Introduction to part II

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In the words of Nurminen, Berleur and Impagliazzo (2006:2) "how can we build up, whatever we may call it, an Information Society, a Knowledge Society, a Digital Society *for all*?" Surely, an ethical but also democratic process must be at the very core of this information society that we build? Such is the argument put forward by the authors of the second part of this book.

The unintended consequences of rapid technological development and explosive knowledge creation have decreased the area of personal ethical choice by directing the possibilities open to us and at the same time closing other possibilities. Personal and institutional changes – increases in roles and in institutions – have also decreased opportunities for personal ethical choice. Since role responsibility – which follows from these – is clearly not enough for the new technologically and socially complex times, we need an ethics of collective co-responsibility. Discourse, fact analysis, foresight, even constitutional change may be needed to ensure an ethically viable society. The difficult question is how to ensure the kind of public discourse in the new technical environments that will enable democratic decision making? Should the discourse in the public sphere (an increasingly large part of which is changing to digital form, especially in the Internet) be regulated and if so, how? It has to be acknowledged that discourse is always regulated in one form or another – if in no other way, then at least by the technology itself and by the choice of words used by those in power – it should at least be as free as is commonly understood and practiced by the populace.

In such a complex environment as the Internet, who has responsibility? The responsibility should only fall on the collective body of people affected; thus a democratic change is a necessity. However, counter to what Horner (see e.g. Horner 2004, 2005) has repeatedly argued, the authors in this section argue that we must take, and make use of, a predictive approach. That is, we have to make the best possible guesses on where the future will take us, based on a knowledge assessment of the technological facts, the decisions on the normative choices made through this discourse, and the collective normative choices of the people.

One way of ensuring an ethical and democratic participation in Information Communication Technologies (ICT) would be to recognize and adopt the idea of "value sensitive design". Based on public discourse, normative analysis and a democratic method of governance, the institutions governing ICT development can influence the direction towards which public funds and legal measures are put. The values of any specific company designing ICT artefacts cannot be determined, but the choices available to them can be influenced through ethical and democratic governance of the field. An analysis based on the ethical compliance of an ICT artifact is not enough; instead we need a proactive ethics. These artifacts ought to be designed so that they *enhance* morally preferred solutions rather than attempting to mitigate their socially negative effects.

References

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