

Module 7 : New Ethical Codes for New Technologies: Responses of the Civil Society Discussion and Forum

Lecture : 36

Course Title :Science, Technology and Society

Number of Lectures : 4 :

Sample Questions :

1. 1. What is meant by traditional ethics ? Cite examples from Immanuel Kant or from Aristotle. Is it related with personal and individual freedom of the human agent ?
2. Why there is need for new ethics ? What is meant by new technology ? Cite some examples.
3. What was the concern raised against traditional media ethics ?
4. Why privacy is a serious issue in Information and computer technology?
5. What is newness in technology and communication ? Answer with reference to mobile phone and communication.
6. What are ethical issues in medical technology ?
7. What is bio ethics and what is newness in genotechnology and ethics ?
8. Can there be a suitable response from civil society to the need for new technology and new ethics ?

(New Ethical Codes for New Technologies: Responses of the Civil Society)

*Whether we will acquire the understanding and wisdom
necessary to come to grips with the scientific revelations of the
20th century will be the most profound challenge of the 21st.*

(Carl Sagan)

Over the last decade there has been an increasing interest in ethics in a number of fields not traditionally associated with ethics, such as business, medicine, publishing, science, and engineering. In order to start one should explain what ethics could mean in the context of technology. Already in Greek philosophy ethics was studied and brought in

connection with what is specific to human beings. In the Aristotelian vision this is the capacity to guide oneself by using reason. In modern times the same connection is made, as this capacity is seen as the foundation of human dignity, and it has led to the conceptual foundation of human rights. One therefore could say that a certain behaviour or choice is ethical if it is in accordance with reason and thereby in accordance with the dignity of human nature. Focusing on our specific field of interest one could say that ethics in connection with technology is the art to make good use of technology.

Defining Technology, Ethics and New Technology

What we mean by technology and what is newness in it and finally, how and where ethics fits into. This is what we are going to examine and understand also in line with some responses, criticisms and observations that also reflect the concerns of civil society to the unknown risks of new technology in general. For making a harmonious blend of values with technology and with new technology, we must focus on our specific field of interest in new technology so that we can make ethical use of that particular technology, i.e. good use of technology that will facilitate our art of living well. The use of technology should objectively be good, that means all technical aspects should be optimized including related issues, e.g., the responsible use of resources and possible waste.

But the goodness should also appear in the subject, that is, in the human being who makes use of the technology. Only if technology is used reasonably respecting commonly accepted human values, i.e. according to human dignity can one speak of ethical behavior.

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On the one hand, the technologies are thought to be “revolutionary” that is, they are a challenge to, and a radical departure from, existing media and information systems and improve new practices and institutional arrangements.

In the case of newer technologies, advocates of the revolutionary perspective contend that, because the technologies are designed, built, organized, distributed, and used differently from conventional mass media and information systems, they have the potential to overturn the social relations, work patterns, cultural practices, and economic and political orders created and fostered by industrial-era communication and information technologies (Beniger, 1986; Castells, 2001; Harvey, 1989; Pool, 1983; Zuboff, 1988). This position has been characterized as the “discontinuity” perspective (Schement and Curtis, 1995; Schement and Leverouw, 1987; Shields and Samarajiva, 1993; Webster, 2002.)¹

If we now turn on the subject of new technology, first we have to be clear what is hinted at. When we began using computers, Internet, mobile technology etc. of communication and other uses that needs effective technological devices, these were termed as new technologies. In STS and communication studies, two main views of the consequences of media and information have emerged. On the one hand, the technologies are thought to be “revolutionary” that is, they are a challenge to, and a radical departure from, existing media and information systems and improve new practices and institutional arrangements. In the case of newer technologies, advocates of the revolutionary perspective contend that, because the technologies are designed, built, organized, distributed, and used differently from conventional mass media and information systems.

¹ The Handbook of Science and Technology Studies

Third Edition Edited by Edward J. Hackett, Olga Amsterdamska, Michael Lynch (Eds).

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Talk of new ethics for new technologies is not a recent phenomenon. With the advent of any new medium there is speculations about need for new ethics to deal with it. We also talked about need for new media ethics the way we often talk about new ethics for new technology. For example, with the introduction of each new media there is ethical dilemma of some kind, from print to internet we have witnessed tremendous changes in our life world. Concerns were expressed against print media or against the ICT time and again.

“ Millions of young girls and hundreds of thousands of young men ,” the journal *The Hour* shrieked : ,”are novelized into absolute idiocy.

Novel-readers are like opium smokers; the more they have of it more they want of it ,and the publishers ...go on .. making fortunes out of this corruption.”²

The concerns against the Internet also shows that people are affected by the media, the force of the medium and its impact is undeniable.“ Media, to employ Gilles Deluze’s term, deterritorializes culture and in doing so unsettles ethical certainties .And the Internet urges a rethinking of ethics, an innovation in the theory of ethics.”³

² Cited in Tebbel ,1975. Quoted in Mark Poster, “ THE GOOD, THE BAD AN THE VIRTUAL “, IN Edith Wyschogrod & Gerald P.Mc Kenny Ed. *The ETHICAL* . Blackwell ,USA , pp.181-196).

³ Mark Poster, “ THE GOOD, THE BAD AN THE VIRTUAL “, IN Edith Wyschogrod & Gerald P.Mc Kenny Ed. *The ETHICAL* . Blackwell ,USA , pp.181-196).

Similar is the case with many new technologies .Take the example of ICT ,for example. New developments associated with the Internet are so radical that traditional ethical concepts are useless in dealing with them.It neds a philosophical aspect of ethics that is to be pondered upon. Do we actually need a new ethics along with a new technology ? What we mean by new technology and new ethics? in every "new technology" case, mere philosophizing—no more than mere "professional ethics" on the part of experts—will not solve our ethical or social problems. In order to start one should explain what ethics could mean in the context of technology. Already in Greek philosophy ethics was studied and brought in connection with shat is specific to human beings.