

Fire at the Louvre

Paul is a scholar of Renaissance art history and a curator at the Louvre in Paris. One morning, a fire sweeps through the museum. As people are evacuating the museum, Paul has an important decision to make. Should he risk his own life by attempting to rescue anything? He sees that he has at least two options. First, he could rescue Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, his favorite painting in the world and the museum's most prized work. Second, he could rescue a museum visitor who seems to have lost consciousness, and who therefore seems to be incapable of rescuing themselves.

Paul realizes that no one would blame him if he did not attempt a rescue at all, given the personal risk involved. He also realizes that, if he does attempt a rescue, he faces a separate question: What /whom should he rescue? Paul thinks of himself as a kind and humane person. Watching a human being die as he saves a painting would be devastating. But he has dedicated his entire life to studying and preserving Renaissance art, and he loves the *Mona Lisa* more than anything else in the world.

Moreover, approximately six million people visit the painting every year, and its destruction would be an immeasurable cultural loss.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Does Paul have an obligation to try to rescue anything at all? If so, can he permissibly choose what / whom to rescue, or does he have an obligation to favor the painting or the person? Explain.
2. How, if at all, would things change if Paul was a firefighter?
3. How, if at all, would things change if the museum visitor were still conscious (yet still immobile), or if the painting were less famous (yet still cherished by Paul)?
4. What kind of value does art have? What kind of value do persons have? How, in general, should we compare the value of art and the value of persons?