ETHICS AND INFORMATION LAW: THE INTERFACE

Pekka Heikkinen

Synopsis

I. The dominant legal perspective: law as a closed system

Concepts:

-(normative) ethics: what is right (act) in certain situations
-law: a formal set of rules defining what is prescribed/forbidden
-"information ethics" = normative issues surrounding information control
-"information law" = a narrow definition: copyright, data protection, freedom of speech, Act on Publicity

The dominant view:

-legal positivism: presumption that there is only one right solution that can be found/deducted from the legal system itself (law as a coherent system)

-justification: the autonomy and neutrality of the legal system

-problem: the inevitable conflict between textual logic and situational logic

II. How could ethics and law interact?

- is there space for ethical imagination in law, "the space to see" (Bankowski)

II.1. Ideals inherent in law

-the limits of law can be found in law itself

-basic rights and human rights: their ethical dimension

-gaps in statutory law

-copyright as an example: all is not protected ("ethical public domain")

- no definition what constitutes a "work"

-copyright protects action, not objects

-however, only action that is deemed original enough

-information (ideas/facts) is not protected
II. 2. Social construction of legal norms

-law in books – law as interaction

a) rules of conduct are codified as part of written law: written law follows practice
   -citation rule in the Finnish Copyright Act: “citation is allowed within the limits of good manners” ("contra bonos mores")
   -"fair" use in US Copyright Act

b) rules of application: practice follows the law
   -self-regulatory norms, all law is not given from "above" (by the state)
   -law as a formal system of rules is always incomplete, thus supplemented by sectoral rules of application

III. Ethical challenges of librarianship

-digitalisation of information and cultural heritage
-role of professional ethics, is there room for ethical deliberation vis-à-vis other information professionals (researchers, journalists)

-in Finland an attempt to create an own ethical code for libraries: freedom of expression and information as a basic value