

So Much for FINE and What's Next?

Syun Tutiya
(Chiba University)

What was/is FINE?

- 5 year project on “information ethics,” starting in 1998
- Led by Mizutani(Kyoto), Ochi(Hiroshima) and Tutiya(Chiba), being masterminded(?) by Kato
- Very few working on the subjects at the time
- Applied ethics as conceived as inquiries into possible ethical principles in the age of rapidly growing sciences and technologies
 - bioethics/medical ethics, environmental ethics, etc

Presuppositions

- Does ethics change with technological changes?
 - No. Technologies do not dictate ethics.
 - Yes. Good reason to think again about the ethical principles we have had, given the change in our lifestyles.
 - Our position. Yes and No.
- Does/Can ethics prescribe technologies?
 - No. Technological developments are independent.
 - Yes. Technologies are for humans
 - Our position. Yes and No.

So, ...

- We were/are compromise-oriented, indecisive, promiscuous.
- Manners are not ethics
- Collecting facts is important even in ethics and philosophy: we have to know how people do and think — creation of databases of “troubles” and “tentative solutions, attempted solutions and perplexities” – unfinished yet
- Communication with people of different backgrounds is important – law, economics, sociology etc

In medical and bio-ethics

- Autonomous, rational agents make a lot of sense as something that can decide on life and death of themselves
- The effects of decisions are easy to see: it is dead or alive, happy or unhappy, etc
- Technologies used are straightforward
- Social costs are obvious. Public policies are justifiable at least on certain grounds
- Problems about ethical principles can be shared by all

With information technologies,

- We thought everything is different
 - information technologies are not easy to understand
 - they are not concerned with life and death
 - individual decision is remote from what societies finally decides on
- Nobody knew what is ethically problematic
 - So far there were topics like:
 - professional ethics
 - copyright
 - privacy (workplace surveillance, database nation etc)

Shift of backgrounds from 80s to 90s

- Computer ethics of 80s: “Professional”
 - professional ethics of computer and communication engineers
 - intellectual property rights of software programmers and administrator
 - responsibility of artificial agents????
- Information ethics of 90s: “Everybody”
 - The Internet for everybody
 - Cell phones owned and used by everybody
 - Digital communication as social infrastructure, visible and invisible
- And what for now and near future?

Now our project focused on:

- No more “computer ethics”, but information ethics as more general
- Information ethics as a branch of applied ethics
- Ethical issues arising with the advent of the Internet
- Education and information ethics, as computers and networks were coming into schools
- Other problems like privacy, cultural differences in globalization, responsibility, etc

We currently think

- Information ethics, as conceived at start of the project is EASY. All the problems are either solved/solvable or hard but not limited to information technologies
- There is no such thing as “Internet ethics”
- IPR immune from technological progresses
- There is no special way of teaching ethics in relation to information technology
- Information technologies are just among those new technologies
- But there are some to think more about

“Internet ethics”

- The “Problems” were:
 - (in)decency, undesirable contents, freedom of the press, etc
 - privacy, data mining
 - web, search engine, digital divide, deep link
 - anonymity
 - “cracking,” intrusion, unauthorized access, etc
- “Solutions” are:
 - Internet is just an advanced way of communication with good features and unexpected side effects, and that’s all

- Backgrounds are:
 - all 40,000 primary and secondary schools hooked up to the Internet, an initiative of the government in 1998-99
 - Yet situations outside are more rapidly changing: “Cell phone for everybody” phenomenon
- Modes of communication surely changed, but anything special about schools?
 - Yes, they are only behind the time
 - Children are to be reared and disciplined in families first, and that’s all
 - A branch of “consumer education”

Status as a branch of applied ethics

- Less serious than life-related ethics, earth-related ethics
- Need some revisions to conventional concepts like privacy, responsibility, property, person but no need for “new” concepts
- No more talking about principles but decide on individual, concrete problems in real situations—common to all applied ethics
- Important but not unique

Other problems have been surfacing:

- Intellectual property rights and open source movement (Eguchi)
- Whistleblowing (Okuda)
- Cultural difference in the time of globalization (Nara and Iseda), etc. etc,

Common to all these “new” problems is:
not limited to information technology
new forms of old problems, maybe

So,

- Our original problems were non-problems or pseudo-problems, all solved or solvable
- But the project did something, namely
 - Stress on the importance of “facts”
 - databases
 - bibliographies
 - interviews
 - statistics
 - New aspects of some traditional issues
 - property
 - privacy
 - etc

Categories

- Anonymity
- Trust
- Appropriation of information and knowledge
- Shared knowledge, social epistemology, open source
- Privacy
- Property
- Communication
- Application of applied ethics

Anonymity

- Need for reappraisal of anonymity
 - election system as basis for democracy
 - revealed preference as basis for market mechanism
 - anonymous way of revealing truth
- Privacy as deprivation of anonymity
 - “let alone”?
 - self control of own personal information?
 - anonymity is more basic than privacy?

Appropriation of information and knowledge

- WIPO way of looking at and thinking about IPR
- Can knowledge be personally owned?
- Yes, but
 - tradition of “education” and “library”
 - simultaneous discoveries suggesting that anyone at the time can and should discover
 - scientific communities still holding on to the 19th century type of communication, namely journals

Applied applied ethics

- Guidelines
- Education
- Databases

So FIN to FINE, but more problems than solutions. This was what we meant at the start.