Software Ethical Dilemma
CPSC 311 Group Work: Slackers

Group Members

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Key Points

- The damage is something that **could happen** therefore there is a chance of it happening
- You have a few choices, you can release the software and hope it doesn't affect consumers, not release it to fix the software, and release the software and warn everyone about the bug.
- We don't know how much harm the action will cause
- Kantian (Steven) - do no harm in general
- Utilitarianism (Kevin) - which action would cause the most happiness for everyone
- Virtue ethics (Steven) - Pick your virtue and go from there
- Egoism (Daniel) - which action would make you feel good

Utilitarianism

If we had to judge it by utilitarianism standards, then we would have to take into consideration the amount of overall happiness that would occur depending on the option we choose. Based on the option of releasing the software without divulging the fact that we know of the bug, all the investors will be happy and consumers will be happy too. We get to keep our job, therefore, satisfying our happiness as well. If we postpone the software from being released, many of the investors will be unhappy with this situation, we will potentially lose our job. So by utilitarianism standards, we would release the software even with the potential chance for it to cause harm to others and have them be unhappy. The overall happiness from the software being released compared to be delaying it is higher in the long term even with the potential chance for the software bug to occur.

Egoism

Take into consideration that the reasoning behind egoism is to do what is best for my own self-interest. Therefore, it is ethically permissible. In the case where I have an option to either release a bugged software that could POTENTIALLY harm its users and possibly harm the company or delay the software and receive inevitable backlash from the consumers and my boss, putting my job at certain risk. In this case, using ethical egoism, I would release the software. I believe ethical egoism would lead to this conclusion by looking at the circumstances.

In order to act in my own interest, I need to secure my position for the time being. Releasing it would have no immediate harm on myself or the company, but there is a chance that users suffer from the bug and then myself and the company would receive the proper repercussions. There's also the chance that no one would notice, thus my decision would prove to be the most beneficial. If I were to delay it, then I would most likely lose my job and harm those who worked under me.

Kantian

The most important consideration in Kantian ethics is to both use reason and to *do no harm*. So we must consider, above all else, which alternative more successfully manages to do no harm. Our first option is to make the security flaw public. I think this is intuitively the "right" action because of its possible damage mitigation and honesty. However, we are not currently viewing this problem through the lens of virtue ethics, so we must not consider honesty. Now, let's consider the alternative; not telling anybody anything and simply releasing it. The benefit of this option is that it may do no harm whatsoever. I believe, because of this, Kantian ethics holds releasing the software to be the best option. It is true that there is the potential for harm, but there will also be harm in not releasing it. The important factor here is that there is a very real possibility of doing no harm whatsoever, making releasing the software as is the best option to satisfy the constraints of Kantian ethics.

Virtue Ethics

Viewing this question through the lens of virtue ethics is confusing. If we consider the virtue of integrity, we should certainly go public with the security flaws and fix them before release in order to maintain our own personal integrity and the integrity of our software. However, punctuality is another virtue to consider. Delivering the software late would violate the virtue of punctuality. This is hardly the only virtue in play, and we could also consider idealism, openness, prudence, reliability, responsibility, sincerity, thrift, and trust. And since there is no clear rule as far as which ethics take precedence over another, we are forced to use personal, subjective standards to weight the different virtues against each other. The drawback of this approach is that it risks becoming a kind of Rorschach test that only serves to reveal the inherent biases already present in a person. Considering this risk, I will say that virtue ethics make either choice *permissible*, but the action with more moral imperative is to reveal the security breach and fix it, as long as it may take. I believe there are too many positive virtues on the side of this option not to choose it, including idealism, openness, reliability, responsibility, sincerity, and trust.