Chapter 11

The Leadership Role of the Ethicist:
Balancing between the Authoritative and the Passive

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ABSTRACT

The pervasive presence of Information and Communication technologies has profound effects on cultural norms and values. This relationship is most commonly referred to in terms of values embedded in a technology (Nissenbaum, 2001). To mitigate potential threats to values, researchers from a variety of disciplines advocate in favor of incorporating ethics into research and design processes. As Boenink (2013) rightly points out, however, there is little work done that outlines exactly what it is that the ethicist does when engaged in 'ethics in the lab'. This paper aims to fill the gap that Boenink has identified and to contribute to the ongoing discussions related to ethics in the lab. The following work will review what the ethicist does in terms of the tasks of the ethicist as articulated by van Wynsberghe and Robbins (2013) and will present two case studies as examples to illustrate the different role of the ethicist in each. The issue of central importance for this paper is how the ethicist's role differs from one case to the next and what guides this shift. For insight the paper looks to the work of Manders-Huits and Zimmer (2009) and their suggestion of the 'leadership role'. Finally, it will argue that a virtue ethics approach should be taken in order to guide the ethicist in these divergent roles.

INTRODUCTION

The pervasive presence of Information and Communication technologies (ICT) have profound effects on cultural norms and values. For example, social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter have highlighted the relationship between technology and values like privacy, fairness, and security. In particular, Facebook is often criticized for violating the privacy of users through its default status for sharing pictures, location or other personal information. Alternatively, information from sites like Twitter is often used without consent for marketing and governmental (or security)

purposes leaving one to question the fairness of extracting information intended for one use but used for another. Given the impact that technology has on society, and vice versa, how can scholars help to shape the research and design of ICT in an ethically responsible manner?

The field of Technoethics is dedicated to uncovering and exploring these kinds of ethical questions and concerns resulting from the intersection of technology and society. Technoethics was first introduced by Mario Bunge in the 1970s (Bunge, 1977) and was intended, at this time, as a call for increased moral responsibility on the part of engineers for their constructions. Technoethics has developed from this time into an interdisciplinary domain that deals with questions of responsible design, use and implementation of technology (Luppicini, 2008). Thus, it is not only the responsibility of engineers but is also that of ethicists, sociologists, educators, policy makers and so on to help shape the future design, use and implementation of technologies in a responsible manner. Most notably, technoethics is dedicated to guiding ethical problem solving for both existing and emerging technologies (Luppicini, 2008; Luppicini & Adell, 2008).

As Luppicini eloquently describes, technoethics is "a broad roadway system with many connections, many places to come from and many places to go" (2009, p. 7). With this in mind, one starting point to consider is the relationship that technologies share with values: cultural values shape which technologies are desirable while at the same time technologies alter societal interpretations and prioritizations of values. From this starting point, one may contemplate what such a relationship might look like and how it comes to be. For this I rely on the notion of embedded values (Nissenbaum, 2001). The basic idea behind an embedded value is such that through the use of a technology a value comes into existence, i.e. when using a privacy enhancing technology the value of privacy comes into existence.

In order to prevent threats to values and encourage the promotion of culturally upheld values many scholars argue in favor of incorporating ethical reflection into the design process (Friedman et al 2002, 2006; Swierstra & van den Burg, 2013; Fisher, 2007; Van Gorp & Van der Molen, 2011; Van Gorp & Van de Poel, 2008; van Wynsberghe & Robbins, 2013). Incorporating ethics into the design process has proven beneficial for a variety of reasons: uncovering intended values and examining their realization in a technology; critiquing intended values of designers; examining value trade-offs; examining value trajectories over time; making it easier for new researchers to understand value interpretations and biases; and making it clear that purely objective research (i.e. value-free research) is not possible (van Wynsberghe, Been, & van Keulen 2013; van Wynsberghe & Moura, 2013; van Wynsberghe & van der Ham 2014; Yarosh et al, 2011).

To address the issue of incorporating ethics into the design process I spent the last two years as an ethics adviser for a technical institute at a University in the Netherlands. During this time I worked on a variety of projects in a variety of roles: providing immediate ethics consultations and advice; educating large groups of researchers about the needs and methods for incorporating ethics into their work; and, working one-one-one with individual researchers to incorporate value analysis (i.e. ethical reflection) into their work. The overall approach that guided my work was the "ethicist as designer" approach (van Wynsberghe & Robbins, 2013). It is an approach that bridges that of 'value-sensitive design' (Freidman et al, 2002, 2006) with 'the embedded ethicist' or 'ethicist in the lab' (Swierstra & van den Burg, 2013; Fisher, 2007). The goal was to examine values already at play in a researcher's work as well as to realize values in a resulting product which would not otherwise have been realized.

A variety of factors have affected the scope of my work as ethics adviser. For each project, I engaged in the tasks of the ethicist as designer as

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