



Ethics Olympiad

2025 AAPAE ETHICS OLYMPIAD

Welcome to the cases for the 2025 AAPAE Tertiary Students Ethics Olympiad. An Ethics Olympiad is a competitive yet collaborative event in which students analyze and discuss real-life, timely, ethical issues. An Ethics Olympiad differs from debating in that students are not assigned opposing views; rather, they defend whatever position they believe is right and win by showing that they have thought more carefully, deeply, and perceptively about the cases in question. Experience shows that this type of event encourages and helps develop intellectual virtues such as ethical awareness, critical thinking skills, civil discourse, civic engagement, and an appreciation for diverse points of view. Please feel free to email us if you have any queries at;

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Cases 1-6 were published by APPE Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl for the National US Championship. The Case Preparation Committee consisted of Robert Boyd Skipper: Chair, Case Preparation Committee; Robert A. Currie, Deni Elliott, Abigail Feldman, Cynthia Jones, Sophia McWilliam, Mallory Wietrzykowski Cases 7-8 were published as part of the regional Ethics Bowl: James Day, Mark Doorley, John Garcia, Richard Greene, Michael Jordan, Rachel Robison-Greene, Becky White; For more information about the Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl visit <https://www.appe-ethics.org/about-ethics-bowl/>

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Case 1: Thanks for All the Fish!

Did you know that orcas are actually dolphins? More commonly known as “killer whales,” orcas are large, carnivorous, endangered aquatic mammals found in oceans around the world. But don’t worry about the “killer” in their name; orcas have no recorded history of attacking humans, except in captivity. In fact, like most dolphins, they tend to view humans somewhat favorably. Recent reports may have you believing that these animals, while not deadly, do not come in peace.

The Iberian orca, a subpopulation of the species found off the coasts of Spain and Portugal, has had increasing contact with humans over the past three years. Since 2020, people have reported over 500 cases of interactions with Iberian orcas. Approximately half of these reports involve orcas curiously swimming around boats or gently nudging vessels as they swim alongside. However, 250 of these cases involve damage to boats, with over sixty reports of serious damage and even the sinking of three ships.

Most researchers attribute this behavior to playfulness, considering it a “fad” among the younger members of the herd. Most of the orcas engaged in these cases of aquatic vandalism are juveniles, and their focus appears to be only the boats’ rudders. According to a June 2023 *Washington Post* article, Dr. Deborah Giles said, “Orcas found off the coast of Seattle once carried dead fish on their heads for fun.” She added, “Elsewhere, they have recorded orcas playing with jellyfish or birds.” Experts believe that these playful antics will subside over time.

However, a different story has gained media attention—one that portrays orcas as bent on revenge against humans. This revenge story even has a main character. White Gladis, a large female orca is cast as the leader of the Iberian orca pod. It is suggested that she “may have had a traumatizing encounter with a boat or a fishing net. In an act of revenge, she is teaching her pod-mates how to carry out revenge attacks with her encouragement.” This speculation was offered in the second *NPR* article on the case titled “Revenge of the Killer Whales?”

This sensationalizing of the orcas with a vendetta, however, is doing more than just spreading misinformation; it’s inciting fear among the boatmen who share these waters with the Iberian orcas. An article by *Newsweek* says, “Many sailors are now arming themselves with guns and other weapons to defend their ships.”

Case 2: A Rogue’s Gallery (of Art)

In the vibrant city of Rome, a controversial figure has emerged, captivating the attention of locals and tourists alike. Known only by her enigmatic pseudonym, “Scribe,” this talented graffiti artist has gained immense popularity for her captivating and thought-provoking creations scattered across the city’s walls and alleyways. However, Scribe’s artistic endeavors have placed her at odds with the authorities, who refuse to grant authorization for her work. Despite this, the artist remains untouched by legal consequences due to her widespread support and popularity.

Though anonymous, Scribe’s gender identity is known from interviews she has given by phone to local newspapers and also by her online publications. In one such interview with *Artistry Insights*, she discusses her journey as a female artist breaking boundaries in a male-dominated street art scene. Additionally, Scribe has mentioned her experiences of navigating public spaces as a woman, which have influenced some of her artworks centered around gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Scribe’s graffiti pieces stir emotions, provoke critical thought, and engage the public in dialogue. Her works encompass a wide range of themes, including social justice, environmental awareness, and political commentary. Perhaps her most well-known work, “The Wings of Unity,” a mural in the heart of Rome’s bustling Trastevere district, features a mesmerizing array of colorful wings, each adorned with symbols representing various cultures and identities. The artwork serves as a powerful message promoting inclusivity and celebrating the diversity of the city’s inhabitants. Despite being unauthorized, the mural has become a beloved landmark, drawing visitors from all walks of life to admire its beauty and significance.

However, Scribe’s art has not been without controversy. The Roman municipal authorities, responsible for maintaining the city’s aesthetic and cultural heritage, argue that the unauthorized graffiti compromises the historical integrity of Rome. They contend that Scribe’s work, while artistically impressive, tarnishes the architectural beauty that the city is renowned for. The government’s strict regulations on public art require artists to obtain official permits and adhere to specific guidelines, which Scribe has consistently defied.

Despite the authorities’ disapproval, Scribe enjoys unwavering support from a significant portion of the public. Many argue that her art revitalizes neglected areas of the city, transforming them into vibrant cultural spaces that attract both locals and tourists. Supporters assert that the authorities should recognize the positive impact Scribe’s art has on the community and adapt their policies to accommodate such creativity.

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Supporters of Scribe contend that artistic expression should not be stifled by rigid regulations. They argue that her art serves as a form of public discourse, encouraging citizens to reflect on social and political issues. Furthermore, they assert that Scribe’s popularity and positive impact on the community should be taken into account when assessing the legality of her work.

Note: This case is fictional and was written largely by ChatGPT, coaxed and cajoled by its faithful human sidekick, Navarchus.

Case 3: Deadly Butterflies

In 1943, when the German Luftwaffe bombed the port city of Grimsby, England, and other towns in Northern England, they used a new type of munition referred to as butterfly bombs. These butterflies, though, were extremely lethal and treacherous. More than one hundred could be tucked inside a container that would explode high above ground, dispersing swarms of bomblets. Their winged fuses would spin, arming the butterflies for explosion in a number of ways—some once they hit the ground, others lying unexploded until touched or disturbed, and yet others with timers set to go off at different intervals. Butterfly bombs were the first type of cluster bombs.

Although the death toll was low by World War Two standards, the number of fatalities in the days after the bombings matched the number of deaths from the bombings themselves. Particularly alarming was the number of children who were killed when their curiosity led them to pick up the toy-sized explosives.

In the Vietnam War, The US military dropped cluster bombs in Vietnam and Laos. The unexploded munitions that remained on and under the earth have killed or maimed thousands of civilians in the past fifty years.

During its war with Afghanistan, Russia used cluster bombs to essentially make the rubble bounce in that perpetually war-torn country. And when Russia began its invasion of Ukraine in 2022, it used cluster munitions to level apartment buildings and vital Ukrainian infrastructure.

Ukraine, in return, according to Human Rights Watch, has hurled thousands of rounds of cluster shells at the Russians—the same munitions it had received from its former ally when they were both part of the Soviet Union. When Ukraine ran out of its Soviet-era artillery shells, it turned to the United States which agreed to resupply the Ukrainians from US military stockpiles.

Although this has upset many of the over one hundred countries that signed onto the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which took effect in 2010, the United States says that without keeping Ukraine supplied with cluster munitions, Ukraine will not be able to match Russian firepower.

It should be noted that neither the United States, Russia, nor Ukraine has agreed to comply with the accord. And Israel, which last used cluster weapons in its war with Hezbollah in Lebanon in 2006, has also chosen not to sign onto the convention.

American-made cluster munitions, according to US military officials, are safer for non-combatants because fewer of them will remain unexploded in contested areas of Ukraine. The US military claims that only 3 percent or fewer US-made bomblets are duds, whereas up to 40 percent of Russian-made bomblets will remain unexploded and hazardous to civilians.

Notwithstanding which country produces cluster bombs with the lowest dud rate, former US Senator Patrick Leahy and Senator Jeff Merkley, a Democrat from Oregon, in an editorial in the *Washington Post*, say sending cluster weapons to Ukraine would be a serious mistake.

“[I]t would go against the two-thirds of NATO members and other allies and partners who are party to the [C]onvention [on Cluster Munitions], and whose support is critical to our collective defense of Ukraine. The last thing we need is to risk a rupture with key allies over a weapon that the United States should be leading the world to prohibit.” Ironically, they add, the United States spends millions of dollars each year to help clear unexploded ordnance from former war zones.

Case 4: Health at Every Size

The last socially-acceptable bias?

Dr. Smith barely looks up from his handheld computer as the fidgeting teenager on the examination table rambles on about her abnormal menstruations. She describes excessive pain and irregular bleeding, despite diligently taking the oral contraception Dr. Smith had prescribed for her six months ago to address her symptoms. Dr. Smith peers over the top of his glasses at her and offers this sage advice: “As I’ve said before, you need to lose weight so you don’t have these problems anymore.”

Versions of this scene are repeated countless times every day in the United States: a woman goes to a healthcare provider for some ailment, symptom, or complaint, like shortness of breath, chest pains, lethargy, or menstrual cramps. Often, one of the first things she is told is some variant of: “You are overweight. You need to lose weight.”

A central theme in the emerging field of fat studies is that stigmas and stereotypes that shame and blame people for their size are not only socially acceptable but also socially encouraged. The Health at Every Size (HAES) movement aims to address these stigmas and shift the focus of healthcare away from size and toward the health of individuals in their particular contexts. HAES advocates argue that there is an essential connection between fatphobia/weight-bias and racism.

HAES advocates and fat studies researchers point to meta-studies and longitudinal studies to critique the view that what healthcare providers and diet and exercise companies promote as the proper or optimal weight range for women is not accurate.

One target of fat studies, as well as of many health researchers, is the perhaps outdated measurement of body mass index (BMI) that has for decades been directly linked to obesity and health. BMI is a function of weight and height, developed in the 19th century by Adolphe Quetelet for population statistics and his search for the ideal “average man,” not for individual health measurement. Despite decades of evidence that BMI is likely not a singularly predictive measurement for morbidity and mortality, its use is widespread in the weight-loss industry and medicine. The BMI has been influential in social Darwinism, eugenics, and attempts to ground racism in science.

On the other hand, many medical professionals and healthcare researchers focus on obesity as a national epidemic in both children and adults. Obesity, it is argued, is a major factor in the alarming rates of diabetes and hypertension, and obesity exacerbates other chronic health conditions and significantly contributes to morbidity and mortality rates. Instead of shifting focus away from obesity, many healthcare professionals argue that we need to place more emphasis on obesity, especially in children, no matter what methods are required to address this public health crisis effectively.

Case 5: Romancing the Code

“The heart wants what the heart wants,” and sometimes what it wants is something so perfect it’s fictional. Luckily you can now find a fictional lover, thanks to the ever-growing dating sim industry.

Dating sims (short for dating simulation games) are a genre of video games where the goal is for one player to romance (or “date”) a pre-scripted character. These digital relationships are often emotionally engaging and fulfilling, giving players a sense of connection and affection for their 2-D lovers. These relationships may address players’ emotional needs and let them explore their ideas of romance and sexuality, without real-life consequences. There is a difference between dating sims with a predominantly female-identifying and those with a predominantly male-identifying audience. The former, known as otome games, tend to have more emotional connections while the latter tend to have more sexual themes.

Players are fully aware they are engaging with a script and that their choices are superficial at best, but the care and attention players receive from these fictional companions can still feel remarkably genuine. One avid dating sim user, known as Wild Rose, was quoted in a 2018 *Guardian* article as saying, “I don’t think Saeran (the fictional character she is romancing in the dating sim *Mystic Messenger*) is human. But I think my love for him can be real even if he isn’t.”

But some players take this virtual love too far, developing an unhealthy reliance and co-dependence on their fictional lives and romance. In an infamous 2010 case, a South Korean couple became so obsessed with their virtual relationship and family in a life simulation game similar to *Second Life* that they let their own three-month-old daughter starve to death. Furthermore, dating sims often contain tropes that perpetuate harmful stereotypes, like older mentors, teachers, or relatives who are presented as love interests. Such stereotypes can be highly problematic, particularly from a Western standpoint.

The popularity of dating sims has continued to grow, leading to questions about their larger-scale societal impact. In countries where dating sims are popular, particularly in places where many of these games are made, like South Korea, Japan, and China, and more recently the United States, questions have been raised about whether dating sims could be or become a factor in lowering birth rates. No direct correlation between dating sims and lowering birth rates has yet been found.

Case 6: Familial Favors

The day before classes began, Sunita and Tariq, both college seniors, attended an address by one of their university’s professors, Dr. Graciela Archer, entitled, “Stumbling into Success.” Career Services sponsored this presentation to help the soon-to-be graduates feel less anxious about life after college. Dr. Archer spoke

energetically about how she, the first in her family to go to college, had found herself and discovered new abilities by trying new opportunities. She explained that her undergraduate major in anthropology had little to do with her graduate studies in philosophy and had not really defined any of the career choices she made.

Dr. Archer had gleefully pursued decades of career adventures and misadventures after graduate school. She was fired from her first job at the county clerk's office for blowing the whistle on a corrupt judge. She taught Spanish at a charter school, and she gave ethics seminars at retreats for major corporations. She even built a governmental ethics office from the ground up while teaching full-time at a research-intensive university. Over the years, she had taught in two different departments in three universities and had even gained tenure once, only to give it up and move on to another career. She had worked her way through college waiting tables, of course, and had sometimes fallen back on that type of work while interviewing. She never felt threatened by the prospect of getting fired, despite her edgy approach to life and research. Why should she? She always landed on her feet, finding work that taught her something new. Today, she was here to tell her audience not to worry about their futures either, since those futures were wide open to them.

Not everyone in the audience was worried. Sunita, in fact, was mostly envious. She had worked two summers in the family law firm. Abiding by her dad's advice, she majored in finance, which was an area in which the firm lacked expertise. Her dad paid for her undergraduate college tuition and promised to pay for her to get a graduate degree in accounting if she didn't get into law school. She knew she should be grateful that she didn't have to worry about finding a job, but her worry-free future didn't seem so wide open.

Tariq, sitting nearby, also felt funneled into his post-college life. His mom managed a local grocery store in a regional chain. Tariq started sacking groceries and stocking produce when he was sixteen. The district manager had promised him a job in human resources at the central office after he got his industrial psychology degree. He didn't plan to stay there forever, but it would help pay off his student loan.

Case 7: That Dog Don't Hunt!

The practice of hunting with dogs traces back to ancient Egypt. It became particularly popular in Britain in the 16th century when social clubs began using dogs with highly developed senses of scent to track woodland animals, dominantly foxes. Participants engaged in the activity primarily for sport. For the most part, the practice in this region of the world has now come to an end. On January 23, 2023, the Hunting with Dogs Bill

was passed in Scotland.¹ The ban does not outlaw hunting outright, nor does it even ban the practice of hunting with dogs. What the bill does do is make it illegal to chase and hunt animals with a pack of more than two dogs for sport. But farmers and ranchers can apply for exemptions for the purposes of “wildlife management.”

One dominant line of reasoning in animal ethics is that we ought to focus on animal welfare. Animal welfare approaches frequently direct their attention not toward banning human use of animals outright, but toward making such practices less cruel or harmful. So, for example, the advocate of an animal welfare approach might focus not on *eliminating* factory farming, but on making the practices used as part of factory farming more humane. This is the kind of strategy that has been successful when it comes to legislation mandating that egg-laying hens be raised cage-free.²

The argument against hunting with dogs takes a similar approach. The argument is that being chased by a large pack of dogs causes animals such as deer, hares, and foxes extreme distress. The animals who end up dying directly in the hunt do not die quickly and painlessly; they are ripped to death by a large pack of dogs against whom they never stood much of a chance. The animals who aren’t ultimately caught by the dogs and don’t die directly as a result of the hunt nevertheless experience severe psychological and physiological problems as a result of the trauma. Some of them suffer injuries that they must deal with for the rest of their lives. Some animal welfare theorists argue that it may not be possible to end hunting entirely, but we ought to ban *this* form of hunting because it is cruel and unusual.

Other animal advocates do not support the Hunting with Dogs Bill in its current form. Those who adopt this philosophy take on the perspective articulated by philosopher Tom Regan that “the truth of animal ethics requires empty cages, not larger cages.” Thinkers like Regan who believe that we should be focusing on rights rather than simply on welfare are likely to think of the Hunting with Dogs Bill as incoherent. After all, if we acknowledge that for sentient beings who can experience pain, being ripped apart while still alive is a bad thing, preventing these animals from being ripped alive by *large packs* of dogs doesn’t go far enough. We should outlaw dog hunting in any form by any number of dogs.

Of course, animal advocates are not the only parties in Scotland or in Britain who disagree over laws of this type. There is strong pressure from some groups to overturn the legislation. Many of the arguments rest on familiar attitudes about the nature of non-human animals and their relationship to humans.

In addition to arguments in support of dominance and hierarchy, advocates of dog hunting argue that they have a right to their cultural traditions. For instance, this month, Scotland’s Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire Hunt, which met for the first time in the 1700s, announced that, as a result of the new bill, they could no longer conduct their hunt and that their 300-hundred-year tradition was now coming to an end.³

Case 8: - This Is Not Your Grandparent’s Seance

There is nothing that causes more grief than the death of a loved one; it can inflict an open wound that never fully heals, even if we can temporarily forget that it’s there. We are social beings and our identities aren’t contained within our own human-shaped space. Who we are is a matter of the roles we take on, the people we care for, and the relationships that allow us to practice and feel love. The people we love are part of who we are and when one of them dies, it can feel like part of us dies as well. For many of us, the idea that we will never interact with our loved one again is unbearable.

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/news/hunting-with-dogs-bill-passed/>

² <https://www.foodsafetynews.com/2021/03/utah-adopts-cage-free-law-with-2025-start-date/#:~:text=Utah%20is%20the%20eighth%20state,into%20law%20on%20March%2017.>

³ <https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/12/europe/scotland-fox-hunting-club-final-hunt-animal-rights-intl-hnk/index.html>

Some entrepreneurs see any desire as an opportunity, even the existential impulses and longings that come along with death. In response to the need to have loved ones back in our lives, tech companies have found a new use for their deepfake technology. Typically used to simulate the behavior of celebrities and politicians, some startups have recognized the potential in programming deepfake chat-bots to behave like dead loved ones. The companies that create these bots harvest data from the deceased person's social media accounts. Artificial intelligence is then used to predict what the person in question would say in a wide range of circumstances. A bereaved friend or family member can then chat with the resulting intelligence and, if things go well, it will be indistinguishable from the person who passed away.

Some people are concerned that this is just another way for corporations to exploit grieving people. Producers of the chatbots aren't interested in the well-being of their clients, they're only concerned with making money. It may be the case that this is an inherently manipulative practice, and in the worst of ways. How could it possibly be acceptable to profit from people experiencing the lowest points in their lives?

That said, the death industry is thriving, even without the addition of chatbots. Companies sell survivors of the deceased burial plots, coffins, flowers, cosmetic services, and all sorts of other products. Customers can decide for themselves which goods and services they'd like to pay for. The same is true with a chatbot. No one is forced to strike up a conversation with a simulated loved one, they have a chance to do so only if they have decided for themselves that it is a good idea for them.

In addition to the set of objections related to coercion, there are objections concerning the autonomy of the people being simulated. If it's possible to harm the dead, then in some cases that may be what's going on here. We don't know what the chatbot is going to say, and it may be difficult for the person interacting with the bot to maintain the distinction between the bot and the real person they've lost. The bot may take on commitments or express values that the living person never had. The same principle is at play when it comes to using artificial intelligence to create versions of actors to play roles.⁴ The real person may never have consented to say or do the things that the manufactured version of them says or does. Presumably, the deceased person, while living, had a set of desires related to their legacy and the ways in which they wanted other people to think of them. We can't control what's in the heads of others, but perhaps our memories should not be tarnished nor our posthumous desires frustrated by people looking to resurrect our psychologies for some quick cash.

In response, some might argue that dead people can't be harmed. As Epicurus said, "When we exist, death is not; and when death exists, we are not. All sensation and consciousness ends with death and therefore in death there is neither pleasure nor pain." There may be some living people who are disturbed by what the bot is doing, but that harm doesn't befall the dead person—the dead person no longer exists. It's important to respect autonomy, but such respect is only possible for people who are capable of exercising it, and dead people can't.

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⁴ <https://www.prindleinstitute.org/2020/01/resurrecting-james-dean-the-ethics-of-cgi-casting/>



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