IT and Ethics

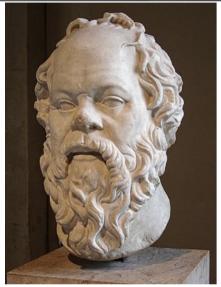
Are right and wrong the same in the IT era?

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What and why

- The classic definition of ethics: the rules and standards that regulate the behaviour of an individual towards others
- Most 'golden rules' are still valid but there is a row of new ethical questions and new aspects brought along by new technologies
- New communication channels (coupled with certain social developments) have shown a need for additional ethical considerations and norms

I know, I know not: imaginary guestions to Socrates



- "Oh, this is so that ..."
 - "Should we obey laws?"
 - "Is stealing OK?"
 - "Are elderly people to be honoured?"
 - "Should I tell truth to anyone?"

- "I do not know what it is."
 - "Is spamming OK?"
 - "Can I lie on Facebook?"
 - "Am I allowed to read someone's e-mail?"
 - "How can I avoid surveillance?"

Tempest in a teapot?

- Maybe it is just an artificial problem invented by bored people?
- But
- (as said in several previous topics) The bets have grown, losing becomes increasingly costly
- Human relationships are sometimes better seen with technology in the background
- Internet is the game for consenting adults
- The Earth has shrunk (not physically...)

Ethical theories

- Some possible ethical approaches to information society (from *Ethics for the Information Age* by Michael J. Quinn):
 - Subjective (Moral) Relativism Right and Wrong are purely individual
 - Cultural Relativism Right and Wrong are consistent in a culture, but tend to change over time and space
 - Divine Command Theory Right and Wrong are set by a higher being and can be learned from the scriptures
 - Ethical Egoism long-time personal benefit is the only source of Right, barter is a foundation of human relationships; doing good makes sense if useful

- Kantianism (I. Kant) an attempt towards universal ethics:
 - Autonomy (1st formulation): Act only from moral rules that you can at the same time will to be universal moral laws
 - Motives (2nd formulation): Act so that you always treat both yourself and other people as ends in themselves, and never only as a means to an end
- Act (Direct) Utilitarism (J. Bentham, J.S. Mills) utility counts;
 Right is determined by the total increase of happiness for all the involved parties
- Rule (Indirect) Utilitarism (J.S. Mills) utility from the rules;
 Right is achieved by the rules which increase happiness

- Social Contract Theory (T. Hobbes, J. Locke, J.J. Rousseau) –
 Right is achieved by the rules which make sense to everyone
 (they obey out of free will)
- Rawls' Theory of Justice (J. Rawls) Right has two assumptions:
 - Anyone can claim enough rights and liberties as long as everyone else can do the same
 - Inequality may exist if a) it stems from factors that are universally accessible, and b) it strives to help the least advantaged people the most
- Virtue Ethics (Aristotle) Right is determined by what virtuous people would do in the situation. Intellectual vs moral virtues

The paradox of liberty and equality

- The French Revolution had a famous motto: "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!" (*Liberté, égalité, fraternité*)
- Sounds nice, but is absurd:
 - Liberty: maximum freedom for self-realization => success is also up to abilities => some get farther than others
 - Equality: maintaining the average for everyone => the more successful or talented people get bored (or hit the ceiling)
 - Equal <u>opportunities</u> vs equal <u>wealth/poverty</u>
 - Fraternity as a requirement can contradict both!
 - IT and information society amplifies the contradictions

Views on cyberethics

- Herman Tavani in his Ethics and Technology:
 - Cyberethics is more than computer/Internet ethics
 - Different fields emphasize different aspects of it
- Examples:
 - IT: issues related to adoption of technology (loss of jobs)
 - Philosophy: "Big Picture" (do we become stupid online?)
 - Social sciences: impact on social groups (too few women)
 - Information sciences: free speech, preservation and development of culture (how to preserve FB content?)

Phases of cyberethics

- Phase I: 1950s and 1960s standalone (non-networked)
 mainframes. The first attempts on AI and the first ethical
 questions in IT (Can machines think? If yes, should we build a
 thinking machine? If machines can be intelligent, then what it
 means to be human?). Privacy (in the context of surveillance
 and large databases)
- Phase II: 1970s and 1980s the rise of business sector, first networks (local and wide area networks). New questions:
 - personal privacy (+network and business aspects)
 - rise of 'intellectual property'
 - beginning of computer crime (rather harmless at first)

- Phase III: since ~1990: the Web era. New issues include
 - freedom of speech
 - anonymity
 - legislation
 - trust
 - public vs private information
- Phase IV: near future merging technologies, ubiquitous computing, smart objects and things, chips, bioinformatics, probably nanocomputing

Different approaches (H. Tavani)

- Professional ethics predominantly the view of computer, natural and information sciences, the issues include professionalism, responsibilities, risks, safety and reliability, codes of conduct etc
- Philosophical ethics the philosophical and legal view on issues like privacy, anonymity, copyright, freedom of speech etc
- Descriptive ethics the view of <u>social sciences</u> on e.g. the impact of technology on various institutions (government, education etc) and social groups (e.g. by sex/gender, age, ethnicity etc)

Normativity and transparency

Ethics can be

- Non-normative observing/describing without judgment
- Normative clear ethical judgment (Right/Wrong)
- Sometimes depends on transparency:
 - Transparent the users understand both the technology and related moral choices (e.g. phones vs surveillance)
 - Non-transparent with known features (tech is transparent, moral choices are not; e.g. Google)
 - Non-transparent (opaque) many new things (e.g. IoT, AI)

Some main issues today

- Copyright (and legislation in general)
- Privacy
- Freedom of speech, censorship and the Big Brother
- Information security, cybercrime, cyberwar
- Digital Divide and ubiquitous computing
- Communication and media (incl traditional vs social)
- Clash of cultures (incl in cyberspace)

Re-visiting Himanen

- Protestant ethic
 - Money
 - Work
 - Flexibility
 - Determination
 - Accountability
 - Optimality
 - Stability

- Hacker ethic
 - Passion
 - Freedom
 - Hacker work ethic
 - Hacker money ethic
 - Hacker net ethic (nethic)
 - Caring
 - Creativity

Half full or half empty?

- In 2000, Attila Krajci formulated a set of online dangers
- Each one can actually be found a positive counterpoint!
 - Trust: "You never know who is on the other side" vs "you can have a carte blanche, ridding you of earlier loads"
 - Authenticity: "What you find cannot be trusted" vs "you can look at the information itself rather than external authority"
 - Sense of reality: "Things go unreal if you are online too much" vs "sometimes, the cyberspace is what someone needs in order to open up"

- Alienation: "net addicts get alienated from others" vs
 "sometimes a way to escape is necessary"
- Identity: "you can be whoever you want until you do not know anymore who you are" vs "you can be whoever you want and stay yourself"
- Aggression: "computer games make you aggressive" vs
 "games can teach very different things"
- Extremes: "Internet has porn, pedophiles and brainwashers" vs "sometimes one needs to see wrong to know right"

- Communication: "Internet does not allow using the whole spectrum of communication" vs "Internet adds new ways of communication, sometimes by seemingly truncating them"
- Noise: "you get lost in the mass of information" vs "there will be totally new ways to extract what you need"

Democracy vs Dictatorship (R. Pinter)

- "Cyber-Athens"
 - Technophiles
 - Digital Agora
 - Direct democracy
 - E-elections
 - Free society

- "Cyber-1984"
 - Technophobes
 - Surveillance and thought police
 - Big Brother
 - E-dictatorship
 - The Matrix?

Seeking for middle ground: technorealism

- A manifesto from 1998: http://www.technorealism.org/
- Some good points, some debatable stuff a commented version can be found at http://www.zpub.com/aaa/techreal.html
- From the pre-Facebook (social media) era a lot of modern things are not included
- Yet, a similarly balancing approach is still sorely needed

Codes of Conduct

- Seems like another piece of pointless bureaucracy
- Similar point to internal rules, security policies etc:
 - Formulation comes after thinking
 - A written thing is easier to remember (stays in sight)
 - Can help find suitable people (who then obey it out of free will <= Social Contract Theory) – those who oppose would be thankful for an early warning

Conclusion

- The ethical foundation in technology is largely the same as elsewhere
- Many new questions (that Socrates cannot answer)
- Ethical choices in technology may affect a much larger area
- Ethical codes (codes of conduct) actually make sense

For further study

- Steven Northcutt, IT Ethics Handbook
- Herman Tavani, Ethics and Technology
- Michael J. Quinn, Ethics for the Information Age
- Robert Pinter (ed), Information Society
- Pekka Himanen, Hacker Ethic

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Thanks