

Ethics Olympiad

2026 AAPAE TERTIARY ETHICS OLYMPIAD

Welcome to the cases for the 2026 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; admin@ethicsolympiad.org



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Case 1: Brave New World

In the opening chapter of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, he describes a London factory that produces humans from artificial wombs. Through using chemicals to modify embryos, the factory creates four types of people differentiated primarily by their level of intelligence. In effect, the controlled production of people creates a rigid caste system, with people being designed to be leaders or menial workers from birth.

Although no such factories exist, editing the genes of embryos is possible. In 2018, He Jiankui, a Chinese scientist used CRISPR technology to genome edit two embryos. Jiankui claims to have made the resulting babies immune to HIV, but was subsequently imprisoned for his work on the grounds of illegal practice of medicine. Only one of the resulting babies was immune to HIV, but both were born healthy.¹ Currently, 75 countries specifically prohibit gene-editing of embryos that would result in a pregnancy, and no country explicitly permits such editing.²³ Despite illegality, a renewed interest in genome editing embryos exists as it could potentially cure diseases like sickle cell anemia and cystic fibrosis,⁴ diseases for which no cure exists. Beyond curing individuals, the potential lack of diseases could also have positive effects for healthcare systems by reducing resource use.

However positive the potential eradication of disease is, the moral quandary that Huxley's novel presents exists. Some worry that opening the door to gene editing would result in 'designer babies'. The concern is that affluent families would have the ability to edit their future children to make them more intelligent, athletic, and beautiful, in addition to disease resistant⁵. There are a multitude of worrying results of legalizing the creation of designer babies, such as increased socio-economic stratification and racist and sexist eugenics.

Case 2: Curb Your Overtourism

Japan, Spain, and a slew of other countries have experienced record high numbers of tourists over the past few years. There have been negative effects of the influx of tourism, including an increase in litter, noise disturbances, overcrowding, and cultural disrespect. Locals in cities like Barcelona and Amsterdam are being priced out of their homes, and there is an overall strain on infrastructure during periods of overtourism, causing inconvenience for the people who live in these tourist destinations.

¹ <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/26/670991254/chinese-scientist-says-hes-created-first-genetically-modifiedbabies>

² <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/crispr.2020.0082#>

³ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/farahqaiser/2020/10/31/study-there-is-no-country-where-heritable-humangenome-editing-is-permitted/>

⁴ <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2019/01/perspectives-on-geneediting/>

⁵ <https://www.healthline.com/health/pregnancy/designer-babies>

One solution to overtourism is tourist taxes, and while this concept isn't new, its prevalence is rising.⁶ These taxes have various purposes: to decrease visitation to overly toured sites and thereby decrease the problems that tourism brings, to encourage travelers to explore more rural areas that would benefit more from tourism than bigger cities, generating funds to allocate to local causes such as environmental protection, and many more. The reasoning and specific policies differ from city to city, though many say these taxes are not enough to mitigate overtourism.

Tourism taxes are often levied at individuals, rather than companies. For instance, a new tourist fee will be imposed on cruise passengers traveling to Mexico. While cruise lines must participate in the Hecho en Mexico program by buying products from Mexico and increasing routes to less popular destinations like Alcapulco, travel companies are often not the ones asked to pay tourism fees, individual travelers are, perhaps in part to control the flow of tourists throughout the year. Another factor regarding individuals' responsibilities to travel ethically is that there has been a growing critical discussion among the public about the importance of "ethical tourism." Traveling to impoverished areas, mission and charity trips (voluntourism), and ignorance of local customs have drawn criticism from proponents of "ethical tourism," though the definition of that phrase can vary from environmental considerations to cultural awareness. While the public has not settled on what constitutes "ethical tourism," the importance of individual responsibility should not be underwritten when addressing solutions to overtourism.

In addition to tourist taxes, other obstacles to control tourism have also become more common. Views of popular sites, such as Mt. Fuji, are being strategically blocked to discourage the crowds of tourists that flock to these areas that create a burden on locals.⁷ Tourists in Barcelona are taking more direct action by actively protesting over tourism and confronting tourists, sometimes with water guns.⁸ The anger of locals is mostly fueled by the rising costs of housing due the rise in short term rental services, such as Airbnb. Some describe locals' anger as misguided and potentially xenophobic. The ire toward tourism being directed at individual tourists, and then into a broader perspective of "tourists = bad" can lead into overly nationalistic, anti-outsider rhetoric, when many say the true target of the discontent should be the government.⁹

Denmark has taken a completely different approach to overtourism with the launch of the CopenPay program, which aims to incentivize tourists with access to free transport and other experiences in exchange for time volunteering to clean up trash or engage in other beneficial activities.¹⁰ Programs like this are similar to the tourist tax recently implemented in Hawaii, which will use funds sourced from the tax to protect the environment after the devastating Lahaina fires. Being intentional about using tourist taxes to fund environmental efforts, or getting tourist participation in these projects directly, could help lessen the negative impacts of overtourism, potentially turning it into a net positive.

Even so, these initiatives have a long way to go if they are to combat large-scale concerns, such as pollution from cruise liners and the like. Additionally, rising costs via tourist taxes can make travel inaccessible for lower and middle-class travelers, leaving the privilege of travel to high class travelers, as the world saw in the case of Jeff Bezos and Lauren Sanchez's Venice wedding. In cases like these, while it is somewhat clear where responsibility falls for the causes of overtourism, it is less clear who is responsible for solving the ills.

Case 3: Tamil Autonomy

On November 21, 2024, the anti-establishment political coalition NPP (National People's Power) won a landslide victory in the Sri Lankan presidential election, securing 159 seats in parliament—more than any other party in Sri Lanka's history.¹¹ Many were moved to vote for the NPP following severe economic fallout in the country two years before and accusations of corruption against the prior ruling party. While the NPP and its leader, Anura Kumara Dissanayake, have pledged to restore national unity in order to resolve the economic difficulties faced by Sri Lankans at large, there remain concerns for such unity of a non-economic nature. In particular, Tamil-majority regions have long insisted upon political autonomy and are somewhat resistant to the unifying efforts of the NPP. The Tamils of Sri Lanka are an ethnolinguistic group that share a religious and cultural identity and have had a historic and well-established presence in the

⁶ Morelli, Olivia. "Hawaii Is the Latest Place to Consider a Tourist Tax—Here's Where Else Travelers Need to Pay to Enter." Condé Nast Traveler. February 21, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.cntraveler.com/story/tourist-taxes-around-the-world>.

⁷ Ryall, Julian. "Can Japan solve its growing overtourism crisis?" Deutsche Welle. February 10, 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/en/visit-japan-tokyo-overtourism-crisis-v2/a-71561020>.

⁸ Goodman, Al. "Barcelona finally turned on its crowds of tourists. Now the city faces a major problem." CNN Travel.

⁹ 19 Loudis, Jessica. "'Overtourism' Is Driving Europeans Crazy." The Nation. September 18, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/overtourism-is-driving-europeans-crazy/>.

¹⁰ Nielsen, Adrienne Murray. "Copenhagen's new 'CopenPay' scheme rewards tourists – but does it actually work?" BBC. July 31st, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20240730-copenhagens-new-copenpayscheme-rewards-tourists-but-does-it-actually-work>.

¹¹ Ondaatje, Anusha. "Sri Lanka Leftists Win Supermajority in Rebuke of Old Guard." BNN Bloomberg. November 14, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/business/international/2024/11/14/sri-lanka-presidents-blocktakes-early-lead-in-parliament-polls/>

region. They differ substantially from the Sinhalese, the majority ethnolinguistic group within Sri Lanka. From 1989 to 2009, the militant organization LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) fought a civil war for the independence of a Tamil state due to, among other things, the alleged racial, cultural, and religious discrimination by the Sinhalese majority. A law following Sri Lanka's independence from Britain, which denied Sri Lankan citizenship to Tamils living in the newly independent region, serves as a historical example of such discrimination. The civil war ended with the defeat of the LTTE and shifting goals for Tamil-representative political parties, who adopted new goals of legal reform rather than independent statehood. The NPP is a radical newcomer to power in Sri Lanka, which has soothed the spirits of some Tamils as the NPP has less political "baggage" to bring in. Additionally, Dissanayake has promised various concessions to Tamil-majority areas, such as a return of land appropriated for state agencies.¹² The hope with these concessions is that Sri Lanka will remain unified as a political entity, consistent with the NPP's ambitions for a national economic revival. Some commentators have lauded the unifying efforts of the NPP as a testament to a renewed sense of shared national identity among Sri Lankan citizens.¹³ With a fresh start, the new leading political party can recognize and appreciate religious, cultural, and linguistic differences without giving up on democratic ideals of a common will and civic solidarity. The NPP even won a majority of parliamentary seats in the city of Jaffna, the eponymous capital of the Jaffna District and longtime political stronghold for Tamil-representative political parties. This could be an indication that even in Tamil-majority areas, the NPP's vision of a national unity has given hope to a long-marginalized population. The successes of the NPP might show the victory of democratic institutions in restoring shared self-governance to citizens in the wake of political differences and religio-cultural divisions. The NPP hopes that these successes will lead to an economic revitalization for Sri Lanka. Other commentators are unconvinced, however. The success of the NPP in Tamil-majority areas has also been attributed to the disdain of Tamils (and Sri Lankans more generally) to the old political order.¹⁴ A series of mass protests in 2022 led to the ousting of former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, and claims of corruption and cronyism have been attributed to the political elite of Sri Lanka. A deep desire for an upheaval of the old political system shows in the newly elected representatives across Sri Lanka, as 146 of parliamentarians, more than half of Parliament, will be first-timers.¹⁵ The success of the NPP in Tamil-majority areas, rather than a success of its vision for Sri Lanka, might simply be a lucky consequence of voters protesting against the political establishment in general. If this is true, then it is unclear how a universal political unity for Sri Lankans can be achieved alongside true political autonomy for Sri Lankan Tamils. Favorable economic conditions for the entire country may not matter to the Tamils who have frequently been marginalized in the name of progress. A push for Tamil independence, especially in a potentially turbulent political climate, may fragment the nation further and introduce yet more economic hardship in a country still reeling from the aftermath of two economic crises. For Sri Lankan Tamils, however, it may be the very project of political unification that leads to the discrimination and standardization that they want to free themselves from.

Case 4: Cruising at the End of the World

Cruising at the End of the World Cruising is big business, with 2024 seeing a reported 34.6 million cruise passengers.¹⁶ While the industry reports a high rate of customer satisfaction, cruising is known to have an actively detrimental environmental effect. Wastewater is discharged directly into the ocean, disturbing delicate ecosystems, docked ships often continue to burn fuel, damaging local air quality, and perhaps most startling, ships produce a massive amount of CO₂, quickening the pace of climate change. So great is this CO₂ emission that each passenger on an Antarctic cruise can expect to emit, on a 7

¹² Srinivasan, Meera. "Sri Lanka President Anura Dissanayake promises return of Tamils' land grabbed by state agencies." The Hindu. November 10, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/sri-lankapresident-anura-dissanayake-promises-return-of-tamils-land-grabbed-by-state-agencies/article68852893.ece>

¹³ "NPP's Historic Victory Sparks Hope and Unity." Groundviews. November 16, 2024. Retrieved from <https://groundviews.org/2024/11/16/npps-historic-victory-sparks-hope-and-unity/>

¹⁴ Arulthas, Mario. "No, Sri Lanka's Tamil question has not been resolved." Al Jazeera. January 9, 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2025/1/9/no-sri-lankas-tamil-question-has-not-been-resolved>.

¹⁵ Waravita, Pamodi. "NPP sweeps the polls including the Tamil majority areas signalling a deep political shift in island politics." CIR. November 18, 2024. Retrieved from <https://cir.lk/2024/11/18/npp-sweeps-the-polls-including-the-tamil-majority-areas-signalling-a-deep-political-shift-in-island-politics/>

¹⁶ <https://cruising.org/sites/default/files/2025-07/State%20of%20the%20Cruise%20Industry%20Report%202025.pdf>

day voyage, what the average European does in a whole year.¹⁷ One draw of cruising can be the opportunity to see otherwise inaccessible parts of the world. Antarctic ice shelves and Alaskan glaciers that were once the privilege of well-funded scientists and explorers can now be accessed by anyone with the means of paying the relatively cheaper asking price of a few thousand dollars. However, these remote locations are often the most at risk of being lost to climate change. The U.S.'s Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, a popular cruising destination, is facing a 95% rate of glaciers in retreat and rapid permafrost loss to rising temperatures.¹⁸ Thus, given the huge emissions associated with these cruises, passengers taking advantage of this new privilege are now themselves contributing to the destruction of their cruise's destination. Still, some justify cruises to these environmentally at-risk habitats by arguing that it is a valuable means of educating people about climate change which will ultimately lead to broader support for climate action. Appetite for addressing these issues from within the industry is limited. While there has been a marked move to liquified natural gas as a fuel, this offers, at most, marginal reductions in contributions to global warming.¹⁹ Truly carbon neutral fuels are seen as long term goals which are currently unviable. There is no serious discussion of reducing the rate of cruising in the time it takes for carbon neutral cruising to become an option.

Case 5: Torture

In 1995, a terrorist plot to blow up a dozen mid-air planes, assassinate the pope, and crash a plane into CIA headquarters was uncovered.²⁰²¹ The plot, dubbed Operation Bojinka, was thwarted by Philippine police, who used interrogational torture against a terrorist suspect to produce a confession. "For weeks, agents hit him with a chair and a long piece of wood, forced water into his mouth, and crushed lighted cigarettes into his private parts."²² Although the torture failed to produce a confession, the suspect finally confessed when an agent masquerading as a Mossad agent threatened to send him to Israel.

¹⁷ <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/09/210928193815.htm>

¹⁸ <https://www.nps.gov/glba/learn/nature/climate-change.htm>

¹⁹ <https://time.com/6285915/cruise-industry-climate-action-emissions-passengers/>

²⁰ https://web.archive.org/web/20080612073352/http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/profiles/project_bojinka.htm

²¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/magazine/2001/12/30/bust-and-boom/1109903e-3762_4b78-90a6-d919efd39920/

²² Vitug and Gloria, Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao, p. 223.

Some think that the Philippine Police acted rightly. The position rests on three central claims: that interrogational torture is defensive violence, that defensive violence is permissible when the violence is proportionate to the harm being defended against, and that the violence of the interrogational torture in the thwarting of Operation Bojinka was proportionate to the threat it was aimed at defending against.

To defend the first claim we need only invoke the simple, intuitive further claim that torturing someone planning an attack is a defensive act. The purpose of the torture is simply to defend innocent lives.

To defend the third claim, some may argue that the extreme discomfort of the terror suspect in Operation Bojinka was minuscule compared to the thousands who would have perished if the Operation had been successful.

On the other hand, some may object to torture by noting that it involves harming someone who is defenseless.²³

Case 6: No-platforming

Mainstream and social media is rife with bias, propaganda, and misinformation, much of which is harmful. For example, false reports concerning the effectiveness and safety of vaccinations can lead to outbreaks of previously eradicated viruses. Given the seeming bona fide sources of such claims, it can be difficult for many to determine their veracity. It would thus seem important to discredit and perhaps even prohibit the spread of clear and harmful misinformation. One way to do this would be no-platforming: where a person or group is prevented from contributing to a public debate, either through policy or protest, on the grounds that their beliefs are dangerous or unacceptable. Examples of this include people having their social media accounts deactivated and speakers not being invited (or uninvited) to take part in public presentation or debate of their views.

The controlling of free speech is a problematic endeavor, however. Many liberal theorists, such as John Stuart Mill, have argued that the free exchange of ideas is not only a right but an important feature of democratic society. Mill goes as far to say that even false and offensive ideas should be allowed to be presented in public, since without a free and open debate between competing ideas we risk dogmatism and intellectual stagnation. He adds

²³ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20464389?seq=1>

that a free marketplace of ideas is important for the challenging of received opinions and the intellectual progress of the community. Suppression of free speech, on this view, is thus a harm to the individuals whose freedom is restricted and to society as a whole.

Proponents of no-platforming argue that there are some ideas which are so clearly false and harmful that their dissemination ought to be prohibited. They argue that when the scientific community has conclusively concluded that particular vaccinations are safe, that anthropogenic climate change is occurring, that there is no evidence of genetic difference in intelligence between racialized groups, etc., it is inappropriate and dangerous to allow people to present false and misleading reports to the contrary. They maintain, in particular, that esteemed public institutions such as universities have a right and duty to not provide a platform to speakers who are known to spread falsehoods and that they should not be expected to provide a both-sides representation of every possible debate. Their claim, in other words, is that public institutions ought to deny a platform to certain speakers—a claim that is compatible with the view that private companies have the right to choose what ideas they platform and with whom they associate.

Case 7: Births of a Nation

Governments around the world are broadening the scope of their laws and policies on procreation. For surrogacy services, the influence of lawmakers on citizens' procreation is steadily increasing, leaving many to ask how justified these policies are and if they achieve their intended outcomes.

The promotion of childbearing and calls to increase birth, also called natalism, has become a conversation in many countries, including the United States, where a natalist conference took place at UT Austin as recently as March 2025. Natalist movements often have ties to extremist conservative policies, even reaching so far as eugenics, though natalism and eugenics are not always necessarily linked. Even without extremist political ties, proponents of natalism have criticized it as a political movement, stating that guiltling or mocking people into procreating isn't effective and can have negative consequences, and that it should be a cultural cause instead.

One sector of procreating that governments have started to control is surrogacy. There are lax commercial surrogacy laws in certain countries, such as Ukraine, which has drawn criticism of exploitation due to the country being vulnerable due to the ongoing conflict with Russia. The concerns around exploitation seem to be taken more seriously by countries that used to be integral to the international surrogacy industry, as many have recently started tightening their restrictions. India used to be a significant participant in the global surrogacy economy, but has recently put a ban in place, along with other countries. "Procreative tourism" can be detrimental in countries that are disadvantaged in the international economy, as the surrogacy industry in these countries tends to be more predatory, leading to exploitation. However, many argue this violates bodily autonomy

and leaves women in poorer countries worse off than if they were able to profit by participating in the surrogacy industry. It also begs the question of if individuals engaging in procreative tourism in order to seek cheaper surrogacy rates are engaging in immoral practices themselves.

Italy has gone so far as to create a law that criminalizes surrogacy, even outside of Italy's borders, and has begun to prosecute a gay couple who sought surrogacy in California. The penalty of Italy's new law "can lead to prison terms of up to two years and fines of between €600,000 and €1m (£500,000 and £840,000)".²⁴ Some fear that governments are overstepping on citizens' rights, while others argue that such limitations may be necessary to protect vulnerable groups.

Case 8: - And Now You Care?

Animal rights activists have raised objections to so-called "factory farming," which entails large facilities often with unsanitary and abusive conditions. On average, about 300 cattle, pigs, or chickens are slaughtered every second in the United States.²⁵ According to industry insiders, the highly efficient processes employed in today's industry occasionally result in the inhumane, and sometimes abusive, treatment of animals. An undercover investigator recorded videos inside of slaughterhouses showing the apparent butchering of still-alive cattle, while others claim to have witnessed the slow suffocation of pigs when the process employed by a slaughterhouse is botched.

Many governments take great care to regulate the meatpacking industry. While more laws and regulations have led to a remarkable change in practice in the industry over the last several decades, from animal welfare to environmental waste disposal, it appears to some that more regulations might be necessary to fully protect animals.

Dutch artist Marco Evaristti tried to bring awareness to the abuse of animals in the industry through a performance art piece, titled "And Now You Care?," an art installation in the Meatpacking District of Copenhagen, Denmark. This exhibit was subject to intense backlash and ridicule from politicians and animal rights activists alike—which is exactly what Evaristti intended.²⁶

To raise awareness and hopefully stop pigs from being abused, Evaristti planned to subject three piglets, caged inside two shopping carts, to death by starvation. The intense backlash, he suggested, would hopefully shed light on the meatpacking industry in Denmark and bring the public inside an industry he denounces as barbaric.

His provocative art installation would never see its intended conclusion of killing the piglets by starvation. Evaristti arrived at his installation one morning to see the piglets missing. To report the theft, Evaristti called the Copenhagen police, who, upon conducting their investigation, revealed to Evaristti that it was one of his own co-conspirators who had taken the piglets. Following the disappearances and the end of his exhibition, Evaristti still maintained that the people of Denmark needed to see piglets starve to death to remedy the injustices done by the meatpacking industry.

²⁴ Giuffrida, Angela. "Surrogate parents too afraid to return to Italy after 'procreative tourism' law." The Guardian. March 17, 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/mar/17/surrogate-parents-too-afraid-toreturn-to-italy-after-procreative-tourism-law>.

²⁵ Kristof, Nicholas. "Animals That Feel the Slice of the Knife." The New York Times. April 12, 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/12/opinion/animal-slaughterhouse-meat.html>.

²⁶ Ho, Vivian. "Three piglets were left to starve in an art exhibition. Then they vanished." The Washington Post. March 5, 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/03/05/piglets-denmark-animal-welfare-art/>

Marco Evaristti is no stranger to scandalous art installations, however. In 2000, Evaristti opened an exhibit at the Trapholt museum entitled *Helena*.²⁷ The work consisted of a room with ten blenders, each containing a singular goldfish. It would be up to the visitors of the exhibit to decide whether the fish should live or die, with nine blenders eventually being switched on by the time the installation was removed due to public backlash. While Evaristti's newest work hopes to sacrifice the lives of three piglets for the good of many more, *Helena* appears to be nothing more than a provocative art installation.

Although Evaristti's original plan was foiled, by one of his co-conspirators no less, he maintains that he is committed to the cause. He states that the citizens of Denmark and the rest of the world must understand the inhumane practices employed by the meatpacking industry at any cost, even the lives of three innocent piglets.

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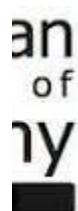
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²⁷ Taheri, Mandy. "Marco Evaristti: The Artist Who Starves Piglets and Puts Goldfish in Blenders." *Newsweek*. March 7, 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.newsweek.com/who-marco-evaristti-artist-piglets-goldfish-2041276>