

Technology, Ethics and Experience: Understanding Interactions as Ethical Practice

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Abstract : Technology has become one of the main channels through which people engage in most of their everyday activities; from working to learning, or even when socializing, technology often acts as both an enabler and a mediator of such activities. Moreover, the affordances and interactions created by those technological tools determine the way in which the users interact with one another, as well as how they relate to the relevant environment, thus favoring certain kinds of actions and behaviors while discouraging others. In this regard, virtue ethics theories place a strong focus on a person's daily practice (understood as their decisions, actions, and behaviors) as the means to develop and enhance their habits and ethical competences --such as their awareness and sensitivity towards certain ethically-desirable principles. Under this understanding of ethics, this set of technologically-enabled affordances and interactions can be seen as the possibility space where the daily practice of their users takes place in a wide plethora of contexts and situations. At this point, the following question pops into mind: could these affordances and interactions be shaped in a way that would promote behaviors and habits based on ethically-desirable principles into their users? In the field of game design, the MDA framework (which stands for Mechanics, Dynamics, Aesthetics) explores how the interactions enabled within the possibility space of a game can lead to creating certain experiences and provoking specific reactions to the players. In this sense, these interactions can be shaped in ways that create experiences to raise the players' awareness and sensitivity towards certain topics or principles. This research brings together the notions of technological affordances, the notions of practice and practical wisdom from virtue ethics, and the MDA framework from game design in order to explore how the possibility space created by technological interactions can be shaped in ways that enable and promote actions and behaviors supporting certain ethically-desirable principles. When shaped accordingly, interactions supporting certain ethically-desirable principles could allow their users to carry out the kind of practice that, according to virtue ethics theories, provides the grounds to develop and enhance their awareness, sensitivity, and ethical reasoning capabilities. Moreover, and because ethical practice can happen collaterally in almost every context, decision, and action, this additional layer could potentially be applied in a wide variety of technological tools, contexts, and functionalities. This work explores the theoretical background, as well as the initial considerations and steps that would be needed in order to harness the potential ethically-desirable benefits that technology can bring, once it is understood as the space where most of their users' daily practice takes place.

Keywords : ethics, design methodology, human-computer interaction, philosophy of technology

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