

Preface

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Conference on Technology Ethics is an event that the Future Ethics research group have organised to promote both technology ethics research and networking. This year was once again different than any before. Whilst the last one was fully virtual, and one before ~~that~~ was physical, this was the hybrid one. This new normal – or should we say established abnormal – sets demands for our communication. It has been noted that communication that lacks the real encounter with people increases the risks of unconstructive and disrespectful behaviour as people can distance themselves from others (Zych et al. 2021). Likewise, people tend to divide people into groups such as us and them. The problem is that those other groups are in many cases seen either lesser than us, or on the other hand, seen as new and fresh, and thus better than us – just because they are different and thus fascinating. The cause of these problems is that we as people tend to judge others on a very thin basis while digital communication amplifies this tendency.

As Charles Ess in his keynote well portrays, there is, for instance, need for common ground, avoidance of misinterpretations, respect instead of insulting, and courage to meet people with different backgrounds (Ess 2021). Habermas and his system–lifeworld model of society is a portraying model when thinking about the changes technology brings to us. In the model, lifeworld is a description of the world where people encounters and communication occur. This world is observed from the perspective of people and their lives. The other side of the model is the systemic "world", which refers to economic systems, political systems, and administrative systems, where actions serve the institutionalised goals of systems. (Habermas, 1984;1987;1996.) Information technology is systemic as it is based on technological artefacts and systems. In those systems, the institutionalised rules are embedded. However, technology is used by people, and it is colonising the lifeworld. Our communication is turned online, we are meeting people virtually, and technology is twined as an integral part of living. The problem is not that we use technology, but instead that it may colonise our lifeworld. It might replace something invaluable, such as time from our families and friends, rest that we need, and free time by ourselves to find what matters to us. We should find ways to use technology so that it helps our lifeworld to flourish.

Fortunately, technology can help us and increase our possibilities in our world. We just need to focus on how we use technology ethically. We need guidance for that which remains the importance of Codes of Ethics. Don Gotterbarn (2021) presented this issue

in his special session, where he underlined that we need time. Likewise, we need individuals and groups that defend the rights of the people like Keynote Leena Romppainen, whose presentation gave us an overview of Electronic Frontier Finland, a registered association that focuses on defending the digital rights of people (Romppainen 2021). We need people to be interested in making the world a better place. We need academics, citizens, people from business and especially you as it is mind of the people where (and only where) the moral decision can be made. This is where this conference wants to contribute—helping people to consider ethics and technology. It cannot be outsourced.

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