Maching Learning Basics

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DGP

- Statistics starts think of the data as being generated by a black box.
  - y <- nature <- x
- Data analysis
  - Prediction (algorithms; e.g., mean)
  - Information (inference; e.g., confidence intervals)

Two cultures (Breiman 2001)

- Statistical inference
  - y <- some probability models (e.g., linear regression, logistic regression, Cox model) <- x
- Machine learning
  - y <- unkown <- x
  - y <-> decision trees, neutral nets <-> x
  - "The problem is to find an algorithm f(x) such that for future x in a test set, f(x) will be a good predictor of y."

Data Modeling vs. Algorithmic Modeling

"There are **two cultures** in the use of statistical modeling to reach conclusions from data. One assumes that the data are generated by a **given stochastic data model**. The other uses **algorithmic models** and treats the data mechanism as **unknown**."

"Algorithmic models, both in theory and practice, has developed rapidly in fields of outside statistics. It can be used on large complex data sets and as a more accurate and informative alternative to data modeling on smaller data sets."

Statistical model

- The following discussions come from Athey and Imbens's review paper (2019)
- Specifying a target (i.e., an estimand; a joint distribution of data)
- Fitting a model to data using an objective function (e.g., the sum of squared errors)
- Reporting point estimates and standard errors
- Validation by yes-no using goodness-of-fit tests and residual examination

ML

- Developing algorithms
- Prediction power not structural/causal parameters
- Using out-of-sample comparisons (cross-validation) not in-sample goodness-of-fit measures
- The major problem is to avoid "the curse of dimensionality"
  - You can reduce dimensionality by limiting covariates (features) to essential ones
  - Or you can add many functions of the predictor variables (e.g., Support Vector Machines)

Underdeveloped in the ML literature

- No interventions $\rightarrow$ no causal arguments (Judea Pearl's criticism)
- Need to exploit the structure of the problems
  - The causal nature of the estimands

ML - Terminology

- Sample to estimate parameters = Training sample
- Estimating the model = Being trained
- Regressors, covariates, or predictors = Features
- Regression parameters = weights
- Prediction problems = Supervised + Unsupervised

ML and Causal inference

- Causal inference
  - Designs: randomized experiments, uncofoundedness, instrumental variables, regression discontinuity, panel data, difference-in-differences
  - Questions: ATE, LATE, CATE, Optimal Treatment Assignment Policies, Structural Parameter Estimation, Multiple Testing (Heterogeneous Treatment Effects)

ML: has a missing data problem (How can ML handle what if questions?)