

**Homework Instructions:**  
**Prepare for next class' Ethics Bowl by reading all 4**  
**cases and answering the "Study Questions" for all 4**  
**cases. Your answers to the "Study Questions" must be typed.**

**Due Thursday, 1/23 (B-Day).**  
**Due Friday, 1/24.**  
**(A-Day)**

#### **4. China's Social Credit System**

On June 14, 2014, China's State Council announced a plan to establish a social credit system, which would assign "social credit scores" to citizens based on their behavior.<sup>1</sup> A citizen's social credit score goes up based on socially desirable actions, like paying taxes or purchasing Chinese products; it declines if a person engages in behaviors that the State Council deems dishonest or otherwise problematic, such as committing crimes or making negative statements about the government. Access to social benefits, like receiving a home loan or travelling on an airplane, would be partly determined by one's social credit score. With this social credit system, the Chinese government aims to create a more honest and harmonious society.

The Chinese State Council postulates that if citizens are rewarded for good behavior and punished for bad behavior, then people will want to act better. Citizens in China are already seeing the positive effects of this system. As one Chinese citizen explained, "I feel like in the past six months, people's behavior has gotten better and better . . . For example, when we drive, now we always stop in front of crosswalks. If you don't stop, you will lose your points. At first, we just worried about losing points, but now we got used to it."<sup>2</sup> When there are negative consequences, people may think twice about engaging in bad or illegal activities. Over time, when citizens of a society are following laws and acting honestly, the society as a whole becomes just, fair, and peaceful.<sup>3</sup>

Critics, however, regard it as an invasion of privacy and personal freedom. One concern is that the ability for the government to assign these ratings is dependent on China's increasingly dense network of surveillance cameras and the advancement of artificial intelligence technology.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, some critics argue that the system has flaws and may be subject to error or even abuse by the government. For example, the social credit score of Liu Hu, a Chinese journalist, placed him on the untrustworthy list, and as a result, he was prohibited from flying, buying a home, and sending his child to private school. His low score was due to a series of tweets that the government did not approve of. According to Liu, "You feel you're being controlled by the list all the time."<sup>5</sup> Critics on the international stage worry that policies like China's will spread. For example, Tyler Grant has argued that "[t]he free world is not far behind if we don't protect privacy, deny our policymakers' desire to expand the reach of government, and resist the urge to commercially or socially punish those who don't share our political ideology. Privacy and liberty are never more than one generation away from extinction."<sup>6</sup> Finally, some people might be concerned that by generating external incentives to engage in pro-social behaviors, programs like this actually undermine intrinsic moral motivation, making people less likely to do the right thing for the right reason.

#### **STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. What are the moral advantages and disadvantages of a social credit system like China's?
2. To what extent is China's social credit system a framework for moral behavior?
3. How can a community balance its interest in encouraging its members to engage in socially desirable behaviors with community members' interests in individual privacy and liberty?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2014/06/14/planning-outline-for-the-construction-of-a-social-credit-system-2014-2020/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/03/life-inside-chinas-social-credit-laboratory/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2014/06/14/planning-outline-for-the-construction-of-a-social-credit-system-2014-2020/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/amp/news/china-social-credit-system-surveillance-cameras/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/amp/news/china-social-credit-system-surveillance-cameras/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://thehill.com/opinion/technology/386524-the-west-could-be-closer-to-chinas-system-of-social-credit-scoring-than>

### 3. What Morals Should Drive Driverless Cars?

Cars of the past required us to do everything manually, from shifting gears to locking doors and rolling down windows. Now we have cars that “can adapt their speed to the surrounding traffic automatically, maintain a safe distance from the vehicle ahead, keep within their own lane, and even park themselves.”<sup>1</sup> Tech companies like Google, Apple, and Uber are aiming for the ultimate autonomous driving experience—cars that can drive themselves—and driverless cars are already being tested on the roads. Even though we may be years away from their release to the public, concerns about driverless cars are already surfacing.

Driverless cars are poised to make life much easier and more convenient. Elderly people who have difficulty driving could regain freedom and independence using driverless cars. Busy parents would no longer need to drop off their children at school or take them to after-school activities. People with long commutes by car could use that time to focus on rest or work instead. Even more significantly, driverless cars could be much safer than human drivers. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 94% of traffic accidents are attributed in part to human error.<sup>2</sup> Driverless cars are designed to follow all traffic laws, including obeying speed limits and completely stopping at stop signs. If human drivers are taken out of the equation, we can imagine that our roads could be much safer. If driverless technology becomes reliable enough, we might even decide that human drivers should be outlawed and removed from the roads for the sake of overall safety.

In addition to the question of whether the aim of such technology should be to get rid of human drivers entirely (along with their dangerous potential for error), the question of what counts as safety also arises. What happens when there are no good options for a driverless car to choose? For example, imagine that a van with a family of five ahead of you suddenly brakes, and your driverless car can either brake but potentially hit the family of five, or it could swerve to the right where there is a school bus full of children, or it could swerve into the median rail on the left—in each case potentially endangering your life as well as or instead of the lives of others. In such situations, human drivers react in unpredictable and generally uninformed ways. Driverless cars, on the other hand, potentially allow us the capacity to be more intentional about how to react to unexpected accidents or emergencies on the road, but there is much disagreement about how to best use this new power.

#### Study Questions:

- (1) Given the choice between endangering 5 lives or your life, should a car in which you are the sole occupant be programmed to endanger you?
- (2) What moral principles should guide us as we decide what to do about the possibility offered by driverless cars to be more intentional than ever before about reacting to unexpected dangerous situations?
- (3) Would people be morally permitted to drive at all if driverless cars are on the whole safer and more reliable?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.economist.com/news/science-and-technology/21722628-forget-hype-about-autonomous-vehicles-being-around-cornerreal-driverless-cars-will>

<sup>2</sup> <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812115>

## 6. The Case of the Missing Serial Number

Cora is an avid cyclist. For the past year, she has been saving money to upgrade her bike. One day, she discovers an amazing deal on Craig's List. The bike she finds is just what she has been looking for but much cheaper than she was expecting to have to pay.

Cora and the seller agree to meet at a park near Cora's workplace, so that Cora can try out the bike. The seller, Megan, helps Cora adjust the bike to fit well. Megan points out some scratches on the frame, but Cora agrees that these are minor cosmetic issues.

Cora loves her new bike, but she receives troubling news 6 months later. A mechanic notices that the clear-coat serial number glued to the bottom of the frame has been stripped off. Cora's stomach sinks: the missing serial number almost certainly indicates that the bike was stolen.

If Cora had known that the bike was probably stolen, she would never have bought it. But she realizes that there is little chance of getting her money back. She never learned the seller's actual identity beyond her first name and no longer has record of the email conversation planning their initial meeting, and she also knows that stolen bikes are almost impossible to trace.

Cora needs to decide whether to turn the bike over to the police. If she does, there is at least a chance—however unlikely—that the police could find the bike's original owner. In addition, she feels guilty that her purchase might have made it worthwhile for a thief to steal the bike. Indeed, the very idea that her prized possession is potentially stolen property is depressing to her.

On the other hand, Cora does not think that she was irresponsible in making the purchase (although it is true that she never checked for the serial number). And Cora worked hard for a whole year to save money for this bike. And again: it is at least *possible* that the serial number was stripped off accidentally. Cora doesn't want to risk losing her bike, especially since she did nothing wrong. Why should she suffer negative consequences if her bike turns out to be stolen property? She wishes the missing serial number had never been brought to her attention.

### Study Questions:

- (1) Should Cora turn over the bike to the police for their review?
- (2) What should Cora do if she *did* have the contact info for the seller after all?
- (3) How, if at all, does the monetary value of the (allegedly) stolen property affect the case?

## 7. Suffering cat

Grumpy Cat has dwarfism, which involves a variety of genetic conditions that make her look like a kitten throughout her life.<sup>1 2</sup> Her human companions take good care of her and have created a large web presence for her. Her popularity has created a demand for cats with dwarfism, and people are now breeding cats with dwarfism to meet this demand. However, it is hard to tell how severe this condition will be for any given litter in advance. Some cats might live relatively happy lives, and others might experience a lot of pain and suffering.

Sydney loves Grumpy Cat. She has shirts, mugs and even bed sheets with representations of Grumpy Cat on them, but what she wants more than anything is to adopt a cat who looks like Grumpy Cat. So, Sydney reads as much as she can about the genetic conditions that these cats face so that she can be prepared to care for one as well as possible. She then asks her local Humane Society to call her if they receive any cats with these conditions, and she signs up for a variety of mailing lists put out by pet rescue organizations in her area, including those that focus on disabled animals, so that she can be alerted when a cat is available near her. However, two years pass and no cats with the particular conditions she desires become available.

One day Sydney finds a web page for a breeder that breeds Munchkin cats, who have a type of dwarfism.<sup>34</sup> She immediately wants one of these cats, but she knows that, while Munchkin cats can have good lives, they can also have health problems that cause a great deal of pain and suffering. For example, they can have severe hip and back problems that may impact their mobility and necessitate multiple surgeries. As a result, many cat organizations do not endorse this breed. However, Sydney also knows that she would take excellent care of a Munchkin cat if given the opportunity. Furthermore, she reasons that we should not discriminate against animals on the basis of disability, and that once a Munchkin cat exists, they need a good home whether or not the people who bred them were right to do so.

### Study Questions:

- (2) Is it morally permissible for people to breed Munchkin cats for the purpose of selling them? Why or why not?
- (2) If people do breed Munchkin cats, is it morally permissible for Sydney to purchase one? Why or why not?
- (5) If Sydney does purchase a Munchkin cat, is it morally permissible for her to post pictures online, if doing so might motivate other people to breed or purchase Munchkin cats? Why or why not?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.grumpycats.com/about>

<sup>2</sup> <http://lilbub.com/about>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.petmd.com/cat/breeds/c\\_ct\\_munchkin](http://www.petmd.com/cat/breeds/c_ct_munchkin)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.petassure.com/new-newsletters/071510/article1.aspx>