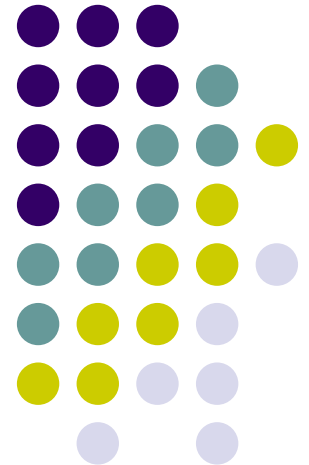


# Google, China, and Moral Compromise

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George G. Brenkert  
Georgetown University

Markkula Center for Applied Ethics  
Santa Clara University



# Google in China



- Google incorporated in 1998. Chinese version of Google.com in 2000
- 2002-5 Sporadic interruptions; blockages.
  - Google loses market share to Chinese Internet companies (Baidu)
- Jan. 2006 - Google decides:
  - Operate in China with Google.cn
  - Filter the searches – notice of blocked pages
  - No email accounts or blogs
  - Google.com remains available in Chinese

# Tiananmen Square on Google.com



# Tiananmen Square on Google.cn



# Google's Decision Protested



- Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Reporters Without Borders, etc:
  - Human right to expression/information violated.
  - Google is aiding repression of the Chinese people.
  - Recommendations to Google to adopt
  - Stop filtering, even if Google must leave China

# My Agenda:



- I. Google's response inadequate
- II. Google is complicit in human rights infringement
- III. Under certain circumstances and conditions, moral compromise is permissible
- IV. Moral compromise is justified in Google's case – it may filter the Internet in China
- V. Implications



# I. Google's Response

- A threefold reply:
  - Satisfy interests of users
  - Expand access to information
  - Be responsive to local conditions
- Inadequacy of response:
  - Doesn't refer to human rights
  - More information/kind of information
  - Local conditions may raise ethical issues

## II. Google and Human Rights



- Right to freedom of expression & information
  - UN Int'l Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- To whom does this apply?
- Private organization – not obligated to provide information
- Hence, blocking sites is not an infringement, in itself, of right of expression

# Google and Chinese Government



- Right to information applies to governments
  - Chinese government violates this right
- Google operates under authority of Chinese government
  - Google's actions are one means Chinese government uses to block information
  - If Google did not filter, its services would be shut down

# Google Complicity



- Is Google complicit?
  - UN Views:
    - Tolerates or Authorizes; Same Extent Conditions
    - Direct complicity
  - Obedient complicity
- Added Conditions?
  - Able to avoid filtering through influencing government's policies? (Santoro)
  - Able to resist retaliation? (Santoro)
- Google's filtering in these circumstances does infringe on human right

# III. Moral Compromise and Google



- Should Google withdraw?
- Individual judgments vs. All things considered judgments
- Google's situation:
  - Factual uncertainty
  - Nondeferability
  - Moral Complexity
  - Vulnerability

The Circumstances of  
Compromise

# Conditions for Compromise



- Fairness
  - Are others who adhere to moral rules unfairly disadvantaged?
  - Do specially heavy moral burdens result from adhering to moral rules?
- Harm
  - Are others threatened with serious physical harm?
  - Do additional harms result from the proposed action?
- Integrity
  - Does the compromise undercut one's overall integrity?
- Mitigation
  - Are there steps that may lessen the severity of the compromise?

# Moral Engagement through Compromise: Mitigating Efforts



- Filter to the minimal extent
- Reaffirm right of freedom of expression & information
- Work within Chinese system for change
- Indicate they filter at behest of government
  - "According to local law and policy, some search results are not displayed."

# Mitigating Efforts:



- Provide list of terms filtered and circumventing information
- Work with others to develop code of conduct that all would follow: Internet companies, national governments, EU, UN Global Compact
- Continuously monitor government policies & actions for greater deterioration in Internet freedom

# IV. Implications & Conclusion



- Google in China → A dilemma for Google and business ethics
- Current theories → Inadequate advice
  - Consequentialist or human rights
- Implications for business ethics
  - Context matters, but conflicts may remain
  - Complex moral situations raise the possibility of moral compromise
  - New frameworks needed