Assignment 2: Constructing Mechanical Questions, Critical Questions, and Ethical Dilemmas
1453 – Computer and Information Ethics – Fall 2019

Due: Friday, 9/27 by midnight
Submission: through Canvas
15 points

Assignment: In this assignment, you will practice rewriting mechanical questions into critical questions, and rewriting critical questions into ethical dilemmas.

Objective: The purpose of this assignment is to give you a practical opportunity to use the tools we’ve been developing for recognizing ethical issues. You’ll do this by practicing constructing critical questions and ethical dilemmas through critical analysis of a news article, in this instance about a contemporary development in a socio-technical system. In order to analyze the ethics of a situation, issue, or event, we first have to distinguish between the types of questions we can ask about it, because determining these influences the kinds of information we can get from answering those questions. This in turn helps us figure out how to take the next step: deciding what actions should be taken when we have decisions to make.

Remember that ethical dilemmas have these characteristics:
1. They are critical questions that are:
2. Values oriented/laden (they ask which values to maximize, or how to maximize a value)
3. Action oriented (they question what we should do)

TASKS:

Task 1: Read the following article carefully:
“Exclusive: Amazon will let anyone answer your Alexa questions now”

Task 2: Write 3 of your own mechanical questions about Alexa Answers:

1. What if some form of profanity is necessary in an answer, will it be banned no matter what?

2. How can Amazon Alexa users upvote? Do they just speak to Alexa after the question is answered with whether they are satisfied or not?

3. Will there be any sort of physical benefits from answering many questions for the Amazon community, or just simply digital progress and badges.

Task 3: Rewrite the following mechanical questions as critical questions:
a. What compensation does Amazon provide for people who provide labor in the form of answering questions for the Alexa Answers data set?
   a. Should Amazon compensate the people who provide answers for the community?

b. In addition to their use of machine learning based algorithmic filtering, what guidelines or rules does Amazon use to determine when a human being should review answers provided by users?
   a. Is it morally correct for one individual to decide whether on not certain answers should or shouldn’t be on Alexa Answers?

c. How many Amazon Echo users ask questions to their Alexa devices each day?
   a. How much of the population relies on their Alexa for daily productivity.

Task 4: Rewrite the following critical questions into ethical dilemmas (or stronger ethical dilemmas).

d. What characteristics or properties of answers provided by users can help identify an instance when the answer is inappropriate for Amazon to include in answers given to the general public by Alexa?
   a. Should Amazon be allowed to determine the criteria of which an Amazon answer is inappropriate or not? Is the general population more entitled to set the specific criteria?

e. What kinds of questions are best suited to be answered by the general public?
   a. Should Amazon limit what types of questions are allowed to be answered by the general public?

Rubric:
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<th>Task 2:</th>
<th>3 points</th>
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<td>1 point for each mechanical question written</td>
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<th>Task 3:</th>
<th>6 points</th>
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<td>2 points for each mechanical question rewritten as a critical question</td>
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<th>Task 4:</th>
<th>6 points</th>
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<td>3 points for each critical question rewritten as an ethical dilemma</td>
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<th>Total</th>
<th>15 points</th>
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