

A U S T R A L I A N E T H I C S

P R E S I D E N T ' S R E P O R T

Welcome to the 2024/25 Summer Edition of *Australian Ethics*!

What's inside?

2025 AAPAE Conference	2
Police ethics versus practice	4
Drawing the line	6
Evil and the problem of peace	7
Book review: Business Ethics	8
2024 Symposium roundup	9
Building a green economy	9
Rethinking informed consent	10
AAPAE Tertiary Ethics Olympiad	11
About the AAPAE	12

Upcoming Events

As you will see in these pages, the AAPAE has two upcoming events!

For those of you who (like me!) have been yearning for an in-person event, the good news is that the AAPAE has teamed up with the Australian Earth Laws Alliance (AELA) to hold its 2025 conference next May in the beautiful 'Eco-Centre' at Griffith University in Brisbane. It will be great to catch up with everyone there!

On 9 October, the 2025 AAPAE *Ethics Olympiad* will take place. This is a terrific online competition where university undergraduates argue with each other about ethical issues, with a welcome focus on listening, civility and thoughtful argument. Follow the links to get involved!

In this Issue

This issue is jam-packed with terrific content, with themes of consent and consequence.

Gordon Young gives an insightful window into the challenges of police ethics, and of ethics education for police. He observes that police are taught deontological rules that align poorly—and perhaps even unrealistically—with the high-consequence-focused activities that they routinely perform, especially in the context of domestic violence.

Alan Chenoweth picks apart the difficult operating conditions for environmental practitioners who must navigate compromises with clients as they determine outcomes that fall between the best-for-profit and mere compliance (desired by many clients) through to the best-for-environment standards (that the environmental practitioner judges as best-practice).

Howard Harris considers the complexities of building a green economy, and also reviews Sunil Savur's terrific new book on *Business Ethics* and his excellent use of James Rest's ethical decision-making model.

Jacqui Boaks gives an overview of the wonderful AAPAE symposium on *Artificial Intelligence and the Professions* she convened in December, and Adam Andreotta provides a precis of his very topical new book on rethinking informed consent in the big data age.

Finally, long-time member, Dr James Page, will be facilitating an interactive seminar entitled 'Evil and the problem of peace' on 14 February - it's free to attend (see page 7 for details.)

I hope to see you all in Brisbane in May!
Hugh Breakey

Professional & Applied

- ♦ BUSINESS
- ♦ EDUCATION
- ♦ ENGINEERING
- ♦ ENVIRONMENT
- ♦ LAW
- ♦ MEDICAL
- ♦ NURSING
- ♦ POLICE
- ♦ PUBLIC POLICY
- ♦ PUBLIC SECTOR
- ♦ SOCIAL WORK
- ♦ TEACHING
- ♦ TECHNOLOGY

ETHICAL FUTURES FOR PEOPLE AND PLANET

AELA/AAPAE CONFERENCE

1-3 May 2025, Griffith Ecocentre, Brisbane

www.earthlaws.org.au/events/ethical-futures

call for proposals now open!

AAPAE
AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR
PROFESSIONAL AND APPLIED ETHICS

aela
australian earth laws alliance



CONFERENCE WEBSITE:

<https://www.earthlaws.org.au/events/ethical-futures/>

Save the dates!

The AAPAE and the Australian Earth Laws Alliance (AELA) are co-hosting an exciting national conference in May 2025 in Brisbane, exploring how we can build ethical futures in a rapidly changing world. We live in a time of rapid and uncertain social, economic and environmental change and disruption. Now more than ever we need to build creative visions for our future and apply principled and ethical decision making and action.

The AAPAE/AELA Conference will explore themes including the following:

- Indigenous ethics, decision-making and governance systems
- Earth-centred ethics, law and governance
- The role of ethics in the future of private sector and corporate governance
- Ethical attention to place and relationship with local culture and environment in a changing world
- The significance of care as an ongoing moral response
- The connections between ethics, spirituality and earth care
- Navigating green-on-green ethical challenges (such as in the intersection of eco-values between conservation and renewable energy production)
- Changes to ethics and values that we need, to ensure a safe and livable future

Papers that explore the AAPAE's area of interest in other domains of applied and professional ethics are also, as always, very welcome. In addition to presenting papers, proposals are invited for panel discussions, workshops and other activities.

[Please visit the main conference webpage](https://www.earthlaws.org.au/events/ethical-futures/) for information about the conference venue, accommodation and other details as they are released.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Ricardo Rozzi, Chilean ecologist, and philosopher is a full professor at the University of North Texas (USA) and the University of Magallanes (Chile). He is Director of the Cape Horn International Center (CHIC), Puerto Williams, Chile and Vice-President of the Center for Environmental Philosophy (CEP), Denton, Texas, USA. He has led the creation in Chile of the *Omora Ethnobotanical Park*, the *Reserve of the Cape Horn Biosphere*, and the *Diego Ramírez Islands-Paso Drake Marine Park*. His research combines ecology and philosophy and has coined the terms *biocultural conservation*, *biocultural homogenization* and



biocultural ethics focused on the links between human well-being and the conservation of biological and cultural diversity. Integrating theory and practice, he has created new educational methodologies such as *Field Environmental Philosophy* and innovative practices such as *Ecotourism with a Hand Lens*.

He has received various awards, including the *National Award for Scientific and Technological Dissemination* (EXPLORA-CONICYT, Chile, 2004), the *Eugene P. Odum Award for Excellence in Education in Ecology* (Ecological Society of America - ESA, USA, 2019), and the *Luis Oyarzún Award* (Universidad Austral de Chile, 2022).

Katie Steele, FAHA is a Professor of Philosophy in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University. She arrived at the ANU in 2016, having spent eight years in the Department of Philosophy, Logic and Scientific Method at the London School of Economics. Her research spans the different aspects of rational or wise decision-making, both for individuals and collectives, including the representation and management of uncertainty and notions of individual and social welfare. Her current project is about how we should best understand the popular concepts of 'precaution' and 'sustainability' in the context of public decision making and priority setting. Katie has been a Principal Investigator on a number of grant projects, most recently the Climate Ethics and Future Generations project hosted at the Institute for Futures Studies in Stockholm. In 2021 she received an ANU Vice Chancellor's Award for Research Excellence. In 2023 she delivered the Parfit Memorial Lecture at the University of Oxford. She is currently an Editor of the journal *Economics & Philosophy*.



An opportunity to be published

The AAPAE has a standing arrangement with the journal ***Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations* (REIO)** to publish selected papers from the AAPAE Annual Conference. Participants of the 2025 AELA\AAPAE Conference are strongly encouraged to submit their paper for publication.

***Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations*—the official journal of the AAPAE Editor: Dr Jacqui**

Boaks: Jacqueline.boaks@curtin.edu.au

<https://www.emerald.com/insight/publication/issn/1529-2096>

POLICE ETHICS VERSUS PRACTICE

Gordon Young

Between 2022 and 2024 I worked for Victoria Police as a professional ethicist, reviewing the ethical elements of their training programs, the operational suitability of their recruit training program, and finally, a full qualitative analysis of their operational cultures, systemic drivers and opportunities for improvement.

From an ethics perspective this experience was equal parts compelling and distressing, and while information sensitivity constrains what I can discuss, I intend to develop a series of articles based on this experience.

By way of introduction, I offer a brief summary of the ethical training regime of Victoria Police, developments over time, and the fundamental paradox at its core that generates many of the negative outcomes we witness in practice.

My initial role involved a full review of its Foundation program for new recruits. This training covered 31 weeks, with approximately one third spent on operational safety (weapons and self-defence training), one third on legal studies and one third on a mixture of sociology and ethical topics. Somewhat unsurprisingly, course feedback and staff sentiment heavily favoured the highly practical operational safety and legal aspects of the training, with the ethical/sociological elements seen as boring, abstract and impractical to operational policing.

This was in part due to the delivery of the material (badly frag-

mented and 'death by Power-Point' at the time), but more fundamentally was a result of the design of that training and the ethical systems within Victoria Police more broadly. Put simply, Victoria Police is based *exclusively* on Deontological principles. Everything from the laws the organisation enforces, to the Values system, to the pseudo-military rank structure, to the proceduralisation of virtually every aspect of the work, enables and demands thinking that focusses on compliance with overlapping sets of rules.

Modern operational policing is possibly one of the most complex jobs a person can undertake, requiring constant awareness of context, quick adaptation to changing circumstances, and multiple overlapping and largely unrelated skillsets ...

This may seem appropriate to the reader, given the place of police as the impartial administrators of justice who should have no role as either parliamentarian or judge. Equally unsurprising then should be the disengagement with the topic of ethics, given the classes invariably boiled down to 'here are the rules, follow them'—hardly a compelling topic at the best of times, but wholly irrele-

vant when, as one recruit put it, "We already passed the integrity standards of recruitment, surely we're already ethical?". A highly distressing interpretation of the nature and function of ethics, but within a context where they are just another set of rules to follow, not altogether unreasonable; if you haven't broken the rules, what is there to talk about?

The problem emerges when this purely Deontological, highly 'honourable' conception of ethics is contrasted against the practical reality of operational policing. Modern operational policing is possibly one of the most complex jobs a person can undertake, requiring constant awareness of context, quick adaptation to changing circumstances, and multiple overlapping and largely unrelated skillsets for basic operational fitness, much less success.

For example, an estimated 60% of day-to-day policing work is family violence related, usually involving a call-out where a verbal argument is underway and physical violence may or may not have occurred. Police are then expected to determine what has occurred, identify offenses that have been committed and take appropriate action—potentially making an arrest, but more often issuing a temporary injunction that prohibits the violent party from the property or contact with the victim until the matter can be seen by a court. To assist this, officers have a 40-point checklist of risk

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

indicators and can refer both victim and alleged perpetrator to a range of support services.

On paper, this is fairly straightforward. In practice, it is an absolute nightmare. Imagine arriving at such a call, where two people are screaming at each other, the scene is a mess, there might be distressed children present, and now you have to figure out what has happened and what sanctions may apply. This is already a stressful, exhausting environment and you are now expected to get involved in an ongoing domestic dispute, manage the emotional state of everyone present, try to determine the objective facts.

Assuming you manage to sift facts from this chaos and determine sufficient cause for an intervention order, you now have to break the news that the alleged offender is effectively banished from their home until a court hearing. You have no scope to alter or adapt this response beyond simply not issuing the intervention, so it is either leave the potential offender with the victim or make them homeless on the spot. Not a pleasant set of choices, especially in ambiguous circumstances, and especially when doing so turns the offender and *potentially the victim* against you on the spot.

With this horror show completed, you now have an average of four hours of paperwork to complete for this single job. Eventually you will complete 10-12 hours of administration for this case alone, all for a relatively low chance of conviction in court at a later date.

Please note that Constables receive two weeks of dedicated training regarding family violence with which to manage this, and while this training is of high quality in itself, it does not compare with the minimum four years training expected for the social work field, who otherwise handle such cases.

Now imagine having to manage such absurdly complex scenarios using a Deontological framework that essentially boils down to eight values, an injunction against brutalising offenders and a vague reference to the Victorian Human Rights Charter (which is not enforceable so don't worry about it).

Unsurprisingly, the officers I spoke with through my research recounted widespread compassion fatigue; a simple exhaustion of their ability to care about perpetrators or even victims in such situations. This was largely due to the overwhelming nature of facing such intense situations with nothing more than a checklist, and the perceived futility of doing so given the outcomes.

The underlying paradox present here is that every aspect of the police is fundamentally Deontological, except their actual day-to-day work, which is possibly the most complex case of Consequentialism-in-action I have ever witnessed. Whether they should or not, and despite a complete lack of training or support to do so, the average day of an officer is spent analysing and adapting to extremely complex situations and attempting to make these fit to otherwise extremely simplistic legal and ethical frameworks.

In practice this involves innumerable judgement calls, with officers conducting themselves in a huge variety of ways that they have found 'works for them', regardless of compatibility with organisational standards. In severe cases this can result in entire shadow-cultures taking root in isolated stations or teams, where standard practice not only shirks the official Deontological values of the organisation, but quietly defies them as 'unrealistic'.

While solutions to this conflict require a fundamental review of the purpose and function of modern police, this conflict between ethical standards and practice is illuminating for all professional ethical practices. The strict Deontological structures of Victoria Police are proper and necessary given the nature of their work and their role in society; however, to pretend that such structures are sufficient, and that consequentialist thinking will not occur in practice is not only naïve, but actively facilitates subversion of those Deontological standards by denying a sanctioned alternative approach when those standards are insufficient or ineffective in practice.

Police officers are human beings; they can and will use their judgement in the practical execution of their duties. If they are not supported in doing so, they won't stop doing it – they'll just do it badly.

Gordon Young

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DRAWING THE LINE:

An ethical acceptability spectrum for the environmental profession

Alan Chenoweth
Donna McAuliffe

Environmental practice is a relatively new and diverse profession, with ethical dilemmas commonly associated with development-related environmental assessments and professional judgments regarding trade-offs. Research into professional environmental practice indicates that practitioners consider it their ethical responsibility to persuade and influence clients/proponents to reduce environmental impacts by making project changes, analogous to a doctor advising patients regarding healthy lifestyle choices. However, achieving a sustainable balance between economic development, environmental values and community expectations (and gaining agency approvals) are not exact sciences, and professionals differ in their opinions, ranging from profit-maximising ('best for project') and mere compliance with regulations, to ecologically sustainable development (ESD) and 'best for environment' approaches.

Multi-disciplinary project teams involve many technical experts with varying professional responsibilities and ethical obligations, requiring negotiation and compromise. In some cases, environmental practitioners can avoid potential ethical dilemmas associated with trade-offs by honest and transparent reporting on the environmental values likely to be lost, and the legal requirements which will be satisfied, without specifically recommending any impact-reduction or sustainability measures for the project. However, in situations where practitioners find their 'best practice' recommendations ignored or overridden, there is likely to be pressure to accept an agreed team compromise, and rewrite their recommendations accordingly. A key element of ethical professional practice (for both individuals and firms) is establishing a non-negotiable boundary between what is ethically acceptable and unacceptable i.e. where to draw the line.

Environmental professionals, in both private and public practice, often deal with clients whose starting position of 'best for project' is not consistent with legal compliance, and must advise them accordingly. However, ethical practitioners may also recommend 'best practice' approaches, for exam-

ple, costly erosion control measures during construction, and advocate that their clients 'do the right thing' for the environment. If clients / proponents agree to go beyond compliance and move part-way towards best-practice, agreeing to 'green-ish' measures, practitioners must decide whether or not to support the compromise. This may involve reporting that the resultant impacts on the environment are acceptable, notwithstanding that their 'best practice' recommendations were over-ruled.

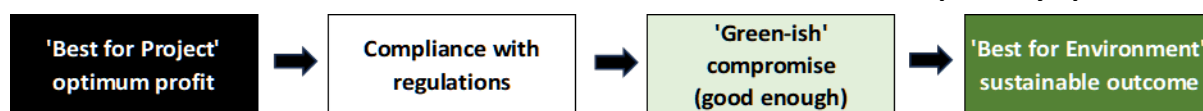
For environmental professionals, an Ethical Acceptability Spectrum diagram (opposite) is suggested as a framework for anticipating and addressing these challenges, and similar approaches are also useful as a workshop device for ethics training. The progression along this spectrum, from left to right, represents development scenarios from a theoretical starting point (optimum profit, minimum environmental protection) to mere compliance with regulations, and ideally through to a 'best practice' ESD approach which minimises environmental harm. Under this framework, project team members may have a range of opinions on the acceptability of different 'green-ish' (good enough) compromises.

The professional obligations of environmental practitioners include advising on legal requirements (minimum compliant protection of environmental values), while at the same time advocating 'best practice' sustainability measures as part of their ethical obligations. Within the dynamics of a project team, presenting a case for more sustainable options requires advocacy skills and experience. The ethical acceptability spectrum concept is consistent with the responsibility of professionals to persuade (or attempt to persuade) clients and decision-makers to improve environmental outcomes, a responsibility reported by most practitioners interviewed for this research and alluded to in the code of ethics of the Ecological consultants Association of New South Wales

However, in many situations, a 'green-ish' compromise emerges which is more than compliance but

(Continued on page 7)

Ethical Acceptability Spectrum diagram



(Continued from page 6)

less than a 'best for environment' solution, and ethical professionals must decide whether or not to support this 'good-enough' outcome as the best that can be achieved. This may involve a careful choice of words in environmental reporting. There are important differences in meaning between terms such as 'acceptable', 'compliant', 'balanced' and 'recommended', depending on their context. The ethical principles of accountability, legibility and avoidance of misleading statements require practitioners to distinguish clearly between these terms to clarify their intentions. Misrepresenting a compromise outcome as an expert's 'best practice' opinion would be misleading and a breach of professional ethics. Distinguishing between 'acceptable' and 'best practice' in this manner is analogous with ethical obligation to distinguish between factual evidence, expert opinions based on accepted theory, and expert conjecture—a distinction emphasised in court rules for expert witnesses.

The ethical acceptability spectrum also represents an extension of typical ethical decision-making models, in that it considers persuasiveness - the capacity to influence others to adopt an ethically-based recommendation ('Can I bring the client with me on this one?'). In offices with junior staff, it may

also involve communicating compromise outcomes to younger professionals, in conversations about ethics and professional judgments about where and when to 'draw the line'. This is not just personal persuasive skills, but also involves technical authority and reputation (credibility), the ethical principles of both the practitioner and client, risk management, relationships with the client and approval agencies and team dynamics.

Many seasoned practitioners reported in interviews that their ability to bring clients with them, or take them 'on a journey', is valuable in responding to ethical challenges, withstanding pressure and sticking up for both the environment and one's own principles. The soft skills of communication, assertiveness, 'honest up-frontedness' and negotiation capabilities are essential in order to discuss difficult topics. However, a key element in confidently dealing with such situations is preparation (through regular conversations and practicing ethical scenarios), so that environmental practitioners know in advance what is and is not acceptable ('Where would we draw the line?').

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References: Please contact the above author direct for a list of references.

Notice of seminar: Evil and the problem of peace

Evil is a strange notion, although in recent philosophical discourse it has been undergoing something of a revival. Questions surrounding evil are of special interest for researchers in applied ethics. For instance, how useful is the concept of evil? How can we validly think of evil in a post-religious age? And, most importantly, how ought we respond to evil—if indeed this does exist?

Interestingly, the revived notion of evil is often linked to the experience of war and genocide. It is almost as if some events are so shocking that only the category of evil can do justice (deliberate use of

that word) to what has happened. So, a logical focus for thinking about evil is to look at application to issues of peace and war.

On Friday 14 February, 2025, at 11.20am, long-time AAPAE member, Dr Jim Page, will facilitate an interactive seminar entitled 'Evil and the problem of peace', as part of a two-day symposium on Peace and Justice, hosted by UNE Sydney, Level 4, 100 George Street, Parramatta. It's free and AAPAE members especially welcome to attend. For queries contact Dr Jim Page, at jpage8@une.edu.au or phone 0418.293 629.

NEW ETHICS TEXT – Sustainable & Responsible

Howard Harris

Book review

Business Ethics: The Sustainable and Responsible Way, Savur, Sunil G., SAGE, 2024. <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/asi/business-ethics/book281457>

There are good things about this book. It has lots of cases, and they are accessible and findable—there is a list of the major cases early on, and many can be found in the index.

There is a clear approach to take to the cases. Savur calls this EDM or ethical decision making, and it is based in the work of James Rest. Not only does the book put Rest's EDM (Ethical Decision Making) model in an historical context, linking it, in part, to Kohlberg's theory of cognitive moral development. That does two positive things for the book—it makes the whole book and its approach both practical and linked to theories that students might have come across elsewhere in their studies.

The book is further relevant with a focus, or at least a recognition, of the importance of SMEs—small- and medium-sized enterprises. As many students of ethics classes, many students in business schools, are likely to work in SMEs, or in small units of large enterprises, this makes the book even more valuable to both teachers and students.

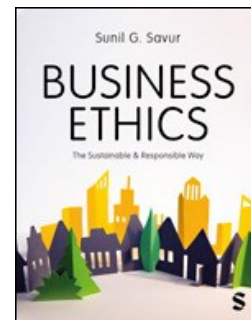
There is a chance that what is taught in ethics classes might determine what is taught in economics. That would be a great achievement for business ethics, an achievement for Sunil Savur's book and for business ethics.

Savur is to be commended for starting in the difficult mire of growth, profit and responsibility, of the need to contribute to society and producing a book with a practical emphasis. Seeing the Enron case as one that links purpose statements to outcomes is a plus.

The book is up-to-date with entries for workplace spirituality, for Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. It does not shy away from hard topics, with a whole section (Part III) devoted to New Horizons. The new stuff comes after the theory, and the book links the new horizons with cases for examination using the developed EDM model.

Review by Dr Howard Harris. University of South Australia.

I declare an interest. Sunil and I taught together at UniSA. We have published together in a paper focussed on small and medium enterprises (SMEs). That said it is a book on which a practical course could be based.



(Continued from page 9)

human life") mentioned by Nas (1995).

These are ethical questions. They are not technical questions, not resolvable by setting limits on the total use of certain materials even limits on 'nasties' such as brown coal or carbon dioxide CO₂, or by requiring the use of a specific pro-

cess such as Fischer-Tropsch. We need more batteries for electric cars—does that allow us to keep mining coal? We need to take risks. Ought we leave it to the politicians? The State theatre company of SA says we will find "Sex scandals, betrayals, culture wars, the price of power, motherhood and Machiavellian manipulation" in the houses of state parliament (2025). Are these the people with

the ethical reputations to examine the environmental qualifications of those arguing for the environment?

Dr Howard Harris

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References: Please contact the author direct for a list of references.

2024 AAPAE Symposium roundup

Thank you to all of those who attended the AAPAE's 2024 Symposium on 'Artificial Intelligence and the Professions'.

Held on online on December 5th, the Symposium brought together a range of scholars and practitioners across disciplines and from a range of fields to consider the questions, challenges, and opportunities that artificial intelligence represents for those in the professions. There was a particular focus on the ethical dimensions of these elements as well as what they might mean for the nature of the professions and professionals themselves.

The Symposium reflected the AAPAE's particular commitment to fostering discussion and thought leadership in this area that will be so critical to those who are themselves professionals as well as what the public and those who rely on professionals have the right to expect from professionals themselves.

We are especially grateful to our terrific keynote speakers Professor Deen Sanders OAM (Lead Partner: Deloitte Integrity) who spoke on **'The ethics of AI and [professional] identity'** and Jennifer Flinn

(Murray Chambers and the West Australian Bar Association and author of [*'The aftermath from the Robodebt Royal Commission: Lessons learned for in-house counsel'*](#), Australian Law Journal, Vol. 98, No. 1, Jan 2024, 8-16) who spoke on **'Use of AI to regulate citizens' rights and obligations: the role of lawyers and the importance of legal ethics'**.

Other topics included the ethics of artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons use for military professionals (Nathan Wood, Hamburg University of Technology); the future of artificial intelligence in higher education and the spectre of automated education (Rob Sparrow and Gene Flenady, Monash University), 'Super-human AI's Challenge to Professional Ethics' (Patric Hagen Harting, Open University); and 'GenAI in High-Stakes Legal Work: implications for professional reasoning, ethics, and judgement' (Felicity Bell and Justine Rogers, University of New South Wales).

Following on from the Symposium, we will be calling for papers for a special issue of the AAPAE's journal *'Research in Ethics Issues in Organizations'* (REIO) on the same topic soon.

Updates will be available on the AAPAE's LinkedIn page and website.

BUILDING A GREEN ECONOMY

Howard Harris

Quite a bit of effort is being expended as we enter 2025 in writing about the construction of a green economy. The construction of batteries, wind farms and the distribution of electricity require copper, aluminium, lithium and other minerals which would often be thought of as (environmentally) harmful.

As well as a time of green economy it is also a time of ethics as the national broadcaster and individual authors produce lists of 'books that changed the world' by

"revolutionizing our ideas". (ABC, 2025; Downs, 2017). Prompted perhaps by Three Mile Island, Amoco Cadiz and other catastrophes of the 1970s (Nas, 1998).

Does the end justify the means? Leibnitz, Bentham and von Wright think so (Kuhn, 1995). Is coal mining acceptable if the product of the coal-fired furnace is used (only) for some environmentally-friendly purpose? Who decides what is environmentally friendly? Is it the United Nations, the sovereign nation on whose land the

coal mine is located, is it a group of Indigenous people who may have some rights with regard to mining noise, pollution, access, historical and ancient rights, is it some nation (such as China) where some activities may be unregulated or under-policed, especially activities on the high seas (beyond territorial waters). Some parts of *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* certainly think that the end justifies the means as does the values-based analysis which extends to the "direct threats to

(Continued on page 8)

PRÉCIS—

RETHINKING INFORMED CONSENT IN THE BIG DATA AGE

Adam Andreotta

If you bought a new smart device, such as a TV, watch or doorbell over the holiday period, did you also read the associated privacy policy outlining how the manufacturer will use any personal data the device collects? If you did, do you feel you have a complete understanding of the process and have given actual informed consent? If you did, do you regularly read the privacy policies associated with the apps and websites you use on a daily basis? If so, you're in the minority, as most people don't read them all (for example, one study revealed that 94% of Australians don't). This means that most people agree to share their data without being fully informed about how they are used

Why is uninformed consent an ethical issue? One reason is that personal data collection is associated with risks. If you are not aware of these risks, you may give consent to companies to use your data in ways that could cause you harm.

Ought we to be reading privacy policies, then? There are several difficulties in doing so. One, of course, is time—we simply don't have the time to go through each one and ensure we are comfortable with all the ways our data may be used. It also doesn't help that privacy policies are sometimes written in ways that are not conducive to understanding.

In my new book, *Rethinking Informed Consent in the Big Data*

Age, I argue that we need to rethink the purpose of online informed consent and offer suggestions on how we can ensure it is actually given. I examine how consent is secured in the medical context and argue that there are valuable lessons we can learn from it.

First, I suggest that privacy policies could be reviewed by ethics committees. This would ensure that privacy policies are not misleading or deceptive. This need not be thought of as a legal requirement, but rather something that companies could voluntarily engage in. The idea of ethics review will be familiar to university researchers in Australia who conduct studies on human participants.

Second, I suggest that online privacy policies could include visuals. This would make them shorter and help people understand them more easily. There's evidence suggesting that we learn better with visuals, and some companies, such as Bankwest and Aurecon, have successfully implemented them. In the book, I provide examples involving Spotify and Meta, showing how certain concepts (such as targeted advertising and data sharing) could be better explained through images. However, the question remains: What would motivate companies to adopt this approach, especially when being opaque could sometimes be more profitable.

Lastly, I discuss the concept of automated consent—the idea that

software could provide consent on our behalf. Imagine a world where you set up the software once, listing all your preferences, and then algorithms handle all the consenting for you. Ideally, you wouldn't need to read consent forms at all—you could trust the algorithm to make decisions, accepting or rejecting policies based on your preferences.

There are risks associated with the idea of delegating consent to an algorithm, which will need to be addressed by ethicists and lawyers in the coming years. One risk, for example, concerns what happens when algorithms make mistakes. What if an algorithm grants consent that fails to align with your preferences, similar to how a driverless car might make a mistake. However, the technology is promising.

We need not be resigned to a world where data is collected and used without our awareness. There are several promising approaches that could help ensure informed consent is actually given by us. How well these approaches will work in practice cannot be determined *a priori*. But I argue they have a good chance of making a positive difference.

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References: Please contact the author direct for a list of references.



Ethics Olympiad

SAVE THE DATE: THURSDAY, 9 OCTOBER 2025

The **AAPAE Ethics Olympiad** is a competitive yet collaborative event in which eth-letes (students) analyse and discuss real-life, timely, ethical issues. The AAPAE Ethics Olympiad differs from a traditional debating event in that eth-lete teams are not assigned opposing views; rather, eth-lete teams 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, civil discourse and civil engagement while fostering an appreciation for diverse points of view. Please remember, the **AAPAE Ethics Olympiad is not a debate** as teams can agree with each other about the best ethical outcome!

The **AAPAE Ethics Olympiad** is conducted via Zoom on the competition day. Teams are involved in a series of three heats where they are scored according to set criteria which reward clear, concise and respectful discourse around challenging ethical cases. Undergraduate students are invited to enter teams to represent their tertiary institution. Any tertiary institution can participate, with a maximum of two teams from each institution allowed to enter. Registration is via the Ethics Olympiad [website](#). Once registered, coaches and eth-letes receive training kits and eight ethical cases. The heats are run simultaneously with a common format and common timing. Specialist judges adjudicate each heat on the day. Heats are held in a round-robin format with each team taking turns to present and critique arguments.

At the end of the day, scores are collated and teams are awarded Gold, Silver or Bronze medals based on the scores and all teams receive a certificate of participation. The **AAPAE Ethics Olympiad** provides participants with a unique and rewarding experience as they engage with other tertiary students from throughout Australasia in a format that promotes civil, critical and collaborative discourse.

Want to find out more...

If you're interested in becoming a coach or 'eth-lete', or want more information, visit:

https://ethicsolympiad.org/?page_id=1458 or email Matthew Wills: ethicsolympiad@gmail.com



2024 Silver Medallists

From Melbourne University

FOR THE NEXT EDITION OF AUSTRALIAN ETHICS

The closing date for submission for the **Winter 2025** edition of *Australian Ethics* is **mid-June 2025** — All articles, news items, upcoming events, book reviews, interest pieces, etc. are always welcome. Please email the editor at: info@aapae.org.au.

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Save the dates

AAPAE & AELA

2025 in-person Conference
Ethical Futures for People and Planet
1-3 May 2025

AAPAE Ethics Olympiad 9 October 2025

AAPAE Charter

The broad purpose of the AAPAE is to encourage awareness of, and foster discussion of issues in, professional and applied ethics. It provides a meeting point for practitioners from various fields and academics with specialist expertise and welcomes everyone who wants or needs to think and talk about applied or professional ethics.

The AAPAE fosters and publishes research in professional and applied ethics, as well as attempting to create connections with special interest groups.

However, the AAPAE does not endorse any particular viewpoint, but rather it aims to promote a climate in which different and differing views, concerns, and approaches can be expressed and discussed.



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