Avery Peiffer

COE 1530

HW 4-5

**1.4:** There are obvious ways in which this app can do harm, mostly concerning privacy and data collection. However, what I see as an insidious, more dangerous type of harm done by this app is its ability to effectively control Karen’s life by harvesting her data. The specificity of the data collected about her purchases, quantities, and routes taken is somewhat dystopian, as it incentivizes the company to funnel Karen’s preferences into a hyperlinear routine, from which it is ‘not correct’, it can be argued, for her to stray. It is when the app moves from coordinating Karen’s route efficiently to collecting data about her purchases that it becomes harmful to Karen’s agency; that is, she no longer needs to make choices about this aspect of her life, because they are all made for her by this app.

I think there is an important distinction to be drawn here, because there are existing apps that have similar functionalities. The Chipotle app, for example, saves users’ order details and gives them the option to order the same items again. I do not see this as problematic because Chipotle is not incentivized to get the user to order the same thing over and over; the user is still allowed to have their agency in selecting their meal. And while Chipotle would love for users to order frequently using the app, even offering promotions and rewards programs for them to do so, it can do nothing about the thousands of other restaurants that can make the same offers. By contrast, Errand Whiz is incentivized to steer Karen clear of making choices that are outside the specific routine it has laid out for her – if she were to do this, the app would then lose its usefulness. Essentially, the app serves no purpose unless it is homogenizing a person’s life to the point of dehumanizing them.

**1.5:** I believe this capability for harm that Errand Whiz possesses is due to ethical failings of the individuals who developed it. They prioritized efficiency and predictability over choices and spontaneity. In philosophical terms, they are operating from an extremely consequentialist point of view, and a twisted one at that. It is true that data-driven approaches can be used to improve people’s lives; however, the actual improvement has severe diminishing returns relative to the amount of data collected. Collecting data as specific as the quantities of purchases an individual makes begins to erode their rights to privacy and agency over their own life. Additionally, there is too much of an emphasis on collecting data for the single purpose of selling it. In doing so, the Errand Whiz team neglects the Kantian principle of not using people as means to some end.

**1.6:** I do not think the Errand Whiz app can exist ethically in its current terms. At best, it is little more than a route optimizer that sells user data to third-party advertisers. At worst, it turns people into data points that only exist to live out the routines it calculates. Unfortunately, I think the bar to clear in order to appear ethical in legal terms is to simply ask for the user’s permission before collecting all of this data. It is unclear that user permission alone makes these acts ethical, though it will likely be viewed that way legally. For example, a user could not understand the full extent of what is happening as their data is being collected and could thus not know the exact ramifications of giving their permission. Just because the data collection undertaken by Errand Whiz can improve the efficiency of an individual’s life does not mean it is ethical in the long run. We can see this type of thinking manifested in *A Brave New World*, where agreeable and comfortable ideas can reduce society to predictable humans with no agency.