Ordinary Technoethics

Technoethics

- intersection
  Philosophy of Technology / Applied Ethics
  - a vibrant future for phil-tech
- premonition in Bunge 1977
- recent deployment in Luppicini and Adell 2008
- foundational program in Mitcham 1997
  - (references on the last slides)
Ideal Language / Ordinary language split in analytical philosophy
- see Rorty 1967, the *Linguistic Turn* textbook

1) Ideal Language
- from logical empiricism
- a neopositivistic project to construct science as a perfect language

2) Ordinary Language
- from Wittgenstein II, J.L. Austin, …
- a deflationist project to scrutinize real uses of language in everyday life and describe the implicit metaphysics in it

my vision: an Ideal Technoethics trend is obvious in mainstream academic applied ethics
- favored by the current bureaucratic implementation of ethics in public and private affairs
- → a new language (Ethical Newspeak), scholastic disputes and agreements...
- → an ethical technocracy, or Establishment
How is ethics possible?

metaethics

How can we derive field-specific norms and values from (general) normative ethical options?

► see Frey and Wellman 2003 for details

Rules, norms, duties, moral values?

for medicine, business, engineering, warfare, parenting...

why a problem?

► because it does not work
  ► people (pretend to) read the Ethical Committee Recommendations, pin the Ethical Chart to the wall and let out a sigh …

we know why it does not work:

► Varela 1999, pragmatics of values:
  ► ethical action happens in situation: “immediate coping with what is confronting us”, concretely
  ► it is not a judgment after deliberate analysis

► ethics is “skill”, not knowledge
  ► it can be an expertise, but a transparent one (not scholastic!)
ordinary phil-tech $\rightarrow$ OT

the importance of ordinary technologically-laden behaviors
- Borgmann 1984 + Borgmann 1995

- focal things and practices $\rightarrow$ ordinary technoethics
  - e.g. cooking a real meal for a real dinner
- an expansion from the ontology of the ordinary involvement with artifacts
  to the implicit values in this involvement
  - = not only significance (ontological and symbolic value)
    but action (pragmatic value)

skills not principles
- progressive and deep learning of ethical skills
- example (just one): writing an email
  - more appropriate
  - when to send it, to which one of the person's addresses, how long the message
- $\rightarrow$ ethical skills, in progress in everyone's ordinary life (private and professional)
  - nothing in it comes from school, moral lectures or pious readings
- the ordinary empowerment of users ($\neq$ extraordinary technologies)
  - it is what characterizes the Internet as a whole
- = an ordinary ethical empowerment of users, consumers, citizens
applied examples:

- earphones, laptop...
- cellphones: choices – pay-as-you-go account and dumb-phone
- transportation: walking/driving – stairs – …
- food
- energy consumption
- violence representation (TV, movies, video games, etc.)

→ the micro-actions and micro-skills of OT

end user empowerment

- technoethics on the user end / on the designer end
- OT consciously focuses on the user end
- even engineering ethics (designer end) is more and more driven by real uses
  - e.g. food hygiene (fat and sugar) or food micro-politics (organic, no palm oil)
  - → shaping the technostructure upwards from the bottom of the pyramid
1- wisdom cultures
- not heroic wisdom (the sage as an exceptional hero), but ordinary wisdom
  - everyone can be a junzi (君子), the Confucian ordinary performer of ethics
- awareness of the ordinary
  - away from the “blasé Dasein”
  - a Buddhist and Zen capacity of attention to the ordinary
  - mindfulness psychology
- self-reliance
  - responsibility not as accountability (justification by discourse) but as ethical responsiveness (see Hershock 2006)

2- importance and care
- see Harry Frankfurt’s importance of what we care about
- OT stresses the importance of micro-uses and micro-concerns with artifacts and invites us to take care directly
  - = reappropriate moral agency
    - some moral agency seems to be built-in in the artifact, most of the time, just because we do not (properly) care
3- reappropriation

- ordinary sustainability
  - reappropriate lost skills and do not delegate the essential (time, health, education, environmental accountability...)
- satiety and frugality
  - reappropriate the skills to cope with material and immaterial abundance

concluding remarks

- shifts that Ordinary Technoethics involves:
  1) a shift from the scholastic to the pragmatic
  2) a shift from the political to the ethical
  3) a shift from delegation to personal sustainability
  4) a shift from avidity to frugality


Bunge M., "Towards a Technoethics", *Monist*, 60 (1), 1977, 96-107


Keulartz J. et al. (ed.), *Pragmatist Ethics for a Technological Culture*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002


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