

Future Ethics

Cennydd Bowles

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reading with friends

Let's talk ethical schools of thought

basic ways of seeing technology

ways of thinking about what's good or bad

- Instrumentalism
- Determinism

"Guns don't kill people; people kill people."

"Technology is just this unstoppable force."

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- Instrumentalism
- Determinism
- Mediation theory

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"Technology is just this unstoppable force."

"The violinist plays the Stradivarius."

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- Deontology
- Consequentialism
- Virtue ethics

Apply a rule universally (e.g. Kantian ethics)

Maximize happiness (e.g. Utilitarianism)

What values do you want to reflect? Do that.

examples testing deontology and consequentialism

- Is it okay to hack your kindle to stop showing ads?
- is it okay for people to share compromising pictures of another person without that person's knowledge?

**Legislation should be a safety net,
not an ethical baseline.**

super high level overview

- unintended consequences (snakes example)
- why is any of this our problem?
“Algorithmic bias may not be intentional, but it is negligent.”
- dismisses **moral relativism**
- **technocracy** (tech-literate get more power; it's not evenly distributed)

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- why is any of this our problem?
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- dismisses **moral relativism** (we can recap that if you want?)
- **technocracy** (tech-literate get more power; it's not evenly distributed)

design fiction as provocation

We can imagine futures and come up with provocative prototypes

...or “provocatypes” (his word, I *promise*)

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for example:

what if we rationed electricity

according to your social status, as

reported by your ID?

doctors would get to cut ahead;

ex-convicts would always be at the

back of the line (and may get

truncated rations); etc...

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Design fictions are not good artefacts to let loose unsupervised:
the resulting conversation, not the artefact, is the
point of the exercise.

More overview

- redefining stakeholders? (e.g. to include values?)
- Make design principles meaningful and not dumb
“‘Make it easy for users’ is a platitude, not a design principle”

Coercion, experimentation, and more

- What's the difference between coercion and nudging?
- Don't get caught up in the is-ought fallacy

“Persuasive objects in the physical world are usually visible or even highlighted, such as speed cameras, but digital constraints are often invisible.”

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Data mining

- into some nuance about data-driven companies and their ethics
(rises above the typical “google and facebook sell all your data!” critique)
- “Raw data is an oxymoron” (cite Geoffrey Bowker)
when we think about data collection, we should think about the intent
- We can’t promise anonymization in perpetuity
- “Tech companies typically benefit from rezoning private information as public; once data is in the open, it’s easier to exploit”
- Harmless datasets become dangerous in concert

- Privacy as a luxury and a two-tiered society of the rich vs the tracked (already happening)

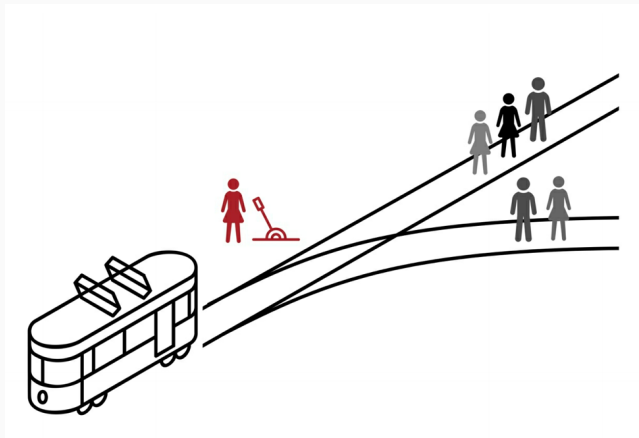
“We can imagine ourselves soon being able to quantify the whole world, turning its people, objects, and properties into structured, actionable information”

How do we evaluate Kosinski and Wang’s “gaydar study”?

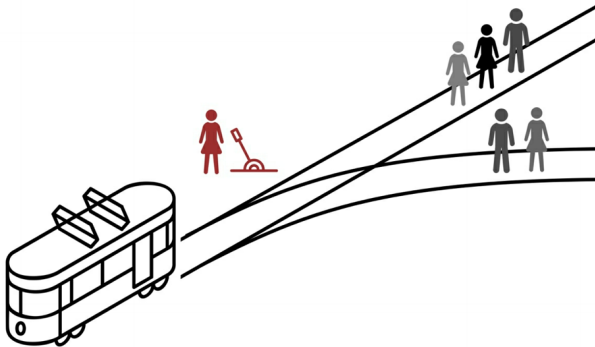
“every extension is also an amputation” (quoting McLuhan)

disengagement becomes a serious danger and ethical design challenge

The trolley problem



The trolley problem is a red herring



The trolley problem: you know the drill.

The trolley problem **is a red herring**

“Focusing on the trolley problem distracts us from deeper ethical and social issues.”

“All we know for sure is that organ donation will drop sharply if [autonomous vehicles] live up to their potential: 20% of all donated organs in the US come from crash victims.”

Freedom of speech

What ethical obligations do you have to let everyone express themselves?

“Speech has never been fully free. Nor should it be.”

“Tech companies must consider forbidding serious verbal abuse even if it contains no credible threat of violence.”

check out Karl Popper's *paradox of tolerance*

Ethics of encryption

Bowles doesn't call for the reversal of invention of technologies, but the regulation of its use.

“It's not hard to learn how to make a bomb, but start bulk-buying ammonium nitrate and there'll soon be a sturdy knock on your door”

The chilling effect of surveillance on dissidence.

“And anyone who's lived a full life has acted in ways that could seem suspicious in retrospect.”

More stuff

- Environmentalism (and algorithms and blockchain and personal electronics and maker culture)
- The future of work (and whether you're telling machines what to do or whether they're telling you)
- Universal Basic Income (UBI)
- The intersection and conflation of ethics and politics
- Capitalism
- When to protest at work vs trying to be constructive
- Personhood and robots and ethics of "people" "Maybe we *should* learn to kick robots; maybe our kids *should* be rude to voice assistants."

Questions, Discussion, Thoughts

Wait how did we get to this slide?

Eat some pastries or something.

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Oh, no wait, go sign up to meet with Cennydd and talk about some of this stuff.

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