

Epistemology and Ethics of Business Analytics

Ethics – Week 1

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Introducing myself

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Ethics and Philosophy of Technology

Overview

1. *understand* the core aspects of ethical arguments, based on an understanding of validity in propositional logic.
2. *apply* core arguments for objectivity in ethics to the management of technology.
3. *analyse* core questions concerning the ethics of data gathering and the ethics of influence in the management of technology.

- Lecture 1: Objectivity in Ethics
- Lecture 2: Data ethics I
- Lecture 3: Data ethics II
- 3 Pre-Lecture assignments (required for passing the course)
- 2 Reflections (required for passing the course)
- **1 Grade point deduction for late submission**
- Exam (contributes 50% to final course grade)

Ethics

- What is ethics?
- How do you define ethics?
- What is your definition of ethics?

Questions about ethics

- What is a good life?
- Do we have obligations toward one another? What are they?
- Is abortion ethically permissible? Capital punishment? Euthanasia? War?
- What is privacy and do people have a right to it?
- What is discrimination and what makes it bad?
- Is ever ethically permissible to lie?
- Do corporations have ethical obligations toward their employees? Or to society at large?
- Is it ethically permissible to use black-box algorithms to diagnose illnesses?
- Is Facebook illegitimately manipulating its users?

Data ethics

- Ethical questions about the *generation, gathering, analysis, protection, and use* of personal data.
- Key questions concern *bias, privacy, security, and autonomy*.

Targeted advertising at Target



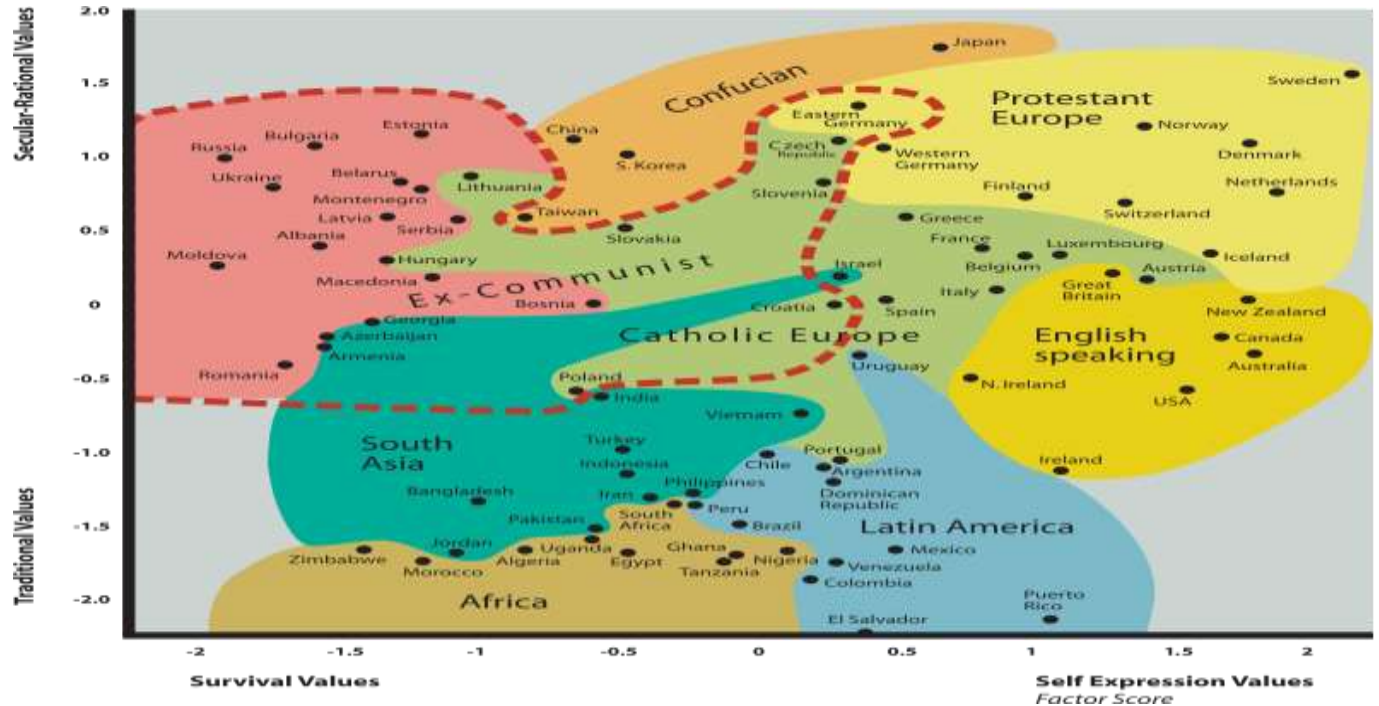
Questions about targeted advertising

- Descriptive questions
 - How effective is targeted advertising?
 - Where is targeted advertising used?
 - ...
 - Suggestive results, not much hard evidence
- Ethical questions
 - When is targeted advertising ethically legitimate?
 - Does targeted advertising undermine buyer's autonomy?
 - What does it mean for targeted advertising to be effective?
 - ...
 - What would you do to answer these questions?

A central confusion

- Ethics
- Beliefs about ethics
- Are people's beliefs about ethics similar or very different?

World values survey



Schwartz (1994) value survey







Organized by
motivational similarities
and dissimilarities

Theory of Basic Human Values



Moral foundations theory

Six key moral foundations

						
	CARE/ HARM	FAIRNESS/ CHEATING	LOYALTY/ BETRAYAL	AUTHORITY/ SUBVERSION	SANCTITY/ DEGRADATION	LIBERTY/ OPPRESSION
<i>Adaptive challenge</i>	Protect and care for children	Reap benefits of two way partnerships	Form cohesive coalitions	Forge beneficial relationships within hierarchies	Avoid contaminants	Keeping dominant individuals in the group 'in check'
<i>Original triggers</i>	Distress or neediness expressed by child	Cheating, co-operation, deception	Threat of challenge to group	Signs of dominance and submission	Waste products, diseased people	Bullying and constraining others
<i>Key emotions</i>	Compassion	Anger, gratitude, guilt	Group pride, rage against traitors	Respect, fear	Disgust	Anger at oppression
<i>Relevant virtues</i>	Caring, kindness	Fairness, justice, trustworthiness	Loyalty, patriotism, self-sacrifice	Obedience, deference	Temperance, chasity, piety, cleanliness	Freedom and self determination, protection of victims

Source: Johnathan Haidt *The Righteous Mind*

Morality as cooperation

Morality as Cooperation (MAC)

	Kinship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •special obligation to kin •the duties of parents to children 	<i>Blood is thicker than water</i>
	Mutualism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •loyalty •teamwork •conformity 	<i>United we stand, divided we fall</i>
	Exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •reciprocity •guilt •forgiveness 	<i>One good turn deserves another</i>
	Hawk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •bravery •generosity •noblesse oblige 	<i>With great power comes great responsibility</i>
	Dove	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •respect •deference & obedience •humility 	<i>Blessed are the meek</i>
	Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •fairness •equity •compromise 	<i>Let's meet in the middle</i>
	Possession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •property rights •territory •prohibition of theft 	<i>Possession is nine-tenths of the law</i>

Take-away message

- Beliefs about ethics (ethics beliefs) are less diverse than often believed.

What do ethics beliefs tell us about ethics?

1. People believe that capital punishment is wrong.
2. Therefore, capital punishment is wrong.
3. People believe that x is ethical
4. Therefore, x is ethical.

Is-ought fallacy

1. Doing the reading will improve your grade
2. You want a good grade
3. *Suppressed premise: If you want a good grade, you should do what will improve your grade.*
4. So, you should do the reading

David Hume, 1739

In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when **of a sudden** I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*.

This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, it's necessary that it should be observed and explained; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation **can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it**. But as authors do not commonly use this precaution, I shall presume to recommend it to the readers; and am persuaded, that this small attention would subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceived by reason.

What do beliefs about ethics tell us about ethics?

1. People believe that [x is ethical]
 2. If people believe that x is ethical, then x is ethical.
 3. Therefore, x is ethical.
- Premise 2 is an ethical claim.
 - Is premise 2 true?
 - More general: How can we argue about ethical claims?

When is targeted advertising ethically legitimate?

1. If targeted advertising undermines the autonomy of targets, then it is not ethically legitimate.
 2. Targeted advertising undermines the autonomy of targets.
 3. So, targeted advertising is not ethically legitimate.
- **How do we establish whether premises 1 and 2 are true?**

The law is of limited relevance

- EU Digital Services Act (DSA)
 - Art 25: providers of online platforms shall not design, organise or operate their online interfaces in away that deceives, manipulates, or otherwise materially distorts or impairs the ability of the recipients of their service **to make free [or autonomous] and informed decisions**
- 1. According to the DSA, online influences must not undermine people's autonomy
- 2. If there is a law against X, then X is unethical.
- 3. So, online influences that undermine people's autonomy are unethical.
- But premise 2 is false!
 - Ugandan law criminalises homosexuality. But homosexuality is not unethical.
 - Nazi law criminalised Jewish religion. But Jewish religion is not unethical.
 - Gambling is not illegal. But gambling might be unethical.

Experiments are of limited relevance

- Empirical evidence can establish *descriptive* claims
 - People value autonomy
 - People believe that autonomy is valuable
 - There are laws that protect autonomy
 - Better autonomy-protection impacts sales
- We *cannot* fully experimentally establish ethical claims
 - People *should* value autonomy
 - People *should* believe that autonomy is valuable
 - autonomy *is* valuable
 - There *should* be laws that protect autonomy

The objective basis of ethical claims

- Ethical claims can be true or false
 - Autonomy is valuable, abortion is permissible, privacy is good, and we should donate 10% of our income.
- So, ethical claims can figure in logical arguments.
- We argue about the truth of an ethical claim by giving **reasons** that are **relevant** for the truth of the claim in question.
- **Non-subjectivity:** Those reasons are judged as relevant by *us* but they are *not subjective*, and neither is the truth of ethical claims.
- No deeper explanation of **relevance** and **reasons** in this course.

Two central questions

- What are ethical claims?
- How do we know that ethical claims are true or correct?

The non-cognitivist challenge

- Ethical claims do not refer
 - S says: „Targeted advertising is ethically problematic“ (P)
 - S means: „I dislike targeted advertising“ (=P)
 - or S means: „Do not use targeted advertising!“ (=P)
- **So ethical claims cannot be true nor false!**
- See Blackburn, Gibbard, and Timmons & Horgan for contemporary versions.

Rebutting the non-cognitivist challenge

1. Peter promised to protect Paul's privacy.
 2. If Peter promised to protect Paul's privacy, then he should protect Paul's privacy.
 3. So, Peter should protect Paul's privacy.
- The logical inference is valid.

The relativist challenge

- The truth of ethical claims depends on your perspective
 - S says: „Targeted advertising is ethically problematic“ (P)
 - S means: “Targeted advertising is ethically problematic *according to me*” (=P)
 - or S means “Targeted advertising is ethically problematic *in my culture*” (=P)
- So, according to relativism, ethical claims are always true *given a perspective*.

Limited support for relativism

- Mistaken tolerance argument
 - Respect for other ethical views
 - But respect does not require truth
- Mistaken science analogy
 - Science is objective because there is no disagreement

Rebutting the relativist challenge

- Reality of ethical disagreement
 - When Paul affirms that targeted advertising is ethical, and John denies it, then they disagree.
- Self-refutation problem
 - The statement of relativism is itself an ethical statement (All ethical claims are true *given a perspective*)

The objectivity of ethical claims

- Ethical claims are true or false independently of whether people think that they are true or false

Implications of objectivity in ethics

- In an ethical argument, appeals to personal opinion – in general - do not suffice
- ... appeals to public opinion mostly does not suffice
- ... appeals to the law mostly do not suffice
- ... appeals to causal consequences mostly do not suffice
- Instead, you need to provide normative reasons that explain the significance of your appeal.

Recap

- Ethics – you know it when you see it
- Data ethics – ethical questions about gathering, storing, using data
- Objectivity in ethics – limited support for subjectivist & relativist position, ethical claims can be true, and supported by relevant reasons

Outlook

- No lecture on Dec 18
- Lecture on Jan 11 **online** but **tutorials on campus**
- Final lecture on Jan 18 on campus
- Exam on Jan 25

Backup

Evolutionary explanations of moral beliefs

- The fact that something would promote the interests of a family member is a reason to do it.
- We have greater obligations to help our own children than we do to help complete strangers.
- The fact that someone is altruistic is a reason to admire, praise, and reward him or her.
- The fact that someone has done one deliberate harm is a reason to shun that person or seek his or her punishment