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What Should Be Done?

What moral obligations do I have when choosing a job or career opportunity, and how ought the potential impacts of my work on others influence my decisions?

When answering any question, having and using the right sources represents only half of the process. An equally important part of deliberation is to be able to analyze a particular approach using precedent. This precedent, therefore, can be found in ethical theories. For many years, humans have followed distinct constructive theories which influence not only how but *why* we act in certain ways. When prompted to answer my moral question, ChatGPT not only answered within its expected confines, but also referenced and used these ethical theories. As they are naturally constructive, these ethical theories likely powered the bulk of ChatGPT's internal reasoning. It is now up to us to critically analyze this reasoning, as well as draw a conclusion on what theories would be useful in the ultimate answer to my moral question.

Utilitarianism seeks to maximize good. While this is an arbitrary definition, we will use it, as the ambiguity of this definition will help make it more visible in ChatGPT's response. A moral obligation it highlighted was reflection, specifically on how one's work affects the well-being of others; leading to a search of "roles that align with your values and minimize harm". (OpenAI ChatGPT). A notable segment of this response is where ChatGPT suggests that one should seek to minimize harm. It is obvious that "minimizing harm" is the contrapositive to maximizing good. This conveniently matches our predefined notion of utilitarianism. Now, we

will refine this definition of utilitarianism: an ethical theory which promotes the greatest good for the greatest number. Further references in ChatGPT's response highlights a globalization of the impacts of one's work. When referencing the impacts to "society, individuals, and the environment" and impacts to the "common good" (OpenAI ChatGPT), ChatGPT considers the potential impact not just for one individual, but for many. This logic follows from our revised definition of utilitarianism. From the very superficial response which ChatGPT provides, utilitarianism already provides a strong foundation for this question's response.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argued that virtue is the mean between two vices. While simple, this theory of virtue has remained strong for millenia. At heart, my moral question is a personal question. ChatGPT recognizes this when it states that my "decision should balance personal fulfillment with the responsibility to contribute positively" (OpenAI ChatGPT). Keeping virtue theory in mind, the most important word here is "balance". To find this balance is to discover the mean between personal fulfillment and responsibility. To do this, we will consider the vices of each. A vice, or excess, of personal fulfillment would be greed. Similarly, a vice may be a deficiency: self-degradation. The same process applies to responsibility. A lack of responsibility would be carelessness, while an excess (found in obsession) is equally dangerous. While utilitarianism introduces a moral obligation to consider the potential impact of one's decision, we see how virtue theory begs the person to be well-rounded. Ironically similar to how one should use a tool like ChatGPT, a good answer requires well-rounded input; virtue theory is therefore important for deliberation on my moral question.

Initial formulation of a framework which may be helpful in answering this moral question was introduced in my "What Is Going On" essay. In this paper, we came to the conclusion that all companies or corporations cannot be inherently moral. This was done by

considering a hypothetical situation where a software engineer was commanded to develop a system which did not align with their own values. If the engineer failed to comply, they would be fired and their family would not have enough money to survive. While extreme, this is a very apt scenario — asking us to consider the greater good. Our previous definition of utilitarianism can be expanded upon by considering where it falls short as a proceduralist theory. In *Crash Course Philosophy*, it is mentioned that “utilitarians suggest that we make our moral decisions from the position of a benevolent, disinterested spectator.” ([CrashCourse](#)). Would a disinterested spectator care about whether the developer cannot survive versus countless others being negatively affected? Is the greatest good truly palpable here? At first glance, it seems so; the developer should bite the bullet to help their family. Utilitarianism alone, however, presents a more dangerous argument: they should *not*. This is because a deadly sin in utilitarianism is considering context, as the short excerpt from the Crash Course video highlights. While utilitarianism is useful in helping realize the greatest good is necessary, any potential answer would be impractical without allowing a healthy consideration of context.

To properly consider context when answering my moral question, it should be noted that the question itself is polymorphic. Times change, as do companies, people, and societal norms. Within the constraints of my question, all these variables serve as important context. Discerning what moral obligations are necessary for choosing a justifiable job requires a healthy balance between our predefined framework introduced in “What Is Going On” as well as an understanding of this aforementioned context. It is hard to ignore the resurfacing of the word “balance” in this consideration. Returning to virtue ethics, some words from Luke Bretherton highlights why being virtuous is helpful to our question: “A virtuous person is able to act in a way that they are directed toward a truly flourishing life in any given circumstance or context.”

(Bretherton, Pg 206). Balancing ever-changing context with our strict framework requires being virtuous. Considering the context and nothing else may create an ill-advised decision. Consider once again the example of the troubled developer stuck between a metaphorical rock and a hard place. If considering only context, the developer would most certainly choose to keep their job to support their family, and bite the metaphorical bullet. Conversely, if considering only our predefined framework, the developer would act as a utilitarian and put their family in danger. If the developer is to make a truly apt choice, they would need to be virtuous and consider a balance of both. As ChatGPT's response initially highlighted, this question is as important to those affected as it is to the person asking it.

We see in both ChatGPT and the readings covered through our study of ethical theories that there can be no singular process which leads to the perfect answer to my moral question. The limits of utilitarian logic were made very clear; the lack of context provides a crippling and dangerous answer, however a useful start. Virtue theory helps fill certain gaps within the utilitarianist response by urging the individual to maintain a healthy balance between two vices: context and rigidity. This context is also inclusive to one's social location. Our analogy of the troubled developer shows this, as the social location of the developer influences the potential response. If the developer was in a more preferable position in society, the answer might be easier. Fortunately I am not within that scope, however there are many who are. Therefore, considering context while not being blinded by it, as well as maintaining rigidity to ground a particular response, the consideration of what obligations are present in choosing between evaluating the justifiability of jobs and opportunities becomes more well-advised not just for me, but for all individuals. Through these considerations, *all* who ask this question can appropriately decide what should be done.

ChatGPT's Response

Using GPT-4.5

Prompt: Consider this moral question: What moral obligations do I have when choosing a job or career opportunity, and how ought the potential impacts of my work on others influence my decisions? Please give a few sentences as a response to this question.

Response: When choosing a job or career, you have a moral obligation to reflect on how your work will affect the well-being of others, seeking roles that align with your values and minimize harm. This involves being mindful of the direct and indirect impacts your profession may have on society, individuals, and the environment. Your decision should balance personal fulfillment with the responsibility to contribute positively to the community, ensuring that your career choices help rather than hinder the common good.

Works Cited

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