

CSC 163: Computing, Ethics, and Society

Chapter 9

Normative Ethics Exercises Solution

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Exercise: Drunk driving revisited

Amanda has had a few drinks. Utilities: taking the bus = -1 (certain). Driving: gets home safely, $+1$, with probability 0.98 ; fatal accident, -1000 , with probability 0.02 .

- (a) Compute the expected utility of each choice.
- (b) What does the utilitarian recommend?
- (c) For which accident probability p are the two choices equally good?

Choice	Expected utility
Bus	
Drive	

Exercise Solution: Drunk driving revisited

- (a) Bus: **-1**. Drive: $0.98 \times 1 + 0.02 \times (-1000) = 0.98 - 20 = \mathbf{-19.02}$.
- (b) **Take the bus**: higher expected utility.
- (c) $(1 - p) \times 1 + p \times (-1000) = -1 \rightarrow 1 - 1001p = -1 \rightarrow p = 2/1001 \approx \mathbf{0.002 (0.2 \%)}$.
- Even a tiny accident probability makes driving worse when the downside is this large.

Choice	Expected utility
Bus	-1
Drive	-19.02

Exercise: Moral considerations

Name the moral consideration illustrated: constraint, obligation, positive right, negative right, partiality, impartiality, instrumental good, intrinsic good.

Example	Consideration
Never lying, even when a lie would be convenient	
Keeping a promise you have made	
A claim on the community to access education, food or shelter	
A claim not to be censored or discriminated against	
Favoring your own children's welfare over strangers'	
Valuing every individual life equally	
Money, valued for what it can buy	
Love or pleasure, valued in and of itself	

Exercise Solution: Moral considerations

Constraints prohibit actions; obligations require actions. Positive rights require others to act (education, food, shelter); negative rights require others to abstain (censorship, discrimination).

Example	Consideration
Never lying, even when a lie would be convenient	Constraint
Keeping a promise you have made	Obligation
A claim on the community to access education, food or shelter	Positive right
A claim not to be censored or discriminated against	Negative right
Favoring your own children's welfare over strangers'	Partiality
Valuing every individual life equally	Impartiality
Money, valued for what it can buy	Instrumental good
Love or pleasure, valued in and of itself	Intrinsic good

Exercise: Utilitarianism vs deontology

Which theory does each statement express, or which theory does it criticize? Answer: utilitarianism, deontology, critique of utilitarianism, critique of deontology.

Statement	Answer
The right action is the one that increases overall wellbeing the most	
Torture is forbidden, whatever the consequences	
If your money helps others more than it helps you, you have no reason to keep it	
Nozick's Experience Machine	
A procedure is justified if the good effect is intended, not the bad (Doctrine of Double Effect)	
Alice is not responsible for Bob's theft she merely witnessed (act vs omission)	
There is no clear, non-arbitrary number of lives that is "enough" to override a constraint	
We cannot reliably calculate future utility values	

Exercise Solution: Utilitarianism vs deontology

Utilitarianism: consequences and wellbeing, impartially. Deontology: constraints, obligations, intentions, autonomy.

Statement	Answer
The right action is the one that increases overall wellbeing the most	Utilitarianism
Torture is forbidden, whatever the consequences	Deontology
If your money helps others more than it helps you, you have no reason to keep it	Critique of utilitarianism
Nozick's Experience Machine	Critique of utilitarianism
A procedure is justified if the good effect is intended, not the bad (Doctrine of Double Effect)	Deontology
Alice is not responsible for Bob's theft she merely witnessed (act vs omission)	Deontology
There is no clear, non-arbitrary number of lives that is "enough" to override a constraint	Critique of deontology
We cannot reliably calculate future utility values	Critique of utilitarianism

Exercise: True or false

For each statement write T or F. If it is false, correct it with a few words.

Statement	T / F	Correction (if false)
Moral relativism says one single moral code applies to every culture		
Instrumental goods are valuable in and of themselves		
A revealed preference illustrates our actions, not our intentions		
Most modern moral theories are partial		
Under the Doctrine of Double Effect, a predictably bad outcome can be permitted if only the good effect is intended		
For utilitarianism, wellbeing is one of several intrinsic goods, and the agent's friends count most		

Exercise Solution: True or false

Each statement: 1 point for T/F, 1 point for the correction.

Statement	T / F	Correction (if false)
Moral relativism says one single moral code applies to every culture	F	It says there is no objective standard of morality applying to all people in all situations
Instrumental goods are valuable in and of themselves	F	Intrinsic goods are; instrumental goods are valuable for their benefits
A revealed preference illustrates our actions, not our intentions	T	—
Most modern moral theories are partial	F	Most are impartial: they value individual lives equally
Under the Doctrine of Double Effect, a predictably bad outcome can be permitted if only the good effect is intended	T	—
For utilitarianism, wellbeing is one of several intrinsic goods, and the agent's friends count most	F	Wellbeing is the only intrinsic good, and everyone's wellbeing is weighed impartially