“JUST WRONG,”
“DISGUSTING,”
“GROTESQUE,”
“OFFENSIVE”

HOW TO DEAL WITH PUBLIC REJECTION OF NEW POTENTIALLY LIFE-SAVING TECHNOLOGIES

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WHAT’S AT STAKE?: COST OF 9/11

Up to 42,000 human lives
- ~3,000 on 9/11
- ~3,000 increased road deaths post 9/11
- ~3,000 coalition soldiers in Afghanistan
- ~3,000 civilian deaths in Afghanistan
- ~30,000 Taliban deaths in Afghanistan

Up to 7 trillion US dollars ($7,000,000,000,000)
- ~$100,000,000,000 lives & property on 9/11
- ~$2,000,000,000,000 in stocks, tourism etc.
- ~$5,000,000,000,000 for war in Afghanistan

Psychological costs

AND THE CROWD WENT WILD!

Less than positive comments:

• “just wrong”
• “ridiculous… grotesque,”
• “defies common sense”
• “absurd… disgusting”
• “loopiest manifestation of… belief… markets [can] solve all problems”
• “a new level of absurdity”
• “despicable… callous… retarded”
• “unbelievably stupid”

FutureMAP terminated ASAP
POLICY ANALYSIS MARKET: PREDICTING TERRORISM

DARPA → funds → FutureMAP → includes sub-project: PAM
WOULD PAM HAVE WORKED?

- Supposedly better than reports, Delphi, experts, polls
- Cost to test = to cost of one more spy

Moral repugnance occurs when person X feels morally charged revulsion about thing T

- E.g. “absurd... disgusting”—Sen. Dorgan
- Sen. Dorgan felt moral repugnance about PAM
HOW TO DEAL WITH PUBLIC OUTRAGE

Assess it
- Clarify the concern
- Check factual claims/assumptions
- Ascertained relevant moral framework/s

Sort it
- Use grouping discussed here
- Consider using group to motivate dialogue

Act
- Alter plan (and reassess or go ahead)
- Stop plan
- Go ahead
SOME BASIC TYPES OF MORAL REPUGNANCE

• *Legitimate moral repugnance*
  - Description: correct facts + morally wrong according to my moral framework
  - Action: Consider redesign or stop if common

• *Mistaken moral repugnance*
  - Description: incorrect facts, I would see it as morally permissible with the correct facts
  - Action: Educate on facts, go ahead

• *Dumbfounded moral repugnance*
  - Description: I know it’s wrong, but I can’t explain why when using my moral framework
  - Action: Investigate more if common, go ahead

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“Shallow are the souls that have forgotten how to shudder.”
—Leon Kass
SOME COMPLEX TYPES OF MORAL REPUGNANCE

• *Indeterminate moral repugnance*
  • Description: morally balanced (right & wrong) according to my moral framework
  • Action: Consider redesign or other policies

• *Mitigated moral repugnance*
  • Description: some moral good, but more moral bad according to my moral framework
  • Action: Consider redesign or stop if common

• *Outweighed moral repugnance*
  • Description: some moral bad, but more moral good according to my moral framework
  • Action: Consider redesign, go ahead
SOME UNUSUAL TYPES OF MORAL REPUGNANCE

• **Conflicted moral repugnance**
  • Description: I feel like it’s morally wrong, but my moral framework deems it morally good
  • Action: Investigate more if very common, go ahead

• **Dominant moral repugnance**
  • Description: I know that’s morally wrong so I will change my moral framework to make sure of it
  • Action: Consider redesign or stop if common

• **Moral repugnance deficit**
  • Description: I don’t feel like it’s morally bad, but my moral framework deems it morally bad
  • Action: Consider redesign or stop if common
MORAL REPUGNANCE: BETTING ON DEATH

• “[T]he fact that our government is essentially setting up a terrorist bookmaking operation is despicable.”—Blogger Greg Saunders

• Betting on death isn’t new
  • Military spending decisions
  • Life insurance
  • Death pools

• Some of these disrespect life, others try to preserve it

- Rotten Dead Pool
- Halloween Dead Pool
- O.B.E. Celebrity Death Watch
- CashforCadavers.com
GENERAL RULES

- *Moral repugnance* is a sign to investigate further, not cancel on the spot.

- Failure to comply with reasonable moral frameworks requires at least redesign and reassessment.

- Much moral repugnance will be a bad guide for policy, so use reason too.
THE REAL WINNERS AND LOSERS

THINK ABOUT IT. AFTER THE NEXT ATTACK, DID YOU REALLY WANT TO ANNOUNCE, "WE HAVE A WINNER"?....
MY WORK ON THE TOPIC


• Weijers, Dan & Richardson, Jennifer (2014). Is the Repugnance about Betting on Terrorist Attacks Misguided? *Ethics and Information Technology*, 16(3): 251-262. [Last author version](#). [The official version](#).
