another consequence worth considering is the potential harm to innocent people. A case could be made that such hacking is likely to target innocent people by accident or otherwise harm them. For example, if a company damages a peer to peer network to deny the sharing of illegal files it also denies people the ability to share legal files.

Limits on hacking: In addition to focusing on a yes/no approach, it is also reasonable to address the matter of the degree of hacking that might be permissible. One approach is to argue that the hacking damage should be proportional. Locke claims that retribution in the state of nature must be proportional to damage suffered and within the limits of reason and conscience. If you agree, the task would be to support this view. One way to argue for this is to consider the claim that retribution that is out of proportion would not lead to a deterrence of future theft but instead to retaliatory attacks. If you disagree, the task would be to argue against it. One way to this would be argue that extreme retribution would serve as a deterrent to others, thus reducing the amount of wrongdoing.

#11 Those Who Walk Away From Omelas

Ursula Le Guin wrote the classic science fiction tale "Those Who Walk Away from Omelas." In this tale, Omelas is a perfect city: everyone is happy, healthy and well adjusted. There is no war, no crime, and no hatred there. But, this utopia comes with a price: the happy state of all the other inhabitants rests on the unceasing misery of a child locked in a foul basement, resting in its own waste. All the inhabitants know of this child and know that their bliss depends on its misery. At some point in their lives, some inhabitants go see the child, so they know full well the price that is paid for their joy. After seeing the child, most go back to their normal existences, appreciating them even more. Others grow quiet and leave the city, never to return.

Of course, there is no Omelas. Yet, this story, like most great science fiction stories, raises a point about our world. The citizens of the industrialized world are able to have and enjoy their luxuries in large part due to the exploitation of others. Much of the clothing worn by Westerners is made in sweatshops in the third world or even within the West. Most of the electronics Westerners buy are produced cheaply by underpaid labor. Much of the gas burned in SUVs comes from countries with repressive regimes. Their exploitation and suffering enables Western nations to enjoy the highest standards of living in the world. The West, and America in particular is like Omelas, and much of the rest of the world is like the child in the dark, foul basement.

Issue: Is it morally acceptable for America and other first world nations to prosper by exploiting others? More personally, is it morally acceptable for you as an individual to benefit from the exploitation of others?

Alternative Issue: If you believe that such exploitation is wrong, what should you do about it? Are you obligated to merely avoid benefiting from such exploitation? Are you obligated to actively protest against such exploitation? Or, might you be obligated to actively fight such exploitation?

Hints

Arguing that it is acceptable: One way to defend this view is argue from the perspective of ethical egoism. This is the view that right and wrong is defined in terms of what is beneficial or harmful to the individual in question. On this view, exploiting others for your own benefit would be acceptable. The main task lies in arguing why your needs and desires outweigh those of others, thus justifying the exploitation. A second way to defend this view is to argue from the “might makes right” perspective. Thomas Hobbes claims, roughly, that being able to establish dominion over others gives one the right to do so. The main task lies in arguing that might does, in fact, make right.

Arguing that it is unacceptable: One way to defend this view is to do so on utilitarian grounds. Utilitarianism, as presented by J.S. Mill, is the view that actions are right if they promote happiness and wrong if they lead to unhappiness. For him, the happiness and unhappiness of everyone matters. Thus, if the suffering of those exploited outweighs the happiness created by their exploitation, then it would be wrong to exploit them. The main task involves showing that we should take into account the suffering of others and not just our own benefits. A second way to defend this view is to do so on the basis that it violates human rights or worth for them to be exploited in the manner. John Locke and other thinkers argued that people have a right to life, liberty and property while Immanuel Kant claimed that people must be respected as ends and not just used as means. The main task is persuading the reader that people have such rights and showing how exploitation violates them.

#12 Killing in War

If you were to kill your neighbors because they provoked you, because you wanted their property, or you believed they were “up to something” it would be regarded as murder and as morally wrong. However, if you get a large number of people together in uniforms and have your leader say the magic words “I declare war”, then what was once murder often becomes acceptable.

While war crimes are recognized, one soldier killing another is regarded as morally acceptable as long as the rules of war are not violated. While many people regard this as perfectly natural, some people regard this as odd-why should dressing up in a uniform and officially telling people you are going to kill them make it acceptable?

Issue: Is killing in time of war morally acceptable, provided the general rules of war are followed?

Hints

Arguing that it is acceptable: One way to argue that it is acceptable is to use an analogy to boxing. Randomly punching people on the street would be like the case of murdering the neighbors. War would be like a boxing match. The task is to complete the analogy to show that they are relevantly similar. A second way to argue is based on the right of self-defense. The common soldier does not decide policy and is put into a kill or be killed situation. The task is arguing how the right of self defense makes the killing morally acceptable.

Arguing that it is unacceptable: One way to argue that it is unacceptable is to develop the initial analogy between war and the murder of the neighbors. The task here would be arguing that the situations are analogous and that the uniforms, the declaration of war, etc. are not morally relevant. Another option is to build an argument based on rights. To be specific, it can be argued that killing in war violates the right to life. The task would be to argue for this. Locke addresses cases of just killing and examining what he has to say might prove useful. A third option is to appeal to the consequences. It could be argued, for example, that the view that killing in war is morally acceptable helps war continue to be viewed as a morally acceptable activity, thus resulting in injuries, death and destruction.

#13 Biomimicry

Biomimicry, a term popularized by Janine Benyus, refers to the field of finding solutions to problems by mimicking aspects of nature. Some types of biomimicry are entirely uncontroversial. For example, the invention of Velcro was inspired by burrs sticking to a dog. Other types of biomimicry raise serious moral questions. For example, scientists who work for Nexia have genetically modified goats so that they can produce spider silk in their milk. The company hopes to be able gather the liquid silk and then, with the technological help of the U.S. Army, weave the silk into threads for a variety of applications. Other types of biomimicry involve similar types of genetic modifications and it is these cases that raise the most serious moral concerns.

Issue: Is the controversial form of biomimicry morally acceptable?

Hints

Arguing that it is acceptable: One way to argue for the morality of biomimicry is to contend that its potential benefits morally outweigh its potential harms. For example, you could make an argument based on the view that the products of biomimicry have the potential to do a great deal of good. For example, it is hoped that the artificial spider silk threads could be used in a process by which replacement human ligaments could be grown. A second way to argue for this view is to argue that it is a mere extension of what has been morally acceptable for centuries—the modification of living creatures by humans. For example, it could be argued that biomimicry is no more immoral than the breeding of the Australian sheep dog.

Arguing that it is unacceptable: It can be argued that such modifications might pose a danger. While it is unlikely that any science fiction style monsters will be spawned by such experiments and run amok, such genetic modifications could create organisms that pose risks to humans. For example, natural bacteria are bad enough and modified bacteria could be a very serious health risk. The main task would be showing the possibility of such harms and arguing that they outweigh the potential benefits. A second approach is to argue that modifying such animals is a wrong to the animals. This can be done by appealing to the consequences of such modifications or perhaps by appealing to a right not to be modified in this manner. Another approach is to focus once again on the potential consequences to humans. It could be argued that by coming to regard living creatures not only as commodities but as commodities to be freely altered to suit our whims, humanity will be damaged. The task is to identify the harm and argue why it would outweigh the potential benefits of biomimicry.

#14 Cloning

Cloning, long a staple in science fiction, became a reality with the cloning of the famous sheep. Even before this success in the field, cloning had been subject to debates over its morality. Such debates are often muddled because people lump together a variety of issues and treat them as more or less the same. However, due consideration of the issue of cloning requires selecting a particular issue and focusing on it. Hence, this case actually includes multiple issues. However, you only need to select one to focus on.

Scientific Cloning Animals: The earliest artificial cloning was purely scientific-the goal was to simply prove that it was possible. Additional experiments are being conducted in cloning, but one planned scientific use is to create “duplicate” animals for controlled experiments. When conducting controlled experiments it is important to keep the experimental group (which is exposed to the cause) and the control group (which is not exposed to the cause) as similar as possible. It is argued that the use of such animals would greatly benefit research in medicine.

Issue: Is the cloning of animals for scientific purposes morally acceptable?

Arguing that it is acceptable: One way to argue that animals should be cloned for testing purposes is to use a consequentialist argument. The main task would be to present the harms of this activity, present the benefits, and then argue that the benefits morally outweigh the harms. This would require some research into the topic-simply presenting the usual vague claim that research would be beneficial would not be adequate.

*Arguing that it is unacceptable :*The consequentialist approach can also be taken on the negative side. In this case, the task would be to argue that the harms morally outweigh the benefits. There are also other approaches that can be taken, such as arguing that cloning is immoral in this case regardless of the consequences. It is also possible to argue from a rights based position. In this case the goal would be to argue that animals have a right not to be cloned even when such cloning might be beneficial.

Cloning for Replacement Parts: Organ transplants have been possible for quite some time, but there are still two problems that remain. First, there are rarely enough organs available for those who need them. Second, there is the problem of rejection—the human body will often treat foreign tissue as an infection and attempt to destroy it. Cloning, it is alleged, can provide a solution to both problems. Replacement parts could be cloned as needed and since they would be the same as the original, rejection would not be a problem. Despite this medical potential of cloning, moral controversy still remains.

Issue: Is it morally acceptable to use cloning to create replacement organs?

Arguing that it is acceptable: One obvious way to argue that such cloning should take place is by appealing to the benefits and arguing that they outweigh potential harms. For example, heart attack is a leading cause of death and many people could be saved by the use of cloned hearts. One way to make a strong case is to use statistical evidence regarding deaths due to a lack of organs to show the extent of the benefits.

Arguing that it is unacceptable: One way to argue that such cloning would be immoral would be to take a consequentialist approach and argue that the harms would outweigh the benefits. Some harms to consider include the following: It could be argued that such benefits, unlike the traditional donor system, would be available primarily to the wealthy. It could also be argued that growing such replacement organs would somehow lead to the devaluation of human life, producing harmful consequences. One task would be showing why these are harms and why such harms would outweigh the benefits.

Cloning for Reproduction: Although there are a variety of methods of dealing with reproductive problems, modern science has a new option available: cloning. One suggested use is that in cases in which a person is sterile or otherwise unable or unwilling to engage in “traditional” reproduction he or she can “reproduce” by being cloned. There is even a precedent in nature—some living creatures reproduce via natural cloning.

Issue: Is it morally acceptable to use cloning for reproduction?

Arguing that it is acceptable: This can be argued by appealing to the consequences. The task is to show that allowing such reproduction would create more morally relevant benefits than harms. Another way to argue for this is to appeal to a right of reproduction and argue that this sort of cloning is acceptable because it allows that right to be exercised (and a right that cannot be exercised is no right at all).

Arguing that it is unacceptable: This can also be argued by taking the consequentialist approach. In this case the task would be to show that the harms of allowing this would outweigh the benefits. There are religious arguments against this procedure, but such arguments would need to be modified to serve as moral arguments. It could also be argued that regardless of the consequences, this practice would be wrong—the task is to show why.

Cloning to Preserve or Multiply “the Best”: One common theme in science fiction is the use of cloning to attempt to preserve the best (or worst, depending on your perspective) people after they have died. For example, the film *The Boys From Brazil* was about the cloning of Hitler. A related theme is the use of cloning to create large numbers of desirable individuals, For example, the idea of cloning the best soldiers to produce a formidable army is one that has been explored numerous times in science fiction (long before *The Attack of the Clones*).

Issue: Is it morally acceptable to use cloning to recreate or multiply individuals.

Arguing that it is acceptable: Once again, the consequentialist approach is a reasonable one to take. The task would be to present the potential benefits and argue that they outweigh the potential harms. For example, if it were possible to recreate people like Einstein, Gandhi, Socrates, Martin Luther King, Galileo, then society would be able to reap the benefits of their contributions over and over again. Cloning the best teachers would enable all schools to benefit rather than just a few. A fairly extreme approach is one that is taken in Frank Herbert’s *Destination Void*. Clones of brilliant and capable people are created to work on a very dangerous project. Since “clones are property”, using them in this manner was seen as morally acceptable. The task would be to argue for this view.

Arguing that it is unacceptable: This can be argued by considering the consequences-in this case the task would be to show that the potential harms would outweigh the potential benefits in a way that is morally relevant. For example, it could be argued that such cloning would consume resources that would be better used elsewhere. This would be made more effective by arguing that the cloning might not produce individuals that have the desirable qualities of the original-even identical twins raised in the same conditions turn out differently. Another approach is to focus on the potential misuse of such cloning-for example, what if followers of Hussein, Hitler, Stalin or Bush were able to clone their leader? Another argument that has been used is that such duplication somehow harms the original individual by diminishing his/her uniqueness. It is also possible to argue that this practice would be wrong regardless of the consequences-the task would be to prove this. Another argument, which has appeared in science fiction, is that such cloning would result in a form of slavery-the clones would be created and forced to serve, as in the Herbert story. Another consideration is that the clones might be forced to pursue the same sort of life as the original, even if they did not want to. It could be argued that this would violate the clone’s rights (“clones are people, too”).

#15 Fetal Tissue and Research

While stem cell research has been grabbing headlines in recent years, researchers have been using fetal tissue in research for quite some time. From a scientific standpoint, studying the tissue has advanced research in cell growth and has suggested some possible treatments for various diseases and conditions, most famously Alzheimer’s disease.

Fetal tissue is typically acquired by researchers from companies that handle its distribution or directly from abortion clinics and gynecologists. The courts will no doubt

be wrangling over the legal issues for quite some time, but the morality of such practices needs to be assessed as well.

Issue: Is the use of fetal tissue in research morally acceptable?

Hints

Arguing that it is acceptable: Proponents of such research focus on its potential benefits and contend that they outweigh other moral concerns. For example, they point to the possibility of developing cures for terrible and debilitating diseases as well as treatments for crippling injuries. The task is to show that such benefits outweigh the potential harms. Part of this argument often involves pointing out that 1) since the fetuses are dead already they cannot be harmed further and 2) it is better that some good come from their deaths rather than just destroying the tissue. Another way to argue is to draw an analogy between fetal tissue and donated organs/bodies. It is considered morally acceptable for people to leave their bodies and organs for research. The task would be to develop the analogy.

Arguing that it is unacceptable: Opponents of such research focus on its potential harms. One alleged harm is that doing such research will impair our respect for human life and lead us to engage in worse practices. A second alleged harm is that women will be encouraged to have more abortions so the fetal tissue can be sold. Another common approach is to employ anti-abortion arguments to argue against the tissue being available in the first place. Other arguments are not explicitly anti-abortion but focus on showing that it is wrong for the aborted fetus to be used for research. One way to argue is to contend that the fetal tissue deserves a proper burial and that such research fails to show the dead proper respect (and, of course, the fetus could not give permission that it be used in such research).

#16 Drug Pricing

Developing, creating and distributing drugs can be fairly expensive and it is generally accepted that drug companies have a right to profit from their efforts. However, in recent years it has been claimed that certain drug companies have been overcharging for their products in order to make even greater profits, often at the expense of people who are very sick. For some drugs, such as the AIDS treatment AZT, many people who need them the most can least afford to pay the prices the companies charge. In response, people have argued that the companies should, at the very least, reduce the costs in order to make the drugs more readily available to those who need them. Some even claim that in certain cases the drugs should be distributed at cost (or even for free). The companies counter that they have a right to recoup their expenses and make a profit for their shareholders.

Issue: Is it morally acceptable for drug companies to charge as much as they can get away with in order to maximize profits?

Hints

Arguing that it is acceptable: One approach is to argue that the long-term benefits outweigh the potential harms. While some people might not be able to afford the existing drugs, the extra profits will encourage and enable the companies to develop more drugs that will alleviate a great deal of human suffering in the long run. Since drug companies are motivated by profit and not the goodness of their hearts, bringing about the best results for the greatest number requires allowing them to maximize profits. Another approach is to argue that drug companies are like any other business and that they have the moral right to charge whatever the market will sustain. The task here is to argue for such a right. Another approach is to argue that we should not expect any more from companies than we do from individuals. For example, it would be very nice if you, instead of working for money, simply worked for free to benefit the poor and the sick. However, most people think they have no obligation to do this. The task would be to support this view and make the analogy between the individual and the company.

Arguing that it is unacceptable: A moderate approach is to argue that the harms of allowing companies to maximize profits exceeds the benefits they would gain. The task would be to show that companies can still make a reasonable profit while making the drugs available at a reasonable price. A more extreme approach would be to argue that the companies are obligated to provide such drugs even if they would make no profit at all. This could be done by taking a consequentialist approach and contending that the general good would be better served. Another approach is to argue that the drug companies are obligated to help sick people if they can. If you take this position, one thing to consider might be the difference between drugs and other consumer products.

#17 Dead Drivers

The use of crash test dummies to improve design of automobiles has dramatically increased their safety over the years. However, developing effective dummies requires getting accurate data about the effects of crashes on the human body. Not surprisingly, the way to get the most accurate data is to use human cadavers in tests. Such research has been conducted, but under fairly strict conditions, such as requiring that proper consent be required and that the tests would provide data that other tests could not provide. Of course, the use of cadavers has raised moral concerns.

Issue: Is it morally acceptable to use human cadavers as crash test dummies?

Hints

Arguing that it is acceptable: One way to argue for using cadavers in crash tests is one based on the consequences. The task is to show that such testing will produce results that will reduce or prevent injuries and save lives and, hence, that the testing is morally acceptable. Proponents of such testing can draw an analogy between such testing and donating one's organs for transplantation-both involve using the dead to help the living. It can also be argued that the benefits easily outweigh the harms. The cadavers are dead, so they cannot be harmed any further. Using them in testing will make vehicles safer, thus reducing the number of injuries and deaths.

Arguing that it is unacceptable: One way to argue that such testing is immoral is to argue that it would have negative consequences that outweigh the benefits. For example, it could be argued that such testing will diminish the respect people hold for the dead. The task would be to show that this harm would morally outweigh the benefits. Another way to argue is that it is simply wrong to use cadavers even if there are benefits to doing so. One way to do this is to argue that the dead have a right to respect and that this use is disrespectful. Not surprisingly, some religious groups have opposed the use of cadavers in such testing. The task would be to convert such religious arguments to moral arguments.

#18 Gender Restricted Organizations

Feminists and others have argued for years against policies and practices that exclude women from organizations such as clubs, business groups and gyms. While one previously male-only bastion has fallen after another in the face of the feminist onslaught, ironically a new type of gender-restriction has received the blessing of many feminists. This is, of course, policies and practices that exclude men from women-only organizations.

The most common example of this sort of organization is the women-only gym or fitness center. An increasing number of gyms are open to women only and, of course, men are not permitted to join or use the facilities. Proponents claim that women need a place to work out away from the stares of men. Opponents claim that discrimination is discrimination whether it is against men or women. No doubt lawyers will soon be making a lot of money dealing with such cases.

Issue: Are gender-restricted organizations immoral?

Hints

Arguing that it is acceptable: One way to argue that such restrictions are acceptable is to build an argument based on the consequences. For example, it could be argued that allowing women a place to work out away from the ogling of men will permit women to work out who would not do so at an open gym. Men are not harmed, it could be argued, because they have plenty of gyms where they can work out and even gawk at women. Another approach is to argue that each sex has the right to places where its members can go and be free of the opposite sex. This could also be argued on consequentialist grounds and the task would be showing that the benefits outweigh any potential harms. A third way to argue would be to build a case on the claim that there are relevant differences between men and women that justify a difference in treatment. For example, it might be claimed that while men do not feel oppressed or uncomfortable when being stared at by women, the same is not true of women who have been conditioned by society to be very body conscious. The task would be showing why this difference is relevant and justifies the difference in treatment.

Arguing that it is unacceptable: One method of arguing against such restrictions is to focus on the moral consequences. The main task would be to show that such restrictions

would create more harm than benefits and then support the claim that such restrictions are immoral. One way to do this would be to argue that allowing discrimination against men sets a precedent for discrimination against others and this would, ironically, make it easier to roll back the advances made by women and minorities. Another approach is to appeal to the principles of equality and relevant difference. The main goal would be to show that men and women are not relevantly different and that such restrictions against men are not morally justifiable. Another approach, used to argue for permitting women into previously male-only institutions, is the rights based approach. It could be argued that men and women have a right to equal treatment, hence the exclusion of men is immoral.

#19 Executive Salaries

Top company executives can receive incomes and benefits that give them an effective salary many times that of the average employee. Japanese executives typically receive salaries that might be up to twenty times that of the typical Japanese worker. Top American executives can take home paychecks that are two hundred times that of the typical American worker. The executives claim that the burden of their jobs and the value they contribute to the company justifies their huge paychecks. Others claim that this is not true. Some argue that even if they do contribute that much value to the company, the chasm between the paychecks is not justifiable. Another factor that comes into consideration is that many companies close plants or cut workers' salaries while preserving or even increasing the money received by the top executives. Such salary differences are perfectly legal, but the morality of such disparity is a matter of concern.

Issue: Is the disparity between executive and worker salaries morally justifiable?

Arguing that it is acceptable: One option is to develop the defense used by the executives, namely that they deserve their salaries because of the burdens they carry and the profits they generate. The tasks here would be to argue that the executives bear such burdens and generate such profits and then argue that this is a morally relevant difference. Another approach is to argue that since companies are privately owned and operated it is entirely up to them how much they pay. Workers that do not like the pay they receive are free to join another company or start their own. It can also be argued that the economy is open to competition and hence the difference is fair. An analogy could be drawn to sports. For example, a runner that trains hard takes home more trophies from meets and races than a runner that does not train as hard, yet this is fair because the opportunities are equal.

Arguing that it is unacceptable: A straightforward approach is to argue that the burdens endured and value generated by the executives does not justify them receiving such huge salaries. One way to do this is to show that the executive is not, for example, equivalent in productivity to two-hundred or even twenty employees. The next step would be to apply the principle of relevant difference and conclude that the executive is not morally entitled to such a large salary. Another approach is to argue against the large salaries by appealing to the consequences. The task would be to show that the disparity creates harms that outweigh its benefits and that this is morally relevant. One harm might be that

such disparity wastes company resources and can cause the company to fail, creating a great deal of harm. Another harm is that such disparity creates a class gap that is inconsistent with democracy or that such a gap can lead to social unrest and anger that would be harmful.

#20 Disrespect of Women in Media

Feminists and others have pointed out that the media is full of content that is disrespectful to women. Some music lyrics refer to women in insulting terms and glorify the use of women as mere sexual objects. Music videos send the same message, only with the addition of a visual element. Most explicitly, pornography presents women in a degrading light and as mere sexual objects.

In reply, people often cite the right of freedom of speech, say the problem is exaggerated or, very bluntly, say that is just the way things are.

Issue: Is the treatment of women in the media immoral?

Hints

Focus: This issue is extremely broad. Hence, writing an effective paper will probably require selecting a more narrow focus. For example, the paper might focus on the portrayal of women in certain types of music videos and argue that this is immoral. A paper might even focus on the morality of a particular work, such as a song or movie. Also, be sure to select a reasonable thesis. Arguing that it is morally acceptable for women to appear as clothing models in a JC Penney catalog would not be much of a paper.

Arguing that it is morally acceptable: One way to argue that it is acceptable is to argue that the negative consequences are outweighed by the positive benefits. For example, songs, movies and magazines that are regarded as degrading to women often sell very well. Not only does this show that money is made from such things it also seems to indicate that people enjoy such things. The task would be to show that the harms are outweighed by the profits and enjoyment experienced by the audience. Another option is to argue that such media does not cause the perceived harms and hence there is no basis for arguing that it is unacceptable. Historical research might be useful. For example, if media caused such mistreatment of women, then women should have been better treated in the past. After all, the amount and variety of such media existing today is unmatched in human history. Yet, women enjoy more rights and better treatment now than in the past. The task would be to make the moral argument. A final approach would be to argue on the basis of rights. Defenders of such media always refer to the legal rights spelled out in the 1st Amendment. Since legal rights do not entail moral rights without an argument, you would need to argue that people have the moral rights to create and view such works (and that this right overrides other moral concerns).

Arguing that it is morally unacceptable: One general approach is to focus on the harms produced by such portrayals and use these harms to build a moral argument. Feminists have been arguing this for years, so there is vast amount of studies and statistical evidence connecting, for example, pornography and violence. The task is to show harms

are produced by the portrayals and then make the moral argument supporting the claim that they are immoral. A second general approach is to set aside the consequences and focus instead on human rights or human dignity. In this case the task would be to show that women have a right to be portrayed in a respectful manner. Another approach is to reverse the situation and build an argument from that perspective. For example, would men find it acceptable if the media bludgeoned them with images and words saying they are stupid, grunting swine suitable only for opening jars and taking out the trash? The task would be to develop the argument.

#21 Spam

Anyone who has an email account is familiar with spam-the unwanted, unasked for email that typically offers, among other things, dubious products, pyramid schemes, scams, medicines, “asset” enhancers and pornography. Laying aside moral questions about the content of spam, there is the question of the morality of spam itself.

Issue: Is sending email spam morally acceptable?

Hints

Arguing that it is acceptable: One way to provide a defense of the morality of spamming is to argue that it is analogous to printed mail advertising. The task would include making the analogy and arguing that printed mail advertising is morally acceptable. A second defense is to argue that the spammers have a right to make money which makes the practice of spamming morally acceptable. A third way to argue for spam being acceptable is to contend that even if spam is annoying, the harm done is so small as to be outweighed by the spammer’s gain.

Arguing that it is unacceptable: One way to argue that spamming is morally unacceptable is to use the notion of cumulative harm. The general idea is that the individual harms are not taken as distinct but rather as a sum and this sum of harm is what is used when considering the consequences. Not all harms are cumulative in this way so an argument would be needed to convince the reader that the harm of spam is cumulative. The main argument would be aimed at showing that spamming is immoral because its harms outweigh its benefits. A second way to argue against the spammer is to counter the claim that the spammer has the right to make money. One way to do this is to consider that rights are generally regarded as having degrees. For example, a person’s moral right to free expression does not allow him the right to yell “I’ve got SARs ...cough cough!” in a crowded airplane. The task would be to argue that people have a relevant right (such as the right to not be annoyed) that overrides the spammer’s right to make money.

#22 Cheating in a Relationship

It is generally accepted that people should remain faithful when they are married, engaged or in some other type of serious relationship. But, of course, temptations and opportunities to cheat do arise.

Issue: Is it morally acceptable to cheat when one is in a serious relationship?

Hints

Focus: Since there are so many different potential cheating situations it is a good idea to focus the paper on a specific sort of situation. However, the situation addressed should be general enough to make a relevant paper and the situation should have a reasonable degree of controversy. A not so great topic would be addressing whether it is acceptable for a person to cheat without protection with someone known to have AIDS and then intentionally infect his/her partner just for the heck of it. A good topic would be the idea of revenge cheating-is it acceptable to cheat in retaliation?

Arguing that it is morally acceptable: One way to argue that it is acceptable is to appeal to the consequences. The task would be to show that in such a case the benefits would outweigh the harms. For example, it could be argued that as long as due caution is taken in regards to disease, pregnancy and secrecy and both people have a really good, guilt free time, then the cheating would be acceptable. Another way to argue for cheating being permissible would be to consider the case of revenge cheating. It might be argued that the initial misdeed must be paid back or balanced.

Arguing that it is morally unacceptable: One method is to appeal to the negative consequences of cheating and then showing their moral relevance. For example, some relevant potential harms would be disease, pregnancy, and the emotional suffering of the other person. Another approach is to focus on the commitment that was made. For example, cheating would be breaking an agreement. The task would be to show why this would be wrong.

#23 Men, Women and Education

Professor Sum of Northeastern University has argued that steps need to be taken to deal with the lack of gender equity in America. What makes Sum unusual is that he believes that it is men who are in need and not women. The philosopher Christina Hoff Summers has also argued along similar lines in her book, *The War Against Boys*.

The statistics are fairly straightforward: Women make up roughly 51% of the population. 58% of the students enrolled in community colleges are women while 61% of the graduates are women. In 1977 for every 100 men receiving a bachelor's degree there were 86 women, In 2002, there were 133 women for every 100 men. In 1977 for every 100 men who received a masters' degree there were 89 women, In 2002, for every 100 men there are 138 women. Men still outnumber women in doctorates, however.

The situation is even more extreme when one considers the plight of minority men. For example, for every 100 African American males earning a bachelor's degree there are 192 women. The proportions are roughly the same for Hispanics and Native Americans.

Issue: Is the gender gap morally acceptable? If not, is there a moral obligation to rectify the disparity?

Hints

Arguing that it is acceptable: One method of arguing that it is acceptable is to claim that while the disparity exists, it is not unfair and hence there is no need to rectify it. The task would be show that it is not unfair. One way to do this would be to argue that the men bring about the disparity by their own actions. For example, it has been claimed that women tend to be more serious about school while men tend to goof off and focus more on parties, friends and women. As another example, perhaps more men simply choose not to go to or complete college. The next step is to make the moral case. One way to do this is by an analogy to running. Runners who train seriously make up a disproportionate number of the top finishers, but this is not unfair. The task here would be to make the analogy between the two types of disparities. Another method of arguing and a fairly controversial one is to argue that the disparity is acceptable because it is making up for centuries of disparity that was not in women's favor. A milder argument would be that a short-term disparity is needed to level out the playing field until past disparities are rectified. The task here would be to provide a moral justification. An even more extreme position would be to argue that women are simply more capable and more intelligent than men and hence the disparity is natural and unavoidable.

Arguing that it is unacceptable: One way to argue that is not acceptable is to argue that the disparity is the result of unfair advantages held by women. Part of the task would involve showing that such advantages exist and that they are morally relevant. In regards to the first part of the task, some evidence can be found in publications such as the *Directory of Financial Aids for Women 1999-2001*. This publication lists 1,700 funding programs that are available only to women and there is not a comparable male-only system in place. Thus, women receive an unfair financial advantage. Another factor worth considering would be the existence of a campus environment hostile to men. There are approximately 300,000 women's studies courses, with 700 majors/minors available. No comparable male-studies program exist (although some feminists claim that the rest of academics is dedicated to men). Further, men are typically forced to undergo sensitivity training that seems based on the assumption that all men are prone to questionable behavior. Thus, it could be claimed that such an environment that turns away men. The second part of the task would be to make the moral case. One way to approach this would be use an analogy to running. If some runners were given extra money to buy better shoes, training and food while the other runners were actually harassed, then this would be unfair. A second method of argumentation is to focus on the consequences of the disparity. For example: As a matter of fact women prefer to avoid marrying less educated men and, in America at least, women tend to marry members of their own ethnic group. This means that there will be an increasing number of unmarried men and women. Unmarried men are more likely to become criminals and are less likely to be stable members of society. There might also be an increase in single parent homes, which could prove harmful. Naturally, it would need to be argued that these harms make the disparity immoral and that it should be rectified. A final way to argue is to appeal to the principle of relevant difference. If it can be shown (as above) that women are receiving advantages simply for being women and that this is not morally relevant, then such disparity would be immoral.

#24 Ownership of Organisms

While people have owned individual animals throughout human history it is only recently that people (or companies) have claimed ownership over entire types of organisms. For example, companies that have genetically engineered certain bacteria have patented these organisms, thus establishing that they are the legal owners of the being. While the courts will settle the legal issues, the morality of such ownership is a matter of controversy.

Issue: Is it morally acceptable for individuals or organizations to own organisms? If so, what are the moral limits of such ownership?

Hints

Arguing that it is acceptable: One way to argue that it is acceptable is to build an argument based on the positive moral consequences of such ownership. One way to do this is to argue that by allowing patents on living creatures, individuals and companies are encouraged to engage in research that can and has created benefits for humanity. Without the possibility of ownership, companies would hardly be likely to invest the time and resources needed to create them. A second way to argue is to support a right of ownership. One way to do this is to draw an analogy between the creation of a new organism and another new product, like a car or computer program, in which ownership is not controversial. The main task would be to develop the analogy and show that organisms are relevantly similar to such products.

Arguing that it is unacceptable: One method of arguing that such ownership is unacceptable is to appeal to the potential harmful consequences. One way to do this is to argue that allowing such ownership can lead to the ownership of more complex organisms, perhaps even intelligent organisms. Of course, the connection would need to be drawn to avoid falling into the slippery slope fallacy (in this fallacy it is assumed, without argument, that one thing will inevitably lead to another-usually something bad). Another option is to use the fact that such ownership encourages the development of more organisms as an argument against allowing such ownership. One way to do this would be to argue that this could lead to a great deal of competition in the field, leading to corner cutting in safety procedures and more extreme research and this could lead to grave consequences. The task would be to make this case. A third approach is to argue that ownership of organisms is wrong regardless of the consequences. One area to look for inspiration is in arguments against the ownership of human beings. The main challenge would be applying these to non-human organisms.

Limits: Rather than arguing for a general yes/no position, it is possible to focus the paper more specifically. For example, one approach might be to argue that the ownership of simple organisms, such as bacteria, is acceptable but that owning more complex animals, such as modified mice or monkeys is not acceptable. The main task here would be to show that there is a morally relevant difference between the organisms. One factor to consider would be that more complex organisms can experience pain and pleasure and hence, on J.S. Mill's grounds, they would have moral status.

#25 Stealing from the Company

Stealing from one's employer is a time-honored tradition. While most people regard major thefts as wrong, almost everyone believes that it is fine to take a few things home from work, such as binders, staplers and similar items. People also believe that it is okay to make use of employer's resources for personal use, such as printing resumes on the office laser printer or doing online shopping on the company's computers.

Issue: Is it morally acceptable to steal from the company? If so, what are the limits?

Hints

Arguing that theft is morally acceptable: One option is to use the traditional argument that small-scale "borrowing" is simply an unwritten job perk. The task here would be to support this claim and show that it is morally relevant. Another option is to argue that the employees are justified in cases in which the companies are large and wealthy. The argument could be based on the consequences. For example, it could be argued that the benefit the employee receives outweighs the damage done to the employer. A third option is to argue that the exploitation of workers (unpaid work, underpaid work, etc.,) justifies such theft-the workers are merely being their own Robin Hoods. The task would be to show that this is morally acceptable.

In regards to the "theft" of time, one option is to build an argument based on the fact that employees actually do more work at home than they do personal business at the office. Thus, the employees are not actually stealing since the company gets the full work out of them, just not in the office or during work hours. Naturally, in all cases there must be a focus on the morality.

Arguing that theft is not morally acceptable: It can be argued that such theft is wrong because of the harm it produces. The task would be to show the harms and argue that they are morally relevant. For example, every dollar stolen from the company is a dollar less in profits and this means less money for paychecks and the stockholders. Another option is to argue that stealing is wrong regardless of the consequences. One way to do this is to use an argument based on reversing the circumstances-surely the employee would see stealing from him to be wrong. If so, consistency would require that stealing from the company be considered wrong as well.

Limits: Another approach is to focus the paper on the moral limits of morally permissible theft. When writing the paper be sure to focus the discussion on a topic that provides ground for reasonable debate. For example, arguing that employees should not steal a factory's major equipment or that it is okay for employees to "steal" supplies they use to work at home would not be very good topics to choose. An example of a reasonable topic is arguing that employers should be allowed to steal to the degree that it compensates for their being underpaid or otherwise mistreated.

#26 Spying on the Employees

As discussed in the last case, employees often steal from their employers. Not surprisingly, most companies regard many of these activities as mere theft and consider them wrong. Some companies even take fairly dramatic steps to counter such activities,

such as forcing employees to track their time in ten-minute increments or installing software that monitors and records what each employee does on her computer.

Issue: What are the moral limits to an employer's efforts to reduce or eliminate theft?

Hints

Arguing about the Moral Limits: The main task here is to consider what limits morality sets on the employer's efforts to deter theft of resources and time. The best way to focus the paper would be to research a specific method of deterring such theft and consider whether it is morally acceptable or not. Be sure to focus on something that provides a reasonable basis for discussion. For example, addressing whether employers should be allowed to conduct cavity searches on employees and place cameras in their homes to see if they steal items from work would not make a very good paper. A paper about using software to record the employee's keystrokes on his/her work computer would be a reasonable paper.

Arguing that a method is acceptable: The first step is to describe the method. The second, and most important step is to assess its morality. One way of assessing a method is to show that its harms are exceeded by its benefits and that this is morally relevant. For example, one method of preventing employee theft of time is logging employee web activity to see if they are working, shopping, trying to find a date or viewing pornography. It can be argued that this method is acceptable because it does not violate the employee's right to privacy and that it is morally reasonable to expect that employees work when they are being paid. The main task would be to support these claims. A somewhat extreme approach is to argue that the company is morally justified in using any method they want, provided the employees are duly informed and it is in the contract. The main task here would be to support this position. One way to do this is to argue that if someone knowingly consents to a contract, they are obligated to stick to the contract. Another method is to focus on the consequences. For example, it could be argued that the employer is morally permitted to use means that legitimately prevent harm to the company. The task would be to support this.

Arguing that a method is not acceptable: The first step is to describe the method and the second is to provide a moral assessment. Examining the consequences of such methods can provide the basis of an effective argument. For example, it can be argued that a particular method, such as forcing employees to track their time in ten-minute increments, would harm both the employers and the employee by lowering morale and hence productivity. The main task would be to show how this connects to morality (as opposed to mere pragmatism). An approach commonly taken against computer based monitoring is that it violates the employee's privacy rights. The task would be to argue that, even at work, the employee has a moral right to privacy. Similarly, it could be argued that such monitoring is an attack on human dignity as it brands the employees as thieves and wrongdoers. Again, the main task is to address the morality.

#27 Equality in Athletics

In order to correct disparities between male and female sports teams laws were passed to bring about equality. While the goal of equality in sports is widely regarded as acceptable, there have been (hopefully) unintended consequences.

Some universities and colleges have, in order to balance the budgets, cut various men's programs. Ironically, the programs most often cut, such as track, golf, tennis and cross-country are sports that have long been open to women. Football, which is still almost entirely a male bastion, typically remains uncut. Because of this, men who would otherwise get to participate in college sports are denied the opportunity.

Further many schools have imposed rule regarding numerical parity. For example, many schools require that the number of male and female cross-country runners be equal. Typically more men want to run cross-country than women which means that some men are denied the opportunity to compete not because of a lack of determination or ability, but because they are men.

Issue: Is it morally acceptable to deny men the opportunity to participate in college sports in order to ensure equality?

Arguing that it is acceptable: One approach is to argue that the overall consequences for the whole outweigh any harms suffered by individual men. For example, while some men might be denied the opportunity to participate, this is a small price to pay for allowing more women to participate in sports. The task would be to present the benefits as well as a morally relevant argument that this justifies the practices. Another approach is to argue from the standpoint of equality-since women are 51% of the population, they are morally entitled to 51% of the resources. The task would be to support this claim. A more extreme approach would be to argue that the practice is acceptable even if it might be seen as unfair. One way to support this would be that the mistreatment of men would offset the years of mistreatment of women.

Arguing that it is unacceptable: One method is to focus on the negative consequences and argue that they outweigh the positive consequences. The task would be to present the consequences and provide the moral argument. Another method is to argue that such practices pervert the spirit of equality that such laws are based on. It can be argued that the moral goal of such laws is to ensure equal opportunity-that any women who want to participate and are capable of doing so should not be denied the opportunity simply because they are women. Consistent application of the principle would require that men be given the same opportunity. For example, if ten women and fifteen men qualified to run cross country and no qualified woman was denied the opportunity to participate simply because she was a women, there would be nothing wrong with this. The task would be to fully develop this argument.

#28 Allowing Species to Go Extinct

Every year many species become extinct. While the exact impact of human activity is a matter of debate, it is likely that human beings have played a direct or indirect role in some of these extinctions. In general, people tend to split into two camps. Some people believe that we are obligated to take steps to actively preserve threatened species and

keep them from going extinct. Other people believe that we are not obligated to take such action.

Issue: Are we morally obligated to take steps to prevent the extinction of threatened species?

Hints

Arguing that we are obligated: One option is to focus on the consequences of permitting such extinctions and to argue that the harm generated by such extinctions morally outweighs the advantages. It is possible to focus on the harm to the species, but it is also a viable option to focus on the potential harm to human beings. For example, it could be argued that some species should be preserved because of the potential medical or research benefits to humanity. Another approach is to focus on the extinctions cause by human beings and argue that if someone harms another, then one is obligated to do something to rectify this. An analogy would be a good choice here, perhaps one drawn between harming species and harming other people or groups of people. For example, special efforts to save species could be seen as analogous to a type of reparation or affirmative action (both are designed to redress and correct past wrongs).

Arguing that we are not obligated: Massive extinctions have been occurring on earth for billions of years and this shows that humans are not responsible for all (or even most) cases of extinction. Hence, one approach is the “it is not our fault” approach. The objective here would be to provide a moral argument as to why humans are not obligated to help species because extinction is a natural process. A milder approach would be to argue that humans are not obligated to help species whose extinction they are not causing or contributing to. A second approach is to argue that the costs of preserving species outweigh the benefits of doing so. For example, some species have reached the point where humans have to intervene with techniques of artificial reproduction to keep the species going. It could be argued that the money would be better spent helping humans in need. The most extreme approach would be to argue that humans have no moral obligations at all to non-humans (or perhaps even to other humans) and thus conclude that humans have no obligations to preserve endangered species. The rather difficult task would be to support this view.

#29 Tracking Devices

The notion that “they” have placed tracking devices on (or in) people has long been a staple of many paranoid fantasies. But, these particular paranoid fantasies are coming true. Currently, most cell phones are equipped with chips that allow them (and their users) to be located fairly precisely. But, that is just the tip of the iceberg. RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) tags, which might be made as small as a grain of salt, could be placed in just about everything from laptops to a pair of pants. There is a variety of ways for the tags to be used to track people. For example, if you buy a tagged shirt with your credit card, the tag will be linked to you. Thus, when you come within range of a RFID reader it will “know” who you are and perhaps even enter information into a tracking database. Those advocating the tags claim they will be used more or less like the

customer reward cards used by supermarkets-to track customers to help decide what to keep in stock. Privacy advocates are concerned that such tags will be misused.

Issue: Is the use of RFIDs and similar tracking devices morally acceptable?

Hints

Arguing that tracking devices are morally acceptable: One approach, which might seem naïve, is to argue that such tracking devices are morally acceptable because they will not be misused. Supporting this would require providing evidence that such technology would not be misused, perhaps by investigating similar technology (good luck...). Another approach is to argue that even if the technology is misused, the potential benefits morally outweigh the potential harms. In both cases it is important to include the moral component of the argument as well. A third option is to use the potential “misuse” to argue for the moral acceptability of the technology. For example, one argument might be built on the current concern over terrorism-such technology would make it easier to track and catch terrorists, which would protect innocent (and not so innocent) people.

Arguing that the tracking devices are not morally acceptable: The most obvious approach is to argue that such technology violates a moral right to privacy. An argument in support of a moral right to privacy would be needed. Another likely avenue is to argue that the technology would have harmful consequences that would be morally relevant. For example, such information might be used in identity theft or by a stalker. Other harms could include the psychological harm of knowing that “they” are, in fact, tracking you.

#30 Lies-the Best Medicine?

In July 2002 a study was published by the New England Journal of Medicine on the subject of arthroscopic surgery. In addition to addressing medical issues, the study also raises an ethical issue in regards to the use of placebos.

In brief, the study focused on arthroscopic knee surgery and involved two main groups of patients: one received real surgery and the other underwent "fake" surgery simulating the actual surgery. The patients who underwent the "fake" surgery claimed they felt better after the process and, interestingly enough, were able to walk and climb stairs faster than those who had received the real surgery. The benefits of the "surgery" were, of course, purely psychological: the patients believed they were better, so they felt better.

While the placebo effect does seem to benefit patients, there is still the issue of whether or not it is ethical for doctors to use it in the treatment of patients.

Issue: Is the use of such placebos by doctors morally acceptable?

Hints

Arguing that such placebos are morally unacceptable: One approach is to build an argument based on the fact that, by definition, the use of placebos in treatment involves deceiving the patient - the effect arises because the patient believes in the efficacy of the alleged treatment. Hence, one way to present a moral argument against the use of such

placebos is to build an argument based on it being wrong to deceive people. The argument could also be augmented by including the fact that a doctor is a professional with a code of ethics. Naturally, it would need to be argued that professionals have a special obligation to be honest. Another approach is to focus on negative consequences. For example, it might be argued that such practices are immoral because doctors could then use and charge for ineffective procedures claiming that they are placebos. Or doctors might intentionally or accidentally cover up serious conditions with placebos, which could lead to dire consequences. Less extreme, it is also reasonable to address the question regarding the morality of charging patients for “fake” procedures.

Arguing that such placebos are morally acceptable: One approach is to argue that a deception in such situations is acceptable. This can be done by building a case based on acceptable deceptions. For example, people are sometimes told lies to avoid causing them suffering or to spare their feelings. If such lying is justified then it can be argued that placebos are morally acceptable. A case can also be built by arguing that the positive consequences of such placebos would outweigh their potential harms. For example, placebos might be used to treat patients who do not need real treatment but insist they are in need of it or there might be cases in which the placebo is actually more medically effective than “real” treatments. And, of course, it has been shown that such “fake” treatments can be more beneficial to the patients than “real” treatments. This could be used to build an argument.

#31 Big Brother Is Watching You...But Should He Be ?

Cameras that observe citizens have become part of everyday life. In the United States law enforcement agencies use cameras to monitor bridges, tunnels, airports and border crossings. If you use an ATM, go into a bank or even shop in a store, you are almost certainly being watched and recorded by cameras. While there are plans to add even more cameras in the US, America is a land of privacy compared to Great Britain.

In 2003 it was estimated that the British are observed by 2.5 million closed circuit cameras and it has been reported that the typical inhabitant of London is filmed approximately three hundred times a day.

Other countries vary in their camera coverage, but the trend is to have Big Brother (or many Little Brothers) watching our activities. Not surprisingly, there is a great deal of moral concern over the use of such surveillance.

Issue: Is the extensive use of surveillance cameras morally acceptable?

Hints

Arguing that it is acceptable: One approach is to build an argument based on the positive consequences of using such cameras. The task would be to specify the consequences, show that they are positive and conclude that the cameras are morally acceptable. One obvious example would be to focus on the role of the cameras in enhancing safety by deterring crimes, catching criminals and so forth. Naturally, it is not enough to simply assert that cameras do this-support would be needed for such claims. Fortunately, cameras have been in use for such a long time there is a significant amount of statistical evidence available. Another approach is to argue that the government or businesses have

a right to observe people in public. The task here would be to argue that such a right exists and that it overrides other relevant rights (such as a right to privacy).

Arguing that it is not acceptable: An argument can be constructed based on the negative consequences of using such cameras. The task would be to specify the consequences, show that they are negative and conclude that the cameras are not morally acceptable. Some negative consequences worth considering include the psychological effects of being observed and the potential that such systems might be misused. Naturally, simply asserting that the harms would occur would not be enough-the key claims would have to be adequately supported. A second approach is to argue that people have a right to privacy that is violated by the use of such cameras. The task here would be to argue that such a right exists and that it overrides other relevant rights (such as the right of a government to protect its citizens).

Degrees of Surveillance: It is also possible to take a more complex approach to the issue. Instead of simply arguing that it is right or wrong, it is also possible to argue for or against particular types of surveillance. The task would be to consider relevant factors and then make the moral case. Relevant factors would include the extent of the surveillance, the use to which it would be put, the location of the surveillance, etc. For example, it might be argued that the use of cameras is acceptable in high risk areas (banks) and in private businesses but general surveillance of public areas is not acceptable. When selecting the specifics you will be considering, be sure to pick a situation that has some reasonable degree of controversy and that can be reasonably argued from either side. For example, arguing that the government should not put “butt cams” in people’s toilets or (more seriously) that banks should be allowed to continue using cameras in ATMs would not make for very good papers.

#32 Same Sex Marriage

Same sex marriage became a matter of great controversy in 2003. While people can, of course, make any personal vow they desire, legal marriage requires that the relevant authorities recognize the marriage. In 2003 some states recognized same sex marriages as legal-treating them as any other marriage so that the spouses would be entitled to all the benefits (and penalties) of marriage (such as insurance coverage, inheritance, visitation rights, and divorce). Not surprisingly people are heavily divided on this matter.

Issue: Is same sex marriage morally acceptable?

Hints

Arguing that it is morally acceptable: One approach is to argue that the consequences of same sex marriage are positive. The task would be to specify the consequences, show that they are positive and conclude that same sex marriage is acceptable. It could be argued, for example, that such marriages would benefit the economy (weddings and divorces are often expensive) or that they would have positive benefits for those married or society in general. A second approach is to build an argument based on rights. The task would be to argue that people have a right to choose who they marry, even if the other person is the

same sex. Another approach is to build an argument based on consistency. Marriage rights are extended to people who are immoral as well as to people who are marrying for the “wrong” reasons (to get money or sex) so it would be inconsistent to deny same sex marriages on the grounds that such a marriage is morally wrong or involves immoral people (without doing the same for all other marriages that are regarded as immoral or as having immoral people involved).

Arguing that it is not morally acceptable: The most common approach to arguing against same-sex marriage is to use a religious argument-typically that such marriages explicitly or implicitly go against religious teachings and are thus sinful. Of course, a religious argument is not automatically a moral argument-but it could be made into one. Taking this approach would have three steps. Step one would be presenting the religious case. Step two would be arguing for the link between religion and morality. Step three would be concluding that same sex marriage is wrong. While this appears to be an easy and simple approach, step two is rather difficult (especially since you can’t just assume the reader has the same view of religion as you). The second approach is to argue that the consequences of same sex marriage are negative. The task would be to specify the consequences, show that they are negative and conclude that same sex marriage is not acceptable. For example, it has been claimed that allowing same sex marriages would have a variety of dire consequences for society including the destruction of marriage. A third approach is more technical-it would involve providing and defending a definition of marriage that excludes same-sex marriages. The tasks would be to argue effectively in defense of the definition (you cannot just say that marriage is between a man and a woman and you cannot settle the matter by using the dictionary-that just gives what the editors take to be an accepted definition) and to show how this impacts on the issue.

#33 A Better Brain

One of the goals of modern neuroscience is to develop ways to improve human cognitive abilities. Researchers are currently working on what are known as “smart pills”- drugs intended to improve memory, concentration and other mental abilities. Not surprisingly, there is already significant ethical debate over such enhancements.

One type of enhancement aims at restoring capabilities that have been impaired or lost due to such things as injury, disease or aging. For example, medications are being devised to offset the effects of Alzheimer’s disease. These enhancements seem to be morally acceptable. Using medication to, for example, restore a patient’s ailing memory is analogous to using surgery to repair bone damage or using antibiotics to restore a patient’s physical health. Such “traditional” treatments are morally acceptable; hence the use of enhancements for such purposes is equally acceptable.

Not surprisingly, the moral controversy centers on the use of enhancements to boost the mental capabilities of healthy people. Given that healthy people have used drugs, such as steroids, to enhance their physical abilities it is safe to conclude that they will use products to boost their mental abilities.

Issue: Is the use of “brain enhancement” moral acceptable?

Hints

Arguing that it is acceptable: One way to argue that the use of enhancers is acceptable is to focus on cases in which their use would have positive consequences and build a case based on those consequences. For example, a surgeon performing a long and complex life-saving procedure or rescue workers in a major disaster would certainly benefit from using a concentration booster to keep them alert and focused in their life saving efforts. In such situations, it could be argued that the benefits of using them would outweigh potential harms, provided that the products did not have significant side effects.

Another way to argue that the use of such enhancers is acceptable is to argue that people have a right to gain an edge in competitive situations. It is easy to imagine people using cognitive enhancing drugs to gain an edge in the workplace against other employees they are competing with for raises, promotions and jobs. An even fiercer arena of competition is the battle between nations. Once mental enhancing products become available it is certain that they will be pressed into service to serve the national interest of each country. Unlike in academics and sports, there seems to be little concern about fair play in business and international competition. Thus, it can be expected that enhancement products will be used with little in the way of restraints or limits. But, given the nature of such competition, it could be argued that such uses would be morally acceptable. This might be done by arguing that it is not inherently immoral to use a better weapon than the enemy in order to defeat him. This could be done by drawing an analogy between the brain enhancers and other weapons, such as fighters, tanks, and sensors.

A more altruistic approach would be to argue that the use of such enhancers would have positive consequences for humanity in general and that their use would be acceptable. For example, the use of enhancers could help researchers develop cures faster than they would without such enhancements.

Arguing that it is unacceptable: One approach to the issue is to argue that the use of enhancers would be unfair in particular types of situations. The clearest and most obvious example would be using them to gain an edge in academics. For example, students would no doubt be tempted to use such enhancers to improve their scores on standardized admissions tests, like the LSAT and GRE. One way to argue for this is to draw an analogy between the use of steroids in sports and the use of brain enhancers in academic competition.

An additional moral concern is the matter of side effects, both physical and social. Physical enhancers, such as steroids, typically have negative side-effects and some of these can be quite serious. Despite these side effects, many people have used them and have been harmed. It seems quite reasonable to believe that mental enhancers will have negative side effects as well. If they are harmful, then a case based on consequences can be made to support the claim that they are immoral.

An argument based on social consequences can also be used. The tasks would be to consider what the negative social effects of such enhancers would be and then argue that these negative consequences would be immoral. For example, such enhancements would probably not be cheap and this would give the wealthy yet another edge over the poor thus furthering the social gap and potentially destabilizing society.

A final moral concern is the effect of such products on the person. While the nature of personal identity is a matter of great debate, it seems reasonable to believe that the mental

attributes affected by such enhancers would play a role in personal identity. Thus, the use of such enhancers could conceivably alter the nature of the person. The task would be to argue that this would be wrong.

#34 Mixed “Race” Relationships

While there appears to be little scientific evidence to support a rigorous concept of race, the social concept is taken to have a great deal of importance, especially when it comes to mixed “race” relationships such as dating and (most especially) marriage.

While white supremacists tend to be the primary opponents of mixed “race” relationships there is significant opposition to “race mixing” in the United States among “nonwhites”, most especially among African Americans.

Issue: Are mixed “race” relationships morally acceptable?

Hints

Arguing that it is acceptable: One way to argue that it is acceptable is to build a case based on the positive consequences. The task would be to determine the positive consequences and then show how this supports the claim that such relationships are acceptable. For example, it might be argued that such relationships would contribute to the weakening of racism. Naturally such claims would need to be supported. A second way to argue that it is acceptable is to build a case based on the right of an individual to choose the person they want to have a relationship with. The task would be to argue that people do have this right and that the right outweighs other considerations, such as “race loyalty” or negative consequences. A third way to argue that it is acceptable might be to consider the moral implications of a rather interesting fact: genetic testing (see, for example, the December 2003 issue of *Scientific American*) has revealed that a significant percentage of Americans are technically of “mixed” race. For example, only 80% of the typical African American’s genes are of West African contribution. In the case of “white” Americans, approximately 30% of those who see themselves as “white” have an ancestry that is less than 90% European.

Arguing that it is not acceptable: One way to argue that it is not acceptable is to make a case that is built on the negative consequences of such relationships for the individuals. For example, people in mixed “race” relationships might face rejection from their “races” and if they have children, these children might be subject to even greater rejection or mistreatment. Another way to argue that it is not acceptable is to argue that people should be loyal to their “race.” The task would be making a case for this obligation and arguing that breaking it would be immoral. A third approach is to argue that such relationships would have negative consequences for the “races” or society. For example, people of various “races” have argued that “race” mixing will destroy the culture and identity of a people. The task would be to argue that the consequences of this would be negative and that this would show that such mixed relationships are morally wrong.