

Class Activity 1 – Social Contract Theory Scenario:

Sam sells DVDs and has a database of customers and their demographic information. He sells them to third party mail-order companies. Some people don't mind it and even buy things from those companies. Some people are annoyed due to the excess "junk mail".

Did Sam do an ethical thing?

Class Activity 2 – Kantian/Social Contract Theory Comparison:

FACEBOOK'S '10 YEAR CHALLENGE' IS JUST A HARMLESS MEME—RIGHT?

Link: <https://www.wired.com/story/facebook-10-year-meme-challenge/>

If you use social media, you've probably noticed a trend across Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter of people posting their then-and-now profile pictures, mostly from 10 years ago and this year. Instead of joining in, I posted the following semi-sarcastic tweet:

Kate O'Neill

✓@kateo

Me 10 years ago: probably would have played along with the profile picture aging meme going around on Facebook and Instagram

Me now: ponders how all this data could be mined to train facial recognition algorithms on age progression and age recognition

My flippant tweet began to pick up traction. My intent wasn't to claim that the meme is inherently dangerous. But I knew the facial recognition scenario was broadly plausible and indicative of a trend that people should be aware of. It's worth considering the depth and breadth of the personal data we share without reservations.

Of those who were critical of my thesis, many argued that the pictures were already available anyway. The most common rebuttal was: "That data is already available. Facebook's already got all the profile pictures."

Of course they do. In various versions of the meme, people were instructed to post their first profile picture alongside their current profile picture, or a picture from 10 years ago alongside

their current profile picture. So, yes: These profile pictures exist, they've got upload time stamps, many people have a lot of them, and for the most part they're publicly accessible.

But let's play out this idea.

Imagine that you wanted to train a facial recognition algorithm on age-related characteristics and, more specifically, on age progression (e.g., how people are likely to look as they get older). Ideally, you'd want a broad and rigorous dataset with lots of people's pictures. It would help if you knew they were taken a fixed number of years apart—say, 10 years.

Sure, you could mine Facebook for profile pictures and look at posting dates or EXIF data. But that whole set of profile pictures could end up generating a lot of useless noise. People don't reliably upload pictures in chronological order, and it's not uncommon for users to post pictures of something other than themselves as a profile picture. A quick glance through my Facebook friends' profile pictures shows a friend's dog who just died, several cartoons, word images, abstract patterns, and more. In other words, it would help if you had a clean, simple, helpfully labeled set of then-and-now photos.

What's more, for the profile pictures on Facebook, the photo posting date wouldn't necessarily match the date the picture was taken. Even the EXIF metadata on the photo wouldn't always be reliable for assessing that date.

Why? People could have scanned offline photos. They might have uploaded pictures multiple times over years. Some people resort to uploading screenshots of pictures found elsewhere online. Some platforms strip EXIF data for privacy.

Through the Facebook meme, most people have been helpfully adding that context back in ("me in 2008 and me in 2018") as well as further info, in many cases, about where and how the pic was taken ("2008 at University of Whatever, taken by Joe; 2018 visiting New City for this year's such-and-such event").

In other words, thanks to this meme, there's now a very large dataset of carefully curated photos of people from roughly 10 years ago and now.

Of course, not all the dismissive comments in my Twitter mentions were about the pictures being already available; some critics noted that there was too much crap data to be usable. But data researchers and scientists know how to account for this. As with hashtags that go viral, you can generally place more trust in the validity of data earlier on in the trend or campaign—before people begin to participate ironically or attempt to hijack the hashtag for irrelevant purposes.

As for bogus pictures, image recognition algorithms are plenty sophisticated enough to pick out a human face. If you uploaded an image of a cat 10 years ago and now—as one of my friends did, adorably—that particular sample would be easy to throw out.

For its part, Facebook denies having any hand. "This is a user-generated meme that went viral on its own," a Facebook spokesperson responded. "Facebook did not start this trend, and the meme uses photos that already exist on Facebook. Facebook gains nothing from this meme (besides reminding us of the questionable fashion trends of 2009). As a reminder, Facebook users can choose to turn facial recognition on or off at any time."

But even if this particular meme isn't a case of social engineering, the past few years have been rife with examples of social games and memes designed to extract and collect data.

Question: Is it bad that someone could use your Facebook photos to train a facial recognition algorithm? Analyze using Kantian and Social Contract Theory.

Class Activity 3 -- The Social Responsibility of Business¹

By Marc Benioff
Oct. 24, 2018

Back when I was in business school in the 1980s, I was taught — as were generations of aspiring entrepreneurs and executives — that the business of business is business. “There is one and only one social responsibility of business,” the economist Milton Friedman famously wrote in “Capitalism and Freedom”: “to increase its profits.” In an essay for this newspaper in 1970, Dr. Friedman went further, arguing that executives who claim that companies have “responsibilities for providing employment, eliminating discrimination, avoiding pollution and whatever else may be the catchwords” of the day are guilty of “undermining the basis of a free society.”

Unfortunately, some C.E.O.s still embrace this myopic view and believe that they have a duty to shareholders alone, with little or no responsibility to the communities in which they operate. I contend that business must have a purpose beyond profits, and that such purpose can, over time, benefit both stockholders and stakeholders.

I’ve seen this in my hometown, San Francisco, and the surrounding Bay Area, which has the third-highest number of billionaires on the planet. Some high-net-worth individuals, including some who work in the tech sector, have been extraordinarily generous in supporting our public schools, hospitals and communities. Others, however, have given little or nothing, and they seem content to let local government bear the burden of enormous local challenges alone. The city of San Francisco, where one-bedroom apartments rent for an average of \$3,300 and the median home price is a record \$1.6 million, is experiencing a full-blown homelessness crisis. I’m a fourth-generation San Franciscan, and while there has always been homelessness, I have

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/24/opinion/business-social-responsibility-proposition-c.html>

never seen it this bad. Families with children are living in cars and are packed into homeless shelters. There are tent encampments in city parks. The sidewalks are strewn with heroin needles and covered in human feces. A visiting official from the United Nations said she was “completely shocked.” An infectious-disease expert from the University of California, Berkeley, found that parts of the city are more unsanitary than the slums of some developing countries.

To their credit, city officials, businesses and community groups have stepped up. Innovative public-private partnerships have helped to bring some families off the streets. Mayor London Breed calls ending homelessness one of her “top priorities” and has proposed additional funding, beds and services. Yet given the scale of this crisis, current efforts are simply not enough. According to the most recent count, a shocking 7,500 individuals in San Francisco are homeless. There are 1,200 families — including about one in 30 children in public schools — who are homeless in San Francisco. Every night, more than 1,000 people are on wait lists for emergency shelter.

This tragedy is not unique to San Francisco. The nation’s homeless population is growing, as the high cost of housing pushes more people onto the streets. In New York City, about one in every 10 students in public schools are now homeless, a record high.

This is a humanitarian emergency and it demands an emergency response. San Francisco’s epidemic of homelessness is solvable, but only if we devote the resources that are necessary. That’s why I — and the company I founded, Salesforce — are part of a broad coalition of San Francisco citizens, business leaders, elected officials, teachers and community activists who are supporting Proposition C on the November ballot. Proposition C would impose a small tax — half of 1 percent — on San Francisco’s wealthiest businesses (on annual gross receipts over \$50 million generated in the city). In other words, if a business brings in \$55 million in San Francisco, only \$5 million would be subjected to the tax. Large retailers would pay an even smaller tax: just 0.175 percent of gross receipts over \$50 million.

This would raise up to \$300 million a year to address homelessness, roughly double what San Francisco spends now. Yes, we are a business that supports a tax on our business — because we are a part of our community and our community is in crisis.

Opponents of Proposition C — including some business leaders — have raised objections that do not stand up to closer scrutiny. They claim that this tax will drive away business and jobs, but of the tens of thousands of businesses in San Francisco, fewer than 400 will meet the \$50 million threshold — small and medium-size businesses are effectively exempt. The city’s own Office of Economic Analysis has concluded that any impact on the local economy would be “small” — a mere 0.1 percent over 20 years.

--

Thinking through the lens of Stakeholder Analysis and in the context of this article, does Milton Friedman’s position that companies’ only social responsibility is to increase profits a valid one?