THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE KNOXVILLE

COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES

TENNESSEE HIGH SCHOOL

ETHICS BOWL

2019

INFORMATIONAL PACKET FOR COACHES

THSEB@utk.edu

philosophy.utk.edu/ethics/index.php

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HOME FEDERAL BANK

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1. History and Mission of the THSEB

"Democratic freedoms only exist in open and tolerant societies where opposing points of view can be exchanged with civility and mutual respect. The THSEB seeks to nurture and promote these timeless values in our future generations. This effort is our contribution to sustaining our democracy."

- Tom Heffernan, Former Director of the UT Humanities Center

One of the hallmarks of modern democratic society is the existence of disagreement on a variety of issues. In order to function well, such a society needs citizens capable of engaging in respectful deliberation and dialogue about a vast array of controversial and complex issues, with emphasis on reasoning, not rhetoric. This requires not just critical thinking, but also a respect for others' values and perspectives and an understanding that the world is not one in which everything is black and white.

Philosophy, more than any other discipline, has a long history of wide-ranging reasoned inquiry into fundamental moral and political questions. In keeping with the primary goal of ancient and contemporary philosophers to prepare citizens to participate in democracy, the Department of Philosophy founded the THSEB in 2009 as an outreach program with the goal of helping prepare area high school students to be informed critical thinkers who will be active and engaged citizens in their local and global communities.

The idea arose at the annual meeting of the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics in March 2009, which John Hardwig, then head of the Department of Philosophy, and Matt Deaton, a doctoral student in philosophy, attended. There they heard about the High School Ethics Bowl program sponsored by the Squire Family Foundation, a group that works with philosophers and educators to ensure that all students in American secondary schools have an opportunity to study philosophy and assists in organizing collaborative yet competitive events among teams from area high schools.

The first THSEB consisted of only two teams, but each year has seen continued growth and a rise in interest, with more than 20 area schools having competed at least once. What began as a few hours one evening has turned into a full-day event with high schools from all over East Tennessee. With its continued development, in 2014, THSEB organizers added the UT Humanities Center as a partner and co-sponsor of the event. Most recently the THSEB received a generous three-year gift from Home Federal Bank to fund the program.

The THSEB program provides students early exposure to critical thinking skills that will benefit them no matter what they do in their lives. It isn't just about promoting a particular narrow area of interest, or promoting the humanities for the humanities' sake. It is about helping students better understand not just their own views, but those of others. While educators often focus on specific technical or vocational knowledge, the THSEB offers an alternative focus. Such knowledge is always important, but students need to be able to not just communicate technical knowledge, but to reason through it critically. No matter what one is engaged with, there will always be value judgments. The THSEB helps students think more about how those value judgments are formed, and then when a disagreement crops up they can hopefully see that they should not immediately dismiss those who disagree with them. While the THSEB is only a start in helping students identify and develop these skills, it is at least that.

Consequently, the THSEB is a discussion, not a debate. Teams are not required to choose opposing sides, nor is the goal to "win" the argument by belittling the other team or its position. The focus is on reasoning, rather than rhetoric, and has many benefits for student learning, including honing critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are proven to boost ACT and SAT scores and that are explicitly targeted by the TNCore standards. Additionally, the event encourages the consideration of perspectives beyond one's own when making ethical judgments.

The spirit and essence of the Ethics Bowl project is captured by the gathering of passionate, intelligent individuals who aim to discover ways – together - of living well. There are no "right" and "wrong" answers here – there is only the sincere attempt to articulate what we think is truly valuable and important to us in life.

While aimed at promoting collaborative, respectful discussion, the THSEB is still a competitive event. The winning school will have the opportunity to compete at the National High School Ethics Bowl in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

PAST AND PRESENT

THSEB DIRECTORS:

2009 to 2011	Matt Deaton
2011 to 2013	Jason Fishel
2011 to 2013	Jeff Cervantes
2013 to 2015	Ryan Windeknecht
2013 to 2016	Don Dillard
2015 to Present	Alex Feldt

THSEB WINNERS:

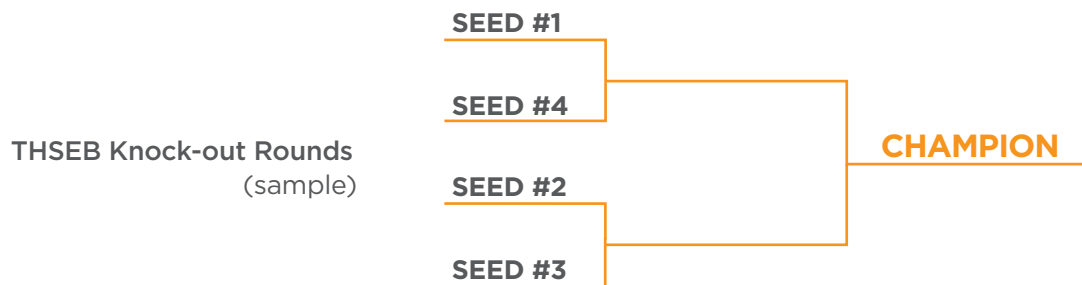|	
2010	Knoxville Catholic High School
2011	Hardin Valley Academy
2012	Austin-East High School
2013	Austin-East High School
2014	Farragut High School
2015	Farragut High School
2016	L&N STEM Academy
2017	Hardin Valley Academy
2018	Maryville High School

2. THSEB Event Basics[1]

Teams

Each team consists of three to seven members who can work together in advance of the event to prepare their responses to the various cases. During the competition, each team is allowed to have up to five members competing in any given match. Team members for each match must be selected and seated prior to the start of that match, before any case is announced. Substitutions cannot occur during a match, so changes can only be made between each round.

Cases

Each year the National High School Ethics Bowl (NHSEB) releases a series of cases that will be used in regional events like the THSEB. Cases are available on the NHSEB website (nhseb.unc.edu/resources/) and are also posted on the THSEB website. These cases cover a wide-ranging array of ethical, political, and social issues. Teams have access to these cases in advance of the event, allowing them to study each one and develop how they might engage with the issues presented. All cases used during the THSEB will come directly from the NHSEB Regional Case set, though teams (as well as judges and volunteers), will not know in advance which cases will be selected for use in each round.

General Competition Format

The THSEB consists of preliminary seeding rounds, followed by knock-out rounds (e.g. quarterfinals, semi-finals, finals). The number of seeding and knock-out rounds will vary depending on the number of teams that register. Preliminary rounds take the form of individual matches between all teams, with no teams playing each other twice (though you might play a team a second time in the knock-out rounds). Knock-out rounds will take the form of a single-elimination tournament, with teams seeded based on their results in the preliminary rounds. Currently, we are using a format that employs only semi-finals and finals as knock-out rounds, which would look like this:

```
                              SEED #1
                                        ┐
                              SEED #4    │
  THSEB Knock-out Rounds               ├──  CHAMPION
        (sample)                 SEED #2  │
                                        ┘
                              SEED #3
```

Teams will be seeded based on total number of wins in the preliminary rounds, with the following tie-breakers employed (in the order listed):
  • **Lowest Number of Losses in Preliminary Rounds** – if two teams are tied with two wins, but Team A has two wins and one tie, while Team B has two wins and one loss, Team A will be seeded above Team B.
  • **Highest Number of Judge's Votes** – in each preliminary round there will be three judges, meaning that a team can earn up to three votes per round; if teams are tied with respect to both wins and losses, the team that has earned the most judge votes will be seeded higher.
  • **Greatest Point Differential in Preliminary Rounds** – if two teams remain tied, the team with the largest point differential over all their matches will be seeded higher; thus, if Teams A and B each won all of their preliminary matches and had the same number of judge votes, but Team A won their matches by a combined difference of seven and Team B won their matches by a combined difference of 15, then Team B will be seeded above Team A.
  • **Highest Total Points in Preliminary Rounds** – if teams have the same point differential over all their matches, we will turn to the greatest cumulative point total to determine the higher seed.
  • **Coin Toss** – if teams remain tied after applying all other tie-breakers, we will determine seeding based on a coin toss.

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[1] This section is adapted from materials provided by the National High School Ethics Bowl (NHSEB), and in many cases uses identical language or copies at length from NHSEB materials. We do our best to model the event after the NHSEB guidelines, but there are some instances where there are slight differences. If you ever have questions about the event or are unsure about any rules or guidelines after reading both our materials and the NHSEB rules and procedures, do not hesitate to get in touch (THSEB@utk.edu) for clarification.

If the competition were to have 16 teams competing, there would likely be four preliminary seeding rounds and two knock-out rounds. Teams that do not qualify for the semi-finals will still compete during that round; they will simply not be able to place in the competition. Consequently, the THSEB would have the following round-by-round structure, allowing each team to compete in at least five matches:

ROUND	COMPETING TEAMS (assuming 16 teams)
Preliminary #1	All teams compete in head-to-head matches.
Preliminary #2	All teams compete in head-to-head matches.
Preliminary #3	All teams compete in head-to-head matches.
Preliminary #4	All teams compete in head-to-head matches.
Semi-Finals	-Top four teams compete for places in the championship. -All other teams compete with each other in consolation matches.
Championship	Winners of semi-finals compete in front of everyone!

Should a semi-final match be tied, we will employ the following two tie-breakers in order: (1) greatest point differential in that one match; and then, (2) the highest seeded team.

Full details of the format (i.e. number of rounds, matches, and teams) will be provided to coaches closer to the competition date, as these decisions depend on how many teams are registered for the event. What will not change is the timing and structure of an individual match and that in every round teams will both present and respond.

Individual Match Format

To open a match, the moderator will introduce the competing teams and judges and note which team has randomly been assigned as Team A (the presenting team for the first case) and Team B (the presenting team for the second case). [2]

After introductions, the moderator will present the first case and the question to which Team A will be responding. Neither judges nor the teams will know in advance which case will be presented or which question will be asked. This is known as the **Moderator's Period**.

Team A will then have up to two minutes to confer, after which any member(s) of Team A may speak for up to five minutes (total) in response to the moderator's question, based on the team's research and critical analysis. [3] This is known as the **Presentation Period**. Team A must address and answer the moderator's question during the Presentation period. In the past, there has been some concern that teams were penalized or rewarded depending on whether one person speaks or everyone contributes. We understand that each team has its own process. Some divide up the cases so that individuals are responsible for a certain number of cases; as a result, one person would present. Other teams ask that each member of the team become responsible for a different aspect of all the cases; as a result, all team members would speak. *We have let the judges know that they should neither penalize nor reward a team for using either approach; both are welcome.*

Because judges' backgrounds are so diverse, teams do not have to reference specific ethicists or ethical theories. Doing so is not a requirement of a good answer, nor is it indicative of a poor answer. *The argument matters. It is not necessary to name a philosopher or ethical theory associated with your particular argument.* Keep in mind that a team is speaking to a broad audience. Many judges have no formal background in philosophy or ethics and may not, for instance, understand your reference to Kant. A good strategy is to explain your ethical reasoning in terms everyone can understand. However, if a team member does refer to "deontology," for example, make sure the reference is accurate. A judge may question you about it during the judges' questioning portion of the match. *In short, remember that philosophical name-dropping is not a substitute for presenting a sound argument, and that sound arguments can be made without any explicit reference to ethical theory.*

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[2] The national competition uses a coin toss and allows teams to select if they want to present first; to help our moderators and prepare scripts in advance, as well as helping keep things on time, the THSEB opts to randomly assign this, making sure it is varied for each team.

[3] The national competition has increased this period to six minutes due to the additional time teams spend together and added practice refining their arguments; at the regional level, we are choosing to maintain the five minutes duration, wanting teams to focus on quality, but also being focused and concise in their responses.

Next, Team B will have up to one minute to confer, after which Team B may speak for up to three minutes in response to Team A's presentation. This is known as the **Commentary Period**. *During the Commentary, a team's role is to help the other team perfect its presentation, NOT to present its own position on the case.* When team members comment, they should think of themselves as thoughtful, critical listeners. Their goal is to point out the flaws in the presentation, to comment on its strengths, note what has been omitted, or needs further development; all this is in the interest of making the presentation of the case stronger. Team B is also welcome to pose questions for Team A during their commentary (though Team A is not under any obligation to answer them). *It should be noted that the judges have been instructed that a "question shower" or "spit-fire questioning," during which a team rapidly asks many questions in an attempt to overwhelm or dominate the other team, is inconsistent with the aims of THSEB and will not merit a high score.*

Team A will then have up to one minute to confer, followed by three minutes to respond to Team B's commentary. This is known as the **Response Period**.

The judges will then begin their 10-minute question-and-answer session with Team A. Before asking questions, the judges may confer briefly. This is known as the **Judges' Period**. More than one team member may respond to a given judge's question. Teams must not confer for longer than 30 seconds after a question has been asked.

Judges will then evaluate the Presentation, Response, and Responses to Judges' Questions by Team A and the Commentary by Team B, and score the teams. This ends the first half of the match.

Thus, each half of a match has the following structure centered around one case:

PERIOD	TIME ALLOWANCES	TOTAL TIME
Moderator's Period	Up to 5 min	5 min
Presentation Period	2 min to Confer 5 min to Present	7 min 12 min
Commentary Period	1 min to Confer 3 min to Comment	13 min 16 min
Response Period	1 min to Confer 3 min to Respond	17 min 20 min
Judges' Period	10 min of Q&A	30 min

After the judges have made their scoring decisions, the moderator will announce the second case that will take up the focus for the other half of the match. This will follow the same structure as above, with Team B taking the presenting role and Team A taking the commentary role. Teams **cannot** make substitutions at this stage in the match, as those that were seated at the start, must remain for the entire match.

Scoring and Determining Match Outcomes

During each round, the panel of judges will individually score each team's responses along the following lines:

• *Team's Presentation to the Moderator's Question* (up to 15 points): in evaluating a team's answer to the moderator's question, the judges will give the team a score of 1-5 on each of the three criteria:
- • Did the presentation clearly and systematically address the question asked?
- • Did the presentation identify and thoroughly discuss the central moral dimensions of the case raised by the question asked?
- • Did the presentation indicate both awareness and thoughtful consideration of different viewpoints, including those that would loom large in the reasoning of individuals who disagree?

- *Opposing Team's Commentary* (up to 10 points)
- *Presenting Team's Response to the Opposing Team's Commentary* (up to 10 points)
- *Presenting Team's Responses to the Judges' Questions* (up to 20 points)
- *Each Team's Display of Respectful Dialogue Throughout the Match* (up to five points)

Based on these criteria, each team will be awarded up to 60 points by each judge. Judges are not to confer with each other while scoring teams. At the end of the match, a team wins a judge's vote if they earned more points from that judge than the other team did. The winner of the match will be the team with the most judges' votes. For example:

> Judge 1: Team A 48, Team B 43 (one vote for Team A)
> Judge 2: Team A 45, Team B 44 (one vote for Team A)
> Judge 3: Team A 39, Team B 49 (one vote for Team B)

Here, Team A is the winner of the match with two judges' votes despite the fact that Team B had a higher overall point total.

If a judge scores both teams equally (a tie), both teams are awarded half of that judge's vote. A match can end in a tie – if all three judges score the match a tie, or one judge votes for Team A, one for Team B, and one scores a tie. Point differential is not a factor in determining the winner of an individual match although it is a possible tiebreaker when ranking teams at the end of the preliminary rounds.

Sample Scoresheet

TENNESSEE HIGH SCHOOL ETHICS BOWL

JUDGE:

ROOM #:

ROUND:

JUDGE'S VOTE (circle only one):

Team A   Team B   TIE

Team A (name):		Team B (name):	
FIRST CASE. Order: TEAM A Presenting, TEAM B Commenting. Only fill out Fields (1, 2, 3, 4)			
1. A's Presentation			
a. Clear and systematic? (5pts.)	/5		
b. Identify and discuss key moral dimensions? (5pts.)	/5		
c. Awareness and consideration of opposing viewpoints? (5pts.)	/5		
Sub-Total (from A, B, C above)	/15	2. B's Commentary on A's Presentation	/10
3. A's Response to B's Commentary	/10		
4. A's Response to Judges' Questions	/20		
SECOND CASE. Order: TEAM B Presenting, TEAM A Commenting. Only fill out fields (5, 6, 7, 8)			
		5. B's Presentation	
		a. Clear and systematic? (5pts.)	/5
		b. Identify and discuss key moral dimensions? (5pts.)	/5
		c. Awareness and consideration of opposing viewpoints? (5pts.)	/5
6. A's Commentary on B's presentation	/10	Sub-Total (from A, B, C above)	/15
		7. B's Response to A's Commentary	/10
		8. B's Response to Judges' Questions	/20
OVERALL RESPECTFULNESS & TOTAL POINTS. Fill out fields (9, 10, 11, 12)			
9. A's Respectful Dialogue	/05	10. B's Respectful Dialogue	/05
11. Total (from Greyed in Boxes above -- 1, 3, 4, 6, 9)	/60	12. Total (from Greyed in Boxes above – 2, 5, 7, 8, 10)	/60

ANY COMMENTS FOR TEAM A:

ANY COMMENTS FOR TEAM B:

Detailed Judging Rubric

Please remember, teams are strongly encouraged to think of themselves as being on the same side rather than as opponents. That is, both teams are working together to solve a difficult problem–while impressing the judges with thoughtful analysis and support. Listening to the other team with an aim to affirm, supplement, or build on their argument is a prudent approach and one that expresses the ideals of the THSEB & NHSEB.

PRESENTATION PERIOD (15 Points Total)
A) **Did the presentation clearly and systematically address the moderator's question?** (5 points)

> 5 = Extremely clear presentation that systematically addressed the key dimensions of the question.
> 4 = Reasonably clear presentation that systematically addressed most key dimensions of the question.
> 3 = Hard to follow the argument. Significant dimensions of the question missed (passable).
> 2 = Serious logical problems or underdeveloped argument (poor).
> 1 = Incoherent presentation.

B) **Did the team clearly identify and thoroughly discuss the central moral dimensions of the case?** (5 points)

> 5 = Clearly and precisely identified central moral dimensions, and discussed these dimensions thoroughly.
> 4 = Mostly identified central moral dimensions and discussed major issues.
> 3 = Adequately identified and discussed some central moral dimensions (passable).
> 2 = Misidentified some moral dimensions of the case and inadequately discussed (poor).
> 1 = Misidentified the central moral dimensions.

C) **Did the team's presentation indicate both awareness and thoughtful consideration of different viewpoints, including especially those that would loom large in the reasoning of individuals who disagree with team's position?** (5 points)

> 5 = Insightful analysis & discussion of the most significant viewpoints, including full & careful
>   attention to opposing points of view.
> 4 = Solid analysis and discussion of some different viewpoints.
> 3 = Underdeveloped discussion of different viewpoints (passable).
> 2 = Minimal consideration of different viewpoints (poor).
> 1 = Minimal awareness of different viewpoints.

COMMENTARY PERIOD (10 Points)
To what extent has the team effectively and directly responded to and engaged the presenting team's argument?

> 10 = Especially insightful, complete, and composed commentary.
> 9 = Key points excellently addressed.
> 8-7 = solid response to presenting team's points.
> 6-5 = Some points made, but few insights or constructive ideas (passable).
> 4-3 = Weak or irrelevant response or merely asking a series of questions (poor).
> 2-1 = Failure to respond to presenting team or resorting to personal attacks.

RESPONSE PERIOD (10 Points)
How well did the team respond to the opposing team's commentary?

> 10 = Especially insightful, complete, and composed response.
> 9 = Key points are excellently addressed.
> 8-7 = Solid response to commenting team.
> 6-5 = Some relevant points are made (passable).
> 4-3 = Weak or irrelevant response (poor).
> 2-1 = Failure to respond to commentary.

JUDGES' PERIOD (20 Points)
How well did the team respond to the judges' questions?

> 20 = Especially insightful, complete, and composed response.
> 19-17 = The most pressing points are identified and discussed.
> 16-13 = Several of the most important points are identified and discussed.
> 12-9 = Some points are made (passable).
> 8-5 = Weak or irrelevant response (poor).
> 4-1 = Failure to respond to commentary and judges.

OVERALL POINTS FOR RESPECTFUL DIALOGUE, AS OPPOSED TO COMBATIVE DEBATE (5 points)
Did the team demonstrate their awareness that an ethics bowl is about participating in a collaborative discussion aimed at earnestly thinking through difficult ethical issues?

> 5 = Respectfully engaged all parties in exceptionally productive and collaborative discussion.
> 4 = Respectfully engaged other team's arguments and points.
> 3 = Respectful of other team's argument but only marginal engagement and pursuit.
> 2 = Unengaged with other team's argument.
> 1 = Combative or dismissive of other team's argument.

# 3. Ethical Reasoning and the THSEB: A Primer [4]

With the THSEB being an **ethics** bowl, you might think that there is an expectation that students will cite directly from traditional moral theories in offering their analyses of the cases. Such an approach tends to support a particular style of ethical reasoning, what we've termed a plug-and-play model—that places more emphasis on, for example, what deontology or virtue or consequentialist or care ethics might say. Taking such an approach, however, limits the range of students' responses, while giving the false impression that what is important in ethics is finding a particular theory that solves our ethical questions. This fails to respect the students' capacities to find their own solutions and offer their own arguments about what is morally relevant and how we ought to act in particular situations.

Consequently, the students' views should be put at the forefront of their own reasoning. Rather than telling the judges what Kant might say and then aiming to anticipate objections that might come from other moral theories, we look for students to offer their own arguments—arguments that clearly consider students' values and how those might interact with the particular details of the cases. None of this is to suggest that traditional ethical theories cannot and should not play a role. It simply means that these theories ought to be seen more as tools to help students create their own arguments. Rather than telling us what Aristotle said, or just giving us their own opinion, students should aim to offer a line of reasoning that explains why certain aspects of the case are relevant and why we ought to focus on certain values as opposed to others when engaging the case.

It is our hope that this type of approach, both in preparation for the event and during the actual competition, will lead students to the following outcomes that are central to our understanding of the THSEB as helping to develop citizens' abilities to engage in respectful deliberation and dialogue about controversial issues:

- They will be better able to critically reflect on their own value systems and beliefs.

- They will be better able to ask why a particular value, rather than another, makes the crucial difference in deciding the right course of action.

- They will be better able to consider how other people might take other values to be crucial difference and be sensitive to this fact.

What follows in the remainder of this section serves as a basic primer of key concepts and theories that can help students in developing their own arguments and engagement with moral values. You will not only find a discussion about the difference between mere opinions (an unsupported moral judgment) and moral judgments, but a primer on four primary types of ethical reasoning that students can find helpful in creating their arguments.
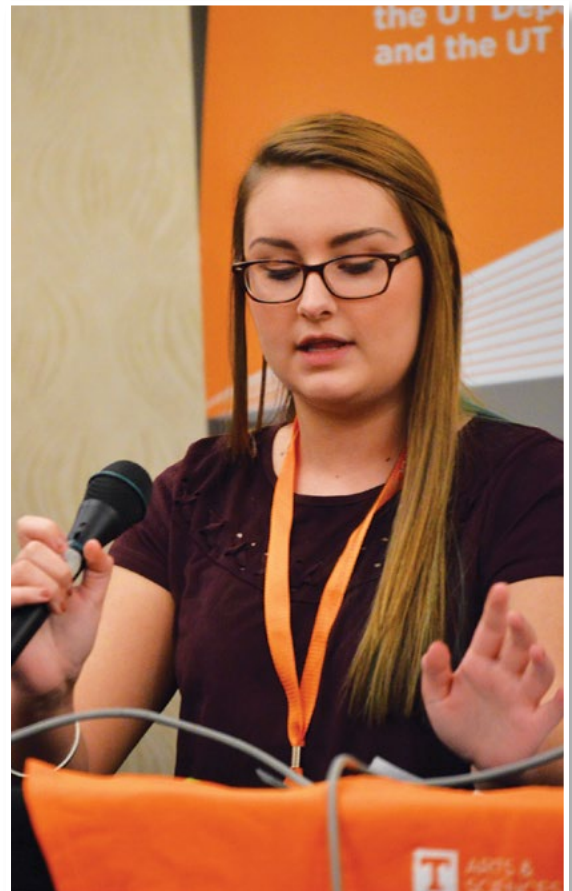
Mere Opinions vs. Reasoned Opinions

We are all familiar with the phrase "everyone's entitled to their opinion."[5] However, it is worth thinking about what opinions are, and why this idea might not be useful in public discourse. Opinions can range across a wide variety of subjects, from things like what your favorite ice cream is to who is the best pianist to what is the best medical treatment for a certain ailment. While it might make sense to say that we are all entitled to our opinion when it comes to ice cream, it doesn't seem helpful in the realm of medical treatment – especially if I have no medical training. Why should my opinion matter? But if I can defend my opinion by appealing to things that are relevant, and in fact show that I have some level of expertise, then perhaps you should take me seriously. However, at that point, it also wouldn't make sense to say that this is *just* my opinion.

This can help us see the difference between a *mere* opinion and a *reasoned* opinion. If I have no medical training and simply offer my opinion that you just need to "walk it off after an injury," I have no real support for my claim beyond "because I think so." However, if I can offer relevant reasons for why you just need to walk it off, then that support backs up my claim and does so in a way that someone who might not already agree with me can evaluate. The former, where I have no real support, can be thought of as an example of a *mere* opinion, while the latter can be seen as a *reasoned* opinion. The difference is that in the case of the mere opinion my only support is my subjective belief that I think it is the case, whereas in the case of reasoned opinion, I am able to offer evidence that supports my judgment.

The difference between mere opinions and reasoned opinions can help us understand a worry about the idea that "everyone is entitled to their opinion" and why it is important to not rely on mere opinions in public discourse. As Patrick Stokes remarks in discussing this idea:

> The problem with 'I'm entitled to my opinion' is that, all too often, it's used to shelter beliefs that should have been abandoned. It becomes shorthand for 'I can say or think whatever I like' – and by extension, continuing to argue is somehow disrespectful. And this attitude feeds, I suggest, into the false equivalence between experts and non-experts that is an increasingly pernicious feature of our public discourse.

When we rely on mere opinions, the conversation often stops. There becomes no way to evaluate if one set of reasons are better than another because we lack explanation. If we rely on reasoned judgments, the conversation can continue. We can evaluate and discuss the reasons that are offered, recognizing that some reasons are more relevant or better than others.

Moral Opinions: Mere or Reasoned Opinions?

To help think about whether our moral opinions are more like mere or reasoned opinions, it is important to think about both what type of thing morality is and where most of our moral opinions come from. First, it is important to think about what morality is—is it more like ice cream or the medical profession? This is important, since if morality is more like ice cream, then we might think that all we can offer are mere opinions (e.g. "Cookies and Cream ice cream is the best because I like it"). However, if morality isn't just a matter of subjective preference, then we want to make sure that any moral opinions are reasoned opinions and not mere opinions, just like we want to make sure a doctor's medical advice is a reasoned opinion and not a mere opinion.

Why should we think of morality as something that isn't just about individual preferences or subjective beliefs? While there are a variety of ways one might engage this, there is a one fairly common and simple argument:

> If we were to believe that moral questions were a matter of personal opinion, similar to which

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[5] For a two-page commentary engaging this idea that can be given to students for discussion, see Patrick Stokes, "No, You're Not Entitled to Your Opinion," *The Conversation*, 4 October 2012, accessed 30 August 2016, https://theconversation.com/no-youre-not-entitled-to-your-opinion-9978. This sub-section is indebted to Stokes' remarks.

flavor of ice cream is most delicious, logical consistency would require that we endorse the claim that virtually *any* action is morally permissible, *for any given person*—just like any flavor of ice cream would be the most delicious, *for any given person.* [6]

However, this seems to go against our commonsense views of morality. Certain actions seem wrong, no matter what someone else might believe, e.g. randomly murdering someone, sexually assalting someone. If so, then it seems we should be able to offer reasons for why it is wrong that go beyond our mere opinions. Thus, we should think of morality as the type of thing that requires reasoned opinions when we make a moral judgment. It can't just be that something is wrong because I think so, but that something is wrong because of other relevant facts, keeping in mind that these facts cannot be wholly subjective—they have to be accessible to others.

Since we have reason to think morality is the type of thing that demands reasoned opinions, it is important to think about where most of our moral opinions come from and whether this is likely to lead us to offer mere or reasoned opinions. It seems our moral opinions frequently find their basis in three sources:

1.   From a **particular value or set of values**
2.   From the (both mere and reasoned) **opinions of other people**
3.   From **our past experiences**.

The first source, concerning values, tends to *directly* inform our opinions, while the second and third, concerning the views of others and our experiences, tend to *indirectly* inform our opinions by informing our values.

Consider the institutional practice of capital punishment (i.e. the death penalty) and the ethical question of whether it is morally permissible to put human beings to death. Two people might have opposing moral opinions on this topic, with one holding that it is morally permissible to execute certain individuals and the other holding that no one should ever be punished with death. Whether you fall into the camp supporting the death penalty or opposing it can depend heavily on the **ways in which your values are *structured***. What it means to think about how values might be structured can be seen by pointing out the way in which certain values rise to prominence over others when attending to a particular case. For example, the opinion "the death penalty is wrong" may come from a value structure in which the value of "life" is at the top, even while also holding values of "justice" and "protecting others." Alternatively, the opinion "the death penalty is right" might stem from a value structure in which the value of "justice" is on top, followed by the values of "protecting others" and then "life." Here, the moral opinion of the individual is seen to be directly influenced by the structure of their values.

In addition to the direct impact of our value structure, our moral opinion about capital punishment might also be informed by or grounded in our social environment. This would include not just the direct opinions of others, but also our own personal experiences. While the most common influences in our social environment are our family and friends, religious organizations and the media also often impact our moral opinions. For example, you might hold the opinion "the death penalty is wrong" because your mother had this opinion or you subscribe to some religious doctrine that opposes it due to an emphasis on the value of each human life. Additionally, you might have had significant experiences with death that have made you view death in such a way that you hold this view. In either case, **your social environment indirectly helps forms your moral opinions by helping shape how your values are structured**. What is important to recognize about your social environment is that sometimes the opinions you encounter that inform your values might not themselves be reasoned opinions. Or, in other words, sometimes you form your beliefs and values based on other's opinions, which may or may not be justified.

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[6] Matt Deaton, *Ethics in a Nutshell: An Intro for Ethics Bowlers*, 2nd edition (Hanover, MD: Notaed Press, 2013), 15-16; available online at https://nhseb.unc.edu/files/2013/10/Ethics-in-a-Nutshell-an-Intro-for-Ethics-Bowl-Participants.pdf
This is another helpful resource for you and your students.

Why the Conversation about Moral Opinions Often Stops

Generally speaking, people tend to be firm in their moral opinions, regardless of whether those opinions are reasoned or not. The firmness of moral opinions tends to derive from moral convictions (alternatively, a moral conviction may simply be a firm moral opinion). Here, our moral convictions can be thought of as the sorts of settled moral views that are, generally, wrapped up in personal identity. For example, if you consider yourself to be "a Christian," the fact that you consider yourself to be "a Christian" may translate into the moral conviction that "because my religion disallows capital punishment, I must believe capital punishment is wrong; otherwise I am not a Christian."

The firmness (or conviction) of this moral opinion tends to stop the conversation. If someone were to challenge the opinion that "capital punishment is wrong" you may take this to be a challenge to you as a person—that you are wrong, as a person. It might make you easily dismissive of alternate points of view if they are unlike yours. Moreover, it may become impossible for you to even consider alternate points of view because it may entail giving up your personal identity (as a Christian, Atheist, Democrat, Republican, Kantian, etc.).

However, a problem emerges when you have a population divided by firm moral opinions. If the parties in a conversation have contrary moral convictions, then the moral disagreement between them will seem to be irresolvable. Irresolvable moral disagreements, in other words, tend to arise because of conversation stoppers. Worse, there is a tendency to exaggerate the contrary point of view and ascribe false beliefs to others.

For example, suppose that Ash holds that capital punishment is ethical. This might be grounded in his belief that it promotes the value of justice, which he finds important. Now suppose that Val holds that capital punishment is wrong. Whatever the grounds for Val's point of view, Ash might say that Val is "anti-justice" or "doesn't value justice." This is because Ash might be convinced that *if* you value justice, *then* you **must** be pro-capital punishment. However, this is probably false. Val likely values justice as much as Ash does. The fact that Val is against capital punishment doesn't mean that Val doesn't value justice any more than it would be correct to say that Ash doesn't value human life by being pro-capital punishment.

How Reasoned Opinions Can Get the Conversation Going

For the most part, people share the same values. Most people value justice, human life, family, freedom, and so on. We just tend to value these in different ways or to different degrees. But when we encounter what seems to be an irresolvable moral disagreement, we have a bad tendency to say that the other person doesn't value what we value. When we think of moral opinions in this more limited way, reducing them to claims tied to individual identities or opinions—thinking of them more as mere opinions—we don't get anywhere. However, if we start to think of moral opinions as reasoned moral opinions, then we can start to better understand how two individuals might hold the same values while reaching different conclusions given the particular issue or case in question.

As noted earlier, reasoned opinions require appeals to relevant facts in a way that makes them accessible to others. To go back to the case of Ash and Val, if they both acknowledge the value of reasoned opinions, then they should each be able to offer an explanation of what they identify as the relevant facts. This allows them to begin a conversation—more importantly, it might lead them to find common ground. Perhaps they both appeal to values of life and justice, but Val highlights certain facts related to the frequency of error in capital murder trials. This causes Val to note that, in this particular context, the value of life becomes more important than justice, while in other cases Val would give justice priority, in the same way that Ash gives justice priority in this case (since he believes the frequency of error is sufficiently low).

By focusing on reasoned moral opinions, we gain the ability not only to enter into a conversation with others about controversial issues, we also gain the ability to reflect on our own positions.

A Moral Reasoning Toolkit: Four Basic Theories

While we want to focus on students offering their own reasoned moral opinions, there is no reason to abandon common ethical theories found within moral philosophy. Rather, these can be part of a toolkit used by students in thinking about how they would respond to particular cases, rather than about how some ethical theorist might respond. Essentially, these theories can help students think about how to make use of or prioritize certain values. We might all agree that promise-keeping is an important value, for example, but we might disagree on the particular conditions under which we ought to keep our promises. What the moral theories can then do is provide examples of how we might engage a general value of promise-keeping in our deliberations about how to act in particular situations. Thus, the hope is that students will **not use the theories as a replacement for their own views, but instead as a supporting element**. Also, just as in practice few people subscribe perfectly to one ethical theory. It may be more effective, in thinking about how one would respond to particular cases, not to rely on reasoning rooted solely in one theory.

Consequentialist Ethics

Consequentialist moral theories, as their name may suggest, typically evaluate actions based on some value metric associated with the consequences of those actions. In most cases, such a theory first identifies an account of value—what it is that constitutes goodness—e.g., pleasure, welfare, happiness, etc. This is typically followed by articulating a choice principle which suggests how we ought to interact with these values—e.g., maximizing them, making them relevantly "good enough," etc. In classical versions of utilitarianism, like those of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, happiness (and by extension, the absence of pain and suffering) is identified as the chief good, and a maximization choice principle is employed, yielding a moral principle something like the following: "Act in such a way that the consequences of your actions produce the most overall happiness and alleviate the most overall suffering."

If you think that promise-keeping is only valuable if it promotes some other good outcome (however this is defined by the theory in question), you are thinking in consequentialist terms. This means you are open to the possibility that there are conditions under which keeping a promise is not the right thing to do. The decision would depend on whether keeping a promise (or breaking it) in fact promotes the overall human good in question. Taking the utilitarian view, to the extent that keeping a promise (in some particular circumstance) promotes the greatest happiness for the greatest number, it would be right to keep the promise, but wrong otherwise.

Deontological Ethics

Someone who subscribes to a deontological ethic will hold that some things are inherently, and thereby always, the right thing to do. Of course, just as consequentialists might argue about what the chief good is, deontologists might disagree as to how to define what is inherently right. One prominent example of a deontologist, Immanuel Kant, held that it is inherently wrong to ever use other people merely as a means to our ends. Alternatively put, at least as Kant saw it, what is inherently right is always to act in such a way that respects the rationality in ourselves and others.

Using Kant, for example, we can consider whether promise-keeping is inherently right. This means that if breaking a promise treats others merely as a means to our ends, then it is always wrong to do so. Think of a promise like a contract—we both agree to do something for the other. If I then break that agreement, I am doing so to advance my ends (even if they may not be self-centered ends) while taking advantage of the fact that you are going to act as you agreed. I am able to use you merely as a means to achieve my end (the reason I've broken the promise). Thus it is always wrong to break a promise, no matter the circumstances, or alternatively, promise-keeping is inherently right.

Virtue Ethics

A virtue ethicist holds that ethics should not attempt to codify human values in ethical rules or principles. Such rules as "Do X if X promotes the greatest happiness" or "Do X if failing to do X fails to respect the rationality in ourselves and others, or involves using others merely as a means to our ends" (and so forth) fail to capture the fluid dynamic of moral life. The claim isn't that we should do X because failing to do so always contradicts a standing moral principle, but rather that doing X is part of a *virtuous character*. In other words, instead of asking what is the right action in any given circumstance, virtue theory adopts a focus on the agent and might ask something like: "How would a good person behave?"

Of course, virtue ethicists might disagree as to how to define a "virtuous character." Following Aristotle, for example, one might begin with a conception of a truly "excellent" human living and regard a virtuous character as the sort of character that would be displayed by someone living that life of excellence. Alternatively, and likewise following Aristotle, one might determine whether promise-keeping is part of a virtuous character by looking at the extremes of character that might be exhibited with respect to such behavior – true moral excellence in human living consisting in a life displaying a sort of "Golden Mean" between possible extremes of behavior. Thus, while it seems likely that persons of virtuous character would typically keep their promises, they would not go to such extremes as to always keep their promises no matter the circumstances, as sometimes there might be other virtues (e.g. justice) that lead them to break their promise.

Care Ethics

Care ethics arises from feminist criticisms of the project of moral theory in general. Many feminist theorists have contended that traditional moral theories typically concern themselves with considerations outside the realm of feminine moral experience—issues that disproportionally affect men rather than women. In contrast, care ethics focuses on the values inherent in *caring practices*—the recognizing and addressing the needs of others for whom we have responsibility. This approach also adopts an understanding of the moral being of persons as inherently relational instead of the understanding of them as more independently engaged in decision-making offered by traditional moral theories.

Just as virtue ethics rejects standing moral principles, so too does care ethics. However, even with this kinship, Virginia Held, a prominent care ethicist, stresses a key difference: virtue ethics focuses on the character of *individuals*, while care ethics centers on caring *relations*. Taking this back to our example of promise-keeping, not only is there no moral principle that I am to look at, I also shouldn't ask what would the person of virtuous character do—this would itself restrict important considerations about who I made the promise to and for whom I might be breaking the promise. If I made a promise to my mother, care ethics says that this relationship and her standing as my mother carries significant moral weight and should be central to my reasoning. Alternatively, if I made a promise to a stranger, but face a choice to keep that promise and not help my mother (who does need my help) or break that promise and help my mother, care ethics says I ought to accord priority to that relationship in a way that the other theories do not include as part of moral reasoning in such cases.

Using the Theories in Competition

The THSEB is aimed at developing the skills for public discourse in a world of disagreement, not necessarily the skill of giving, for example, a perfect Kantian or a perfect Aristotelian answer. Also, while the above examples provide a brief description of four common types of ethical reasoning, they are not meant to be wholly exhaustive. Students are welcome to engage other approaches or emphases in their deliberations. What is most important is that students are always making sure to give clear reasons why we ought to take their opinion as a guide, as opposed to the opinion of some other theory or line of reasoning.

To this end, students might simply want to keep the following questions in mind when turning to a particular moral theory:

> 1. Why does that particular moral theory (in this particular case) offer a better guide than our own moral judgment?
>
> For example:
>
> 2. What important value(s) might be undermined if we acted contrary to that particular theory (in this particular case)?
>
> 3. Why should someone who doesn't rely on that particular theory care about the application of that theory (in this particular case)?

For example, suppose that in a given case, there is some conflict concerning the value and role of promise-keeping. Perhaps this conflict arises as a result of bias (e.g. you really hate the person you gave the promise to). Suppose further that you adopted a consequentialist approach and determined that, given the value of promise-keeping and its utility in that context, it would be right to keep your promise. In this regard, you might offer (something like) the following:

> 1. *Why is consequentialism a better guide than my own moral judgment?* In this case, I gave a promise to a person that I don't particularly like. I know that I ought to set aside my personal dislike for this person, but sometimes even the strongest willed person may struggle with doing so. In other words, I have good reason to doubt my ability to make an unbiased judgment, and appealing to a theory allows me to make an objective judgment that I can trust (more so than my own judgment).
>
> 2. *What would be undermined if I acted according to my own judgment (i.e. without theory or contrary to theory)*? The theory in question yields the verdict that I ought to keep my promise. If I acted contrary to the theory (i.e. according to my own biased judgment), then not only would I fail to act according to my own values, but I may also undermine further things I value, like my credibility and reputation. After all, if I broke my promise under this circumstance, then people might be less willing to trust me in the future.
>
> 3. *Why would someone who relies on his or her own judgment (or that of another theory) care about the application of consequentialist theory in this case*? I think any other rational person, in circumstances like this, would have good reason to doubt their ability to make an objective judgment. Moreover, I think that, like any rational person, they would care about making the right calls and would be concerned about bias and prejudice. Thus, I think it follows from these things that any other rational person would use the tools at their disposal to make a judgment consistent with the things that they would care about as a rational being.

In any case, remember: you don't need a PhD in philosophy to do ethics. Everyone, in their own way, is able to identify what is valuable or what is right and wrong. Additionally, everyone is able, if they make the decision to consciously do so, to reflect on their values and views on what is right and wrong using ethical reasoning. Ethical reasoning is simply an effort to figure out how our values inform our moral judgments about the latter. This lets us all offer moral opinions that are reasoned opinions that can be used in a respectful public dialogue.

4. Why High School Ethics Bowls Matter: A Coach's Perspective

The following was prepared by David Goff, Library Media Specialist and Ethics Bowl Coach at Austin-East High School in Knoxville, Tennessee. He can be reached at david.goff@knoxschools.org.

The Academic Advantage

After six years of working with students in Ethics Bowl teams, five of which our students successfully competed in (unfortunately we did not actually make it to the competition the first year), I feel confident in saying it is a very valuable activity for high school students. In fact, I would suggest that it is the most valuable extracurricular activity available for academically capable, college-bound high school students. Please do not misunderstand me. It is not an activity that must or should be restricted to elite students. Any student of any level is capable of learning the basics and participating. But an Ethics Bowl offers an opportunity for students to stretch their thinking to the limits of their abilities… and even beyond. There are few activities available on the high school level that allow our academically- or advanced students to use so many higher-order thinking skills and then to apply their results to real-life situations. There is a strong emphasis in education these days to provide students with both **rigor** and **relevance** in academic instruction. Ethics Bowl preparation demands both. In the context of a timed competitive environment, students are challenged to prepare rigorously so that they can quickly apply their knowledge in friendly and collegial competition with their peers. The relevance factor comes into play with the selection of case studies. The cases chosen for the competitions are not imaginary. They are snatched from the current events that are taking place in the world around us! Students must think logically, reason to a conclusion, and then prepare an oral presentation that processes the content of their arguments. This requires the use of analysis and synthesis, two of the highest level of thinking skills. In fact the Ethics Bowl comprises in one activity the entire Cognitive Domain of Bloom's Taxonomy. What could be a better academic activity than a FUN activity that encourages students to really develop their thinking skills?

Challenges for High Achievers

We live in difficult times educationally. Budgets are being cut. Education is being restructured, reorganized, and restructured again. Teachers are required to work longer hours and students often have longer school days. Even traditional sports programs are struggling in many schools while many academic activities are no longer available to students. Schools are forced to devote ever-increasing levels of attention to raising scores in high stakes testing, particularly for struggling students. What opportunities are available for gifted and high-achieving students to develop their unique and extremely valuable abilities? An Ethics Bowl offers an opportunity for these academically capable students to really shine. I don't believe it is an accident that in three of the last four years, the valedictorian has been a member of the Ethics Bowl team. I am not suggesting causation, but rather the dynamic synergy of attraction to an activity that is meaningful to high-achieving students. It has absolutely nothing to do with my recruiting as I have no involvement in or knowledge of student grades.

The Social Dimension

One of the things I hope will result from the proliferation of Ethics Bowls is that students will not only learn to reason *about* ethics, but they will learn how to become ethical people. We live in a world that is polarized with competing cultures, religions, philosophies, and systems of thought. Where is the common ground for rational discourse? How can we peaceably work through these dilemmas? I have become convinced that an honest and rational ethical analysis and discussion can be an effective beginning point for serious dialogue about the issues that divide our culture. Moreover, if we can begin to *reason* ethically, it is much more likely that we will *behave* ethically. What difference might it make if our national, state, and even local leaders began to even consider the ethical implications of their actions? I refer here not only to politicians, though most of us view them as morally bankrupt, regardless of political party. What if businessmen considered the ethics involved in moving a business overseas, and the impact such a decision would have on the lives of their current employees and their

communities? What if religious leaders were to find ethical ways to find common ground and work together for the good of all members of society, regardless of their religious persuasion? What if county funding bodies were to consider the ethics of funding the building of profit-making prison facilities rather than building, upgrading, and improving schools to educate children so that they do not end up in those prisons? There are so many potential applications, and an Ethics Bowl can open the door to students learning to think in an ethical manner and so someday help to restore our broken society.

Long-Term Benefits for Students:

1.   Develops analytical reading and listening skills.

2.   Develops critical thinking skills.

3.   Improves oral communication skills.

4.   Develops writing skills.

5.   Improves teamwork and collaboration skills.

6.   Enhances problem-solving skills.

7.   Challenges students to apply ethics in their everyday lives.

8.   Prepares students for college-level reading, writing, and thinking.

9.   LOOKS GREAT ON A COLLEGE APPLICATION OR A RESUME!

5. FAQs

Q: Do I need to know anything about philosophy or ethics to coach a team?

A: No! Participation in the THSEB does not require any previous knowledge or experience with philosophy. All it requires is an enthusiasm for helping students develop critical thinking skills. We are here to provide whatever we reasonably can to ensure the readiness and competitiveness of your team. Our primary interest is simply teaching students the benefits of thinking critically about important ethical issues and understanding and respecting the perspectives of others—values developed through the study of philosophy and other humanities disciplines

Q: How difficult is it to recruit students?

A: This can often depend on each school. Some schools already offer philosophy classes and are able to draw from those students, while others find it fairly easy to recruit from those involved in speech or debate groups. In most cases, coaches have found that once they make the benefits of participating clear to students, they are interested in joining the team.

Q: What sort of time commitment can someone expect?

A: Again, this can often depend on the school, since some schools already have philosophy classes, where preparation for the ethics bowl could be included, or time periods set aside for extra-curricular activities. Based on feedback from previous coaches, we have found that most meet once a week, with an additional hour or so of preparation for those meetings.

Q: Does the THSEB benefit my students?

A: Absolutely! Participation in the THSEB promotes ethical awareness and responsibility. It encourages reflective, civil public discourse. It hones reading comprehension and critical reasoning skills which are proven to boost ACT and SAT scores and that are explicitly targeted by TNCore standards. It brings students face-to-face with new perspectives on complex issues, which nurtures empathy. This of course is just a small sampling of the benefits that participation in the THSEB can have.

Q: Is there any advice you have for new coaches?

A: We'll let Chris Webb, the coach from L&N Stem, answer this one: "Make sure students are committed to participating, become very familiar with the cases, attend the coaches' meeting at UT, take the offer from a member of UT's Department of Philosophy to come and visit your classroom, and don't worry about the need for your students to 'show-off' their knowledge of philosophers…[it is] best for students to strive to articulate their thoughts and opinions in their own words." And of course, don't forget to have fun!

6. On-line Resources *(Taken from NHSEB website)*

If you have questions that are not answered here, don't hesitate to e-mail them to THSEB@utk.edu.

WRITTEN RESOURCES:

How to be an Ethics Bowl Coach compiled by Matt Deaton & Marcia McKelligan

Ethics Bowl for the Classroom by Roberta Israeloff & Matt Deaton

Ethics Bowl for the Classroom Moderator Script by the Squire Family Foundation

Ethics Bowl Logical Fallacies from the North Carolina High School Ethics Bowl

Ethics in a Nutshell: An Intro for Ethics Bowlers by Matt Deaton

Preparing for the National High School Ethics Bowl by Gabriel Espinosa

The Educational Significance of the Ethics Bowl by Robert Ladenson

WEB-BASED RESOURCES:

AGORA-net: Participate Deliberate from Georgia Tech, School of Public Policy

Lesson Plans and Videos from PLATO (Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization)

PODCAST & GENERAL VIDEO RESOURCES:

WiPhi: Wireless Philosophy – videos that introduce philosophical issues to a general audience

Ethics Bites – podcast about significant ethical issues (e.g. climate change, free speech)

Public Ethics Radio – interviews with scholars and thinkers engaged in ethics in public life

Philosophy Talk – radio show about important philosophical issues

Philosophy for Beginners – online lectures aimed an introducing philosophy to those new to it

TENNESSEE HIGH SCHOOL

ETHICS BOWL