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Data and Algorithms: Ethics and Policy - Memo 1

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<div align="center">**Why is it important to *clarify concepts*?**</div>

Humankind has evolved overtime into a species that is able to critically analyze information and subsequently make informed decisions. Said claim is offered as fact not value. That is, a reasonable person should take this as undisputable. It is true over time humankind has developed tools for criticism and analysis, and we could simply list several ways in which we use this development to make decisions, thus humankind makes informed decisions using their ability to be critical or analyze information.

The example above is one way to gain adherence when arguing. I began by stating the claim, and then I justified this claim with a sort of new claim, that suggests a reasonable person should agree based on this set of evidence, in this case the example of human evolution. This method of pause creates room for ideas but there is more one must do when arguing ethics. Firstly, one should clarify the concepts.

In my lead-in I didn't exactly explain what I mean by things like "informed decision." While it is possible to infer the meaning by taking the words at their individual meanings, it is also true that some compound concepts have unique meanings to individuals. Individuals may attach their own value to a concept and have a unique interpretation of a particular concept. It is important to carefully clarify concepts in the beginning of a philosophical argument because "you don't want to be talking past other people," when making your point.

In addition to being respectful and on topic, we also must use this classification to identify the actual ethical consideration. It is not as if there is one right answer when considering a moral value. Data and Algorithms is a fascinating example of this because taken at their individual meanings we generate a working definition but when put together as a concept or in different contexts we might infer different things.

One application might be in legal settings such as patent law where, for instance "[i]nventions built upon an abstract mathematical algorithm . . . can be patented, while the algorithm . . . cannot (Rubel et al. p. 29). To make judgements we stake a position on some moral platitude, and it is important to know what moral lens is being used. Deciding the "fairness" or what level of "agency," legitimacy," or "freedom," one should have depends entirely how those concepts are defined.

According to Rubel et al. "considering whether it is justifiable to use algorithmic systems in criminal justice decisions, for example, we will need to specify a number of concepts in order to make progress," (p. 15). Which is to say, we inherently ponder many concepts when making decisions / arguing, and to have a productive debate means that the parties are at least—to use a phrase—speaking the same language.