Australian Association for Professional and Applied Ethics

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AUSTRALIAN ETHICS

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Welcome to the 2025 Winter Edition of *Australian Ethics*!

2025 has been a busy time for the AAPAE. In particular, it was terrific to see so many members and friends at our Conference in May! It was wonderful to have it so well-attended, with over 70 participants across three days at Griffith University's beautiful Eco-Centre. The AAPAE teamed up with the Australian Earth Laws Alliance (ALEA) for the event, and the topic 'Ethical Futures for People and Planet' created an exciting mix of scholars, practitioners, advocates and activists. For most sessions there were three concurrent streams, and there were extra events into the evenings, including panel discussions and a film screening. Warm thanks go to the hard working crew at ALEA—Michelle Maloney and Sarah Bashforth—as well as to the AAPAE conference convenor team, including Larelle Bossi and Jorge Mendonca. The call for papers from the conference has just gone out, and all contributions on the theme are welcome (for details, email Larelle: l.bossi@griffith.edu.au).

This edition of *Australian Ethics* covers a lot of ground. As ethics so often does, it prompts us to look at the moral dimensions of issues we may encounter every day, but so easily take for granted or overlook. I start things off by reflecting on the challenge of shifting ethical gears, which I suggest occurs when an issue we're heavily invested in and connected to comes up against a major ethical shock—like murder—that somehow seems more far off and abstract. Next, Larelle Bossi provides some sober reflections prompted by Clive Hamilton's and George Wildenfeld's 2024 book *'Living Hot'*. She argues that the adaptation now forced on us by climate change can best be navigated through biocultural, ecofeminist and democratic ethics. Leila Toiviainen gives a philosophical review of Helen Garner's recent book *'The Season'*, tracing Garner's role as a grandmother taking her grandson to his games over the course of a football season. While Howard Harris reminds us of the importance of respecting others' right to privacy and never just assume, even if it is all in the family.

Jacqui Boaks surveys the current state of the ethics of Artificial Intelligence (the topic of the AAPAE's 2024 workshop). Interestingly, she notes how much consensus has formed around a principlism framework that would be familiar to many AAPAE members, though augmented by a much-needed principle of transparency. She observes that there are still may issues yet to be resolved, but at least there is a widespread awareness that the study and resources of ethics can help us grapple with these. Jacqui will be editing an issue of REIO on this theme—check out the call for papers (p10).

Congratulations also go to Jacqui, as the editor, and all the authors, of the latest edition of *REIO 'Ethics in Management: Business and the Professions'*. Jacqui provides a helpful rundown on the issue's many interesting articles on p11.

Finally, a reminder that the 2025 Tertiary Ethics Olympiad is coming up! If you're at a university and would like to know more, details are on the back page, or feel free to email me at h.breakey@griffith.edu.au. The AAPAE AGM is also happening soon; it will be held online on 22 August (see p3).

Best wishes to all and looking forward to seeing some of you then!
Hugh Breakey

What's inside

Professional & Applied

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

A sympathetic response to murder?

The challenge of shifting moral gears and the emotional invisibility of the taboo

Hugh Breakey

The December 2024 murder in the USA of United Healthcare CEO Brian Thompson raises many ethical questions, as does communities' reactions to the killing. The alleged killer, Luigi Mangione, appeared to act on political-cum-ethical motives, as suggested by the etchings on the bullets he used, and the manifesto he had on him when apprehended. Both communications invoked ethical concerns with the way health insurers operate in the USA, especially by their practices of denying and contesting legitimate claims (though I do note there are searing critiques that have been levelled at the manifesto's simplistic arguments).

Both immediately and in the time since the murder, there were significant signs that large and/or vocal parts of the community had—if not explicit support for the act—then at least a great deal of sympathy with the reasons why it was done. For many, the refrain seemed to be: *Of course murder is wrong, but...*

There is a sense in which this is surprising. Speaking personally, I would have anticipated that the horror of a cold-blooded act of violence against a law-abiding citizen would have prompted a stronger immediate outpouring of support for the victim. What follows are some of my thoughts on why this prediction proved incorrect.

No doubt there is a lot going on when it comes to reasons why killings occur, and reasons why different individuals—and even moreso communities—react to murders in the way they do. But one factor that might be in play is what I'm thinking about as *the difficulty in shifting moral gears*.

Imagine a case where you and many others are aware of substantial ethical wrongdoing that has significant real world costs (like, say, improperly denying healthcare claims that leads to profound consequences for those suffering from grave medical problems). Let's suppose you are very well-read on the issue and that the problems have been publicly known for a long time. Maybe you or your loved ones have been personally impacted by the issue and you are now part of a loose (perhaps online) community of like-minded people who share information and rally for change. However, repeated efforts to reform decision-makers or systems over the years have been met with wholesale failure. The industry and decision-makers within it are able to shrug off moral exhortation or attempted social castigation, and the legal and governance system surrounding the wrong-doers seems impervious to change (perhaps because the wrongdoers can exert control over it, through political lobbying or even regulatory capture).

You know murder is wrong, but the moral prohibition on it has been (in a sense) so successful that it has begun functioning as a taken-for-granted taboo.

The system seems broken, and you are frustrated and angry.

Then a heinous crime is done to one of the perceived wrongdoers apparently on the basis of the very concerns you have been levelling for years. The criminal echoes and explicitly invokes your community's values, arguments and frustrations. They are saying the exact same things you have been urging for years to no effect.

And now, at last, there *is* an effect. Of course, you know that murder is wrong. But that wrongness might feel to you more abstract and impersonal than the ethical concerns you and your community have held front of mind for years. As Robert Nozick in *Philosophical Explanations* once observed about punishment:

> "Correct values are themselves without causal power, and the wrongdoer chooses not to give them effect in his life... When he undergoes punishment these correct values are not totally without effect in his life (even though he does not follow them) because we hit him over the head with them."

At last your values—the correct values—have had an effect on the wrongdoer; he has been hit over the head with them. In such a case, I suggest, it will be difficult for you to change moral gears in the sense of suddenly conjuring up the emotional and moral heft that a crime like murder should invoke. The psychological momentum of your past focus on these wrongdoers who were impervious to ethical concerns makes it hard to avoid the intuitive reaction: *See! This is what you get! What did you expect?*

One reason this reaction might be so strong is that you have not been absorbed for many years on the problems with vigilante murder. You have not researched the topic, you have not shared recurrent conversations with passionate like-minded peers, and you have not watched on in horror and frustration as vigilante murderers continue despite your best efforts to stymie them.

You know murder is wrong, but the moral prohibition on it has been (in a sense) so successful that it has begun functioning as a taken-for-granted taboo. It falls outside the Overton Window on topics that can be reasonably advocated in polite society. Cold-blooded vigilante murder (outside of exigent cases like self-defence) becomes almost *unthinkable*. It simply does not occur to most people as a

(Continued on page 3)

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way of solving problems or responding to their concerns.

Of course, it was not always thus. There were times when ideologically-motivated violence *was* seen by significant parts of society as at least potentially acceptable—namely when done against religious heretics. And in those cases, it absolutely became a topic of serious discussion. Theorists of toleration like John Locke and Pierre Bayle did enormous amounts of work describing and publicising the profound ethical (and other) problems that arise from ordinary civilians taking law and punishment into their own hands.

In *On Liberty*, Mill suggested that having people that publicly disagreed with and contested even taken-for-granted truths served a valuable purpose. Otherwise norms can lose their living power, and we start to give them a:

> "dull and torpid assent, as if accepting it on trust dispensed with the necessity of realising it in consciousness, or testing it by personal experience; until it almost ceases to connect itself at all with the inner life of the human being."

The murder itself, and the sympathetic reaction to it, seem to attest to Mill's worry here. Apparently, the murderer and those responding sympathetically to the murder had a rich, lively, personal, living, communally-reinforced engagement with the brutality of corporate profit-seeking when it came at the cost of the legitimate entitlements of vulnerable people… but had no such engagement with the horrifying reality of politically-motivated vigilante murder.

Perhaps this is inevitable. In a complex world, with many pressing problems that require collective movements to be successfully addressed, society cannot keep endlessly re-litigating ethical 'no brainers'. But at the same time, hard won insights to recurring social and political problems cannot be allowed to fall into lifeless, emotionally detached habits of mind. At the least, one of the goals of ethics education can be to encourage a moral reasoning that is capable of focus on immediate concerns while putting those concerns into a larger ethical framework that shows vividly and straightforwardly the wrongs inherent in crimes like murder.

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Australian Association for Professional and Applied Ethics Incorporated

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NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Notice is given of the Annual General meeting of the Australian Association for Professional and Applied Ethics Incorporated to be held on: **Friday, 22 August 2025 at 2 pm AEST by videoconference**

The business of the meeting is:

a. to confirm the minutes of the last preceding annual general meeting and of any special general meeting held since that meeting,
b. to receive from the committee reports on the activities of the Association during the last preceding financial year,
c. to receive and consider any financial statement or report required to be submitted to members under the Act,
d. to elect office-bearers of the Association and ordinary committee members, and

other business, if any, that may be transacted at an annual general meeting.

Further details and the Zoom link will be shared with member via email. For more information: **info@aapae.org.au**

Call for Papers: Ethical Futures for People and Planet (closing soon: 29 August 2025)

Special Issue of *Research in Ethical Issues in Organisations (Emerald),* the official journal of the AAPAE.

Now more than ever, we need creative, principled visions for the future. This issue seeks to bring together diverse scholarly voices exploring how ethics can inform and guide our collective response to the challenges of our time.

As many of you are aware, the AAPAE partnered with the Australian Earth Laws Alliance (AELA) this year to explore the future of ethics in a time of profound environmental, social, and economic disruption. Following the conference, we invite submissions of papers between 5,000 and 10,000 words expanding on the theme of the conference: ethical futures for people and planet. **For more details, contact Dr Larelle Bossi: l.bossi@griffith.edu.au.**

"Living hot" and thinking ethically

Larelle Bossi

Reflections prompted by the book *"Living Hot: Surviving and thriving on a heating planet"* by Clive Hamilton & George Wildenfeld, 2024

Adaptation as a moral imperative in the Anthropocene

Clive Hamilton and George Wilkenfeld's *Living Hot: Surviving and Thriving on a Heating Planet* begins with a claim many still find difficult to articulate: *the era of climate mitigation as a dominant policy goal has largely passed.* Despite decades of warnings, Australia and the world are failing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions fast enough to avert disruptive ecological and social transformations. The authors offer no illusions. "There has always been a sense of unreality about our climate change predicament", they write, pointing to years of "denial, deputation and delay". What lies ahead, they argue, is not the continuation of the climate we have known, but its unravelling—an increasingly hostile atmosphere of heatwaves, fires, floods, droughts and systemic risk.

But their story is not just scientific—it exposes the **fragility of our existential future** amid a global economic and political power play that Australians too often forget we're only a small, arguably insignificant, part of. Accounting for about 3% of global emissions when fossil fuel exports are included—or less than 1% if we count only domestic emissions—Australia *may once* have had the chance to show global leadership (even if only in a utopian sense, given our geography, population size and landmass).

But, as Hamilton and Wilkenfeld bluntly argue, *that time has passed*. Whatever progress the wealthy world makes is more than offset by the rising emissions of China, India and other nations in the Global South. Petroleum and gas companies are still expanding their investments. And despite their public commitments to climate action, our own Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese have continued to support these expansions.

In this context, **Australia is effectively powerless to shift global emissions trends,** and that reality demands not despair, but ethical clarity. The ethical shock of this claim is not in its novelty—climate scientists and Indigenous communities have warned of these futures for decades—but in its finality. Hamilton and Wilkenfeld are not asking whether we can adapt. They insist that *we must, stupid!* And that our government ought to prioritise the development and implementation of a comprehensive program making our cities, dwelling, factories, farms and ecosystems resilient so they—we—survive well in a warming climate. They argue that this is not to be assumed modifications at the margins. And yet, in a book that offers such stark clarity, their engagement with the ethical dimensions of adaptation is surprisingly thin—roughly a page and a half, with limited reference to the rich traditions of environmental philosophy and applied ethics that could certainly guide us through a way forward.

It is precisely this gap that invites deeper reflection. What would it mean to take seriously an *ethics of adaptation*? And what frameworks are most appropriate in a context where the challenge is no longer to prevent climate collapse, but to *live ethically within it*?

Adaptation beyond strategy: A moral reckoning

To speak of adaptation is to speak of more than infrastructure or policy. It is to confront a normative question: how *ought* we respond to inevitable climate disruption? Who bears responsibility for preparation and care? Who gets protected and by what values are those protections justified?

Standard accounts of adaptation tend to focus on vulnerability indices, resilience metrics and systems optimisation. But adaptation is never ethically neutral. It is shaped by prior injustices, asymmetries in power and knowledge and deep contestations over what constitutes a good life in radically altered circumstances.

Adaptation is not simply a technical or procedural problem, it is a moral and political project. To pursue it ethically requires frameworks capable of recognising ecological entanglement, epistemic pluralism and historical injustice. This is where the frameworks by such traditions as ecofeminist ethics or Riccardo Rozzi's emerging biocultural ethics offer critical insights. You might reasonably ask: *why not draw from the traditional pillars of moral philosophy—deontology, utilitarianism, or virtue ethics—to guide our adaptation to climate breakdown?* After all, these frameworks have long shaped our ethical reasoning in the Western philosophical canon.

But the problem is not that these traditions are without value—it's that they are, on their own, insufficiently responsive to the complexity, locality and interdependence that adaptation now demands. Climate disasters are inherently *situated*. They unfold in specific places, impacting specific communities, ecosystems and lifeways. I argue that a duty-based framework often misses the situated moral knowledge and historical contexts that shape real-world adaptation decisions. Utilitarianism, while seemingly pragmatic, tends to obscure questions of justice and relational accountability under the guise of aggregate outcomes. And virtue ethics, though more flexible and character-based, still often centres the moral agent as an autonomous individual, rather than as part of a web of interdependencies—human and non-human alike.

This is why frameworks like biocultural ethics, ecofeminism and kinship ethics

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

become indispensable. They are not only *theoretically robust*—they are morally attuned to place, kinship, power and care. They refuse the abstraction that erases land, culture and history from ethical consideration. Instead, they begin with lived experience, ecological entanglement and the recognition that ethics is always *embedded*, *partial* and *relational*. To adapt justly in the Anthropocene, we cannot rely solely on moral theories developed for liberal individuals in stable states. We need ethics that are adaptive, decolonial and ecologically grounded.

Biocultural ethics and the centrality of place

I like to think of bicultural ethics as integrating life (biological diversity), lifestyles (cultural practices) and life-places (specific ecological contexts). Rozzi's *biocultural ethic* argues that ethics must be situated—responsive not to universal prescriptions, but to the concrete relations that bind people to their environments.

This perspective is acutely relevant in Australia, where ecological vulnerability is layered with colonial history and where First Nations communities have adapted to changing climates for over 60,000 years. Rozzi's ethic foregrounds not only the value of local knowledge systems, but the *moral obligations* that arise from living in situated, interdependent relationships with land, waters and non-human kin.

A biocultural ethic of adaptation would reject both technocratic universalism and climate fatalism. Instead, it would advocate for decentralised, place-based adaptive responses that recognise traditional ecological knowledge, community sovereignty and cultural continuity as essential to ethical resilience.

Ecofeminism and the ethics of care

Ecofeminist theorists from Val Plumwood to Ariel Salleh have long critiqued the epistemological violence of extractive capitalism, which treats both women and nature as passive resources. They propose instead an ethic grounded in *care, interdependence and attentiveness to vulnerability.*

Applied to adaptation, ecofeminism challenges models that frame climate disruption as a "security threat" to be managed from above. It reorients the moral gaze toward those already carrying the burdens of crisis: carers, Indigenous knowledge holders, marginalised communities, non-human ecologies. Adaptation here becomes not an elite managerial task, but a collective ethical practice rooted in sustaining relationships and regenerating life systems.

In short, decisions about how soon global carbon emissions reach a peak and how quickly they then decline will be made not in Canberra but in Delhi, Moscow, Washington, Brussels and, above all, Beijing.

An ecofeminist ethics of adaptation would also resist narratives of heroic resilience that demand stoic endurance without addressing systemic inequities. Instead, it asks how structures of care can be scaled and supported; how governance can foster reciprocity rather than competition; and how policies can be responsive to the moral insights of those most intimately connected to place.

Adaptation as decolonial and democratic work

What biculturalism and ecofeminism share is a commitment to relationality and to the idea that ethics is not an abstract calculus, but a situated practice of responsibility, informed by historical context, ecological specificity and social interdependence. In an Australian context, this demands a shift away from the dominant frameworks of climate governance (which often privilege markets, risk management and national interest) toward relational, biocultural and care-based ethics.

This also implies a commitment to decolonisation. Adaptation plans that do not engage with First Nations sovereignty, land custodianship and knowledge systems risk reproducing the very injustices that have made many communities more vulnerable to climate harm in the first place.

Adaptation must also be democratic

As a necessarily place based crisis, climate adaptation demands that we resist the temptation to centralise power in times of disruption. Instead, it calls for participatory, polycentric governance grounded in community agency and moral accountability. As such, traditional top-down governance models no longer serve. They are mismatched to the moral geography of the crisis. The climate itself has disrupted the illusion of centralised control. Fires, floods and heatwaves are not evenly distributed abstractions; they expose the material limits of bureaucratic distance. In this context, adaptive governance must be inverted: not from above, but from below; not imposed but cultivated. The environment has reminded us, viscerally and repeatedly, where the real power lies.

Naming the ethical work ahead

Hamilton and Wilkenfeld are right to demand realism. But ethical realism must go further than policy. It must confront the deeper transformations that adaptation requires, not only in our built environments, but in our moral frameworks. The future is not only hotter. It is more ethically complex. We will need philosophical tools that are grounded, plural and responsive to the realities of a world in flux. We need ethics in action!

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References: Please contact the author direct

Helen Garner, *The Season*, Text Publishing 2024, 188 pages

Leila Toiviainen

Helen Garner is one of Australia's best and most admired of authors, nationally and internationally. She is known both for her fiction and non-fiction works such as *Monkey Grip* and *Joe Cinque's Consolation*.

The Season is unlike any of her previous writings but has those same appealing aspects of storytelling, her powers of observation, her self-critical and self-deprecating comments and her boundless empathy, generosity and tolerance of her fellow human beings trying to live their lives as best they can.

I enjoyed this book on my first reading of it at the end of last year and it was my chosen Christmas present for my friends. Since then I have returned to it for comfort and enjoyment; in a world of many negative news it makes me feel happy and optimistic about the future, the world, Australia and especially my community in Tasmania and those around me. As an ethicist, I have discovered that Garner gives answers to the three fundamental questions of ethics posed by all philosophers since the ancients: how we should live, how we should get value out of life, how we should treat each other.

The Season has a simple structure, Garner tells us about taking her grandson to the under 16s footy training throughout the year 2023. The chapters have the headings of months from February to August, Ambrose's (or 'Amby's') training begins in February in warm and sunny summer air and concludes similarly in August, the seasons change, the young boys grow into men while the devoted grandmother grows older.

Garner, after a life in which she has "fought with men, lived under their regimes, been limited and frustrated by their power" (p2) has written a book about a footy season during which she has come to understand, "How deep it goes in men, this bond, this loyalty; I would never mock it" (p175). Through her we encounter many good, loyal men in the book, both in Garner's immediate family and on and off the footy field. There are her son-in-law and two grandsons of whom Amby is the youngest, then there are the many volunteers she encounters on her weekly trips to training, the fathers of the sons playing footy, the supporters of each club. They are no longer a powerful and frustrating species of men, but individuals with their own fears, hopes, aspirations and attachments. Just like the women in Garner's writing, they come alive to the reader as good, decent individuals whom you would very much want to meet and get to know better.

Garner lives an idyllic life next door to her daughter and her family, there are chooks and a dog, Smokey. Household chores as well as joys and sorrows are shared and feelings are discussed in a constructive environment. She has been a supporter of the Western Bulldogs team, formerly known as Footscray, since 2000 when the demise of the club due to lack of funds appeared imminent. She watched the TV documentary, *Year of the Dogs*, and "went straight to the computer with my credit card and joined" (p49). She discusses footy with her sister who plays the saxophone and barracks for Geelong, and most of all with Amby when she drives him back and forth to training in her old Corolla. She admits that she doesn't understand the rules too well even after twenty years. She does, however, highlight the many unwritten rules that most matter to both the members of the teams and those supporting them.

Amby provides his grandmother with an insightful comment when he tells "Hel" how good it feels to tackle someone, he understands that it is about "basically inflicting physical harm" (p44) but it does not result in any hard feelings and at the end the players of the opposing teams shake hands. He agrees with his grandmother that the Western Bulldogs are "a charming team" (p149) and that they are decent. They treat each other and the members of the opposing team well; there is no lingering anger or resentment.

In a world that has changed a lot in Garner's 80 years, she maintains in *The Season*, as she does in all her earlier books, that there are unchanging values like goodwill, decency, trustworthiness and honesty. This is clear in her descriptions of the Western Bulldogs as a team, "the boys from Sparta" (p.10) and their captain: On the big screen as I walk into the kitchen I see the mighty figure of Bontempelli in flight, an archangel out of Blake or Milton, all crystalline and celestial – and the blue of the Bulldogs jumper! So intense, so mouth-watering, so made of sky" (p62).

... it is possible to live a life of love and joy if we share it with others, if we share the values of collaborative communities and treat each other with decency and respect.

The spiritual dimension of footy, the sense of "communion" with something higher than yourself familiar to footy fans comes through in *The Season* when Garner recognises the god-like power of the players in other teams, for instance,

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

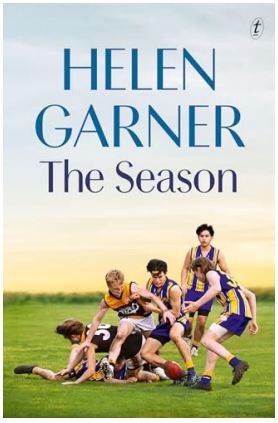
Charlie Curnow of Carlton: "It's Homeric: all the ugly brutality of a raging Achilles, but also this strange and splendid beauty" (p168). She is staring at a photo of Curnow in a *Sunday Age* "in horror" because she recognises the superhuman effort in a very human young man.

Garner's communion with others extends to opera; surprisingly the two interests of footy and opera are shared by the same fanatics. She goes to Wagner's *Ring Cycle* in Geelong with an old friend who is "footy mad from childhood" (p36). On Saturday night there is a rest night from *The Ring* and the two friends head off to the old pub in town to watch footy "in front of the colossal screen. We shout and rage and cheer like everyone around us…Everything, including football, is Wagnerian in Bendigo…" (p37).

By May the days are getting longer and cooler and Garner questions her commitment to the trips to Amby's weekly training: Am I bored? It's like sitting in a court watching a trial. There are long passages without drama, but because you're in love with the story and its characters, even boring parts are interesting. I'm watching footy. Just standing around in a dream, in the presence of footy. And boys. Nameless boys at dusk. In the presence of boys hovering on the verge of manhood (p73).

Garner's description of being in love with the story and its characters is very apt, she gives an example of the object of her love in July when she declares her love for one of the Bulldogs players: "Gee I love Cody Weightman! He always looks as if he's at a party…". I certainly share her love for Cody "bursting with goodwill, dancing in triumph"(p125) and as she points out, an old commentator, and no doubt numerous spectators would join in to say "Thank you! For the joy you gave us!"

In *The Season* Garner shows us that it is possible to live a life of love and joy if we share it with others, if we share the values of collaborative communities and treat each other with decency and respect.



Dr Leila Toiviainen
Retired researcher
Acknowledgement:
For Ronnie Sammut with heartfelt thanks.

Howard Harris

Howard & bookbinding

Howard enrolled in a WEA course for the first time ever last month. The course was 'Bookbinding for Beginners' and the course was in the city which meant a train trip, a tram journey and a long-ish walk for me four times if I was to see the course out (which I did). I learnt how to bind books and how to design a course—something I had not expected. The instructor (PhD and CertIV in AWT Assessment & Workplace Training) knew what she was doing, and even had examples she had made herself. Is there a lesson in there for those of us (like me many years ago) who teach ethics? Ethics is practical. It is something you do. It might not be as practical as bookbinding, but if it is all theory—about being nice people—then the course might not be much use if it is meant to change people's lives and to make the world a better place. What's bookbinding got to do with ethics ?

One might say, 'Nothing'. I, however, say, 'Practice'. There was a link as the bookbinding course set me off to complete the family history my sister and I had begun many years earlier. The ethics emerged when I wrote about others without thinking who would see it. Did person A expect person B to know that (even if A and B were both part of the same family). The bookbinding class was teaching me about books that could be unbound and changed. That was what I was aiming at—something where people could write (as much or as little) about themselves as they liked. But at least one family member was worried about who would see it.

So even though it was meant to be a 'write it yourself' family history, there were still ethical questions. Even though it was 'all in the family', who should know what? Those are ethical questions that do not go away. Even in a bookbinding course which I did not expect to include ethics. Leave aside anything I learnt about teaching, about ethics being practical. As a recent birthday gift a friend had given me GK Chesterton's *Orthodoxy*, a book which spends a lot of space considering what liberty means and concluding that liberty is easily locked up. That what starts out being action intended to enhance liberty can quickly become constraining. And setting out to do one thing and ending up achieving the exact opposite hardly seems ethical. Even if that is the outcome of a bookbinding class.

A/Prof Howard Harris
Adjunct Associate Professor
Former President of the AAPAE (2006-2008)

The ethics of Artificial Intelligence: The emerging consensus and the role of applied and professional ethics

Jacqueline Boaks

While the pace of technological change in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) seems so rapid as to be impossible to keep current with, when it comes to the ethics of AI the ground is more solid and less subject to change.

In fact, there are areas of broad consensus when it comes to the ethics of AI including the three below. All three have emerged in recent years and position the fields of applied and professional ethics—as well as those who practice thinking about ethics in these fields—well for engagement with the increasingly critical field of the ethics of AI.

In my recent experiences sharing insights into the ethics of AI with participants from industry, government, medicine, the law and academia, this consensus and the applicability of applied and professional ethics to these seemingly new challenges has been a very welcome message.

Consensus 1: The connection with the principlism of medical ethics

Among the large and increasing volume of statements on AI ethics, by far the most common format is a statement of a number of AI principles. While the number of principles in each statement varies, there is significant uniformity on the principles themselves.

In the main, these frameworks of the ethics of AI are modelled on the principlism of Beauchamp and Childress—namely, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice and autonomy—that forms the basis of medical ethics and indeed of much of professional ethics.

Australia's AI Ethics Principles, for example, begin with the requirement that AI serve human wellbeing, protect human autonomy, avoid harm and treat individuals fairly.

Luciano Floridi and Josh Cowls were among the first to notice a convergence in AI ethics principles as well as at least surface level similarity to medical ethics. More recently, Correa et al.'s "meta-analysis of 200 governance policies and ethical guidelines for AI usage published by public bodies, academic institutions, private companies and civil society organisations worldwide" identified convergence on key principles across these statements. The principles most cited in these frameworks concerned transparency (appearing in 165 of the 200 documents) followed by safety and trustworthiness (156 of 200), then justice and fairness (151 of 200).

Consensus 2: The primary importance of transparency and explainability

The primacy of transparency and explainability—including disclosure of the use of AI, describing how AI is used and an explanation of the outcomes it produces has a strong history and is far from contingent.

Floridi and Cowls argued for the inclusion of a fifth, AI-specific principle of 'transparency' in addition to the four principles carried over from medical ethics—reasoning that AI use is particularly liable to lack of transparency and that this transparency is an enabling principle that allows those affected by AI to consider and if need be to challenge its use.

> *On the basis of our comparative analysis, we argue that a new principle is needed in addition: explicability, understood as incorporating both intelligibility (for non-experts, e.g., patients or business customers; for experts, e.g., product designers or engineers) and accountability.*
>
> *The addition of the principle of 'explicability ... complements the other four principles: for AI to be beneficent and non-maleficent, we must be able to understand the good or harm it is actually doing to society and in which ways; for AI to promote and not constrain human autonomy ....*

Applied and Professional Ethics are the starting point for responsible AI—shaping standards, grounding moral accountability and fostering healthy ethical debate.

Moreover, this transparency places constraints on aspects of AI such as human-like appearances. Joanna Bryson argues that anthropomorphised AI undermines the ongoing disclosure and transparency of AI as AI.

Consensus 3: The ethical considerations are fundamental and primary

In an era of increasing prevalence of statements of AI frameworks and emerging consensus, there is much discussion of 'responsible AI use' and 'safe AI'. Nonetheless, the ethics of AI and ethical deployment of AI remains a live, separate and much needed discipline.

Kevin P Lee frames these differences convincingly and argues that AI ethics is the foundational enquiry that both

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

gives rise to the AI frameworks (compliance with which counts as 'responsible AI') and is the correct domain for consideration of moral questions of AI beyond and within what is prescribed by such frameworks. It is thus the right space in which to explore the questions of the ethics of AI *that are not yet decided* or set in the frameworks that reflect our emerging consensus as well as those that *are not exhaustively decided* by these frameworks, for example what counts as a violation of autonomy, or how we should balance the conflict and tensions between safety and autonomy.

This is not only good news for those already in these fields, but also often good news for those outside of the field who are increasingly thinking about the ethical considerations for this rapidly evolving technology. Over the course of the past two years, I have hosted many discussions on the ethics of AI, from full day masterclasses for industry participants to online community of inquiry sessions for academic staff. Almost unanimously, participants express relief and strong interest to know that the fields of professional and applied ethics offered existing and well proven ways of thinking about these questions. At their best these conversations are public deliberations, and it is welcome news to many people that we do not, collectively, need to start from nothing in these conversations.

The field of applied ethics, including the principlism that forms the basis of much of professional ethics, is however only a starting point for AI ethics. Much of AI ethics presents genuinely new ethical challenges and genuinely new ways for age-old ethical challenges to appear in new guises and new complexity. Driverless cars, for example, might in some ways mimic the classic trolley problem that instructors have used to introduce students to normative ethics for decades now. But, in practice, their design and manufacturing raises new questions about the nature and extent of moral and legal responsibility. For one, the engineers and CEOs responsible for driverless cars will be far more removed from any accidents and harms than the putative passerby at the switch who can change the course of the runaway trolley in Foot's thought experiment. The potential harms that AI is predicted to cause or has already triggered stretch our moral concepts to the limits of existing shared use and challenge our understanding of those concepts. For example, should the questionable actions of operators like Cambridge Analytica—deliberately influencing individuals' voting behaviour without their knowledge—be understood primarily as violations of autonomy, of privacy, or of some other moral term?

Another hot-button example is online safety. Online safety is a natural extension of personal safety in general—protection from online harms is, after all, conceptually similar to the protection from physical harms, particularly when minors are involved. But the questions of how we should weight online safety against privacy, amid AI's increased ability to invade privacy, as well as questions about new forms of privacy such as decisional privacy, all require substantive ethical consideration and discussion. Applied and professional ethics have a core role to play here, in large part by sharing these tools and models of thinking, bringing to the discussion the insights gleaned from these existing fields and applications, and bringing the wider community into these discussions.

More broadly, these discussions include the relative weighting and prioritising, operationalising and a full understanding of this evolving privacy/safety construct. This is what Floridi and Cowls refer to when they note that "while the four bioethical principles adapt surprisingly well to the fresh ethical challenges posed by AI, they do not offer a perfect translation. As we shall see, the underlying meaning of each of the principles is contested, with similar terms often used to mean different things".

In other words, while the above studies identified a consensus on 'values', the realities of the field—like all fields of applied ethics—mean that that the substantive discussions remain to be had. Those in the fields of applied ethics and professional ethics are well placed with respect to these dialogues and should be encouraged to both contribute to these discussions and to openly share with the wider community the conceptual tools and modes that these fields contain.

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References: Please contact the author direct, see also

https://www.industry.gov.au/publications/australias-artificial-intelligence-ethics-principles/australias-ai-ethics-principles

Want to add to this debate? See the call for papers: *The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence and the Professions*—special Issue of *Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations* Emerald **on page 10 this issue**.

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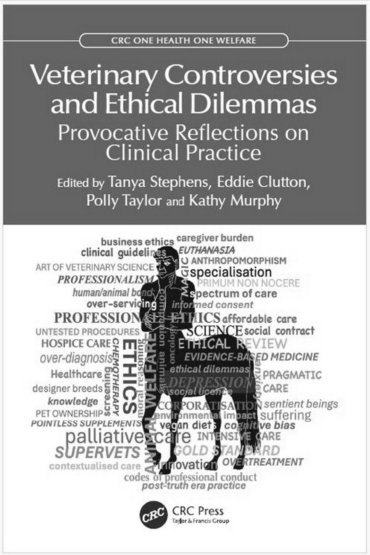
A thought-provoking new book on the veterinary profession!

Veterinary Controversies and Ethical Dilemmas

Provocative reflections on clinical practice

Edited by Tanya Stephens, Eddie Clutton, Polly Taylor, Kathy Murphy



This book identifies increasing concerns with the veterinary profession and confronts them provocatively, with a view to stimulating positive change. A central theme is the emergence of the profitable 'fur baby' which is being propagated through encouraged anthropomorphism, a limited evidence base, overdiagnosis, overtreatment, and practice corporatisation. Richly accompanied with thoughts on veterinary celebrity, the misrepresentation of veterinary 'success', research using client-owned animals, unregulated treatments and end-of-life decision-making, the book represents a small room full of large elephants. With experienced contributors from around the world, each chapter combines personal story with evidence-based reflections.

While many of the subjects presented will have undergone some degree of ethical analysis, the book itself does not intend to teach veterinary ethics; instead, its role is to identify key concerns with the profession's current trajectory and to present them with candour, from the perspective of concerned veterinary professionals.

Ideal for use within the veterinary curriculum to stimulate undergraduate thought and discussion, this book will also be a valuable reference for practitioners as the veterinary profession comes to terms with life in a post-truth era.
https://www.routledge.com/Veterinary-Controversies-and-Ethical-Dilemmas-Provocative-Reflections-on-Clinical-Practice/Stephens-Clutton-Taylor-Murphy/p/book/9781032579863

"This collaborative book is one I wish I had had to hand in my practice days, even better when I was a student with the prospect of qualifying soon. It has expertly recalibrated my sometimes uncertain moral compass regarding what levels of diagnostics and treatment to impose on the cat, bringing with it a welcoming sense of comfort and assurance. The book is a compelling read, enhanced by contributions from multiple authors. Each brings their own style and perspective to a captivatingly wide variety of topics, ranging from the history of our profession, aging pets, zoo animals, the art of veterinary medicine through to students' education... I relished the fact that the contents are both delightfully controversial and deliberately provocative."

Julian Kupfer, BVSc LLM MRCVS, Chair of the Animal Welfare Foundation, UK

Call for Papers: The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence and the Professions

Special Issue of Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations (Emerald)

The 2024 AAPAE Symposium brought together a range of scholars and practitioners across disciplines to consider the questions, challenges and opportunities artificial intelligence represents for those in the professions. There was particular focus on the ethical dimensions as well as what they might mean for the nature of the professions and professionals themselves. Papers addressed the professions across the law, education, medicine and the military.

Questions of interest include but are not limited to:

- What does AI mean for the professions?
- What does AI mean for professional ethics?
- What does the public have a right to expect of the professions with respect to AI?
- What impact will AI have on education and training pathways for those in the professions?
- What does AI mean for the role of special knowledge in the professions?

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Ethics in Management: Business and the Professions

(Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations, Volume 28)

Volume 28 of the AAPAE's publication series, ***Research in Ethics In Organizations***, was published in April 2025. Arising in part from the proceedings of the online AAPAE conference on the same topic, the volume comprises papers presented at the conference and other contributions on the same topic across a wide range of ethical issues and challenges entailed in management and leadership roles and the professions.

The volume features significant and compelling new work from Australian and international authors from a range of disciplines. It covers timely topics such as what we ethically expect of leaders, how power should be shared and how free market operations must be ethically justified, the ethical implications of research, what duties we might have to defend others on humanitarian grounds, and whether we should strive to be passionate about our work and careers.

Our conference keynote speaker, Professor Michelle Greenwood and her co-author, Margaret Ying Wei Lee, (both of Monash University) addressed the topic of how research ethics might be conceptualised for social impact, moving beyond institutional research ethics compliance to a much more substantive ethical consideration of the assumptions that underpin research practice and the implications of the knowledge created by research. It's a particularly interesting lens for those undertaking conceptual research, especially those in the humanities and fields such as philosophy, where institutional ethics compliance is often not part of research.

In the second paper in the volume, Ezechiel Thibuad (The Education University of Hong Kong), challenges the evolving and increasingly positive, description of 'passion' as a workplace and career asset to be encouraged and fostered by managers and explicit demonstrated by employees. Thibaud shows how such models and expectations can, in fact, harm workers and represent a form of elitism.

The 'Social Licence to Operate' of organisations is the subject of the third paper. Hugh Breaky (Griffith University), Graham Wood (University of Tasmania) and Charles Sampford (Griffith University), advance a new conceptual framework to produce a more detailed understanding of the dimensions and types of social licence to operate, and one that suggests meaningful ways to assess the authenticity and relative worth of efforts by companies in this area.

In the fourth paper, Jessica Flanigan (University of Richmond), argues that political and business leaders are indeed bound by the same moral considerations as the rest of us. Flanigan argues that this is because leadership is not morally distinctive, contra the so-called 'Exceptionalist' perspective that Flanigan connects with Just War Theory and explicitly argues against. Instead Flanigan reasons for what she calls 'Consistency'—the view that there is a single set of ethical standards that apply to all, including those in leadership roles.

Also engaging with the idea of special roles and duties, Shannon Brandt Ford (Curtin University), explores the obligations and responsibilities to protect others at an individual level. In an extremely timely paper, Ford draws on arguments made in the context of military roles and settings to signal that in some cases individuals who are third parties may indeed have a humanitarian obligation to use force up to and including lethal force where innocent human lives are threatened.

The final chapter returns to for-profit organisations. Larelle Bossi (Griffith University) and Lonnie Bossi outline a new model that they call "a layered round table approach" in response to the calls for new kinds of leadership post-COVID-19 and the popularisation of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Their layered round table approach is offered as a move away from the hierarchical, systematised, impersonal and transactional interactions of the military and traditional corporate organisational structures—a position these authors argue has remained largely unchanged for 150 years—while simultaneously avoiding the relatively simplistic "round table" models that have not yielded the changes and advantages the authors argue are needed.

In the final paper, REIO editor Jacqueline Boaks (Curtin University), reviews Martha Nussbaum's most recent book *Justice for Animals: our collective responsibility* (Simon & Schuster), an issue that increasingly faces organisations of all sorts with both direct impact and use of animals and indirect impact on their environment and lives. The review describes the work of a skilled philosopher's attempt to construct a philosophical proposition that not only appeals to our well-held intuitions but awakens our better selves in the form of a serious call to action across such a large range of human activities.

https://www.emerald.com/insight/publication/doi/10.1108/s1529-2096202528

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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.

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

Ethics Olympiad

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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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