

The Eight Moral Frameworks: Practical Applications

The following paper will explore and analyze a hypothetical scenario where a decision concerning highway safety improvements must be made. I am to view this situation as if I were the civil engineer in charge of those safety improvements. The primary choice at hand for me is to decide which intersection out of a possible two is to receive funding for necessary improvements. The interesting aspect in regard to choosing between the intersections is the fact that the situation will be analyzed through eight moral theoretical frameworks. Each moral framework has distinct attributes and characteristics which will ultimately affect my final decision.

The first moral framework I will take into consideration is General Utilitarianism. The general statement for Utilitarian thinking is that those individual decisions that produce the greatest amount of happiness to those affected should be exercised. Looking at the relevant data concerning the two sites, Site A has much more traffic on average compared with Site B. Since Utilitarian thinking aims to bring about the greatest amount of good, I would choose to place the new signals where they would benefit the most people; Site A.

Now the decision will be made within the context of Act Utilitarianism. The act utilitarian tends to focus on the decision that brings more positive consequences than any alternative. Under this framework I would choose to place the new signals at Site A. The reasons are simple. By looking at the relevant data again, I see that by choosing Site A over Site B, the good consequences would be a greater reduction in the number of fatalities, injuries, and property damage; all at the same cost as Site B and while serving a greater number of people.

The third framework is called Rule Utilitarianism. In Rule Utilitarianism, decisions are chosen and viewed as if each were a rule contradicting the other. This form

of decision making places more emphasis on conforming to certain rules. To make an accurate choice using Rule Utilitarianism, I must decide which one represents the common expectations of those affected. Rule 1 – Civil engineers should improve intersections with the greatest number of accidents. Rule 2 - Civil engineers should not improve intersections with the greatest number of accidents. The morals of those affected would most likely favor the greatest good. Most people expect a civil engineer to make decisions that assist in making travel safer and more efficient. Improving a major city intersection would help to accomplish that expectation. Site A.

The cost-benefit perspective looks at a decision on a more quantifiable level; usually in monetary terms. Someone using this method would take each decision and figure out the cost of that particular decision and the relative benefit it would generate; all of this in monetary terms. The improvement cost of \$50,000 is consistent at each site; thus simplifying the decision. After some calculations, I can determine that in a six year period, the signals at Site A could save two lives as opposed to just one at Site B. This results in a reduction of \$104,000($52,000 \times 2$) in damages. The reduction in injury damages would be \$18,000($6 \times 3,000$). Interestingly, property damage costs actually increase at Site B as a result of new signals. Since the monetary benefit of new signals at Site A is always greater than Site B, I must choose Site A.

The Golden Rule is the next framework to be explored. With this framework I must examine the situation from my perspective, and also from those affected by the consequences of making either decision. If choosing Site A, I must put myself in the place of someone who travels through Site B. If I was someone who crosses the Site B intersection would I also see Site A as the moral place for the new signals, despite the deaths and injuries at this one; probably not. Those that use the intersection at Site B have a higher probability of death, injury, and property damage in proportion to traffic numbers. Since the respect for people is priority over maximum utility, I would probably choose site B.

The next framework is known as the Self-defeating Criterion. This view asks whether a choice in a certain situation, if made the same in all other similar situations, would be counter productive. So, if everyone who is responsible for improving an intersection chooses the one within the district and major city, is this going to counter the intentions and goals of the one person's choice? I do believe it could and I would probably choose Site B. If everyone decided to choose the major city district intersections, the rural intersections would be neglected and the death and damages would continue. By always adhering to the same criteria, it is possible to ignore the respect for your entire audience.

The sixth framework to be analyzed along with this situation is termed Rights. The use of Rights represents the respect for people as moral agents and prohibiting decisions that infringe on people's moral agency. Using this framework makes the decision a little more complex. People have the right to life. If I choose Site A, I will save more lives. However, in choosing Site A, have I discriminated against the people in the rural area that will still have a risk at the Site B intersection? Aren't they entitled to life and bodily integrity too? The key to remember with Rights is that they are meant to protect moral agents against *unjustifiable* infringements. Thus, if I can justify choosing Site A, then it is permissible. The numbers seem to justify Site A.

Lastly, the framework called Creative Middle Ways will be put into consideration. The special part about Creative Middle way is the ability to compromise on a decision. The previous frameworks always required a definitive choice; Site A or Site B. The problem is that there will still be damages and death at the foregone intersection. In using Middle Way, I would have new signals placed at Site A, but I would also make it an effort to examine the causes of the accidents at Site B. It may be possible that accidents can be reduced there with a change in speed limits, different signal operation, better visibility, etc. This method at least makes an attempt at satisfying both sides of a choice.

This paper was a very interesting look at the same situation through many perspective theories on morality. With numerous methods to assist in coming to a conclusion, it seems unlikely to encounter a situation where a decision is impossible to make. The important thing about these frameworks is that different situations can be viewed through the framework or frameworks that best suit the requirements and the audience considered. Many times people require decisions based mainly around the monetary figures, but the importance of considering the respect for people should always be an issue.