Data Ethics: Philosophical Bases

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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
What is a good life?

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

Virtue Ethics

Origins
Principles

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Aristotle (384–322 BC)

After Lysippos - Jastrow (2006)

Work on ethics

Nicomachean Ethics
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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)
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Limits/risks:

- list of virtues contingent to his time
- prudence is not science
Is happiness our goal in life?
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Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

Work on ethics

Critique of Pure Reason
Critique of Practical Reason
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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
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
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Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)

By Henry William Pickersgill

Work on ethics
The Principles of Morals and Legislation

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)

London Stereoscopic Company - Hulton Archive

Work on ethics
Essay on Bentham
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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)
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  A classic dilemma
  Results

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

The fat man variant

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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: some zones of the brain activated
- fat man case: other zones of the brain activated
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WYHTR: What You Have To Remember
- ethics of virtue
- deontological ethics
- consequentialist ethics