

# Chapter 1

## On the Importance of Framing

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### ABSTRACT

*Forces have converged to produce stunning new technologies and the Information Age. As a result, we experience unanticipated consequences. Among the implications of this transition are a variety of ethical predicaments. This chapter introduces a process of conceptual framing. We classify this work as the inspection and consideration of our conceptual frameworks. We move from doubt about our current frameworks toward better ones. The way to make this transition is to render beliefs into ideas and then compare those ideas. Nevertheless, there is always an imperfect alignment of ideas with lived reality, so we must avoid dogmatic closure. The ethics predicaments we face are in actuality an ill-defined “mess” of multiple problems, the solutions to which affect one another. In response, we consider the processes of design for the future in the face of such ill-defined ethics problems.*

### INTRODUCTION

Every person has probably formed an opinion about being touched by information technology. Have the latest technological advances been generally good or bad? Could we have prepared ourselves better for them? Could we even have foreseen complications such as privacy infringement, identity theft, internet fraud, or failures with electronic voting devices? Now that we find

ourselves beset by such complications, how do we navigate our way toward ethical responses?

In the last decades of the twentieth century, forces converged to produce stunning new technologies with far-reaching implications for human life—how we work and play, learn and think. It has truly become an Information Age (Toffler, 1981). As with any new technology of such power, we have also experienced plenty of unanticipated consequences. Familiar ways of life have been shifting. Novel threats to social order are emerging. Longstanding beliefs about

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the nature of our world and our place in it have given way to uncertainty.

There has always been such a rhythm to innovation (Dewar, 1998; Introna, 2007). Forces converge to produce some novelty, some widget or process, and over time the novelty becomes integrated into the larger array of systems we call society. This integration is subject to a variety of delays, as the prevailing systems attempt to adapt themselves. In these assorted time lags, people struggle to figure out what is going on and whether it is even a good thing. These struggles constitute a delay in the process of integration, while human beings try to make sense of the implications of their own innovations. Gradually, humanity comes to absorb the novelty, bringing it within the comprehending order, and moves on—though usually not without a period of disruption, sacrifice, and stress. In some instances, we replace the novelty with something better, or we simply reject it. Today, we find ourselves still trying to integrate the suite of novelties that goes by the collective name of Information Technology.

Among the many implications of this new age are a variety of perplexities we can refer to as ethical. As we assimilate or discard new technology, we struggle to understand and frame the meaning of ethics in the new context. These problems are the main focus of this book.

In order to develop tools for analyzing ethical issues, we turn to the work of several scholars who study the interplay of ideas, innovation, and ethics. In this chapter, we examine the ethical implications from various perspectives – to develop ways to formulate, conceptualize, and describe ethical dilemmas that arise from the Information Age. Only then can we hope to arrive at justifiable responses. Our hope is that through this preliminary work of *framing* information assurance and security ethics, we can advance our *understanding* of information assurance and security ethics.

The sections of this chapter build upon one another in the following way. The perspectives we present come from scholars of philosophy

and organizational management from around the world. First, using the work of the Russian émigré, Isaiah Berlin, we consider the conceptual frameworks we use to think about ethics. Second, based on the work of an American, C.S. Peirce, we state as our goal the transition from doubt about our current frameworks to the adoption of superior ones. Third, relying on a seminal essay by the Spaniard José Ortega y Gasset, we argue that the way to make this transition is to remove our personal bias by rendering our beliefs and the beliefs of others into ideas and then comparing those ideas. Fourth, using advice in a cautionary note articulated by the Frenchman Henri Bergson, we recognize the imperfect alignment of ideas generally with lived reality, so that we might avoid dogmatic closure around any one idea to the exclusion of all others. Dogmatic closure would be unhelpful. Fifth, relying primarily on the work of management scholar Russell Ackoff, we try to describe the nature of the ethics problem of the Information Age and discover that it is what he calls an ill-defined “mess” of multiple problems, the solutions to which affect one another. It is not one problem we face, but many entangled problems. Sixth, we proceed to draw from the work of social scientist Herbert Simon on the processes of design for the future in the face of such ill-defined ethics problems as we seem to be facing.

## **BERLIN ON CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS**

Human beings at the current stage in the Information Age participate to a greater or lesser extent in conceptual delays as they try to make sense of its implications for ethics. They are trying, in the words of Isaiah Berlin, “to understand themselves and thus operate in the open, and not wildly, in the dark.”<sup>1</sup> This effort to understand falls under the discipline of philosophy, as described in Berlin’s essay on “The Purpose of Philosophy (2000).”

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