

1. Tell us about your centre, the *Centre for Philosophy of Technology and Engineering Science*. What activities are you currently undertaking?

The Centre, abbreviated CEPTES (<http://www.ceptes.nl>) undertakes research in the philosophy of technology and engineering science, and encourages scholarly exchanges between philosophy, engineering science, and social science. It includes twelve senior researchers and a number of PhD students. The research focus is on three key technologies: information technology, biomedical technology and nanotechnology. These technologies and their social and ethical aspects are investigated from the viewpoint of ethics, social and political philosophy, epistemology and metaphysics.

We currently have several funded projects, including projects on the relation between technology and agency, the construction of scenarios for ethical analysis of new biomedical technologies, the nature of engineering science and the anthropological and ethical implications of human enhancement technologies. A large project that I am currently leading myself is called *Evaluating the Cultural Quality of New Media*, and I'll say more about it in answer to a later question.

As a research centre, we are quite active internationally and regularly organize international conferences and workshops, such as, recently, CEPE 2005 and E-CAP 2007. In 2009, we will organize the 16th conference of the Society for Philosophy and Technology. We are always interested in exploring the possibilities for collaboration with other research centres and scholars, and you can contact us through the CEPTES website.

Since 2007, our centre also participates in the *3TU.Centre for Ethics and Technology* (<http://www.ethicsandtechnology.eu>), a new interuniversity centre of excellence of the universities of Delft, Twente and Eindhoven in the Netherlands. This new centre includes about forty researchers in ethics of technology, and is the largest of its kind in the world. Jeroen van den Hoven is its current director. You can be sure to hear more about it in the near future.

2. What trends do you see in the fields of philosophy and information ethics?

One trend that I am witnessing worldwide is a decline, or defunding, of traditional, "pure" philosophy. So-called applied philosophy, on the other hand, seems to be expanding, and one can see the emergence of all kinds of new areas,

like neuroethics and nanoethics, as well as growing interest in existing areas like environmental ethics, human rights ethics and intercultural philosophy. At the same time, most mainstream philosophy departments are still hesitant to expand into the area of applied philosophy, which is unfortunate.

In information ethics, one current trend is the convergence of traditional computer ethics with classical library and information ethics and media ethics, as information and media are increasingly synonymous with digital information and media. Another trend is that of converging technologies: the convergence of information, biomedical, nano, neuro and cognitive technologies. These convergences blur the boundaries between fields like computer ethics, biomedical ethics, nanoethics, neurophilosophy, and the philosophy of cognitive science, and this should make for some interesting future collaborations. A third important trend is the move towards intercultural information ethics. Information technologies are now key technologies in both Western and nonwestern nations, but very different attitudes exist towards them. It is increasingly recognized that there needs to be an intercultural dialogue about these differences, and information ethics could play a key role in such a dialogue.

I think the field of computer and information ethics as a whole has to break new ground as well as capitalize more on its past achievements. I feel that some of the research gets repetitive, raising and discussing known themes and issues without sufficiently acknowledging or building on existing work.

3. How did you become involved in INSEIT?

I am a founding member of INSEIT and have been active in computer ethics since 1996. I was researching the existence of values and biases in technology at the time, and Helen Nissenbaum's and Batya Friedman's essay *Bias in Computer Systems* inspired me to take this topic into a more practical direction. After my first CEPE conference, I decided to make computer ethics a major focus of my research - I liked the academic community and its research agenda.

4. If you could possess any power, what would it be and why?

I believe the biggest challenge facing humanity is the worldwide deterioration of the environment. So I would like to have powers to help create a sustainable society. The current environmental crisis results in large part from our use of technology to maintain a particular standard of living. The challenge for us is to create technologies and forms of social organization that are both sustainable and allow us to maintain an acceptable standard of living. In my current research I am studying the underlying issue here which is the relation between technology and

the quality of life. I am applying this research to information technology, but I expect that it could also be applied to environmental issues, and I may do some work in this area in the future.

5. What are your short and long-term plans for your scholarship?

The project *Evaluating the Cultural Quality of New Media* (<http://www.ceptes.nl/vici/>) is a five-year project that aims to investigate the implications of new media and new media culture for the quality of life and the quality of society and culture as a whole. The project includes three postdocs, two PhD students and myself; I am working on it for 75% of my time. We aim to develop a new approach within computer ethics that focuses on the prudential goodness of information technologies and correlated cultural practices rather than the moral rightness of IT-related actions and policies. Many publications are planned, amongst which several books, and we will be organizing two international workshops relating to the project at the University of Twente.

6. Who is your philosophical hero and why?

I think I am too much of a philosophical omnivore to have one philosophical hero. I have been inspired by philosophers from quite different traditions, eras, and philosophical specializations. Of the ancient and modern philosophers, I think I have been influenced most by Aristotle, Hume, Kant, Nietzsche, Peirce and Wittgenstein. In contemporary philosophy, there are many I can mention, such as Hilary Putnam, John Searle, John Rawls, Bruno Latour, Jim Moor, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, philosophers with quite different interests and approaches as you can see.