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**Driving behavior being tracked**

In recent years we have hit the Information age. The amount of data that is harvested for any purpose has accelerated exponentially over the past decade, and the trend is staying strong. This data revolution is known as “big data.” Regulations regarding data mining are in place, but there are many cases which are not addressed. The data mining industry is moving at incredible speeds, therefore it is the engineers that must make ethical decisions in an industry that outpaces many of its regulations. A type of system being looked at very carefully by court officials are vehicles. There are many aspects that are harvested by cameras, monitors, and even the vehicle itself. The emergence of this type of scrutiny has raised privacy concerns among government officials, advocates and citizens. Cars have become much smarter in recent years, and not all of its features are for the user’s benefit.

In many cars today, there are Electronic data recorders, or EDRs. The purpose of EDRs, also called “black boxes,” is to record the status of your car in the moments before a crash. Black boxes have been appearing in cars since 1995. They have become increasingly popular since then, and as of September 1st 2014, every new car created will contain a black box that records the status of your car. The original intention of black boxes was to make cars safer by informing car manufacturers of the problems with the car after a crash. In recent years, the data is being used by attorneys to make points in lawsuits involving drivers. (USA today cars spying) Before the data of your black box is used against you, there is generally a search warrant. In some cases though, courts have ruled that there is no unreasonable search and seizure in taking data from a box at an accident scene. (Abelson)

The decision to be made is: Are black boxes acceptable and just to install in all cars, giving nobody the choice to refuse it. To make this decision from an Act Utilitarian standpoint, we will attempt to evaluate the overall utility, or happiness of society involving black boxes. The good that the black boxes bring is justice, safety, and as a result, peace of mind. In a courtroom, if a black box is reliable and proven to read it’s inputs accurately, then the results of that black box can be used as reliable evidence and be very useful in that in takes much of the hearsay out of the equation. This way, the decision in the courtroom will be far less likely to falsely condemn an innocent person. This will provide happiness to the innocent, and justice to the wrongdoer. Black boxes also improve the safety of your vehicle. When a car manufacturer harvests the black box from totaled cars, the engineers will use that data to improve the safety of the cars from that point on. Through improved justice and safety, people will have more peace of mind, which will increase their happiness. Outside of peace of mind, there is also increased quality of the features of a vehicle that are not safety related. Black boxes could pick up on inputs that are not working correctly. For example, if many black boxes are receiving inputs that say the fuel door is open when it is not, car manufacturers will become aware of this and fix the problem for the next iteration of that model. This will result in an increase in happiness in the consumers of the vehicle. On the negative side of the issue, black boxes will cause unhappiness in the people that wish not to have their driving habits monitored on a daily basis. For such people, they might feel as though someone is intruding on them. This will undoubtedly cause unhappiness. By the Utilitarian ethical reasoning, the decision to add technology that tracks driving habits before a crash seems to be an ethical decision.

Looking at this from a Rule Utilitarian point of view, the decision is a bit more difficult. For this analysis we will be focusing on a few of the Utilitarian rules from Gert’s list of rules. On the positive side, installing black boxes would enforce the rule: “Do not deceive.” The box would eliminate much of the hearsay in a courtroom and allow an objective fairness to determine a case more strongly than a strong and dishonest argument from a lawyer. Another rule that the device could enforce is to “Obey the law.” Black boxes would also hold people responsible for a reckless mistakes that they make in driving, if they were being reckless, such as not wearing a seatbelt, or speeding. On the negative side of the Rule Utilitarian system, the rule: “Do not deprive of freedom,” is denied by implementing an act the puts black boxes into all vehicles because a person does not have the choice to purchase a new car and not have their driving habits monitored. I can only make the conclusion that implementing the box is a net benefit to society because it enforces two rules and only contradicts one.

Both act and rule utilitarian ethical reasoning come to the conclusion that the black boxes being installed into cars are a net benefit to society, regardless of the privacy concerns behind them.