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About the Case Set

This case set was developed for use in the 2026 APPE Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl® regional competitions. APPE IEB® is a unique, collaborative experience for undergraduate students that provides valuable educational experience in practical and professional ethics. Learn more at appeieb.org.



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1. CTRL-ALT-DEFENSE

Anthropic, the company behind the large-language model Claude, had been in negotiations with the U.S. government over military use of its artificial intelligence tools. Anthropic was largely willing to work with the Pentagon, but it drew two lines it considered non-negotiable: it would not allow Claude to be used for lethal autonomous warfare without human oversight, and it would not allow Claude to be used for mass surveillance of Americans. After the government objected to those restrictions, Anthropic sued, arguing that the government had unlawfully punished the company for refusing to remove its safety guardrails.[1]

Anthropic's CEO, Dario Amodei, has said he is not opposed to AI-enabled weapons in principle; his concern is that today's AI systems are not yet reliable enough for that purpose.[2] That distinction raises a difficult question: If a future AI system could be shown to perform as accurately as, or even more accurately than, human analysts, would the ethical objection disappear?

Some might say yes. War is already full of human error, bias, panic, fatigue, and incomplete information. If AI can process information faster, identify threats more accurately, and reduce battlefield mistakes, refusing to use it could itself be irresponsible.

Others might argue that accuracy is not the only concern and that AI could change the moral character of military decision-making. Drone warfare already allows one country to use force without placing its own soldiers directly in harm's way. AI may create another layer of distance by removing, or appearing to remove, human judgment from the decision itself. Even if a human remains "in the loop" formally, that human may become accustomed to relying on the system's recommendations. Military technology can become morally troubling precisely because it works too well. If AI makes it easier to identify targets, authorize strikes, and conduct warfare without risking one's own soldiers, it may make war more efficient while also making it easier to start and harder to restrain.

The Pentagon reportedly argued that AI should be treated like any other software tool. One official compared it to Microsoft Excel: useful, powerful, but ultimately neutral. Similar arguments have been made with guns, that they are just a tool that can be used in bad ways by humans, or that the gun itself should be regulated because it makes violence easier. The Pentagon also argued that they should be bound only by U.S. law, not company usage policies. The military is accountable to elected officials, law, and the chain of command. Private companies are not elected, and their internal policies may not reflect democratic judgment.

AI is already being used for everyday tasks at the Department of War. The Department put out a press release on May 1, 2026 stating that AI capabilities "will streamline data synthesis, elevate

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[1] Sriram, Akash. "Anthropic's Case Against the Government: What the AI Company Says Happened." *Reuters*. March 9, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/legal/litigation/anthropics-case-against-government-what-ai-company-says-happened-2026-03-09/.

[2] Seetharaman, Deepa. "Anthropic Courted the Pentagon. Here's Why It Walked Away." *Reuters*. March 4, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/technology/anthropic-courted-pentagon-heres-why-it-walked-away-2026-03-04/.

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situational understanding, and augment warfighter decision-making in complex operational environments."[3]

But there are still concerns with AI's ability to judge certain scenarios. A researcher pitted GPT-5.2, Claude Sonnet 4, and Gemini 3 against each other in a wargame, and 95% of the time, the outcome ended in a tactical nuclear strike. The models often treated tactical nuclear use as a manageable risk rather than as a line that should almost never be crossed.[4] There are concerns that even if AI doesn't have the ability to "pull the trigger" so to speak, the habitual use of AI could change human decisions, or, if a suggestion is made at the right moment, a human could be susceptible to such a decision.

[3] "Classified Networks AI Agreements." *U.S. Department of War*. May 1, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.war.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/4475177/classified-networks-ai-agreements/.
[4] Morales, Jowi. "AI Chatbots Used Tactical Nuclear Weapons in 95% of AI War Games, Launched Strategic Strikes Three Times." February 26, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.tomshardware.com/tech-industry/artificial-intelligence/llms-used-tactical-nuclear-weapons-in-95-percent-of-ai-war-games-launched-strategic-strikes-three-times-researcher-pitted-gpt-5-2-claude-sonnet-4-and-gemini-3-flash-against-each-other-with-at-least-one-model-using-a-tactical-nuke-in-20-out-of-21-matches.

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~~2. An Explosive Ban~~

In the Netherlands, a nationwide ban on fireworks sold to private individuals is currently on track to be in full effect by the 2027 New Year. The ban comes after over 4,286 fire incident reports, 1,200+ injuries, two deaths, and the burning of a 19th century church near Amsterdam during the first week of the Netherlands' 2026 New Year's festivities.[5]

Dutch parliament has been attempting to pass legislation that would ban fireworks across the country for the past 15 years. Up until 2025, party discourse regarding financial reimbursement for firework sellers had prevented the law from being finalized. That was until over $17.5 million in firework-related damages, alongside 200 separate arrests rocked the Netherlands during 2025's New Year's Celebration. These numbers, alongside an agreement to reimburse firework businesses provided parliament a heaving shove that finally got the ban through.[6]

As 2027 looms closer, so too does the Netherland's firework ban, worrying firework sellers across the nation. Many claim that banning fireworks is only banning *safe* fireworks as black market dealers will likely become more popular. The ban dictates that fireworks are not to be sold to private individuals. But, this ban has not yet expanded to mail-order fireworks, allowing an accessible caveat for dedicated enthusiasts. This is especially frustrating considering the roughly $140 million made across the country by firework sellers each year—a number that parliament is still worried about compensating, citing no real solution to this loss of revenue. However, it is possible that permits, age restrictions, designated areas, quieter fireworks, or limits on particularly dangerous products could reduce harm without requiring a ban and a total loss of revenue.

On top of significant, indeterminate economic impact, many Dutch people have argued that firework usage is ingrained in culturally significant New Year's festivities. The global use of fireworks has signified the warding off of bad spirits for millennia, dating all the way back to the ninth century in China.[7] For the Netherlands, their love of fireworks was sparked in the 17th century and became even more popular after WW2. For the more superstitious, a lack of fireworks ringing in the New Year is considered bad luck.

Unfortunately, fireworks ward off more than just bad spirits. Environmentalists have proven that fireworks frighten wildlife, sometimes leading to mass confusion and death. Over the pond in America, 2011 New Year's Eve fireworks were determined to be the cause of the death of over 4,500 blackbirds in Beebe, Arkansas. The loud noises were believed to have startled the sleeping birds to suddenly wake. This species of blackbird is known to have poor night vision,

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[5] Niranjan, Ajit. "Whistle, Crackle, Banned: Dutch Set to Outlaw Fireworks After More New Year Chaos." *The Guardian*. January 9, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/jan/09/dutch-netherlands-fireworks-ban-new-years-eve.

[6] Kirby, Paul. "Dutch Vote to Ban New Year's Fireworks, But Not Just Yet." *BBC News*. April 8, 2025. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c7vnzgvqpdro.

[7] Hernandez, Joe. "The Explosive History of Fireworks, From Ancient China to Revolutionary America." *NPR*. July 4, 2024. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/2024/07/04/nx-s1-5027826/fireworks-history-ancient-china-revolutionary-america.

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which caused them to fly quickly and aimlessly into nearby buildings, cars, and trees.[8] Another, perhaps more obvious environmental harm are the debris and chemicals released by the setting off of fireworks, which create a significant source of air pollution and fire hazards. During the Indian celebration of Diwali, over 100 million pounds of fireworks are set off, causing toxic hazes to cover cities. These toxic hazes are caused by particulate matter that can cause lung damage, heart issues, and acid rain.[9] Fires are also common during these celebrations. Perhaps the most fire damage occurs during America's celebration of the 4th of July, which almost exclusively centers around setting off fireworks. It is estimated that each year an average of 18,500 fires result.[10] There were roughly 32,300 fires in 2023, the last recorded year.[11]

These general environmental concerns bleed into more anthropocentric concerns, like veterans with PTSD, who can suffer immense flashbacks during firework-related festivities. Even still, the global sentiment towards fireworks is overwhelmingly positive, with few signs of fizzling out. Loud fireworks are being exchanged for quieter ones, and those set on utilizing fireworks to celebrate care more about their experience watching them than easily-overlooked environmental impacts. Many governments are looking to ban fireworks as more and more dangerous incidents occur each year alongside climate change. At the same time, holidays like the 4th of July depend almost exclusively on firework shows to make the holiday what it is—leading some to ask is the implementation of a ban a step towards progress, or the death of a global cultural phenomenon?

[8] Opar, Alisa. "Illegal Fireworks Likely Cause of Massive Arkansas Blackbird Deaths." *Audubon Magazine*. January 4, 2011. Retrieved from https://www.audubon.org/news/illegal-fireworks-likely-cause-massive-arkansas-blackbird-deaths.
[9] Han, Jessica. "Crowd-Pleasing Fireworks Are Not So Pleasing to the Planet." *Earth.Org*. December 30, 2024. Retrieved from https://earth.org/environmental-impact-of-fireworks/.
[10] Price, Kiley. "As Climate Change Dries Out the West, Fourth of July Fireworks Spark Increased Wildfire Risk." *Inside Climate News*. July 2, 2024. Retrieved from https://insideclimatenews.org/news/02072024/todays-climate-fourth-of-july-fireworks-risk/.
[11] "Firework Safety." *National Fire Protection Association*. n.d. Retrieved from https://www.nfpa.org/education-and-research/home-fire-safety/fireworks.

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3. Sister City No More

In 2018, Osaka, Japan cut ties with its sister city, San Francisco, over the installation of a statue honoring "comfort women."[12] This term refers to women who were trafficked and sexually abused by the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II. Despite Japan's disapproval, the statue, named "Women's Column of Strength," was installed near Chinatown in San Francisco to bring awareness to the sexual violence and imprisonment suffered by thousands of women from Korea and China during WWII, as well as remind the public of all other women affected by these types of crimes. The City of San Francisco intended to highlight the values of "memory, dialogue, peace and reconciliation, transformation and justice" and hoped that "the memorial [would] offer a place for community members and visitors to remember, grieve, learn, find peace and commit themselves to human rights, justice and safety for women and girls around the world."[13]

Japan's rejection of San Francisco's "Women's Column of Strength" is not the only time the Japanese government has spoken out against monuments honoring "comfort women." The Japanese embassy was displeased with New Zealand's plan to erect a similar statue, warning that installing the monument would damage diplomatic relations between Japan and New Zealand. The proposal to install the statue was rejected by a New Zealand council, which cited lack of public support as the reason for its rejection.[14] The council stated that "opponents raised concerns about community tension, political interpretations of the statue and its relevance to New Zealand, while supporters said it was an opportunity to promote reflection, acknowledge historical harm and strengthen education."[15]

The question of Japan inserting itself in San Francisco and New Zealand's decisions about their own public monuments seems questionable, especially when the Japanese government has done little to offer formal apologies or reparations that are satisfactory to the survivors of these events.[16] However, the relevancy of a monument to a city, state, or nation cannot be overlooked when asking which events and peoples are most important for a community to honor and remember. In regard to the question of relevance to the region, it is notable that the Chinese and Korean population of San Francisco is much larger than that of New Zealand, and an even more striking difference is that the U.S. military is reported to have participated in the abuse of

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[12] "Osaka Cuts San Francisco Ties Over 'Comfort Women' Statue." *BBC News*. April 4, 2018. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-45747803.
[13] "Column of Strength – San Francisco, California." *World Heritage USA*. n.d. Retrieved from https://worldheritageusa.org/monumentstoolkit/publications/column-of-strength/.
[14] Atkinson, Simon and Kelly Ng. "NZ Axes Plan for WW2 Sex Slaves Statue After Japan Protest." *BBC News*. April 28, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c62r8g6m541o.
[15] "New Zealand Local Council Rejects Plan for 'Comfort Women' Statue After Japan Protest." *Reuters*. April 29, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/new-zealand-local-council-rejects-plan-comfort-women-statue-after-japan-protest-2026-04-29/.
[16] "SF Memorial." *"Comfort Women" Justice Coalition*. n.d. Retrieved from https://remembercomfortwomen.org/sf-memorial/.

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“comfort women,” while New Zealand had no such involvement.[17] In this case, the U.S. has some shared accountability in the atrocity as well as a relevant connection to it with the Korean and Chinese population of San Francisco.

Pushing the question of relevancy even further, it’s possible that both the United States and New Zealand should further analyze and update the monuments they have honoring their own historical wrongdoings, such as slavery and occupation of native lands. Many statues of conquistadors and Confederate leaders still exist across the U.S., with notably fewer monuments dedicated to Native Americans and enslaved people. There are dozens of plantations, which many say are akin to Nazi concentration camps, that still run as wedding venues and facilitate tours that underwrite the exploitation of enslaved people, which is a stark contrast to the way that concentration camps in Europe repurpose sites of atrocity into public history.

These "remembrances" ask how national, state, and city governments should prioritize which events are memorialized in public spaces. Monuments and memorials seem to play a significant role in society, as well as in diplomatic relations between cities, such as Osaka and San Francisco, and countries, like Japan and New Zealand. Questions about culpability, resources, and national memory help shed light on the most important aspects in determining public monuments, though the answers may not be clear cut in all cases.

[17] “U.S. Troops Used Japanese Brothels After WWII.” *NBC News*. April 27, 2007. Retrieved from https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna18355292.

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4. Judging a Book by the Cover

20-year-old internet personality Clavicular, aka Braden Peters, is a part of a growing community on social media who believe in "maxxing" their physical appearance. At the core of this movement is the belief that male attractiveness is the key to worldly achievement—maximizing certain facial and physical features helps garner favorable attention and unlocks opportunities.[18] To achieve this, people like Clavicular argue for a range of modifications ranging from "soft" ones (Softmaxxing) like grooming to more serious cosmetic procedures (Hardmaxxing) that include bimaxillary osteotomy (double-jaw surgery), rhinoplasty, cheek implants and eyelid surgery. Supporters of "Looksmaxxing" are looking for a harmonious blend of height, weight, and physical features, and the phenomena seems to target male adolescents and young adults specifically.

While "Looksmaxxing" is new to the lexicon, it directly builds on the notion of "Pretty Privilege"—that good looks carry an advantage. People with certain physical traits and facial features tend to come off as smart, capable, trustworthy, and morally virtuous.[19] Attractive people also see higher labor market earnings than less attractive peers and receive more raises and promotions.[20] There are also other advantages to being attractive, with many achieving greater social mobility because of their looks, offender attractiveness factoring in to criminal justice processing,[21] success rates linked to physical attraction in dating and marriage, and, in an increasingly visual and virtual world, as currency online where views and likes directly correlate to brand partnerships and monetization success.

Despite the many advantages that individuals derive from societally set standards of good looks, influencers associated with the "Looksmaxxing" trend are getting a slew of negative attention labeled as a movement of narcissistic, looks-obsessed young adults—typically men—who spend more time focusing on physical appearance instead of intellectual and personal growth. But proponents say this subculture is only using societal preferences for beauty standards to celebrate the rituals of male aesthetic improvements in a proud and public way.

One could argue that the attention and intensity of discussion about men focusing on physical appearances and employing cosmetic and surgical procedures lack the same reserved ambivalence that women received for centuries of beautification culture and procedures. Historically, beauty and aesthetics were seen as uniquely feminine, and therefore the conversation about beauty products or procedures rarely examined the aesthetic in conjunction with the ethical, political, or ontological.

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[18] Bernstein, Joseph. "Handsome at Any Cost." *The New York Times*. February 13, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/13/style/clavicular-looksmaxxing-braden-peters.html.
[19] Little, Anthony, Benedict Jones, and Lisa DeBruine. "Facial Attractiveness: Evolutionary Based Research." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London Series B* 366, no. 1571 (June 2011): 1638-59. http://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2010.0404.
[20] Scholz, John Karl and Kamil Sicinski. "Facial Attractiveness and Lifetime Earnings: Evidence from a Cohort Study." *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 97, no. 1 (March 2015): 14-28. https://doi.org/10.1162/REST_a_00435.
[21] Sigall, Harold and Nancy Ostrove. "Beautiful but Dangerous: Effects of Offender Attractiveness and Nature of the Crime on Juridic Judgment." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 31, no. 3 (1975): 410–14. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0076472.

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The realms of intellect and beauty have been seen as increasingly mutually exclusive, especially at an individual level. In the intellectual community, too much attention to personal appearance is considered a character flaw. On the other side, intellectual pursuits are seen as cold, functional, and strict, resulting in a worldview that lacks creativity, emotional depth, and humanity. In 2017, researchers at the University of Cambridge and the University of Essex conducted a study that suggested that people are more likely to find an attractive scientist interesting, but more likely to consider their less attractive colleagues to be better scientists.[22] This polarity often dismisses equally qualified professionals like doctors, engineers, and scientists as more capable if they are better looking. However, there are also studies that demonstrate that a professor's attire and attractiveness are considered to affect student performance, material retention, greater student participation in school activities, and an evaluation of greater teaching effort.[23]

Author and professor Peggy Zeglin Brand observes how parents are more willing to go to extremes for the sake of improving their children's looks and asks, "how can an aesthetics of beauty—as it filters down to younger ages through advertising, peer and parental pressure—ever be justified apart from ethics?"[24] Philosopher Heather Widdows similarly analyzes an attraction towards beauty and the societal draw by asking whether the failure to engage in a beauty ideal, including by transformative beauty practices, is not just an aesthetic failure but also implies a moral one? In other words, do we have a duty to be beautiful?[25]

Based on research and studies about the benefits of good looks, Widdows argues that beauty-ideal frameworks allow individuals the means to a good life (material goods, relational goods, lifestyle goods, and even the elusive good of happiness), and therefore, "…under such a framework attaining minimum (good enough) standards of beauty becomes effectively a (moral) duty, something that is required and necessary." Additionally, pursuing beauty ideals, from grooming to physical enhancements, have become the shared standards by which members not only apportion praise and reward, but also blame and shame. For example, disheveled hair, unkempt clothes, higher weight are often seen as a sign of laziness, a lack of discipline, or low self-worth. Conversely, people are seen as more disciplined, focused, dedicated, and healthy if they are physically lean and muscular. Widdows explains that these overarching moral frameworks are standing in for "an ideal to aspire to, and work towards, as individuals judge themselves and others successes or failures according to the extent they conform to it." And all of this is more relevant than ever before because our perception of the self is changing and we now locate the self in the body—"…not just our actual, flawed bodies but our transforming and imagined ones."

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[22] "Brains or Beauty? People Perceive Attractive Scientists as More Interesting but Less Able, Studies Show." *University of Cambridge*. May 22, 2017. Retrieved from https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/brains-or-beauty-people-perceive-attractive-scientists-as-more-interesting-but-less-able-studies.

[23] Akst, Daniel. "Yes, Students Do Learn More from Attractive Teachers." *The Wall Street Journal*. August 26, 2016. Retrieved from https://www.wsj.com/articles/yes-students-do-learn-more-from-attractive-teachers-1472223974.

[24] Zeglin Brand, Peg, ed. *Beauty Matters*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.

[25] Widdows, Heather. *Perfect Me: Beauty as an Ethical Ideal.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.

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5. The Gambler

Kalshi and Polymarket are two leading companies in the recently popular world of "predictive markets," which are trade-betting markets that allow users to predict events for financial incentives. Users purchase contracts, akin to commodities contracts, on essentially anything, from the length of a press conference delivered by a politician to the location or date of a celebrity's wedding.

Gambling more broadly has existed for some time. In particular, the recent deregulation of gambling at the federal level has allowed for the proliferation of gambling websites and apps, including wider participation on platforms that host predictive markets.[26] We now live in a society where, so long as you are of legal age, anyone can gamble on sporting events from their living room couch. It appears that those skeptical of predictive markets would have to concede that using them for actions not unlike other traditional gambling platforms presents little moral harm beyond that of gambling itself. However, it is the ability to "gamble on anything" that presents the most difficult question with regard to the moral quandaries of predictive markets.

Proponents of predictive markets highlight the utility of these markets. Tarek Mansour, the CEO of Kalshi, recently headlined a conference on global finance. During a panel discussion, he shared his long-term vision "to financialize everything and create a tradable asset out of any difference in opinion."[27] Shayne Coplan, the CEO of Polymarket, recently called his platform "the most accurate thing we have as mankind right now." Thus, we are caught up in a question of utility. The financial incentive created by purchasing contracts on-wagers for outcomes of current events could indeed allow for greater insight into the public's view on certain issues. For example, Kalshi capitalized on the 2024 U.S. presidential election by using the financial incentives of their platform to offer a more accurate polling of American voters. In short, the idea is that once individuals have "skin in the game," which is accomplished through a financial incentive, a wider audience is reached, and more accurate data is collected when compared with traditional polling methods. However, when these wagers directly impact individuals' lives, how much are we willing to sacrifice in the name of accurately predicting these events?

In early Spring of 2026, a U.S. Army Special Forces soldier was indicted on several federal charges relating to contracts he purchased on predictive markets. The individual in question profited nearly $400,000 by allegedly using insider information to purchase contracts on these markets that the Venezuelan President, Nicholas Maduro, would be removed from office. Federal officials have accused the soldier of using information he gained while planning the

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[26] Liptak, Adam and Kevin Draper. "Supreme Court Ruling Favors Sports Betting." *The New York Times*. May 14, 2018. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/14/us/politics/supreme-court-sports-betting-new-jersey.html.

[27] Dellinger, AJ. "Kalshi CEO Says He Wants to Monetize 'Any Difference in Opinion.'" *Gizmodo*. December 4, 2025. Retrieved from https://gizmodo.com/kalshi-ceo-says-he-wants-to-monetize-any-difference-in-opinion-2000695320.

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operation to capture Mr. Maduro when he purchased these contracts.[28] In a similar vein, more than $50 million was recently traded across these same prediction markets in relation to the ouster of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Also concerning are the 150 accounts that purchased contracts the day before U.S. military intervention in Iran.[29]

Opponents of these contracts highlight the morally dubious nature of purchasing contracts on events like the removal of a head of state or other forms of violence or conflict. Take, for example, the previously mentioned case of contracts on the "ouster" of Ali Khamenei. While the language of the contract does not explicitly reference the political assassination of the leader, opponents state that there are very few ways an autocrat who has been in power for decades could be removed from power absent their death. This concern does not extend only to heads of state, however, and is present when contracts are purchased on any geopolitical conflict. Is there a meaningful difference between purchasing contracts on the winner of, say, a U.S. federal election and the removal of a head of state? Are there any geopolitical issues that allow for contract trading without risk of moral harms?

One final concern with predictive markets like Kalshi and Polymarket is the effect they have on the individual and how they appreciate events in the real world. Being able to treat any future event as an investment might adversely affect one's capacity to appreciate the moral, political, cultural, or aesthetic value of said event. An event might simply be the actualization of a possible fact about the world, and predictive markets seem to treat the future in this way, with a financial incentive to indicate the most likely fact. But events might be more than this, and the ability to appreciate the non-factive elements of the future might be eroded by an obsession over the truth or falsity of a possible world in the future.

[28] Weiser, Benjamin and Jonah Bromwich. "Soldier Used Classified Information to Bet on Maduro's Ouster, U.S. Says." *The New York Times*. April 23, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/23/nyregion/polymarket-maduro-indictment-soldier.html.
[29] Livni, Ephrat. "Betting on Ayatollah's Ouster Ignites Ire Over Prediction Markets." *The New York Times*. March 18, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/18/world/middleeast/ayatollah-ouster-bets-death.html.

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6. Beans or Greens

Soybeans and their derivative products are a massive business, accounting for 9% of total global agricultural trade.[30] Brazil and the United States have competed for global dominance in soybean production and export, and over the past nine years, Brazil has been first in both. For Brazil, soybean cultivation has had a variety of positive effects for its population, wherein it has directly contributed to employment growth, played a role in reducing poverty and improving household living standards, and stimulated the development of civil infrastructure.[31] At the same time, the industrialization and mechanization of soybean cultivation has lessened the demand for traditional agricultural labor and caused social and economic difficulties for smallholder farms, ultimately leading to concentrated land ownership and market share by large agribusinesses. While soybeans have been extraordinarily profitable for Brazil, they have not been profitable for all Brazilians.

One complication for Brazilian agribusiness, especially smaller farms and local farmers, is the Soy Moratorium. Established in 2006, the private agreement between companies, NGOs, and other industry entities committed them to not buying soybeans from deforested areas in the Amazon rainforest.[32] The agreement has been lauded by environmental groups for its success in reducing deforestation and participating companies have been the beneficiaries of significant, albeit functionally distinct, tax incentives.[33] While there have been significant positive impacts from the moratorium, Brazilian farmers have criticized it for leading to differential and unfair treatment between soybean producers and giving further market leverage to large, established agribusinesses that have the means to benefit from the moratorium.

After significant pressure, a law was passed in the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso to strip tax incentives from companies participating in the moratorium.[34] Starting January 2026, large soy traders have begun to leave the pact, thereby lessening the influence that the moratorium has over soy businesses. For Mato Grosso, the largest soybean producing state in Brazil, the law can be understood as an effort to “level the playing field” between Brazilian, domestic producers and the multinational agricultural corporations that they are in competition with. For a country that relies heavily on soybean production and export, the law can be understood as a way of

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[30] Valdes, Constanza, Jeffery Gillespie, and Erik Dohlman. “Soybean Production, Marketing Costs, and Export Competitiveness in Brazil and the United States” (Report No. EIB-262). *U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service*. 2023. https://doi.org/10.32747/2023.8142532.ers.
[31] Peng, Dailiang et al. “Global Soybean Trade Dynamics: Drivers, Impacts, and Sustainability.” *The Innovation* 7, no. 2 (February 2026). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.xinn.2025.101124.
[32] da Cruz, Gabriela Mota and Luiz Arthur Chiodi Pereira. “What Is the Soy Moratorium and Why Was It Suspended?” *Insper Agro Global*. September 10, 2025. Retrieved from https://agro.insper.edu.br/en/agro-in-data/Articles/What-is-the-soy-moratorium-and-why-was-it-suspended.
[33] Mano, Ana and Manuela Andreoni. “Exclusive: Soy Trading Firms to Abandon Amazon Protection Pact in Brazil.” *Reuters*. December 29, 2025. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/soy-trading-firms-abandon-amazon-protection-pact-brazil-2025-12-29/.
[34] Garza, Frida. “A Major Agreement to Protect the Amazon is Falling Apart After 20 Years.” *Grist*. January 13, 2026. Retrieved from https://grist.org/business/a-major-agreement-to-protect-the-amazon-is-falling-apart-after-20-years/.

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helping local, smallholder farmers and supporting the Brazilian economy at large. With many multinational companies being based in the Global North, the law can also be seen as a way for Brazil to increase its economic independence and global leverage against North American and European agribusiness.

The law has received resistance from environmental groups, however, who have pointed out the potentially grave environmental effects that the collapse of the moratorium will have. The Amazon is the largest tropical rainforest on the planet, accounting for 10% of global biodiversity, 20% of global liquid freshwater, and 1.4 billion acres of dense forests.[35] These forests serve as a large "carbon sink" which removes a net total of 340 million tons of carbon dioxide per year.[36] One 2026 study connects deforestation to reductions in rainfall, which exacerbates the effects of climate change and could lead to an irreversible "tipping point" that not only changes the Amazon ecosystem but has global consequences.[37] A different, comprehensive 2026 study argues that "the economic benefits of deforestation-linked activities in the Amazon are low, especially when compared to its environmental damages."[38]

Environmental groups worry that the withdrawal of large soy traders from the moratorium will incentivize deforestation, but the ongoing collapse of the Soy Moratorium seems to indicate that current incentives to prevent such deforestation have not sufficiently benefitted those who matter most in preserving the rainforest. In 2025, 98% of local farmers blocked from selling their products by the moratorium still illegally cleared land anyway.[39]

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[35] Cesareo, Kerry, Michele Thieme, and Anita van Breda. "Amazon." *World Wildlife Fund*. Retrieved from https://www.worldwildlife.org/places/amazon/.
[36] Veit, Peter, David Gibbs, and Katie Reytar. "Indigenous Forests Are Some of the Amazon's Last Carbon Sinks." *World Resources Institute*. January 3, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.wri.org/insights/amazon-carbon-sink-indigenous-forests.
[37] Mulkey, Sachi Kitajima. "New Study Shows Risks of Amazon Deforestation. And Rewards of Protection." *New York Times*. May 6, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2026/05/06/climate/amazon-rain-forest-deforestation-climate.html.
[38] Ferreira, Alipio. "Amazon Deforestation: Drivers, Damages, and Policies." *Land Use Policy* 160 (January 2026). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2025.107810.
[39] Mano, Ana. "Almost All Farmers Blocked by Brazil's 'Soy Moratorium' Cleared Land Illegally, Traders' Study Finds." *Reuters*. July 30, 2025. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/almost-all-farmers-blocked-by-brazils-soy-moratorium-cleared-land-illegally-2025-07-30/.

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7. Equal Access Activism

What do burgers, blended coffee drinks, and fried chicken have in common? You can order them all in a drive-through! Except if you are hearing-impaired or have difficulty speaking, then you may have to order at the counter inside the store.

For many Americans with disabilities, additional steps like ordering from store counters, lack of wheelchair accessible ramps, and websites with no searchable white text are examples of preclusive measures that isolate and segregate them from fully participating in society. In 1990, Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) into law, both addressing this discrimination and codifying laws to help public spaces remain open and accessible for all. This was to directly assure equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency to persons with disabilities.

However, even after 36 years of ADA, Anthony Bouyer is still finding places that are not easily accessible or are in violation of ADA regulations.[40] In September of 2025 alone, Bouyer found three businesses within the same block that had a range of issues like inaccessible counter heights, access ramps that were either unleveled or too steep, and cracked pavements in parking lots. While federal ADA law does not allow for monetary damages, in some states like California, plaintiffs can sue under state-specific laws like the Unruh Civil Rights Act.[41] Such acts allow redress for denial of access in the amount of $4,000. Bouyer sued all three.

Bouyer casts himself as a disability advocate determined to make California more navigable for those in wheelchairs. Bouyer himself was paralyzed after a surgery to remove a spinal cord tumor. Since then, he says, he has been trying to "improve the lives of disabled people."[42] He travels around the Californian county of Orange with a 12-inch level gauge to measure the slopes of store aisles and parking spaces. In a 2023 deposition, Mr. Bouyer is quoted saying, "Everywhere I go, if I see something that doesn't look correct, I measure it."

The small businesses affected by Bouyer's lawsuits say that they are being squeezed by the cost of the legal proceedings and the damages they are being sued for. Small businesses are often unaware they're in violation of the ADA and cite the difficulties in understanding zoning regulations, knowing how to work around old or historic buildings, or the technical knowledge necessary to fix digital assets like their website. For most small businesses that operate under tight margins, lawsuits of such nature threaten to drive them out of business. The owner of Lola's Chicken Shack in Alameda County, Mark Rogers, decided to postpone a brain surgery

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[40] "Newport Beach Civil Rights Attorneys Secure Summary Judgment for Paraplegic Man - Judge Orders Shopping Center to Provide Accessible Parking as Required by ADA." *Manning Law APC* via *PR Newswire*. January 11, 2022. Retrieved from https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/newport-beach-civil-rights-attorneys-secure-summary-judgment-for-paraplegic-man---judge-orders-shopping-center-to-provide-accessible-parking-as-required-by-ada-301459021.html.

[41] "Unruh Civil Rights Act," Cal. Civ. Code § 51 (West 2023).

[42] Ellis, Rebecca. "One Man Has Filed 1,800 Disability Lawsuits against SoCal Shops. Store Owners Are Fed Up." *Los Angeles Times*. April 27, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2026-04-27/los-angeles-restaurants-disability-lawsuits.

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when his business was sued for lack of accessible outdoor tables and high front door threshold.[43] A family run burger joint in Richmond, California closed down after 38 years when they were sued and their landlord refused to install a costly wheelchair ramp.[44]

Addressing these violations by hiring pricey consultants or subject matter experts doesn't always resolve the issues because there is a lack of guidance over specific violations and changing policy regulations by the Department of Justice. Business owners are also sued by law firms like Manning Law that specialize in handling a large number of cases connected to ADA compliance issues. Manning Law has filed more than 9,000 lawsuits in southern California over the span of a decade.[45]

While there has been a substantial increase of lawsuits in states like California and New York, nonprofit organizations like Disability Rights Advocates argue that advancing rights, inclusion, and equity of people with disabilities is best done with high impact litigation as a strategic tool.[46] In 2025 alone, DRA cites securing settlement agreements with the City of Chicago to install thousands of Accessible Pedestrian Signals, with the California Department of Health Services to provide Medi-Cal notices in accessible formats such as Braille, and with the Tennessee Department of Corrections to secure access to interpreters and videophones for deaf prisoners. Penalties and heavy civil fines like the $352,000 settlement against Bad Daddy's Burger Bar in Murfreesboro, Tennessee also create impactful news stories for businesses who don't understand their obligations under ADA law. The restaurant denied seating a youth wheelchair basketball team claiming they were a potential fire hazard.[47]

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[43] "How Small Businesses are Targeted with Abusive ADA Lawsuits." *U.S. Chamber of Commerce Institute for Legal Reform*. October 12, 2022. Retrieved from https://instituteforlegalreform.com/blog/small-businesses-targeted-with-ada-lawsuits/.

[44] Nelken-Zitser, Joshua. "A Decades-Old Burger Joint Closed after Being Sued over Wheelchair Access, Saying Its Landlord Wouldn't Pay for a Ramp." *Business Insider*. April 12, 2024. Retrieved from https://www.businessinsider.com/restaurant-closed-citing-disability-suit-says-landlord-wouldnt-buy-ramp-2024-4.

[45] "The Manning Law Firm." *Karlin Law Firm, LLP*. n.d. Retrieved from https://www.karlinlaw.com/manning-law-firm-page/.

[46] "2025 Annual Report." *Disability Rights Advocates*. 2025. Retrieved from https://dralegal.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/DRA-2025-Annual-Report.pdf.

[47] "Murfreesboro Restaurant Agrees to Pay $352,000 to Settle Allegations it Violated the Americans with Disabilities Act by Discriminating Against Children with Disabilities Just After the Anniversary of the ADA." *U.S. Attorney's Office, Middle District of Tennessee.* July 30, 2024. Retrieved from https://www.justice.gov/usao-mdtn/pr/murfreesboro-restaurant-agrees-pay-352000-settle-allegations-it-violated-americans.

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~~8. Fishy Business~~

Every year, millions of non-native trout are bred in hatcheries and released into waterways across America. The culprit? Federal and state wildlife conservation agencies.[48]

During 2023 alone, over 1.1 billion fish were estimated to have been caught in the United States, with roughly 35% (or 715 million) of those fish being kept.[49] In an effort to keep up with recreational demand, federal and state wildlife agencies have introduced expansive stocking programs that place non-native brown and rainbow trout in bodies of water throughout America. Adding a surplus of non-native fish species to the so-called "fishing pool" helps to prevent the overfishing of native species; some of which are already struggling to maintain steady population numbers against the prevailing threats of climate change, dam building, and water pollution. In many parts of the country, recreational fishing could completely deplete native fish populations, so supplementing local populations with easy-to-reproduce species of trout allows wildlife agencies to populate waters whenever and wherever they need to, encouraging fishermen to hunt artificially transplanted fish populations instead of struggling native populations.

With native populations at such high risk of extinction from overfishing, it might seem counterproductive for agencies designed to protect wildlife to encourage the recreational fishing industry. Ironically, however, maintaining a successful recreational fishing industry secures a crucial source of funding for state wildlife conservation. In most U.S. states, agencies tax fishing gear purchases and put the tax towards funding conservation projects. On average, the taxes received from these purchases total roughly $206 million each year, a monetary representation of a fishing custom that has had a stronghold on American culture since the creation of the Federal Fish Commission in 1871.[50] This creates an interesting paradox where native fish conservation flounders without a booming fishing industry.

On top of the tax paradox, non-native trout have proven to cause real trouble for native species.[51] Rainbow trout in particular are native only to the Rocky Mountains as steelhead trout—their anadromous form, wherein they migrate from saltwater seas to freshwater rivers. The presence of rainbow trout as an exclusively freshwater species is completely alien to American waterways, and this becomes a significant problem when rainbow trout aren't fished. Rainbow trout have the ability to—and have been known to—hybridize with other trout species,

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[48] Krieger, Nate. "Why Are States Unleashing Millions of These Fish?" *Vox News*. April 22, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.vox.com/videos/486341/why-are-states-unleashing-millions-of-these-fish.
[49] "Fisheries of the United States Reports." *National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries*. Updated February 6, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/fisheries-united-states-reports.
[50] "Excise Taxes: Action Needed to Improve Compliance for Sport Fishing and Archery Imports" (Report No. GAO-24-106569). *U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO)*. July 29, 2024. Retrieved from https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-106569.
[51] "The Cult of the Rainbow: When Invasive Trout Threaten Native Species." *Due West Anglers*. November 22, 2022. Retrieved from https://www.duewestanglers.com/the-cult-of-the-rainbow/.

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producing offspring that have historically disrupted native food webs.[52] This is mainly due to the fact that rainbow trout have demonstrated proficiency in out-consuming resources vital to the survival of certain native species.[53] In 1940, the introduction of rainbow trout to Lake Tahoe was responsible for the near extinction of Lahontan cutthroat trout. Like many other species of Salmonidae, rainbow trout have voracious appetites, consuming everything from small fish, to frogs, to insects. These appetites have the ability to quickly outcompete other species, as they are typically more aggressive and hungrier than other fish.

In defense of hatchery raised trout, how ethical is it for conservation organizations to breed them in the first place? Hatchery trout are often raised in cramped, overcrowded facilities with rampant disease—an issue for both the hatchery trout and native species if released into open waters. This practice is similar to those often harshly criticized in the factory farming industry more broadly.[54] Ultimately, the end goal of their introduction isn't to rebuild populations or to allow the species to thrive, it's for them to be killed in place of native species.

[52] "New Threat Facing Lahontan Cutthroat Trout at Independence Lake: Hybridization." *California Department of Fish and Wildlife*. April 30, 2020. Retrieved from https://wildlife.ca.gov/Science-Institute/News/new-threat-facing-lahontan-cutthroat-trout-at-independence-lake-hybridization1.
[53] "Case Study: Rainbow Trout." *U.S. Department of State*. n.d. Retrieved from https://2001-2009.state.gov/g/oes/ocns/inv/cs/2322.htm. **Note: This is an archived webpage.**
[54] "50 Years of Research Overwhelmingly Shows Hatcheries are Harmful to Trout, Salmon, Char and More." *Hatch Magazine*. September 6, 2023. Retrieved from https://www.hatchmag.com/articles/50-years-research-overwhelmingly-shows-hatcheries-are/7715778.

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9. GEM in the Rough

On November 1, 2025, the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) opened in Cairo. The opening of the museum reignited interest in the British Museum returning the Rosetta Stone to Egypt.[55] The Rosetta Stone was discovered in Egypt by the French in the 1790s, then taken by the British shortly after and has been displayed in the British Museum ever since.[56] The British Museum claims they have not received a formal request from the Egyptian government, and that they are also bound by strict laws; specifically, the British Museum Act of 1963, "...which places strict limitations on returning objects." Many argue that the British Museum should return the Rosetta Stone to the GEM, as it holds more historical significance to Egypt and would bring more value if it were contextualized amongst the GEM's collection of over 50,000 artifacts that span 5,000 years of the country's history. Some have argued that returning previously stolen artifacts, also called repatriation or restitution, is a moral obligation of the countries that possess these items.

Egypt is not the only country to make efforts to repatriate their ancient artifacts, in fact, repatriation is a common call to action in many African countries.[57] Uganda and Ghana were both "loaned" back some of their artifacts from England in 2024, but were not granted permanent ownership of these objects since the British Museum Act of 1963 prohibits the return of museum artifacts except under extraordinary circumstances. This law played a role in Greece being denied the repatriation of the Parthenon Marbles, which the Greek government initially requested back in the 1980s. Negotiations between Greece and England about the ownership of the Parthenon Marbles are ongoing, with Greek officials stating they intend "...to 'fill the void' that an absence of the Parthenon Marbles would create at the British Museum with a series of regular loans from Greece to the U.K."[58] It is possible that the GEM could strike a similar deal with England in order to agree on repatriation of the Rosetta Stone.

While nations call the return of their historical artifacts "repatriation," museums refer to this process as "deaccessioning." Deaccessioning can put a strain on a museum's resources, including the staff power required to monitor which objects are deaccessed, as well as a potential financial loss if they are not compensated for the returned objects, which could put the preservation of their other collections at stake.[59] Some museum officials also refer to the "public

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[55] Whiddington, Richard. "Egyptologists Call on British Museum to Return Rosetta Stone (Again)." *Artnet News*. November 4, 2025. Retrieved from https://news.artnet.com/art-world/egyptologists-call-on-british-museum-return-rosetta-stone-again-2708336.
[56] "This Day in History: July 15 (1799: Rosetta Stone Found)." *HISTORY* (*A&E Television Networks, LLC*). Updated July 15, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/july-15/rosetta-stone-found.
[57] Carter, Sarah. "African Nations Want Their Stolen History Back, and Experts Say It's Time to Speed Up the Process." *CBS News*. June 24, 2024. Retrieved from https://www.cbsnews.com/news/africa-stolen-artifacts-colonial-deaccessioning-repatriation/.
[58] Lawson-Tancred, Jo. "Greece Rallies Global Allies to Reclaim the Parthenon Marbles." *Artnet News*. June 27, 2025. Retrieved from https://news.artnet.com/art-world/parthenon-marbles-update-2662028.
[59] Huh, Elizabeth. "Deaccessioning: What Is It, Why Is It Controversial, and How Is It Changing?" *The Columbia Journal of Law and the Arts*. February 13, 2023. Retrieved from https://journals.library.columbia.edu/index.php/lawandarts/announcement/view/595.

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trust" put into museums by the public, and that deaccessioning can erode this trust. On the other hand, giving up ownership of artifacts allows for the possibility of being loaned other historical exhibits, as Greece has promised to do with England.

Because more museums in the U.S. are privately owned and there aren't prohibitive laws like the British Museum Act in place, the process of deaccessioning or repatriating in the U.S. is considerably different than it is in England. Since there are no legislative roadblocks to returning artifacts like there are in England, some museums in the U.S. have engaged in repatriation. The Fowler Museum of UCLA voluntarily returned seven museum artifacts back to Ghana in 2024, with one of the senior curators of the museum stating that, "...in the case of pieces that were violently or coercively taken from their original owners or communities, it is our ethical responsibility to do what we can to return those objects."

One law in the U.S. pertaining to repatriation is The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). NAGPRA was signed into law in 1990 and has been recently updated to speed up the process of repatriation by implementing new systems and regulations, especially regarding human remains and funerary items.[60] The new regulations have shifted the duty of initiating restitution to the museums themselves rather than tribal governments, and also require museums to obtain consent before displaying Native American artifacts. NAGPRA highlights that the nature of the artifacts being repatriated is significant; human remains and sacred and funerary items seem extremely important to return out of respect for the culture that they originated from. The Rosetta Stone is not a funerary object, but is considered highly culturally valuable due to its significance in decoding ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs.

These different examples outline the most crucial factors impacting repatriation of museum artifacts. In the case of the Rosetta Stone being returned to Egypt, cultural significance, country of origin, and laws and regulations regarding deassessioning seem particularly important to consider. However, there are many other variables to weigh in deassessioning decisions, such as museum resources, public access, private and public ownership, and more.

[60] "Interior Department Announces Final Rule for Implementation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act." *U.S. Department of the Interior*. December 6, 2023. Retrieved from https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-announces-final-rule-implementation-native-american-graves.

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10. To Be, or Not to Be…Forgotten?

The Delhi High Court recently ruled that a so-called "right to be forgotten" flows from the right to privacy contained within India's constitution. The "right to be forgotten" is often invoked in debates surrounding access to public criminal records and individuals' data. In short, it is the right for an individual to have their personal data erased from varying webpages and online indexes.[61] This ruling allows for individuals to request that their personal information regarding court cases be removed from pages that allow for digital access in particular situations. Specifically, the court ruled that court records from cases resulting in acquittals and discharges must be de-indexed from search engines. While court records are still a matter of public record, and names of those involved will still be included, the justices held that individuals should not have their names linked to these records when accessed digitally.[62] While distinct from the right to privacy itself, which seeks to prevent information about an individual from reaching the public sphere, the "right to be forgotten" directly concerns already accessible information.

Key to proponents of legislation supporting the "right to be forgotten" is the belief that one should be able to dictate the path of one's life free from stigma or setbacks imposed by situations or actions from an earlier time in their life. A particularly powerful example of how the "right to be forgotten" can improve one's livelihood is when considering the prevalence of so-called "revenge porn" sites, where individuals' intimate photographs are posted to the internet without consent. Similarly, digital access to things like acquittal records and arrest records can have a real impact on individuals seeking employment, even if they have no criminal record outright, or have had that record expunged.

Opponents of this kind of legislation argue that a right to be forgotten might lead to pernicious forms of internet censorship. For many, a key good of the internet is the apparent freedoms it provides, as well as an expansive, unrestricted network of international communication. How might it be determined that information contained within a certain webpage is considered eligible for deletion? A hypothetical extreme could very well be the removal of any content deemed to have a negative impact on the public perception of the ruling government or individuals in power.

This lack of restriction can prove to be a useful tool for employers seeking to screen applicants. Unsavory social media posts from an individual's past really could play an important role in how they are perceived by the wider public, especially in the case of politicians. Graham Platner, a former candidate for the U.S. Senate in Maine, recently came under fire for since-deleted posts on the popular social media forum Reddit. Although these posts were deleted before he began

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[61] Wolford, Ben. "Everything You Need to Know About the 'Right to Be Forgotten.'" *GDPR.EU* (*Proton AG*). n.d. Retrieved from https://gdpr.eu/right-to-be-forgotten/.
[62] "Delhi HC Recognizes 'Right to Be Forgotten,' Lays Down Framework for De-Indexing Judicial Records." *The Hindu*. June 1, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/delhi-hc-recognises-right-to-be-forgotten-directs-search-engines-to-disable-name-based-search-in-court-orders-news/article71048040.ece.

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his campaign, several archiving sites kept records of his account and associated posts.[63] While the court ruling out of India pertains explicitly to litigation and records requests, it is not absurd to proponents of "right to be forgotten" legislation to suggest an expansion of this right to the internet broadly, allowing for the systematic removal of one's information from webpages across the internet.

Where is the line drawn between freedom of expression and undue burden placed on an individual due to their past actions? As a new generation of adults comes of age—a generation that has spent much of their youth online—the privacy of personal information, or lack thereof, could have serious impacts on their future lives.

[63] Kaczynski, Andrew and Em Steck. "'I Got Older and Became a Communist': Deleted Posts Show Maine Senate Hopeful's Raw Views on Politics, War and Police." *CBS News*. October 16, 2025. Retrieved from https://www.cnn.com/2025/10/16/politics/kfile-graham-platner-maine-senate-candidate-deleted-reddit-posts.

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~~11. Cost of a Conscience~~

The fourth most common type of cancer that affects women globally is cervical cancer, with 660,000 new cases each year and around 350,000 deaths. The World Health Organization reports the highest rates of cervical cancer incidence and mortality in low- and middle-income countries especially in sub-Saharan Africa, Central America and South-East Asia.[64] The HPV vaccine has been available for 20 years but has remained inaccessible for most girls in those countries because of the cost, supply shortage, required number of doses (3), and a lack of infrastructure for vaccinating pre-teen and teenage girls.

In 2021, the Gates Foundation, formerly the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, started working with a vaccine manufacturer to produce and accelerate a single-dose HPV vaccine that would be simpler to deliver and solve the cost problem. This vision was supported and made possible thanks to the Gates Foundation's $89 billion large endowment fund. According to their 2024 Annual Report, "4 million girls who would have been unprotected from cervical cancer got vaccinated."[65] The HPV vaccination efforts are one of many audacious missions the Gates Foundation has undertaken to bring life-changing products and programs to those who need it most around the world.

Long celebrated around the world for its work and impact, in January 2026, the foundation was receiving attention for a different reason. In the Department of Justice's release of documents relating to disgraced financier and human trafficker Jeffrey Epstein, the billionaire co-founder and chair of the Gates Foundation, Bill Gates, was mentioned more than 3,000 times in emails and appears in photos with Epstein's pilot, Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, as well as women whose identities have been obscured.[66] There were several email exchanges between Gates and Epstein and in draft emails Epstein claimed to help Gates manage fallout from extramarital affairs and even negotiations with staff employed by Gates himself. Boris Nikolic, who Epstein named as his backup executor for his will, worked for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and appears over 14,000 times in the Justice Department's files.

Facing requests and questions from foundation staff, Bill Gates responded to the nature of relationship he had with Epstein in a town hall meeting at the end of February 2026. In it, he apologized to the staff, took responsibility for his actions and admitted to having an affair with two Russian women while married to co-founder and ex-wife Melinda French-Gates. Witnesses at the town hall reported seeing distressed employees in the audience in tears.[67] It followed withdrawals from donors and partners and reports of employees "struggling to reconcile their

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[64] "Cervical Cancer." *World Health Organization*. Updated July 3, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/cervical-cancer.
[65] Ainslie, Carolyn. "Annual Report 2024: Letter from the CFO." *Gates Foundation*. 2024. Retrieved from https://www.gatesfoundation.org/about/financials/annual-reports/annual-report-2024.
[66] Lavietes, Matt. "Bill Gates Addresses Being Mentioned in Epstein Files, Says He Was 'Foolish.'" *NBC News*. February 4, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/bill-gates-addresses-mentioned-epstein-files-says-was-foolish-rcna257441.
[67] Glazer, Emily. "Bill Gates's Image Takes a Hit from Epstein Ties." *The Wall Street Journal*. May 30, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.wsj.com/business/bill-gates-image-epstein-e0b83243.

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commitment" to the foundation with "concern about what they're hearing and reading about the chair."[68] In his address Gates conceded that he regretted his relationship with Epstein and that the controversy is the "opposite of the values of the foundation."

Part of the conflict for employees and key donors has been the institutional decision to pursue a philanthropic collaboration with Epstein while the foundation was also aggressively marketing itself as a champion of women's empowerment, and positioned itself to have significant influence over groups working in that space. Questions remain about how damning revelations concerning one primary source of endowment could invalidate or morally complicate the consequences of that endowment.

The impact of mission-driven non-profits, given the support of large endowment funds, is evident in the foundation's work over the last 26 years. Since it was established, the Gates Foundation has given $100 billion to saving and improving lives around the world. The foundation has also led campaigns to raise money and support from wealthy donors to encourage philanthropy amongst millionaires and billionaires in the hopes of solving global health issues with greater urgency. Vetting the morals and ethical standing of each patron or donor can be a demanding task, and at the same time could very well be masked by deception. For many non-profits, it can be a balancing act to accept money from an organization that has historically undermined or even contributed to the very problems they are trying to solve.

While divorcing the merits of an action from the person enacting them is difficult enough, the question of the means employed to bring necessary benefit to millions also deserves a spotlight in philanthropy. An example of this was best captured in an email dated March 6, 2013 between Boris Nikolic and Jeffrey Epstein, where the latter is trying to determine Bill Gates' position on paying tribal leaders in Afghanistan to allow a vaccination drive against polio in a village. Nikolic responds, "To me if a leader is using some of money for his personal gain — but this allows job done — is super OK. Even at the worst — weapons — depends what kind of weapons and what could be repercussions. Bill is much more reluctant/negative re this."[69]

[68] Musaddique, Shafi. "Gates Foundation Chief Feels 'Sullied' by Epstein Links." *Alliance Magazine*. February 19, 2026. https://www.alliancemagazine.org/blog/gates-foundation-chief-feels-sullied-by-epstein-links/.
[69] "EFTA00955764." *U.S. Department of Justice*. Updated July 17, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.justice.gov/epstein/files/DataSet%209/EFTA00955764.pdf.

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12. Medicine and Misinformation

In 2025, the Chinese government announced new rules for social media influencers who discussed topics related to health and medicine.[70] It "emphasizes stricter requirements for healthcare practitioners and related personnel when posting medical science information on social media platforms" and underscores "the need for platforms to take greater responsibility to verify account credentials and ensure content authenticity." As the *South China Morning Post* reports, more than 92% of China's 1.07 billion short-form video users consume health-related information specifically. Relatedly, Article 13 of China's Code of Conduct for Online Presenters specifies that those who livestream content that "requires a higher professional level"—topics such as medical care, finance, and law—should obtain the relevant qualifications and report them to the livestreaming service for review.[71] The recently released rules regarding health and medical science on social media appear to be a concerted effort to curb misinformation, with an emphasis on content that can be seen as medical advice.

The rapid spread and persistence of misinformation online have been a concern not just in China, but also worldwide. The World Economic Forum, in its 2024 Global Risks Report, reported that *misinformation* led the global rankings in perceived short-term, risk severity.[72] The problem of misinformation, particularly medical misinformation, has been a concern for qualified professionals for some time, but a major factor contributing to the severity of the problem is the rise of increasingly powerful and accessible generative artificial intelligence models. Paired with the ease that social media influencers have in curating, then presenting information alongside the lack of incentives or initiative that consumers have in verifying it,[73] misinformation has become a problem of increasing concern. When it comes to healthcare, wrong advice can often lead to improper treatment, worsened symptoms, and serious harm, highlighting the importance of curtailing misinformation to prevent it from spreading in a "viral" way.

Among the concerns of misinformation noted by the World Economic Forum, however, is that "the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation may be leveraged to strengthen digital authoritarianism and the use of technology to control citizens." As misinformation becomes more common, governments are placed in situations where they have a unique role in

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[70] Liang, Xinlu. "China Cracks Down on Fake Medical Advice with New Rules for Health Influencers." *South China Morning Post*. August 22, 2025. Retrieved from https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3322803/china-cracks-down-fake-medical-advice-new-rules-health-influencers.

[71] "Code of Conduct for Online Presenters (国家广播电视总局、文化和旅游部关于印发《网络主播行为规范》的通知)". *Chinese State Administration of Radio and Television, Ministry of Culture and Tourism*, translated by China Law Translate. June 8, 2022. Retrieved from https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/online-presenter-code-of-conduct/.

[72] "The Global Risks Report 2024." *World Economic Forum*. January 2024. Retrieved from https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2024/.

[73] Merchant, Raina and David Asch. "Protecting the Value of Medical Science in the Age of Social Media and 'Fake News'." *Journal of the AMA* 320, no. 23 (December 2018). https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2018.18416.

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ascertaining and determining the truth. While curbing medical misinformation is important, measures taken to censor this misinformation can also be utilized by government organizations to restrict information that might not be so easily categorized as “misinformation.” Statements of value, including religious commitments, political affiliations, and cultural markers, seem to be fundamentally different from medical, financial, and legal advice, but these might still be affected by legislation that targets misinformation online. For instance, while Article 13 of China’s code of conduct (referenced above) advises those who livestream content to have the relevant qualifications if they give advice on professional topics, Article 4 of the same document specifies adherence to “the correct political orientation, orientation for public opinion guidance, and values orientation.” Defining particular sets of values as correct or incorrect could be sufficient to censor alternative views on the good life if curbing misinformation—incorrect information—is the goal of the code.

Finding a balance between the correct presentation of topics, like those related to healthcare and medicine, while still allowing the possibility of alternative views is the one major task of content moderation writ large. Allowing open and free speech about topics that generally require specialized research and study on social media can allow for the democratization of information and the ability to share and disseminate views that challenge dominant, dogmatic perspectives, including those that stem from private industry lobbying, but it can just as easily allow bad actors to exploit the rapid and largely unverified consumption of information for profit or other non-altruistic reasons. Strategies to combat inaccurate, misleading and incomplete information by unqualified influencers on social media might require nuance, such as disclaimer warnings and increased media literacy education,[74] but with the publics’ increasing reliance on social media for inspiration, news and education,[75] these nuanced strategies might be too little, too late.

[74] Denniss, Emily and Rebecca Lindberg. “Perspective: Social Media and the Spread of Misinformation: Infectious and a Threat to Public Health.” *Health Promotion International* 40, no. 2 (April 2025). https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daaf023.
[75] Sun, Mengru. “Understanding the Relationship Between Social Media Use for Information Acquisition and Life Satisfaction from a Knowledge, Beliefs, and Practices Perspective.” *Frontiers in Psychology* 16 (October 2025): 1678675. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1678675.

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13. Normally Distributed Violence

"Stochastic terrorism" is a recent conceptual introduction to discussions about terrorism, political violence, and freedom of speech. Drawn from the Greek word *stochastikos*, "stochastic" terrorism is a "random" and non-deterministic form of political-motivated violence, wherein a speaker—an influential, public speaker with the capacity to broadcast their message to a large, anonymous audience—uses rhetoric to disseminate ideas that are statistically likely to increase violence, perpetrated (typically) by single, "lone wolf" actors.

Stochastic terrorism, by one influential definition, is a continuous, interactive process whereby a speaker uses and amplifies hostile rhetoric, dehumanizing language, and escalating verbal attacks on a person or group of people in such a way to inspire but not explicitly direct an attack carried out by a person who is unknown to the speaker. This process relies on a statistically predictable, albeit individually unpredictable, act of targeted violence by someone other than the speaker.[76]

Instances of stochastic terrorism might be older than mass media. Henry II of England said of the Archbishop of Canterbury, "Will no one rid me of this meddlesome priest?" Not long after, four of Henry II's knights set out to do exactly that, attempting to kidnap and eventually murdering the Archbishop. The knights' actions were not ordered by Henry II, and Henry II was not aware of the plot. But in speaking as he did, Henry II nonetheless made the chance of the Archbishop's "ridding" much more likely.

One of the great difficulties of public speech is that one cannot know how every person will interpret their message. To say that any particular speaker that passionately extols their virtues is "raising the probability of violence" can be difficult to demonstrate. As a mere fact of rhetoric, every piece of public speech is likely to marginally change the probability of violence for better or worse, but this is a distant calculation for the speaker themselves. In a world of increasingly polarized and radical rhetoric, however, this calculation might not seem so distant. Given that audiences are larger—up to hundreds of millions—the odds of a random, and significant, act of political violence is higher given a probabilistic distribution of extremism among listeners.

While terrorism is both legally and conceptually distinct from hate speech, stochastic terrorism creates a gray area where the two can become entangled. The statistical probability of a crime is not the same as the perpetration of the crime, and making a suggestion is not the same as the issuing a directive. Legislative attempts to prevent stochastic terrorism—either by criminalizing certain types of speech or holding speakers liable in certain cases—end up becoming exceptions to freedom of expression.

There have been several challenges to the contents of free speech and the guarantees covered under the First and Fourteenth Amendments. In the 1910s and 1920s, several cases were argued before the Supreme Court challenging "criminal syndicalism" laws enacted by states to

[76] Amman, Molly and J. Reid Meloy. "Stochastic Terrorism: A Linguistic and Psychological Analysis." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 5 (October 2021): 2-13. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27073433.

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interpret and govern possible harm through speech. Amid fears of violent political movements, these laws criminalized membership in certain organizations, the publication or distribution of organizational literature, and participation in rallies or meetings of such organizations. The decision in *Whitney v. California* (1927) upheld that “utterances inimical to the public welfare, tending to incite to crime, disturb the public peace, or endanger the foundations of organized government” were punishable, and thereby a legitimate exception to freedom of expression.[77]

This standard changed in 1969, when Clarence Brandenburg, a leader in the Ku Klux Klan, invited a local TV station to cover a rally where he gave an inflammatory speech where references were made to the possibility of "revenge" or forced expulsion against minority groups. He was arrested under Ohio's criminal syndicalism laws and sentenced to 10 years in prison, but Brandenburg's conviction was reversed by the Supreme Court and a new test was articulated—the “imminent lawless action" test—that speech is protected unless it meets two strict criteria: (1) it must be directed to inciting imminent lawless action and (2) it must be likely to incite or produce such action.[78] Because Brandenburg's generalized threats did not urge immediate illegal acts, his conviction was overturned, and the standard established in *Whitney* was overruled.

Stochastic terrorism, by the definition above, does not involve immanent lawless action and *relies* on a lack of immediacy. For figures that speak hatefully about a particular group or individual, the fact that violence is not immediately likely provides plausible deniability for the speaker. First Amendment protections guarantee equal opportunity for expression, regardless of content. These protections safeguard a diversity of political, religious, and cultural views, but they can also safeguard exaggerations, propaganda, and even outright lies.

While the Brandenburg test is one of the primary measures in determining punitive harm and legal cases have relied on the "imminent" nature of danger, there is a relative degree of flexibility in how imminent and to what degree something could be considered imminent. For example, if a popular media or political figure was to hold a rally, use charged language while dehumanizing a group of people, and call for possible action to impede a political event that would occur within hours—all a short distance away from the exact venue where that event would occur—there could be questions about how "imminent" an occurrence of violence was.

[77] Whitney v. California, 274 U.S. 357 (1927)
[78] Bradenburg v. Ohio, 395 U.S. 444 (1969)

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14. The Allure of the Machine

Sewell Setzer III was fourteen when he began spending hours talking to a chatbot based on the *Game of Thrones* character, Daenerys, on Character.AI, a platform that lets users chat with AI-generated characters. As Sewell's use of the platform increased, he quit basketball, started getting demerits at school, and spent less and less time with his family. Although his mother suspected that Sewell was struggling, she couldn't figure out what was causing him to pull away.

During conversations Sewell had with "Daenerys," he directly referenced suicide, which the chatbot responded to by discouraging the idea and reminding him he had so much to live for. But when he alluded to suicide indirectly with messages like "I will come home to you" and "I will shift to Westeros today," the chatbot would respond "come home to me as soon as possible." Eventually, after sending a message to "Daenerys" saying that he would come home soon, Sewell shot himself with his stepfather's gun.[79]

Research has shown that AI chatbots don't respond adequately when there are subtle hints or nuanced language used that allude to ending one's life. In a recent study, 29 chatbots were tested and none of the tested agents satisfied criteria for an adequate response, defined as meeting seven criteria that included urging professional help and stating the chatbot was not equipped to deal with a suicidal crisis. 51.72% satisfied the relaxed criteria for a marginal response and 48.28% were deemed inadequate. The most common errors cited were inability to provide emergency contact information and a lack of contextual understanding.[80]

Following Sewell's death, his mother filed a lawsuit against Character.AI, alleging that the company designed a product that encouraged emotional dependency in vulnerable minors and failed to respond appropriately when Sewell expressed suicidal thoughts. The Setzer lawsuit is now part of a growing group of suits against AI companies alleging that chatbots deepened users' emotional dependency, and increased suicidal ideation or detachment from reality, or otherwise caused harm to minors.[81]

Courts have heard similar claims involving older forms of media. Families have sued after young people harmed themselves or others, alleging that songs, role-playing games, or violent video games had a direct correlation with the harm. But courts have been reluctant to treat things like books, movies, or games, and the people who made them, as legally responsible for the actions

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[79] Barron, Jesse. "A Teen in Love with a Chatbot Killed Himself. Can the Chatbot Be Held Responsible?" *The New York Times*. October 24, 2025. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/24/magazine/character-ai-chatbot-lawsuit-teen-suicide-free-speech.html.

[80] Pichowitz, Wojciech, Marian Kotas, and Patryk Piotrowski. "Performance of Mental Health Chatbot Agents in Detecting and Managing Suicidal Ideation." *Scientific Reports* 15 (August 2025): 31652. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-17242-4.

[81] Gillette, Sam. "Teen's Mom Settles with Google and AI Company After Claiming His Suicide Was Fueled by Love of Chatbot." *People Inc*. Updated January 13, 2026. Retrieved from https://people.com/teens-mom-settles-with-google-and-ai-company-after-claiming-his-suicide-was-fueled-by-love-of-chatbot-11881597.

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of their audiences. The book *Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger has famously been linked to multiple violent acts including the murder of John Lennon, but that hasn't stopped the book from being widely circulated as a part of school curriculums across the country.[82] Many argue that holding an artist or company responsible for the actions of their audience would be impossible—there are an infinite number of ways to interpret art and media. Direct accountability could also be considered an assault on free speech where artists, and in this case companies, censor their content for fear of litigation, and would require courts to decide what stories and ideas are too dangerous for the public.

Character.AI has since instituted an age restriction of 18 or older on their product. This implies that the concern lies only with minors, although there have been several cases of adults who have committed violent acts following a conversation with a large language model, or chatbot. An age restriction does not address the underlying features that may create harm: a chatbot's ability to imitate intimacy, encourage prolonged engagement, reinforce a user's beliefs, or fail to recognize a crisis. But it is true also in our society that adults are given more autonomy than minors to engage in potentially harmful vices, such as drinking and gambling.

The suicide of Sewell Setzer III and others has brought many questions regarding AI technology, including what duties AI companies have to AI users, what regulations should be placed on AI if any, and what role individuals play in engaging in this technology in a morally responsible way.

[82] Gleim, Sarah. "How 'The Catcher in the Rye' Influenced Real Killers." *A&E Television Networks, LLC*. February 25, 2026. Retrieved from https://www.aetv.com/articles/catcher-in-the-rye-murder-connections.

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15. Udderly Conflicted

The United States generally classifies animals as legal property.[83] While anti-cruelty and animal welfare laws exist and differentiate "animal property" from other types of property,[84] the sentiment remains: animals are ultimately legal property and receive value within the law based on their relationship to their owner. But does it have to be this way? In 2002, Switzerland amended its constitution to protect the dignity of animals, and one year later, Switzerland revised its civil code to state that animals "are not objects."[85] Other countries have enacted similar laws that recognize animals as "sentient beings" such as Germany (2002), New Zealand (2015), Denmark (2020), Spain (2022), and the United Kingdom (2022).

Throughout the world, there are many different conceptions about our relationships and responsibilities towards animals, both ethically and legally, but which of these understandings is right? Should U.S. law remain the same, treating animals as property, or should we advocate to legally recognize animals as sentient beings or even legal persons?

In the U.S., animals still have a right to minimal welfare. Some legal scholars contend that animals can receive all of the protections and care that they deserve under the property status through strong anti-cruelty and animal welfare laws.[86] Other scholars posit that the consequences of granting animals legal personhood would present significant issues within our society and ultimately plague courts with unending debates to find the elusive ethical standard for human treatment of animals.[87] It would also be naive not to recognize that our society runs on the products of animals for food, clothing, and services. Recognizing animals as anything more than property could have detrimental effects on our current societal practices, and a significant change in the way animals are recognized in law might disrupt religious or cultural customs that depend on animals or their derivative products.

While this side of the argument holds weight, it is important to question if this property status really encapsulates the appropriate moral attitudes to take towards animals. Imagine that someone kicked your car and then kicked your dog.[88] Additionally, imagine someone kicked your dog and then kicked a stray dog without an owner. If animals are truly property and only hold value because they are owned, then the two actions in the first case would have closer

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[83] "Animals' Legal Status." *Animal Legal Defense Fund*. n.d. Retrieved from https://aldf.org/issue/animals-legal-status/.
[84] "How Animals Differ from Other Types of 'Property' Under the Law." *Animal Legal Defense Fund*. n.d. Retrieved from https://aldf.org/article/how-animals-are-treated-differently-from-other-types-of-property-under-the-law/.
[85] Michel, Margot and Eveline Schneider Kayasseh. "The Legal Situation of Animals in Switzerland: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back – Many Steps to Go." *Journal of Animal Law* 7 (2011): 1-42. Retrieved from https://msujanrl.org/previous-volumes.
[86] Cupp, Richard, Jr. "Animal Cruelty Laws Don't Depend on Animal Rights." *The New York Times*. October 2, 2014. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/10/01/enforcing-the-legal-rights-of-animals/animal-cruelty-laws-dont-depend-on-animal-rights.
[87] Pardo, Michelle. "Legal Personhood for Animals: Has Science Made Its Case?" *Animals* 13, no. 14 (July 2023): 2339. https://doi.org/10.3390/ani13142339.
[88] Regan, Tom. "The Case for Animal Rights." In *Advances in Animal Welfare Science 1986/87*, edited by Michael Fox and Linda Mickley, 179-89. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987.

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moral value than the two actions in the second. If this intuition seems off, then this might suggest a value within the dog, or any animal, that the car fundamentally lacks.

One option for countries like the U.S. is a compromise between animals as property and animals as legal persons, such as "sentient property." Recognizing animals as sentient beings means that the legal system would recognize them as living entities capable of feeling, and thereby beings whose welfare is worthy of being actively considered and, whenever reasonable, protected.

While this position helps us to break away from the restrictive property classification, perhaps it does not go far enough. Some philosophers think that all animals ought to have legal personhood,[89] wherein they would be granted the capacity to initiate a lawsuit and basic rights, such as the right to life. With legal standing, animals could be represented in court to protect their interests and defend their rights, even if limited. While thinking about animals as legal persons might be mind-boggling at first, maybe humans and animals aren't so different after all. All animals feel pain and pleasure, many animals are conscious,[90] and some animals have intelligence levels comparable to human toddlers.[91] Further, the legal process of classifying animals as legal persons isn't unprecedented. In 2013, India became the first country to recognize dolphins as legal "nonhuman persons."[92]

[89] Francione, Gary. "Animals—Property or Persons?" In *Animal Rights: Current Debates and New Directions*, edited by Cass Sunstein and Martha Nussbaum, 108-42. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195305104.003.0006.
[90] Birch, Jonathan, Alexandra Schnell, and Nicola Clayton. "Dimensions of Animal Consciousness." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 24, no. 10 (October 2020): 789–801. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2020.07.007.
[91] Sharbaugh, Carolyn, et al. "Comparable Measures of Cognitive Function in Human Infants and Laboratory Animals to Identify Environmental Health Risks to Children." *Environmental Health Perspectives* 111, no. 13 (October 2003): 1630–39. https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.6205.
[92] Shad, Sonia. "Indian High Court Recognizes Nonhuman Animals as Legal Entities." *Nonhuman Rights Project*. July 10, 2019. Retrieved from https://www.nonhumanrights.org/blog/punjab-haryana-animal-rights/.

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