

ACTIVITY

Understanding Responsibility

Responsible Research and
Innovation in Data Science
and AI





Summary

This activity has been designed to help participants reflect on a series of scenarios that constitute moral dilemmas. For each scenario, participants will need to identify the relevant moral agents and subject that are involved, and then consider what the moral responsibilities of the respective agents, as well as thinking about any potential conflicts of interest or values that may arise.

Learning Objectives

- Gain familiarity with the related concepts of 'moral agent' and 'moral subject', and how to identify them within a particular scenario.
- Learn how to identify moral responsibilities, as well as when (and why) they may come into conflict.



Instructions

Pre-requisites

To carry out this activity, you will need to understand the following two concepts:

- ✎ **Moral agent:** a person or group of people who is responsible for a particular action or decision, which is directly attributable to some morally significant event or consequence (e.g. harming another person). That is, they are the agent of the action or decision.
- ✎ **Moral subject:** a human, non-human, or otherwise physical object that has some moral status in virtue of their capacity to be affected by an action or decision.

Steps

- 1 To start you will need to choose a question that represents an ethical challenge or dilemma.

- 2 Next, you will need to identify the moral agents and moral subjects that are involved in the scenario.
 - ➔ For each moral agent, you will need to identify the set of responsibilities that they have.
 - ➔ For each moral subject, you will need to identify the ways in which they may be affected that have moral significance.

- 3 Finally, you will need to consider any conflicts or trade-offs that arise within the context of this scenario. Such trade-offs may exist between a moral agent and a moral subject, or between moral agents where there is some collective responsibility.

Example



Should I eat meat?

Agent: Yourself

Responsibilities: minimise harm to animal welfare; reduce carbon emissions

SUBJECT 1

Animals Concerns: welfare and suffering due to factory farming

SUBJECT 2

Future Generations Concerns: environmental impact due to unsustainable animal agricultural practices

SUBJECT 3

Farmers Concerns: livelihood and income

Value Tension 1:

Welfare of the animals and the environmental sustainability of present and future generations is in tension with the livelihood of farmers who depend on income from animal agriculture.

Value Tension 2:

Welfare of animals and future generations is in tension with your (possible) satisfaction of eating meat or the time constraints on your ability to learn about and prepare new plant-based meals.



Goal

The goal here is not to try to resolve the tensions or solve the question. Instead this activity has been designed as a warm-up exercise to get you thinking about the different components and processes involved in ethical reflection and deliberation. Feel free to make use of the space provided by the time to explore different ideas, and challenge yourself to think about the different perspectives that may be involved.

Tips and Guidance



Your own life and work experiences are likely the best source of scenarios that you can use for this activity, as you will be highly familiar with them. But, be careful and try to identify the possible biases that you may bring to bear on the evaluation of the scenario.



To better identify the relevant values for the scenario, think about what motivates the moral agents and subjects. What are their respective concerns, goals, or objectives?



If you're struggling to identify conflicting values, you may need to consider a broader range of moral subjects.