

**How to make examples of moral collective action puzzles (MCAP)**

- i. Identify all the features your example must have to be an MCAP.  
For example: there must be a worthwhile goal that requires lots of participation to achieve, and it must be overall bad for a particular person to participate.
- ii. Start with the feature that is easiest to find examples of.  
For example: we'll start with "worthwhile goal that requires lots of participation to achieve."
- iii. Think of something with that feature. It's helpful to think of *lots* of examples with this feature, so you have a some "in reserve" if the first one doesn't work.  
For example: having enough blood in the blood bank requires lots of people to donate blood.
- iv. Now add the additional features to your example.  
For example: we want to make it so that donating blood is overall bad. Usually we can make something into an MCAP by making the costs to the participant quite high. So maybe we can make the person who donates blood terrified of donating.
- v. Sometimes you need to tweak your example to make it work. Add and subtract details to make sure it has the features you are looking for.  
For example: even if it's scary to donate blood, the people who get the blood get a lot of benefits. So it's not clearly overall bad to donate yet. However, if there is a *surplus* of blood, then there is really little benefit of donating. Now the costs outweigh the benefits.

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*I've listed the main principles Sinnott-Armstrong discusses which might explain why we should participate in (some) MCAP. After each, I've either given his objection to the principle, or explain why he thinks the principle doesn't show that we should participate in MCAP.*

**Causal/harm-related principles**

*The harm principle:* We have a moral obligation not to perform an act that causes harm to others.

- One ordinary individual's non-participation in climate-change-related MCAPs does not cause any harm to anyone, because it makes no difference to climate change.

*The indirect harm principle:* We have a moral obligation not to perform an act that causes harm to others indirectly by causing someone to carry out acts that cause harm to others.

- One individual's not participating in an MCAP rarely influences others. When it does cause some others to not participate, their non participation is not harmful.

*The contribution principle:* We have a moral obligation not to make problems worse.

- Non-participation in MCAPs almost never makes things worse, since either the goal will be achieved without it, or it wouldn't even if one did participate.

***Group action principles:***

*The general action principle:* I have a moral obligation not to perform an act when it would be worse for everyone to perform an act of the same kind.

- If no one had children, it would be terrible. This doesn't give me an obligation to have children.

*The group principle:* We have a moral obligation not to perform an action if this action makes us a member of a group whose actions together cause harm.

- Imagine that the government sends all taxpayers a check for \$600, and it's clear that, if everyone cashes this check, it will be a financial disaster for the government. Even so, if you know that everyone else is going to cash it, it is morally permissible for you to do so.

***Rule-oriented principles***

*The ideal law principle:* We have a moral obligation not to perform an action if it ought to be illegal.

- Maybe it should be legally required to pay some particular tax. However, if it is not yet legally required, you are not yet morally obligated to pay that tax.

*The contractualist principle:* If a rule against  $x$  is a rule that no one could reject as a general rule or law, then I have a moral obligation not to do  $x$ .

- No one could reasonably object to a general rule against adultery or assault. However, in some special cases, there is nothing immoral about adultery or assault: e.g. if the spouse or assaultee consents.

***Virtue oriented principles***

*The virtue principle:* We have a moral obligation not to perform an act that expresses a vice or is contrary to virtue.

- If not participating in MCAPs doesn't hurt anyone, there's no reason to think it is a vice.