

Case Analyses, B&R Chs. 4-5

Review the material from Chapter 6, especially how we measure utility or happiness.

Below are 4 ethically-loaded scenarios. **For each scenario** (so, 4 times total):

1. *Briefly* describe (in a sentence or two) **two possible courses of action** that could be followed in the scenario.
 - 1.1. “In the decision of whether or not to skip class on a whim, I can either skip class on a whim or go to class.”
2. For each of the two possible courses of action, identify and *briefly* explain (in no more than 3 sentences each):
 - 2.1. the **scope** of the action, or how many people are affected by the action,
 - 2.2. the **benefits or positive utility** (+) of the action (0-10; about how beneficial was it?), and
 - 2.3. the **cost or negative utility** (-) of the action (-10-0; about how costly was it?)
 - 2.4. Then calculate the **total utility** for each course of action:
Total utility = (scope) x (benefits + cost)
 - 2.5. Skip class on a whim:
Scope: 1 (if I’m not in class, nobody else will really be affected)
Benefits: +2 (skipping class gives me a small amount of freetime)
Cost: -3 (skipping class makes me miss material that would help with assignments)

Total utility = (scope) x (benefits + cost) = (1) x (2 - 3) = -1

Go to class:
Scope: 1 (going to class only affects me)
Benefits: +3 (I learn material in class that helps with assignments and helps my grade)
Cost: -2 (I lose time and have to pay attention in class)

Total utility = (1) x (3 - 2) = +1
3. Conclude (in a sentence or two) by telling **which course of action promotes the most overall utility**, or which course of action has the consequence of promoting the greatest good for the greatest number of people.
 - 3.1. “In the decision of whether or not to skip class on a whim, more overall utility is promoted if I go to class, making it the right thing to do.”

Some tips for good writing (and a good grade):

- Address **all 3** aspects of the prompt.
- **Include a word count** for each scenario. Be sure it's between 120-180 words, no more than 240.
- Pay attention to **grammar, spelling, sentence structure**, etc.
- Write as though you were **speaking** - be **conversational**, not wordy and formal.
- **Do not try to sound smart** - this will only make you sound silly and upset your grader.
- Be sure that you're expressing yourself clearly - **write the paper for your peers**, not your professor.
- **Revise** your rough draft at least once before submitting it; do the same with your final version - "The first draft of anything is \$h!+" - Ernest Hemingway.
- **Assume ignorance** on the part of your audience (me).
- Avoid posing **rhetorical questions** - I don't want to have to think about whatever answer you have in mind. If you're going to raise rhetorical questions, give an answer.
- Be **concise**, but thorough. **Trim** the excess. **Organize** your thoughts.

Cases and Scenarios (Identify the scenario you're writing about by these titles):

1. Charity vs. iPad (B&R pg. 127)
2. Should Your Next Car Be a Hybrid? (B&R pg. 129)
3. Factory Farming and Animal Suffering (B&R pgs. 130-131)
4. Torture Lite (B&R pgs. 132-133)

Case 1

Charity vs. iPad

Josh has his eye on the latest iPad and has been saving up his earnings from the tutoring job he works at his college. Although he's been really looking forward to getting this new toy, he's now having second thoughts. Joe is an international studies major and also a member of the international student club. Just last week, his friend Samesh made a presentation to the club about Kenya students who can't afford to finish high school. In Kenya, attending school is mandatory, but since it costs money, many people cannot afford it. Samesh proposed that the club start collecting for a reputable charity that sponsors Kenyan high school students. Both Josh and most of the club felt they really wanted to help; still, Josh also would like that new iPad. He is torn, but realizes that by donating the iPad money to the charity, he could do a lot more good than by just spending it for himself.

Case 3

Should Your Next Car Be a Hybrid?

Hybrid cars—cars powered by a small gas engine and a battery—are now considered a mainstream alternative to a regular car. Their current market share, according to various Internet sites, is about 3.5%. The main factor driving America's growing interest in hybrids is probably fluctuating gas prices, although it would be nice to think that we are also becoming more "green" conscious. Since hybrid cars use less fuel, they also release fewer pollutants into the air. Of course, pollutants are still created by the electric generating facilities used to charge hybrid batteries.

So, should you consider getting a hybrid? Act utilitarianism would answer this question by comparing the main advantages and disadvantages of owning a regular car to owning a hybrid. One nice benefit to the owner is that a hybrid saves money on fuel and so can soften the impact of future surges in gas prices. For example, the 2014 Toyota Prius has an average fuel economy of fifty-three highway miles per gallon, twice what most other cars can offer. In addition, many states offer tax advantages for buying a hybrid.

One disadvantage to hybrids is that they are more expensive than regular cars, even with the tax advantages. Also, because hybrid engines contain more electronics, repairs can cost more than for conventional cars. In addition, the price of replacing a hybrid battery is probably not cost effective (current estimates say the batteries should last up to 100,000 miles). Meanwhile, some environmentalists object that the production and disposal of lithium batteries is not environmentally friendly.

Still, there are several nonmonetary benefits to hybrid cars. Our using less gas could reduce or maybe even eliminate our dependence on foreign oil from some of the world's most unstable regions. It could also reduce air pollution. Gasoline exhaust causes respiratory problems, increases the risk of cancer and asthma, and can harm people's immune systems. Reducing air pollution would also help put the brakes on climate change, since carbon dioxide, the main component of automobile exhaust, is primarily responsible for greenhouse warming. Limiting pollution may become a major benefit, since there's growing evidence that climate change is already melting the earth's ice caps, warming the oceans, intensifying world weather patterns, allowing disease-carrying mosquitoes to spread northward, and destroying a large number of animal and plant species.

Electric cars are another emerging option; these promise many of the same desirable effects as hybrids. Electrics presently cost substantially more than hybrids, although that didn't stop Tesla buyers in 2016 from putting down deposits on new Tesla cars that wouldn't even be manufactured for another year or two. In any case, and given the many very negative effects being fueled by gasoline automobiles, our moving from conventional cars to either hybrids or electrics may soon not merely be an option, but a moral imperative.

Case 4

Factory Farming and Animal Suffering

“Factory farming” refers to the concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) used to produce the foods most Americans like best: chicken, beef, and pork. The practice is widespread, because about 9 billion chickens and half a billion turkeys are raised for human consumption in the United States each year. Let’s look at these farming practices in a little more detail.⁹

When raised on a CAFO, few chickens or turkeys ever catch a glimpse of the outside world in their lifetimes (which run about six weeks for chickens and a little longer for turkeys). To save space (and thus money), these poultry are raised in pens that provide about half a square foot for each chicken and less than three square feet for each turkey. When the birds are grown, they don’t have enough room to even stretch their wings.

Perhaps because they’re so close together or because they are bored stiff, these birds can get rather feisty. To prevent them from injuring each other, their beaks are cut off. For turkeys, the tips of their toes are clipped as well—without using anesthetic. To prevent infection (which can rapidly spread in such crowded conditions), the birds are given heavy doses of antibiotics. These antibiotics are also necessary because the pens normally remain quite unsanitary. As you can imagine, this also produces a pretty horrible stench, mainly from bird feces.

Both chickens and turkeys have been genetically altered to grow faster and bigger. A faster turnover in birds allows for faster profits, which helps keep the cost of meat lower for the consumer. Fatter birds also mean fatter profits. Unfortunately, some chickens grow so heavy that their legs collapse under their own weight. Turkeys grow breasts so large (Americans prefer breast meat!) that they can’t reproduce normally; they must be artificially inseminated. Turkeys are also prone to falling down and may be injured by other turkeys stepping on them.

When the birds are brought to the slaughterhouse, they are dumped from their crates onto conveyer belts, and some fall off. Because of the speed at which workers process the birds, the fallen birds may not get picked up again; as a

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⁹The information for this case has been gathered from the website of Farm Sanctuary, accessed August 27, 2016, <http://www.factoryfarming.com>, and from the book by Peter Singer and Jim Mason, *The Way We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter* (New York: Rodale, Inc., 2006); see specifically Part Chapter 2, “The Hidden Cost of Cheap Chicken.”

Case 4 (Continued)

result, they either die from exposure or from getting torn up in the machinery. Once on the conveyer belt, the birds are hung upside down by their feet and are first run through a bath of electrified water. This step adds a humane touch of stunning the birds; however, it's not legally mandated because chickens and turkeys don't fall under the Federal Humane Slaughter Act. In fact, the stunning is done primarily to expedite the slaughtering process. However, some birds emerge from this bath still conscious. Conscious or not, they then proceed toward a mechanical knife that cuts their throats. Because of the high processing speeds, some birds manage to survive even this step. Thus, some are still alive as they reach their last stop—a scalding tank that submerges the birds in boiling water.

As repulsive as some of these facts may be, there are points in favor of CAFO processing. First, although birds are obviously capable of suffering, it is unlikely that they have the sorts of experiences we may imagine as we think about the slaughterhouse. We tend to anthropomorphize—to think from a human point of view. For instance, we may picture a bird experiencing overwhelming terror as it proceeds along the conveyer belt. Yet birds are not likely to even remotely appreciate the fatal significance of the process. In addition, human beings benefit from factory farming in many ways. For one thing, chicken farmers don't earn much, and factory farming helps their businesses remain profitable. Cheaper methods also pass significant savings on to consumers. For a family living below the poverty line, this savings could make the difference between having meat at the dinner table or not.

Case 5

Torture Lite

What is "torture lite"? The term, coined by the popular media, refers to sophisticated interrogation techniques that do not cause visible physical harms, as do more traditional forms of torture. Examples of torture lite include sleep deprivation, isolation, standing in stress positions, noise bombardment, humiliation, mock executions, and subjecting the prisoner to heat and cold. One notorious technique is *water boarding*: the suspect's head is dunked into water or his head is wrapped in a wet towel to induce the sensation of drowning. In contrast to traditional forms of torture, which inflicts pain directly, torture lite causes suffering more indirectly. Indeed, many of these interrogation techniques do not require any physical contact between the interrogator and the victim.

Such "advanced" interrogation techniques have been employed by a number of democratic governments, including by the United States during the Bush administration as well as by France and the United Kingdom. These methods are mainly used for intelligence gathering. Since the Geneva Convention forbids more classic forms of torture, these are not used by democratic governments. Torture lite, as some argue, is thus the only legal alternative and is sometimes necessary to prevent even greater harm. For instance, lite techniques have been used in an attempt to prevent terrorist attacks. Since 9/11, the use of these techniques has become more common. Torture lite has become particularly notorious due to its use at Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib.

The primary moral defense for using these techniques is utilitarian. Supporters argue that by subjecting prisoners to these techniques, we can gain important information that may prevent great harm to society. The suffering of one (or a few) individuals is relatively minor, after all, compared to the potential suffering of a great many. This rationale follows what's called the "ticking bomb scenario": imagine that there's a bomb hidden somewhere that threatens to kill millions of people; the only way to find the bomb and prevent these deaths is to torture the individual who knows where the bomb is hidden. Isn't it obvious that we should torture the individual in such a situation?

Georgetown Law Professor David Luban has offered some interesting challenges in reply. According to Luban, the scenario makes some assumptions that are seldom if ever met in reality. For instance, it assumes that we know *for sure* that the suspect has the information we want. But is that ever the case? Not knowing what useful information the suspect might be able to reveal, could we justifiably torture someone? How high must the odds be in our favor? Is a 50/50 chance of obtaining important information sufficient? Could just a 20% chance of success justify torture if enough is at stake? Should this be a game of odds in the first place? Also, how many individuals could we justifiably torture, for how long, and to what degree if we think we might gain some needed information?¹⁰

Philosopher Jessica Wolfendale, meanwhile, argues that the line between ordinary torture and torture lite is not well defined, for even the latter can cause permanent psychological and physical harm. Standing in stress positions can cause

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Case 5 (Continued)

swollen ankles, blistering on the feet, and a raised heart rate. Carried far enough, it can lead to kidney failure and heart attack. Sleep deprivation can produce delusions that sometimes can remain even after deprivation has ceased. Torture lite can also cause post-traumatic stress disorder to such severity that the victim may never be able to function again as a normal member of society.¹¹