Data Ethics

Project - [Marks 38]

Instructions: Begin by reading the *British Medical Journal* article "Should spreading anti-vaccine misinformation be criminalized?" (available here and on the course website). This article was written by two scholars with opposing views on its titular question. The articles are very short, and key elements of each author's argument are left implicit. In this paper, you will attempt to reconstruct an argument for each position, using the arguments presented in the text as a starting point. You will also evaluate these arguments and defend your evaluation.

Submission: Your paper should be submitted in Word document converted to PDF format.

Format: Your paper should be organized as follows, and points will be deducted for deviating from this format:

1. Introduction (1 paragraph, 5 points)

Introduce the ethical/policy question at issue in the article. Explain both what the question is and why it matters. Identify the position each author takes on this question (be as specific as possible).

2. Author 1: Melinda Mills (2 paragraphs, 6 points)

Begin by outlining the most important *non-normative* premises relied upon by Mills. Suggest an ethical principle that would justify Mills' conclusion (assuming her non-normative claims are correct). This principle might be implicit or only partially explained in the text. Your primary focus should be on finding a principle that clearly supports the conclusion. This principle should be one that Mills would plausibly endorse, but it need not be the exact principle upon which she relies in the text. Clearly explain how the principle combined with Mills' non-normative premises supports her conclusion.

3. Author 2: Jonas Sivelä (2 paragraphs, 6 points)

Follow the same format as the preceding section, but apply the instructions to Sivelä's

argument. *4. Principle Evaluation (2-4 paragraphs, 12 points—6 per principle)*

Assuming you have chosen the ethical principles in Sections 2 and 3 well, the arguments you have reconstructed on behalf of each author should be logically valid (see Lecture 1). However, this leaves open the question of whether premises of the argument (the ethical principle and non-normative

premises) are true, which would make the argument *sound*. For the present, we will assume that each author's non-normative premises are correct. This leaves only the ethical principles.

To evaluate each ethical principle, we will use the method of cases (see Lecture 1). For each principle, you will identify two cases: One case (other than the case of vaccine misinformation) in which it recommends a *plausible* conclusion and one case in which it recommends an *implausible* conclusion (i.e., a counterexample). You should select both principles with this section in mind (i.e., pick a principle that is plausible but open to criticism). Make sure to explain why each principle recommends each conclusion in each case.

5. Conclusion (2 paragraphs, 9 points)

In this section, defend your own view on the central ethical question. To begin, clearly state your conclusion. Next, you should identify all non-normative premises upon which your argument relies. If these do not appear in the source article, support them with at least one scholarly citation. Finally, identify your ethical principle, and clearly explain how it (along with your non-normative premises) supports your conclusion. To support this principle, explain why it does not fall victim to either of the counterexamples raised for the preceding principles (i.e., explain why your principle recommends a plausible conclusion in each of the counterexample cases).

Tips: You will be assessed primarily based upon the clarity of your analysis. For example, the grader should be able to clearly identify the three principles described (the first author's, the second author's, and yours). For this reason, you are strongly encouraged to err on the side of clarity. If you have a choice between saying something explicitly and leaving it implicit, say it explicitly. If you have a choice between explaining what seems obvious or leaving it to the reader, explain what seems obvious.

You will also be assessed based on the plausibility of your own reasoning and the fairness with which you present the reasoning of others. While no points will be added or subtracted based on whether the grader agrees with you, the grader should be able to appreciate why you have drawn the conclusion that you have. Also, the grader should be able to appreciate why each author has drawn the conclusion they have. For this reason, make sure that you present each author's argument in a way that makes it at least appear plausible. Ideally, you will present each argument so fairly that the grader will not be able to tell which author you agree with more until you state your own conclusion.

Grading Rubric:

Section	Points	Items
Section 1 (5 pts)	1	Identifies ethical questions clearly.
	2	Author 1 position identified clearly and accurately. Partial credit for answers that are clear but inaccurate or accurate but unclear.

	2	Author 2 position identified clearly and accurately. Partial credit for answers that are clear but inaccurate or accurate but unclear.

Section 2 (6 pts)	2	At least two non-normative premises clearly identified.
	2	Author 1's principle is clearly identified, and it is a principle that the author might plausibly endorse. Partial credit for principles that are clear but implausible.
	2	Principle supports the conclusion and the student makes this support clear. Partial credit for principles that support the conclusion but are poorly explained.
Section 3 (6 pts)	2	At least two non-normative premises clearly identified.
	2	Author 2's principle is clearly identified, and it is one the author might plausibly endorse. Partial credit for principles that are clear but implausible.
	2	Principle supports the conclusion and the student makes this support clear. Partial credit for principles that support the conclusion but are poorly explained.
Section 4 (12 pts)	3	Case in favor of the first author's principle (i) is clearly explained, (ii) is a case where the principle makes a plausible recommendation, and (iii) includes a clear explanation of how the principle supports this recommendation.
	3	Counterexample to the first author's principle (i) is clearly explained, (ii) is a case where the principle makes an implausible recommendation, and (iii) includes a clear explanation of how the principle supports this recommendation.
	3	Case in favor of the second author's principle (i) is clearly explained, (ii) is a case where the principle makes a plausible recommendation, and (iii) includes a clear explanation of how the principle supports this recommendation.
	3	Counterexample to the second author's principle (i) is clearly explained, (ii) is a case where the principle makes an implausible recommendation, and (iii) includes a clear explanation of how the principle supports this recommendation.
Section 5 (9 pts)	1	Student's conclusion clearly stated.
	2	All non-normative premises clearly explained (there must be at least one).
	2	Student's principle clearly explained along with how it supports the conclusion. Partial credit for a clear principle and unclear explanation.

	2	Clearly explains how the principle avoids the counterexample to the first author's principle. Answer should clearly identify what (plausible) conclusion is recommended in the case and explain why. Partial credit if the principle actually recommends the conclusion but the answer explains why poorly.
	2	Clearly explains how the principle avoids the counterexample to the second author's principle. Answer should clearly identify what (plausible) conclusion is recommended in the case and explain why. Partial credit if the principle actually recommends the conclusion but the answer explains why poorly.
Total	**38**	

HAPPY LEARNING!