IT Research and Development: should there be control?

John Weckert

Abstract

Two views are prevalent with respect to suitable topics for scientific research. One, typically held by researchers, is that any topic of research is fair game for the researcher. The result of research is knowledge, and knowledge in itself is neither good nor bad, therefore there can be no moral reasons for restricting research in any area. The proviso of course is that the research is undertaken in an appropriate manner. The other view is that science, even pure science, should serve the needs of the broader society, and therefore the society should have a say in what scientific research is conducted. Some should be avoided or even forbidden because it is harmful or will most likely be put to some harmful uses, because it is useless and therefore a waste of public assets, or because other research is more important. This debate rests on a tangled web of theories, reasoning and assumptions. This paper will explore some of these underlying issues and examine the responsibilities of professional researchers, with particular reference to research in artificial intelligence.

Full Text: PDF