

## **Group Technology Ethics Case Study**

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## **The Infinity Gauntlet**

The Infinity Gauntlet (IG) is a technology that is being pursued by Thanos, an evil supervillain. The IG gives its wearer the power to “snap” their fingers and eliminate 50% of the universe’s population. Thanos is planning to acquire the IG and use it to do just that. His justification is that the universe is overcrowded, which has led to untold suffering due to competition for scarce resources (e.g. food, livable planets, etc.). By unilaterally choosing to use the IG to eliminate 50% of the universe’s population, Thanos believes he will create a better universe. The IG is, therefore, and incredibly powerful technology that can have significant societal impacts.

### **Section 1 – Introduction and Framing of The Technology**

The Infinity Gauntlet (IG) is a powerful artifact sought by Thanos, enabling him to erase half the universe's population with a snap of his fingers. This technology holds extraordinary power, capable of enacting drastic and irreversible changes to existence. Thanos believes this will alleviate suffering from overpopulation and resource scarcity, but such reasoning raises serious ethical concerns.

The IG’s capacity to disrupt countless lives highlights the failure to consider individual recovery. Its instantaneous nature means that the profound loss of family, community, and cultural identity occurs without warning or opportunity for healing [3]. Additionally, the technology’s sheer power raises questions about its long-term effects on societal structures and the potential for chaos in the aftermath. The IG gives the wearer the power to unilaterally eliminate 50% of the universe's population, reflecting a lack of informed consent. This feature treats sentient beings as mere tools for the vision of a better universe [4]. This disregard for autonomy underscores the irresponsible use of power and the ethical dilemma of making life-and-death choices for others without their input.

Thus, the IG not only illustrates its potential for devastation but also emphasizes the ethical dilemmas surrounding individual rights and moral responsibilities.

### **Section 2 – Ethics Analysis**

Thanos’s pursuit of the Infinity Gauntlet reflects a utilitarian perspective [3], asserting that eliminating 50% of the universe’s population will reduce suffering from overpopulation [1]. Consequentialism evaluates actions by their outcomes, focusing on maximizing “the Good” [5]. However, this approach disrupts lives on a massive scale, causing widespread, irreversible harm without considering how individuals might recover. Moreover, Thanos’s snap imposes a singular vision of a “better universe” on billions, disregarding personal freedom and autonomy, thereby undermining individual rights and dignity. Reflecting on our weekly readings and the explanations provided, our group identified two critical ethical issues: the disruption of lives without consideration for recuperation and the disregard for

personal freedom through the imposition of a singular vision of the greater good. These concerns underscore the ethical shortcomings inherent in prioritizing outcomes over individual rights and autonomy.

To illustrate the first issue, we can examine the Infinity Gauntlet from "Avengers: Infinity War." This powerful tool grants its owner's wishes without restriction or oversight, ultimately leading to shortsighted decisions that inflict irreparable harm. Thanos's actions disrupt countless lives and fail to account for the recovery from the consequences of his choices, severing bonds between friends and family. From an ethics of care perspective, his actions are unethical because they fail to value interpersonal relationships. Thanos does not incorporate care into his decision-making process. The ethics of care emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships and caregiving in ethical decision-making [19]. Moreover, the broader social impact is neglected in the use of the Infinity Gauntlet. While some may argue that overpopulation is a public concern, Thanos's choice incurs tremendous societal costs. Survivors face trauma, grief, and fear, potentially outweighing the anticipated suffering from overpopulation. Thanos's solution resembles the dam in Mozambique, which caused more harm than the original problem [20]. Eudaimonist ethics further stresses that true well-being involves the flourishing of the entire community, not just individual happiness. Thanos's willingness to sacrifice individuals for his vision ultimately harms society, increasing suffering and disrupting lives without consideration for recovery. By disregarding the impact of his actions, Thanos undermines the virtues essential for a healthy society [6]. In conclusion, Thanos's pursuit of a greater good undermines individual rights and disrupts communities, resulting in irreversible harm. This analysis highlights the dangers of prioritizing outcomes over the dignity and interconnectedness of individuals, underscoring the need for ethical decision-making that respects personal freedom and societal welfare.

Continuing with the second issue of disregarding personal freedom, The question of who gives anyone the right to impose a singular view, like Thanos in *Infinity War*, is a critical one. In the story, Thanos believes he has the authority to decide what's best for the universe, but this raises significant ethical concerns. No one has the inherent right to force their beliefs on others, especially when it leads to harm or oppression. Kant's categorical imperative encourages us to recognize and respect people as valuable in their own right, not just as tools for our goals. Thanos's plan to eliminate half of the universe's population disregards the fundamental rights of countless beings, treating them as means to an end rather than as individuals with their own values and choices [4]. According to deontological ethics, an action is considered morally good because of the characteristics of the action itself, not because of a good outcome. Thanos fails to honour the rights of individuals to live and make their own choices by imposing his singular vision for a "better" universe [2]. Additionally, from a Eudaimonist ethics standpoint, achieving true well-being is not just about individual happiness; it involves the collective flourishing of society. Thanos's actions may bring happiness for him, but he disregards the idea that a thriving society requires diverse contributions and perspectives, not a singular viewpoint [6].

## Section 3 – Ethics Design Element

Out of the two issues identified—(1) disrupting the lives of all without considering how to recuperate and (2) disregarding personal freedom by imposing a singular vision—we propose addressing the first issue with a specific design element. The Infinity Gauntlet (IG) as it currently exists allows one person, Thanos, to execute a decision that impacts the entire universe without any input from those affected.

To mitigate this issue, we suggest implementing a **democratic deliberation system** within the IG. This system would prevent unilateral decisions by requiring deliberation and consent from a representative council drawn from various civilizations in the universe. The importance of engaging with diverse stakeholders in decision-making processes is emphasized in **Value Sensitive Design** [7], where moral and ethical considerations are accounted for through participatory frameworks. This deliberation aligns with Harari's concerns over the concentration of data and power in the hands of a few [9].

The system would act as a safeguard against impulsive, destructive actions, encouraging transparency and the distribution of decision-making authority, similar to the **distributed decision-making** model discussed in ethical engineering frameworks [8]. This approach ensures that no single individual can impose their will without considering the ethical and societal implications, thus preserving the democratic integrity of the decision-making process.

## Section 4 – Design Element Defense

The proposed democratic deliberation system within the Infinity Gauntlet (IG) addresses ethical concerns by ensuring collective decision-making rather than unilateral imposition. This aligns with Value Sensitive Design (VSD), which emphasizes engaging diverse stakeholders in ethical deliberation processes [7]. By incorporating a representative council, the system mitigates the risks associated with concentrated power, echoing Harari's warning against allowing decision-making authority to rest with a single individual [9].

Furthermore, the design resonates with ethical engineering frameworks advocating for distributed decision-making to promote accountability and transparency. In situations with far-reaching consequences, collective deliberation serves as a safeguard against impulsive actions, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the ethical implications of decisions.

From a deontological perspective, this design element respects individual autonomy and dignity. Deontological ethics emphasizes adherence to moral duties and rights, asserting that actions must align with ethical principles regardless of outcomes [10]. By requiring consensus and deliberation, the proposed system upholds these imperatives, ensuring no individual's autonomy is compromised for expedience. Ultimately, by prioritizing democratic engagement and distributing authority, this design element preserves the integrity of the decision-making

process, making it both morally sound and responsive to the needs of all affected civilizations.

## Section 5 – Anticipating Objections

The proposed democratic deliberation system within the Infinity Gauntlet (IG) presents several anticipated objections and potential challenges.

Firstly, the **practical feasibility** [11], [12] of the system may be questioned. Establishing a representative council composed of civilizations from across the universe raises logistical concerns, such as determining equitable representation, managing communication across vast distances, and ensuring timely decision-making. These factors could significantly compromise the Gauntlet's operational efficiency, particularly in scenarios requiring immediate action.

Secondly, issues related to **power imbalances** [13], [14] may arise. Larger or more advanced civilizations could exert disproportionate influence over deliberations, marginalizing smaller or less developed entities. Such dominance could undermine the intended democratic fairness and inclusivity of the system, raising concerns about equitable representation and decision-making.

Additionally, the system may be vulnerable to **decision-making gridlock** [15], [16]. Requiring consensus or majority approval from a diverse body of representatives could lead to delays, particularly in high-stakes situations where rapid responses are critical. This could diminish the effectiveness of the Gauntlet's intervention in urgent matters.

Finally, from a **utilitarian perspective** [17], [18], critics may argue that prioritizing individual autonomy and deliberative processes could hinder actions taken for the greater good, especially in circumstances where swift, unilateral decisions may be deemed necessary for universal stability. Addressing these concerns will be essential to refining the proposed system.

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