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ECS 188

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## Homework 1

### 1. Describe relativism, utilitarianism, and deontology

Relativism can be very subjective because it varies from person to person—what morally right for you may not be right for me, and vice versa. There's isn't a standard set of morals, thus one would have to decide for themselves what's right or wrong. It can also change over time because morals change over time (e.g. slavery). Relativism can be seen as contradictory, because if you see something as right, but society sees it as wrong, that essentially means you're wrong—a contradiction.

Utilitarianism tries to maximize happiness and create the best possible outcome from a small sacrifice (e.g. who should a self-driving car hit to avoid a large accident). The consequences of the actions determines whether if it's right or wrong. Utilitarianism focuses on the value of a result; if a situation is more valuable than its alternatives, then it'll get chosen. This can be seen as unjust because everything is seen as a ranking, no one person's unhappiness or happiness is more important than another's.

Deontology possesses an existing defined structure of universal rules to follow. An action is established right or wrong according to these existing universal morals. Though this bring up some weakness: because these rules are fixed, there's no flexibility in extreme circumstances. For example, you had to shoot someone because they were about to attack your family, however, since you killed, you're in the wrong. Humans shouldn't be treated as means to an end, rather, individual humans are valuable.

2. Please analyze the case illustration section for Utilitarianism and write down the information elements needed for a utilitarian to decide how to use those expensive dialysis machines.

Back during the early deployments of kidney dialysis machine, the demand exceeded the supply. Thus, some hospitals set up committee tasked with tough decision of who gets access to the machines. These committees started utilizing utilitarian criteria: “The medical condition of each patient was taken into account, but the decisions were additionally made on the basis of the personal and social characteristics of each patient: age, job, number of dependents, social usefulness of job, whether the person had a criminal record, and so on” (Johnson 11). From this example, the information that the hospital needed was your credibility, reliability, and record. Because utilitarianism tries to maximize the best possible outcome, the hospital wants to save the ones that will benefit society. To do so, they would need all prior information about the subject to create the best possible decision. In other words, the ethical decision depends on the information about the subject, and whether the result of said ethical decision yields a positive outcome or not.

Another information element we can consider is “how are humans valued?” Beside using prior information about the person, how was it that these hospitals were able to rank an individual. At that point, an individual’s life is marked as an arbitrary value—as objects. When the public heard what the hospitals were doing, they criticized the utilitarian methods used. It was unethical and disrespectful to assign people with arbitrary social value. They claimed that every individual has a value and purpose—at least that should be respected.

3. Please choose one of ethics theories from Johnson's paper (i.e., relativism, utilitarianism, and deontology) and write down the information elements needed to support the ethical analysis for this personal information collection action. Please justify why these information elements are both necessary and sufficient to perform the analysis.

Cambridge Analytica ran into a controversy a couple years back when it was revealed that they collected personal data through Facebook without consent to create targeted political advertisement. Let's assume that this action was done as an ethical decision through deontology. Deontology states that individual beings are valuable. So, by making personalized advertisements, Cambridge Analytica respects these values, rather than see subjects as means to an end.

One information element is personal information and data. Consider the action—data collection—as a means to inform the subjects by seeing what their preferences are and creating recommendations fitted to them. By collecting the personal data of the subject, you can then create curated knowledge for your subjects, in this case political advertisement. Information such as a subject's state location, county location, age, age group, and even their religion can provide personalized political advertisement so that the subject can support the preferred political party or movement. From Kant's categorical imperative, instead of using people as a means to their end, Cambridge Analytica provides personalized knowledge in return, thereby respecting the subject's ability to provide personal information. This means Cambridge Analytica respects their subjects and they acted from duty, hence making their ethical decision correct.

Another information element to consider is the right to access of information. One can argue that the access to information and knowledge is a universal human right, hence by definition of deontology, the denial of access to information and knowledge is deemed universally wrong. This means that Cambridge Analytica has the right to access information, and in return, they provide personalized advertisement as knowledge. Because of contradiction, Cambridge Analytica's actions of data collection is right because of the action of denying access to information and knowledge is wrong. Thus, Cambridge Analytica's actions are universal and correct, hence making their ethical decision correct.

The information elements Cambridge Analytica used are both necessary and sufficient to perform the ethical analysis for this personal information collection. Through deontology, their action can be argued as morally correct, and their decisions can be argued as ethical.