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I had trouble following a couple of your points,
but I like some of your creative selections.

John Oakes

Dr. Terry Slocum

Geog 806

Ethics Paper

The Case of the Caribou

In this situation, a GIS analyst is put into an ethical dilemma by the intersection of her employer's wishes and the ethical issues regarding the creation of a product that misrepresents data. The ethical issues are as follows:

1) If the analyst agrees to her supervisor's demand that the migration routes be left off the map, the immediate issue is creation of a map that deliberately misrepresents. It is a graphic lie of omission. The consequences of this omission are presumably intrusion into the caribou migration and possible ill-effects for the eco-system. The lie would ostensibly help the utility build an efficient pipeline.

2) The omission could hurt the utility by not preparing them for the political onslaught they may face if other groups with this caribou info protest. This would tarnish the reputation of the firm and possibly the analyst.

3) If the analyst decides to include the caribou migration routes on the map out of an idealistic stand, she is not following her supervisor's instruction and thus fails a key job description component. This failure would then make it unethical for her to accept payment from her employer for a job she did not do.

seems a bit more like a consequence than an ethical issue.

The analyst lacks complete information. To understand the ethical implications of her decision to include or not include the migration routes, she needs to understand why the supervisor made the demand. It is this critical lack of information ^{that} which defines this problem and structures my response to it. My first recommendation would be for the analyst to inquire as to why the demand was made. Perhaps the request is reasonable and not ethically grey. Perhaps the firm has made a rational decision to omit the routes and is willing to accept the consequences of possible backlash from the utility or other groups. More likely, the utility and the firm have collectively made such a decision. In this case the analyst would have three options: 1a) refuse to work on the project for ethical reasons; 1b) refuse to work for and support a company that would make unethical decisions (as she sees it); 2a) agree to work on the project anyway; 2b) "Wash her hands of it" i.e. agree to work on the project but refuse to take credit or responsibility for it } *is this ethically appropriate?* (but keep job and pay). Decisions 1a and b both would have an affect on the income and career prospects for the analyst. It is unclear precisely what those affects would be, but let us reasonably assume that they are adverse. Decisions 2a and b would leave the income in tact and possibly lead to an increase. But then we face the quandary of the omission being an ethical issue.

If we assume that both the utility and the firm have come to a reasoned decision to omit the routes from the map to sway the public at a meeting, then the analyst must decide, before anything else, if it is unethical to lie by omission. If the analyst is a consequentialist, she must weigh the endangerment of caribou habitat versus the endangerment of her own career and income, and at a base level, her survival. Here we encounter what I deem to be another major problem with ethics as a platform for regulating conduct. Her ethical approach will be rooted in a deeper framework for judging right and wrong actions. Here, ethics is defined as searching for the greatest net benefit. But if you are a materialist then the primary good is your survival and

define since we didn't cover this in class.

the passage of your genetic material. The greatest net benefit is your dominance over other competitors so that you can pass on genetic material. This is the foundation of Nietzsche's *ubermensche*, the superman that rises above all encumbrances because he is not limited by banal moralities that are the standards set by immaterial forces that do not exist (1883 *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*). But if self-preservation is the highest net good, then the best way to achieve this, one could argue, would be to protect the Caribou, the ecosystem and the natural environment. Perhaps the caribou migration interruption would not affect the current generation's ability to thrive and replicate, but it could cause problems for the offspring of the analyst. This is a consideration that may cause a desire to preserve the ecological status quo.

If one's view of the value of "morality" can trump ethics, then ethics are inextricably tied to morality. (The underlying assumption of ethics is that the greatest net good means that one's definition of net good includes anyone other than themselves.) For the net good to include others is a fundamentally moral stance that others have value, and more so, that others have value equal to my own. Thus I find that "ethics" is a term that is used to discuss morality on the assumption first and foremost that A) all men are equally valued B) all men are deserving of fair treatment and C) that humans know what this fairness is and D) we all have a responsibility to proceed in this fairness. Ethics is a subset of morality. It is a more focused morality. Trying to separate the two ^{is} ~~and~~ like trying to separate a hen from her chicks. You can separate them physically, talk about them as if they were different, but that does not change their genetic connection.

Talk of morality and immorality seems a bit funny in an academic setting, but it is fundamental to how we direct our lives and our work as Geographers and scientists. For the purposes of this hypothetical question we must assume that the analyst recognizes morality as a sound basis for decision making, and that she deems other humans to be imbued with value,

relevance to the eight steps?

Sounds similar to the preceding

self-preservation

?

I struggled to follow this sentence

apart from their utility to her survival. As mentioned before, she can 1a) Refuse to work on the project for ethical reasons. 1b) Refuse to work for and support a company that would knowingly make unethical decisions (as she sees it). 2) Agree to work on the project anyway. 2b) “Wash her hands of it” i.e. agree to work on the project but refuse to take credit or responsibility for it (but keep job and pay).

I do not think that moral actions always look the same in every context. To do so or think so would be naiveté. No decision has perfect information and thus there are no perfect decisions. That said, there are some safe generalizations that can be made, and must be made in life, in order to make a decision. In a sense, moral principles can guide us in making specific decisions. In this context, a guiding principle would be that the ecosystem is inseparable from humans, and therefore, its protection is tantamount to the protection of other humans. We are a part of the environment. The environment will affect the lives of many humans. In this particular case, I would say that the outcome to the ecosystem and to her reputation and career could be severe. The stakes are high for this analyst.

To omit the information from public knowledge is morally and ethically negligent. That said, she is obligated ethically to make maps for her employer only so long as she receives pay to do so. To make the map otherwise (with the migration info) is not ethically wrong. It is her personal prerogative. It is then the prerogative of the firm to fire her if they are displeased with her decision. Regarding solutions 1a and b, I conclude that she is under no moral obligation to her employer to omit the caribou from the map. Although she is wise to inquire first as to why the omission is being made, in order to verify that her ethical quandary is not a mere miscommunication of confusion on the issue. Regarding 2a and b, I conclude that ethically she can actually make the map with the omission. What she cannot do is keep the information from

the public. So how can she navigate this ethical dilemma so as to protect the public and her career?

good ideas

My recommendation to the analyst would be to discuss this with her superiors and, if possible, the utility client. I would have her appeal to their morality and attempt to convince them that it is better to deal with the caribou situation in a transparent fashion. Perhaps she could mention the loss in reputation, long term financial costs, and possible legal actions. This would prevent the analyst from having to do anything immoral or unethical. If the assembled decision makers refused to change their strategy, the analyst would then be wise to make an offer to gladly finish the map as ordered, because it is a moral good to serve a customer and employer well. She would also *indicate* that she would be similarly compelled by her conscience to arrive at this public forum as a private citizen to ensure that the (already free and public) information was disseminated adequately. The outcome of this discussion would be very interesting indeed. It would be a coup for the analyst no matter what. The decision makers would realize that there was no way to prevent the information from being disseminated. And to fire the analyst for refusing to make an ethical violation could cause a lawsuit. Firing the analyst would do no good either way. The cat would be out of the bag, and the best course of action for the company would be to deal with the situation transparently at the public hearing. This may mean opening itself up to more criticism about the caribou, but certainly it would be less than the criticism for attempting to hide its knowledge.