Sculpting a Sustainable ‘Space of Actions.’
Philosophical and Neuro-Ethical Considerations of the Current Moral Action Overload.

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Classic tension: abstract and concrete moral norms

- Plato’s Idea of the Good
- Aristotle’s concrete & realizable moral good
Pluralistic account of virtue

"In order to become good and wise (agathos kai spoudaios) requires three things; these are

- nature
- habit
- reason

(physis, ethos, logos).” (Aristotle, Politics 1332 a 38)
Pluralism yet with coherence

Requirements of coherence and consistency of actions
- over time
- across a person’s thinking & willing

--> crucial role for moral habits
Action planning = “sculpting a space of actions”

Cognitive science perspective:
• Replacing goal-directed actions with stimulus-response actions
• Development of skills
• “action planning is like arming the cognitive system to behave like a reflex machinery” (Hommel, 2006)
Moral action overload

Enlarged space of action options:
• more potential action participants
• more -technological, instrumental, social- action options
• larger spans of time involved

Widened scope of action:
• globalization of action consequences
• globalization of involved participants
• enlarged temporal horizon
Reduction of complexity via action planning

Hierarchical account of intentions/desires:
- from desires to volitions and ideals
- increasing consistency & coherency
- supporting social & joint action
- including future situations & generations

(Harry Frankfurt; Michael Bratman)
Cognitively anchoring a hierarchy of intentions

Intentions:
- Distal (future-directed)
- Proximal (present-directed)
- Motor

(Pacherie, 2008)

Fig. 1. The intentional cascade of D-intentions, P-intentions, and M-intentions.

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Result of planning: ‘Sculpted space of actions’

Action space, sculpted by influences such as:
- environmental affordances
- motor primings
- motivation state
- intentions
Cognitive challenges posed by moral action overload

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How can this action space be processed, sculpted in a cognitively adequate way?
Politics are crucial for a sustainable “space of actions”

Politics as mediating between neural mechanisms and global responsibilities by:

• Arranging and determining sustainable political choices
• Anchoring distal preferences in proximal actions
• Facilitating the coordination of actions of individuals over time and of social interactions
• Providing the environment with recognizable affordances for action


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Thanks!

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