



CASE SET: 29th APPE Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl® National Championship

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Prepared by:

Robert Boyd Skipper, Chair, Case Preparation Committee

Payton Bucki

Deni Elliott

Abigail Feldman

Cynthia Jones

Alex Richardson

Sophia McWilliams

Mallory Wietrzykowski

Jenna Wong



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1. A SCHOOL FOR ALL SEASONS

Here's your chance to design a campus for the common good. Start by imagining a small private college in the United States with a long history and large endowment. Let's call it The Lyceum. Faculty pursue their own research and scholarship, but their tenure and continued employment depend on good teaching. The school's primary mission is to challenge every student to become a visionary leader in their chosen field.

The school's focus on human flourishing for the common good expresses Aristotle's ethical and political ideal. However, the polarization of American politics makes it difficult to determine how to operationalize the ideal.

Institutions of higher education (IHEs) have always struggled to step out of their moment to meet all students' needs. Over its history, The Lyceum, like all IHEs, has reflected contemporary community convictions as well as potentially misguided actions by instructors and administrators. These factors have negatively impacted some students. Here are a few representative examples from the past seventy years:

In 1963, an African American student was suspended because his community activism interfered with his attendance and behavior in class. As he was needed to fill the school's small quota of African American students, the dean of students chose not to expel him. Nevertheless, the student left without graduating. Although he had helped desegregate local public schools and found a solution for the food desert in the economically deprived section of town, the college trustees reduced the number of Black student admissions to cut down on disruptions.

In 1973, a Native American student who had grown up on a local reservation knew that his tribe's roots ran deeper than the school's. His history classes emphasized the accomplishments of European American settlers, and his instructors seemed ignorant of the Native American history at the school's doorstep. He kept silent about his heritage and concerns, correctly guessing that he probably wouldn't have been admitted if his ethnicity had been known.

In 1983, a pre-med major had her career goal repeatedly questioned by her white male science professors. One said it was wrong for her to take a valuable seat from a male student, even if she was better qualified. After all, he said, a pretty girl like her was sure to quit medicine to get married and have babies. The student went to nursing school instead and did, indeed, give up her career five years later to marry a doctor and become a stay-at-home mom.

In 1993, a lesbian student came out to the dean of students to argue that she and her female domestic partner should be allowed to live in married student housing. Heterosexual couples who identified as "engaged" were allowed to live together, so why not same-sex couples? The dean rewrote the rule, limiting occupancy to legally married couples.

In 2003, the small number of students with disabilities provided a list of complaints to the administration. Although the student disability office complied with the Americans with Disabilities Act by providing proctors and extended time for exams, other changes were needed. For one thing, the school's website did not contain a single image of a person with an obvious disability. The lack of audio descriptions and closed

captioning on the website denied online access to individuals with visual or hearing impairments. Students in wheelchairs could not access the Student Life Center where clubs met because there was no ramp. ASL interpreters were provided at campus events, but only when a hearing-impaired student made a direct appeal. If the requester didn't show up for the event, they were reprimanded, as it was their fault that the college had wasted money in hiring an unneeded interpreter.

In 2013, four veterans transferred from The Lyceum to the public university. They wrote an editorial for the local newspaper, alleging anti-American sentiment on the private college campus. The veterans had felt attacked by their political science instructor, who seemed to delight in describing mistakes the United States had made in response to the 9/11 terrorist attack.

In fall, 2023, a European American student became fed up with being blamed and shamed by his professors. He was sorry about people who had been enslaved, the Native American boarding schools, and everyone else mistreated in the country's past, but it wasn't his fault. He didn't choose his family or his history. The plantation settled by his ancestors in the 1700s, with forced labor from dozens of enslaved workers, had helped create the school's endowment. He was not eligible for The Lyceum's need-based scholarships. He spoke up in his history class one day, saying, "Why don't you ever talk about how white Americans made opportunities for everyone possible?" Other students booed in response.

The pendulum of US public policy has swung from providing affirmative action for students from marginalized groups to disallowing "reverse discrimination" against students who come from dominant culture backgrounds. Leadership at The Lyceum must now decide if their Office of Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI) helps or hinders their efforts to welcome everyone. DEI thrives on some campuses; it has disappeared from others; and some schools have found ways to euphemize the office and its goals to make their DEI efforts less controversial.

How would you redesign The Lyceum so that it excludes no voice, challenges each student to think beyond their comfort zone, and contributes to a collaborative society? As the campus you are creating is a private college, not reliant on governmental support, you may design the school to promote human flourishing without worrying about regulatory repercussions.

2. BEGUN, THE STAR WARS HAVE

In 1983, President Reagan announced a plan to develop a space-based defense system called the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) to shoot down Soviet missiles in flight. Media commentators dubbed the SDI “Star Wars” and ridiculed it as fanciful, out of touch, and wasteful. Indeed, the SDI ended in 1987.

Despite the early failure of Reagan’s SDI program, discussions about space weaponry have resurfaced and are no longer the stuff of science fiction; however, while technology has advanced, many geopolitical concerns have stayed the same. The United States and Russia have remained predominant players, and agreements from the Cold War era still influence space policy. The United Nations Outer Space Treaty, ratified in 1967, declared space to be a common province of mankind, subject to no claim of national sovereignty, and it banned the use of nuclear weapons or other so-called weapons of mass destruction to enforce such claims. In April of 2023, the United States and many other countries voted for a UN resolution reaffirming this commitment to keep space the peaceful province of all mankind, but Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia vetoed the extension of the nuclear weapons ban. This veto came alongside US intelligence reports confirming that Russia was developing new space-based weaponry designed to destroy satellite infrastructure by creating massive energy waves. Many fear a return to the philosophy of “mutually assured destruction” that had framed international relations in the last half of the twentieth century. But what are we to think about the deployment of more conventional kinetic weapons, energy weapons like those proposed under SDI, and other advanced weapon technologies?

One argument against deploying *any* weaponry in space involves the prodigious growth of our reliance on space-based infrastructure like satellites. Almost every industry and business (not to mention our personal devices) relies on space-based communication to navigate, manage vital services like power grids or internet connectivity, develop predictive and responsive weather models, transfer data of all sorts, and so forth. A 2019 study by Research Triangle Institute International estimated that losing even one key piece of this infrastructure—GPS satellites—could cost the US economy an average of one billion dollars per day.

Another concern many have raised with space weaponization is the debris fields created by the destruction of satellites or other space-faring objects. Some space debris is already present as a by-product of multi-stage launches, spacecraft breakups, reentries, waste jettisoned by various craft, and so forth. Deploying even the most basic kinetic weaponry in space would surely create more debris. As of 2024, the European Space Agency has claimed there are over one million pieces of space debris large enough to cause catastrophic damage. A worst-case scenario, often called a “Kessler’s syndrome,” could occur if debris collisions compound and cascade, leading to ever larger and more damaging collisions. Many argue that using space weaponry risks worsening an existing problem and could make low-Earth orbits unusable for generations.

Others argue that space is simply the next frontier in a dangerous world of competitive geopolitics. Despite the risks, nations may be tempted to deploy weapons, which could escalate into a new venue for conflict. As recently as 2019, the United States established the Space Force (USSF), a new branch of the military, to “secure our nation’s interests in, from, and to space.” According to a 2024 USSF press release, the branch plans to undergo a substantial “reoptimization” alongside the US Air Force in order to “ensure continued supremacy in their respective domains while better posturing the services to deter and, if necessary, prevail in an era of Great Power Competition.” As the USSF puts it, “The space domain is no longer benign; it has

rapidly become congested and contested. We must enhance our capabilities, develop Guardians for modern warfare, prepare for the high intensity fight, and strengthen our power projection to thrive and win in this new era.”

To the USSF’s point, other nations are indeed developing new capabilities in this arena, leading some to believe that space weaponization may be inevitable. Russia, China, and India have recently demonstrated anti-satellite capabilities. In late 2023, Israel intercepted and destroyed an Iranian ballistic missile in low-Earth orbit, marking the very first instance of combat in outer space. As state interests in space grow, so too will the strategic benefits—and, some would say, the necessity—of defending those interests with space-faring weaponry. This is especially concerning as mining and other resource extraction projects, like the Artemis Mission begun in 2022, seem likely to kick off a new space race which, unlike that of the 1960s, is not purely exploratory.

3. BRING OUT YOUR DEAD!

As I draft this case for the Ethics Bowl this morning in a serene rural setting, sipping a freshly brewed coffee, I hear a pop-pop-pop, followed by a crackling sound like a string of fireworks, coming from the nearby shooting range where people are using rapid-fire weapons. We Americans certainly do love our guns.

In November 2023, *The Washington Post* published an article in a series about the use of AR-15-style weapons in recent mass shootings. The article, entitled “Terror on Repeat,” was different from the usual news story about mass shootings. This one included pictures.

Typically, out of concern for the families of victims and because graphic images may be too disturbing or upsetting to some readers, newspapers will withhold the more horrific photographs, even when they are available. The *Post*, however, argued that “most Americans have no way to understand the full scope of an AR-15’s destructive power or the extent of the trauma inflicted on victims, survivors, and first responders when a shooter uses this weapon on people.”

Advocates for many different causes have learned that pictures are more effective than words. Animal rights organizations often promote their cause by showing, rather than telling, conditions inside commercial poultry farms. Pro-lifers often promote their cause by showing images of aborted fetuses. Campaigns to fight world hunger promote their cause by showing pictures of children dying from starvation. Civil rights activists promote their cause with photographs and video footage of the victims of racial violence. Yet the proponents of gun control have, until now, treated graphic images of gun violence as taboo.

Even the *Post* held back some of their material. “Terror on Repeat,” did not show pictures of any identifiable bodies. They initially sought permission from the families to use such images, but despite the fact that some families were open to granting permission, they eventually “decided that the potential harm to victims’ families outweighed any potential journalistic value of showing recognizable bodies. We ultimately included nine photos from the Uvalde files showing scenes inside the classrooms taken shortly after bodies were removed. In addition, we show sealed body bags in the school hallway.”

The designers of the *Post* article took special care to intercept readers before they saw too much. The article begins with a note from the editor: “The photos, videos and personal accounts below are extremely disturbing and may be too upsetting for some people.” As a further precaution, the article is interactive; as the reader scrolls through, the images and the accompanying text scroll at different rates, allowing for warnings to emerge before certain images. One such warning was: “The next section includes photographs where you can see the blood and destruction that remain after bodies have been removed from the scene of an AR-15 shooting.”

Journalists’ reticence to show photographs of local tragedies may seem odd, given the apparent lack of qualms they have when it comes to showing graphic images of foreign wars or terrorism. It may indeed be that friends or families of these distant casualties are unlikely to see the photographs. But there may be more at play. Widespread coverage of unusual crimes often spawns copycat crimes, and perpetrators themselves may seek greater news coverage to bolster their notoriety. The perpetrators of several shootings

such as the Halle Synagogue shooting (2019), the Christchurch Mosque shooting (2019), and the Buffalo Supermarket shooting (2022) livestreamed their attacks, leading to widespread concern about the role of social media in broadcasting images of violence.

4. DOCTORS WITHOUT BOUNDARIES

Dr. Clara Hastings is a rising star in the field of clinical psychology. She has won numerous young researcher awards for her innovative experimental designs and has received several million dollars in grants for her work with neurodivergent individuals. Dr. Hastings believes there is a link between certain neural pathways in the hippocampus and some extreme, socially problematic behaviors associated with neurodivergence. She has been developing a specific, albeit somewhat invasive, version of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) targeting the hippocampus and believes she can effectively help reduce the anxiety experienced by neurodivergent people as well as their emotional responses to certain triggers.

The United States has rather strict laws governing research involving human subjects, but Dr. Hastings believes her innovative methods should be made available to neurodivergent individuals and their families and loved ones as quickly as possible. As a well-known scientist, she frequently receives job offers from universities in other states and countries to set up a clinical psychology lab. She has ties to Italy, Turkey, Brazil, and India, where she has former colleagues, mentors, or mentees in each country. She decides to reach out to a former colleague now working in India to discuss her work, including her plans to circumvent the onerous Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures at her own university in order to collect data as quickly as possible. She shares her plan with colleagues at her current university and speaks to her dissertation advisor as well as colleagues with whom she has collaborated on other research involving human subjects. Although several of them caution her that the technology does not currently exist for the experimental design she has envisioned, none report their concerns to her current university, the university in India where she moves her research lab the following year, or any professional organization in her field. These colleagues include Nobel laureates, researchers in related fields, and two bioethicists. Several of Dr. Hastings's colleagues express very serious concerns to her about the informed consent procedures in India, yet no one goes beyond voicing these concerns to her directly.

Within six months of moving to her new lab in India, Dr. Hastings begins submitting research papers on her innovative treatment method for adverse behaviors associated with neurodivergence to top journals. She lists as coauthors many of the colleagues and former colleagues who had questioned the appropriateness of her research design. Some of these colleagues are listed as having assisted with the informed consent process. A few of these colleagues were not informed in advance about the publications, and their only participation in her research was to question the appropriateness of the informed consent procedures or the experimental design. However, since publications and grants are the lifeblood of academic scientists, no one complains.

5. FAMILY TIME

Horses and sex were Jennifer Crumbley’s two major vices. These simple pleasures, prosecutors argued, contributed to Ms. Crumbley’s distraction from the deteriorating mental state of her fifteen-year-old son, the Oxford High School shooter. On November 30, 2021, using a gun his parents had bought for him, the shooter opened fire at Oxford High School, ultimately killing four of his classmates and wounding others.

Just three days after the Oxford shooting, Karen McDonald, the Oakland County Prosecutor, made the historic decision to charge both of the shooter’s parents, Jennifer and James Crumbley, with involuntary manslaughter, despite the fact that they had neither participated in the violent crime nor urged their son to commit it. Both Jennifer and James Crumbley were found guilty of involuntary manslaughter; these verdicts marked the first-ever conviction of parents for a mass shooting committed by their child.

McDonald argued that the Crumbleys had failed to perform their basic legal duties to exercise reasonable oversight over their child; the couple’s negligence, she argued, made the shooting possible. Ms. Crumbley’s time-consuming hobby of caring for horses and her extramarital affair were used to demonstrate her negligence as a mother. Mr. Crumbley was admonished for his failure to keep a semi-automatic gun—the murder weapon—secured in their home prior to the shooting.

While some rejoiced at the Crumbley couple’s conviction, others viewed the ruling with more skepticism. Legal scholars point out that Jennifer and James Crumbley were essentially the guinea pigs of a legal experiment that upended the established principle of law: “people are not responsible for the actions of others.” Many believe the verdict could set a new precedent for the degree to which parents may be held accountable for the criminal behavior of their children.

On the other hand, holding parents responsible for some acts of their children is not an entirely new concept. In 1903, Colorado was the first state to criminalize contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Proponents of these laws believe that familial conditions are a key predictor of a child’s criminal behavior. Parental responsibility legislation quickly gained popularity; today, all fifty states have some version of parental responsibility laws.

Some are hopeful that the James and Jennifer Crumbley ruling may prevent future crimes of a similar nature. In an interview with *Today, Explained*, Quinn Klinefelter, a senior news editor for WDET, said that holding parents criminally responsible for their negligent behavior may lead other parents to think twice before allowing their child access to weapons or neglecting their mental health needs.

These convictions may provide members of the community affected by the tragedy with healing and closure. Although it is impossible to bring back the victims slain by the shooter, the Crumbley conviction offers hope that parents indirectly complicit in their child’s crime may be held accountable for their failure to prevent such tragedies.

Critics of the verdict, however, believe that holding parents responsible for their child’s actions is too extreme. Even if a parent diligently attends to their child’s behavior and needs, they may still miss key

warning signs or misinterpret their child's actions or explanations. "If you put a microscope on anyone's life," Klinefelter wondered, "would anyone escape looking completely innocent?"

Sue Klebold, the mother of one of the Columbine shooters, knows this feeling all too well. Klebold, an average suburban mother by all accounts, had no idea that her son was experiencing mental health struggles before he carried out the shooting. In her essay, "I Will Never Know Why," Klebold wrote, "I think I believed that if I loved someone as deeply as I loved him, I would know he was in trouble. My maternal instincts would keep him safe. But I didn't know. And my instincts were not enough."

Because Jennifer and James Crumbley did not commit violent acts themselves, some argue that they do not pose a significant threat to the safety of the community and that the use of time, money, and public resources to prosecute the Crumbleys was wasteful.

There is an old legal saying, "Hard cases make bad law," which means that extreme cases are not a good basis for laws that will have a more general application. Looking beyond the Crumbleys' convictions, where could the precedent lead?

6. GIVE A HOOT AND SHOOT?

Barred owls are common and numerous in their historic range east of the Great Plains. In recent years, barred owl populations have expanded into the Pacific Northwest, driven westward by human-induced habitat destruction, and are now increasing exponentially. They thrive on the region's diverse food sources, such as salamanders, small mammals, and insects. However, barred owls are not native to the Pacific Northwest and only reached the area due to the impacts of European settlement and human-caused changes to habitat.

The introduction of barred owls to the Northwest has caused a problem for their smaller, endangered cousins, the northern spotted owl and the California spotted owl. Because the newcomers from the east are somewhat more aggressive and are generalists in terms of prey, they have been able to outcompete the native spotted owls. This has contributed to the spotted owl being listed as endangered at the state level and federally threatened.

The US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) has presented a novel solution to this situation. They propose shooting more than 400,000 barred owls. The plan, if approved, would allow for the killing of barred owls over the next thirty years. In areas where this plan has been tested, the annual decline of spotted owls fell from 12 percent to only 0.2 percent. It is hoped that, if implemented long-term, this plan would allow for the recovery of the spotted owl.

USFWS biologists have provided many reasons to support lethal removals. Foremost on the list is the imminent extinction of a species. If nothing is done, the spotted owl will most likely cease to exist. On the other hand, the loss of barred owls would represent less than 1 percent of their total global population. Additionally, the introduction of barred owls does not only threaten the spotted owls but could destabilize the entire ecosystem. The biologists also note that alternatives such as sterilization or relocation are likely to be ineffective and unfeasible.

In March 2024, seventy-five wildlife protection organizations published a letter opposing the USFWS's proposal. They point to the difficulty in hunting nocturnal birds that live in low densities in protected lands. They also warn of possible negative consequences, such as lead poisoning of other species and the accidental killing of non-targeted animals. Furthermore, they object to the targeting of native animals that are simply adapting to habitat changes caused by humans.

Cameron Barrows, an emeritus researcher at the Center for Conservation Biology, argues that "If nothing is done to slow the encroachment of barred owls, you will lose spotted owls," and that the view of those opposed to the plan essentially "means 'We'd rather have barred owls than spotted owls.'"

This case was contributed by Matthew D. Mangum, JD, LL.M.

7. HIT THE BREAKS!

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many people resorted to online shopping to buy what they wanted and needed. With more goods being shipped and more opportunities for packages to be lost or stolen, G7, a Beijing-based fleet management platform developed by GLP, introduced a series of AI-based technologies to monitor the transit of goods in China. Anti-fatigue cameras—equipped with facial recognition technology—were installed on truck dashboards to report and alert any driver who appeared to be falling asleep at the wheel. This AI records the frequency of the driver’s blinks, with an abnormal rate suggesting that the driver is losing focus. The technology also monitors other driver behaviors, such as how often the driver checks their cellphone while driving, how many times they stop for gas, and the electronic payment methods they use to make on-the-road purchases. Furthermore, if a driver doesn’t respond to periodic buzz alerts, service hotline staff are immediately notified and place a call urging the driver to pull over for a break. Beyond monitoring the drivers, the AI also records other data about the trip itself. Driver-assistance systems send warnings if there is insufficient space between the truck and other vehicles on the highway. The truck’s cargo is constantly temperature-regulated and weighed in real-time to deter theft.

G7 claims that these developments drastically improve the security and traceability of transported goods. Efficiency in transportation is paramount in China. According to a 2020 Bloomberg Technology News report, logistics costs for issues like transportation account for about 15 percent of China’s economic expansion in 2019, more than double that of the losses for Europe and the United States. According to Ren Xingzhou, former head of the Development Research Center of the State Council of China’s market-economy research unit, the “efficiency of circulation and logistics directly impacts overall economic development.”

Other companies have also emphasized the importance of security and traceability for transported goods. E-commerce companies like China Post, FedEx, Amazon, and Walmart have partnered with G7 to ensure efficiency of transportation. Flock Freight, the US equivalent to G7, is another company developing AI-assisted technologies to maximize transportation efficiency. Flock promises that these monitoring services will provide more than just economic benefits: efficient travel means reduced carbon emissions from freight, which in turn leads to environmental benefits.

However, using AI to monitor truck shipments isn’t the only case of companies using AI to monitor drivers. Car manufacturers like Tesla use built-in AI systems to collect, share, and sell driver data to service providers, data brokers, and other third parties. Usage-based insurance plans monitor consumers’ day-to-day driving habits to create rates that better reflect their driving data. Arity—the analytics company behind tracking apps like Life360, GasBuddy, and MyRadar—has collected information on drivers’ location, routes, and fuel efficiency and sold the data to insurance companies. These companies then generate a driver score—similar to a credit score, though not visible to the driver—to assess driving risk.

Critics of these driving monitor systems argue that the technology presents serious privacy concerns. Drivers are often not properly informed that their data is being collected and sold. Even if they are informed, most drivers do not have control over the kinds of personal data being collected and shared by the apps they depend on or by the vehicles themselves.

Furthermore, even if drivers were notified of the kind of data being collected, monitoring certain driving behaviors may lead to unintended consequences and complications in interpreting the data. For example, some insurance companies record when a driver makes a hard stop to gather data about the kind of environment the driver is in. However, when a driver gets a notification from their vehicle or app that they made a hard stop, they may be encouraged to make fewer hard stops. Drivers may then hesitate to make hard stops—or other stops for that matter—even when the circumstances may call for it. As a result, data collection that aims to encourage safer driving may actually backfire, incentivizing more dangerous behavior instead.

8. PIRATE MY WORK, PLEASE!

Do you have a favorite show—one you watch over and over again? Now, imagine it suddenly disappearing. No streaming, no DVDs, nothing. Luckily, though, some fan of the show recorded it and is now sharing it with the world. Of course, that kind of sharing is illegal and labeled piracy. But you want to watch it, the performers want you to watch it, and everyone involved in the production wants you to watch it. But Very-Big Entertainment Media, Inc. (V-BEM) owns the exclusive rights, and they've decided it's not making them enough money to even keep copies of the show. So, they delete all its data to make room for other shows they think will perform better.

The creators and fans are devastated by V-BEM's housecleaning. The creators, without explicitly recommending that their fans break the law, start hinting that people can only view their work through illegal channels—nod, nod, wink, wink. They post comments and describe themselves as “creators of a show you can only watch if you pirate it.”

Animation is one creative profession that typically pays very little. And when corporations like V-BEM own the product, animators have even more trouble finding employment. Some, unable to exhibit their hard work and skill, may even find they have to leave gaping holes in their résumés.

V-BEM doesn't exist, but real media corporations argue that since they've assumed the risk of investing in a production—paying the salaries of the people who made it, distributing and promoting it, and defending the artists against theft of their creative work—they should control what becomes of it. Streaming platforms and digital libraries are getting larger and larger, forcing corporations to make choices about which shows they'll offer in their catalogs. So sometimes, the storage cost isn't worth it. If someone buys a painting, one might argue, the painting's owner has the right to decide whether to let a museum display it, hang it in their living room, or burn it. So too with audio or video productions.

But the creators and consumers who end up with nothing may disagree.

9. SMILE FOR THE CAMERA, SWEETIE

Josh and Alicia Dougherty have eleven kids, two dogs, and over five million followers across their social media platforms. The family is known as “the Dougherty Dozen” on TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook, where the parents share what their lives look like as a household of thirteen with adopted and biological children ages four to seventeen. Alicia posts short-form content about how she plans meals for such a large family, prepares for birthdays and other family traditions, and raises awareness about adoption and the foster care system. No detail is too camera-shy for the Doughertys. Alicia shares her children’s baby pictures, the interior and exterior of her house, and details of her children’s mental and physical health conditions, like post-traumatic stress disorder, fetal alcohol syndrome, and autism. She has even shared how the inspiration for her youngest daughter’s name, Harlee Quinton, came from the protagonist of the DC movie franchise—the movie that Alicia and Josh were watching as they conceived her.

Due to their strong online presence, the Doughertys have faced much commentary and critique from loyal fans and haters alike. The online community has left comments on her posts and created Reddit threads to discuss her oldest son’s weight loss and acne, the children’s malnutrition from eating processed foods at every meal, and how they treat the teenagers like toddlers during family-friendly activities like Easter egg hunts. “Mom and Dad Dougherty” have also been criticized for how they handle the social and cultural challenges that can come from mixed-background adoptions. For example, in teaching two of her adopted children about their African American heritage, Alicia enrolled the twin boys in hip-hop classes at their local community center.

The Doughertys are not the only example of controversial family vloggers. Other parents—many of whom are also vocal about supporting adoption and children with disabilities—have shared their own stories about their unique families. However, many worry about the health and safety of the children featured in these videos. The mother of the TikTok-famous preschooler Wren Eleanor is facing backlash for posting videos of her four-year-old daughter suggestively eating hot dogs and sitting in a short dress. Ellen Fisher, a Hawaii-based vegan blogger and mother of five, was called out by online dieticians for allegedly starving her young children with a strictly vegan, nutritionally-deficient diet. The Utah mother behind the YouTube channel “8 Passengers” was found guilty of child abuse after sharing her extreme parenting techniques.

The children of these online families have mixed reactions to their upbringing being made public. Some have used their family’s fame to jumpstart their own careers and even reconnect with estranged relatives. Others have spoken out about the long-term damage of being online from a young age. As one former child—now in her twenties—of a mom influencer reflects, “There was this idea that you have to look perfect and pretty and like nothing is wrong all the time in front of the camera...being an influencer kid turned my relationship with my mom into more of an employer-employee relationship than a parent-child one. Once you cross the line from being family to being coworkers, you can’t really go back.”

Despite these concerns, fans of family vlogging argue that there are still many benefits. Family influencers have spread awareness on how to advocate for children with special needs, shared diverse cultural lifestyles with large audiences, and educated other parents on positive reinforcement techniques, such as “gentle parenting.” Many parents have quit lower-wage jobs to pursue content creation full-time and spend more time with their families. Parents have used the money earned from social media to pay off mortgages, secure professional networking and brand deals, and even fund their children’s college tuition—all of which is shared online.

10. STANDING ROOM ONLY

Mmm, peanut butter and jelly. Ian, a city construction worker, headed to the curb on his lunch break to enjoy his favorite type of sandwich. Just as he prepared to pavement park, he noticed something strange. His usual “grub spot” was now filled with dozens of spiked blocks, leaving no room to sit. With a sigh, he trudged back to work, eating as he walked. Disappointed at the lack of sitting space, Ian found one upside to his plight—he now had a valid reason to forgo salads.

Hostile architecture is an urban design strategy where man-made infrastructure is used to guide or restrict the public’s behavior. Georges-Eugène Haussmann popularized hostile design in the 19th century by replacing Paris’s maze of narrow, winding roads with a simple system of straight, wide avenues to deter revolutionary-era mob protests. Robert Moses later brought the strategy to the United States by ordering that overpasses crossing the routes to Long Island be built low enough to block public buses from reaching Long Island recreation spaces, effectively segregating public transportation users—who were predominately racial minorities and impoverished civilians—from accessing public parks.

While people like Ian may be slightly inconvenienced by hostile architecture, others—particularly the homeless population—are more severely affected by the design strategy. Modern-day examples of hostile architecture include fences, benches divided by metal bars, and strategically-placed potted plants. In areas with hostile architecture, the homeless have few places to rest. According to Dr. Selena Savic, the author of *Unpleasant Design*, “Not only is it evident from interventions like this that social diversity and inclusion are not on the design agenda, but it is also okay to repel people like pests.”

Hostile architecture not only affects the homeless by making public spaces uncomfortable, but it also impacts their health and safety. One obvious consequence is sleep deprivation. With limited places to rest, homeless persons may struggle to get adequate sleep. Hostile design may also exacerbate feelings of depression and isolation by making the unhoused population feel even more unwanted. When popular public areas become less welcoming, homeless populations may be forced into back alleys or other areas where they are more exposed to violent crimes and sexual exploitation. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, there have been over 2,000 instances of violence against individuals experiencing homelessness since 1999. In another study, Dr. Jennifer Hess, who surveyed thousands of major medical centers in the southeastern United States, found that approximately one out of every twenty emergency room visits are made by persons experiencing homelessness.

On the other hand, proponents of hostile architecture point out that it fosters community safety by deterring unsafe activities like recreational drug use. According to American Addiction Centers, approximately one-third of homeless individuals regularly use drugs or alcohol. Moreover, about two-thirds of the unhoused population has a history of drug or alcohol use disorders. One theory of crime prevention, the so-called broken windows theory, suggests that visible signs of crime create an environment that encourages criminality. The rationale for modern-day hostile architecture is strongly rooted in the broken windows theory, and even though the validity of the theory has been challenged, hostile architecture may, at the very least, provide the community with a perceived sense of safety.

Private business owners often feel that they are just trying to run a business, and homelessness is a pervasive, systemic problem best left to the government to solve. So when they install hostile architecture

like planters outside their shops, they are simply beautifying a public space and keeping their customers feeling comfortable and safe. The root causes of homelessness are not problems they can solve.

Hostile architecture as a way of discouraging unwanted behaviors is probably here to stay. But if you think, “None of this affects me; I’m not homeless,” think again. Hostile environments don’t only exist outdoors. Owners of businesses will often use similar techniques to discourage customers from staying too long. Harsh lighting, unpleasant repetitive music, hard chairs, small or crowded tables, and various other factors encourage restaurant-goers to finish up quickly and make room for the next group. Even department stores with no place to sit send a clear message: “Come in, buy stuff, leave.”

11. THE DOORBELL FILES

On August 31, 2023, Danelo Cavalcante, a convicted murderer, escaped from Chester County Prison in Pennsylvania. The State Police believed the escapee posed a threat to the public and cautioned residents to secure their homes and vehicles while authorities conducted a search. After two confirmed sightings, the initial search was at first conducted within a three-mile radius of the prison. However, this distance was extended after Cavalcante allegedly stole a vehicle and attempted to flee to the home of an acquaintance.

Upon arriving at his acquaintance's house, Cavalcante attempted to communicate through the household's Ring doorbell camera. The footage of this interaction was recorded and shared with authorities, revealing his approximate location and that he had shaved to alter his appearance. By exposing both the fugitive's new look and whereabouts, authorities were able to adjust their search strategy, leading to his capture and reincarceration.

In addition to neighborhood watch groups and public video surveillance, doorbell cameras increase security by placing video monitoring in residential areas. For example, doorbell cameras such as Amazon's Ring or Google Nest Hello give homeowners increased surveillance of their homes, the ability to record footage, and the capability to speak remotely with persons at the door. With greater control over their home's security, homeowners may feel safer, knowing their residence is less vulnerable to break-ins or theft by "porch pirates"—individuals who steal packages delivered to homes and left on porches.

However, while doorbell cameras offer homeowners a sense of protection, the footage captured is not exclusively their property. Doorbell cameras store their data in the cloud, where it can be accessed by third parties. For example, law enforcement can retrieve footage from doorbell cameras through partnerships with the companies providing these services. While homeowners appreciate the additional security doorbell cameras offer, they may not be fully aware of the extent to which their activities are monitored. Visitors may not consent to being recorded if given the choice. Additionally, while doorbell cameras are intended to protect one's own household, there are few rules preventing the misuse of these surveillance systems. For example, doorbell cameras may be positioned so they capture a bit *too much* of what is going on in a neighbor's yard or record delivery drivers, with some footage later posted online without the consent of the persons being recorded. Thus, spaces that were once considered private may no longer be so.

Although doorbell cameras provide homeowners with a valuable sense of security, they can also be misused. In cases like the search for Cavalcante, expanding surveillance from public to private spaces can enhance public safety. However, this increased surveillance could be a step closer to an Orwellian society, where privacy no longer exists.

12. THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS

The minimum wage set by the federal government is \$7.25 per hour, but most states have raised it beyond that level. However, when it comes to employees who receive at least \$30 per month in tips, the US Department of Labor allows employers to pay as little as \$2.13 per hour. When clerks offer a touch screen for payment, they not only make tipping easier for customers, but also provide electronic proof of tip income that permits their employers to pay them a sub-minimum wage.

The practice of tipping, in which customers give employees money to supplement their low hourly wage, is inconsistent and unpredictable, and it rides on a troubled history. Workers handing over the tap screen that encourages customers to add a tip might hope for a surge in income. But whether or not it helps the worker or not, some would argue, the practice primarily serves the employer's interests.

Tipping practices in the United States are inconsistent. Some low-paid employees are tipped; others, who also make less than a living wage, are not. Food service workers, including counter and wait staff, hotel employees who clean rooms and assist guests with luggage, along with taxi, Uber, and Lyft drivers, expect tips. On the other hand, grocery store clerks, hotel front desk staff, and bus drivers do not. Workers providing services in face-to-face contexts are more likely to be tipped than those who interact with customers online or by phone. The only relevant difference between tipped and non-tipped employees seems to be that employers can pay tipped employees less.

With no rhyme, reason, or regulation to control who is tipped and by how much, psychology often becomes the determining factor. White workers get a higher percentage tip than workers of color. Attractive young women get larger tips than men or older women. Tipping at restaurants was once an opt-in choice—the diner determined how much extra cash to quietly leave on the table as they left the restaurant. Now, with cashless payment, the customer must opt out of tipping, usually under the watchful eye of the person directly impacted by that choice. “No tip” buttons are small; custom tips are difficult to calculate; the offered choices of 20, 22, and 25 percent are intentionally designed to be the easiest and quickest to select.

Tipping became popular in the United States as the practice fell out of favor in most of Europe. Enslaved people, when freed, were promised “forty acres and a mule.” President Lincoln's death led to the revocation of that commitment. Former slaves, lacking the skills and education needed to compete with white workers for jobs that paid a living wage, found tipping to be one of the few available methods of earning a living.

The tipping culture sustains a lower class of workers who depend on customer charity, a situation described as undemocratic for well over a hundred years. Indeed, while tipping always benefits the employer, withholding a tip only harms the worker. Some argue that the threat of withholding tips is a means of exploiting workers who expect and need them.

While some tipped workers make out quite well, would you rather earn a living wage or depend on the kindness of strangers?

13. TICTALK

Psychiatrists at the Hannover Medical School in Germany found themselves puzzled over a bizarre medical coincidence when, in 2019, dozens of patients began arriving with a strange set of identical tics. These symptoms were complex and specific: patients shouted phrases such as “Fliegende Haie” (“flying sharks”) or performed elaborate actions such as crushing eggs. Before long, it was discovered that the patients shared their identical symptoms with yet another individual, popular twenty-three-year-old YouTuber Jan Zimmermann, who makes videos about his experience with Tourette’s syndrome.

Zimmermann is one of many social media stars who create content about neurological and mental health disorders, aiming to speak candidly and humorously about their experience. Their online presence reflects a cultural shift toward increased awareness of neurodivergence and mental wellness. However, although creators on TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram claim to make media that reduces stigma and improves literacy around mental and neurological conditions, some researchers and clinicians fear they may be doing just the opposite.

In recent years, as internet communities for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder, Tourette’s syndrome, and anxiety have grown in popularity, healthcare providers have reported an uptick in the number of teens diagnosing themselves with psychological and neurological conditions. The number of patients claiming to have rare afflictions, such as dissociative identity disorder, has also risen, apparently as a result of a small number of widely viewed videos describing the condition. The influx of patients has made clinicians wary of the simplified, soundbyte-sized descriptions of disorders shared on apps.

Symptoms of mental health disorders are relatively common, but their presence does not necessarily indicate pathology. Qualified professionals typically assess patients for clinically significant impairment, for example, by evaluating whether and how symptoms impact the patient’s daily life.

The majority of posts reaching teen audiences are created not by credentialed psychologists but by fellow young people. Some creators detail personal experiences or reenact compulsive behaviors or panic attacks. Others offer common symptom lists for conditions like anxiety, which may be as general as “overthinking word choice” and “thinking everyone is judging you.”

Not all online videos claiming to spread awareness and support are accurate. In a study of 500 TikTok videos that included the hashtags #mentalhealthtips and #mentalhealthadvice, researchers found that 83.7 percent of mental health advice on TikTok is misleading, and 14.2 percent of videos include content that could be potentially damaging (for example, suggesting medication to combat symptoms without first consulting a doctor).

Others have taken advantage of viewers’ preoccupation with mental and neurological disorders for clout. Several TikTok and YouTube stars have faced scrutiny and backlash for exaggerating their symptoms or faking them altogether.

Though the majority of posts are well-meaning, the problem with online content about psychological or neurological disorders, according to licensed therapist Emma McAdam, is that it skips over the first lesson taught in Psychology 101—namely, that you’re going to see yourself in the lists of symptoms. Teens are especially susceptible to the “horoscope effect” of oversimplified descriptions of disorders because they’re in a stage of life when they’re likely to feel misunderstood.

In extreme cases, frequent viewers of content about disorders may *develop* mental health conditions as a result of watching videos, as occurred at Hannover Medical School. Doctors characterized the patients’ illness not as Tourette’s, but as a psychological (rather than neurological) disorder wherein patients lost control of their bodies—in other words, a case of social contagion. Most of the patients recovered immediately once doctors told them they did not suffer from Tourette’s.

A more pernicious impact involves a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. Young people who have diagnosed themselves with mental health conditions may be more hesitant to seek a licensed professional for confirmation and may try inappropriate or ineffective solutions. The result is an increased number of young people distressed about their mental health, according to Lucy Foulkes, a researcher studying mental health awareness campaigns. “Meanwhile, legitimate mental disorders are ironically taken less seriously,” Foulkes said. “If everyone is ill, no one is.”

On the other hand, some clinicians see social media not as a nuisance but as an underutilized tool for providing help at scale. Wait times for an initial evaluation with a psychiatrist exceed three weeks on average, and more than half of psychologists report being too booked to receive new patients. Rather than struggling to meet demand in person, some providers and developers aim to improve online discussions of mental health by joining them—for example, by creating space to distinguish normal feelings and experiences from disordered ones.

For others, communities on TikTok and other platforms, particularly those for ADHD and autism, offer belonging and validation that may be hard to find in the real world. This is especially true for women and people of color, who are frequently overlooked for diagnosis in childhood or face financial barriers to evaluation by a professional. The experience of finding others who share and understand one’s thoughts and behaviors—and a language with which to talk about it—confers a valuable sense of identity.

A more laissez-faire approach to diagnosis may, in fact, lead to a more sensitive and caring society. Increased identification with those who suffer from severe mental and neurological conditions creates an opportunity for more widespread acceptance. When more people push for workplace policies and community services for those with disabilities, everyone stands to benefit.

14. TOO MANY OR TOO FEW

In *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), Margaret Atwood envisions a dystopian future in which most women are infertile, and those who can bear children must submit to doing so for the privileged few. Another dystopian novel, *Logan's Run* (1967), envisions an overpopulated world in which everyone is euthanized upon reaching their twenty-first year. While such radical responses to population problems may seem far-fetched, the economic impact of both very high and very low birthrates can be significant enough to call for government action.

One problem of low birth rates arises when fewer and fewer young people pay into a support system for an increasing number of elderly citizens. On the other end of the spectrum, countries with very high birth rates, like Chad, Somalia, Angola, and the Republic of Niger, face overpopulation, overcrowding, and poverty. Some countries rely on emigration or immigration to compensate for high or low birth rates, but these solutions bring their own economic and social challenges, as experts in many developed countries point out.

Facing a serious overpopulation problem, China for many years implemented a one-child policy, forbidding families from having more than one child, but it is now experiencing the fallout of that approach. While the policy did lead to the desired decline in population, it forced families to choose between having a male or a female child. In rural China, male children traditionally inherited the family property, carried the family name, and supported aging parents, so male children were more highly valued. This led to higher rates of abortions of female fetuses and the adoption of female children in other countries. The male-to-female ratio in the population shifted dramatically toward men. Now that the average woman of childbearing years has an expanded choice of mates, many are opting out of traditional female roles and at least postponing childbirth.

In Atwood's dystopia, pollution and radiation had caused the plague of infertility and subsequent population decline, whereas, in real life, population declines are affecting developed countries because many women are choosing to have few or no children. Rather than forcing women to reproduce, some countries with low birthrates have begun incentivizing reproduction.

In contemporary China now and in other places where the low birth rates are low, such as South Korea, Japan, and Finland, governments are combating the low birth rates with direct payments or monthly allowances to women or families who have children. Japan, in light of a fifty-year decline in its birth rate, is heeding the warnings of economic and population experts about the dire consequences of ignoring the sharp population decline and is considering numerous incentives to encourage reproduction.

Many theorists argue that zero population growth (ZPG) should be the ultimate goal. Some proponents of ZPG argue that countries like the United States have already exceeded the "optimum level" of population and should focus instead on the well-being of both their citizens and the environment, striving to achieve the balance afforded by ZPG. Finding that sweet spot can be quite a challenge.

15. UNFIT TO SIT

During her nearly four decades of service on the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, Judge Pauline Newman has been lauded “the heroine of the patent system” and the Circuit’s “most prolific dissenter.” But in 2023, at ninety-six years old, the celebrated jurist was barred from hearing cases amid concerns about her mental fitness.

Newman’s peers ordered a one-year suspension—later extended to two years—after an investigation, which included interviews with court staff, revealed “overwhelming evidence” that Newman was experiencing mental issues, including memory loss, confusion, lack of comprehension, and an inability to perform basic tasks. Newman, who has lifetime tenure as a federal judge, denies suffering from any cognitive deficiencies and claims the suspension is an illegal attempt to remove her from the bench. The tussle over Newman’s cognitive abilities has renewed debate over lifetime appointments—particularly for jurists serving on the nation’s most influential courts.

The lifetime tenure of the federal judiciary is of both theoretical and practical importance within the US legal system. Federal judges, unlike members of the legislature, are beholden only to the US Constitution. The promise of a lifetime position is meant to insulate judges from the political pressures that influence lawmakers and the nation’s leaders. The idea is that if a judge knows they have the job for as long as they want it, they’re less likely to make decisions that cater to those in power.

On the other hand, judges, in general, are getting older. In 1995, Judge Richard Posner called the federal judiciary “the nation’s premier geriatric occupation.” Today, the average age for federal judges is sixty-nine—older than at any other time in the nation’s history. This aging judiciary brings with it a higher probability that some judges will serve beyond their capacity.

At the state level, many governments have imposed age limits for judges as a means of reducing the risk of senility. In New York, for example, court rules mandate retirement at seventy years old, though two-year extensions on the bench may be granted until the age of seventy-six, provided judges receive medical clearance.

Though meant to protect both judges and the public, age limits have sometimes proved controversial. Policy advisors have long resisted age limits for the federal judiciary, arguing that such limits may lead presidents to appoint younger, less qualified judges in order to maximize their long-term impact on courts. Others have raised concerns that age limits could invite bias. In 2020, several New York judges sued the state’s chief judge for age discrimination after the court system denied applications from forty-six of the forty-nine judges over age seventy who sought to continue their work on the bench. The chief justice cited budget restrictions as the reason for the cuts. Although courts eventually ruled against the suing judges, a group of New York lawmakers later introduced a bill to eliminate the age limit for judges serving in certain courts.

Mechanisms for temporarily excluding judges may also serve as pretextual means of showing older jurists the door, as Newman alleges. Although the Constitution grants Congress the sole power to uphold the “good behavior” of judges through impeachment, the Judicial Conduct and Disability Act of 1980, enacted

by Congress, allows judicial bodies to investigate and suspend their peers for concerning or inappropriate conduct. For judges as old as Newman, year-long suspensions may cause mental and physical decline from the loss of purpose, daily routines, and cognitive engagement—potentially creating the very problems they are meant to address.

Despite concerns about fairness, judges serving in federal courts—particularly the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit—hold significant power. Their decisions are often the final determinations in most of the cases they handle. In Newman’s case, only the US Supreme Court can overturn rulings made by her and her fellow judges.

For judges who choose to step down, the decision to retire can itself be political. A study by the *Minnesota Law Review* recently revealed that senior judges are increasingly basing their retirement decisions on which party controls the White House at the time of their departure. These political considerations are often seen as incompatible with the goal of maintaining a neutral judiciary.

Critics of lifetime tenure are quick to point out that no other Western democracy allows judges to serve until death. Although Article III, Section 1, of the United States Constitution has long been interpreted to grant lifetime appointments for federal judges, it does not expressly mandate this reading.

Recently, organizations and legal analysts have proposed alternative solutions to the lifetime tenure debate. The advocacy group Fix the Court, for example, has lobbied for eighteen-year term limits for justices on the US Supreme Court, ensuring that each president would get two appointments per four-year term.

16. WHEN CIVILITY FAILS

On the night of May 28, 2020, amid widespread protests over the police killing of George Floyd in Minnesota, and fueled by tensions over the killings of Breonna Taylor in Kentucky and Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia, protesters overran Minneapolis's Third Police Precinct (near where Floyd was killed), set it aflame, and ultimately left it to burn to the ground during the night. This act of protest was one of hundreds that summer that have occupied our collective memory and public discourse since. Many other powerful demonstrations in Minnesota, as well as in other places around the United States and the world, were peaceful marches and civil disobedience in the style of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. But some, like the torching of the Third Precinct, involved looting and vandalism in cities around the country and were decidedly less civil.

Public moral appraisal of violent protests has been relatively swift and clear—those demonstrators presumed responsible have been roundly and consistently criticized in the media and other public discourse. Violence, many say, undermines the moral authority of the movement and risks alienating potential allies. They emphasize that violence and destruction of property can harm innocent bystanders and divert attention from the movement's core message. Critics also raise concerns that escalating tensions with law enforcement through acts of incivility can lead to further violence and erosion of social cohesion.

Others argue that *uncivil* disobedience is sometimes necessary to amplify marginalized voices and draw attention to injustices that more peaceful methods fail to address. They contend that, historically, civil rights advancements often follow disruptive protests, such as sit-ins and boycotts, which *forced* society to confront issues it had ignored. Activists argue that the property damage and clashes with law enforcement during these protests drew significant media coverage and spurred much-needed public discourse about racial inequality and police violence. In their view, these uncivil tactics could be justified as a more effective means of exposing and challenging systemic injustice.

Philosophers have puzzled over questions of political disobedience for ages. When citizens, in frustration, turn to directly confrontational tactics like large-scale illegal demonstrations, many philosophers call for a more civil disobedience in the tradition of Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, and others. These thinkers eschew political violence and defend the civil nature of their resistance programs as being crucial to their success. Some have argued that a near-just political arrangement, one in which some unjust outcomes still occur, may benefit from civil disobedience as a form of course correction, as opposed to a more total or revolutionary form of resistance. Others have argued that the persistence of problems like racial oppression proves that civil movements like King's have not had staying power. As evidence, they point to the ongoing battles over key legislative achievements of the civil rights era, like the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and to high-profile incidents of what they claim is racially motivated, state-sanctioned violence. In their view, such dire circumstances challenge the sense of political obligation among citizens that keeps civility at the center of our discourse.

17. WHEN GOOD GOODS GO BAD

In 1970, Akira Kurosawa directed *Dodes'ka-den*. Kurosawa's film depicts a collection of vignettes about the inhabitants in a shantytown of Japan. In one story, a child consumes fish discarded by a local fishmonger. Unfortunately, this fish is not fresh and the child tragically dies of a foodborne illness. Reflecting on this preventable death, we may ask: at what point should we stop risking the freshness of foods for the sake of resourcefulness?

In a BBC article, Rachel Nuwer (2024) discusses overproduction, overstocking, and excessive sushi waste in Japanese stores. Japan, known for having a large quantity of food waste, has taken steps to ameliorate the issue through policies aimed at reducing food waste. For example, in 2019, a policy was enacted encouraging retailers to reasonably extend "best-by" dates on foods to discourage waste. Unfortunately, consumer greed and preference for fresh sushi have limited the effectiveness of these efforts. Since fresh sushi is most desirable and more likely to be purchased by consumers, sushi is thrown away before its best-by date. Additionally, employees are not permitted to take sushi home that is going to be discarded, even if it is still safe to consume. As a result, sushi and other foods are thrown out and incinerated, which is the most common means of food disposal in Japan. Companies are aware of the excessive food waste but continue to stock a surplus of foods like sushi, knowing some will be discarded even though it could be sold.

While fresh and non-expired foods are most desirable, food waste in these quantities leads to both economic and environmental burdens. Importantly, the issue of food waste is not unique to stores in Japan. For example, it has been estimated that 40 percent of food, approximately sixty-six billion pounds, is wasted in the United States by households, corporations, and restaurants. Depending on the region, food waste can be incinerated, disposed of in landfills, composted, or repurposed into biofuel. Each of these methods requires space and resources to varying degrees. Some efforts to reduce waste include donating soon-to-expire foods to donation centers, alerting consumers about sales on soon-to-expire products, or reducing food production to match what is actually purchased. However, while these programs help, they do not go far enough.

Dealing with food waste creates an environmental burden, and this burden is exacerbated when considering what goes into food production. For example, consider what is necessary to produce some of the ingredients for fresh sushi. Soy is one of the major products contributing to global deforestation, rice paddies take away from freshwater ecosystems, overfishing has weakened populations of pacific bluefin tuna, avocados require a significant amount of water to grow, warming ocean temperatures threaten seaweed farming, and a significant percentage of salmon farming is done unsustainably. Thus, while we often burden the environment by accumulating ingredients to make foods such as sushi, we burden it further when wasting food.

From the perspective of producers, vendors, and consumers, it is important for food to be fresh and safe. To indicate the freshness and safety of foods, best-by and expires-on dates are added to consumable goods for purchase. Although these dates are required on processed and purchased foods to ensure safety standards, they are often, unbeknownst to consumers, more of a recommendation than a fixed deadline. For example, the Cleveland Clinic and the US Department of Agriculture state that best-by dates indicate when the quality of a food product will decline, meaning the product is often safe for consumption past that date.

Furthermore, several other frozen or shelf-stable foods will outlast their expiration date but are still thrown away.

Selling fresh and non-expired foods is a way to ensure consumer safety and continuous sales. However, these freshness standards often lead to excessive waste. In light of environmental concerns and the burden of our wastefulness, more sustainable practices need to be balanced with freshness standards to ensure safety while reducing waste and overproduction.

ABOUT THE CASE WRITERS

Payton Bucki

Payton Bucki is currently pursuing her Master's degree in Public Administration at Oakland University, after earning Bachelor's degrees in Political Science and Social Work in April 2024 at the same institution. Payton competed with the Oakland University Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl team for two years, qualifying for IEB Nationals in both 2023 and 2024. Payton's passion for writing stems from her years of writing, research, and editorial work for *The Oakland Post* and *BeGolden* magazine. Outside of the Post, Payton advocates for disability support services and acceptance through Best Buddies International. Payton serves as the advisor for Oakland University's Best Buddies chapter.

Off-campus, Payton volunteers with Michigan Youth in Government, where she serves as an Alumni Volunteer and a member of the Model Judiciary Program Committee. In these roles, Payton assists in developing civic engagement and government education programs for thousands of middle and high school students from across the state. Following graduate school, Payton aspires to attend law school. In her free time, Payton enjoys reading, traveling, backpacking, hiking, and spending time with her dog, Oskey.

Deni Elliott

Deni Elliott, EdD, is Professor Emeritus at the University of South Florida. She held the Poynter Jamison Chair in Media Ethics from 2003–2013. Deni is Co-Director for the National Ethics Project. She has organized the Northwestern and the Southeastern Regional Ethics Bowls and has served as a judge, moderator, and case writer for both regional and national bowls. During her 40-year career as an ethics scholar and professor, she wrote more than 200 journal articles and book chapters. Her name appears on the covers of nine books in the ethics arena. Now retired, she is reinventing herself as a writer of popular works that non-academics want to read.

Abigail Feldman

Abigail Feldman has been involved in Ethics Bowl for more than a decade. As an undergraduate, she was a member of the first Ethics Bowl team from Tufts University to advance to the national championship competition. Following graduation, she returned to Tufts as a teaching assistant for philosophy courses there, including Introduction to Ethics and the Ethics Bowl course for undergraduates. She helped design and facilitate the first Ethics Bowl program for incarcerated students at MCI-Concord in Massachusetts. She holds an EdM from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and is currently pursuing a JD at Boston College Law School.

Cynthia Jones

Cynthia Jones, PhD, is a Professor of Philosophy and the Director of the Office for Advocacy & Violence Prevention at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, where she also served for eight years as the founding director of the university's ethics center. Her research includes end-of-life issues in medicine, health disparities, moral issues in funding, and survivor advocacy, and she is the current or past PI on more than 20 grant and donor projects. She has coached teams or served as a case writer and judge for the Ethics Bowl for 19 years.

Sophia McWilliams

Sophia McWilliams is a December 2022 Communications graduate from Berea College, a small liberal arts school, located in the Appalachian Mountains of Kentucky. An avid gamer, and a published fantasy author, Sophia likes to try and bring a touch of wonder to everything she works on. She has been helping with Ethics Bowl since before she was in high school; back then she would help research for other case writers and supply ideas that were more “in” or “hip with the kids.” Now as an official member of the team, her cases tend to focus on animals/environmentalism, fantasy, creativity, or interpersonal connections.

Alex M. Richardson

Alex M. Richardson, PhD, is Associate Director for Content Strategy and Engagement at the Janet Prindle Institute for Ethics at DePauw University, where he also teaches in the Department of Philosophy. Alex oversees the Prindle Institute’s ethics education resource libraries and digital experiences, as well as various national engagement initiatives. In addition to his work at the Institute, Alex serves on the Board of Directors of the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics (APPE), and as Chair of the American Philosophical Association’s Committee on Pre-College Philosophy. Alex has been involved with the Ethics Bowl community for many years at both the High School and Intercollegiate levels. He is Organizer of the IEBOnline Regional Competition, and sits on the APPE IEB Council as a Regional Representative in this capacity.

Robert Skipper

Robert Boyd Skipper, PhD, is a professor emeritus of philosophy from St. Mary’s University, San Antonio, Texas. While there, he taught engineering ethics and also served as director of the Texas Regional Ethics Bowl for over 20 years. He has been involved with the Ethics Bowl since 2000, and is currently the chair of the IEB’s national case-writing committee, which he first joined as a writer in 2009. His current philosophical interests are fictionalism, aboutness, and aesthetics. Outside of philosophy, his interests include literature and chess. He lives in the small Texas town of Wimberley, between Austin and San Antonio, where he blogs on <https://robertboydskipper.substack.com> about the latest books he’s reading.

Mallory Wietrzykowski

Mallory Wietrzykowski is a graduate student in St. Louis University’s philosophy and bioethics PhD program with research interests in applied ethics, bioethics, public health ethics, and feminist and queer philosophy. Mallory’s interests in ethics and philosophy arose from undergraduate coursework and her experiences competing on her undergraduate university’s club ethics bowl team. Mallory has since graduated with her BA in philosophy from Grand Valley State University and her MA in philosophy from Kent State University.

Jenna Wong

Jenna Wong has been heavily involved with the Ethics Bowl since she competed on her high school’s team in her home state of California. Since then, she founded the University of Chicago’s Ethics Bowl team, helped organize the University’s first campus-wide Ethics Bowl competition, and has judged for IEB Nationals and NHSEB Chicago Regionals.

Jenna earned her Master’s in Bioethics and Science Policy with a concentration in Technology Ethics and Policy from Duke University. She graduated *summa cum laude* from the University of Chicago with a BA in Philosophy and a BA in Law, Letters, and Society. Jenna is passionate about AI and technology ethics and currently works as an AI and Public Safety Research Associate at NYU Law. Her goal is to promote

responsible AI governance, establish privacy rights, and mitigate algorithmic bias in law enforcement and Big Tech.

Contributor

Matthew D. Mangum

Matthew D. Mangum, JD, LLM, is Clinical Associate Professor at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. In addition to teaching courses on Business Law, Ethics, and Intellectual Property, he maintains a small law practice focusing on copyright and trademark. Matthew has played several roles in the Texas Regional Ethics Bowl including participant, judge, coach, and director. When not in the classroom, Matthew can often be found in a national park.