

Artificial Intelligence as Cognitive Capital: A Qualified Deontological Analysis

- ▶ **Introduction:** the focus of this presentation is on how we might make apt responses to artificial intelligence as a feature of our practical life (in particular societies, communities, and other social contexts).
- ▶ **'Cognitive capital':** this concept helps us to bring into focus artificial intelligence as (i) a resource we value and (ii) as a feature of our environment about which we harbour reservations.
- ▶ **Qualified deontology:** a moral philosophy that may afford a basis on which to make apt responses to artificial intelligence.

Cognitive Capital

- ▶ **Origins of the concept:** extrapolation from the writings of Pierre Bourdieu.
- ▶ Bourdieu on capital: Bourdieu uses 'capital' in a wide range of ways: thus we have 'cultural capital', 'social capital', and 'symbolic capital'.
- ▶ Bourdieu's *modus operandi*: place an adjective in front of 'capital' (a repository of value with practical significance) so as to bring into focus (a) the relevant source of value and (b) its practical significance.
- ▶ Symbolic capital: an example – lawyers as possessors of '*noblesse de robe*': lawyers possess a form of capital (a skill-set, a disposition, etc) that equips them to secure or advance the interests of the collectivity (P. Bourdieu, *On The State*).

Cognitive Capital

- ▶ *Noblesse de robe* as capital: extrapolation – those who (ultimately) acquire symbolic capital in the form of *noblesse de robe* also build up a fund of cognitive capital.
- ▶ Here, we might draw on Stanley Fish when he talks of lawyers apprehending the world through ‘practice-informed eyes’ (S. Fish, *Professional Correctness*).

Cognitive Capital



- ▶ Central claim in this presentation: artificial intelligence (where practically useful) presents us with forms of cognitive capital.
- ▶ Viewed in this light, it takes on the appearance of a resource we value.
- ▶ But its presence in practical contexts also generates unease.
- ▶ So how should we respond to it as a feature of our practical life?

Moral Philosophy: Some Preliminaries

- ▶ **Deontology:** certain entities, interests, and states of affairs are intrinsically valuable; certain modes of behaviour are the intrinsically right thing to do.
- ▶ Example: people have intrinsic value; we should act in ways that are attentive to the value they possess.
- ▶ **Consequentialism:** the value of an action derives from the value of its consequences (or anticipated consequences).
- ▶ Example: the crude utilitarian injunction to pursue 'the greatest good of the greatest number'.
- ▶ **Mutual antagonism:** moral philosophers regularly emphasize the antagonistic relationship in which these deontological and consequentialist approaches to moral philosophy stand relative to one another.
- ▶ However, we can integrate deontology and consequentialism into a composite body of moral thought: qualified deontology

Qualified Deontology

- ▶ Qualified deontology gives sequential priority to deontological considerations.
- ▶ Example: humans and their interests as sources of intrinsic value; we should act in ways that secure these sources of value.
- ▶ However, qualified deontology is, in a limited range of circumstances, responsive to countervailing consequentialist reasons for action.
- ▶ Example: the consequences of a particular course of action will be (or are likely to be) highly beneficial; in these circumstances, we have grounds for overriding our (sequentially prior) commitment to securing sources of intrinsic value.

Qualified Deontology and Exclusionary Reasons

- ▶ An exclusionary reason gives us grounds on which to ignore considerations that, in other circumstances, would prompt us to embark on such-and-such a course of conduct (Joseph Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms*).
- ▶ An exclusionary reason is defeasible in circumstances where we can, on reaching a certain threshold, override it.
- ▶ Exclusionary reasons are a feature of qualified deontology: the qualified deontological *modus operandi* - (i) act on deontological considerations, but (ii) when the benefits (or anticipated benefits) of a countervailing consequentialist course of action reach a certain threshold, they provide reasons for action on which we can act.

Applying Qualified Deontology to Artificial Intelligence

- ▶ Deontology: give sequential priority to humans and their interests.
- ▶ Consequentialism: if the benefits of artificial intelligence as a source of cognitive capital reach a suitably high threshold, we have grounds for overriding our prior deontological commitment.

A Mediating Principle

- ▶ Embracing artificial intelligence (understood as cognitive capital) will (or is likely to) yield benefits that are in the public interest.
- ▶ Overriding (or putting at risk) sources of intrinsic value (humans and their interests) is necessary in order to secure the benefits (or anticipated benefits).
- ▶ Here, we are working the proportionality into our qualified deontological response to artificial intelligence.
- ▶ A nagging difficulty: when we talk of pursuing the public interest, should we think in terms of **universal benefit** (a strongly egalitarian approach) or something less exacting?

Conclusions

- ▶ Artificial intelligence as cognitive capital
- ▶ Qualified deontology as a resource for the purposes of critical reflection
- ▶ The ticklish topic of the public interest
- ▶ Two final thoughts related to the public interest: (i) Bourdieu on 'the properly political' and (ii) qualified consequentialism.