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PHILOSOPHICAL LEARNING APPLIED TO ONLINE SURROUNDINGS IN EU

MANUAL

PHILOSOPHICAL COOKBOOK:
Recipes that Help you Remain Safe and Sane in Digital World

BELIANUM

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Common "Traps" of the Digital World: Don't Get Fooled!

This manual titled Philosophical Cookbook: Recipes that Help You Remain Safe and Sane in Digital World includes a repository of philosophical methods, tools, and concepts, which are presented as possible means for addressing the challenges of the online environment. It is written in a way that is accessible to students and the general public.

While the digital world and online culture offer many benefits and chart the path of significant developments, there are pervaded with particular traps or challenges. Let us first mention only some of the most common ones. The first one is the so-called information overload which concerns the abundance of information available online; therefore, it is easy to get overwhelmed and struggle to filter out relevant and accurate information from all the noise. The digital world also includes several important privacy concerns, as personal information can be easily collected, shared, and sometimes exploited without consent. Additionally, there are risks of data breaches, hacking, identity theft, and other cyber threats. The internet world is home to different scams, phishing attempts, and fraudulent activities. Next, since the digital world offers endless distractions, such as social media, gaming, and online entertainment, this can turn into addictive behaviours and difficulties with managing time effectively. The anonymity in an online environment can lead to increased incidents of cyberbullying and online harassment, causing emotional distress and impacting mental well-being. Online AI-based algorithms often personalize content based on user preferences, leading to the formation of filter bubbles and echo chambers. This can limit exposure to diverse perspectives, reinforce biases, and hinder critical thinking. An epistemic bubble refers to a situation in which individuals are only exposed to information, perspectives, and beliefs that align with their existing views and opinions. It occurs when people surround themselves with like-minded individuals or engage primarily with sources that reinforce their preexisting beliefs, leading to a limited and distorted understanding of the world. An echo chamber further involves actively filtering out dissenting views. This can also can lead to a reinforcement of biases, a lack of exposure to diverse perspectives, and a diminished ability to critically evaluate and consider alternative viewpoints. It is important to actively seek out diverse sources of information, engage with different perspectives, and challenge one's own beliefs to avoid falling into an epistemic bubble. By fostering intellectual curiosity and embracing a variety of viewpoints, individuals can broaden their understanding, enhance critical thinking skills, and promote a more well-rounded and informed perspective. To navigate all these traps, it is vital to practice digital literacy, be mindful of online behaviour, protect personal information, maintain a healthy balance between online and offline activities, and stay informed about digital risks and best practices for online safety. Encouraging digital literacy, critical thinking, and empathy can empower youth to navigate the online world safely and responsibly.

This Philosophical Cookbook presents a way in which philosophy, with its key concepts, methodologies and tools, can help one to attain this goal.

The manual thus consists of three parts. Part 1 focuses on philosophical concepts, while Parts 2 and 3 deal with philosophical methods and tools. Each part has several chapters, and every chapter has the same structure. First, the chosen concept, method or tool is briefly defined and described. The following section includes an identification and elaboration of a particular problem or challenge, that the digital world gives rise to (e.g. fake news, hate speech, privacy concerns). The concluding section of each chapter then elaborates on how a particular philosophical concept/method/tool can help us tackle or better understand the issue/problem/phenomenon in question.

Authors

PART 1
Philosophical Concepts

Truth and Knowledge

What is truth and what is knowledge?

Truth is usually understood in relation to statements or beliefs, as in the case when I say that my statement or my belief that it is raining outside is true. In the most direct way, it can be further elaborated as correspondence between a statement or belief and the objective reality or facts it represents. My statement that it is raining outside right now is true, just in case the world really is such that it is raining. In other words, when a statement or a belief accurately describes or corresponds to the way things actually are, it is considered true. In philosophy, this understanding of truth is labelled as the correspondence theory of truth. There are also other theories, such as a pragmatic theory (truth as related to the practical consequences or utility of a belief or statement; e.g. in this vein, a scientific theory that consistently produces accurate predictions can be regarded as true) and coherence theory (truth is a function of internal consistency and coherence of a set of beliefs or statements; something is considered true if it fits well with other beliefs or statements).

Knowledge is usually defined as justified true belief. A person knows something, e.g. that there is a bottle of water on the desk in front of her, when she has a belief about it, her belief is true, and she has good reasons for adopting or holding this belief (evidence or grounds for belief). All three elements seem necessary. (E.g., I cannot know something that I have no belief about, I cannot know something that is not true (I can believe it, but this is not called knowledge), and I do not know something if I am merely guessing or just happened to hold a true belief). This kind of knowledge is usually labelled as declarative knowledge or "knowledge-that" (e.g. Sarah knows that there is a bottle on the table in front of her.). Another type of knowledge is procedural knowledge or "knowledge-how", e.g. knowing how to ride a bike or change a car tyre. The latter pertains to knowledge of how to perform a specific skill or task and often requires practice to gain it.

The challenge of post-truth and the phenomenon of bullshit

The term post-truth refers to a cultural or political setting in which objective facts and empirical data are valued less than emotional appeals, personal beliefs, or opinions. Truth becomes relative and subjective in a post-truth world, sometimes overridden by appeals to personal feelings, biases, or ideologies. The concept of post-truth has gained significance in recent cultural and political discourse and media, particularly in the age of social media and internet communication, when misinformation and deception may spread quickly. Narratives, rhetoric, and persuasive strategies are frequently emphasized over verifiable facts and data in a post-truth world. Post-truth does not imply the impossibility of truth or that all information is necessarily wrong. Instead, it suggests a situation where truth and facts can be manipulated or downplayed in favour of narratives that resonate with people's preexisting beliefs or emotions. All this can lead to a blurring of the line between fact (or knowledge) and opinion, making it more challenging to establish a shared understanding of reality.

"Bullshit" is a colloquial term often used to describe information or statements that are deceptive, misleading, exaggerated, or simply not true. The term gained popularity through philosopher Harry Frankfurt's influential essay "On Bullshit" (2005), in which he explores the nature and characteristics of bullshit. Frankfurt suggests that a liar knows the truth but intentionally misrepresents it, whereas a bullshitter does not care about the truth or falsity of their statements. They are more interested in shaping perceptions or manipulating others through persuasive language or claims that lack a solid foundation. Bullshitters are typically indifferent to the audience's understanding or the accuracy of their own statements. They are more focused on creating an impression, maintaining an image, or promoting their own agenda. In essence, bullshit involves communication that lacks sincerity, integrity, or a genuine commitment to truthfulness. Frankfurt's thesis is also that Western society is increasingly permeated by bullshit. Bullshit is about asserting things that, in a sense, we do not even believe ourselves. It is not a lie, because a bullshit remains a bullshit whether it is true or false. It is a very special relationship to truth, where all that matters is that you are "faithful" to your desire to asset or pronounce a statement, while the truth of it is irrelevant to you. In short, it is a mixture of disrespect for honesty, nonsense, disinterest, deception and self-deception. Frankfurt also highlights our involvement in the community of bullshitting, either by actively contributing to it or by failing to recognise it or by tolerating it in our midst.

Both phenomena are present in the digital world and oftentimes hard to detect.

How can truth and knowledge help us tackle post-truth era and bullshit?

Truth and knowledge play crucial roles in addressing the challenges posed by the post-truth era and in combating bullshit. First, focusing on the notions of truth and knowledge and utilizing them as part of critical thinking help individuals discern between reliable information and misinformation. What is also important is media, information and digital literacy, since one can then better understand how information is created, disseminated, and evaluated, and thus one can more easily spot deceptive or misleading content and make informed judgments about the accuracy of claims. Truth is the foundation of the so-called fact-checking and verification. It is often very useful to engage in fact-checking statements that we encountered in the digital world and scrutinizing evidence for them. This can counter the spread of misinformation. Accountability is also important, meaning that one must hold individuals and institutions responsible for their claims and challenge their practices if they are deceptive. One must also be mindful of one's own biases. Lastly, a general aim is to create and promote a culture of truth, that is, a community that values truth, knowledge, and intellectual integrity. This includes fostering open and honest dialogue, encouraging respectful and evidence-based debates, and promoting the joint pursuit of knowledge. Emphasizing the importance of truth in various aspects of society can help counteract the influence of post-truth tendencies.

Bias and Prejudice

What are bias and prejudice?

The terms "bias" and "prejudice" usually have negative connotations and are frequently linked to attribution of unfavorable characteristics to certain people based on certain resembling features and leading to false generalizations, logical fallacies. For instance claims like all blondes are stupid, all men are aggressors, women cannot read maps, all people from southern countries are lazy, are examples of prejudices or bias. The problem stems from false generalization without basis in solid empirical evidence or logic. For instance we can easily prove there is at least one smart blonde, man who is not aggressor, woman who can read a map, etc. To avoid bias seems to be very important not just in our daily interactions with people but this risk can emerge also while doing research, for instance various surveys, data analysis and interpretation may be biased which can lead to distorted interpretation of reality.

Cognitive bias can be characterized as systematic errors in subjective reasoning about the world, which are widespread. Unfortunately "they are difficult for individuals to avoid and in fact can lead different individuals to subjectively different interpretations of objective facts. " (Britannica: Cognitive bias, 2023)

Dictionary characteristic of prejudice says it is "an adverse or hostile attitude toward a group or its individual members, generally without just grounds or before sufficient evidence. It is characterized by irrational, stereotyped beliefs". (Brittanica: Prejudice, 2023) It is often oriented towards ethics group and related to racism but can exist also towards certain people based on their characteristics like weight, gender, sexual orientation etc.

Regarding the nature of prejudices or bias, it seems to be related to so-called "controlled" and "automatic" information processing. These ideas emerged especially in 1970s. The mentioned two types of processing of information, can be characterized as follows:

> *- controlled processing is voluntary, attention-demanding, and of limited capacity,*
> *- automatic processing unfold without attention, has nearly unlimited capacity, is hard to suppress voluntarily." (Brownstein, 2019; Payne & Gawronski 2010; see also Bargh 1994).*

Fazio (1995) and colleagues showed that attitudes can be understood as activated by either controlled or automatic processes. The automatic processing is related to bias and prejudice, since it offers us immediate evaluation of situation without much deep rational thinking and reflection.

It seems to be important to master the skill of revealing these threads of prejudices and biased understanding of the world in order to avoid harm and false sense of reality.

The problem of bias and prejudice online

We can perceive bias and prejudice also online. For instance, in internet discussions, it is possible to see hate speech, racistic, sexist etc., views. Also, certain fake news are manipulating the reader to believe in manipulated justification of inequality based on ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation, age etc.

We can get manipulated also by the existence of cognitive bias that leads to unclear uncritical thinking. New technologies can unfortunately also contribute to forming biased attitudes towards certain people. For instance, deep fakes, fake pictures, etc can lead to manipulation while presenting people with certain characteristics as criminals, threat, less intelligent etc.

However, the bias is also influencing digital technologies for instance AI is influenced by bias of previous decisions of people since it is using deep learning for eg. judging cases in medicine, selecting candidates for jobs, for loans etc. Some proponents of AI claim that AI can be impartial because it can be programmed and has no emotions so cannot be so easily influenced, however although it is true to some extent, in current state it is possible to see bias also in AI decisions as they are influenced by human agents. AI seems to have a great potential for helping mankind and is already used in judging candidates for jobs, who should get a loan, legal cases etc. However as mentioned above all these areas demonstrate biased views therefore we have to use critical thinking to judge these decisions

How can understanding of bias and prejudices help us tackle it online?

The understanding of the existence of bias and prejudices as described above can help us be more aware of manipulation and getting into a trap of false irrational judgements. It is important to know that we people due to the nature of our thinking are in danger of committing biased attitudes towards others. It is important to exercise critical rational thinking and argumentation in order to avoid harming others by unjust and unfair treatments based on false generalizations which can occur not just offline but spread also online. One of the challenges is also multiplication of the bias in AI etc. However by understanding and identifying bias and prejudice it is possible to prevent the negative effects of it. It can be illustrated by a metaphor of wearing damaged glasses that manipulate our vision that we perceive things around us differently but if we are aware of that we will avoid making decisions to sit in the car and drive while wearing them.

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Man With Broken Eyeglasses Stock Photo - Download Image Now - Eyeglasses, Broken, Damaged - iStock (istockphoto.com)

Fake vs. Real /Appearance vs. Reality

What is real and what is fake?

In our daily lives, we are confronted with the distinction between the real and the fake. A good example of this is real and fake news and other messages we receive. To be real, news must have verified and credible content, while fake news contains untrue and unverified information, including generalisations.

What is real is the subject of the coherence theory, which states that only what fits the facts is real. The weakness of this theory, however, is that the concept of truth is a regulatory ideal that can only be realised in a unified and sophisticated science that is far removed from the partial belief systems of actually existing human society. Pragmatic theory, on the other hand, asserts that what is useful is true. Opponents protest that the supposed conflation of truth and utility is pernicious. Man as a moral being is obliged to seek truth without regard to utility.
Untrue is the antithesis of true and refers to deficient or incorrect, even false, facts. Untrue can be news, but also our image of ourselves in front of other people and our behaviour in society. We also know about falsified documents and falsified source products. It is also important to know that what is "fake" can be so intentionally or unintentionally.

The challenge of distinguishing between fake and real

We live in the age of marketing, a time when, for the first time in history, there are too many things, or far more, than people need to survive. In the flood of information, it is difficult to distinguish between real and fake products, and between advertising and other content. Chronic lack of time also plays a role, which is why we accept and use the first information or product that is offered to us or that is offered to us by marketing networks with the help of algorithms that carefully collect information about us and our interests.
The problem that modern people face is that fake products in real life are so similar to real ones that it is difficult to distinguish them. Besides, some important real messages are well encrypted and censored, so the general public does not know about them. So we can only guess what important heads of state say to each other and what the situation on the war fronts really is. A good example of this is the war in Ukraine, which is also about cyber warfare. We are dealing with two opposing sides using the data of the war in their own way while pointing out the misinformation of the other side. This begs the question: What is real? Are we living in a more real-world or a more fake world? What can we do ourselves to prevent the spread of misinformation?

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The real information about the current war in Ukraine will, in all likelihood, come with time. Similarly, information about previous wars, especially the World War II. Nevertheless, we humans are always called to seek the truth and do our best in our daily lives to work with verified information or pay attention to diction when describing events related to war.

How can the correct way of expressing tackle the real?

We can avoid spreading misinformation by checking it carefully. We have seen that not all information (e.g., about a war) can be verified. To avoid the spread of misinformation, we can only change the diction of the expression. Instead of asserting and defending unverified facts, we should use words that allow for the possibility that the information expressed may not be true. So instead of using fixed sentences, we should use more open-ended sentences. Some examples are given below.

Fixed sentences	Open sentences
I am convinced that Russia is losing the war.	It seems to me that Russia is losing the war, but I cannot say that with absolute certainty.
The Russian authorities are reporting that a plane has been shot down near the Sevastopol air base in the Crimea peninsula.	The Russians are writing that a plane has been shot down near the Sevastopol air base on the Crimean peninsula.
Pope Pius XII and Hitler hated each other.	Archival documents from World War II report that Pope Pius XII and Hitler were not on the best of terms.

Private vs. Public

What is private and what is public?

In the philosophical discourse, the distinction between private and public domains is central to understanding numerous ethical, political, and social phenomena. This chapter aims to provide an introduction to the conceptual dichotomy between private and public.

Private refers to belonging to or for the use of one particular person or group of people only. It often indicates things over which we have enough control to keep out of sight of others if we so wish. Public, on the other hand, refers to of or concerning the people as a whole. The public is therefore concerned with things that are visible, accessible, and, at least in some sense, available to all.

The private sphere is often related to an individual or a small group, such as a family. Here, personal choices, individual values, and intimate relationships reside. The private sphere is seen as the realm where individuals can freely express themselves without interference from others. It includes things like personal thoughts, feelings, and actions that are usually considered one's »own business«. The key here is personal control over what remains private, rather than shared with everyone else.

Some examples of private spheres may include your own bedroom, your feelings toward a particular person, or your personal diary. Some important philosophical concerns in this context are related to the concepts of:

   1. **Autonomy:** The right to self-governance and personal decisions without external control.
   2. **Intimacy:** The relationship and interactions with close family and friends without unnecessary exposure.
   3. **Secrecy:** Ethical considerations around keeping things confidential or hidden.

The public sphere, on the other hand, refers to the areas of social life where individuals come together and for example, discuss and identify societal problems and work collectively on solutions. This might include public forums, government bodies, community organizations, and other places where people gather to engage in dialogue and decision-making that impacts the broader community.

Examples of public sphere would include a town hall meeting to discuss community issues or the laws and policies that govern society. In this sense, philosophical concerns regarding the public sphere may include the following questions:

1. **Democracy:** The process by which people collectively make decisions and govern themselves.
2. **Justice:** Fairness and equality in the distribution of resources, opportunities, and treatment of individuals.
3. **Transparency:** Openness in governance, the decision-making process, and accessibility to information.

However, it should be emphasised that, although the public sphere generally speaking encompasses a space of openness that allows access to information, which is a prerequisite for the collaboration of individuals, the public sphere more broadly refers to a space where our thoughts and actions can be publicly accessible and visible to all. In this sense, we can differentiate physical public spaces and virtual ones.

Physical public spaces may include streets or parks, where our activities are visible to anyone passing by. It may include shopping malls, libraries, or public transportation. These spaces are public in the sense that because of the immediate proximity of other people our activities cannot always be kept private.

Virtual public spaces refer to social media platforms, video-sharing platforms, live-streaming platforms, and so on. The posts on such platforms are not private precisely because they are shared with other people and are thus »public«. Our posts may be voluntary (a tweet about our opinion on an upcoming election, a photo of us at a recent party, or a professional description on the website of a company we work for), but they may also be involuntary in that we may be tagged in a photo of a friend who posted it, we may be photographed in a park, or our posted information may be used for purposes for which we did not give consent.

We do not always participate in virtual public space entirely voluntarily, not least because hybrid public spaces exist today. Attending public events like concerts, sports games, or political rallies may lead to exposure through television, online news, or social media, and even though we participated voluntarily in physical public spaces, we are often not aware that we participated in virtual public spaces as well.

The Problem of the Interplay Between Private and Public and Digital Traces

As we saw above, the distinction between private and public isn't always clear-cut. Many issues overlap in other ways as well, creating complex philosophical questions. Those may include:

1. **Privacy Rights:** How do we balance the individual's right to privacy against society's need for security or information? For example, should the government have access to personal phone records in the name of national security?
2. **Ethical Responsibilities:** Where does personal responsibility end, and public responsibility begin? For instance, if you see someone littering in a park, is it your private concern or a public issue?
3. **Social Influences:** How do public policies and societal expectations shape private beliefs, actions, and values?

A digital trace, or digital footprint, refers to the data left behind from online interactions, whether through social media, web browsing, online purchases, or even email exchanges. In all the interactions and activities we carry out online, there are information records that are used by web applications for their own purposes but can also be used for unwanted purposes.

This trace connects intimately with both private and public spaces, as private browsing or personal messages can be tracked by service providers, and public interactions on social platforms become part of an accessible online persona. The complex interplay between private and public digital traces raises profound ethical issues. Privacy concerns emerge as personal data in private spaces might be accessed or sold without explicit consent. In public domains, the digital trace might lead to scrutiny, judgment, or misuse of information, raising questions about accountability and integrity. The digital trace thereby acts as a mirror reflecting both personal choices and societal norms, with implications that extend into issues of autonomy, transparency, responsibility, and the delicate balance between individual rights and collective considerations.

How can we use our knowledge of the difference between private and public in our participation in online surroundings?

Our participation in the virtual world is directly linked to our understanding of private and public space. We should be aware of their implications, especially when it comes to:

1. **Protecting personal information:** Recognize what information is personal and sensitive, such as passwords, addresses, and financial details, and be cautious about where and how you share this information, recognizing that public platforms can be accessed by others.

2. Understanding privacy settings: Utilize privacy settings on social media to control who can see your posts, photos, and personal information. Remember that some information might still be visible to the platform itself or may become public if shared by someone with different privacy settings.

3. Engaging in online discussions: Consider the opinions and information you share in private chats or closed groups as well, and recognize that public forums and comment sections are visible to many, and what you share could have broader implications.

4. Assessing source credibility: In private exchanges, you might perhaps share unverified information with friends or family. In public settings, ensure that the information you share or respond to is accurate and from credible sources to avoid spreading misinformation. Keep in mind that public sources in an online environment could be »anyone«. So your sources can often be unreliable.

5. Digital etiquette and behavior: In private conversations, you might engage more informally. In public online spaces, practice good digital etiquette, being mindful of your language and behavior since it reflects on your online persona. When expressing opinion avoid discussions that can be interpreted, even if incorrectly, as hateful speech, bullying, or harassment.

6. Consideration of future implications: Remember that even in private settings, information can be screenshot or forwarded. Think about how your online actions in public spaces might affect future opportunities, such as college admissions or employment.

7. Understanding legal and ethical boundaries: Even in private exchanges, laws such as copyright or harassment still apply. Public online activities are subject to legal scrutiny, so understanding basic legal obligations and rights is essential.

Understanding the distinction between private and public domains, especially in the context of the Internet, is pivotal from a philosophical and ethical standpoint. It urges us to reflect on the nature of autonomy, consent, responsibility, and transparency. The choices we make in protecting personal information, engaging in online discussions, utilizing privacy settings, and even our digital etiquette all carry ethical implications. These decisions reflect our values, our understanding of our rights and obligations, and our commitment to the broader societal norms of fairness, respect, and integrity. In navigating the complex interplay between private and public spheres online, we are constantly challenged to balance individual freedoms with collective responsibility, personal expression with public accountability, and privacy with the shared values that underpin our digital community. This interwoven relationship highlights the intricate and multifaceted ethical landscape we traverse in our online interactions, underscoring the need for thoughtful and deliberate engagement.

Violence and Harm

What are violence and harm?

The concepts of violence and harm seem to be closely interrelated and like two sides of a coin. Violence has the potential to lead to harm. At the same time, harm is often caused by certain forms of violence. Violence can be characterized as "the use of physical force to harm someone, to damage property, etc." and also as a "great destructive force or energy." (Enc. Britannica: Violence) On the other hand, harm can be understood as a "physical or mental damage or injury: something that causes someone or something to be hurt, broken, made less valuable or successful, etc."(Britannica: Harm).

The words harm and violence seem to be not just purely descriptive but also contain normative aspects. The problem of harm is one of the central categories of ethics. The topic of violence and harm is philosophically very thought-provoking. There emerge questions like for instance - when can be harm and violence justified? Which harm is more relevant? Which morally relevant features are there regarding harm? Whose harm is more relevant? For instance, in environmental ethics, there emerge questions like, e.g. - Does harm to living beings count equally? For example is it equally bad to harm a dog and a tree? In biomedical ethics there emerge questions regarding harm to human beings in various states and the criterion for judging such cases. For instance, a fetus, a person in a coma, a healthy adult, etc. In social philosophy, there are questions regarding the authority and legitimate use of violence. For instance, in relation to the so-called common good, preventing instability of state, society, in the case of war, etc. Also, questions related to harm for instance to the property.
More importantly, there are core philosophical questions – What is even harm? How is it to be defined? And what about violence - what do we mean by violence? What counts as violence? There are various issues related to violence such as pacifism, the problem of rape and gender issues, pornography, terrorism, civil disobedience, revolutionary changes, and various social issues related to history like colonialism, etc.
Then there are questions regarding doing and allowing harm (active and passive harming) and whether there is any morally relevant difference between them. (see, e.g., Woollard, Howard-Snyder, 2021) To illustrate the problem of doing harm and allowing harm it is possible to mention for instance seeing a criminal attacking another person without helping the victim is an example of allowing harm. The person watching is not directly causing the harm but allowing it. Similarly, there can be cases when there is no moral agent but the harm is caused by eg. natural forces etc. In ethics there is an interesting discussion about the evaluation of such cases, the so-called, „consequentialists believe that doing harm is no worse than merely allowing harm while anti-consequentialists, almost universally, disagree." (Woollard, Howard-Snyder, 2021) What do you think?

Or is for instance letting AI and other digital things "do" their stuff that can cause harm an example of allowing harm?

One of the approaches to ethics dealing with harm is utilitarianism as a form of consequentialism, where in its classical approach, the main criterion for harm in utilitarianism is pain. Classical deontology deals with harm as well for instance, Kant advises not to harm persons who are rational (human) beings.

The issue of harm in social philosophy was analysed for instance, by utilitarian liberal philosopher J. S. Mill who proposed the so-called harm principle, according to which "the state can justifiably intervene against an individual only if intervening prevents harm." (Folland, 2021). Thus, for instance, the state shouldn´t intervene against in vitro fertilisation or the publication of controversial books etc., if they are harmless. (Folland, 2021) Similarly, probably there should also be no intervention against digital tools if they don´t cause harm. But do they?

The problem of violence, however, is not interesting only from the point of view of philosophy, ethics, but multiple disciplines deal with various aspects of the topic for instance psychology, pedagogy, politology, law etc. There is also an interesting question regarding harm related to self-defence (see, e.g., Frowe, Parry, 2021)

Digital aspects of harm and violence

In the digital realm, there are various ways of manifestation of harm and violence. Violence and harm can be recorded and displayed in several forms, and online videos of harmful acts have the potential to be massively shared. This can have diverse consequences. It can help to identify and track the criminal. However, it can also harm people watching it.

At the same time, there is an ongoing debate regarding the effects of violent videogames (see, e.g., Greitemeyer, 2019), movies and videos with violent content, especially on children and possibly supporting insensitivity and further spread of harmful behavior, like bullying and other forms of violence towards other human beings, animals, natural entities, properties, etc.

The use of digital technologies can lead to various harmful consequences, for instance, addiction (e.g., on social media, and mobile phones in general …). Also, various aspects of data management can be harmful and lead to, e.g., privacy violations, loss of property, etc. There are high numbers of cases of online bullying as well.

How can a philosophical approach to harm and violence help us to deal with the issues in the digital realm?

As sketched above the theme of digital harm and violence can and should be analysed from the philosophical and ethical point of view. The question in the digital era is, for instance, related not just to the issues mentioned above but also to the problem of responsibility – who is to be responsible in the great chain of contributors to the content in the digital realm? Moreover, the question is even more complicated when adding AI into the mix. Who is responsible for the harms of digital technology? The user, the designer, the programmer, the company, the boss of the company, the AI someone else? In what sense are they responsible? Who can be held accountable? And to what extent? Can we use the approach of J.S. Mill to harm principle? Can we apply the principles of so-called non-consequentialism focusing rather on motives or those of consequentialism focusing on the impact of the harm? Or do we need to create new moral rules? How to judge the cases of allowing harm in the digital realm?

(Picture: Pixabay)

Credibility and Authority

What are credibility and authority?

Credibility is unquestioning reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truthfulness of someone or something. Someone or something becomes trustworthy to us based on meeting several parameters. So closely related to the notion of trustworthiness is the notion of authority as someone or something that is or ought to be trustworthy in some way. The notion of authority, however, is not easily settled - its boundary has become elastic, changing according to its place in the context of a particular theory. In the social sciences, the dominant understanding of authority is one that conceives of it as a property of a person, function, office, or government that authorizes (makes legitimate) the decisions and commands issued on their behalf. Authority is used to describe some real system of power or social control that is regarded as legitimate by those it includes.

In political philosophy, the concept of authority is used to define the relationship between the ruler and the ruled and to distinguish this relationship from other relationships. Political authority is exercised by the state - in many ways, it controls the lives of its citizens. Political philosophers ask: When is authority legitimate? Depending on one's understanding of authority, this question may be the same as asking when coercion by someone who sees himself as an authority is legitimate. When do we have an obligation to obey authority?

The prominent political philosopher Hannah Arendt distinguished authority from power, from coercion by force, and from persuasion by argument.
According to this author, authority is:

- A de facto relationship (it is the right to decide and not the power to decide).
- To have de facto authority requires that the state has the power to coerce precisely those who do not want to respect the demands of
- authority can exist without power
- it also refers to relationships outside of politics and in religion, education, family
- it is a special communicative relationship between the speaker and his utterance and the listener and his response

According to some authors, a distinction can be made between three basic types of legitimate authority:

1) as justifiable coercion - an extremely fragile concept - it can only be applied by the state when it occupies territory acquired as spoils of war
2) as a possibility of enforcing obligations - authority is entitled to issue orders
3) as a right to rule - authority has permission to issue orders and make rules and also to compel others to obey them.
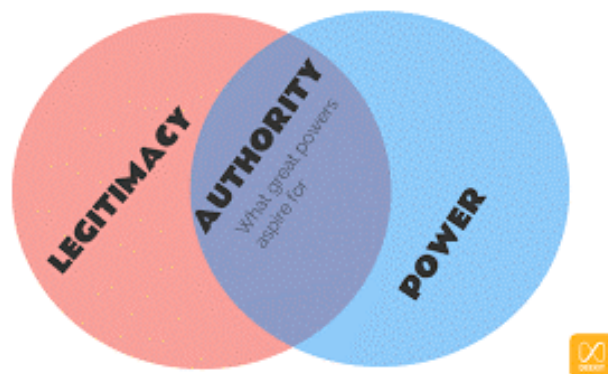
The problems with credibility and authority in the digital realm?

The first problem may be related to the distinction between political authority as a normative concept (or morally legitimate authority) and political authority as a non-normative concept (or de facto authority). To say that the state has authority in a normative sense is to say something normative about the relationship between the state and its subjects. De facto authority is distinct from political power. Political authority refers to the ability of the holders of authority to compel others to act in the way they wish, even when citizens do not want to do what the holders of authority demand of the authority. Political power (the authority holder) operates in the realm of threats and offers. The state has de facto authority or legitimate authority because it has the power to coerce citizens.

This is essential to the state's ability to maintain public order and to assure those who regard it as an authority that it will be able to do what it is supposed to do.

Another problem lies in the distinction between theoretical and practical authority. A theoretical authority in a particular field of intellectual inquiry is an expert in that field. Theoretical authorities function primarily by giving advice to the layman, which the layman is free to accept or reject. The judgments of theoretical authorities give people reasons to believe, while the judgments of practical (political) authorities are usually taken as reasons to act. Theoretical authorities usually do not impose duties on others, although they may advise what a person's duty is. Practical (political) authorities issue directives that give people reasons to act, not reasons to believe. The role of practical (political) authorities is to get people to act in a certain way in order to solve various collective action problems, such as different types of coordination problems, security problems, and free-rider problems.

Another topical issue concerns the debate on the incompatibility of moral autonomy and political authority. The basic idea is that it is incompatible for a subject to obey the commands of an authority simply because it is the command of the authority. Political obligations arising from authority cannot be fully justified. Submission to authority requires giving up the right to act according to one's own judgment (not to be morally autonomous). The duty of autonomy is thus incompatible with the duty to obey political authority. Respect for political obligations depends on the legitimacy of authority - legitimacy depends on consent. In the absence of consent, the state has no right to force citizens to comply with its instructions. Citizens should consider the question of their obedience on a case-by-case basis.

The eminent political philosopher Joseph Raz offered an inspiring justification of authority. Raz uses the example of regulating road traffic by regulations. The practice of authority lies in understanding the reasons for issuing regulations and in responsible action by citizens. It demonstrates that the benefits provided by the state are benefits for every citizen. Citizens may have their own ideas about driving style and speed, but regulations make these personal ideas irrelevant. There is a penalty for non-compliance. Citizens can comment (have their own opinion) on the regulations.

How can credibility and authority help us?

As we have introduced the notions of credibility and authority so far, we might get the impression that these are co-related concepts that are not useful for the problems of the digital world. However, we could not be more wrong. In several chapters of this publication, we have mentioned the role that critical thinking, the ability to argue and work with information and the selection of its sources, plays in the development and stabilisation of a democratic society. The digital world has become a key source of information for many of us, thanks to its speed, interactivity and diversity. There are currently more than 1.9 billion websites in the world. It is, therefore, possible to find virtually anything on the Internet. But how do we know what of this wide range of information can be considered trustworthy? How do we know whose opinion should carry weight for us on a certain subject?
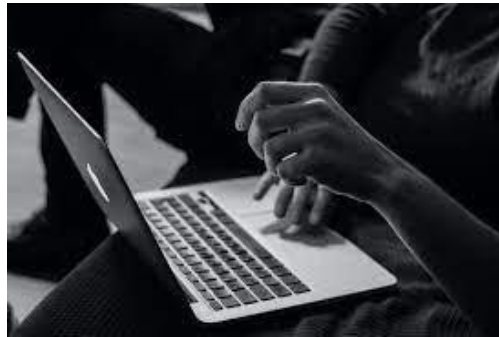
Before deciding to use any resource found on the Internet, it is useful to follow a few guidelines:

- Research the website thoroughly (reputable sites have the author/maintainer listed),
- find out the aim and purpose of the site, who the site is aimed at,
- identify the author,
- be aware of objectivity (distinguish facts from opinions),
- timeliness, when the information was obtained, published,
- compare the information obtained with other sources, e.g. encyclopedias or statements by experts in the field (http://library.cutn.sk/Slovak/?page=internet_use_policy)
- Work with primary sources in an online environment such as:
  - Public surveys
  - Research data
  - Interviews
  - Statistical Office data
  - Government documents
  - Audio, video recordings
  - Research articles, monographs
  - News agencies

If we examine the source of the published information in this way in the first step, if we realise whether the way the information is presented directly attacks our emotions or, on the contrary, appeals to our reason, if we realise that the author of the article is a credible expert - i.e., an authority - in the field, we have every reason to consider the information as credible. This does not mean, however, that such information does not also need to be critically reflected upon. As we know, anyone, even an expert taken at his word, can be wrong, and blind trust should not be placed in anyone. Certainly not in people whose knowledge of an issue is the result of their own internet 'research' and for whom the term 'argument' is an insult.

Ownership and Rights

What is ownership and what are rights?

Ownership in philosophy refers to the concept of having control, possession, or rights over something, whether it be physical objects, ideas, or other entities. Philosophical discussions of property often explore the nature of property and its ethical implications. Philosophy seeks to answer questions such as:

- What do we really own?
- Is knowledge and experience the only thing we really own?
- How can we possess material things?
- What are our rights to the things we think are ours?

We can answer contemporary questions about rights and property in the real and digital world by answering the questions above. Here are some interesting interpretations of the concepts of rights and property in the history of philosophy.

The English philosopher **John Locke** (1632 - 1704) argued that individuals have a natural right to acquire and own property through their labour. According to Locke, when a person combines his labour with unowned resources, he acquires legitimate ownership of the resulting product.

Karl Marx (1818 - 1883) challenged the idea of private ownership of the means of production. Marx argued that private ownership perpetuated social inequalities and advocated collective ownership and the abolition of private property in favour of communal ownership.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905 - 1980) and other existentialist philosophers emphasize the relationship between property and personal identity. They argue that individuals can experience a sense of ownership over their choices, actions, and existence itself. Ownership in this context refers to the idea of personal responsibility and authenticity.

Legal systems define and protect property rights, while ethical considerations address issues of fairness, distribution, and the social responsibilities of owners to others. These perspectives provide different lenses through which property can be understood and evaluated. The concept of property in philosophy intersects with broader discussions of individual rights, social justice, economic systems, and personal autonomy.

The problem of ownership and rights in digital world: digital privacy and digital preservation

The issue of property and rights in the digital world is a complex and evolving one, involving a wide range of legal, ethical, and technological challenges. Key issues where we need philosophy are:

Digital technologies have made it easier to create, share, and reproduce **intellectual property rights** such as music, films, software, and written content. This has raised questions about copyright infringement, piracy, and fair use. Balancing the rights of content creators with the interests of consumers and the public domain is an ongoing challenge. If we are using Locke's philosophy, it is clear that when a person combines their labour with unowned resources, they acquire legitimate ownership of the resulting product. But if we listen to Marx, then some music, films, and software can be in the public domain, free for all.

As we all conduct more of our personal and professional lives online, the issue of **digital privacy** becomes paramount. Questions of data ownership, consent, and control have led to debates about privacy regulations and data protection laws. Most often, digital privacy is about how freely personal content can be disseminated in the digital world. This is a very important ethical issue today. One of the key ethical principles in digital privacy is the concept of informed consent. Individuals should have the right to know what data is being collected about them, how it will be used, and the ability to consent or opt out of data collection practices. When companies or organisations fail to provide clear information or manipulate users to give consent, ethical concerns arise. Informed consent is essential to respect individual autonomy, ensure ethical conduct, and protect the rights and welfare of individuals. Digital privacy is important to you too. We need to be aware of what we are agreeing to in the digital world. Often, we click "I agree" to get a game or watch a movie without reading what we agree to. The problem of digital privacy is linked to issues of **digital identity** and associated rights. Online identity theft, impersonation, and digital personas can blur the lines of ownership and representation. We need to be careful and we need to know who we share our digital identity with. Take care of your digital identity because it's yours.

Ensuring the long-term accessibility and preservation of digital assets, especially in rapidly changing technological environments, is another challenge. Is it true that real physical identity is becoming less important to us today, and digital identity, or identity with the digital world, is becoming more important?

Questions arise about who should be responsible for preserving digital heritage. This problem is often called **Digital Preservation.** Digital preservation can be seen as a philosophical problem when considered in the broader context of knowledge, culture, and the preservation of human heritage. Philosophical questions arise about the nature of information and its temporality. How do we define the persistence and authenticity of digital knowledge in an ever-changing digital landscape? Philosophical discussions explore how digital preservation contributes to the continuity of culture and the transmission of knowledge across generations. What is the role of digital artifacts in shaping collective memory and identity? How much our overall (real) identity is now linked to our digital identity? If in the digital world, we are all just global digital identities, how threatened is our local, national identity? Do we lose ourselves if we forget a part of our real, let's say, physical identity? This is a very complex philosophical question. With all this complexity of philosophical problems, you can ask yourself an ethical question: If something is freely available on the Internet, but you know it is digital theft, will you pay for said content or take the chance and use it for free? Now you are in an ethical dilemma. Digital-analogue ethical dilemma.

How can philosophy help us understand digital ownership and digital preservation?

Philosophical studies of property rights and ownership conceptions are particularly relevant in the context of digital ownership. Digital assets can be governed by a variety of property theories, from utilitarian distribution theories to Lockean concepts of labor-based acquisition. Questions like whether one may actually "own" digital content, given its non-rivalrous and easily replicated nature, can be clarified through philosophical thought. The moral underpinnings of digital ownership and the balance between privacy and security can be evaluated using ethical theories like utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics. Philosophical considerations of existence, impermanence, and time are extremely pertinent to the field of digital preservation. There are concerns concerning the nature of their informative content, their permanence across time, and the ontology of digital objects. Our comprehension of how digital entities endure or change is influenced by philosophical discussions of identity and persistence as well as the metaphysics of information. Discussions about digital preservation are also influenced by ethical issues. Deontological viewpoints may highlight obligations to future generations or to the producers of digital works, but utilitarian studies may assess the overall societal benefit received from maintaining some digital content. The importance of conserving digital artifacts as examples of human ingenuity and cultural legacy may also be brought up by existentialist philosophers. Philosophy thus provides a strong conceptual framework for understanding the intricate problems of digital ownership and preservation. We can learn more about the nature of digital assets, the rights and obligations attached to them, and the moral principles governing their management for future generations by engaging with fundamental philosophical questions.

Self and Identity

What is the self? What is identity?

The questions of self and identity have fascinated thinkers, philosophers, and scholars for millennia, forming the backbone of debates about what it means to exist, to be aware, and to be human. In this chapter, we will take a look at what self and identity are, how one can get to know him/herself, and how self and identity are related to online surroundings.

The concept of "self" is intricate and has been explored across various disciplines like philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, and even theology. At its core, the concept of the 'self' pertains to a being's individual consciousness, awareness, and experiential perception of an individual's own being, knowledge, and values. Philosophers have long pondered whether the self is static or ever-changing. Is the 'self' we recognize today the same as the one we identified with yesterday? Or is it in perpetual flux, shaped by our experiences, emotions, and the inexorable march of time?

In tandem with the self is the notion of identity. While the self grapples with issues of consciousness and perception, identity concerns the labels, roles, and attributes we attach to ourselves and are ascribed by society. These may relate to race, gender, culture, profession, or myriad other descriptors. Thus, one can identify as an African American, a German, a doctor, a woman, a mother, a Muslim, and so on. We can now tell that human beings have different identities that are interconnected. A coherent discourse is a discourse that enables the integration of different identities, and according to Umut Oezkirimlji (2000, 230-233), it is also possible to pave the way to an understanding of a redefined identity that requires different constructions of identities. These are constructed in encounters and communication and are formed in specific historical situations. People construct certain identities over the course of their lives, and certain types of identities may change over the years (e.g., an unbeliever becomes a believer, a school child becomes an employee, etc.).

Philosophically, identity is where personal narrative intersects with collective discourse. This is where identity and self intersect as well. The philosopher John Locke postulated the "memory theory" of identity for example, suggesting that personal identity is rooted in continuity of consciousness, while David Hume believed that identity is a bundle of experiences with no underlying self.

The challenge of understanding yourself and your identity

From a young age, people begin to question their origins. Philosophical questions such as "Who am I?" and "Where do I come from?" become even more relevant during adolescence. Young people (and even some older ones) today find it very difficult to answer the questions posed to them. Social networks dictate trends that are fleeting and quickly accepted, leading to great confusion in identification.

The second challenge is related to the human need for acceptance, which has been a survival option for humans throughout evolution. People often imitate others and move away from their unique and essential identity because they fear that the society they want to belong to will not accept them as they are. In doing so, they often suppress the real them, may even disguise themselves, and are afraid to say the things they like. Young people often deny that they listen to certain music or dress the way it is fashionable at the moment, even if this style does not suit them or they do not really like it.

The latter, and the feeling of not being good enough the way I am, leads young people to despair and a so-called identity crisis, which leads to great confusion, depression, and a constant search for a higher meaning in life. Often young people are unable to make important life decisions or are under great pressure to make them. Often they do not even know what they want for themselves, which in a way is also a consequence of the modern world that dictates to young people what is good for them and what they need to be happy and fulfilled through virtual advertising and solutions.

How can we know ourselves through philosophical approaches?

Philosophy offers a variety of tools to help us know ourselves, and approaches from other disciplines can also help us. The first thing we can do is to withdraw into solitude for a while and give ourselves over to silence. Only when we have learned to be with ourselves, to listen to ourselves and to name our wishes and feelings, can we recognise ourselves? Various questionnaires can help us to do this. We need to be honest in answering questions about who we are and what we want. Our answers should not look like we are trying to please others.

In doing so, we can ask ourselves the following questions:

- Who am I?
- What do I love?
- What am I good at?
- What talents do I have?
- What do I want to do?
- What are my most important values?

It is also important to try as many things as possible. We can engage in different debates and train ourselves to form our own opinions based on who we are and what we stand for. We also need to make sure that we can justify our opinions.

Self and identity in online surrounding

In our interconnected digital age, the online environment has become an inseparable component of modern existence, offering new dimensions to the age-old philosophical notions of self and identity. From virtual identities to avatars, the online space provides a unique platform where traditional understandings of the self are both challenged and expanded.

The online environment allows for the creation of **virtual identities**, where individuals can present versions of themselves that might be either an extension of their offline identities or something entirely different. Virtual identity offers an opportunity to craft a digital persona that aligns with an individual's aspirations, fantasies, or desired public perception. This digital self-representation might be more polished, more adventurous, or even more authentic than what one showcases in offline, day-to-day interactions.

Avatars, particularly in gaming or virtual worlds, add another layer to this discourse. An avatar serves as a digital embodiment, a representation in a virtual realm that can have its own personality, appearance, and narrative. For many, avatars become deeply personal extensions of themselves. They offer a space for exploration—of different genders, species, capabilities, and roles—that may be unattainable or challenging to explore in the physical world.

The online environment facilitates the management of **multiple identities**, as well. A person might maintain different personas across various platforms: a professional on LinkedIn, a photographer on Instagram, a political commentator on Twitter, and a gamer on Twitch. Each of these identities can be distinct and cater to different facets of a person's life, yet all coexist harmoniously in the digital sphere. This multiplicity allows individuals to navigate diverse spaces, tailoring their identity to the specific norms and expectations of each platform.

While the flexibility of online self-representation is empowering, it's not without its complexities. The distinction between the online self and the offline self can sometimes become blurry, leading to existential dilemmas. Additionally, the pressure to maintain a perfect online persona can be mentally taxing. There's also the danger of one's virtual identity being co-opted, manipulated, or misused, leading to concerns about privacy and digital security.

Philosophically, the online realm prompts us to reconsider the boundaries of reality. If one's virtual interactions and experiences lead to genuine emotions, insights, and personal growth, can they be considered any less "real" than offline experiences? As our digital and physical realities intertwine, the lines demarcating self and identity across these planes become increasingly porous.

In conclusion, the online environment serves as a mirror, reflecting both the possibilities and challenges of the modern age. It beckons us to confront and reconceptualize notions of self and identity, offering a canvas where the ancient and the futuristic seamlessly converge. As we navigate this digital era, we're not only participants but also architects, constantly crafting, refining, and redefining the multidimensional tapestry of human identity.

Freedom

Freedom of expression and action

There are many definitions of freedom and many philosophers were asking themselves if there is such thing as free will. Thomas Hobbes suggested that freedom consists in there being no external obstacle to an agent doing what he wants to do and David Hume thought that free will is simply the power of acting or of not acting. All of them agree that free will is the capacity unique to human being that allows them to control their actions. Freedom can be separated into two concepts and that is freedom of will on the one hand and freedom of action on the other. Freedom of will comes before freedom of action and it is a necessary condition for acting freely. Actions consider some consequences and acting freely includes responsibility. According to the dominant view of the relationship between free will and moral responsibility, if an agent does not have free will, then that agent is not morally responsible for her actions. We cannot be responsible for the action that we didn't decide to do. On the other hand, John Stuart Mill and many other philosophers think that freedom stops when it violates other people's interests. He believes that freedom of expression is a community right and not only our personal one. There is no such thing as unlimited freedom without consequences because our freedom can harm others. Some philosophers thought that there is no such thing as free will in the sense that every action has a set of reasons which lead to that phenomenon. In that case, the freedom of man could be found in searching for the reasons and desires behind our actions and being less determined. Also, there is freedom of expression which is a fundamental right of every human being but it is often violated all around the globe. When is the time to draw a line between freedom of expression and hate speech? Should we always defend someone's freedom of expression or should we limit our ways of communication on the internet? Let's find out more about that problem.

The problem of freedom in modern society (internet and the freedom of expression)

The General Declaration on Human Rights points out that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and that this right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and the freedom to seek, receive, and disseminate information and ideas through any media and regardless of borders (Roksandić Vilička and Mamić 2018: 331). Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right and it shouldn't ever be violated if we want a democratic society. But the problem is still the same and that is defining freedom, human rights, and the line between using and abusing our freedom. Internet nowadays allows users to share their thoughts with a huge number of other users and can create a safe place to practice their freedom.

It is precisely the freedom of expression that the Internet provides, as well as the possibility of articulating thoughts, attitudes, ideas, attitudes, and beliefs regardless of borders, in real-time and without spatial limitations, that leads to misuse with serious consequences (Roksandić Vilička and Mamić 2018: 353). The question is what to do with hate speech on the internet and some other activities that promote and encourage nonmoral actions since a democratic society needs to defend our right to express our thoughts and also protect our online identity which can be as explicit as we want. That leads us to question the balance between unlimited media freedom and the potential damage resulting from that unlimited freedom, or in other words, Popper's "paradox of tolerance": should we tolerate what should not be tolerated? (Turčilo 2014: 4). The other problem of modern society regarding freedom is the constant manipulative praxis that can be found online and through contemporary surveillance systems (controlling our desires through 'cookies' and selling our personal data for a little bit of digital dopamine rush).

How can philosophy help us tackle modern problems of freedom?

In solving the problem of somewhat unsolvable online problems in the field of ethics - such as pornography, pedophilia, unverified information, vulgarity, and hate speech, theorists have two extreme points of view. The first is based on the fact that censorship and control of content on the Internet are necessary and the second point is based on the fact that we live in a democracy and the introduction of restrictions is a radical measure (Ružić 2008: 110). There is some mechanism by which the online community regulates itself but the internet can be a really dangerous space in which someone can abuse their freedom and harm other people even worse than in "real life". There must be a limit to our freedom and that is the freedom of others and their own thoughts, interests, and desires. On the other hand, the internet has become a world of misinformation and a field in which we are victims of constant manipulation. We are becoming victims of consumerism because we are bombarded with things that we want but don't need and our every step is marked through website 'cookies'. If we think like Spinoza or many other philosophers and look closely into the conditions of our freedom, we can find that we are constantly determined by big companies or some influencers who crave for attention and manipulate are actions. We can be free only if we know when we are not.

Responsibility and Anonymity

Being anonymous or being responsible

Being anonymous means that your identity is secret and unknown. It can mean to do something or speak about it without revealing who you are. Responsibility is something that is lacking for the individual if his identity is hidden. It is taking the consequences for your actions and standing behind something you do. On the one side, anonymity can offer forms of security and on the other hand, it can deny forms of responsibility. The word "responsibility" is surprisingly modern[1]. In all modern European languages, "responsibility" only finds a home toward the end of the eighteenth century. The origin of the word is also rather interesting. The original philosophical usage of "responsibility" was political. This reflected the origin of the word. The word was used for the government which is responsible to the people.

The question regarding the connection between anonymity and responsibility is aimed at the actions people do anonymously that probably won't do otherwise (especially on the internet). The dilemma of anonymity – what will I do if my actions cannot be connected to me – is nowadays available to more people and its effects are more easily spread (Jordan 2019: 4). Anonymity is often misunderstood as a form of privacy or vice versa but the two concepts are very different and they have different moral grounds. To clarify the contrast: anonymity involves the desire to hide the identity of the perpetrator of actions that may have harmful public consequences, while privacy is merely the demand that the public does not interfere in an individual's thoughts or actions that have no practical public consequences or significance whatsoever (Lucas 2013: 111). It is different if your personal data is protected or unknown and our actions can be radically different regarding that difference.

The concept of moral fog and anonymous crimes in modern society

We already saw how individual freedom can be abused and harm others but we will see now how anonymous circumstances can develop more deviant behavior and all the different things a normal human being can do with permission or without responsibility. This does not necessarily mean that anonymity causes individuals to engage in problematic behaviors, but rather that it puts them in a different condition that affects their perception and moral dispositions, leading to different decision-making. We can imagine these circumstances as a moral fog that appears when we don't need to take responsibility for our actions or our identity is unknown.

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[1] More about it on: https://iep.utm.edu/responsi/

The concept was introduced in the book Evil Online by Dean Cocking and Jeroen Van den Hoven (2018) and it describes this general problem for our valuing, how our appreciation of value is limited, distorted, or out of focus altogether. It is a situation where it's hard to figure out what the right or wrong thing to do is. They argued that otherwise morally competent and inclined people can behave appallingly online because their capacities to see value and disvalue become (even more) fogged up (Cocking and Van den Hoven 2022: 69). The concept can explain how people act when everything is allowed and it can be connected to the Stanford Prison experiment where people accepted their role of guards and became extremely violent towards others - the prisoners which could have been guards themselves. There was another similar experiment in which we can investigate the anonymous cruelty people have in themselves. It is the Milgram experiment where the people obeyed an order that they didn't need to and that is to make people suffer from electrical shock (up to 450 volts even though the screams weren't real). The people who suffered the trauma eventually become silent and pretend to die. There was even an art performance regarding a similar social situation with cruelty included but towards animals. It was called Helena and it was an art installation by Marco Evaristti at the Trapholt Museum in 2000. The performance was a room with 10 blenders, each of which contained a goldfish. The fish were vulnerable to any visitor to the exhibit who chose to turn on a blender and kill them. All these experiments open up a debate about how circumstances (responsibility) are a condition for moral action and how we can be better human beings by always reflecting on our actions and relying on some philosophical, moral theories and imperatives that were invented long before the internet.

How can philosophy help us tackle the moral fog?

Lee Rainie and other scientists from the Pew Research Center[2] have come to the conclusion that a clear majority (59%) of participants say that people should have the ability to use the internet completely anonymously and 86% of internet users have tried to be anonymous online and taken at least one step to try to mask their behavior or avoid being tracked. Why do people want to mask their behaviour and they prefer a foggy reality? We will try to find some answers by grasping into two moral theories or imperatives from two famous philosophers to tackle the contemporary moral fog that anonymity can provide us all. The first one is David Hume's concept of "taking other one's shoes" to see how it is to be them and to feel what others feel. That kind of mechanical empathy can be good advice for people to morally investigate their behavior online, especially if they are bullying someone or hacking someone's account and especially if they are promoting hate speech. If we would be offended, sad, or frustrated if someone did the exact same thing, then we shouldn't do it even though we don't know the consequences and our identity is completely unknown.

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[2] More about that on: https://www.academia.edu/9994676/Anonymity_Privacy_and_Security_Online

The second is the categorical imperative which was first introduced by Immanuel Kant and could be a very useful moral compass in online behavior. Imagine a world in which your (or someone else's) online act becomes a universal law and everyone was doing the exact same thing to each other. Would that world be a good world? Probably not because a lot of people would suffer. Kant thinks that we should always act as if it could become a universal law and make our community better for everyone not only for us.

Even though anonymity can be an ideal tool for criminals to act and to do something that is not morally acceptable, anonymity can be very useful and it isn't all that black and white. The attributes of anonymity, including minimal accountability, disinhibition, and deindividuation can encourage robust political speech, provide safety from reprisal, permit the freedom to speak freely, and create a strong sense of group identity (Bodle 2013: 30). Anonymity can also provide a space for whistleblowing criminal acts or it can be a weapon in dealing some forms of repressive regimes. It isn't how we do it, it is what we do and why we do it that counts and the philosophy will always remain a good tool to help us find our path in a foggy digital world.

PART 2
Philosophical Methods

Argument and argumentation

What is an argument and what is argumentation?

Critical thinking is a broad term that refers to activities related to thinking processes, such as questioning, exploring, reasoning, arguing, justifying, articulating, persuading, debating, analysing, testing, predicting, planning, deciding, etc. Critical thinking is thinking that is appropriately guided by (good) reasons rather than, e.g., desires, prejudices, fears, idiosyncrasies, etc. Critical thinking can be contrasted with uncritical thinking. This is often the case in our everyday thinking, at least in some parts of it, which is often irrational and illogical, subject to errors and distortions, or simply incoherent. In contrast, critical thinking is characterised by being based on criteria that ensure its clarity, precision, and reasonableness (in terms of arguments, definitions, and explanations). We thus strive to consciously regulate our own thinking and reflect on it, to become aware of (hidden) assumptions, possible fallacies, etc., and to improve ourselves in the light of these aspects. One way to do this is to focus first on the basics of sound argumentation. We need to find good reasons for our claims or to answer adequately the question of why we hold a particular view or why we think that way.

An *argument* is a structure in which a particular claim is supported in a reasonable way by reasons for accepting it. In an argument, the reasons justify (i.e., support, justify, prove, demonstrate) the conclusion, and this support persuades a rational person to accept the conclusion. Here is a simple example of an argument. All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore, Socrates is mortal. In order to arrive at the form and understanding of an argument, we can begin by answering the following questions. What are the premises (and what are the presuppositions of the argument) that are supposed to support the claimed conclusion? What is the ultimate conclusion of the argument, or what is it that someone in the argument is trying to assert or persuade us? What inferences are used in the argument and how do these lead from the premises to the conclusion? An *argumentation* consists of formulating arguments, stacking and linking arguments, and creating counter-arguments. Argumentation is thus the process of constructing, presenting, and evaluating arguments in a logical and persuasive manner. It involves reasoning, evidence analysis, identifying logical fallacies, and rhetoric tools, and allows for a systematic and productive exchange of ideas and reasoned discourse. Evidence is used to demonstrate the credibility and relevance of the argument. Parties involved can present their arguments, counterarguments, and evidence to support their positions while addressing potential objections and challenges. The aim is to foster intellectual growth, encourage open-mindedness, and facilitate constructive dialogue by promoting reasoned and evidence-based discourse.

The challenge of false dilemmas and binary arguments

What one often encounters in the digital world is the presence of false dichotomies or binary arguments. A false dilemma, also known as a false dichotomy or false choice, is a logical fallacy that occurs when someone presents a limited set of options or alternatives as if they were the only possibilities, overlooking or excluding other viable options. Usually, it mistakenly suggests that there are only two mutually exclusive choices when, in reality, there may be additional valid alternatives (as in the case of a debate about the effectiveness and reasonableness of COVID-19 vaccination). It is often employed as a persuasive tactic to manipulate or simplify complex issues, limit critical thinking, and force individuals into accepting one option over another. Presenting the options as being extreme or polar opposites is a widespread phenomenon in the digital world since it is easy to divide people along the pro et contra line. An ancient case that nicely demonstrates the dangers of false dilemma-based thinking is the story about the Judgment of King Solomon. In the story two women came before Solomon to settle a dispute about who was the true mother of a baby; each of them claiming to be the mother. Solomon proposes dividing the baby in half with a sword. So the dilemma was that they either resolve the matter by themselves or the baby would be cut in half. One of the women accepted the dilemma, and while the resolution of the dispute was not plausible, accepted that the baby be cut in half. The other refused the dilemma and begged the baby to be saved at all costs. Solomon then declared the kind woman to be the true mother and handed her the baby, since he wisely established that she is the genuine mother. Other, more current examples and ones related to the digital world, are climate change debates, animal rights debates, and debates about the moral permissibility of abortion. In the first mentioned case one side argues that human activity is the sole cause of climate change, emphasizing the importance of reducing carbon emissions and transitioning to renewable energy sources. The other side argues that climate change is a natural phenomenon and denies human contribution, suggesting that no action is needed. What is often overlooked are other aspects (e.g., both human activity and natural factors as contributing to climate change and there might be other good reasons to change the way we live and our attitude towards the natural environment).

How can truth and knowledge help us tackle false dilemmas and binary arguments?

Critical thinking can help us spot such false dilemmas, in particular by focusing on the presuppositions in arguments or narratives that we encounter in the digital world. Identifying a false dilemma fallacy entails recognizing the presence of a limited number of options presented as the sole viable possibilities while ignoring or rejecting other viable alternatives. Often a clue that there might be a false dilemma at work is an otherwise complex situation when there are only two options provided, which are frequently represented as opposites or extremes (terms

like "either/or," "black or white," "with us or against us," or "with us or against us"). What is also often present is oversimplification and the lack of gradation. False dilemmas often overlook the possibility of degrees between the presented options. They present a stark contrast without considering the potential for intermediate positions or varying levels of involvement (e.g., the simple claim that it is morally (im)permissible to consume meat, might allow for a more nuanced formulation, as in the case that we might reduce the consumption of meat to a considerable degree and that this would have many desirable consequences). False dilemmas often use emotional language and the options presented in a false dilemma may lack sufficient justification or evidence to support their exclusivity. They rely more on rhetoric or persuasion than on logical reasoning and robust evidence, and the focus on critical thinking helps us unearth all this.

Common Sense

What is common sense?

Common sense refers to the basic, practical knowledge that is widely shared among people within a society. It is often used to describe the ability to make sound judgments and decisions based on experience and observation.

In the field of philosophy, the Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid (1710 – 1796) is known for his work on common sense. In his philosophy, common sense refers to the innate ability of the human mind to perceive and understand certain basic truths about the world, such as the existence of an external world, the existence of other minds, and the reliability of our senses.

Reid argued that these beliefs are not based on empirical observation or reasoning, but are instead "first principles" that are immediately and self-evidently true. He believed that these principles are necessary for us to engage with the world and make sense of our experiences.

Reid's ideas about common sense were influential in the development of Scottish Enlightenment philosophy, and his work has been discussed and debated by philosophers ever since.

What are some really stupid ideas?
Please don't follow all the trends.

In the online world, common sense can be easily manipulated or undermined by misinformation, propaganda, and biased information sources. Additionally, social media algorithms can create "filter bubbles" where people only see and engage with content that

reinforces their existing beliefs, making it difficult to recognize and engage with new ideas and perspectives that may challenge common sense assumptions.

That being said – have you heard of the Darwin Awards?

The Darwin Awards are a tongue-in-cheek "honor" that humorously recognizes individuals who have contributed to the improvement of the human gene pool by accidentally removing themselves from it through their own foolish or reckless actions. The concept of the Darwin Awards originated in the 1980s and has since gained popularity as an internet meme and informal recognition.

The awards are named after Charles Darwin, the renowned biologist known for his theory of evolution. The idea behind the Darwin Awards is that individuals who engage in particularly foolish, dangerous, or ill-advised actions that result in their own demise are inadvertently removing their own genes from the pool of potential future generations. A typical example of a Darwin reward recipient would be a man testing a bulletproof vest and discovering that the vest is not in fact bulletproof.

It's important to note that the Darwin Awards are meant to be humorous and should not be taken as a serious scientific or ethical concept. The stories associated with the Darwin Awards often involve unusual or extreme incidents, and they serve as cautionary tales about the importance of personal safety, risk assessment, and common sense.
While challenges to common sense always existed, the surge in viral trends presented a lot more actual danger in the cases of neglect of common sense.

The Tide Pod Challenge: In 2018, a dangerous trend emerged on social media, particularly YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter, where people were filming themselves eating Tide Pods, which are laundry detergent capsules. This obviously goes against common sense as these products are toxic and not meant for human consumption. The trend led to many hospitalizations and even deaths, prompting warnings from health officials and the company Procter & Gamble manufacturing Tide Pods.

Bird Box Challenge: The challenge inspired by the Netflix movie "Bird Box" gained traction in early 2019 primarily on various social media platforms, including YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Participants blindfolded themselves and attempted to perform various tasks, such as navigating through their surroundings or engaging in physical activities. This trend posed significant safety risks due to impaired vision and the potential for accidents.

Fire Challenge: The Fire Challenge emerged around 2014 and spread across multiple social media platforms, including YouTube, Vine (which has since shut down), and Facebook. This trend involved individuals intentionally setting themselves on fire, usually by dousing their body with flammable substances and then igniting it. The goal was to capture the act on video and share it online, which posed severe risks of burns and other injuries.

Skull Breaker Challenge: Originating on social media platforms in early 2020, primarily on TikTok and quickly spreading to other platforms, including Instagram and YouTube, this dangerous challenge involved three participants standing side by side. The two individuals on the ends would trick the middle person into jumping, then simultaneously kicking their feet out from under them, causing them to fall backward and potentially suffer serious injuries.

How does using common sense help you prevent death or serious injury?

It seems rather redundant to explain this ... It is common sense. Don't eat detergent and don't get food poisoning and don't die ...If you want something a bit more nuanced: Common sense can be a useful starting point for reflection and decision-making, but it is important to recognize its limitations and biases, and remain a sense of critical openness. By being aware of the potential for misinformation and biased information sources, we can seek out additional perspectives and information to inform our judgments and decisions. Additionally, recognizing the value of diverse perspectives and experiences can help us challenge and expand our common sense assumptions, leading to more nuanced and informed decision-making. Ultimately, using a combination of common sense and critical thinking can help us navigate the complexities of the online world and make sound judgments and decisions based on evidence and reason. Even though common sense sometimes might not be enough it would almost always be good not to put it aside completely. If you ask yourself: *"Does this go against common sense?"* and if the response is *"Yes."* – please make sure you have really solid reasons to go against it and perhaps even have some sort of a risk management strategy to go along.

Definition

What is definition and how to create a (good) definition

Throughout our time in education, we acquire an array of definitions. These definitions range from chemistry and biology to informatics and geography, and everything in between. However, have we ever questioned what a definition truly is? What is the significance of defining quality? Are the definitions taught to us in school well-crafted and reliable? If we cannot effectively define something, then we are presented with an issue. That's why we need to provide a clear explanation at the start. In the case of the term "cow," these features would include being a female type of cattle, being a mammal, being an ungulate, being a domesticated animal, being a ruminant, having horns, and producing milk. A definition is a statement that describes the key features of a term. We can't include all these words in the definition because the definition has some rules. Some 2,400 years ago, Aristotle established the fundamental principles definition. The definition should be precise, not too broad or narrow, and cover the essential aspects of the term. It is crucial to avoid circular definitions ("A cat is a cat"), and instead provide a clear and concise definition. Negative definitions should also be avoided ("A cat is not a train").

A definition comprises two components: the definiendum and the definiens. The definiendum is the term being defined, while the definiens is the term that provides the definition. The definiens includes the closest (higher) category (genus proximum) and the specific difference (differentia specifica) that sets it apart from other members of that category.

Let's try to define Football.

- Football is a sport played with a ball between two teams. It can be played using any part of the body, except the hands from shoulder to fingertips.

Maybe we can add one more sentence to be a little clearer;

- The main objective is to score as many goals as possible into the opponent's goal to achieve victory.

In this definition of Football, the closest (higher) category (genus proximum) is a sport, and the specific difference (differentia specifica) is that can be played using any part of the body, except the hands from shoulder to fingertips.

Now, try to define the cow!

The problem of incorrect definitions in the digital age

It's simple to find invalid or incorrect definitions for terms on the Internet. This is particularly true for widely-used terms, like "philosophy". It's even more difficult to find good definitions of concrete concepts on the Internet. One of the first definitions of "chicken" that we can find on the Internet is:

> "The chicken (Gallus domesticus) is a domesticated species that arose from the red junglefowl, originally from India. They have also partially hybridized with other wild species of junglefowl (the grey junglefowl, Ceylon junglefowl, and green junglefowl)." (Wikipedia)

If a person who has never seen a chicken reads this explanation, it may not help them comprehend what a chicken is. The definition uses a genus proximum - a domesticated species. However, the remainder of the description is a genetic definition. To make this explanation meaningful, you would need knowledge of all the listed species that contributed to the chicken's development. Unfortunately, many definitions in the digital world are unclear or invalid. It's crucial to understand how to define and recognize a good definition.

As we browse the internet for hours every day, we frequently come across unfamiliar terms and seek definitions of them. However, we often encounter invalid definitions. If we understand the fundamental principles of logic and the meaning of a definition, we can effortlessly distinguish between a valid and an invalid definition. Let's figure out what the definition, genus proximum, differentia specifica means. We can keep it simple by following the rules of definition and searching the web for accurate and inaccurate definitions because the definition can help us navigate through the digital cacophony of information.

How to Apply Defining as a Philosophical Method in the Digital Age

In our modern digital world, we are surrounded by countless amounts of information. It's tough to navigate through that much information. It's tricky to distinguish between fact and fiction. From an administrative standpoint, having the ability to clearly define concepts and put them into action can aid us in sifting through this information overload. On the other hand, the Internet is full of definitions that are inaccurate and inadequate. Thus, it is vital to understand the skill of defining.

Let's see. On the web page of worldhistory.org we can find this definition of philosophy:

> "The word Philosophy comes from the Greek Philo (love) and Sophia (wisdom) and so is literally defined as "the love of wisdom". More broadly understood, it is the study of the most basic and profound matters of human existence."

On the most popular online encyclopedia (Wikipedia):

> "Philosophy (love of wisdom in ancient Greek) is a systematic study of general and fundamental questions concerning topics like existence, reason, knowledge, values, mind, and language. It is a rational and critical inquiry that reflects on its own methods and assumptions."

What are the differences between these two definitions? What is closest (higher) category (genus proximum)? What is the specific difference (differentia specifica)? Is the same in both definitions? In the first definition, genus proximum is "study" and in the second definition is "systematic study". This is a significant difference because "Study" is a higher-level term than "Systematic Study," meaning "Study" is the proximate genus of "Systematic Study." When we examine the *genus proximum*, the second definition is more precise. In the second sentence of the second definition, we encounter another *genus proximum* which is "a rational and critical inquiry." If we look into the specific differences *(differentia specifica)* between the two definitions, the first definition refers to the study of "the most basic and significant aspects of human existence". The second definition, according to Wikipedia, describes *differentia specifica* as the study of "general and fundamental questions concerning topics such as existence, reason, knowledge, values, mind, and language." In this context, the second definition is more accurate. Both definitions are acceptable, but the second one is slightly superior. Unfortunately, incorrect definitions are more prevalent online. With one click, we can find a definition like this.

> "Philosophy has always been a search for spiritual truth, a process that deepens our understanding of nature, humanity, and the universe." (New Acropolis.org.)

Here, we have a definition, which comes from a different context - namely, *genus proximum* here is "search." Philosophy can be described as a search for truth but not as spiritual truth like it's written here. If we want to define it like this we need to provide further explanation of what is meant by spiritual truth as well. However, this definition is too narrow and unclear. Is spiritual truth simply an unseen truth, or a belief held by people? Would chemical processes be considered spiritual truth, or simply truth? More, and more questions arise.

Critical Thinking

What is critical thinking?

Critical thinking has been on everyone's lips in recent years. The term 'critical thinking' has become so popular that even those who do not understand what it is are using it. It is therefore necessary to define exactly what critical thinking is and what it is for.

Critical thinking is closely related to philosophy and logic because it is based on philosophical reasoning. Formal and informal logic are the basic rules by which we think critically. One of the definitions of critical thinking is "Critical thinking is light philosophy". We can't talk about critical thinking without philosophy. There are thousands of different definitions of critical thinking, one of the most functional of which might be as follows:

> "Critical thinking is that mode of thinking—about any subject, content, or problem—in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully taking charge of the structures inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual standards upon them."
> (Paul, Elder, 2002., 15)

Critical thinking in itself does not contain any concrete values or principles that one would try to impose by teaching critical thinking. It is a way of thinking in which someone should avoid emotional content and arbitrary principles. Critical thinking must be unbiased and based on common sense and consistent reasoning.

Critical thinking has its own forms, namely formal and informal logic. The name "formal logic" is most often used as a label for "Aristotelian" or "traditional" logic. It describes the forms of correct thinking. Formal logic examines concepts, judgments, and conclusions (syllogism, polysyllogism, fallacies of inference, etc.). On the other hand, "informal logic" is much younger than formal logic and has become increasingly present in the last fifty years, largely thanks to the development of theories of critical thinking. Informal logic is an extension of logic that establishes new canons of thought that are used in "live conversation". It is natural that formal logic and rhetoric meet in critical thinking, and it can even be argued that informal logic is the result of the formal concepts of traditional logic and the art of conversation derived from rhetoric. Although the "boundary" between formal and informal logic is apparently easy to define, it is difficult to draw it in a "live conversation". It is important that both formal and informal logic provide us with the tools we need to think critically.

The problem of uncritical thinking in the digital world

The digital world has made it easier than ever to access information. However, it has also made it more difficult to distinguish between reliable and unreliable information. This has led to an increase in uncritical thinking, which is the tendency to accept information without question.

There are many factors that contribute to uncritical thinking in the digital world. One factor is the sheer volume of information available. Today, we have access to information from all over the world, much of it unfiltered and unverified. This can make it difficult to know what to believe. Another factor that contributes to uncritical thinking is the ease with which information can be shared. Social media has also contributed to the problem of uncritical thinking. Social media platforms are designed to keep users engaged, and one way they do this is by recommending content that confirms their existing beliefs. This can create echo chambers where people are only exposed to information that reinforces their views. As a result, they may become less likely to question or critically evaluate the information they are presented with.

Critical thinking as media literacy in the digital world

Media literacy is the ability to apply critical thinking skills to the messages, signs, and symbols conveyed by the mass media.

Today, the amount of information we encounter in the digital world is staggering, and critical thinking gives us the tools to navigate in such a world. We can say that for the development of critical thinking skills, critical questions can help us to find our way through a lot of this information. When we want to examine some information, we can ask:

WHO (Who wrote it? Who benefits from the information? Who knows more about the subject of the information? What sources, if any, did the authors of the information use? Who will be affected by the information?)

WHAT? (What does the researched information not tell me? Do I want to know more about this topic/information? What else do I want to know? What is the most and least important in this information? What are the strongest and weakest aspects of the information?)

WHERE? (Where is the source of this information? Where did the event described in the information take place? Where are the arguments that support this story? Where can I check this information? Where have I seen similar information or reasoning?)

WHEN? (When did what the researched information describes happen? When was it written?

When was it updated? When might this information be useful?)

WHY (Why was it written in the first place? Why did the author have this point of view? Why am I being shown this? Why is this information important? Why do people need to know this?)

We cannot ignore these questions either:

- How do I know this is true?
- How reliable is it?
- Can I trust this portal?
- How do I know if this is a biased article?
- How would I put it in my own words?

You can take any text on the internet and study the information in it using the questions above and you will see how critical thinking is truly the basis of media literacy. Have fun!

Spotting Fallacies

What are logical fallacies?

Logical fallacies are errors in reasoning that occur when the arguments presented contain flaws in their logic or structure, rendering them invalid or unsound. We can divide the logical fallacies into formal and informal ones. The formal ones are typically called errors and pertain to mistakes in reasoning, meaning flaws in the structure of a deductive argumentation. We often use the term fallacies to indicate mistakes that are not a cause of a faulty application of logic but rather misrepresent the context or content of the statements themselves. In this sense, the broader term fallacies refers technically to informal fallacies that are not straight up mistakes in the sense of an improper use of rules of argumentation.[3] Arguments containing informal fallacies may be formally valid but are still fallacious. The source of the error is not just due to the form of the argument, as is the case for formal fallacies, but can also be due to their content and context. These fallacies, despite being incorrect, usually appear to be correct and thereby can seduce people into accepting and using them. And we want to dedicate some attention to these types of fallacies.

There are many examples of fallacies and we can list a few of the most famous ones to offer a better understanding of them:

- Ad hominem fallacy: Attacking the person instead of addressing the argument. Example: "I can't believe you're taking **her** advice on what to wear. She's always dressing so poorly herself."
- Appeal to authority fallacy: Using an authority figure as evidence, rather than sound reasoning and evidence. Example: "The celebrity said we should vote for this candidate, so we should."
- False dilemma fallacy: Presenting only two options when there are more possible choices. Example: "You're either with us or against us."
- Slippery slope fallacy: Assuming that one event will lead to a chain reaction of negative events without sufficient evidence. Example: "If we allow same-sex marriage, soon we'll be allowing people to marry animals."
- Straw man fallacy: Misrepresenting an opponent's argument in order to make it easier to attack. Example: "I think we should invest more in renewable energy." "So you're saying we should completely stop using fossil fuels and go back to living in caves?"
- Circular reasoning fallacy: Using the conclusion as one of the premises in an argument. Example: "The Bible is true because it says so in the Bible."
- False cause fallacy: Assuming that just because one event followed another, the first event must have caused the second. Example: "I ate chicken before I got sick, so chicken must have made me sick."

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[3] (for example from the statements a) If you get a good grade on the mathematics test, parents buy you a present; and b) You got a bad grade in mathematics ... one would conclude c) You do not get a present from the parents ... - this of course is an error because the two premises a and b only determine the outcome

- Bandwagon fallacy: Assuming that just because many people believe something, it must be true. Example: "Everyone is buying this product, so it must be good."
- Red herring fallacy: Introducing irrelevant information to divert attention away from the main issue. Example: "I know I didn't do my homework, but my dog was sick last night and I had to take him to the vet."
- Appeal to emotions fallacy: Using emotions to persuade instead of sound reasoning. Example: "If you don't donate to this charity, think of all the poor children who will suffer."

What is the problem of "echo chambers"?

The online world has made it easier than ever for logical fallacies to spread and go unchecked. With the abundance of information available on the internet, people may encounter arguments that appear to be persuasive but are actually based on flawed reasoning. Furthermore, social media algorithms can create "echo chambers" where people only see content that reinforces their existing beliefs, making it difficult to identify and challenge logical fallacies.

Living in a specific cognitive bubble the online ec(h)o-system is inclined to reinforce the ideas and beliefs of consumers. Websites and platforms want to keep the consumer engaged and coming back for more. By creating a personalized experience where content is tailored to the preferences and interests of the user/consumer, online environments increase the chances that consumers will find value in their offerings, which can lead to longer sessions, increased interactions, and ultimately, higher retention rates. This is especially important for platforms that rely on advertising revenue, as increased user engagement can attract more advertisers.

In other words, we might say that the internal drive of the internet (or at least some websites and platforms) is not to bring the user closer to the truth which might antagonise him but rather to provide the consumer with information and entertainment that will please him – because in the money comes this way.

How we might apply the understanding of logical fallacies to the issue of "echo chambers"

By understanding logical fallacies, we can become more critical consumers of information and better equipped to identify flawed arguments. When encountering an argument, we can ask ourselves whether the reasoning presented is sound or if there are any logical fallacies present. By doing so, we can make more informed decisions and avoid being swayed by arguments that are not based on solid reasoning. Additionally, recognizing and correcting logical fallacies in our own arguments can help us improve our own communication and reasoning skills.

Testing Hypotheses

What is a hypothesis and testing hypotheses?

The term hypothesis is etymologically derived from the Ancient Greek hypothesis, or from the Latin suppositio, in the sense of a supposition or conjecture. There are several explanations of the term hypothesis in the literature, but basically, we can think of a hypothesis as a statement that is a proposal for an explanation of a phenomenon, but this proposal has not yet been proven in any way. In sociology, we think of a hypothesis in the sense of an empirically verifiable statement that ascribes certain properties to some class of elements, or speaks of a connection of events or of their consequences, thereby stating some regular regularity, e.g. in the form of a functional relationship between variables. In this sense, we often speak of so-called nomological hypotheses, because the deductions from them serve to establish (scientific) laws. Hypothesis testing is then the process of verifying whether a hypothesis is true or false.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING
Types of Hypothesis Tests
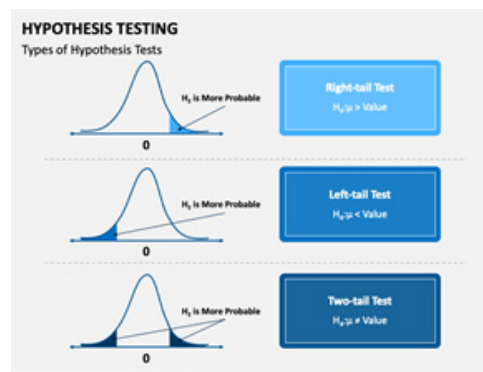
The above shows that the scientific hypothesis is not identical to the common conjecture. As a rule, we formulate a hypothesis on the basis of empirical material as a collection of certain facts. We may formulate various hypotheses in an attempt to explain the facts in question. However, we select from among them, e.g. by verification, those that are appropriate to the set of facts. In this selection we have to observe some basic parameters:

- The hypothesis formulated cannot contradict the facts it explains.
- Among several hypotheses explaining the same phenomenon, we prefer the hypothesis that explains the maximum of the facts.
- For correlated phenomena, we minimize the number of explanatory hypotheses.
- In verification, we respect the probabilistic nature of the implications of the hypothesis
- Hypotheses that contradict each other cannot be simultaneously true

One of the notorious philosophical hypotheses is **the** so-called **nebular hypothesis** - an important attempt to explain the universe in a non-theological way. It is the idea of the possible origin and evolution of the universe from a primordial nebula. This idea was originally developed by René Descartes and later systematically elaborated by Immanuel Kant in parallel with Laplace. In sociology, one of the most famous hypotheses is **the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis**, which proposes that language influences the way we grasp material and social reality. This hypothesis is also referred to as **the hypothesis of linguistic relativism**. One of the more well-known hypotheses in the field of sociological research is **the** so-called **contact hypothesis**, according to which individual discrimination and prejudice against members of a minority group will gradually disappear if members of both groups have direct personal contact with each other.

The problems of testing hypotheses in the context of the digital world

The first difficulty for us may be that we distinguish several types of hypotheses. We can speak of a so-called **heuristic hypothesis** as an untested conjecture about certain contexts, the function of which is to stimulate further processes of inquiry. Another type of hypothesis is **the statistical hypothesis**, in other words, **the probabilistic hypothesis.**

This is a scientific statement about the context of an event or its consequences which, under generally given conditions, does not occur in every case, but only with a certain probability. Important types of hypotheses are **the admissible hypothesis, the research hypothesis, the null hypothesis, and the alternative hypothesis**, which we will explain later in this section.

- **Admissible hypothesis** – any hypothesis that does not contradict the facts it explains
- **Research hypothesis** – a statement about certain traits, phenomena, or variables derived from a testable theory.
- **Null Hypothesis** – a tested hypothesis, established on the basis of results. It is usually a hypothesis whose parameter is null – i.e., the hypothesis that there are no differences between two sets, traits, etc. However, more generally, it can be any exact hypothesis that we are interested in rejecting. As a rule, it is formulated with the explicit intention of rejecting it, and forms a methodologically important first step in the decision-making process. We refer to it as H0, and if it is rejected, we can accept the alternative hypothesis
- **Alternative hypothesis** – an operative statement about the research hypothesis. It is any of the admissible hypotheses different from the null hypothesis. Its validity is tested by a statistical test of the significance of the null hypothesis – the test rejects the validity of H0, we can accept the alternative hypothesis H1.

Now that we have clarified, at least briefly and simply, the issue of what is and what is not a hypothesis, let us turn to the issue of hypothesis testing. The term test/testing is generally understood to denote a certain systematic procedure either to obtain, detect, or verify data or phenomena according to a specific purpose, focus, and objective. All tests should meet a number of basic criteria that may themselves be problematic: objectivity, validity (the ability of the research instrument to detect what it was intended to detect), reliability (the accuracy and reliability of the research instrument), standardization, sensitivity, comparability, the economy in the sense of small time and labour requirements, usefulness, documentation.
Hypothesis testing is, as we have already mentioned, the process of verifying whether a hypothesis is true or false. However, the validity of a hypothesis could only be decided with complete certainty by examining the entire base population. Since in most cases, such research is impractical or even impossible, the truth of the hypothesis is decided on the basis of a sample or a sample whose construction may be equally problematic. There are, however, a number of well-established procedures for its construction, which we do not have the space to discuss here.
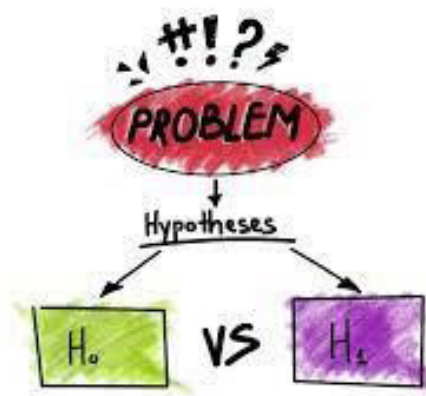
The basic hypothesis testing procedure is as follows:
- formulation of the null hypothesis
- formulation of an alternative hypothesis
- determining the significance level
- calculating the test statistic
- deciding whether or not to accept the hypothesis

Two types of errors can occur when testing a hypothesis:
- Type I error: rejecting the null hypothesis even though it is in fact true.
- Type II error: accepting the null hypothesis even though it does not actually hold.

5 misconceptions about Hypothesis & correct understandings.

Abrar Knowledge: https://www.youtube.com/c/AbrarKnowledge
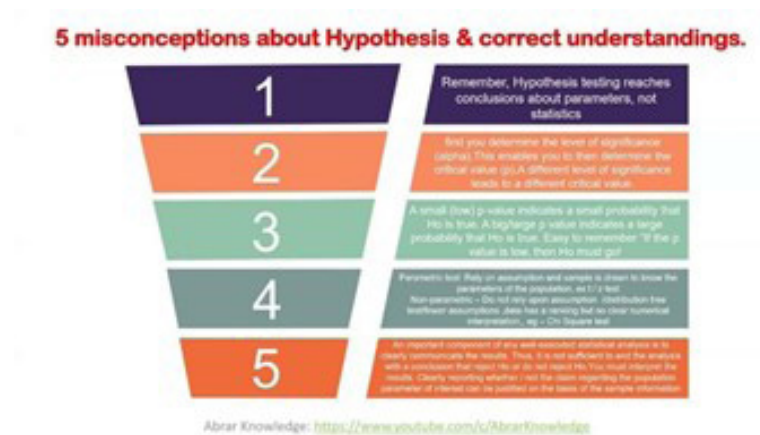
It may seem that hypothesis testing will not help us in the digital world. But we could not be more wrong. The digital environment is a new type of environment to which we are adapting. We are trying to understand it and not always succeeding. Hypotheses testing is an effective tool for explaining the interconnectedness of its seemingly unconnected phenomena. Many of the problems we face today are as yet satisfactorily unexplained but clearly connected to the digital world. For example, we have underestimated the power of social networks to empower movements or activities calling for social change, such as the events of the Arab Spring; we have also underestimated how significantly more challenging navigating them will be for the current generation of 60-somethings and what the consequences will be in terms of polarisation of society. However, if we want to understand them adequately, if we want to explain them satisfactorily - hypothesis testing is an effective tool to use. Its fundamental virtue is its validity and reliability, which makes its conclusions significantly more credible than our mere assumptions, which in the digital world are often passed off as ready-made 'truths'. However, this does not necessarily mean that we must now become scientists and test everything in this way. But we should know that if something has passed solid testing, it is more likely to be a true explanation than a claim that is not backed by any reliable testing.

How can testing hypotheses help us solve the problems of the digital world?

To loosely paraphrase Karl R. Popper, we could say that all of human life, from the beginnings of civilizational advances to the present, can be seen as a constant problem-solving effort to secure better living conditions. Popper speaks of the method of trial and error that has been behind many of mankind's key discoveries. Today, however, we have come so far as mankind that adherence to the trial-and-error method could have fatal consequences for us. Imagine, for example, its application in the development of nuclear weapons or in biomedical research as such. Scary, isn't it?

Testing hypotheses, however, allows us to explain phenomena, events, or the connections between them in a scientifically accurate, validated, and safe way. On such a basis, we as humanity can expand our knowledge and thus understand more and more of both the world around us, including the digital world, and ourselves.

As a relatively new environment, the digital world is still under-researched. We may understand the algorithms that shape it, but these are not a sufficient explanation of how this environment works to shape human identity, shape social movements, create new types of criminality, worsen or improve the psychological state of its users, and so on.

We can see that the digital environment in its ultimate effect transforms the non-digital world. It has the potential to fundamentally change our everyday lives. Our individual attempts to understand its pitfalls are inadequate and are often the source of fatal mistakes. Fortunately, we are not alone in this, and we have an effective tool to map and explain the workings of phenomena even this new and complex in a scientifically rigorous way - we can trust the results of scientific hypotheses testing.

Paradoxes

What are paradoxes?

A paradox is a statement or situation that appears to be contradictory or absurd, yet may contain a truth or logic that is not immediately obvious. That is to say, the logical basis may be or seem founded or even true and yet the resolution of the premises brings us into an impossible state where the conclusion must be true and false at the same time. Because of that paradoxes often challenge our assumptions and force us to think in new ways and to reflect on our entire system of understanding.

As this definition is indeed very hard to understand it will be much easier to explain the paradoxes with some examples.

The Liar Paradox:

This paradox involves a statement that contradicts itself. For example, the statement "This sentence is false." If the statement is true, then it must be false, because it says so. So that is a contradiction, therefore the statement cannot be true and must be false. But if it's false, then the opposite of what it states must be true. As it states that it is false, therefore it must be true. Which again is a contradiction. It cannot be true and it cannot be false, yet it must be one or the other – and that is the paradox.

The Grandfather Paradox:

This paradox now refers to a situation rather than a statement and it involves time travel. If you were to travel back in time and prevent your own grandfather from meeting your grandmother, then you would never have been born. But if you were never born, then you wouldn't have been able to travel back in time to prevent your grandparents from meeting in the first place.

The Unexpected Hanging Paradox:

This is a rather fun logical riddle and involves a prisoner who is sentenced to death. The prisoner is told that they will be hanged on a day of the week between Monday and Friday, but that the hanging will come as a surprise. The prisoner reasons that the hanging can't happen on Friday, because if it hasn't happened by Thursday, then they will expect it on Friday. But if the hanging can't happen on Friday, then it can't happen on Thursday either, because the hanging would then be expected on Wednesday. By this logic, the hanging can't happen on any day of the week, which creates a paradox.

What is the "certainty bias"?

There is a phenomenon explored and described by some cognitive psychologists (including Amos Tversky, Gerd Gigerenzer, and Jonathan Baron) in the 20th century that is referred to as the "illusion of solvability" or the "certainty bias." It is a cognitive bias where individuals tend to believe that a solution to a problem exists, even when one may not be readily available or straightforward. This bias often leads people to seek simple or quick-fix solutions, even in complex situations that may require more nuanced approaches.

The illusion of solvability can arise from various factors, including the human desire for certainty and closure, the preference for simplicity over complexity, and the tendency to overlook or underestimate obstacles and challenges. People may underestimate the difficulty or complexity of a problem and overestimate their own ability to solve it.

This bias is observed in various domains, including personal problem-solving, decision-making, and the search for easy answers in societal or global issues. It can influence behavior by leading individuals to disregard evidence or alternative perspectives that challenge their belief in a simple solution.

And as the bias exists in our offline existence it can be even more pronounced in the online environments because of several factors:

- Information overload: The internet provides access to an enormous amount of information, which can be overwhelming. When faced with an abundance of information, individuals may seek quick and easy answers to simplify complex issues. This can lead to a preference for certainty and a tendency to overlook nuance or contradictory evidence

- Echo chambers and filter bubbles: Online platforms often use algorithms to personalize content and recommendations based on users' preferences and past behavior. This can result in individuals being exposed primarily to information that aligns with their existing beliefs and interests. Echo chambers and filter bubbles can reinforce pre-existing biases, limit exposure to diverse perspectives, and amplify certainty bias by creating an environment that validates and reinforces existing beliefs.

- Social media and viral content: Social media platforms are designed to promote rapid and widespread sharing of content. This can lead to the spread of simplified or exaggerated information that may cater to people's desire for quick and certain answers. The emphasis on viral content and clickbait headlines can further reinforce certainty bias by promoting simplistic narratives or solutions to complex issues.

How can an appreciation for paradoxes help us deal with certainty bias?

In the online world, paradoxes can be easily misunderstood or oversimplified. Memes and viral content often present complex issues or ideas as simple, contradictory statements that can be easily shared and spread.

Paradoxes can be useful tools for reflection and critical thinking. By exploring paradoxes, we can challenge our assumptions and broaden our perspectives. We can also use paradoxes to explore and question our own beliefs and values, recognizing that our understanding of the world is often shaped by contradictory ideas and experiences. Additionally, understanding paradoxes can help us appreciate the complexity of the world and the importance of seeking out diverse perspectives and ideas.

In the non-western traditions, we might find a counterpart for paradox reflection in the Zen Buddhist practice of the study of koans. A koan is a paradoxical or enigmatic statement or question used to provoke insight and realization. It is a tool employed to go beyond conceptual thinking and intellectual understanding, leading to direct experience and enlightenment. Zen practitioners, including monks, nuns, and laypeople, engage in the study and contemplation of koans as part of their spiritual practice.

If we can assume to state the point of koans we might say that they are designed to question the very nature of our understanding and reality itself, they defy logical analysis and lead towards a non-conceptual understanding.

Some examples of koans that we could think about are:

- "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"
- "What did your face look like before your parents were born?"
- "What is the color of wind?"
- "What is the sound of a stone sinking in water?"

What both paradoxes and koans might teach us is that not everything is simple and straightforward or even has a solution let alone an easy and simple one. We can learn to embrace uncertainty to a certain level and learn not to get too attached to some fixed viewpoints.

Scepticism

What is scepticism?

"Guard yourself from lying:
there is he who deceives and there is he who is deceived."
- Sextus Empiricus

Scepticism is a questioning attitude or doubt toward knowledge claims that are seen as mere belief or dogma. For example, if a person is skeptical about claims made by some institution or individual, then the person doubts that these claims are accurate and his attitude is often motivated by the impression that the available evidence is insufficient to support the claim. He doubts that the source is trustworthy and thinks that he is being manipulated. Formally, skepticism is a topic of interest in philosophy, particularly epistemology, and the doubt can be applied to any topic, such as politics, religion, or pseudoscience. René Descartes marks a turning point in modern philosophy with his sceptical method. He was even doubting his own existence because it is hard to have sure proof of anything. He eventually figured out that if he thinks, then he is. He is a thinking rational being and therefore his existence is real. To be a real sceptic, a person must rely on his mind, and that is his ratio and common sense. There is a difference between radical scepticism and healthy scepticism. A radical sceptic refuses to believe anything like some evil demon constructs the world and deceives him and the healthy sceptic approaches beliefs with care or due diligence by not believing everything too quickly.

The problem of fake news, pseudoscience and manipulation on the internet

Fake news is false or misleading information presented as truth. Fake news often has the aim of damaging the reputation of a person or entity a well as deceiving the public and manipulating their actions. If the manipulation is detailed and consistent it becomes propaganda. Pseudoscience consists of statements, beliefs, or practices that claim to be both scientific and factual but are incompatible with the scientific method.

Modern technical achievements and the development of the Internet, especially social media, have led to the expansion of media manipulation, so skepticism has become an important philosophical method or a tool with which people can question reality and accept or reject what is offered to them. This doesn't mean we have to be distrustful or suspicious of absolutely everything and be radical scepticist, but we certainly shouldn't take everything for granted and let others make up our minds. By influencing the opinion, the actions of the individual are also influenced, so it is very important whom we allow to guide us. It is necessary to always look at the other side of the coin to get a complete picture and be guided by common sense.

Also, it is very important to be skeptical of yourself and of already established norms and opinions, and always go deeper into the problems we are facing. Why someone who is a sceptic on the internet is in somewhat advantage compared to others? It's because nowadays there is a lot of institutions or organizations that intentionally promote misinformation, pseudoscientific explanations, and manipulative praxis in general towards all kind of audiences for some material or ideological (political) profit. Flat Earth theory and many other conspiracy theories are now really popular because the freedom of speech and globalization through modern media is out of the control of common sense.

How can scepticism help us tackle the modern era of misinformation and the death of common sense?

Nowadays, many nonprofit organizations dedicate their work to promoting scientific scepticism and resisting the spread of pseudoscience, superstition, and irrational beliefs like The Skeptics Society. Of course, you can be as easily manipulated by the government or some other random individual or organization on the internet but the point is to be a rational individual that thinks for himself and the sceptic method is a way to do that. Ask for better argumentation and explanation and try to philosophically unwind concepts, theories, and opinions that are available in the digital world. Always look for other perspectives and use logic to explain to yourself why is something the way it is. Even if it is sometimes hard to understand something, you can always rely on your common sense and remain sane in the digital world. For example, if you read an article or if you are in a communication with someone who is aggressively discrediting alternative sources or some alternative believes, it's possible that you are being manipulated. Being a septic in those situation can help you resist it and act more freely. No one should be a radical sceptic but a lot of everyday communication, not to mention the media, is a manipulative praxis that can harm your rational operation and convince you to do something that is against your own beliefs.

Analysis

What is analysis?

The word analysis stems from Greek and its original meaning is "to loosen". Although the meaning of words usually undertakes some changes during history we can see the metaphor of making something more loose even nowadays when thinking about analysis and analyzing something. The analysis is often interpreted precisely as breaking something down into parts, as untangling something and focusing on the partial elements rather than the whole. Analysis is then in contrast to synthesis which does the opposite - put parts together.

This conception of breaking something down for instance concepts according to Michael Beaney (2014) may be called the decompositional conception of analysis. However as the author points out there are also other conceptions of analysis. "In ancient Greek thought, 'analysis' referred primarily to the process of working back to first principles by means of which something could then be demonstrated. This conception may be called the regressive conception of analysis." Beaney (2014) claims that the analysis can have also transformative or interpretative dimension. Analysis in philosophy is often connected to logic – "In the work of Frege and Russell, on the other hand, before the process of decomposition could take place, the statements to be analyzed had first to be translated into their 'correct' logical form." Despite the three mentioned approaches to analysis they should not be understood as concurring because in the practice of analysing we are often combining them. "To analyze something, we may first have to interpret it in some way, translating an initial statement, say, into the privileged language of logic, mathematics or science, before articulating the relevant elements and structures, and all in the service of identifying fundamental principles by means of which to explain it." (Beaney, 2014)

The analysis is used in practically every research to some extend whether in science or humanities, arts etc. and also outside of academia. We can see body composition analysis in sports, analysis of blood in medicine, analysis of texts in literature, etc. In philosophy some argue for the distinction between analytical and continental philosophy where the former uses more the methods of logical analysis (see Baldwin, 1998). However, this doesn´t mean the latter is avoiding any analysis at all, moreover, the sharp distinction between the two areas of philosophy seems to be problematic as such given the fact that many authors combine the methods and thus can be attribute characteristics linked to either of the approaches.

The problem of disinformation and misinformation online

The online realm offers us a valuable source of information regarding practically any matter. However there are various informational sources, some are more reliable than others. It is possible to see even fake photographs or videos supporting fake information.

How can understanding analysis help us tackle disinformation and misinformation in the digital realm

The use of analysis online can be in breaking down claims and for instance news etc. into smaller parts and checking their validity. It can be a conceptual analysis, analysing what the words mean in a given context whether they are used for manipulation and who benefits from such presentation and spreading of information, and how the information can be manipulated. For instance, while exercising our critical thinking we can focus on manipulative words carrying emotional messages and trying to manipulate by for example fear. In this regard, we can mention that according to research around 80% of anti-vaccine websites use fear for manipulation rather than solid evidence (see e.g. Kata, 2010). We can also analyse the pictures or videos and put them in context. Many hoaxes are created by amateur graphic designers so after a careful look it is quite easy to discover that pictures are adjusted to present different messages which better supports the manipulative ideas. We can also check on different sources of the presented information and focus more on scientific evidence or rational explanation. We can also use other tools mentioned in this chapter.

Regarding analysis in general it is possible to mention that in the online realm, there is potential for analysis of communication online as such, there is also a big discussion regarding (big) data analysis and the use of the information. The philosophical-ethical problem is for instance whether we should allow business companies or other stakeholders to collect data about individuals and their online behaviour, preferences, social contacts, etc., and use it for marketing and so on.

Hermeneutic Circle

What is the hermeneutics and the hermeneutic circle?

The hermeneutical circle is often used as a standard argument by supporters of autonomy for the humanities. Advocates of an alternative methodology valid for the humanities present the hermeneutic circle as an ontological problem or as a specific methodological problem in the humanities and social sciences (Mantzavinos 2009). At the beginning, it is useful to define the term hermeneutics. The term hermeneutics is etymologically derived from the Greek term hermeneutiké or hermeneuein as to clarify, explain, interpret, and translate. Originally, the term referred to the art of interpreting mainly ancient texts, but also, for example, myths or oracles. The origins of hermeneutics in this sense can be traced back to the Stoics. In its current sense, hermeneutics is one of the philosophical methods that conceives of knowledge as a specifically open and reflective understanding, thus defining itself in relation to methods that emphasize explanation and description. The origins of this approach can be seen in the German philosopher and theologian F.D.E. Schleiermacher, who came up with the thesis that a text can only be properly interpreted through an understanding of the totality of the life context in which it was produced. This brings us to the notion of the hermeneutic circle, which was developed by H.G. Gadamer in his work. For him, the meaning of a text is the joint work of the one who left it and the one who works with it. However, any such interpretation is shaped by the preconceptions and conditions in which it takes place. In other words- there is no understanding that is free of all presuppositions and that can achieve so-called "pure" truth.
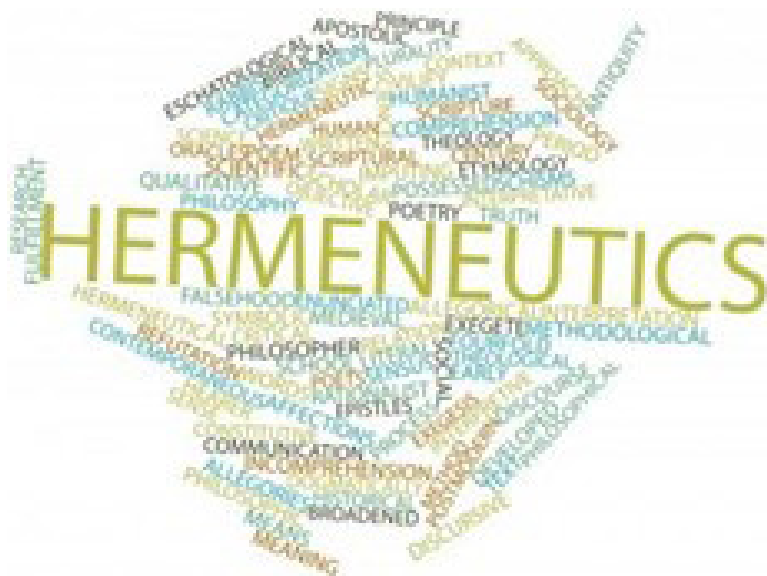
The hermeneutic circle thus tells us that each piece of knowledge can only be understood from the totality of the context, which in turn can only be understood by understanding other pieces of knowledge. That is to say, all our knowledge consists in a kind of pre-understanding. The hermeneutic circle has at least three stages: 1. the preunderstanding with which the interpreter approaches the interpreted phenomenon, 2. the hermeneutic experience which does not correspond to this preunderstanding, 3. the corrected schedule with which we can return to the first step. It is clear from the above that ultimately the hermeneutic circle is the source of several fundamental difficulties.

The problems of the hermeneutic circle?

The fundamental problem with the hermeneutic circle is that, according to its proponents, it is impossible to break out of it. We can, however, try to become aware of it and thus mitigate its effects. In order to understand what difficulties the hermeneutic circle entails, even in the digital environment, it may help to recapitulate the possible meanings of the term hermeneutics. It can be seen as the art of interpreting meaning from texts; the process by which we can ascertain the point of view that conditions the speaker's attitude toward the subject of the conversation; the doctrine of the presuppositions and phenomenology of understanding; the theory of justification of the process of understanding; the philosophical method of understanding human being and being-in-itself as the basis of all knowledge; and then specifically the hermeneutic circle as a method of understanding.
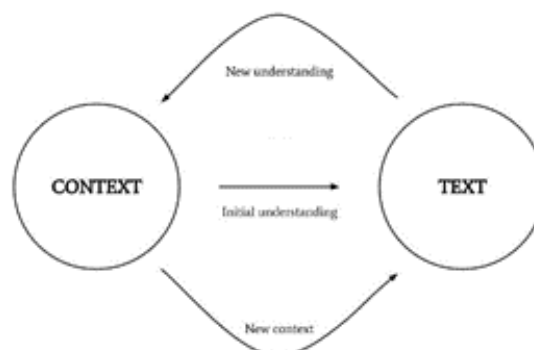
If we take a closer look at the method of the hermeneutic circle, we can see that its consequence, among other things, is that our understanding of society moves in a circle. In other words - we can only understand a certain slice of what is happening in society, for example, a part of the political process, if we understand the social whole, and conversely, we can only understand the whole if we understand the part (Mantzavinos, 2009).

Similarly, understanding the digital world as a whole is therefore only possible if we understand some part of it, which is not possible without understanding the whole to which the part belongs. Our understanding of the digital world is thus constantly moving in circles, but this does not mean that it is not progressing. However, it is necessary to be aware of the interconnectedness of these two steps and not to forget the crucial role of both our personal hermeneutic personal biases and the tradition that shapes our understanding.

It seems that the hermeneutic circle method can be of considerable help in our efforts to understand the digital world. It can effectively help us to understand why the population of social network users is so highly polarised, and why we struggle to understand how the digital world works and influences the real world around us, and it can also provide us with an answer to the question of why different people perceive and interpret the same information in fundamentally different ways.

- *Pre-comprehension*: Median understanding. Literature review and phenomenological interview
- *Understanding*: Convergence of meaning units, unveiling of the interrogated phenomenon
- *Interpretation*: Articulation of the understood phenomenon
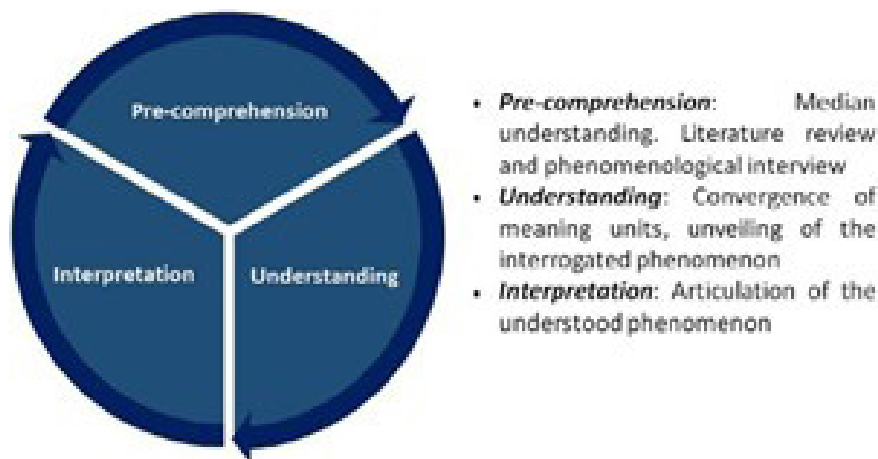
How can the hermeneutic circle help us solve the problems of the digital world?

As Kagan says, humans are the only species that can operate in two realities - schemas (perceptions of material things) and words, which are inseparable from our lives in our attempt to understand the world around us (2016). The effort to understand the world around us is intrinsic to us as humanity. Due to current technological advances, our world has become a little more complicated. The digital world presents us with a new and specific challenge. We see that it was naive to assume that we as humanity were ready for it. The hermeneutic circle shows us that in trying to understand the digital world, we must also reflect on the preconceptions with which we approach it. The narrative co-determining our relationship to modern technology is perhaps most evident in the field of AI at present (Coeckelbergh, 2023), but we also identify it in our relation to the digital world and its components. Modern technology as threat, modern technology as opportunity, modern technology as the triumph of reason, modern technology as mystery, these are the basic frameworks within which our relationship to a world in which these technologies play an increasingly crucial role is being shaped. What backgrounds we come from, who we are, what values we hold have a significant bearing on how we interpret particular pieces of information in the digital environment. If we want to better understand the digital world, we need to recognize that how we react to individual stimuli in it says perhaps more about ourselves and the times we live in than it does about the digital environment itself. If we realize this, we can understand ourselves better at the same time as we try to understand the digital world. However, we should not lose sight of the complexity of the digital world, which makes it impossible to take things out of 'context' without getting off the path of understanding the 'things' themselves.

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PART 3
Philosophical Tools

Cases, contrast cases, and thought experiments

What are cases, contrast cases, and thought experiments

The use of cases, whether real or imagined, has been prominent in philosophy. They are also very useful in education; a teacher can introduce a case, usually in the form of a dilemma, and students are then asked to analyze it and take the perspective of the person supposedly presented with this dilemma. Two goals are inherently presupposed. First, in this way, students can more easily bridge the gap between theory and practice in the sense that they can try out different approaches to the situation and see which one is more fitting, with an assumption that they will be able to imitate or build on that in future cases that might present to them in real life. Secondly, such use of cases increases engagement and gives students an opportunity to more fully invest themselves in the case. The use of cases enables one to promote and cultivate reasoning that is sensitive to context and related to experience. Martha Nussbaum summarizes this nicely, when she says, that good philosophy often gets us to represent situations from a critical practical perspective that can allow us to see relationships that have eluded us in our daily thinking. This enables us to go beyond our deeply-seated beliefs. Cases can differ in their complexity. Contrast case is a method that involves imagining alternative, but similar scenarios or conditions to compare and contrast different outcomes or principles. They are used to highlight the significance of specific factors or variables by exploring what would happen if those were altered or removed.

Thought experiments can be understood as imagined scenarios or cases with a certain level of complexity and novelty. They are usually designed and used to elicit our responses or intuitions, e.g., regarding our use of key concepts, support or rejection of a given argument or a particular theory, general principle, hypothesis or presupposition, or to offer us a new insight, illumination or perspective on a given problem or case. They are also useful for revealing particular implicit assumptions in our considered opinions that we tend to miss otherwise. Robert Nozick designed the following thought experiment The Experience Machine. Imagine that scientists have invented a machine that can give us whatever desirable or pleasurable experience we want. We enter into the machine and the machine could produce in us the pleasures of enjoying a beautiful beach, performing a wonderful piece of classical music, solving a famous math problem, etc. These experiences are not in any way distinguishable from the "genuine" ones that we could have outside the machine. Now imagine that you are offered to enter into this machine, choosing the experience as you desire. Would you accept the offer or choose real life instead? Nozick supposed that the responses of most people would be that they would not choose the machine and that this is an argument against hedonism. We value not just experiences, but also the way of achieving them; we want to do certain things, and not just have the experience of doing them.

The machine also hinders our autonomy and a sense of genuine life.

The problem of privacy and surveillance

The aspects of privacy and surveillance are very important in the digital world and concern the tension between the benefits of technology and the potential harms and infringement on individual privacy rights. This includes mass surveillance as through technology governments, corporations, and other entities gain capabilities to collect and analyze vast amounts of data about individuals (e.g., one's locations, online activities, communication data). This can be used for the so-called profiling, where this personal data is then used to create detailed profiles of individuals, including their interests, preferences, behaviors, and even intimate aspects of their lives.

Carissa Véliz opens her book on the issues of privacy in the digital age with the following paragraph.

> "They are watching us. They know I'm writing these words. They know you are reading them. Governments and hundreds of corporations are spying on you and me, and everyone we know. Every minute of every day. They track and record all they can: our location, our communications, our internet searches, our biometric information, our social relations, our purchases, and much more. They want to know who we are, what we think, where we hurt. They want to predict and influence our behaviour. They have too much power. Their power stems from us, from you, from your data. It's time to take back control. Reclaiming privacy is the only way we can regain control of our lives and our societies." (Veliz 2020, 6)

Among others, she mentions the fact that if you buy a smart TV and make it a part of your home WiFi network, this TV probably uses a technology called 'automatic content recognition' (ACR), and can connect to and exchange data with more than 700 distinct internet addresses just being turned on for 15 minutes.

How can cases, contrast cases, and thought experiments help us tackle the issues of surveillance and privacy?

While the use of (contrast) cases and thought experiments can be relevant for almost every aspect of the digital world, this section focuses mainly on issues of surveillance and privacy. Thought experiments can help us to explore and analyze complex issues and implications unique to these contexts. E.g., thought experiments can help us understand the implications of widespread surveillance and the erosion of privacy in the digital age. Consider the following thought experiment. You suddenly wake up in a society in which every aspect of a person's life is continuously monitored and recorded. And these records can be accessed by numerous people. Do you regard such a situation as morally unacceptable? What would need to change in this described scenario, that would make it acceptable? What if the benefits of such a society would be that it would enable preventing every terrorist attack and saving many lives? Would that make a difference? Is the described case any different than the actual state of affairs? Which aspects of your life do you regard as most important in relation to privacy? Consider similar models of societies, e.g., as described in Huxley's Brave New World or Zamyatin's We. What are the most relevant aspects that stand out in these two novels?

In general, when thinking about or discussing a case or a thought experiment, you can be guided by the following questions. What are the (morally) relevant features involved in the case? Which one of these features is most important? Are there any clashes between these features? How should the clash be resolved? Are there any similar or analogous cases for comparison? How do we morally evaluate these other cases? All this can help you respond to real-life cases and evaluate them accordingly.

Aphorism and Irony

What is aphorism and what is irony?

An aphorism is a concise, laconic, or memorable expression of a general truth or principle. It can be an old saying that represents some instance of life. It can be philosophical or motivational and it can summon up some universal truth or knowledge. Here are few examples from famous philosophers:

Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards. - Soren Kierkegaard

The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts. - Bertrand Russell

The limits of my language mean the limits of my world. – Ludwig Wittgenstein

In the last one, Wittgenstein presents his understanding of the language and the world. It summons up the meaning of communication and representation of reality and it can be a trigger to a deeper understanding of the way we construct the image of the world that surrounds us.

Irony is a philosophical tool in which the expression of one's meaning is opposite or sarcastic and provocative. By using language that normally signifies the opposite, irony can have a big impact on the audience. Irony is typical for humorous or emphatic effect but also as a tool for a deeper understanding of the subject and abandoning traditional or superficial beliefs about the world. For example, if it were a cold, rainy gray day, you might say, "What a beautiful day it is!" and be humorous but you can also ironize someone's opinion and encourage them to understand their point of view and their mistakes.

The problem of universal truth and certain knowledge?

Socrates used irony as a dialectical tool for investigating the truth. He forced his students to "give birth" to the truth with philosophical thinking. With confusion, he encouraged them to grasp more into their loose argumentation and to find that their beliefs were false or lacking. He did that so his students could understand how little they really know about the world and how knowledge is fragile. The outcomes of their philosophical workout are breaking the misbelieves and stereotypes. People can deceive themselves their whole life into something that is not the case. It is hard sometimes to be sure about something so there is a difference between opinion and truth and we must always be oriented towards the truth and the real meaning behind everything.

Universal truths are some facts that are widely accepted and cannot change over a time period, or under any circumstance. Certain knowledge is something that we all believe is true and on which we build all other beliefs about the world. The general facts about reality are crucial for further understanding of the world around us. Nowadays, our reality is digital and our world is mirrored on the internet. Social media can be a big arena for the clash of a lot of different opinions which isn't bad at all but it is also a place of misinformation. The biggest problem we are facing today is what to believe and how to be certain about something we face online and aphorisms and irony can help us tackle misunderstandings and challenge us to think philosophically and inspire others to do so as well.

How can irony and aphorisms lead to better argumentation and a better understanding of our reality?

Some of the earliest philosophical texts from traditions around the world used an aphoristic style because aphorism can construct a challenging and provocative philosophical statement that challenges our mind and forces us to think deeper. The nature of the aphorism is undogmatical and it opens up a training ground of interpretations and discussions on any topic. Aphorisms can offer us a hypothesis on which we draw conclusions or on which we doubt the world that surrounds us. By "ironizing" someone's opinion or some superficial beliefs, we can challenge our friends and even ourselves for the higher order of thinking and to develop our logical argumentation. Irony challenges people to search for hidden meaning and to really understand the conceptuality of our reality. Therefore, irony requires interpretation, it leads us to believe and recognize as true not what is expressed, but what is meant. There is a small number of facts about our reality that we can be hundred percent sure about and it is important to know if we can rely on something we face on the internet or in real life. That doesn't mean that we live in a false world or that we must ironize every kind of opinion or statement but we need to encourage each other for a deeper understanding of the world in order to make correct decisions and act accordingly. Another way we can use irony and change our digital surroundings is by exposing the contradictions and hypocrisies of our online behavior. For example, we often claim to value privacy and security, but at the same time, we willingly share our personal information on social media platforms. By using irony to point out these contradictions, we can encourage people to reflect on their behavior and reconsider their values and priorities.

Aporia

What is aporia?

Aporia is a philosophical puzzle or doubt with no clear answer. When the doubt or uncertainty is genuine, it can signal a real dilemma and encourage the audience to think about different options for resolution. It often includes some kind of logical contradiction that is a roadblock to understanding. It can be formed as a statement or as a question. In rhetoric, it is verbal expression of genuine uncertainty about some subject and it is used as an interpersonal communication tool. On the other hand, when speakers only pretend to be uncertain, they can use aporia to catch listeners' attention and engage them in eliminating the doubt on their own. The main purpose of aporia is to get the audience (listener) involved in the thought processes the speaker intends to address. A speaker could pretend that he doesn't know something obvious or question something in a dumb way and provoke listeners to think about what is said.

Example of aporia: *How many roads must a man walk down before you call him a man?* (Bob Dylan, *Blowing in the Wind*)

The contemporary problem of online harassment

The Palestinians are like crocodiles; the more you give them meat, they want more.
 - Ehud Barak, Prime Minister of Israel, August 28, 2000.

One concrete problem people face in digital surroundings is the issue of online harassment and hate speech but hate speech is always present. Online harassment can take many forms, including cyberbullying, trolling, and targeted harassment based on a person's race, gender, religion, or other characteristics. The anonymity and distance of the internet can encourage people to say things they would never say in person, and this can lead to a toxic online environment where individuals feel threatened or unsafe. Hate speech can also be pervasive in online spaces, with individuals using the anonymity of the internet to spread harmful and derogatory language. The impact of online harassment and hate speech can be significant. Targeted Individuals may experience stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems. This can also spill over into their offline lives, affecting their relationships and their ability to function at work or in school. In some cases, online harassment and hate speech can also lead to physical harm. Governments and online platforms have attempted to address this problem by implementing laws and policies to prohibit hate speech and online harassment. However, enforcement can be difficult, and many individuals continue to engage in these behaviors. Additionally, some argue that these measures may infringe on freedom of speech and the right to express controversial opinions. So, the question is how can one rhetorical and

philosophical tool encourage young people to change their behavior, to be more open to others, and to build a welcoming and collaborative online community.

How can aporia help with online harassment and encourage us to accept different perspectives?

From the writings of his student Plato, we can tell that Socrates was quite fond of employing aporia in his philosophical pursuits. Aporia causes uncertainty and makes the audience discover certainty through the speaker's act. The main objective is to allow the audience to analyze the situation they are engaged in and to deliver some judgment. Here is one famous philosophical aporia which is constructed as a paradox:

The Meno Paradox: In Plato's dialogue "Meno," Socrates and Meno discuss the nature of knowledge. Socrates asks Meno whether knowledge can be taught, but they reach a paradox when they realize that if you know something, you don't need to learn it, and if you don't know it, you won't recognize it when you learn it. This leads to a state of aporia where they are unsure whether knowledge can be taught or not.

Also, In the play Hamlet written by William Shakespeare, we can find a great example of aporia in the famous line "to be or not to be, that's the question." Paradoxes and doubts written as an aporia can encourage deep and constructive thinking about something and it can lead to a change in our beliefs and bad assumptions about someone. One way that aporia could help address this problem is by challenging the assumptions underlying online harassment and hate speech. Aporia encourages individuals to question their own beliefs and assumptions and to consider alternative perspectives and viewpoints. By doing so, individuals may come to realize that their actions and words are harmful and that they are contributing to a toxic online environment.

For example, imagine a person who frequently engages in online harassment and hate speech targeting individuals of a certain race. If someone clashes with the harasser by ironising his behaviour with aporia, the harasser might be ashamed or rethink his behaviour. Through aporia or some ironical paradoxes, this person may come to realize that their actions are not based on any logical reasoning or evidence, but rather on a deeply ingrained bias or prejudice that makes them silly. They may also come to see the harm that their words and actions are causing to individuals and to the online community as a whole or feel like ridiculed. Aporia can be a powerful tool for generating discussion and debate around a particular issue (race, gender, social status etc.) By expressing doubt or confusion, it can prompt others to share their own thoughts and ideas, leading to a more collaborative and inclusive online community. It can also be used to express the complexity of a problem and the different perspectives that exist around it.

This can help people understand and empathize with others who may have different experiences or viewpoints, leading to more constructive and compassionate interactions online.

Analogy

What is an analogy?

Generally, by analogy, we mean similarity or, more precisely, resemblance. The term analogy is derived from the Greek ana logon as the correct ratio or correspondence of relations or from the Latin proportio. The notion of analogy is probably most often encountered in the methodology of science, or in the theory of modelling, in semantics, or logic. However, nowadays, this concept is also employed by symbol theory or epistemology thematizing theories of knowledge based on similarity or comparison.

In general, we distinguish two kinds of analogy:

1. Formal analogy based on the correspondence between the elements of the model and the elements of the system being modelled.
2. Material analogy, which also assumes a material similarity between the modelled system and its copy.

Both types of analogy assume structural similarity between the modelled system and the model, but also work with the differences between them.

Analogical reasoning, together with inductive and deductive reasoning, constitute the basic forms of reasoning. While inductive and deductive reasoning stays within the field of already known knowledge, analogical reasoning transcends already existing knowledge, and it is its heuristic quality that makes it an integral part of scientific discovery. In analogical thinking, we start from existing knowledge similar to inductive thinking, but while inductive thinking aims at a general conclusion, analogical reasoning aims at the recognition of a new element (Jurásová 2012). Cognitive psychology also works extensively with analogy, analyzing the potential of analogy in problem-solving.

Barsalou (1992) provides the following example of problem-solving by analogy:

"...someone who has worked at the complex for a while could simply explain to you that the layout is analogous to a starfish. On hearing this analogy, you might transfer knowledge about starfish to the office complex. Thus the knowledge that a starfish has a circular body, with five legs extending from it radially and symmetrically would lead to the belief that the office complex contains a center circular body, with five tapered buildings extending from it in a radially symmetric pattern." (p.110)

It is clear from the above that all of us, not just scientists, encounter or work with analogy every day. Just as scientists must be cautious in thinking of two systems as analogous, so must we be cautious. Suppose we have experienced several breakups in the past because of a partner's infidelity. Based on these experiences, we have created a kind of "catalogue" of red flags. We started a new relationship and the partner quickly apologized for not feeling well and, if we weren't angry, suggested rescheduling dinner for another day. We realized this was one of the red flags. But is one indicator enough to consider this relationship analogous to the previous ones and act accordingly? Apparently not.
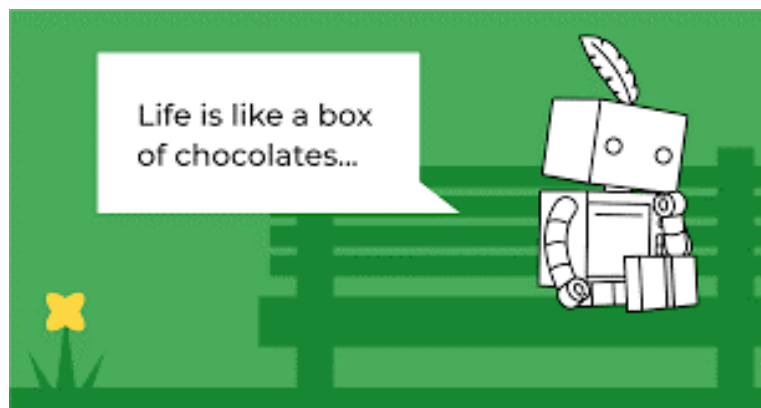
The problem of false analogy

As we have seen, analogies can be very helpful in problem-solving. However, just as they have their advantages, they also have their pitfalls, which should not be forgotten. Analogies can help you access prior knowledge, stimulate creativity, simplify complexity, communicate effectively, and find connections or patterns. However, on the other hand, analogies can be misleading, inaccurate, incomplete, or biased, as we tried to show in the previous example with partner relationships. This is why care must be taken to ensure that the analogies we use are verified, adapted, or refined to fit the problem and its context. Otherwise, instead of helping us either to find a solution to the problem or to discover something new, the analogy may lead us astray.

Often we can come across or fall for a so-called false analogy. A false analogy is an argument based on a misleading, superficial, or implausible comparison. Also known as faulty analogy, weak analogy, false comparison, metaphor as argument, and analogical fallacy. The analogical fallacy consists of the assumption that things that are similar in one respect must be similar in others. Thus, it compares based on what is known and assumes that the unknown parts are also similar (Pirie 2015). Analogies thus become false or flawed if they are overexposed, unconvincing (Nordquist 2023), or extremely trivializing to the point of misleading, such as the claim that "Getting vaccinated is like being forced to wear a yellow star."

Another example would be statements like "In relation to a computer virus and a biological virus, a hacker is the same as a doctor. Just as a doctor can cure a person's illness, a hacker can cure a computer's virus." In this example, the false analogy lies in equating a hacker with a doctor based on the premise that both can "cure" something. While there's a surface-level similarity in the idea of curing, the analogy overlooks crucial differences. A doctor has medical training and ethical considerations when treating illnesses, while a hacker might engage in unauthorized activities and potentially illegal actions.

How can analogy help us solve the problems of the digital world?

We have mentioned several times that the digital world is a highly complex system that we still do not know in all its aspects. The technical side of things is one thing, but the digital world as a phenomenon that is undoubtedly transforming the human world and our society in a significant way is another. In view of this, it can be and is difficult for us to understand. But this is where a good analogy can help us. In technology in general, we can come across several established analogies that aim to make it easier for us to understand a complex system: 'Cloud computing is like a library, not a bookstore. It is a simple way to access every book on the planet without having to own all of them." Or "Blockchain is like a huge bank vault with rolls of safe deposit boxes. Each safe deposit box has a glass front so that everyone can see the contents of the box. When someone opens a new safe deposit box, she gets a key that is unique to the box. Making a copy of the key does not duplicate the contents of the box. Having a key does not mean you own the box, just the contents in it." (Chin 2018).

Analogies

socks are to feet as gloves are to ?
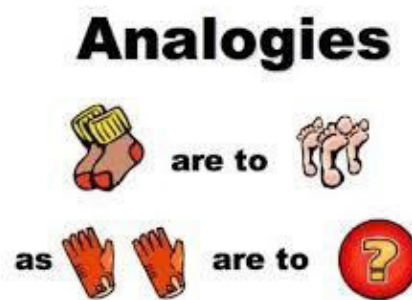
A specific type of analogy is metaphor. We also work with it in our efforts to understand, for example, the Internet. The central metaphor we work with in this regard is that of the Cloud as a global system "with great power and potential, retaining an aura of something transcendent, something almost impossible to grasp." (Bridle, 2021, p. 18) However, this metaphor is not the most apt: "The Cloud is not something abstract, amorphous, or even invisible; one only needs to know where to look. It is not a magical place beyond the seven mountains in a utopian kingdom, made of water vapor and radio waves. It is a physical infrastructure consisting of telephone cables at the bottom of the ocean and huge warehouses with computers stacked to the ceiling, consuming vast amounts of water and energy, and having its own state and legal jurisdiction." (Bridle, 2021, p. 19) Thus, we see that an inadequate metaphor can lead to flawed thinking about technology and overlooking certain key aspects, which ultimately skews our thinking significantly.
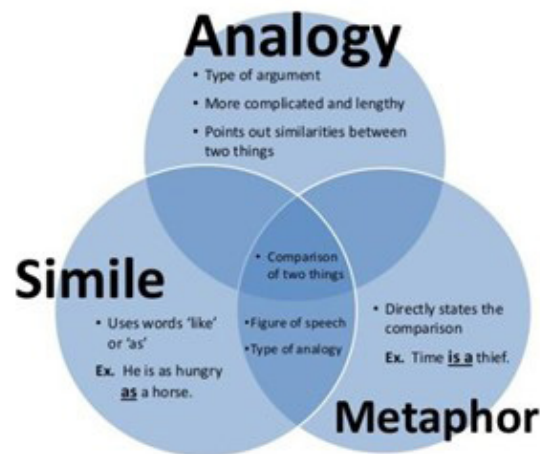
However, if we get the analogy right, it can help us understand complex phenomena or events. A well-formed analogy can help us discover and formulate new knowledge and can also help us in our everyday decision-making processes. However, let us not forget to compare things that are comparable. Of course, we are comparing two different things, so they will obviously differ in some ways, but their key similarities should be obvious and represented in several features.

Ockham's Razor

What is Ockham´s Razor?

William of Ockham is a renowned Middle Ages thinker (late 13th-14th century). He is well known, especially for the idea of economy of thinking – Ockham´s Razor (sometimes also Occam´s Razor). Although the term has been used since the 19th century, especially thanks to mathematician William Rowan Hamilton. (Kaye, 2023)

The so-called Ockham's Razor (OR) is often interpreted as a piece of advice to not to multiply entities beyond necessity and it is quite frequently linked to principles of contemporary science. At the same time, interestingly enough a physicist Stephen Hawking in A Brief History of Time, attributes his discovery of quantum mechanics also to the Ockham's Razor. (Kaye, 2023)
In simple words, Ockham´s Razor is advice to prioritize explanation of a certain event that is based on less assumptions than concurring explanation or explanations. For instance, if we are to explain certain daily events, we don´t need to use extra supernatural forces or entities when we can explain them simply. For example, you miss a bus and it can be simply explained because you got to the bus stop late and not because someone cast a spell on you and a black cat crossed your way. This may seem to be in accord even with common sense.

However, some critically thinking readers may raise a question of whether the principle of simplicity can really guarantee truth. Of course, we can find examples when the more complex explanation can be closer to the truth. For instance, imagine your car is broken. „The gas gauge on your car may be broken or the empty gas tank may be just one of several things wrong with the car. In response to this objection, one might point out that the principle of simplicity does not tell us which theory is true, but only which theory is more likely to be true. Moreover, if there is some other sign of damage, such as a blinking oil gage, then there is a further fact to explain, warranting an additional hypothesis". (Kyle, 2023)

Fun fact is that actually, Ockham himself was not that extremely radical as he is sometimes interpreted as denying the existence of certain entities that are redundant, at best he „allows us to refrain from positing them in the absence of known compelling reasons for doing so." (Spade, 2019)

So-called Ockham´s razor is used in philosophy to eliminate certain metaphysical theories especially those that may involve superfluous explanations. For instance, materialists may use the razor against dualists in the philosophy of mind since they claim there is extra ontological category that is not necessary for explanation. Similarly "nominalists about abstract objects may use OR against their platonist opponents, taking them to task for committing to an uncountably

vast realm of abstract mathematical entities."

As Spade points out: "The aim of appeals to simplicity in such contexts seem to be more about shifting the burden of proof, and less about refuting the less simple theory outright.".(Spade, 2019)

What may be interesting, given the above-mentioned use of OR, is again Ockham himself, who is inclined towards the claim that "the only truly necessary entity is God; everything else, the whole of creation, is radically contingent through and through. In short, Ockham does not accept the Principle of Sufficient Reason." (Spade, 2019) However, it remains an open question whether the idea of God is not unnecessary as well.

As mentioned above the popularity of OR is continuing even in the 20th century and has a lot to offer even nowadays. It is worth mentioning for instance Karl Popper who explains the favour of the idea of simplicity and claims it doesn´t have to stand on appeal to practice or aesthetics. He offers the idea of falsifiability and claims that we prefer simpler theories to more complex ones "because their empirical content is greater; and because they are better testable". (Swinburne, 1997) To sum Popper´s idea up is to say that "a simple theory applies to more cases than a more complex one, and is thus more easily falsifiable. This is again comparing a simple theory to a more complex theory where both explain the data equally well." (Spade, 2019)

To sum it up, as we can see, Ockham´s razor in its simple form, understood as seeking rational simplicity in the explanation of events despite its variety of interpretations, has its potential for contemporary society

The problem of conspiracy theories and hoaxes in the digital realm

The digital environment offers us the potential for almost unlimited sharing of various ideas. We can come across numerous examples of complex conspiracy theories and creative hoaxes like giving microchips to people through vaccines to be able to get monitored and controlled organized by billionaires such as Bill Gates and George Soros etc. Also, flat Earth theory relies on various ideas regarding how the roundness of the Earth is faked by governments and how the world really looks flat maybe even supported by big creatures holding it or huge oceans around. Also, various chemtrails theories emitting from airplanes are a source of poison transmitted to citizens in order to make them deliberately sick and easily manipulated by governments and the rich.

How can understanding Ockham´s Razor help us tackle conspiracy theories and hoaxes in the digital realm?

In the digital realm, we can see the potential of Ockham´s razor in finding simple solutions without unnecessary additions to explanations where it is possible to perceive these problems with unnecessary elements added to explanation for instance in online discussions, forums etc. The idea of giving microchips to people through vaccines to be able to be monitored and controlled by billionaires like Soros and Bill Gates instead of a simpler explanation of vaccination for medical benefits is one of the ideas that can be approached by Ockham´s Razor which would be in favour of the latter of the two explanations. Similarly, the flat Earth theory could also be cut off by OR which could say that a simpler explanation of the roundness of the Earth based on physics seems to be more plausible than the story which adds the elephants, government lies etc. Also, chemtrails refutation can be simply based on stating that plane engines produce exhalates.

However, it is interesting to mention that also for instance the Ockham´s razor has its application also in other aspects of the digital realm: "In software development, the rule of least power argues the correct programming language to use is the one that is simplest while also solving the targeted software problem." Which illustrates other uses of modified OR in the digital realm. (Wikipedia- Occam´s razor, 2023)
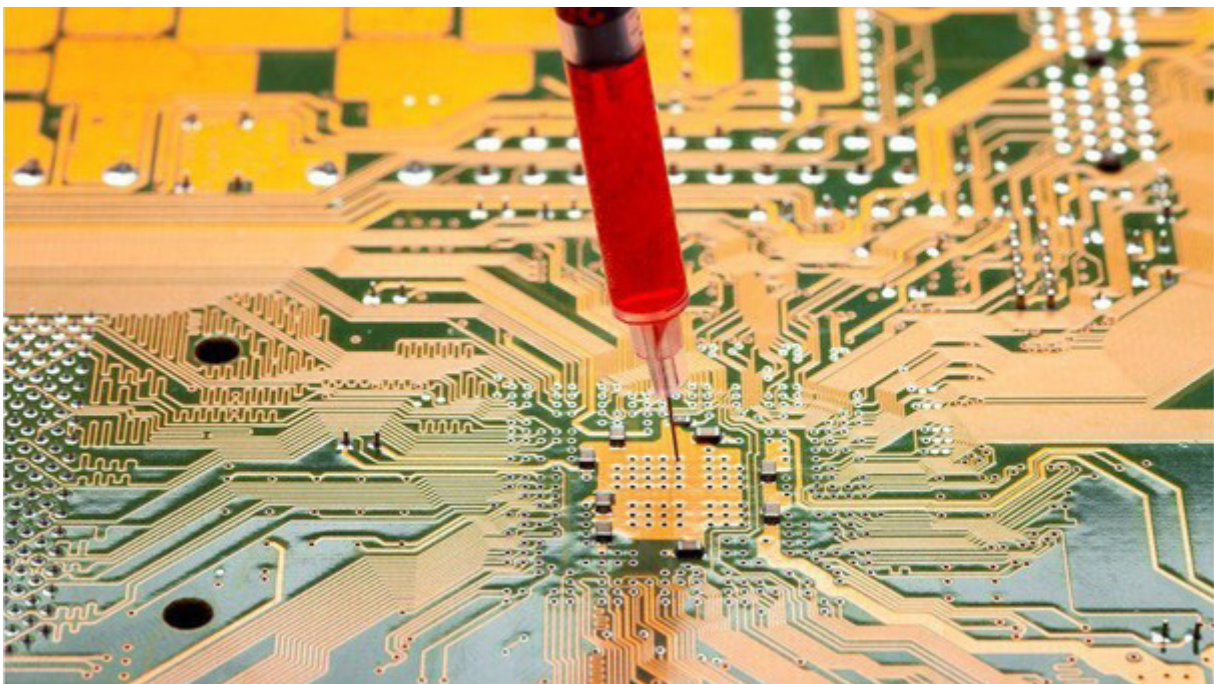
Vaccine rumors debunked: Microchips, 'altered DNA' and more - BBC News

Explanation and Types of Explanations

What is the explanation and what types of explanations do we know?

An explanation or explication is a statement of the essential circumstances or causes of something that is not clear or understandable enough for us. Explanation is thus making phenomena or things intelligible, understandable to us. It is one of our basic ways of knowing the world. We know different kinds of explanation such as scientific explanation, deductive - nomological explanation, genetic explanation, historical explanation, inductive or probabilistic explanation, and pragmatic explanation.

Scientific explanation is an essential means of advancing scientific knowledge. Through scientific explanation, we systematize scientific knowledge. In other words, when we explain something scientifically, we subsume what is explained (explanandum) to that by which we explain (explanans). We thus show that the explanandum proceeds according to some general regularities. If we know these initial conditions, we then look for suitable theories or general regularities to our explanandum, whether known or newly formulated. We consider deductive nomological explanation to be the basic form of scientific explanation. In it, the relation between explanans and explanandom is one of logical deduction. From explanans containing general laws e.g., Z1, Z2, Z3...Zn and specific conditions a1, a2...an we get explanandum E by logical deduction. Such an explanandum is logically deducible from the premise of the explanans. The premises of explanans contain general laws, at least some premises have empirical content, and the sentences in explanans are factually correct. All these conditions are collectively called the adequacy conditions of an explanandum. Hempel and Oppenheim give an example where we want to explain why the part of the oar that is submerged in the water seems to be broken upwards with respect to the part above the surface.

The premises of an argument to explain this phenomenon will include both statements about the law of refraction of light and the law that water is an optically denser medium than air, and statements of fact that an oar is a flat piece of wood and that some part of it is submerged in water. The question of why the phenomenon occurred is therefore a question of according to what laws and as a result of the realization of what conditions the phenomenon occurred (Jastrzembska 2004).

Another type of scientific explanation is a genetic explanation (not in the biological sense). In this type of explanation, the explanandum forms the last link in a series of individual explanations. It may take a causal-genetic form or a statistical-genetic form. A specific case is the historical explanation as we mentioned in the introduction. In this type of explanation, the explanans of at least one preceding member still require additional information, which, however, may not be the subject of the explanation itself. An example could be the attempt to explain, for example, the currently globally increasing degree of polarisation of society from the position of, for example, sociological research. In order to clarify this, we will also need information that is not itself the subject of our investigation.

We have also mentioned a pragmatic explanation. In this type of explanation, certain concepts and statements are relativized to a certain kind of person differing from each other in certain aspects such as education. This type of explanation is mainly of didactic importance. From this point of view, the minimum condition for this explanation is comprehensibility, but even in this case, we assume that the explanans states at least one sufficient condition for the explanandum. This type of explanation is used in their pedagogical practice by teachers, and textbook writers, but also by all parents answering the eternal children's question "Why?"

Another type of explanation is the so-called probabilistic, inductive or statistical explanation. In this type of explanation, the explanandum is derived from the explanans with only a certain degree of probability. Depending on how we think about probability, we then distinguish statistical explanations - in which probability is interpreted as relative frequency: if an event

of type B has some probability equal to p under conditions C, and if event d is of type C, then event d is of type B with probability p. Another type of probabilistic explanation is the inductive explanation. In it, the probability is interpreted as a quantitative logical relation between certain sentences, the strength of which is expressed by the so-called degree of confirmation or verification. A hypothesis is thus probable on the basis of some empirical observation. For example, if up to now we have always observed only swans on a nearby neighbourhood river in the fall season, it is probable that the bird I see there this fall is probably, to a degree consistent with previous empirical findings, a swan.

The problems with the explanation

Explanation and its various forms are an important aid, ultimately, to our adaptation to the world around us. They help us make proper generalizations that consolidate knowledge into principles and theories, or they help us create new theories. However, as we have already seen in the previous section on explanation and its different kinds, giving a good explanation is not entirely easy. It is enough if we do not comply with the so-called conditions of adequacy of an explanation and our efforts will be in vain. But not only in vain, but on the contrary, we may commit an error which, if not sufficiently fed back by the scientific community, may cause a serious distortion in the research on the subject.

Let us now look briefly at what we should keep in mind when trying to give a good explanation of a phenomenon, event, or fact, from the position of, for example, a teacher:

- A good explanation is testable or falsifiable. You can run an experiment in the real world to see if it's true or not.
- Find the core of your message - keep it simple.
- Make it concrete.
- Use analogies.

- Use examples.
- Tell stories.
- Make it credible – Pitch it right (Burns 2018).

The digital world is, in many of its aspects, uncharted territory for us. Better said, we can explain its technical parameters and the technical parameters of its use, but we cannot explain all its contexts and its effects on the human world. We don't know exactly how the digital world affects the identity formation process of its users, we don't know exactly why people are inclined to believe everything they find online, and we don't know why the online world is more appealing to some of us than the offline lived reality. Perhaps not all of the things mentioned will be sufficiently exhausted by explaining them, and instead, it will be more important to understand them.

How can explanation and its different types help us solve the problems of digital world?

We consider two aspects to be important in this respect. First, it is crucial that any progress in scientific knowledge of the digital world be built on rigorous scientific explanations that meet the conditions of explanatory adequacy. It goes without saying that we explain different phenomena through different kinds of explanations based on their adequacy and applicability. Secondly, as teachers, parents, or as people to whom children turn with their curious questions around the world, we should remember that none of their questions should go unanswered but without an answer appropriate to the age of the questioner. Our aim is that the explanation of what we are asked should be both "true" and, at the same time, understandable to the one to whom the explanation is directed. With this in mind, we should follow a few simple steps that we mentioned in the previous section of this chapter - be clear and unambiguous, use analogies and examples helpfully, try to create space for checking our explanations in practice, etc. For example, when explaining to high school students the risks of posting private photographs and data on social networking sites, we do not overwhelm them with technical details but rather turn to convincing examples from practice, etc. Being aware that an explanation of a phenomenon is the result of a long chain of honest and challenging scientific work and must satisfy a few basic conditions is an important step in understanding how we come to know the world around us. On this basis, we will see that science and scientific knowledge is the best way we have so far to learn about the world and the universe, and it also helps us to be, for example, better teachers.

Hume's Fork

What is Hume's fork?

Hume's fork is a philosophical concept introduced by the Scottish philosopher David Hume, which argues that all knowledge can be divided into two categories: relations of ideas and matters of fact. Relations of ideas are necessary truths that can be known through reason alone, while matters of fact are contingent truths that can only be known through experience. Hume developed this principle in his work "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding," which was published in 1748. In this work, Hume was concerned with understanding the nature and limits of human knowledge.

Relations of ideas are a priori, or self-evident, truths that are known through reason alone, such as mathematical truths. For relations of ideas, Hume gives examples such as mathematical truths, like the proposition that 2+2=4, or the Pythagorean theorem. These are self-evident and do not require any empirical evidence to be proven.

Matters of fact, on the other hand, are based on empirical evidence and experience, and they are not necessarily true or necessary. As a matter of fact, Hume provides examples like the sun rising in the morning or water boiling at 100 degrees Celsius. These are facts that we learn through our senses and experience, and they are not necessarily true or necessary. Hume also emphasizes that matters of fact can never be known with absolute certainty, because our knowledge of them is based on past experiences and induction, which cannot provide us with infallible knowledge.

Hume also uses the example of cause and effect to illustrate his point. While we can observe that one event seems to follow another, we cannot say with certainty that the first event caused the second, because the relationship between cause and effect is not self-evident and cannot be known through reason alone. Rather, we must rely on our past experiences and inductive reasoning to make conclusions about causal relationships.

If matters of fact can be linked with inductive reasoning, it can be said that relations of ideas lean on deductive reasoning. This is because deductive reasoning starts from general principles or premises and draws conclusions based on those principles or premises, whereas inductive reasoning starts from specific observations and draws general conclusions based on those observations.

Hume's fork is important because it suggests that there are limits to what we can know based on reason and experience alone. It also raises important questions about the nature of knowledge and the relationship between reason and experience.

What is the personal anecdotal bias?

In the online world, it can be difficult to distinguish between relations of ideas and matters of fact. The internet is full of information, but not all of it is accurate or reliable. Additionally, social media algorithms can create "filter bubbles" where people only see and engage with content that reinforces their existing beliefs, making it difficult to recognize and engage with new ideas and perspectives.

There is a specific cognitive bias that leads us to generalize our own personal experience that is completely inductive in nature and in Hume's terminology a matter of fact into a sound and solid relation of ideas, supposedly supported by deductive reasoning. This phenomenon can be described as "personal anecdotal bias" or "personal experience bias." It refers to the tendency for individuals to generalize their own personal experiences to broader populations or situations, often without considering the limitations or biases inherent in their own experiences. Several factors contribute to personal anecdotal bias:

- Salience and emotional impact: Personal experiences that are vivid, memorable, or emotionally charged tend to have a greater influence on individuals' judgments and perceptions. These experiences can create a bias by making the information more accessible and influential in decision-making processes.
- Availability heuristic: The availability heuristic is a mental shortcut where people rely on readily available examples or instances that come to mind when making judgments or assessments. When personal experiences are easily recalled or readily accessible, individuals may use them as the basis for forming generalizations.
- Limited sample size and self-selection bias: Personal experiences are often based on a limited sample size, as individuals can only directly experience a fraction of the world. Additionally, people tend to engage in self-selection bias, seeking out experiences that align with their existing beliefs or preferences (close to confirmation bias). This further narrows the range of experiences individuals are exposed to, leading to biased generalizations.

How can an understanding Hume's fork help us filter through the information available (online)?

Hume's fork can help us think critically about the sources of our knowledge and beliefs. By recognizing the distinction between relations of ideas and matters of fact, we can evaluate the claims we encounter and determine whether they are based on reason alone or require empirical evidence. Additionally, Hume's fork can help us appreciate the limitations of our own knowledge and recognize the importance of being open to new experiences and perspectives in order to expand our understanding of the world.

Having a truly good grasp on what is deductive reasoning and not subject to standards of empirical justification and what is on the other hand inductive reasoning and requires a different level of scrutiny can help us quickly detect some concrete logical fallacies.

If there are some people who strongly claim that they pose some truths with complete certainty, we might think of a saying by the famous French Enlightenment author Voltaire, who wrote: *"Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is absurd."* Though a bit poetically stated the underlining notion is that certainty is indeed very rare in our everyday life. Whatever we experience (and is according to Hume a matter of fact), has some limitations and needs to take these limitations to heart. It is not absolute and we should acknowledge that. We should always leave some room for doubt and perhaps conclude with an American philosopher from the first half of the 20th century George Iles: *"Doubt is the beginning, not the end, of wisdom."*

Critique and Deconstruction

What is critique and what is deconstruction? And what does critical thinking have to do with it?

Critique and deconstruction are two distinct but related intellectual practices commonly found in fields such as philosophy, literary theory, and the humanities. These are two concepts that are usually brought together and let's see what they mean. Critique is an evaluative and analytical process used to assess the strengths and weaknesses of a particular idea, work, theory, or practice. It often involves examining the underlying assumptions, arguments, evidence, and implications of the subject under scrutiny.

Critique and critical thinking are essential skills that involve analysing, evaluating, and forming judgments about various ideas, arguments, or information. They play a crucial role in academic, professional, and personal contexts.

Critical Thinking and critique are very similar, but there are differences. Critical thinking is a broad cognitive process that involves analysing, evaluating, and synthesizing information and ideas to make reasoned and informed judgments or decisions. It focuses on developing skills such as logical reasoning, problem-solving, and effective communication. Critique, on the other hand, is a specific activity or process within critical thinking. It involves a detailed and systematic examination and assessment of a particular work, idea, argument, or piece of art. Critique often aims to identify strengths and weaknesses and provide constructive feedback. Critical thinking is a general cognitive skill that can be applied to various aspects of life, including decision-making, problem-solving, and analyzing information from various sources. Critique is more focused and typically involves evaluating a specific object or concept, such as a research paper, a piece of literature, a painting, a speech, or an argument. It is a more specialized form of critical thinking. A third term in relation to criticism and critical thinking is deconstruction.

Deconstruction is a specific method of analysis associated with postmodern philosophy and literary theory, particularly developed by Jacques Derrida. It focuses on revealing the hidden assumptions and contradictions within texts, discourse, or systems of thought. Deconstruction questions the binary oppositions and hierarchical structures that often underpin language and concepts. It seeks to destabilize these fixed meanings. This approach often involves identifying and exploring the "differences" and "absences" within a text, highlighting the instability of meaning. Deconstruction is known for its scepticism toward the idea of a single, fixed, and authoritative interpretation of a text or concept. Instead, it emphasizes the diversity of multiple possible interpretations.

Critique and deconstruction as a problem in the digital world

Critique and deconstruction can be both a problem and a solution in the digital world, depending on how they are used and the context in which they are applied. Excessive criticism without constructive feedback can be harmful in the digital world. It can be overly negative criticism as it can demotivate creators, stifle innovation, and create a hostile online environment. Deconstruction can be out of context. Taken to extremes, deconstruction can lead to the misinterpretation of content or ideas. It can lead to the spread of misinformation or misunderstanding. Critique and deconstruction can sometimes reinforce existing biases and echo chambers in digital communities, where people only engage with ideas that fit with their existing beliefs. Unfortunately, in some cases, criticism and deconstruction can escalate into online harassment, where individuals or groups are targeted with abusive comments, threats, or doxing.

Critique and deconstruction as a solution in the digital world

On the other hand, critique and deconstruction can be a solution or a path to a solution. Critique plays a crucial role in maintaining the quality of digital content. It encourages content creators to strive for excellence and helps consumers to make informed choices. Encouraging critique and deconstruction can empower individuals to be more discerning consumers of digital information. They can better identify misinformation and bias. Someone can become an informed digital citizen with the help of critique and deconstruction. Constructive critique and deconstruction can also drive innovation by identifying weaknesses or areas for improvement in digital products and services. In the digital world, critique and deconstruction can hold powerful individuals, organisations or platforms accountable for their actions, decisions and policies. Deconstruction can also be a valuable tool for analysing the cultural, social, and political implications of digital content and platforms. The key to balancing critique and deconstruction in the digital world is to promote a culture of responsible and constructive engagement. Constructive feedback is very important. Encourage critique that provides specific, actionable feedback rather than just criticism. We also need to promote digital media literacy (maybe this is just critical thinking about digital media content?) to help individuals critically evaluate content and distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources.

Principle of Charity

What is the Principle of charity?

In the realm of philosophy, communication, and critical thinking, the principle of charity plays a vital role. This principle, though simple in concept, has profound implications for how we interact with others' ideas, arguments, and viewpoints. In this chapter, we will delve into what the principle of charity is, why it's essential, and why it's important to apply it to the online surroundings.

The principle of charity is a philosophical guideline that encourages individuals to interpret others' statements and arguments in their most reasonable and strongest form. It involves giving the benefit of the doubt to a speaker by assuming that they are rational and coherent in their thinking and seeking to understand their statements in the most favorable light before analyzing or critiquing them. This promotes fair and constructive dialogue and helps to avoid misunderstandings or misrepresentations of what others are trying to say.

An example might be that in a classroom discussion, one student says: "I think artificial intelligence is dangerous." An uncharitable interpretation of the statement and response could be: "So you want to halt all progress in AI and return to primitive technology?" A charitable one, on the other hand, could perhaps be: »You perceive certain risks in AI development. Can you explain what aspects you find dangerous or what safeguards you think might be needed?" Another example might be discussion in social media comments. A comment that states: »I don't belive in diets, they don't work for me«, might be interpreted in an uncharitable way as: »So you think everyone should eat whatever they want without any regard for health?". But one could also use the principle of charity and interpret the statement accordingly and respond: »You've found that traditional dieting methods haven't been effective for you. What have your experiences been, and what do you think might be a better approach for personal health?". In each of these examples, the charitable interpretation avoids jumping to extreme conclusions or oversimplifying the speaker's view. Instead, it seeks to understand the statement in a more nuanced, rational, and empathetic way, often leading to more meaningful and respectful dialogue.

Digital realm problems and the application of the principle

The principle of charity is important, especially in relation to:

1. Avoid Misunderstanding
Often, people have different backgrounds, beliefs, and ways of expressing themselves. The principle of charity helps us bridge these gaps by seeking to understand what someone truly means, rather than jumping to conclusions or attributing to them an irrational or flawed position.

2. Promoting Constructive Dialogue
By striving to understand others' viewpoints fully, we create an atmosphere of respect and openness. This allows for more fruitful discussions, where ideas can be explored deeply rather than getting stuck in antagonistic debates.

3. Encouraging Critical Thinking
When we take the time to understand an argument in its strongest form, we are better equipped to critically evaluate it. This leads to more thoughtful and accurate conclusions.

Applying the principle of charity involves several steps, such as:

1. Listening Actively
Pay close attention to what the other person is saying. Try to understand the context, their perspective, and the essence of their argument.

2. Asking Clarifying Questions
If something is unclear, ask questions to get a better understanding. This helps ensure that you're engaging with the actual argument, not a misunderstood version of it.

3. Avoiding Straw Man Fallacies[4]
Strive to represent others' arguments as they intend them, not in a weaker or distorted form that's easy to refute.

4. Reflecting on Your Own Biases
Recognize that your perspective and biases might influence how you interpret others' arguments. Being aware of this can help you approach others' ideas more openly and honestly.

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[4] See the chapter on Logical Fallacies for further clarification.

Why is the Principle of Charity an important tool for participation in the online surroundings?

In the digital age, where online communication has become a predominant form of interaction, the principle of charity plays a critical role. Online environments, such as social media platforms, forums, and comment sections, often lack the nuances of face-to-face communication, like tone of voice and facial expressions. This can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

Applying the principle of charity in an online environment means striving to understand others' comments and posts in their most rational and coherent form. For example, if someone tweets a criticism of a political policy, rather than responding with an attack on the person's overall political affiliation, a charitable response would ask for clarification or provide a thoughtful counter-argument related to the specific policy.

In the digital age, where information is rapidly exchanged and personal connections may be more tenuous, the importance of the principle of charity is magnified. It serves as a tool to foster more constructive dialogues and to bridge the gap between differing viewpoints. This approach helps to mitigate the polarization and hostility that can easily flourish online, fostering a culture of empathy, respect, and intellectual rigour.

Moreover, with the rise of global connectivity, we are exposed to a diverse array of perspectives and cultures. The principle of charity enables us to navigate this diversity more effectively, promoting cross-cultural understanding and collaboration.
Ultimately, embracing the principle of charity online leads to a more thoughtful and productive digital discourse, aligning more closely with the idea of the internet as a place for meaningful connection, education, and growth. It allows us to engage with complexity, appreciate nuance, and cultivate a more respectful and intellectually stimulating online community.

Two important guiding principles could be to always assume the rationality of others and to respond thoughtfully. Approach the other person's statements with the assumption that they have logical reasons for their views. Don't immediately jump to conclusions or assume they are being unreasonable. When you do respond, do so in a manner that reflects an accurate understanding of the other person's position. Address the actual points they are making rather than attacking them personally or responding to a mischaracterized version of their view.

Objective vs. Subjective

What is objective & subjective?

Objective refers to something that exists independently of individual opinions or perspectives and is verifiable through evidence or data. Subjective refers to something that is influenced by individual opinions, perspectives, or emotions, and may not be verifiable in the same way as objective facts.[5]

To practically explain the objective & subjective pair we can look back to Tumblr in 2015 when a user by the name Cecilia Bleasdale posted a photo that later went viral as "The Dress". The situation played out online as a lively and heavily covered debate over the color of a dress. Some people saw the dress as blue and black, while others saw it as white and gold.

The situation sparked a massive online debate, with people vehemently defending their perception of the dress and arguing that others were objectively wrong. In reality, both perceptions were subjective and based on individual differences in color perception and interpretation. Our perception of color is always subjective, while the wavelength of light emitted or reflected by an object is objective. So "red" is a subjective perception (different for every individual) of the objective phenomenon of an object objectively reflecting light of the wavelength of 700 nanometers.[6]

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[5]This is going to be a real long footnote. It should probably be a chapter by itself. But then we would probably have too many chapters in this cookbook. In fact you are probably not really interested in reading this footnote. Really. It is long. And quite technical. But – if you ever go on a quiz show or play trivia with your friends it might be useful. Or if you are really interested in philosophy (in which case this footnote is a starting point for you). So, if we really want to complicate matters we can say, that there are different branches of philosophy that deal with objective and subjective. The branch that would deal with the objective would be called physics in Aristotelian times and later natural philosophy and to some extent even metaphysics (this is not a later name for physics, it is a different thing... both physics and metaphysics deal with the objective ... to some extent). Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that explores the fundamental nature of reality, existence, and being. It delves into questions about the nature of reality, the existence of abstract concepts, the nature of consciousness, and the relationship between mind and matter. Metaphysics starts from the perspective of physics and the objective but can extend to some aspects of the subjective, as it examines the fundamental nature of reality as a whole even in the aspect of perception. However it tries to view this subjective element of perception from a third-person – objective – point of view. The branch of philosophy that deals primarily with the subjective from the first-person perspective is called Phenomenology. Phenomenology is a philosophical approach that focuses on subjective experience and the structures of consciousness. It seeks to describe and understand the phenomena as they appear in our conscious experience, emphasizing the first-person perspective. Phenomenology examines subjective experiences, intentions,and the ways in which we perceive and interpret the world.

[6]By the way, the wavelength range typically associated with the color red is approximately 620 to 750 nanometers (nm). And yes, we are going for the record in footnotes for a single chapter.

This situation highlights the importance of recognizing the difference between objective facts and subjective experiences, and how easy it can be for our own biases and perceptions to shape our understanding of the world around us.[7]

Here are some other examples where we have a subjective descriptor on one hand and an objective one on the other:

- <u>Taste:</u> Taste is a subjective experience that can vary from person to person. However, there are objective factors that determine the taste of food, such as its chemical composition and the receptors on our tongues that detect different flavors.
- <u>Beauty:</u> Beauty is often considered to be in the eye of the beholder, and what one person finds beautiful may not be the same as what someone else finds beautiful. However, there are objective aspects of beauty, such as symmetry and proportion, that have been shown to be universally appealing across different cultures.
- <u>Emotions:</u> Emotions are subjective experiences that can vary greatly from person to person. However, there are objective physiological and neurological factors that underlie emotions, such as changes in heart rate, hormone levels, and brain activity.

Opinion or fact or perhaps even an alternative fact?

In the online world, it can be difficult to distinguish between objective and subjective information. Social media and online forums are often filled with opinions and personal anecdotes presented as facts, making it challenging to discern what is based on objective evidence. Additionally, the internet has enabled the spread of misinformation and disinformation, which can further blur the line between objective and subjective information. There are instances where an opinion can be considered a fact in a specific sense. We can talk about subjective facts. In certain cases, an opinion can be considered a "subjective fact." This means that while the opinion itself may not be universally true or objective, it represents a genuine belief or subjective experience held by an individual. For example, if someone says, "I feel cold," it is a subjective fact because it represents their personal perception and experience of temperature.

Additionally, we can talk about social or cultural facts. Some opinions can also be considered "social facts" or "cultural facts" when they reflect prevailing attitudes, beliefs, or norms within a particular group or society. These opinions are considered facts in the sense that they exist as

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[7] If you want another viral example of the objective/subjective notion we can also give you the auditory version of »The Dress«. In 2018 a user by the name RolandCamry posted a clip to Reddit. The sound bite quickly got the name »Laurel or Yanny«. The Laurel or Yanny auditory illusion is an example of how our perception of sound can be influenced by various factors, such as the frequency range of the sound and individual differences in hearing ability. The illusion involves a short audio clip of a voice saying a word that some people hear as "Laurel" and others hear as "Yanny". The reason why people hear different words in the same audio clip is due to the differences in the frequency range of the sound. The original audio clip actually contains both the "Laurel" and "Yanny" sounds, but the frequency range of the clip is such that some people's brains pick up on the lower frequency sounds and hear "Laurel", while others pick up on the higher frequency sounds and hear "Yanny".

part of the shared collective reality or cultural framework. For example, a statement "Pizza is a popular food" expresses prevailing opinions within certain societies or cultures.

However, most opinions are just opinions and should be regarded as such and treated accordingly. There are opinions, interpretations that try really hard to present themselves as objective facts.[8] There is even a term for this - "alternative facts". This term gained attention in 2017 when it was used by a White House official to describe a differing interpretation of the size of a crowd at the presidential inauguration of Donald Trump.

"Alternative facts" refers to the presentation of information or claims that may contradict objective, verifiable facts or evidence. The term "alternative facts" sparked controversy and criticism because it suggested that different versions of reality could coexist, undermining the idea of a shared understanding of truth based on empirical evidence. Critics argued that such usage can contribute to misinformation and undermine the importance of objective facts in public discourse.

It's important to note that there can be genuine differences of opinion, interpretation, or perspectives on certain matters. However, when "alternative facts" are used to describe assertions that contradict well-established and demonstrable evidence, it can raise concerns about the manipulation of information and the erosion of a common basis for understanding.

How can we use the understanding of objective and subjective to filter opinions and facts?

Understanding the difference between objective and subjective information can help us be more critical consumers of online content. By recognizing when information is subjective or based on personal opinions, we can evaluate it with appropriate scepticism and seek out additional sources to verify the claims being made. Additionally, understanding the importance of objective evidence can help us make more informed decisions and avoid being swayed by emotional appeals or anecdotal evidence. By using a balanced approach to evaluating information, we can better navigate the complexities of the online world and make more informed decisions.

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[8] There is even a term to describe the ambition of a subjective opinion to try and present itself as a fact. "Truthiness" is a term coined by American comedian Stephen Colbert on his television show "The Colbert Report." It refers to the quality of an idea or statement that feels true or right, even if it lacks factual evidence or objective support. It describes a subjective sense of truth rather than relying on verifiable facts or evidence. Colbert used the term "truthiness" as a satirical critique of the way in which individuals and media sources often rely on gut feelings, emotions, or personal beliefs rather than objective facts when making claims or arguments. It highlights the potential for people to be swayed by appealing narratives or information that aligns with their preconceived notions, even if those ideas may not be based on actual evidence. "Truthiness" is often used to point out the dangers of relying solely on subjective feelings or intuitive judgments without considering objective facts and evidence. It underscores the importance of critical thinking, fact-checking, and seeking verifiable information to arrive at more accurate and informed conclusions. The term "truthiness" was named the Word of the Year by the American Dialect Society in 2005.

This is especially important in this day-and-age that is sometimes described as "post-facts" or "post-truth" era. The term refers to a societal and political climate in which objective facts are perceived as less influential in shaping public opinion compared to appeals to emotion, personal beliefs, and subjective interpretations. It suggests a shift away from a reliance on verifiable evidence and objective truths in public discourse and decision-making.

The term has gained prominence in recent years, particularly in the context of political debates and the rise of misinformation and "fake news" on social media platforms. It highlights the concern that facts and evidence are being devalued or overshadowed by narratives that appeal to emotions, biases, or ideological agendas.

Vicious and Virtuous Circle

What is a vicious circle?

A vicious circle is usually understood as a logical fallacy that employs circular reasoning, which means that it already directly presupposes what is yet to be established. In a very simple form, it can be pointed out in the following example of someone saying, "Because I'm not lying, that means I'm telling the truth." Simply asserting that one is not lying as a basis for the claim that someone is telling the truth commits such a fallacy since one is merely repeating one and the same claim. Another example would be the following seeming argumentation: "We know God exists because the Bible says so. Everything written in the Bible must be true because it was written by God, and God never lies." Such types of fallacious arguments are also labeled as begging the question or assuming the conclusion (Latin *petitio pricipii*). As a form of bad reasoning, it was already highlighted by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle.
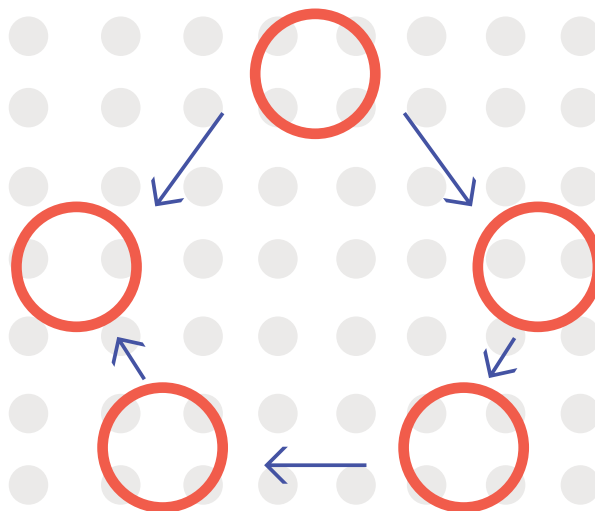
Circular reasoning or vicious circle is a more elaborate form of this fallacy that occurs when the speaker starts with a conclusion that is yet to be established and mixes this in an otherwise valid argumentation. If we overlook this, one can often get away with it. Again, a very simple example would be: "The Soul is simple because it is immortal, and it must be immortal because it is simple.". But often, circularity is harder to detect, since it could be concealed by a longer argumentation or deceptive use of language. Similarly can be said about explanations; an explanation is circular if it is uninformative, i.e., when what it uses for explaining is more obscure than what it seemingly explains (e.g., when one would want to explain why the surface of the earth is flat as drawn on a map by invoking a very obscure flat earth theory positing world-wide scientific conspiracy, the oceans being surrounded with walls of ice, the gravity functioning in a way that goes contrary to our best science, etc.). On the other hand, the reasoning could also exhibit a virtuous circle, when one e.g. justifies or explains something on

the basis of a more general theory; in this way, a sort of web of mutually logically dependent statements is established such that the truth of any particular statement is logically derivable from the truth of other statements in the system. Such explanations could be informative and are often very productive.

The problem of conspiracy theories, epistemic bubbles, and echo chambers

One example when vicious circle reasoning is ubiquitous present is within many forms of conspiracy theories and similar phenomena. For example, one finds examples like the following one: "I know that global warming is not real, because the European Environment Agency and NASA are liars. We know that NASA and the European Environment Agency are liars because they claim that global warming is real." But it is important to add, that not all such sceptical views are unjustified at all times and that in many cases, some of the conspiracy theory digital environments may sometimes stumble upon the truth. Another example of such a digital environment are websites that advocate for a view that the Biblical creation story is literary truth, that the world was created in six days and is roughly 10,000 years old. Such theories often employ what we have labelled as circular explanations, that is employ explanations that are more obscure than the data they explain, e.g., God placing dinosaur bones in sediments for the purpose of testing people's faith. Earth just appears much older, since it was created like that, as opposed to genuinely being old. (Note how the latter explanation is simpler than the former and, from this perspective, must be preferred. Compare the section on Ockham's razor for this philosophical tool.) One must also note that such sites often explicitly exclude other viewpoints, e.g. one can find the following qualification at the bottom of the webpage:

> "All participants and contributors are open to express varying personal opinion, as long as content submitted holds to and/or supports the conditions found below. All participants and contributors must:
> 1. Have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior.
> 2. Believe that the Holy Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God.
> 3. Believe in a Creation Week of literal, 24-hour, days, and a universal age of less than 10,000 years." (source: https://thecreationclub.com/)

It is easy to point out that the opinions expressed are thus really too varied. This can lead to phenomena that we label as epistemic bubbles (also filter bubbles) and echo chambers. An epistemic bubble is an online space or structure that includes only attitudes and viewpoints that confirm my already existing beliefs while (unintentionally) excluding all others. As a member of the epistemic bubble, one is not exposed to full information, diverging viewpoints, and opposing arguments. Echo chambers are epistemic spaces where individual beliefs are further strengthened and where opposing opinions are deliberately and actively pushed out of this

space. Once we are in the grip of such a chamber, it is difficult to get out of it (Nguyen 2020). Epistemic bubbles and echo chambers can also systematically cultivate mistrust against anything that stands "outside".

How can thinking about vicious and virtuous circles help us tackle epistemic bubbles and echo chambers?

In order to tackle the challenge of epistemic bubbles and echo chambers, one must be cautious in forming opinions or beliefs. It is desirable to expose oneself to various alternative views and be able to reflect, appraise, and apply information aptly. It is also good if one cultivates healthy doubt (given the vast amount of misinformation or incomplete information), thinks critically, and analyse and understands the views of others. Being alert to the phenomenon of vicious circles is part of this. Be careful when considering ideas, views, or theories, and look for the presuppositions that they make and the range of information that they take into account. A vicious circle (a form of fallacious reasoning) often goes hand in hand with the problem of fake news and misinformation; a person seeks information and only consults those sources of information that are already confirming, what he or she wants to believe (e.g., that the coronavirus is a hoax and that it was set into motion by big pharma that wanted to make big earnings). If one consults only those sources that are already presupposing this and then forms a conclusion that the virus is a hoax, he or she has fallen prey to this fallacy (circular reasoning in the wider sense). If, on the other hand, you consult various different and independent sources that all point to the same conclusion, such reasoning exhibits marks of a virtuous circle, it enables you to form other well-supported beliefs, etc. Similarly, one has to presuppose the laws or logic to get one's reasoning from the ground; there is no independent proof for such laws. Yet, this is not a vicious circle, and the law of logic helped us, among other things, build a fantastic amount of knowledge about our world. And the more you cultivate such critical, open-minded, and careful investigation, the more these habits of mind help you to orient in a world full of (mis)information.

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