

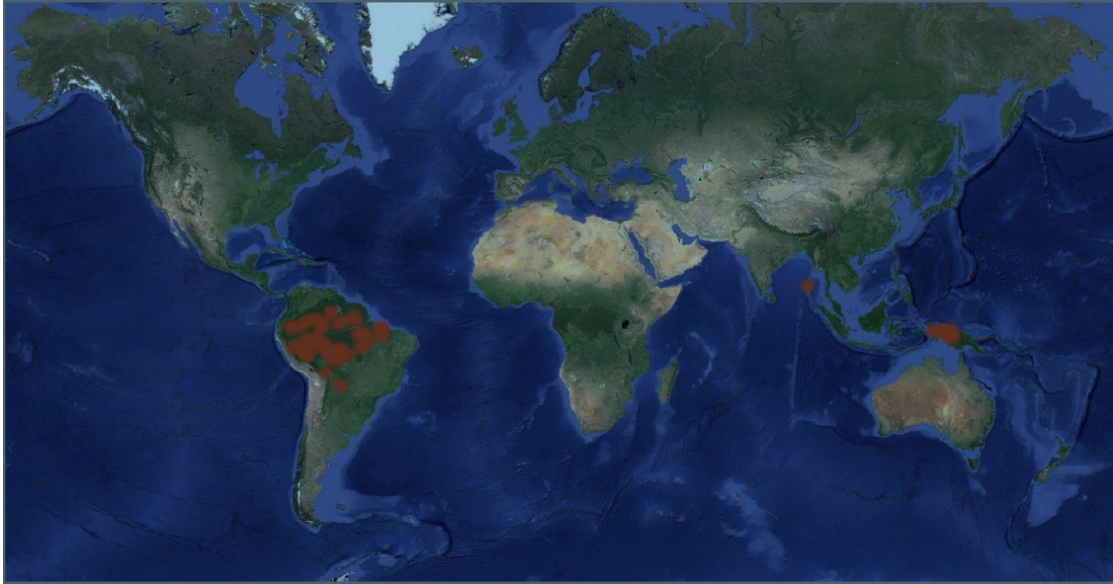
TOK EXHIBITION

The guiding prompt to this inquiry is **what constraints are there on the pursuit of knowledge?**



This image, depicting the spinal cord of a dog, was used when announcing the decision of the US Department of Veterans Affairs to continue publically funding projects which involve research on dogs. The projects include parts of dogs' brains being removed, electrodes being attached to dogs' spinal cords and dogs being euthanised. They have been going on for decades, and have reportedly aided the invention and development of devices such as the cardiac pacemaker. Cardiac pacemakers are used by people suffering from arrhythmia, an irregular beating of the heart, and have saved human lives. This case raises the question of whether it is right to end the lives of test-subjects in the pursuit of knowledge which has the potential to save lives. It makes us think about the treatment of test subjects and the extent to which pain or disadvantages can be inflicted upon these until that treatment is seen as unethical and should be stopped.

The pursuit of knowledge is as old as mankind itself and has aided the development of all aspects of human life we know today. Knowledge has been pursued through research in all areas, yet this image shows that particular branches of research include the use of living test subjects - most frequently animals. The presence of these test subjects raises the central question of which is more important: the well-being of test subjects, or the gaining of new, potentially helpful knowledge? One can argue that no life is more valuable than another. Yet, to justify their treatment of test subjects, experimenters often compare the sacrifices made with the benefits gained. Whether success or breakthroughs made through experiments justify the treatment of test subjects remains an issue.

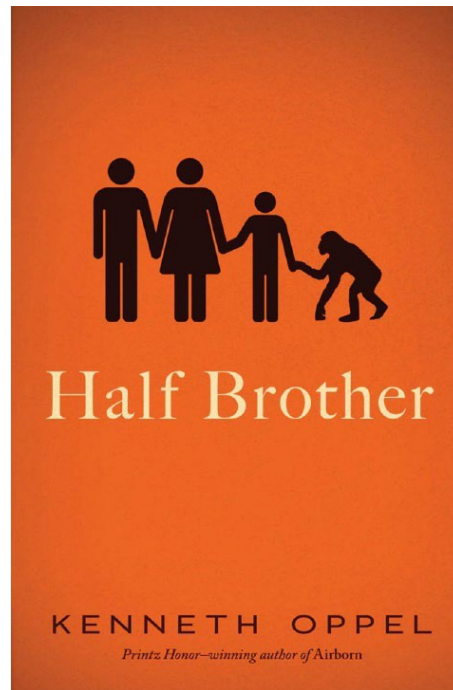


This is a map showing the approximate locations of all tribes known which have not been contacted by the rest of the world. Whether we should contact these peoples has been debated for a long time.

Through this contact, much, potentially new knowledge could be shared. We could help tribes develop their healthcare, sanitation and nourishment, and warn them of illegal loggers and climate change. Many argue, however, that if the tribes have survived until now without foreign contact, they can continue doing so, and that they have a right to be left alone.

We cannot assume things about the tribes: would they even want to meet us? The claim that the interference of the "white man" inevitably leads to the downfall of the indigenous tribe has also been raised. For example, the people in the tribes might not have immunity to diseases that people making contact with them have, and this could mean that making contact with them causes the tribe to get the disease and die out. This raises the question of whether it is right to contact a well-faring community without the guarantee that this interference will not end their peace and health.

The uncontacted tribes help expose the complexity of whether there should be constraints on the pursuit of knowledge. Any experiment involving human subjects requires a subject-signed participatory consent form. Consent can only be given by the tribes if they are contacted, but in this case, making contact is the thing you would want consent for, so that is not possible.



This image depicts the cover page of a fiction novel titled *Half Brother*, written by Canadian author Kenneth Oppel. In the story, a behavioural scientist and his family, wanting to research the language-learning capabilities of chimpanzees, raise an infant chimp as they would raise their own child. *Half Brother* plays out the consequences of such research in a fictional realm. Indeed, this is a key advantage of fictional works: the consequences of the treatment of test subjects can be mapped out and analysed wholly without having to deal with any unexpected, negative implications.

This case thus helps us understand the issues in the relationship between experimenters and test-subjects. One of the main questions raised by this book is whether the action of raising a chimpanzee as a human child is right. Humans and chimpanzees might share 96% of their DNA, but the ways in which infants of the two species are raised are undisputedly different. The difficulty of finding an appropriate home for the chimp once the experiment is complete must also be considered - it would likely not be equipped to live in the wild. Whereas dogs (as seen in the first image) are clearly seen as animals, in this case, the line between animal and human becomes blurred. Apes, despite not being fully human, are seen as more human than any other species; the similarity between so many of their mannerisms and our own cannot help but have us hold them in higher regard than most other animals.

We see ourselves as a modern, forward-thinking society, and embrace all knowledge-gaining and -sharing opportunities. However, this book uses a fictional situation to help show different facets of the question of whether there should be any constraints on the pursuit of knowledge, and if so what they should be. It gives us a deeper understanding of the difficulty of coming to agreements regarding this issue.