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AUSTRALIAN ETHICS

# PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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## Welcome to the 2024 Winter Edition of *Australian Ethics*!

The theme for this edition of *Australian Ethics* is sins and the professions.

Leesa Wisby and Kim Atkins start things off by considering the role of self-forgiveness in the medical profession. Importantly, they argue not only for the importance of self-forgiveness in reasserting the moral status of the self, but also for community support in this endeavour. No-one can be perfect, and professions need to help professionals come to terms with their inevitable failings. Their argument struck home with me. I was recently in Sydney at a workshop convened by the Professional Standards Councils. One of the speakers highlighted that a large share of ethical wrongdoing in the legal profession involved lawyers making honest mistakes, but then wrongfully covering up their errors. A system that wed together genuine accountability with pathways to restore moral standing could hope to nip this major source of professional wrongdoing in the bud.

Next, Roderick O'Brien reflects on ethics and the profession of arms, analysing the recent Australian Defence Force document on Military Ethics. He provides a measured evaluation, noting its virtues, and also some broader lessons.

Finally, Alan Tapper explores Julius Kovesi's notion of 'complete moral concepts'—and specifically of moral wrongs. He points out that the list of acts that are *just plain wrong* is a long one, and is seemingly getting longer, and he reflects on the apparent human need for such concepts.

**Upcoming Events**

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

On 10 October, the *AAPAE Ethics Olympiad* will take place. These are terrific online competitions 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!

On 28 November, we will host an online symposium on the pressing topic of *Artificial Intelligence and the Professions*. Join us in a deep discussion of how this unprecedented technological disruption might impact how we understand professions, professionalism and professional ethics.

And for those of you who have been yearning for an in-person event, the good news is that the AAPAE is teaming up with the Australian Earth Laws Alliance (AELA) to have its 2025 conference next May in the beautiful 'Eco-Centre' at Griffith University in Brisbane. I t will be great to catch up with everyone there!

**Hugh Breakey**

# ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE PROFESSIONS

Call for Papers:

## AAPAE Symposium and Special Issue of Research In Ethical Issues in Organizsations (REIO)

**THURSDAY, 28 NOVEMBER 2024 (ONLINE)**

## Overview

In a 2024 report on Generative AI and the future of work, the International Monetary Fund reported that:

> **"Almost 40 percent of global employment is exposed to AI, with advanced economies at greater risk but also better poised to exploit AI benefits than emerging market and developing economies. In advanced economies, about 60 percent of jobs are exposed to AI, due to prevalence of cognitive-task-oriented jobs."**

*Gen-AI: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work*. (n.d.). IMF. https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/Staff-Discussion-Notes/Issues/2024/01/14/Gen-AI-Artificial-Intelligence-and-the-Future-of-Work-542379?cid=bl-com-SDNEA2024001

In contrast to previous revolutions in technology and work, the professions are more vulnerable to impact and change from artificial intelligence.  At the same time, the 'cognitive-task-oriented jobs' will need to navigate using artificial intelligence more than others.

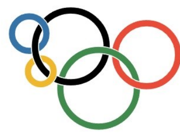
This online symposium will bring together academics, practitioners, researchers and others to discuss what generative AI means for the professions and for professional ethics.

## Possible topics of interest include:

What does AI mean for the professions?
What ethical issues are posed by the potential disruptions to the professions?
What does AI mean for professional ethics?
What impact will AI have on education and training pathways for aspiring professionals as well as those already in the professions?
What does the public have a right to expect of the professions with respect to AI?
What does AI mean for the role of specialist knowledge in the professions?

**The AAPAE invites abstracts on these and related topics,
to be submitted by 30 September 2024.**

**For more information, email Dr Jacqui Boaks: Jacqueline.boaks@curtin.edu.au**



# Ethics Olympiad

**SAVE THE DATE: THURSDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2024**

Started as a university-based US initiative in 1993, the "Ethics Bowl" continues to be a popular competition today, culminating in the annual Intercollegiate *US Ethics Bowl*.

To extend the reach, the Ethics Olympiad was created in 2013 to promote the study of philosophy in Australasia among High School students and, in 2022, further expanded to include tertiary students in the region. The Ethics Olympiad has a proven track record of providing educators with a creative vehicle for developing skills in communication, critical thinking and respectful discourse while dealing with important ethical issues.

The first Tertiary Ethics Olympiad was run in 2022. This event involved 10 teams and the top teams went on to participate in an online international final. Since 2023, the AAPAE has been pleased to be a sponsor of the Ethics Olympiad.

## What is an Ethics Olympiad?

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.

## How does it work?

During the competition day, all teams are involved in a series of three heats where they are scored according to set criteria which rewards clear, concise and respectful discourse around challenging ethical cases. At the end of the day, scores are collated and teams are awarded Gold, Silver or Bronze medals based on the scores. The 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.

The **AAPAE Ethics Olympiad** is conducted via Zoom on the competition day. 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. Please remember, this is not a debate as teams can agree with each other about the best ethical outcome.

All participants receive a certificate and the winning teams receive medals.

## 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

# Self-forgiveness is a virtue for the medical profession

Leesa Wisby & Kim Atkins

We maintain that self-forgiveness is an important virtue for the practice of medicine because it is a necessary condition for a therapeutic relationship, understood as 'hospitality' (Levinas, 1961). We outline a model of self-forgiveness and then highlight some features of medical practice that demonstrate the value of self-forgiveness for professional excellence. A consequence of our view is a further claim that the medical profession has an obligation to provide its practitioners with conditions that enable self-forgiveness. However, we will not argue that here.

**The role of self-forgiveness**

We take the view that self-forgiveness presupposes that we recognise human beings and human understanding as fallible and shaped by our circumstances, and that we can accept our moral failures and engage in a process whereby "we make good to ourselves" (Snow, 1993). To this end, we concur with Robin Dillon (2001) that the role of self-forgiveness is not about eliminating negative feelings and/or self-regard, but rather, restoring one's moral agency and one's faith in one's self-worth. Importantly, this process does not preclude self-reproach, shame, guilt, or a sense of inadequacy as a person and a worry about future inadequacies.

Dillon (2001) argues that self-forgiveness is an appropriate response to an injury to our self-respect. She describes the injury as "a complex, multilayered and interpenetrating phenomena" characterised by feelings of shame that encompass "all those aspects of cognition, valuation, affect, expectation, motivation, action and interaction that compose a mode of being in the world whose heart is an appreciation of oneself as having morally significant worth." Self-forgiveness, in short, is the effort to 'make good' the self, following an injury to one's self-respect. In her nuanced analyses, Dillon argues that it is injury to one particular kind of self-respect, namely, evaluative self-respect, that drives self-forgiveness.

Evaluative self-respect refers to one's confidence in one's merit in terms of the normative self-conception underlying one's sense of one's own equality, agency, and individuality: evaluative self-respect stands back and asks if one "is living congruently with her normative self-conception" (Dillon, 2001). Self-respect can take this form because we see ourselves through a kind of double lens: both as we think we are and as we want ourselves to be. Precisely because these views of oneself can clash, one cannot have a normative self-conception without the disposition to evaluate, not just one's actions, but also oneself. Indeed, it is precisely this phenomenon that generates the question of forgiveness at all. When one fails to live up to one's normative self-conception, one experiences self-reproach and shame: one is confronted with the "self as feared" (Dillon, 2001). This experience sets a specific task before the self: to restore the integrity of the self by restoring one's worthiness to aspire to a particular normative self-conception. The successful effort to make good the self, relegates the 'self as feared' from a dominant position of power and agency to one of subordination to one's normative self-conception: the self as one wants to be.

Thus, self-forgiveness shows itself to be a virtue by bringing about the restoration of integrity and moral agency, with its concomitant high standards, despite the persistence of some negative self-regarding attitudes such as guilt and shame, and despite some concern about failing in the future. What matters here is that the agency of 'self as feared' is attenuated so that the person is loosed from motivations rooted in destructive dispositions and can think and act according to the principles that comprise their normative self-conception.

Dillon (2001) argues that the path to restoration entails another type of self-respect, "agentic recognition self-respect" which is the "proper appreciation of oneself as a moral agent". Self-reproach threatens one's sense of being a moral agent when it becomes an unrelenting process of self-punishment and denial of self-worth. But self-reproach serves a virtue when it provokes the person to take appropriate responsibility and accountability for their failings

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and attempt to restore their sense of moral selfhood. Thus, the complexity of self-respect yields the well of "preservative self-forgiveness", which is the recognition of one's inherent worth in a way that aligns with "honesty, proportion, an intact sense of justice and responsibility, and compassionate understanding of human fallibility" (Dillon, 2001). In its function of restoration of the self to wholeness and agency, driven by a proper appreciation of one's intrinsic worth and motivated by a commitment to the cultivation of a good life, self-forgiveness is a virtue.

**The virtue of self-forgiveness for medical practice**

The Medical Board of Australia (2020, 2.1) specifies the professional qualities (virtues) of medical practitioners, which includes "integrity, truthfulness, dependability and compassion". A doctor's professional obligations are clearly outlined in the various medical codes of conduct and ethics, providing guidance related to the expectations and requirements of the profession. For example, medical practitioners must provide competent, safe, and effective care, be attuned to the relationships they have with patients and colleagues, undertake self-care, practice reflectively, and learn from "what has gone well and what hasn't." (Medical Board of Australia, 2020, 2.1). However, while virtues such as compassion and honesty have been explored across the wider literature, self-forgiveness as a virtue has had less attention in the research literature (Blustein, 2007).

Because it is fundamentally relational and dynamic, clinical practice can be highly complex and always involves a level of indeterminacy, thus it is inherently vulnerable to error, especially in situations needing rapid decision-making (Christensen et al., 2015; Shepherd et al., 2019). The centrality of the principle "do no harm" implicitly recognises this inherent vulnerability, as well as the vulnerability of the patient within the power structures of the therapeutic relationship. This is evident in the practitioner's obligations to observe professional and personal boundaries and avoid exploitation; practise to high standards of competency and within one's scope of knowledge; and respect the patient's privacy and confidentiality (Medical Board of Australia, 2020).

> … self-respect, integrity and self-regulation require the ongoing guidance, engagement and support of others.

Unfortunately, despite awareness of medicine's inherent fallibility, there persists a culture, both within the medical profession and among the wider public, that regards doctor-related error as unacceptable. This has been accompanied by an attitude that the uncertain nature of medicine should not be communicated to patients (Blustein, 2007), and, when mistakes inevitably occur, a culture of shame and blame (Hoffman, 2014, Smith et al., 2000) that silences healthcare professionals, and at times, leads them to deny error for fear of legal and professional repercussions (Smith et al., 2000). This increases the vulnerability of patients as well as the practitioner. In addition, there are few dedicated services to support doctors to come to terms with their errors (Blustein, 2007; Wu, 2000). However, without a supportive process, feelings of shame, anger and guilt have been shown to give rise to defensiveness, blame-shifting and loss of self-confidence, thus undermining the doctor's competency to conduct a therapeutic relationship (Christensen et al., 1992). It is essential, then, that the doctor can recover in a way that supports them to continue to care effectively for others.

Dillon's account shows how self-forgiveness can facilitate a doctor's capacity to hold themself to reasonable account (rather than unrealistic standards of perfection), disclose errors, take responsibility, and accept blame without being overwhelmed, and to express remorse; and this is borne out in empirical research (Blustein 2007; Berlinger, 2011; Baume & Garada 2016). Self-forgiveness, in acknowledging

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vulnerability and reducing the power of negative self-regard, serves a protective role after medical error (Bynum & Goodies, 2014). In restoring self-respect and competency, self-forgiveness also restores safety to the patient relationship.

**'Hospitality' as a model for the clinical encounter**

The account of self-forgiveness so far demands a deeply relational model of the clinical encounter and its therapeutic effects. Benarayo (2022) explains that health is about adaptations to 'disruptions' from the external world, some of which are experienced as suffering. In clinical care, the therapeutic relationship mediates the patient's adaptation through an interaction in which the clinician is available and responsive to the other's suffering, welcoming it into the clinician's world of meanings and generating a shared narrative which makes sense of the suffering and "compels the patient to see therapy as integral to healing". Following Levinas, this interaction is characterised as an environment of 'hospitality'. What matters is the meaningfulness of the understanding created in the relationships at least as much as any pharmaceutical or other intervention (as is borne out in research about wastage and low value health services: Olivares-Tirado and Zanga, 2023).

Benarayo (2022) argues that shared vulnerability lies at the heart of the hospitable clinical encounter, so the doctor must fully commit to the recognition of their own humanity and fragility to be open to the humanity and fragility of their patients. Only then can there be a welcoming space of trust between them. Accordingly, hospitality (and the success of the therapeutic relationship), presupposes a self-forgiving subject: a doctor who is responsible, accountable, attuned to themselves and the relationship, who can accept and acknowledge their own fallibility and consequently self-care. Following medical error, the virtue of self-forgiveness is fundamental to restoring hospitality as the ethical ground of clinical care, and medicine as a truly caring practice.

**Conclusion**

Medicine is complex, uncertain, and subject to error, and this has serious implications for patients and doctors, as well as doctors' employers. We have argued that the virtue of self-forgiveness is necessary for doctors to fulfill their professional commitments to patients and to themselves. Implicit in our account is the role that other people play in the path to self-forgiveness through recognitive processes that mediate evaluative self-respect. In addition to considerations of patients, we believe that others play a key role in restoration of the clinician because of the intersubjective structure of the self. Self-respect, integrity, and self-regulation require the on-going guidance, engagement, and support of others. Therefore, there is a responsibility for the professional community to support and enable each other's humanity. Suffice to say here that it is through compassionate professional engagement and support processes that relevant others can and should pave the road to self-forgiveness in the clinical context.

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

**FOR THE NEXT EDITION OF *AUSTRALIAN ETHICS***

The closing date for submission for the **Summer 2024-25** edition of *Australian Ethics* is **mid-December 2024** — All articles, news items, upcoming events, book reviews, interest pieces, etc. are welcome. Please email the editor at: **info@aapae.org.au.**

# 2025 AAPAE AND AELA CONFERENCE—ADVANCE NOTICE

Conference theme:

## Ethical Futures for People and Planet

**Thursday 1st to Saturday 3rd May 2025**

***Griffith University EcoCentre***

***Nathan Campus, Building N68, 170 Kessels Rd, Nathan QLD 4111***

***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

The 2025 conference will focus on these and related questions. Papers that explore the AAPAE's area of interest in other domains of applied and professional ethics are also, as always, very welcome. The **Call for Papers** will be announced in August, and key timelines will be shared later this year.

# Ethics and the Profession of Arms

Roderick O'Brien

**"EVERY SUBJECT'S DUTY IS THE KING'S, BUT EVERY SUBJECT'S SOUL IS HIS OWN."**
(Shakespeare, Henry V, Act 4, Scene 1)

**"SOLDIERS! YOU MUST EMERGE FROM THIS FIGHT NOT ONLY VICTORIOUS, BUT ALSO WITHOUT REPROACH. IT SHOULD BE SAID OF YOU LATER THAT WHENEVER NECESSARY, YOU FOUGHT BRAVELY, BUT THAT YOU ALSO SHOWED YOURSELVES TO BE HUMANE AND GENEROUS AT ALL TIMES."**
(Order of the Day of General Guillaume Henri Dufour before the Sonderbund War, 1847)

The Profession of Arms may not be the most ancient of professions—there is debate about that—but it is certainly of ancient lineage, and through the centuries has attracted a rich tradition of ethics or morals. And in December 2021, the Australian Defence Force issued a new document Military Ethics. It is available at https://theforge.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-12/ADF-P-0%20Military%20Ethics%20Ed%201_0.pdf. The document is part of the ADF's Philosophical Doctrine, and is worth the attention of professional ethicists. The document is intended to be a companion to one on leadership, and to form a coherent pair. The Leadership document, already in its third edition, is available at https://theforge.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-06/adf-philosophical-doctrine-adf-leadership.pdf. The leadership document states: "Ethical leadership is the single most important factor in ensuring the legitimacy of our operations and the support of the Australian people."

Despite the emphasis on leadership, the document is intended for the development of all ranks. Australian Defence Force personnel are trained to be autonomous down to very small units, and recent scandals have reminded us that ethical failings can be found in the lowest ranks. Lance-Corporals lead teams of up to four soldiers, but can have considerable combat autonomy.

The unique ethical situation of the "profession of arms" is frankly explored in the first chapter: "In Australia, the members of the ADF exclusively comprise the profession of arms. As members of the profession of arms we may be called upon to do things that would not normally be ethically permissible; we may be asked to kill. The use of lethal force and the destruction of property is a task that may be required to achieve the ADF mission, but this is not an end in itself."

Then, in five working chapters, the document explores the ethical issues particularly facing the military professional: for this brief note we can simply summarise the chapters.

*Chapter 2* covers the ADF's legal and ethical responsibilities for the use of force. This chapter includes a reference to "just war" theory. The discussion includes the decision to go to war, the jus ad bellum, and locates that decision with the civil power. Nevertheless, the ADF advises the civil power, and has much more experience than the cabinet of the time in discerning the application of the just war theory.

*Chapter 3* covers the ethical theory which underpins the document. The reader will find an affirmative treatment of just war-natural law theory, duty ethics and virtue ethics. Consequentialist ethics, relativist ethics and subjectivism are excluded.

Chapter 4 identifies some of the major ethical issues for the military professional: discrimination, proportionality, military necessity and humanity.

*Chapter 5* provides a decision-making process for identifying and dealing with ethical issues.

*Chapter 6* helpfully names some of the instances of unethical conduct, and seeks to identify causes. Mentioned are abuse of power, normalisation of

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deviance, the damaging effects of war, moral drift and disengagement, and ethical relativism. A section on future ethical challenges hints at more complex questions: "Artificial intelligence, technologically enhanced combatants, lethal autonomous systems, cyber-conflict and information operations are just some of the areas that will have deeply challenging ethical dimensions." Perhaps these are not in our future, but already established elements of armed conflict.

A short document of only 60 pages is never going to include every possible nuance or ethical dilemma. For example, the document identifies just war theory as foundational, but does not define what this means. Yet, the content of just war theory is contested (for example, do you include jus post bellum?), or even rejected entirely.

**As members of the Profession of Arms we may be called upon to do things that would not normally be ethically permissible; we may be asked to kill.**

The document seems intended to provoke discussion. It is clearly labelled "first edition", anticipating that there will be more. (The pair document on Leadership is already in its third edition.) The bitter Gaza conflict must be better understood, for we may be seeing both parties shredding their reputation and their ethical standing. The brief statement about future ethical challenges needs prompt elaboration, because we see in the invasion and defence of the Ukraine a rapid engagement with new technologies. And the continuing quasi-conflicts in the South China Sea remind us of the ethical issues around escalation.

The document also tackles the relationship between law and ethics. Are we to have an ethically-based armed force, or are we to have a legally-constrained armed force? The use of similar terms in the law of armed conflict (LOAC) and ethics (such as proportionality) can be confusing. The document seeks to have its cake and eat it, too. The LOAC are seen as a minimum standard of legal conduct, but the ethical responsibility stands separately.

Towards the end of the document, we find this section: "Upholding the highest ethical values is not just good for the reputation of the ADF, it is also essential for the moral authority and integrity of every ADF member. Raising one's ethical duty of care helps keep people grounded in their own humanity and protects them from moral disengagement." Similar claims could be made for other professions, and for a variety of areas of ethics. Try substituting your own organisation for "ADF" in the sentences just quoted. The ethics of the profession of arms will continue to be important for professional and applied ethicists.

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**Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations—the official journal of the AAPAE**
***Editor*: Dr Jacqui Boaks: Jacqueline.boaks@curtin.edu.au**

## AAPAE Listserv

If you have any information or notices that you would like us to relay to your peers, please email your request (word format) to: info@aapae.org.au

**The AAPAE's Listserv has around 700 subscribers locally and overseas.**

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

# A multitude of sins

Alan Tapper

Are there some things we should never do? Ordinary folk and some philosophers think there are. What are they? The list seems at first quite short. A typical answer is that we should not commit murder, assault, rape, theft and fraud. These things are "wrong in themselves", or, more colloquially, "just plain wrong".

Some philosophers, so-called "consequentialists", argue that nothing is just plain wrong. They invent ways in which murder might be sometimes justified by imagining a case in which the consequences of a murder are so good that it would be justified "all things considered". This is a debate I'm not discussing here.

My interest is in whether the list of things that are commonly thought of as "just plain wrong" is a short or a long list. I think it is longer than you might guess. In fact, I think we are surprisingly inventive in coming up with "wrongs".

Start with the list of traditional wrongs. In addition to the four above, we can add these: manslaughter; affray; adultery; treason; sedition; treachery; kidnap; extortion; larceny; negligence; slander; libel; defamation; chicanery; malfeasance; embezzlement; perjury; demagoguery; racketeering; trespass; profiteering; and bestiality.

The fact that these behaviours are often legal offences does not detract from their being morally wrong. They are often made illegal just because of their moral wrongness. And the moral wrongness is not completely covered by the fact that they are deemed wrong in law.

Coming to more contemporary kinds of wrongness, we can list the "isms" that are wrong in themselves. These include racism, sexism, antisemitism, elitism, speciesism, heterosexism, ethnocentrism, Eurocentrism, Orientalism, Occidentalism, and white supremacism. Some old isms are cronyism, sectarianism, jingoism and fanaticism. Bigotry is the general term for these kinds of wrong.

Special mention should be given to "wowserism". Wikipedia tells us that is not just an Australian invention; Kiwis also invented it. (So it is like the pavlova, I guess.) The great poet, C.J. Dennis, defined a wowser as "an ineffably pious person who mistakes this world for a penitentiary and himself for a warder".

In regard to sexual orientation, the wrongness is usually deemed a kind of phobia—homophobia; transphobia, etc—even though "phobia" strictly speaking denotes a fear of something, such as arachnophobia, the fear of spiders, rather than a hatred of something. "Fatphobia" is a recent inclusion in this type of list.

We also have "miso" words: misogyny, misandry, misanthropy. Apparently the "miso" bit comes from ancient Greek.

Then there are various kinds of bad character or bad motive. For example, vindictiveness, spitefulness, hatefulness, smugness, self-righteousness, hypocrisy, insincerity, pretentiousness, snobbishness, prudishness and so on.

Modern life creates new kinds of wrong behaviour. For example, hooning, scamming, spamming, rorting, gouging, grifting, stalking, sexual harassment, groping, phishing, joy-riding, carjacking, fleecing, influence-peddling. To white-washing, we have lately added green-washing. Bootlegging is an old practice, but it has acquired a modern variant. Blame-shifting is a new name for an old wrong. Carpet-bagging is an old American term that is now recognised worldwide.

The philosopher who discussed these sorts of words (and from whom I learned to look out for them) is Julius Kovesi. He called them "complete moral concepts". A wrong being "complete" means that it is deemed wrong as part of its definition. (Kovesi introduced this terminology in his 1967 book Moral Notions. There is a short biography of him at https://www.womeninparenthesis.co.uk/quartet-biographies/. See also *Australian Ethics* for 2012: http://aapae.org.au/australian-ethics/julius-kovesi-on-concepts-and-moral-philosophy).

Kovesi was clear that "completeness" is not an indicator of the magnitude of a wrong. A thing can be completely wrong but only a minor wrong, as is obvious from the examples given.

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There may be "incomplete" wrongs that are as bad as the worst complete wrongs.

Talking about "complete" wrongness will probably trigger some worries about religious influence on our moral outlook, which for many people aspires to be quite secular. The religious moral concepts include sin, blasphemy, sacrilege and profanity.

These may seem to be complete moral concepts, but they should not bother non-believers. Only a believer can blaspheme. A non-believer may use words which would be blasphemy if spoken by a believer, but he or she is not blaspheming. One might be especially offensive to another person by using terms one knows that person will find offensive, but that is not at all the same as being blasphemous.

My main point is that we have always had ideas of things that are "just plain wrong", and we continue to produce new such ideas. It seems that we can't do without them. Why?

Maybe they function like survey markers. Perhaps by reference to these markers we can figure out where a given situation is located on "the moral landscape". Faced with a moral problem, perhaps we should look around for the nearest "survey markers". Maybe that is a helpful way of shedding light on our problems.

On Kovesi's view, when we make a moral judgment, we either bring an action or character under a complete moral concept or we reason analogically from such a concept to a certain case that is not itself fully described by any such concept. This is somewhat like the survey marker view.

**... we have always had ideas of things that are "just plain wrong", and we continue to produce new such ideas. It seems that we can't do without them.**

Kovesi had sophisticated views on these matters. I will end by quoting him at length.

"An intuitionist is able to intuit an obligation in a situation only if the situation is described by a moral term which is complete; a deductive system can have major premisses only if the crucial term in the major premiss is a complete moral term; a utilitarian can have a highest good only if that highest good is described by a complete term; a positivist can claim that words like 'wrong' add nothing significant to our judgment if what we judge to be wrong is described by a complete moral term, and the existentialist can claim that principles are no help in one's moral decisions only if the situation is such that it cannot be described by the help of a complete moral term.

The logic of complete moral notions also explains how these systems succeed in their various ways in distilling all value from our ordinary life and language, leaving them empty of value, concentrating it into a 'purely evaluative element'. For an intuitionist like [HA] Prichard the consideration of facts is not a moral activity but is like any other empirical consideration: the moral act is the act of intuition. The positivists only substitute an expression of attitude towards, in place of an intuition about, something which they think can be empirically ascertained.

In other systems the 'purely descriptive' statement of our acts takes either the form of a minor premiss with which our obligation is deductively connected via a major premiss, or the form of a causal statement with which our obligation is causally connected via a highest good. The existentialists are no exception and provide another variation of this pattern. Their world is without values and the purely evaluative element is there in the claim that we create values by our decisions. We have seen that what is created in these situations is that formal element in the absence of which there could not be a complete moral term."

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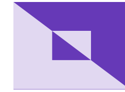

### Save the dates

**Ethics Olympiad 10 October 2024**

**AAPAE 2024 online Symposium**
**Artificial Intelligence and the Professions**
**28 November 2024**

**AAPAE & AELA**
**2025 in-person Conference**
**Ethical Futures for People and Planet**
**1-3 May 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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