

Torts – 70311

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Introduction

What is a Tort?

- A civil wrong or injury which the law will redress with damages
- The law of torts is concerned with compensation of losses suffered by private individuals in their legally protected interests, through conduct of others which is regarded as socially unreasonable.

Aims/Concerns' of Torts:

- Compensation – putting the injured party in the same position they would have been, had the wrong not occurred.
- Deterrence – preventing people for acting in harmful ways by deterring them from engaging in wrongful future conduct.
- Loss spreading – shifting the costs that befall on the victim to another party, the tortfeasor. In modern times, many tortfeasors are insured, so the loss spreading falls upon the insurer, who then passes this on to its customers.

Workers Compensation

- With the introduction of workers compensation legislation, injured workers pursuing common law claims has greatly decreased, and the common law doctrine of negligence is on the verge of legislative extinction

Motor Accident Compensation

- NSW does not have 'no fault' compensation, but does have some special provisions under the *Motor Vehicle (Compensation) Act 1979* for victims of 'blameless accidents', including specific provisions for children.
- For those in NSW who aren't injured in 'blameless accidents' or who are 16 years or older and don't satisfy requirements for Lifetime Care and Support Scheme, the common law is their only remedy → but for non-economic and economic loss claims, there are restrictions.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

- Criminal compensation schemes have been widely enacted to ensure that victims are somewhat compensated → it is unlikely that the criminal would have finances to repay the claim

Tort Reform Legislation

- Great fear of being sued led to detrimental effects on community activities, the Ipp Report found → legislation and courts have reflected this by placing greater weight on the proposition that people will take reasonable care for their own safety, swinging pendulum towards defendant → Former Justice Ipp does believe the changes have made it overly difficult for plaintiffs.

- With different statutes around Australia, different classes of accidents and plaintiffs will be governed by different statutory schemes, resulting in different liability rules and rates of comparison.
- Reasons for reform:
 - = Insurance Crisis
 - = Unaffordability of 'generous' awards of damages
 - = Bias of common law of tort toward plaintiffs
 - = Need for more 'personal responsibility'

Case v Trespass

- **Case:** Case protects a plaintiff from indirect interference (i.e. D leaving throwing a log on the road, and P coming along and tripping over it and receives injury)
- **Trespass:** Trespass protects a plaintiff from a direct interference (i.e. D throwing a log at P, injuring them)

What interests does Tort Law protect?

- Personal safety and security
- Safety of property
- Reputation
- Psychiatric/Emotional damage
- Economic losses

Trespass

Proof of Damage → actionable per se – it is not necessary to prove damage

Nature of interference → writ based on direct interference

Onus of Proof

- Plaintiff must establish that the defendant caused the act.
- On the defendant to prove a lack of fault/negligence, except in highway cases: *McHale v Watson* (1964)

Elements:

A positive voluntary act – intentional or negligent act: fault

- Intentional deliberate act or a negligent act (*Williams v Miltonin*) directly causing interference – a wilful act
- No trespass without fault: *Holmes v Mather*, *Stanley v Powell*, *McHale v Watson*

Holmes v Mather

= Defendant alleged to have trespassed when horses which were drawing defendant's carriage went out of control and hit plaintiff

= COURT HELD: Not intentional or with fault as servant did his best to avoid injury but was unable – it was not the act of guiding the horses away from the plaintiff which had brought the horses to the place where the accident happened

Stanley v Powell [1891]

= D in shooting party, shot at pheasant which glanced off a tree and hit plaintiff in the eye, causing blindness + other injuries

= COURT HELD: It was an accident, and cannot be a trespass as there was no negligence or lack of caution.

Williams v Milotin (1957)

= P was struck by D while riding his bike – with D claiming that P couldn't sue for trespass as it was outside statute of limitations

= COURT HELD:

McHale v Watson

= COURT HELD: "Is it for the defendant who threw it to prove an absence of intent and negligence on his part?" → YES

- In determining negligence, reasonable person test applies.

Directness/Interferes with the plaintiff

- The interference in trespass must be direct, not merely a consequence of it: *Reynolds v Clark + Scott v Shepherd*

- *Hutchins v Maughan [1947]*: a trespass will lie when the injury “follows so immediately upon the act”
- “Did the impact follow so closely on the D’s act that it might be considered part of that act”: *Sir John Salmond (1945)*
- Directness does not require physical contact between the plaintiff and the defendant: *Scott v Shepherd (1773)*

Scott v Shepherd (1773)

= Firework thrown in crowded marketplace, fell on Yate’s stall and Will picked it up and threw it on, landing on Ryal’s stall, who threw it on, later exploding and injuring plaintiff

= COURT HELD: Intermediate acts of Willis and Yates do not purge original tort in the defendant – they were acting in the agony of the moment in self-preservation, as if part of an unbroken chain

= DISSENT: Blackstone J dissented saying that trespass was only committed against Yates/

Hutchins v Maughan [1947] Lack of intervening act:

= Defendant laid on unfenced land where D grazed his horses, with P’s dogs coming along and eating the bait, dying → this was after D had told P about the bait

= QUESTION TO BE ANSWERED: Injury to dogs was immediate or consequential – direct occasioned by D’s actions, or merely consequential upon that act.

= COURT HELD: No trespass as the act of laying the baits by itself did not intervene with P’s property → “the injury suffered cannot be said to have follow so immediately in point of causation upon the act of the defendant as to be termed part of that act.”

Is actionable *per se*

- No requirement to show damages, just need to establish trespass.
- May be awarded where there is injury or damage to bodily integrity or person’s dignity, rather than physical injury.
- Damages may be awarded by the way of punishment (exemplary damages) OR for injured feelings (aggravated damages)
- Exemplary damages may be mitigated by plaintiff’s conduct (eg, provocative: *Fontin v Katapodis (1962)*)

Trespass to the person

Forms of Trespass to the person include:

- Battery
- Assault
- False Imprisonment

Battery

- The direct and intention act by a person which causes contact with body of another.

Elements of Battery:

1. An intention voluntary act by a person
2. Which directly
3. Causes contact with the body of another

Direct and intentional act

- Must be willed/voluntary act

Contact with the body

- Positive, affirmative contact that is outside accepted usages/accidental contacts of daily life – spitting in someone's face, unwelcome kiss, taking something from P's hand, throwing boiling water at plaintiff
- "Any touching of another person, however slight might amount to battery": *Collins v Wilcock [1984]*
- Concept historically was referred to as "touching in anger": *Cole v Turner (1704)*. It is unsure what "in anger" means,

= Hostility means unwanted contact: *Collins v Wilcock [1984]* where the police officer gave more contact than was generally accepted in getting someone's attention.

Rixon v Star City [2001]

= Rixon was approached at casino by security guard, who grabbed him on the shoulder, turned him around and asked him if he was Brian Rixon

= COURT HELD: No battery as the contact was for the purposes of engaging Mr Rixon and not in excess of what is accepted in everyday life.

- Mere omission cannot amount to battery, as it must be a positive act. However, an omission can turn into a positive act, as seen in *Fagan v Metropolitan Police Commander*

Assault

- Any direct threat by a person which intentionally or negligently creates in another an apprehension of imminent, harmful or offensive contact.

Elements of Assault

1. An intentional voluntary act or threat by the defendant
2. Which directly creates in another person (the plaintiff)
3. A reasonable apprehension of imminent contact with that person's body

Intention

- The threat must be intentional

Cranston v Consolidated Meat Group Pty Ltd [2008]

= Incident arose amongst two employees working at the meat factory, where D told P to go away, gesturing with his hand that also carried a knife. P sued for assault, saying she was apprehended imminent contact

= COURT HELD: Use of knife was unconscious, resulting solely from the fact that D used the knife in his course of work and was by no means intended to create fear in the mind of P.

Act or threat

- Can be threatening acts, words or both.

NSW v Ibbett (2006)

= Police followed D's son into garage at night, causing a commotion that D heard and went into investigate, lifting up the garage finding a police officer pointing a gun at her son, and then at D herself, demanding that D let in "his mate."

= COURT HELD: Confrontation was more than enough to satisfy requirements of assault.

Do words alone constitute a threat?

- No clear authority but words alone may constitute assault if the oral threat causes apprehension of imminent bodily contact

Barton v Armstrong [1969]

= COURT HELD: "It is a matter of the circumstances" as to whether words alone will constitute assault BUT the telephoning of somebody during the middle of the night, in a threatening tone to instil fear in one's mind, is more than just mere words → mere words becoming conduct?

- Silence on the phone may constitute assault: *R v Burstow; R v Ireland [1998]*

Apprehension

- It is necessary to establish an intention to cause apprehension in the plaintiff that a battery is about to occur.
- OBJECTIVE TEST: Would a reasonable person in the plaintiff's position have been apprehensive of imminent contact → not the individual themselves