

Ethics and Philosophy of Computing

Introduction

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15 April 2015

Housekeeping

- Seminars: Wednesdays 10.00-12.00
 - Start today 15/4 end 10/6.
 - Exception: 13 May, 9.00-12.00 (Ivan + Madhavan)
- Papers to be circulated one week in advance.
 - Everybody to read before seminar.
 - Final short written assignment to hand in (June).
- Approx. 30-40 min talk + discussion questions.
 - Aim for more discussion than monologue.
- Obligatory* attendance.
 - If you'll have to miss one, notify me in advance.

*If taking for the 5 credits.

Why Ethics?

Facebook data privacy case to be heard
before European Union court

**Prism: Just how much do the spooks
know?**

Information commissioner: 'apps are
failing to respect user privacy'



Microsoft, Facebook,
Google and Yahoo
release US surveillance
requests

[→ Read more](#)



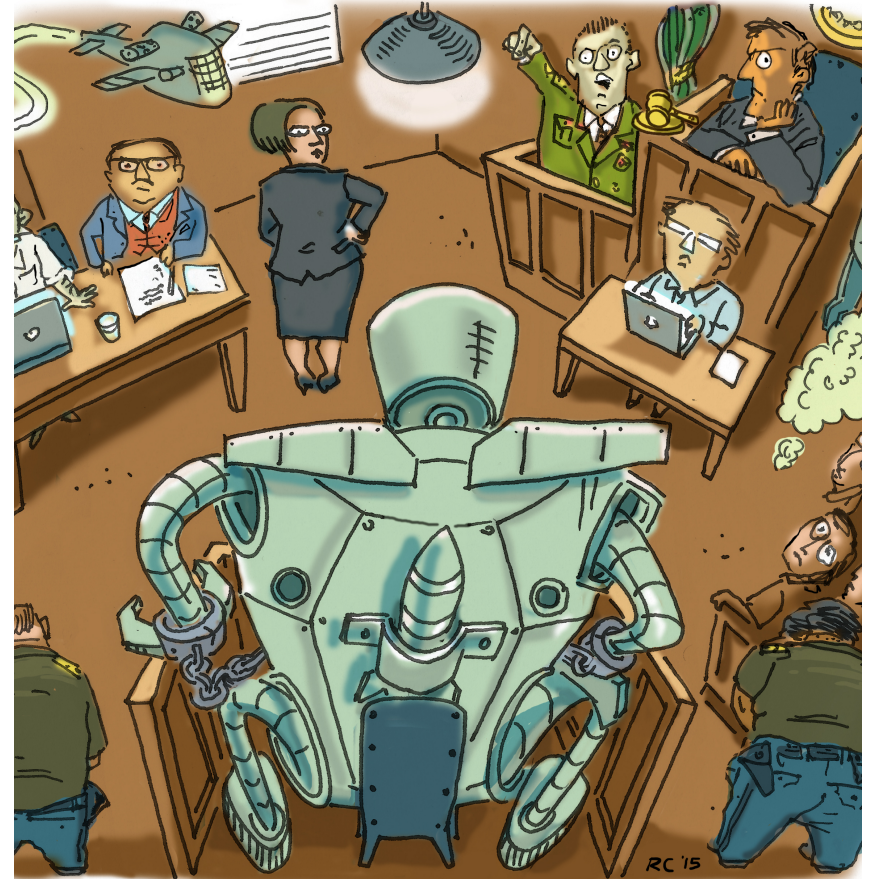
Don't trust your phone, don't trust your
laptop - this is the reality that Snowden
has shown us

Why Ethics?

The next generation of weapons in military arsenals could be "killer robots," machines that would select and destroy specific targets without further human intervention. But if a robot broke the law, who would be held responsible? Would the programmer, manufacturer, military commander, or robot end up in court?

Human Rights Watch 9 April 2015:

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/08/killer-robots-accountability-gap>



Why Ethics?

- 47% of US jobs at risk of being automated within 20 years.
[Brey & Osborne 2013](#)
- In Sweden, as many as 53%. [SSF 2014](#)
- Also white-collar jobs in e.g. sales, accountancy, financial analysis, diagnosis.



Applied Ethics and ICT

1. Professional Ethics
 - Codes of conduct for IT professionals/researchers (normative).
 - E.g. whistle blowing. When permissible? Required?
2. Philosophical Ethics
 - Social impact, ethical use and nature of ICT
 - Social policy, normative.
 - E.g. Privacy, piracy...
3. Sociological/Descriptive Ethics
 - Impact of technology on communities/groups.
 - E.g. Who has access to ICT?
 - What jobs are lost due to automation?

Examples

- Sociological/Descriptive:
 - Brey-Osborne report. Which jobs at risk by automation?
 - Is there discrimination due to profiling from data?
- Philosophical/Normative:
 - Human Rights Watch on autonomous weapons:
 - Gap in legal accountability
 - Recommends prohibiting them.
 - Facebook vs Europe case:
 - Is data collection legal? What should be acceptable?
 - Robots/Automation replacing many jobs:
 - Policies to avoid mass unemployment?
- Professional Issues/Normative:
 - Consequences for IT companies/workers of court cases above.
 - Snowden, NSA-whistleblowing on surveillance.

Discussion: Professional and Philosophical Ethics

- What (if any) responsibilities do we, as scientist, have for the technology we develop?
- Should this inform our choice of research topics? Who we take funding from?
- If we develop technology which could affect society a lot, do we (as scientists) have an obligation to work for policy changes promoting benefits/minimising harmful effects?
- Give concrete examples if you want.

Ethical Theories

- Consequence Based (utilitarian)
 - Maximum happiness for largest number
- Duty Based (deontology)
 - What's one's duties? Respect for others.
 - Can't use others as means-to-an-end.
- Contract Based (rights)
 - Morals as contracts between individuals.
 - Doing no harm vs. doing good?
- Character Based (virtue ethics)
 - Personal development.
 - What traits are virtuous?
 - E.g. Honest person behaves in a certain manner.

Just-Consequentialist Framework

(Moor)

- Deliberate policy from *impartial* point of view.
 - Does it cause unnecessary harm to any group or individual?
 - Does it support individual rights and allow for fulfilling ones duties?
- Select best policy based on
 - Weighing good/bad consequences.
 - Distinguish between disagreement about facts and principles.

Discussion: Privacy is Theft

- I understand that we're obliged, as humans, to share what we see and know. All that knowledge must be democratically accessible.
- It's the natural state of information to be free. We have a right to know everything we can. We all collectively own the accumulated knowledge of the world.
- So what happens if I deprive anyone or everyone of something I know? Aren't I stealing from my fellow humans?

From *The Circle* by Dave Eggers

Discussion: Privacy is Theft

- Analyse the arguments and claims in the dialogue. What ethical theories are applied?
- Apply the Just-Consequentialist Framework to assess the policy that privacy is theft. What argumentation leads to it being considered moral/immoral?
- Do you agree that privacy can be seen as theft? Why/why not? Structure your argument.

The Information Ethics Framework

(Floridi)

- *Information entities* as first-class citizens.
 - Need not just be living creatures.
 - Person *as* his/her information.
- All beings (also inanimate) have (at least minimal, overridable) rights or moral worth.
- Entropy: Destruction, corruption of information objects.
- Moral Agents. Autonomous and Adaptable.
 - Humans with responsibilities a special case.

Information Ethics: Moral Principles

1. Entropy ought not to be caused.
 2. Entropy ought to be prevented.
 3. Entropy ought to be removed.
 4. Promote information entities by preserving, cultivating and enriching their properties.
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- Duty evaluated in terms of contribution to “infosphere”.
 - Increase of entropy is evil.

Discussion

- Apply the moral principles of Floridi's Information Ethics to the *Privacy is Theft* example. What do you conclude?
- Floridi also points out that in the Information Ethics framework, information about a person can be viewed as *being (part of) the person* as opposed to a *person owning* the information. Does this make any difference to the view that *Privacy is Theft*?