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What Is Going On?

How can I more carefully consider the impacts of my work in order to aptly determine which jobs or opportunities are morally justifiable?

It is difficult to put into words how important technology has become in our modern world. It is equally difficult to acknowledge a diverse range of perspectives when working in this digital world. It may be helpful, therefore, to have a comprehensive framework upon which to decide what work is morally justifiable. In their respective journals, both Paul Scherz and Thomas W. Ogletree offer contrasting yet complementary perspectives which build this framework. By considering the moral sources of Christian tradition and those who exhibit cries for liberation, building a framework for which to use in an answer to this question may become easier.

In Scherz's journal, *The Challenge of Technology to Moral Theology,* we are introduced to moral theology not by its definition, but by its weakness. It is argued that modern technology reshapes human experience and social structures in ways that moral theology struggles to address. In many ways, this is a very astute observation. The aforementioned ubiquitousness of technology in our modern world feeds this struggle. Scherz puts it poignantly, stating "Digital technologies touch on all aspects of moral theology: virtue, justice, sexuality, family, work, warfare, and politics. They are reshaping our lives" (Page 240). Later, he adds that "the analysis of technology in moral theology has been less than robust." (Page 240). Taking advantage of the polymorphic nature of encyclicals, Scherz uses Pope Francis's Laudato Si' to elaborate upon the

technocratic paradigm (Page 240-241). Through Pope Francis's words, the technocratic paradigm is identified as a novel ethical issue that moral theology must confront — a problem that traditional frameworks don't address. This challenges moral theology to evolve. It is clear that, in order to carefully consider the impacts of technology and one's work in the digital world, our framework must build off of moral theology, and by extension, Christian tradition.

Scherz also uses structural social analysis to emphasize "sociotechnical systems" — technology's involvement in society. In doing so, he refers to different areas of human social experience. This includes but is not limited to: history, such as industrial modernity, social frameworks like surveillance capitalism, and policies, including bureaucratic governments favoring the powerful. Scherz critiques how these systems historically evolved and now dominate through corporate and governmental control. This is important to keep in mind. Finally, Scherz alludes to a real and extreme example of governmental oppression through technology: China's social credit system. "Technological surveillance as a tool of regulation and control extends beyond the corporate realm into governance and civil society, with China launching a system of social credit that could influence nearly every aspect of citizens' lives." (Page 239). While this dystopian reality feels far from Christian tradition, it isn't. This dystopia extends from a lack of Christian values and ethical deliberation by those who originally implemented it. Unfortunately, this dystopia shows that it is a privilege to choose jobs at free will and deny opportunities which lead to such horrors. A young developer in China may not even be able to deny such an unjustifiable job; they may share the same moral question, but be barred from even asking it.

Privilege to choose must not be confused with having no obstacles in the way of choosing. Ogletree's journal *Corporate Capitalism and the Common Good* highlights how our

corporate culture suppresses the cries of the people whom we affect, and at times even our own. Even though we are able to choose our jobs, we are purposely made distant from those it affects, or even more likely, held captive by companies. The potential for companies to be catalysts is prevalent in Ogletree's writing, where he mentions an example: "To avoid labor-union wages, industrial firms have moved significant portions of their productive activity beyond U.S. borders, where supplies of low-skilled labor are plentiful" (Page 90). This is a very real scenario. What if a software engineer is told to implement a translation feature on some of the company's internal tools? What if they were never told that this is due to the company's questionable decision to outsource their labour – causing hardworking Americans to lose their jobs? Even more so, what if they were forced to comply, otherwise fired and denied the paychecks they need to live? Motivated by corporate greed, it's easy for a company to make such decisions while employees remain equally powerless as those calling for liberation themselves. In this morbidly ironic case, both the employees and those affected by the company are victims. While in different scenarios, both cry for liberation. Although times are changing, there will always be companies that serve to be the same variable in this metaphorical equation. This excerpt from Ogletree's analysis further informs our framework by showing that it is important to maintain a Hobbseian view of companies. No company can be inherently moral.

Our framework must account for another case: the content of the work being done. Obviously it is important to retain a skeptical view of the positions or opportunities one may accept, but this moral question also should further one's deliberation about the work being done in these positions. The motivation behind this lies in the words of James Joyce when he asserted "in the particular, contains the universal". This raises the question: might one do their particular or even mundane work ethically? Ogletree offers insight by stating "The principle of mutuality, I

would suggest, funds the ethical dimensions of market exchanges. It displays the importance of truthfulness and reliability in such exchanges: the full disclosure of information pertinent to an exchange, the refusal to market products that are unsafe, or to deceive and mislead potential customers in order to make a sale." (Page 84). Here, Ogletree emphasizes transparency. In the shoes of a developer, this calls for ethical coding at every step of the process. Synthesizing a need for "ethical coding" from Ogleree's words is indeed transitive, as he didn't directly imply this. This initial call for transparency comes from an economist. While being offered from a completely different industry, it is justifiable that Ogletree's point transcends economics. We can clearly see that he would insist upon truthfulness and safety in the software industry, rejecting profit-driven deception. His mention of "the refusal to market products that are unsafe" (Page 84) contrasts with a "users need not know" tech ethos. This concept of considering everything at every step of the way does not just pertain to maintaining transparency. Coming full circle, Pope Francis first introduced this concept in Laudato Si', hoping to promote more care for the environment. Socially, the emerging calls for more environmental protection suggests us to meditate on a final dilemma. Many, including Ogletree, argue that "The competitive drive to reduce production and delivery costs also leads to environmental harm." (Page 90). In the scope of the moral question, harm to the environment will continue to happen even if all of the work being done and the results of such work have good intentions. A final addition to our framework might be the infamous euphemism "the road to hell is paved with good intentions".

With so many additions to a possible framework for deliberation, it may seem that this moral question is infinitely harder to answer. While both Scherz and Ogletree come from very contrasting positions and offer various points, their thoughts help inform us on a very important area: edge cases. Although this admittedly complicates any potential answer, it is a necessity that

these edge cases be addressed. By considering the technocratic paradigm and the social position of those asking this question, one might be able to address different circumstances previously not considered. By recognizing the inherent problems caused by corporations and by emphasizing the importance of maintaining transparency in the face of this inevitable evil, a potential answer may be stronger — harder to avoid and ignore. In total, the answer to what jobs or positions are justifiable will not be definitive, but rather an extension of the framework built here. Despite it being impossible to cover all the options in this ever-complicated world, adhering to such a framework will ideally be its own reward.

Works Cited

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