



# McGill

**ECSE 557**

**Intro to Ethics of Intelligent Systems**

## **Assignment 1:**

**Fundamentals, principles, and values**

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## Table of Contents

- |  |     |
|--|-----|
| 1. Part 1.1: Ethical dilemma case study          | p.2 |
| 2. Part 1.2: Use of AI throughout the assignment | p.7 |

## **Part 1.1: Ethical dilemma case study**

1. The direct stakeholders for this case study are :

- The children that will be interacting with the GFM (whether they were offered the toy by their parents or Metell directly).
- The parents that will buy the GFM.
- The Metell company which sells the GFM.
- The child psychology researchers which will use the data collected by the GFM's for research purposes.

The indirect stakeholders for this case study are :

- The engineers that will develop the companion app as they will indirectly interact with the customers (via the product)
- The engineers responsible for allowing the parents to download the companion app (for instance, the engineering team responsible for letting certain apps being downloadable on the app store), as they will indirectly interact with the customers (via the product).
- The engineers that will develop the technology behind the recording functionality of the GFM as they will indirectly interact with the customers (via the product).
- The homeless shelter as an entity responsible for the homeless people it provides a service to.
- The team in charge of the homeless shelters in the San Francisco Bay Area, as it oversees what is deemed acceptable as a donation to the shelters.
- The US Consumer Product Safety Commission CPSC, as it is the government entity responsible for the protection of the public (on a federal level) from unreasonable risks of serious injury or death from consumer products under its jurisdiction, including products that pose hazard or can harm children.

2. The GFM embodies some conflicting values. On the one hand, the GFM is designed to express empathy and safety with regards to the children it will interact with, thus making it a comforting and well intentioned machine.

On the other hand, the GFM records the children talking about their fears and shares those recordings. It is invading their privacy for a third party benefit. Therefore, the GFM also raises concerns regarding breaches in the children's right to privacy.

3. One could identify multiple points of tension in this case study :

- a. The first one would be the point of tension between the need for data collection for therapeutic purposes and the respect of the privacy of the children playing with the GFM.

On the one hand, the collection of data on what fears children might have, and how children process those fears, can be valuable for research purposes which in

turn might help us understand more aspects of children psychology. The research (or at least the way it is portrayed in the document) is meant to develop strategies to make sure that children are better followed in their psychologic growth, which is to the children's benefit.

On the other hand, collecting data on children's fears without any explicit consent and without explaining to them the stakes at hand is a breach of their fundamental right to privacy. Although one could argue that the children could benefit from their parents being made aware of certain issues (not all) they might be going through (as the parents are expected to have the well-being of their child at the center of their pre-occupations), the argument is harder to defend for the researchers obtaining these recordings.

In terms of the impact on the different stakeholders, although parents and researchers might appreciate the insights given on children psychology, the collection of such sensitive data would also cause some discomfort and distrust on the children's end which in turn can prove to be counterproductive and cause other harm.

- b. Another point of tension in this scenario is the tension between Metell's responsibility towards the public, and its financial objectives. Indeed, although one might be tempted to think that Metell is selling the GFM to assist parents and researchers in alleviating fears in children, one should also nuance this perspective by noting that Metell's sole objective by selling the GFM is profit. Therefore, even if some good was generated for the public, the main point of Metell's campaign is to generate profit.

Therefore, a possible consequence of this marketing campaign would be a strengthening of the public's concerns over the company's real motives and potential uses of data. Metell could also be more generally challenged on its activities (as a result of the public's distrust), which might impact the image of the company and thus its financial situation.

- c. Finally, another point of tension would be the tension between the desire to help the homeless community of the Bay area, and the importance for the shelter to be as efficient as possible in terms of costs. The GFM is an expensive toy, and one that can help children alleviate some of their fears. Gifting GFM's to the homeless shelter is a way of allowing children to play with a toy that they would probably not have the means to afford by themselves.

Still, one could ask the question of whether Metell would have been as inclined to help the homeless community of the bay area if they were not profiting from

it. One might also argue that the homeless population within the shelter might have more inclination towards using the product as it is gifted for free. Then, one could suspect that Metell would essentially be receiving more data and more user feedback from people in a situation of vulnerability, mainly benefitting the company.

Furthermore, one could also say that the GFM could be used in certain cases as a substitute to more adequate methods of caring for the children to lower costs, which goes against the well-being of the children.

4. From the utilitarian perspective, the proposal of the toy makers is completely justified. On the one hand, Metell will benefit financially from selling their products. On the other, the researchers in children psychology will be able to use more data for their research thus furthering the possible discoveries in children psychology. Moreover, parents will be more informed of what their children's fears are. Therefore, they will be better equipped to assist their children. Finally, the children will be able to have their fears alleviated by the toy, in addition to receiving more adequate support from their parents and having an improved mental health. This implies that from a utilitarian perspective, the proposal of the toy makers is the one that does the most good for the most people.

One could also raise that the utilitarian perspective does not take into consideration the morality of the means deployed to achieve this greater good, but focuses only on the achieved end result. This theory also implies that any action would be justified to generate this end result. For example, any breach in confidentiality, or selling of the data collected for financial benefit would theoretically be justified by the utilitarianism perspective.

5. From a deontological perspective, one would not be able to justify Metell's marketing strategy. Indeed, according to deontological principles, no end result would justify the intrusion into someone's privacy, as it is not a moral action. The deontological perspective suggests that it does not matter what the end result is, nothing would justify considering an immoral action such as invading someone's benefit (especially when it comes to children who do not have a clear understanding of the stakes involved in such a situation). This is also even more true in the case of the homeless children of the bay area, as these individuals are in an even more critical and vulnerable situation. With regards to the deontological perspective, the impact of such a decision will be a distrust from the children regarding their parents and potentially researchers as a result of the invasion of their privacy.

This theory also implies that in no scenario is the data collection on a children's fears the right thing to do. One might argue that if pushed to the extreme, this theory would justify letting the children face their fears alone for as long as they are not consciously

vocal about them, or do not provide explicit consent for allowing someone to help them this way.

6. From a virtue ethics standpoint, I think that it is not necessarily immoral to give the data from the GFM to child psychology researchers. However, such a decision would have to be taken after a thorough conversation with all the stakeholders involved, insuring their consent to have that data shared.

In our case, there is no mention of Metell explicitly asking for the consent of the parents or the children before deciding to share the recordings to child psychology researchers. A more transparent process from a virtue ethics point of view would be one where Metell specifically asks consent for the sharing of the data recordings of the GFM for research purposes, and offering a proper way of opting out of sharing the recordings if desired.

## **Part 1.2: Use of AI throughout the assignment**

AI has been used during the completion of this assignment in the following manner :

- A first draft was done completely without the use of AI (Part 1 and 2)
- That draft was then reviewed thoroughly (still without the use of AI) mainly with the TA's during the tutorial, and a second draft was generated.
- Then, that draft has been compared to the input of a LLM, such as ChatGPT, to provide another angle to the answers of some questions (in Part 1), and to see if there was more efficient ways of generating code for the Part 2 of this assignment.
- Finally, a final draft was generated combining the most interesting insights from draft 2 and the output results of AI LLM's.
- Then, that last draft was reviewed (without AI), and properly formatted and commented.