

Ethics I

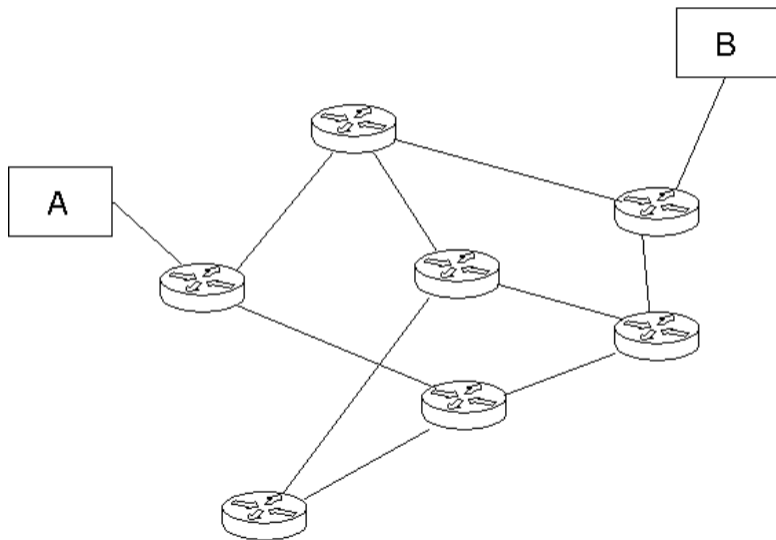


“Technology is not and has never been socially or politically neutral; it embodies and usually transmits the attitudes, economic endowments, moral priorities, and even the aesthetics of the societies that create it. It is very hard to simply adopt the machine and not the less tangible biases that go with it.”
Walter Russell Mead (<http://www.the-american-interest.com/2015/04/09/the-paradox-of-american-democracy-promotion/>)

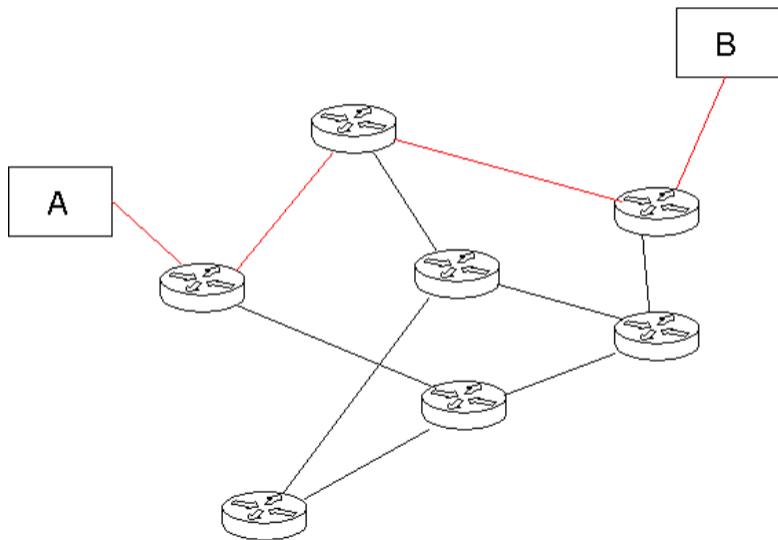
The Network Stack

7	Application
6	Presentation
5	Session
4	Transport
3	Network
2	Link
1	Physical

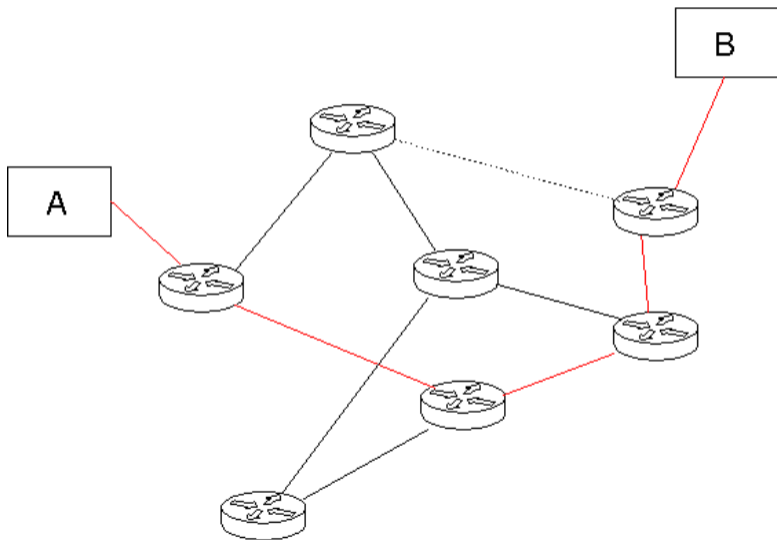
The Internet: Packets



The Internet: Packet Routing



The Internet: Alternate Paths



The *Real* Network Stack

9	Political
8	Financial
7	Application
6	Presentation
5	Session
4	Transport
3	Network
2	Link
1	Physical

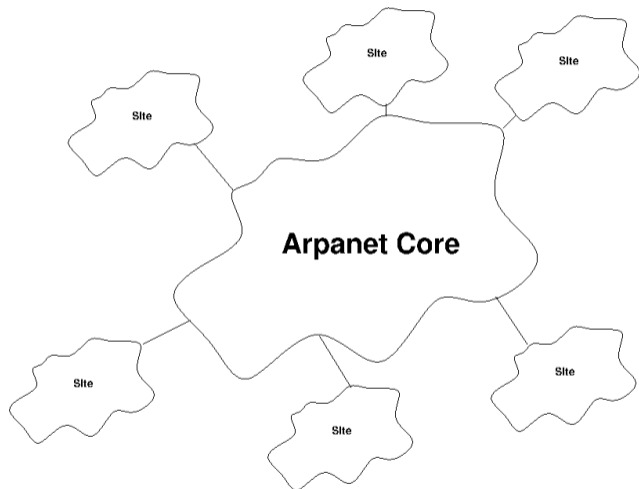
It's an Internet

- The Internet is a “network of networks”
- Packets are routed from network to network
- The networks interconnect
- Who pays?

The Pre-1982 Phone Network

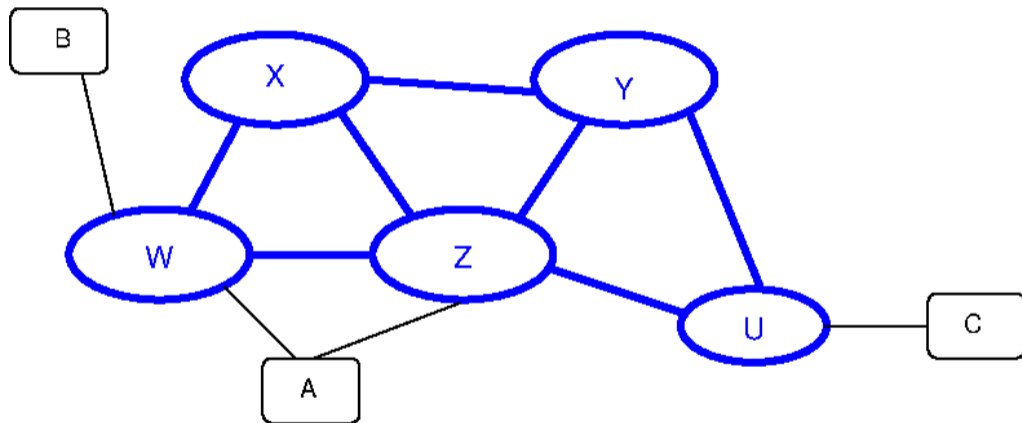
- One major US phone company, AT&T. (In most of the rest of the world, the phone company was part of the PTT (Postal, Telephone, and Telegraph) ministry.)
- Most local phone companies were wholly-owned subsidiaries
- Strictly regulated, including rates and hence rates of return for AT&T
- International connections were arranged government-to-government
- The phone network was *centralized*

The Early ARPANET



It looked the same!

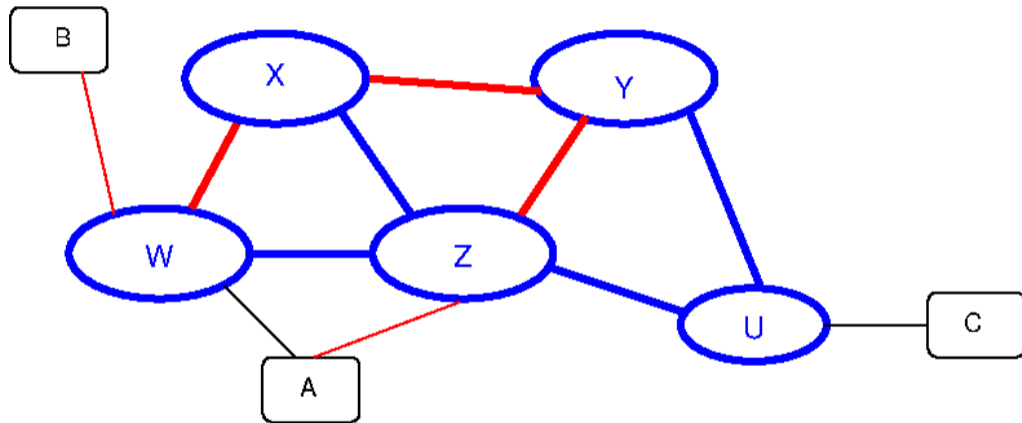
Today's Internet: ISPs



ISPs in Theory

- They're all alike, and can all talk to each other
- Many interconnect at more than one point
- None are privileged
- They interconnect the way they want
- Many international connections, arranged by the individual ISPs
- A variety of payment schemes, including free interconnection (“peering”)
- Why?

Packets' Path Depends on Business Deals



What are Z's contracts with W, X, and Y?

- The Internet grew up in a deregulatory era
- Phone companies were being broken up and/or privatized and/or exposed to competition
- More flexibility—and more complexity

- Not all ISPs are alike
- The big ones—the “Tier 1” ISPs—don’t pay each other for interconnection
- Most of the Tier 1s are the big phone companies: AT&T, Verizon, Sprint, etc.
- Smaller ISPs buy “transit” from the Tier 1s
- In principle, they don’t have to; in practice, they’re not big enough to reach the bulk of the Internet any other way
- Large “eyeball” ISPs (e.g., Comcast, Verizon FIOS) are often in a monopoly position for reaching consumers in their region

Why?

- Again, minimal regulation
- The Internet architecture, both financially and technically, reflects larger societal trends

In Other Words...

- One reason for today's high-level Internet architecture is the political climate of the times
- In a time or place that favored regulation more, we'd see a very different topology

Societal Consequences

- The rich topology makes it hard to censor Internet traffic
- “The Internet treats censorship as damage and routes around it.”
- Countries that wish more control over content (e.g., China, Iran, Saudi Arabia) have enforced a more centralized architecture internally

Ethical Categories

- Common: apply to everyone
- Project goals
- Profession-specific knowledge

- Conflict of interest
- Kickbacks, bribery, etc.
- Software licenses

Important, but we won't spend class time on these—they apply to everyone.

Project Goals

- Is the outcome ethically acceptable?
- Will the result be “good for society”?
- One way to look at it: would you still approve if you were not personally benefiting?

Profession-Specific Knowledge

- Only a specialist is likely to be aware of the issue
- Only a specialist is qualified to evaluate the issue
- But everyone can be affected

Focus of Responsibility

- Your employer
- ☞ Generally profession-specific issue
- Society as a whole
- ☞ May be either goal-specific or profession-specialized

A Look at History

- Nuclear weapons
- Recombinant DNA
- Human subjects research
- Yellow fever

Nuclear Weapons: Five Individuals

- Leo Szilard
- J. Robert Oppenheimer
- Werner Heisenberg
- Edward Teller
- Andrei Sakharov

Which of them acted ethically?

(Note: some edits suggested by Prof. Alex Wellerstein, Stevens Institute.)

- Invented—and patented—the nuclear fission chain reaction (patent [GB630726](#), issued 1936, “Improvements in or Relating to the Transmutation of Chemical Elements”).
- He was well aware that the atomic bomb was one possible use, and sought to keep the patent secret (it wasn’t published until 1949)
- Instigated the famous 1939 Einstein letter to President Roosevelt calling for research into developing an atomic bomb, and then worked on the Manhattan Project
- In 1943, attempted to use his patent rights to gain a policy voice for scientists on use of the bomb
- (Unsuccessfully) tried to petition Truman to not use the bomb on cities
- After the war (and partly because of the Bomb), gave up physics and became a biologist

Which of these items were ethically proper?

All of Them?

- The invention was an act of pure science—and the patent was a mechanism to keep it secret, especially from the Nazis
- (Other British scientists felt that patents were unethical because patents generally had profit, rather than knowledge, as their motive.)
- The Einstein letter had two goals: to start U.S. research towards a bomb, and to suggest the desirability of keeping uranium ore away from the Nazis
- Szilard gave up nuclear physics because he felt it had led and would lead to too many immoral consequences

What About a Policy Voice for Scientists?

- Partly inspired by H.G. Wells' book *The Open Conspiracy*
- Wells: "It seemed to me that all over the world intelligent people were waking up to the indignity and absurdity of being endangered, restrained, and impoverished, by a mere uncritical adherence to traditional governments, traditional ideas of economic life, and traditional forms of behaviour, and that these awakening intelligent people must constitute first a protest and then a creative resistance to the inertia that was stifling and threatening us."
- Are scientists really more qualified to rule?

Should Scientists Rule Society?

- They certainly know more about science
- They don't necessarily know more about economics, law, public policy, . . .
- They don't necessarily have the people skills to get consensus on their (idea of proper) policies
- Is this democratic? Was Szilard?

Anthropogenic Climate Change

- Most (qualified) scientists are firmly convinced that it's real
- But what should be done?
- Tax carbon? Direct regulation? Do nothing and assume that the free market will solve the problem?
- These are not questions that climatologists are uniquely qualified to answer
- But—what is their role?


The Atomic Bomb

- In 1943, almost no one knew about the bomb's existence or potential. Who should decide policy?
- Szilard had thought harder and further ahead than most (save perhaps Niels Bohr)
- He acted *according to his own moral view*
- Special knowledge does confer special *responsibility*—but it does not imply special *ability*
- Szilard was, arguably, the scientist of his generation most driven by ethics
- For his troubles, he was suspected of being a Communist and his security clearance was yanked—the other reason he switched fields. . .

J. Robert Oppenheimer

- Scientific director of the Manhattan Project; was afraid that Germany would get the bomb first
- “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds” (Oppenheimer thinking of a line from the *Bhagavad-Gita* after seeing the first A-bomb test.)
- In 1945, when working on bomb target selection, suggested sharing the research with the world, for moral reasons
- He did advocate using the bomb against a city, rather than just a demonstration detonation
- Opposed the H-bomb initially, on both technical and moral grounds
- When a new technical approach was devised, he called it “technically sweet” and supported work on it.

Did Oppenheimer Act Ethically?

- In 1942, when he was appointed to head the Manhattan Project, it was hard to argue that any weapon against Nazi Germany was immoral
 - It was far less obvious, in mid-1945, that the bomb should be used against Japan without warning. (It was also somewhat unclear if there was any chance Japan would have surrendered to anything less than what was done.)
-  Even later, he did not regret his role in the Manhattan Project.
- One of his motives for using the bomb against a city: make it clear how *different* a weapon it was, to increase chances of international control and avoid an arms race
 - But why should technical changes affect the morality of using the H-bomb?

A US Navy Cryptanalyst

is probably true. It's also true, by the way, that right toward the end of the war, when Truman and others had to make a decision as to whether or not to drop the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, I thought at the time that if he had only asked me, I could have told him that there was absolutely no need to do it. There was... There were literally dozens of messages... naval messages from a lot of the shore installations, particularly the air stations—those that were running the... you know, the Kamikaze business; one just not far from Yokohama (B% in Atsui)—where the reports back to headquarters, “We have no fuel. We are out of gas completely.” They always came back, “Mobilize the people in the villages. Send them up to the countryside to dig up pine roots. You will distill pine roots and produce enough fuel to get your planes off the ground.” That's how bad it was. It was at this time and not long after that, that the decision was made in order to, quote, “save two million lives” that the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. That is two million American lives, see?

(From a [1975 talk](#) at the NSA)

A Mixed Bag

- Oppenheimer was a tortured soul, who did agonize over moral and ethical questions
- Too often, though, he seemed to be seduced by other considerations
- Access and power?
- Technical challenges?

Werner Heisenberg

- Nobel Prize-winning physicist
- A major figure in the German A-bomb project
- Met with Bohr in Occupied Denmark—but just why is unclear (Bohr was vehemently anti-Nazi)
- Made a crucial theoretical mistake in calculations, and thus concluded that graphite reactors—the easiest kind to build, especially after the British destroyed the stocks of heavy water in Norway—weren't possible

Amoral, at Best

- He did work on fission for the Nazis
- “He had agreed to sup with the devil, and perhaps he found that there was not a long enough spoon” (expatriate German physicist (and former advisee of Heisenberg) Sir Rudolf Peierls)
- Did he sabotage the graphite calculations? There’s no evidence on this, but there has been speculation.
- Was he seeking help from Bohr or warning the Allies?
- He was diffident when asked directly by Armaments Minister Speer if a bomb was possible
- But he never declined to work on it
- He did feel that an atomic bomb couldn’t be built in Germany under wartime conditions, so he instigated a modest reactor project instead, aimed at propulsion
- (By contrast, another famous physicist and Nobel laureate, Frédéric Joliot-Curie, was very active in the French Resistance)

Edward Teller

- Generally favored hawkish policies: “the only route to security was through better weapons” (Wellerstein)
- A prima donna during the Manhattan Project; he only wanted to work on the “Super” (what later became known as the H-bomb)
- “. . . blamed at Los Alamos for leading the laboratory, and indeed the whole country, into an adventurous programme on the basis of calculations, which he himself must have known to have been very incomplete.” (Bethe)
- Helped strip Oppenheimer of his security clearance, partly because Oppenheimer opposed a (premature) crash program to develop an H-bomb
- Deceived people about the likely success of X-ray lasers in Reagan’s anti-missile system (the “Strategic Defense Initiative” (SDI), better known as “Star Wars”)

Enough said. . .

Von Neumann to Ulam: Icicles are Forming



- Often called the “father of the Soviet H-bomb”
- Developed it for Stalin, because the Soviet Union felt threatened by the West
- In 1948, he declined a request to join the Communist Party, telling one of Beria’s generals “a number of its past actions seemed wrong to me and I feared that I might have additional misgivings at some future time” (Rhodes, *Dark Sun*)
- Later became a prominent dissident, and an advocate for disarmament and human rights
- Awarded the 1975 Nobel Peace Prize

Recombinant DNA

- In 1974, biologists called for a moratorium on research on recombinant DNA until the safety of such research could be assessed, and perhaps better procedures devised
- Most scientists around the world went along
- This sort of self-restraint—not investigating potentially interesting and useful new science—was all but unprecedented
- A meeting was held at Asilomar to come up with a consensus

The Asilomar Conference

- Match restrictions to perceived risk
- Use a combination of procedures (i.e., limited access, no mouth-pipetting), physical controls (hoods, negative pressure, air locks), and biological controls (hosts that can't live outside the lab)
- Concluded that some experiments should not be done at all
- (Virus gain-of-function experiments?)

Human Subject Experimentation

- Formal restrictions on experimentation on humans without prior review by an ethics board (“Institutional Review Board” (IRB))
- Immediate trigger: the Tuskegee syphilis experiment
- Applies to virtually all human subject experiments, even something as simple as questionnaires
- IRBs must include scientists and non-scientists, men and women, people familiar with particularly vulnerable target populations such as prisoners

The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment

- 600 African-Americans (399 with syphilis, 201 without) were studied and tracked, starting in 1932
- None were ever offered treatment for syphilis, even after penicillin became available
- (The pre-penicillin treatment, neosalvarsan (an organoarsenic compound) wasn't that effective and was rather toxic besides)
- Local doctors, white and African-American, were told not to treat the subjects
- The study was supposed to last six months; it lasted 40 years
- Arguably, it was ethical in 1932, since there were no effective treatments then—but it continued long after treatment was available
- Even so, the target population selection was racially biased

Walter Reed and Yellow Fever

- Major Walter Reed was in Cuba, investigating how yellow fever was transmitted
- He concluded that human experimentation would be necessary to settle the issue
- Some of the investigators experimented on themselves—and one died
- Other experiments used volunteers—but were they genuine? They were well-paid
(<http://virtualmentor.ama-assn.org/2009/04/mhst1-0904.html>)
- Did they really give informed consent?
- They probably did a good job by the standards of the day

Two Scientific Journals Retract Articles Involving Chinese DNA Research

The rare retractions come after several scientists raised questions about how Chinese researchers obtained the full consent of their Uyghur subjects.

New York Times, September 9, 2021

China, Unhampered by Rules, Races Ahead in Gene-Editing Trials

Western scientists the Journal interviewed didn't suggest America's stringent requirements should be weakened. Instead, many advocate an international consensus on ethical issues around a science that makes fundamental changes to human DNA yet still isn't completely understood.

Dr. Wu's consent letters briefly mention gene engineering. He says he tells patients his trial is aimed at modifying their immune systems and doesn't dwell on the fact he is using an experimental tool. His explanation to participants, he says, varies based on their education.

"The Chinese patients will sign the consent letter," says Kedgene's Dr. Zhou. "But mostly they listen to what doctors tell them."

(<https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-unhampered-by-rules-races-ahead-in-gene-editing-trials-1516562360>)

Good Intentions; Bad Results?

“Knowledge,” Niels Bohr once noted, “is itself the basis for civilization.” You cannot have the one without the other; the one depends upon the other. Nor can you have only benevolent knowledge; the scientific method doesn’t filter for benevolence. Knowledge has consequences, not always intended, not always comfortable, not always welcome. The earth revolves around the sun, not the sun around the earth. “It is a profound and necessary truth,” Robert Oppenheimer would say, “that the deep things in science are not found because they are useful; they are found because it was possible to find them.”

Richard Rhodes. *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*

Approaching Ethical Issues

- What are the implications of your actions?
- Who might be affected?
- Do others with no stake in the activities agree that your actions are ethical?

Making a Choice

- There is no perfect foresight
- Even honest, honorable people can disagree about what is ethical in a given situation
- That said, there are some things that are never acceptable
- Matters are more complex when dealing with technical questions—technical issues are often conflated with moral and/or political views (i.e., should the H-bomb project have been started before the Ulam-Teller design made it clearly feasible?)
- But—you have to *think hard* about such questions

Questions?



(Great egret with fish, Morningside Park, June 11, 2021)