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Big Data Dilemmas

Creating an ethical code to fit all situations is a difficult task, because every situation is different. My ethical code from the midterm relies upon a strong government presence to regulate the engineering companies, and to give engineers realistic constraints to protect both the individuals of society as well as the environment and ecosystems. I believe that in the absence of the necessary government regulations, the engineers of a company have a moral and ethical duty to make decisions that are pragmatic, while still maintaining the health and well-being of the environment and the mental and physical health of individuals in society. This will make sure that individuals and the environment are both protected, even in the absence of necessary government regulations. As technology and society evolve, there are many unforeseen dilemmas that can arise. Many of these can be reasoned through with respect to basic ethical codes, however sometimes dilemmas are more complex, and require a high level ethical code like the one I have outlined. One of these ethical dilemmas is the use of big data, artificial intelligence, and its interconnectivity with the government.

In determining whether the relationship between big data, artificial intelligence, and the government is ethical or not, we must apply my ethical code to the situation. This dilemma is important because this issue is becoming very relevant all over the world, especially with the prevalence of artificial intelligence and its many benefits. For example, the Chinese government is trying to implement a ‘social credit’ system based on surveillance that would monitor and control individuals’ actions and values using artificial intelligence (Lubman, *Wall Street Journal*). However, when applying my ethical code, we have a dilemma of our own. Since my ethical code relies upon the government to create regulations that protect people, we run into an ethical paradox. This is the main problem I run into when using my ethical code. If the government is the benevolent entity that we believe it to be, this whole situation would be completely ethical. However, that requires us to accept that premise. Since our ethical code is also based upon pragmatism, we must also question everything. The reason we must question the government in this situation and not in other situations is because the government stands to gain more information and power if it has access to big data, and it might not be serving the interests of the people. Since the government is run by individuals, we must take into account these alternative motives. To fully understand the scope of this dilemma, we must take into account some external factors, and in particular the privacy of individuals. Privacy of individuals is important to many, and without it, many individuals’ mental health would suffer, especially with the societal values of the United States. Therefore individuals, engineers and companies must question all regulation passed by the government in terms of using big data to bolster artificial intelligence and the use of this technology by the government. Being spied on by anyone, especially by the government, is very bad for the mental health of individuals. Because of this, I believe the relationship big data and artificial intelligence have with the government is unethical. However, if the engineers limited the specific government knowledge of individuals by only passing anonymous data and statistics to the government, there is a possibility that this relationship could be ethical. Such data could be used for good things, such as automating transportation resources, and making daily life more efficient for the masses. Artificial intelligence can even be used to help diagnose illnesses such as cancer (Howard 10:49). I think it is the responsibility of engineers and companies with access to big data to filter this data before giving it to the government. A possible problem that could arise from this situation is that companies could use the data they gathered in a malicious way. However, with engineers at every company using similar ethical codes, this will not become a problem.

My ethical code can be adapted to almost any situation, but sometimes external factors and complex issues require more analysis, as well as the application of pragmatic principles. I believe that big data and artificial intelligence can have a positive relationship with the government as long as steps are taken to ensure that the power of this technology is not abused to take away the privacy of individuals.