Dependable Systems
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Training Exercises C1 (Intro) and C2 (Filter Bubbles)

with Example Solutions

Issue 1: *Conceptual Work*

Conceptual work can be very difficult, even for seemingly simple concepts. What is soup, for example? Take ten minutes and try to come up with an explication of "soup". *Then* watch this video: `https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1HVTNxwt7w`

Pick another term (any non-technical term) and try to come up with an explication.

A little inspiration: baguette, sports, pandemic, bike, helmet, smartphone, cat, to send a message, to steal a job (think back to the argument you reconstructed from the *Känguru Chroniken*), computer, artificial, normal, truth, meaning, knowledge, love, justice, friendship, life, health, intelligence

Issue 2: *Are you in a filter bubble?*

Discuss in a group:

(a) Do you think you (personally) are in a filter bubble?

(b) How much do you feel that filter bubbles and echo chambers influence your beliefs and your actions?

(c) What are the topics that frequently come up for you online?

(d) Is that the same as for others or is that different?

(e) Do you think that, in your case, this is good, bad or a neutral? Answer both from a moral and from a rational perspective.

Issue 3: *Miscellaneous*

Think about the following statements. Are they true or false? Do they need conditionalization? You can give arguments for them if you want to.

(1) The distinction between "echo chamber" and "filter bubble" is artificial.

(2) Facebook alone cannot implement something in order to break the filter bubble of most people.

(3) Filter algorithms do more harm than good in the global society.

(4) Given the way that humans work psychologically and in societies, you hardly can have freedom of speech without having echo chambers.

(5) You can get rid of filter bubbles and echo chambers without the help of computer scientists.

(6) You can reasonably get rid of filter bubbles and echo chambers without the help of computer scientists.

Sketch of a Solution 3:

(1) It depends on how we understand the two terms. If we take the two to be technical terms with a precise definition, the terms are artificial in a way, and so is their distinction. If we take at least one of them to be an 'in-between' term, then the distinction might be less artificial.

(2) Probably true. As we have seen in the lecture, the most plausible way to understand the term "filter bubble" is in a way that involves many filter algorithms. If this is true, then Facebook alone cannot break the filter bubble, as other websites would still have filter algorithms. So, at best Facebook can weaken the filter bubble of the people who use Facebook.

(3) This is an empirical question that is not (only) a question of philosophy anymore. But it nevertheless is an interesting question in our context. Prima facie, however, there is some evidence that this claim is false. Because without filter algorithms the internet would be unusable, and there are many benefits of having (a usable) internet.

(4) Probably true. If we have freedom of speech then it is inevitable that different people will utter different opinions on certain issues. There will probably be people who will accept one opinion and reject the other, from which (little by little) echo chambers will plausibly emerge. What drastically varies, however, is the extend to which this happens. Current today's communication structures with social media etc arguably work in favour of echo chambers more than this was the case in the past.

(5) If we are talking only about online filter bubbles and echo chambers: Technically yes, but probably not in a viable way. You could, for instance, stop using the internet altogether. But the price of would just be too high. If we are also including offline filter bubbles and echo chambers, then computer scientists are irrelevant in this matter anyway.

(6) Probably false. Not using the internet anymore (the solution just suggested) is not a very reasonable way to get rid of filter bubbles and echo chambers. For this reason, only a solution that involves significantly altering filter algorithms is a reasonable way to get rid of filter bubbles. For doing so, computer scientists are needed. Consequently, you cannot reasonably get rid of filter bubbles without the help of filter bubbles.