

POLICING THE INTERNET: *JAKE BAKER* AND BEYOND

March 9, 1995

QUESTION FOUR: RIGHTS FOR COMPUTER PROGRAMS?

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PROFESSOR LOWENSTEIN: Question over here.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT:

I have a question about (inaudible) to whether people had a right to being anonymous on the Internet.

It seems that there's an opposite thing going on, which is it's very easy to impersonate somebody else.

I have a scenario here which I just wondered what you all thought of, and it kind of deals with pornography issues.

If someone writes a program that is trained to read alt.sex and learns how to write these stories, I was wondering, first of all, who is liable? The author of the program or the author of the stories that the program has been learning from?

My second question is, how do you -- I mean, then we'd be censoring a program, and in essence that program has taken the form of a person on Internet and how are those issues going to be dealt with? I mean, the program as an actual entity which people on the Internet will see as a person, does that have rights, or how would you send (inaudible) (coughing)

DANIEL WEITZNER:

I really have to say, I think programs don't learn. Programs can be made to function in a way that mimics what we think of as learning. I think that people write programs to do certain things.

Now, you may have, you know, standard of care issues about how careful you have to be when you write a program and the degree to which you can foresee the consequences of the operation of that program, but I really don't ever want to get to the point where we have to start talking about the rights of computer programs.

(Laughter)

DANIEL WEITZNER:

I really don't. We can't talk about rights anymore, if that's what we're talking about.

PROFESSOR LOWENSTEIN: Barry Steinhardt, you had a comment.

BARRY STEINHARDT:

As some of you might know, we have a rights of series. I was wondering, rights of computer programs.

What I actually wanted to do, what your question sort of reminded me of was the earlier question about encryption technology, specifically about public key encryption, about the Pretty Good Privacy program that Phil Zimmermann is the author of.

There's a flip side to this encryption issue, which is, not only is encryption used to keep information private but public key encryption is also used to verify authenticity. And the suppression public key encryption is an issue for -- in commerce where we want to be able to verify that this was, in fact, someone. You know, this was in fact Joe Jones' credit card and Joe Jones' authorization to buy whatever.

So that there's a real risk that we run by suppressing encryption technologies that we're going to deny American industry and others the ability to verify the authenticity for communications.