Data Ethics: Philosophical Bases

Karën Fort

karen.fort@loria.fr / https://members.loria.fr/KFort

January 31st, 2022
Sources of inspiration

- Coursera MOOC from the University of Geneva (2018): *Le Bien, le Juste, l’Utile. Introduction aux éthiques philosophiques*
- *L’éthique aux interfaces entre biologie/santé et sciences de l’information* (2016). H. Chneiweiss. (with his approval)
- Wikipedia
The Question Behind

Virtue Ethics

Deontological (duty) Ethics

Utilitarianism

Applying ethics

To finish
It took God six days to create the Heavens and the Earth…
and Monty Python ninety minutes to screw it up.

(c) 1983 Universal City Studios. All rights reserved.
What is a good life?

How humans should best live (to achieve this good life)
The Question Behind

Virtue Ethics
  Origins
  Principles

Deontological (duty) Ethics

Utilitarianism

Applying ethics

To finish
The Question Behind

Virtue Ethics
   Origins
   Principles

Deontological (duty) Ethics

Utilitarianism

Applying ethics

To finish
Aristotle (384–322 BC)

Work on ethics

Nicomachean Ethics
The Question Behind

Virtue Ethics
  Origins
  Principles

Deontological (duty) Ethics

Utilitarianism

Applying ethics

To finish
Ethics is about happiness, feeling good

Which "good"?

- each (intermediary) good (pleasure, money, etc) is linked to another
- except the **sovereign good**: supreme good, not linked to another

Inspired by nature (proper function of a being):

- plants: a good life is to grow, to produce fruits
- dogs: satisfaction of senses
- specific for human: choose our life and the goal of our life (**practical reason**)  

⇒ thinking in terms of being a "good" person
Ethics is about action (not theory)

Do the best thing, make the best choices: a virtuous man is a virtuoso (perfectionism)

To achieve this:

▶ exercise being virtuous
▶ be surrounded by virtuous persons

Main virtue = **PRUDENCE** (not too much, not to little: middle ground)
A bit further

All our activities are about ethics

Importance of:
- education (role models)
- (real) friendship (we are social beings)
- justice
- politics
A bit further

All our activities are about ethics

Importance of:
▶ education (role models)
▶ (real) friendship (we are social beings)
▶ justice
▶ politics

Limits/risks:
▶ list of virtues contingent to his time
▶ prudence is not science
Is happiness our goal in life?
The Question Behind

Virtue Ethics

Deontological (duty) Ethics
  Origins
  Principles

Utilitarianism

Applying ethics

To finish
The Question Behind

Virtue Ethics

Deontological (duty) Ethics
  Origins
  Principles

Utilitarianism

Applying ethics

To finish
Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

Work on ethics
Critique of Pure Reason
Critique of Practical Reason
The Question Behind

Virtue Ethics

Deontological (duty) Ethics
  Origins
  Principles

Utilitarianism

Applying ethics

To finish
The Imperative of the Practical Reason

Inflexible order of nature → to be really free I have to reason (practically) and act accordingly, without being the slave of my passions

▶ submission to duty (internal law: wanting to do good) elevates us (perfectionism)
▶ test: universalization (care for others)

⇒ thinking in terms of the ”right” action
Parenthesis on Government

For Kant, 4 kinds of government (Wikipedia)

1. Law and freedom without force
2. Law and force without freedom
3. Force without freedom and law
4. Force with freedom and law
Parenthesis on Government

For Kant, 4 kinds of government (Wikipedia)

1. Law and freedom without force: anarchy
2. Law and force without freedom
3. Force without freedom and law
4. Force with freedom and law
Parenthesis on Government

For Kant, 4 kinds of government (Wikipedia)

1. Law and freedom without force: anarchy
2. Law and force without freedom: despotism
3. Force without freedom and law
4. Force with freedom and law
Parenthesis on Government

For Kant, 4 kinds of government (Wikipedia)

1. Law and freedom without force: **anarchy**
2. Law and force without freedom: **despotism**
3. Force without freedom and law: **barbarism**
4. Force with freedom and law
Parenthesis on Government

For Kant, 4 kinds of government (Wikipedia)

1. Law and freedom without force: anarchy
2. Law and force without freedom: despotism
3. Force without freedom and law: barbarism
4. Force with freedom and law: republic
Kant’s ethics

- Perfectionist: the human being should aim at being better
- Moral principle is a priori and absolute ("you shall not kill/steal")
Contemporary Deontological Ethics

Opening towards two dimensions:

▶ Jürgen Habermas (1929-): open to other people (intra-generational ethics)
  ▶ discourse ethics: a respectful, symmetric, authentic discussion with all concerned will generate the best solution

▶ Hans Jonas (1903-1993): open to other generations (inter-generational ethics)
  ▶ ethics of responsibility: preserve what is fragile and vulnerable
    → precautionary principle
The Question Behind

Virtue Ethics

Deontological (duty) Ethics

Utilitarianism
  Origins
  Principles

Applying ethics

To finish
The Question Behind

Virtue Ethics

Deontological (duty) Ethics

Utilitarianism
  Origins
  Principles

Applying ethics

To finish
Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)

Work on ethics
The Principles of Morals and Legislation

By Henry William Pickersgill

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)

Work on ethics
Essay on Bentham

London Stereoscopic Company - Hulton Archive
The Question Behind

Virtue Ethics

Deontological (duty) Ethics

Utilitarianism
  Origins
  Principles

Applying ethics

To finish
Bentham’s Utilitarianism

Scientific, truly altruistic, method:

- observation of human behaviours: they want pleasure
- counting positive and negative points (money) for each decision to be made
- each person counts for 1 (nobody matters more than the others, even the agent)

⇒ maximize pleasure for a maximum of persons (beings)
⇒ no perfectionism
⇒ thinking in terms of the consequences of an action
Mill’s Utilitarianism

Maximize **happiness** (not pleasure)

Adds **virtue** as part of happiness (hierarchy in pleasures)
Contemporary Utilitarianism: consequentialism

Only consequences matter

Criteria: satisfaction of preferences, well-being, still not moral

But no more calculus

Which consequences matter?

- everybody counts for 1: problem (1 person can be killed to save more)
- average vs addition, negative?
- of each act, for the agent (if the agent kill 1 person it has really negative effects on the agent)
- virtues with good consequences (virtue consequentialism)
The Question Behind

Virtue Ethics

Deontological (duty) Ethics

Utilitarianism

Applying ethics
   A classic dilemma
   Results

To finish
The Question Behind

Virtue Ethics

Deontological (duty) Ethics

Utilitarianism

Applying ethics

A classic dilemma

Results

To finish
The (classic) trolley problem [P. Foot, 1967]

By McGeddon - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0
The (classic) trolley problem

The fat man variant

By John Holbo, CC BY-NC 2.0
The Question Behind

Virtue Ethics

Deontological (duty) Ethics

Utilitarianism

Applying ethics
  A classic dilemma
  Results

To finish
Trolley dilemma votes:

- 90% of the persons would activate the shift (distant action)
Trolley dilemma votes:

- 90% of the persons would activate the shift (distant action)
- 10% would push the fat man (direct and immediate)
Brain imaging:

- normal case: rational zones of the brain activated
- fat man case: emotionnal zones of the brain activated
The Question Behind

Virtue Ethics

Deontological (duty) Ethics

Utilitarianism

Applying ethics

To finish

   WYHTR: What You Have To Remember
   A bit of work
- ethics of virtue
- deontological ethics
- consequentialist ethics
A bit of thinking

Review your analysis of the articles you presented during the first class, according to the 3 ethical stances we just saw