Information Society Commission

Ethics & Values in a Digital Age

December 2004

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Minister of State Tom Kitt TD with members of the ISC Working Group on Ethics and Values. From the left are Charles Stanley Smith, Brian Lennon, Minister Tom Kitt TD and Rev Dr Eamonn Conway.

1. Foreword from the Information Society Commission

1. Establishment of a Working Group on Ethics & Values

The Information Society Commission established a Working Group on Values and Ethics in February 2004. This was the final Working Group to be established by the Commission, and consisted of the following ISC members: Michael Byrne, Dee Carri, Eamonn Conway (Chair), Brian Lennon, Charles Stanley Smith and Donal Toolan. Brian McAufield and Petra Woods represented the ISC Secretariat.

Following a number of meetings and consultations, the Working Group formed the view that:

- The pervasive nature of technology as well as the rapidity of technologically-enabled social change presents new challenges to society with regard to values and ethics.
- These new challenges are insufficiently understood and attended to by public bodies.
- In its advisory capacity to government, the Information Society Commission clearly has a responsibility to provide fora for highlighting and clarifying the issues involved.
- Failure to attend to these issues could undermine and even destabilise the use and adoption of technology in society.
- Guidance on values and ethical issues is a felt need in society. The Information Society needs leadership in addressing such issues, and Government has a role in providing and encouraging such leadership.

2. Fora for Discussion of Fundamental Questions

The list of questions and issues that arise in any consideration of ethics and values in the Information Society is vast and deep. From the medical world to the world of marketing, from ecology to electronics, new, or at least newly-framed, ethical dilemmas and values issues are continually emerging, and *will* continue to emerge. Specific examples of such issues considered by the Working Group are listed in the Appendix. It was beyond the resources of the Working Group to address all the possible issues but it was felt that a conference attended by thought leaders in industry and education could begin to identify the tasks and strategies appropriate to government policy with regard to these questions.

It was the view of the Working Group, subsequently endorsed by the conference, the proceedings of which form the substantial part of this report, that concrete answers to concrete questions are important, but have only a limited shelf-life. More basic questions, even if uncomfortably abstract or somewhat theoretical, need to be surfaced and addressed. These questions relate fundamentally to the *kind* of Information Society Ireland wishes to become.

> "Is it possible that despite our discoveries and advances, despite our culture, religion and science, we have remained on the surface of life?"
> Rainer Maria Rilke

In other areas relating to the Information Society and the work of the Information Society Commission, the development of clear policy statements and the delineation of concrete action points might be considered necessary and appropriate. When it comes to issues relating to ethics and values, a more deliberative and reflective approach is required. Enforcement of ethical behaviour inevitably leads merely to minimalism; values are 'caught' not 'taught'.

Moreover, the Information Society is of its very nature pluralist and multi-cultural, and so, processes leading to greater understanding of and reflection upon diverse viewpoints are essential. The provision of fora for the discussion of and identification of values and ethical issues in the Information Society would in themselves be both informative and transformative.

Because of the complexity of such matters, and the perception that it is at least difficult or even impossible to reach agreement on values and ethical issues, some shy away from such discussions altogether, and suggest in particular that the government should leave the matter to individuals and/or private bodies. This view was not shared by any of the Working Group or by those consulted in the course of its deliberations. In fact, it was felt such an approach would not only be a lost opportunity but also an abdication of responsibility.

> *"The Net offers us a chance to take control of our own lives and to redefine our role as citizens of local communities and of a global society. It also hands us the responsibility to govern ourselves, to educate our children, to do business honestly, and to work with fellow citizens to design rules we want to live by."*
>
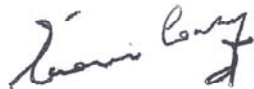> Esther Dyson, *Release 2.0: A design for living in the Digital Age*

3. The need for Leadership.

A well-informed society is not necessarily a *transformed* society; a knowledgeable society is not necessarily a better one. It all depends on the uses to which people put their knowledge; the decisions and choices that they make, and the values that underpin these.

As Minister Tom Kitt TD said in his Opening Address to this Conference,
> "Much effort is expended in using IT to make organisations operate better. But we need to ask, 'What do we mean by better?'. The more deeply we think about such questions, the more we realise that these are really philosophical and spiritual questions."

This report can be summarised as a call to each citizen to think more deeply about these questions and to take personal responsibility for the uses to which they encourage and enable technology to be put, whether in the workplace or through their consumer choices. It is also a call to Government to exercise leadership with regard to the kind of society Ireland is becoming, because of the often hidden choices we are making as we strive to become one of Europe's leading knowledge-based societies.

Dr. Eamonn Conway
Chair of Working Group on Ethics and Values
Information Society Commission

2. Summation and Analysis

**Barry McMillan, Centre for Culture, Technology, & Values,
Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick.**

I. Introduction
The Information Society Commission's conference, 'Ethics and Values in a Digital Age' (Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, 15th October 2004) was both a necessary and important addition to prevailing discourse on the Information Society. This was clearly evident from the responses and engagement of attendees on the day,

> "I think I have detected that [i.e. a sense of the importance of ethics and values, and arguments that go beyond individual interest] in every single speaker so far this morning, and I think that's a very heartening sign for the sort of work that could, in turn, come out of this conference..."
> - Conor Galvin, University College Dublin

and from the feedback the Commission received from participants subsequently,

> "…a very informative day, which gave plenty of food for thought."
> - Rutger Kortenhorst, John Scottus School

The stated aims of the Conference were:
- To address the question of how we can speak of ethics and values in the Information Society
- To identify the specific ethical challenges presented by the increasing dominance of new technologies
- To identify tasks, responsibilities, and strategies, appropriate to government in terms of providing leadership with regard to values and ethics in the Information Society.

Addressing, and expounding upon, these aims, were four speakers with four paired respondents:
Prof. William Desmond, Professor of Philosophy and Director of the International Program of Philosophy, Katholieke Universiteit, Belgium, whose paper was entitled 'The Need of Finesse: The Information Society and the Sources of Ethical Formation'. His respondent was Dr. Colman Farrell of SUAS – an organisation promoting service, leadership and global citizenship among young people in Ireland.

Mr. Martin Curley, Global Director of IT Innovation, Intel Corporation, whose paper was entitled 'Profitability Versus Sustainability'. His respondent was Dr. Paula Treacy, Senior Environment Officer, Waterways Ireland.

Dr. Gary McDarby, Media Lab Europe, whose paper was entitled 'Digital Prophets: Eating Locusts and Wild Honey Whilst Reading E-mail'. His respondent was Ms. Elaine O'Donovan, Managing Director of the OMT Group.

Dr. Diarmuid Martin, Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, whose paper was entitled 'Has Religion a Role in a Technological Society?'. His respondent was Mr. Brendan Tangney, Co-director of the Centre for Research in IT in Education, Trinity College Dublin.

A conscious decision was made to select speakers and respondents from a variety of backgrounds – a philosopher, an activist, a corporate director, an environmentalist, a research scientist, a management consultant, a Church leader and an educationalist. The idea was to bring a sufficient number of diverse perspectives to bear on the questions at the heart of the conference in the expectation that discussion would be vibrant and fertile, and that future directions for the pursuit of the questions might be generated. It is, however, worth noting two limitations.

Firstly, in the circumstance of a conference, diversity will always, inescapably, be limited. Important perspectives will be absent inevitably from any conference, no matter how wide ranging. The result of such absence is that certain significant topics or considerations will not have come to the fore or will not have been considered. Moreover, the corollary of such an absence is that certain views will have been articulated unchallenged or unmoderated due to the absence of those who would hold contrary views, have different experience, or operate from different methodologies. Such considerations are always relevant, but are perhaps more particularly relevant where the matters under consideration are ethics and values.

Diversity is also constrained by certain inherent biases and perspectives. All four main speakers were white, middle-class, able-bodied men, largely from academic backgrounds. Such factors will have resulted in the foregrounding of certain questions and approaches to questions, to the neglect of other questions and approaches. This observation is not a criticism of the content of this conference per se, but it serves to draw attention to the reality of hegemonic approaches on such matters. The absence of contributions from the poor, the disabled, people of other ethnicities, the educationally disadvantaged, the elderly, and women (though it is to be acknowledged that while none of the main speakers were women, two of the respondents were), means that there were important questions and considerations that did not arise during conference discussions. The obvious way of counteracting such absences is to hold subsequent conferences where such views can be ventilated.

The second consideration which arises (and which is the downside of the virtue extolled in the previous paragraph) is that whilst diversity allows, indeed is necessary, for a richness of content and discussion, that very diversity often acts (in a situation where the time-frame is limited) towards keeping any discussion which arises at a level of such mutually-agreeable generalities that the proposal of specificities or definite actions is stymied. At this conference the combination of limited diversity, plus the accommodation of the range of views expressed, functioned, for the most part, to keep the discussion at the level of general principles, rather than proceeding to specificities, tasks and strategies. Again, this suggests that there is a necessity for subsequent conferences on this topic to build on the insights derived here by focusing on the proposal of specific tasks and strategies.

These caveats stated, it is nonetheless clear that this conference represented a necessary primary step in the ISC's addressing of the matter of ethics and values in a digital age.

II. A Preliminary Consideration

In response to comments arising throughout the day about the nature of the conference title, Prof. William Desmond, Professor of Philosophy and Director of the International Program of Philosophy, Katholieke Universiteit, Belgium, during the final question and answer session, contributed an insight that provides essential context for this whole discussion,

> "People seem to talk about values as if they were some sort of things floating up there that we could all just pluck from the tree of golden apples or something, but I think that's a mistake…That's a kind of market image of values – that there are values there on the shelves and you can pick them and make your own choices and so on. We are already shaped by values before we become capable of that type of more rational, calculative choice. Values seep into and shape our souls before we actually have the freedom in that more self-conscious and reflective way to decide this way or that way. At that level we are socially shaped by the flow of values that are at play in our society…[O]ur lives are saturated with values in one sense, so the problem is discriminating between values that we consider to be worthy of a human being, and values that in the long-run lead to forms of life that are really not fulfilling for human being."

This insight is key to the backdrop against which any contemporary discussion of ethics and values is played out, and warrants contextualisation and expansion. It is one of the truisms of the modern, individualistically-conceived, self that we each are entities unto ourselves, perceiving, pursuing, and shaping our own destinies, and making allegiances and connections with others only as we need to or see fit – and for mutual benefit. Such an individualistically conceived notion of selfhood (often expressed through a confrontational use of rights discourse) now holds sway throughout contemporary Western culture. A fundamental reason for this ubiquity is that capitalism is now not only the dominant economic ideology, but the dominant cultural ideology of our day. As a mode of being, the individualist self is capitalist ideology personally embodied. Truly, we have become capitalists and contemporary life, in all its aspects, is now played out across a matrix of individualism, acquisition, affiliation, dividend and pay-off. We no longer understand only our economic relations in these terms, we understand our personal and social relations in these terms too.

Advertence to some of the experiences and outcomes of corporate capitalism is instructive here. Experience shows that unmoderated corporate capitalism results in an increasing rich/poor divide (nationally and globally), social marginalisation, ever-increasing consumerism, cultural homogenisation and environmental destruction. These negative outcomes arise because unmoderated corporate capitalism considers itself individualistically, and with a dominant concern for only its own flourishing and well-being. It neglects the social/cultural context in which it operates and ignores the consequences that its decision-making has for all those realities – human or environmental – with which it interacts. By wreaking such havoc, it ultimately creates the conditions for its own demise.

With these considerations in mind, we see how William Desmond's comments about "the market image of values" draw an important parallel with the negative consequences for human persons imbued with an individualistic, capitalist notion of

self. Thinking of themselves as self-realising, destiny-shaping, monads, they fail to see how they are connected and embedded within society, and the existential complexity that that denotes. The nature of our very existence means we are socially connected to, and have responsibilities to, more than just those with whom we have chosen to have connection; our development and realisation as persons is constituted by interconnectedness with 'other' as well as with 'I'. Consequently there is no such thing as value-neutrality. Because we are embedded in a social and cultural framework, we are always incarnating, manifesting, or espousing, values, whether we are conscious of it or not. We are not blank slates who choose, at some point, to espouse values. Rather, long before we consciously choose values, values, in some sense, choose us. The question then for us, is not one of what values do we choose, but rather, of discriminating between values in the pursuit of ideals we might think of as worthy of human being. William Desmond, again, puts the matter succinctly,

> "[W]ithout a vision of what the whole amounts to and to where it all leads, we tend to have a foreshortening of the perspective on human life as a whole."

III. Esprit de Géométrie and Esprit de Finesse
It is not surprising that William Desmond, as the professional philosopher on the panel, dealt with the notions of ethics and values with somewhat more specificity than the other speakers. Indeed, the key underpinning ideas upon which his paper rested – Blaise Pascal's concepts of esprit de géométrie and esprit de finesse – were subsequently taken up and reiterated by a number of the other speakers, respondents, and audience, through the day.

Outlining Pascal's distinction between the 'geometrical mind' and the 'mind of finesse', Prof. Desmond went on to elaborate Pascal's assertion that,

> "…when it comes to human things, the geometrical mind is insufficient. The geometrical mind deals with what is clear and distinct, what is manipulable, what is devoid of ambiguity, what can be subject to technique and scientific method. But when we turn to the human being we are dealing with something that is essentially ambiguous and equivocal, and what we need with human beings is what he calls the *esprit de finesse.* We need finesse to be able to understand the saturated ambiguity of the human condition, and the techniques that are appropriate to the geometrical mind are simply not appropriate when we turn to human things and especially when we turn to ethical formation and the religious nature of the human being."

It is not necessary that one share Prof. Desmond's belief in the religious nature of the human being, nor his (at least) implied connecting of the ethical impulse and said religious nature, to see the significance and insightfulness of his redaction of Pascal. The ethical questions that the digital age presents us with are matters not of *géométrie*, but of *finesse*. He continues,

> "The technical means available in the Information Society grow out of the immense developments of the geometrical mind, using geometrical mind as a broad metaphor for this sense of scientific and technical knowledge. But has our sense of the mind of finesse been as equally developed, and surely, given what I have already said, ethical formation has to do with finesse, not geometry? What would be the ethical finesse needed to meet the geometry of the Information Society, or is the geometry of the Information Society so much in the dominant position that it tries to usurp the place of finesse and

reduce everything to itself, and hence stand in the way to even recognising that the ethical issues of finesse are issues at all? It may be the case that we are taken up in the mindset that we actually can't see that they are ethical, they don't even arise, given that way of thinking."

In his presentation of Pascal, Prof. Desmond provided a framework into which key aspects of the discussion could be placed, explored and interrogated. Its utility was, indeed, illustrated by the advertence to the framework that occurred throughout the day, but perhaps its greatest merit was that its claim to validity could be based on rationality and logic (though obviously rationalism is not without its drawbacks either), rather than on creedal assertion. Many valid and insightful points that were raised by other speakers in the course of the day were articulated from the perspective of a Christian humanism. Whatever the merits of those points, one was left wondering how in a heteronomous culture such arguments might be presented as more than just advocacy, and be persuasive to those who are not Christian humanists.

In the remainder of his paper, Prof. Desmond extrapolated on his Pascalian framework by looking at the application of its insights in the areas of, what he termed, "four communities" – the family, the workplace and economy, the political sphere, and the space of ethical and religious service beyond will-to-power. Two further points emerge for consideration here. The first of these is what Prof. Desmond refers to as, "a certain foreshortened attitude to time". He describes this thus,

> "Certainly in our culture the emphasis is often on what is now, and what can be fast. So there is an emphasis on what is immediately available and what is immediately manipulable."

The difficulty with this creeping foreshortening of time as he sees it, is that much that is valuable in our lives cannot be attained in the immediate, and requires patience and dedication,

> "If time is foreshortened to what is just immediately in the foreground, the longer vista – which I think is necessary for full human flourishing – tends to not be given proper consideration."

As we become more intolerant of non-immediacy, we begin to lose those things that require patience and time. Ethical education (particularly of the young), and good parenting both require "the patience of longer time", he says.

> "If for instance in the intimacy of the family some of the fundamental value judgements are not communicated to young people you are in serious trouble in terms of the society as a whole. I don't think you can have ethical workshops later to make up for deficiencies, because all of this takes place at a very impressionable time of ethical formation."

A further point he makes, and connected to "the foreshortened attitude to time" he describes, is that of "serviceable disposability". He elaborates,

> "Modern democratic societies tend to be very utilitarian. They have developed technologies for their usefulness – for instrumental purposes, often tied to economic profit… I develop a notion of what I would call serviceable disposability as a kind of value, a sense of value that permeates in this utilitarian network. Something has to be serviceable, that is to say it has to serve us, it has to be of use to us in that sense. But with the serviceability goes

disposability which means once it serves its purpose it's disposable. We use it, we use it up, we move on to the next thing to be subjected to serviceable disposability. We may feel less ethical compunction in using things in this attitude of serviceable disposability but in fact we often use human beings with the same attitude. Persons are themselves treated in terms of serviceable disposability. Human resources that are to serve their use but once they have done so they are perhaps used up and disposable."

Clearly, notions of the disposability of technology have all sorts of negative implications in terms of consumption, waste and the implications for the environment, but if, as William Desmond suggests, the dominance of the *esprit de géométrie* means that we start to deal with each other in terms of serviceable disposability, then the wider cultural implications for the elderly, the disabled, and the infirm, are alarming. Indeed, one of the contrasts he offers to an ethos of serviceable disposability is the profession of nursing,

"Nursing for instance…is another profession where service is not a matter of serviceable disposability, it's a matter of an availability, sometimes beyond what your contract sets down, and making yourself available with a patience which receives no wages in the system of utility."

Having drawn attention to the distinction between the *esprit de géométrie* and the *esprit de finesse*, and drawn out some of the negative implications of the prevailing of one over the other, Prof. Desmond concluded his paper with a statement and a question,

"Geometrical enlightenment seems to produce a dying of the light. As our cybernetic geometry waxes, does our ethical and religious finesse wane?"

The broad assent with which Prof. Desmond's analysis and insight was met, was perhaps most succinctly summed up in the response from the floor from John Lawlor of e-net,

"I am really worried that we are in danger of trading innocence for bandwidth."

IV. Information Technology and the Question of Ambiguity
Mr. Martin Curley, Global Director of IT Innovation with the Intel Corporation, opened his presentation by explaining that he was offering "a personal perspective" and "not necessarily the opinion of my company". This point acknowledged, he did, nevertheless, represent the voice of corporate IT in the discussion. Unsurprisingly, his presentation was largely about the positive aspects of information technology, as he saw it. However, his assertion in the final question and answer session of the day that,

"…perhaps we need a new model…[C]apitalism will run out of steam. Growing, based on ever-growing consumption of resources probably isn't the answer."

came as a surprise, and perhaps lent a note of credibility to his claims about the growing maturity of corporate social responsibility.

Mr. Curley's presentation was substantially about how he perceived information technology to be transforming society positively. Noting that many companies now

spend up to fifty per cent of their corporate capital budgets on information technology, Mr. Curley outlined how the Intel Corporation had "developed a framework" for the pursuit of "win-win investments" that, "can transform a city, can transform healthcare, add significant value, but that the IT costs actually go down". Such an approach, he proposed, "could be used in the profitability versus sustainability debate". In his presentation, Mr. Curley offered two examples of "win-win investments". The first was a civic renewal project in Westminster, London and the second was the use of tablet PCs and wireless networking in a hospital in Israel.

The Westminster project was initiated by Peter Rogers, CEO of Westminster City Council. Emphasising that the borough has "very many deprived people", Mr Curley continued,

> "Peter's vision is that technology can really help the general standard of living. What we have been doing, sort of aligned with Peter's vision of civic renewal and service provision, is trying to build a technology plan, a strategic plan that could help transform Westminster. I think we have hit on a win-win business case. This case also brings up some ethical questions. Closed circuit television cameras is a solution that is being used in Westminster for the last number of years and its certainly driving results. There has been a twenty per cent year on year crime reduction through the use of close circuit television. It has led to numerous convictions. Using new technology, wireless IP cameras, the capital cost of installing these cameras is reduced by eighty per cent. So instead of covering just a small part of Westminster, the city can decide if they want to actually cover all of Westminster using these cameras – without any additional capital outlay. They have dramatically improved flexibility. Instead of actually taking two months to install a new camera, they can actually move them overnight. Recently they have been moving the cameras overnight to record drug busts. It's a great example of public private partnership. There is a visionary local authority that has a vision of transformation and working with companies, like Intel and Cisco, which are not getting paid for this, and is really looking to see how can we transform the city. Of course the results stand for themselves. This was a win-win business case because the city has been wirelessly enabled just based on this business case alone."

Mr. Curley was clearly very positive about this project, but did also note that,

> "This technology is very powerful but it's going to mean that value-based decision-making and ethics will become increasingly important in our society."

That he raised an ethical concern in this regard was important, but the presentation of a "win-win business case" did somewhat presume the outcome of any questions to be raised. The reduction in crime in the borough, and the resultant increase in quality of life, are commendable outcomes. Such consequences, however, are not the only considerations, and other ethical complexities arising need also to be considered. Obvious concerns and issues about privacy necessarily arise – not only as to the location of cameras, but as to who 'polices' them, who has access to the CCTV footage, where and for how long such CCTV footage is stored, and to whom access to the stored footage is granted? Additionally, questions arise as to who bears appropriate responsibility for public safety – the local area authority, the local police

force, or a private corporation? And further still is the consideration of whether a project such as this one represents the privatisation of the state's responsibility to its wider society? Clearly there are 'winners' here, but who they are, whether they should be winners, and who loses what in the transaction, all warrant considerable consideration. A consequentialist or utilitarian ethic is insufficient to parse the ethical complexity of this situation.

The second example of a "win-win investment" outlined by Mr. Curley was presented via a short video clip and illustrated, "an example, in Israel, of how technology is transforming healthcare". The video clip was an advertisement for Intel wireless technology, and was set in an Israeli hospital, where doctors and patients spoke about how the Intel technology had transformed their lives. The doctor now had easy and immediate access to all patient records – "Now, I don't know how I ever managed without it" – while a patient told the camera, "It gives me peace of mind". However, the video clip also raised a number of ethical questions on several levels.

As with the Westminster example, the only ethical criteria apparently applied to this project was that of consequences. Again, while patient healthcare and well-being have been improved, such consequences cannot be the only factors for consideration in such a project. In this instance, it was impossible not to be cognizant of the wider geo-political realities within which this "win-win" project is located, and the backdrop of political affiliations, and thereby exclusions, it potentially connoted – why this hospital, in this country, at this time?

A further set of ethical concerns that arose from this video clip was more immediate to the conference situation itself. Whatever the illustrative intentions of showing the clip, the projection of an advertisement in such a context could not be considered a neutral action. The audience was, after all, attending a conference on ethics and values. What values were being manifested in the projection? The audience comprised a captive group of people likely to be interested in the product, in a context where they were largely open-minded towards the reception of what was being presented to them. It was being offered as a piece of documentary evidence for a case Mr Curley was making, and yet it was clearly an advertisement. It raised the question as to whether this opportunity was also being employed as a "win-win business" situation. In the light of the use of this advertisement in this way, one could only feel a certain ambiguity towards the aspirations of corporate social responsibility.

It was peculiarly appropriate that the material in Mr. Curley's presentation should have given rise to ambiguity in such a manner, because ambiguity in relation to the use of information technology was one of the recurrent themes of speakers, respondents and audience members. In direct response to Mr. Curley's video clip, Ms. Elaine O'Donovan, managing director of management consultants OMT and respondent to Dr. Gary McDarby, observed,

> "[I]f we forget about nurturing, we are likely to be left with a set of tools that can do things like helping doctors to know about their patients a lot quicker, but which doesn't necessarily help them to care about them."

It seems apparent, then, that the ethical aspects of information technologies lie not primarily in the technology itself (though obviously there are direct ethical questions arising from matters of resources and investment), but rather in matters of utilisation,

adoption, and dissemination. William Desmond had also drawn attention to the ambiguous ends to which information technologies could be put. For example, on the one hand, the widespread dissemination and accessibility of pornography on the internet,

> "One thinks of the way the intimacies of love and sexuality have become manipulable images and commodities"

and on the other,

> "One thinks of the enormous amount of material that is available for people who are looking of information about educational material or health related benefits, and so on."

In similar vein, he noted the ambiguity that modern technology enabled the abusive pictures in *Abu Ghraib* prison in Iraq to be taken, but that same technology ensured that the photographs and the atrocities captured in them were unable to remain hidden. He also noted the paradox of how information technology has made communication immeasurably easier, and yet is also capable of creating "a kind of cybernetic solitude".

V. Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability

In addition to noting the benefits of information technology, Martin Curley addressed corporate social responsibility and its applicability to the question of sustainability. While noting that, "the investment community still largely ignore social and environmental issues", he cited the Shell Petroleum Company as a model of good corporate practice, observing that Shell talks of "people, planet, and profits" before going on to, in a positive light, quote their definition of sustainable development,

> "Development that meets the needs and aspirations of the present generation, and does not compromise the ability of future generations."

Mr. Curley developed his theme by elaborating on the evolution of the three generations of corporate social responsibility,

> "[F]irst generation corporate social responsibility. You could argue that this is mainly sort of PR so to speak and really was just an attempt to avoid the debate – where companies started to engage in alleviating social activities…Second generation, where the corporations really start to engage and start to look at, rather than just sort of tactical engagements or in charity or whatever, looking for strategic projects for improvement, doing some cross organisation stakeholder work and starting to look at sort of institution-wide policies… Third generation corporate social responsibility is where I think we are today. And I think there are just a few companies operating in this space, where global corporations are trying to participate in large systems' transformation and looking for solutions that are not only profitable but also actually are going to make a dramatic change…"

This raises the practical question of whether or not the rhetoric of third generation corporate social responsibility is, or will be, more meaningful than that of the first generation. The case for third generation corporate social responsibility was to some extent undermined by the unfortunate choice of the Shell Petroleum Company as an example of vision and good corporate practice. The ongoing hardships suffered by the Ogoni people in Rivers State, Nigeria, as a result of Shell's operations there, and

the continuing bitter struggle between MOSOP – the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People – and the Shell Company, are a potent illustration of the fears many hold about the operation of transnational corporations.

Dr. Paula Treacy, Senior Environment Officer at Waterways Ireland, was respondent to Mr. Curley, and harking back to William Desmond's *géométrie/finesse* distinction described Mr. Curley's presentation as, "definitely an exploration of the..[*géométrie*] ..of the information age". She was dismissive of the idea that Shell represents good leadership in the area of corporate social responsibility,

> "[H]e quoted Shell when he was defining sustainable development and of course Shell has taken that from the Brundtland Report [World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987]. The Eco Summits had actually defined that concept in recognition of the need to not simply focus on purely economic interests."

She continued by highlighting the need for transnational corporations to establish credibility and trust where their corporate social responsibility rhetoric is concerned,

> "We have lots of sustainable development plans that industry has developed and now we are talking about corporate social responsibility. The reality with the whole concept of that, is that there are two things: first and foremost, it should be driven by ethical investment, and bankers should be willing to invest in industry where there is a proven commitment to ethical investment. Secondly, corporations that develop corporate social responsibility policies should be held accountable to them. There should be indicators to show how they are actually living up to the kind of policies that they are developing.

Extending, into an environmental context, William Desmond's notion that information technologies seem to create the conditions for "a kind of cybernetic solitude", Dr. Treacy observed that,

> "[E]nvironmentalists comment that we live in an autistic age, and that this society is autistic in that it is removed, it is not connected – it lacks a kind of connection, a kind of empathy, with environmental interests or with other human beings. We certainly have a problem with fragmentation, and if we don't encourage integrated thinking we are going to have more and more of a problem."

In contrast to Mr. Curley's optimism, she concluded,

> "I am not convinced that corporate social responsibility and sustainable practices are actually going to be part and parcel of the way those corporations operate."

During the question and answer session that followed, Mr. Sean Coughlan, Social Entrepreneurs' Programme Leader with The One Foundation, expanded Dr. Treacy's challenge to the corporate sector to other sectors of society,

> "One of the things Paula finished with was the challenge to the corporate sector and the IT sector to start moving beyond paying lip service to issues like sustainability and corporate social responsibility. My comment on that is I would equally say that there is a challenge to all those other groups to start thinking about how they can start making this a win-win situation… [W]e can't just challenge the corporate sector to step up to the mark; in a way all

other sectors of society also have to step up to the mark and start thinking about what is relevant for the corporate sector and trying to find solutions or paradigms that would allow the corporate sector to win as well… [W]e should be adopting that challenge ourselves to help the corporate sector to find wins for themselves."

VI. Leadership

A theme which recurred repeatedly in almost all the main contributions and sessions was that of leadership, and of what leadership in the context of the Information Society might mean. In his extrapolation of his géométrie/finesse distinction, William Desmond considered the implications for the exercise of political power. He posed serious questions for the political manifestation of the esprit de géométrie,

> "I think that political power and everything to do with this is not reducible to the network of utility, and I know there have been voices in the last twenty years who want to, as it were, suck the political into the economic. But political power has to do not only with the management of economics, but also the sense of people, the sense that a people has of itself, and here, of course, the question of leadership becomes very, very important… Today one might ask if something like political power is seen too much through the eyes of serviceable disposability. Is service of the economy first, or is service of the people first, or is the economy a means of over-riding that service. There are public services and civil services beyond serviceable disposability."

He further elaborated on this vision of ethically sound leadership – leadership which manifests the *esprit de finesse* – by describing, what he termed *agapeic* (derived from the Greek, the term is taken from Christian theology) service,

> "There is a service which is not just servile, and is not just concerned with political sovereignty. What is at issue is an ethical service that extends beyond itself for the good of the other. It is less concerned with things or other human beings as serviceable for us, but of our being in the service of a good that transcends us in an ultimate sense…There is a service of generosity that is the core of all communications of value… This communication is at the heart of the family, of teaching, of useful service honestly rendered, of political power responsibly exercised."

This idea of "political power responsibly exercised" struck a chord with a number of other participants. Mr. Charles Stanley-Smith, ISC, articulated his concerns regarding leadership primarily in terms of global relations,

> "Somebody has got to start..[driving].. messages home about sustainability. For instance… if everybody in the world lived at the rate of the Americans, we would actually need to have eight earths… How do we deal with that? Do we stop the Third World countries that are developing? Do we just tell them, 'Sorry you can't develop any more because you are going to be using too many resources, stop it'? It is something for which we will need leadership. Maybe…as a small country with a dynamic area like this, there is an opportunity for this country to do something about it?"

Martin Curley suggested that, in the light of "abdication of responsibility to the free market",

"[W]e need leadership at government level, we need leadership from society, and we need leadership from corporations."

Mr. David Martin, a teacher at Mount Temple Comprehensive School, felt that an alternative to "the top-down model of leadership" offered the way forward,
"There is an alternative but I am not sure people are willing to risk it – and that's the inverted pyramid, a leadership that empowers people. I am able to be free from school today because the leadership in my school gave me permission to come, but it actually happened because eight of my colleagues will be covering the classes. They won't be getting any pay for that, and I will have to reciprocate in turn, to enable them. Our society depends on that to actually happen, but I am not sure there is the desire for that inverted leadership, one that will empower people…"

Not content with the notion that new modes of leadership should be just about 'them', the leadership theme was also, additionally, developed as a personal challenge by some speakers. Elaine O'Donovan expressed this approach succinctly,
"[W]hy is it we always keep saying how are we going to find the leaders? Who are the leaders for tomorrow? How will we educate them? It just struck me today that that is all about looking out there. That just brought me right back to this notion of intimacy and connectedness. Why aren't we looking in here, and saying, 'What's my leadership role?'"

and Mr. Brendan Tangney, Co-director of the Centre for Research in IT in Education, Trinity College Dublin, elaborated on the idea,
"[W]ho is providing leadership? Is it the policymakers? By and large I would say no, that the policymakers are at the head of the posse but they are not in any sense leading it. Is it corporate social responsibility? I was impressed by Martin Curley's talk but in general, maybe industry is moving in that direction but I won't hold my breath that that is happening on a global scale. Are we going to get leadership by looking inwards? That was a very good observation you know, we are all leaders in our family, in our workplace, in our community. We have a responsibility to act as leaders."

At the close of the day, Dr. Eamonn Conway, ISC, citing Gary McDarby's presentation, drew together David Martin's, Elaine O'Donovan's and Brendan Tangney's perspectives,
"I really thought the introduction of the word prophet was interesting…Very often we think of a prophet as somebody who is able to foresee the future. A prophet is actually somebody who has a particular insight into what is going on now, has some way of looking at that, that highlights things that are otherwise not being attended to or otherwise not being seen…[W]e had people speak today who were being prophetic, they were not just taking about nice things, they were being prophetic, and that connected with us. I think maybe the question we have to ask is, how do we discover in ourselves that voice? Because I think each one of us in this room has that voice somewhere in us. How do we allow and enable that voice – those voices – to be heard more?"

VII. Religious Perspectives

Though, on the face of it, the approaches of Dr. Gary McDarby, a research scientist with Media Lab Europe, and Dr. Diarmuid Martin, Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, might not be expected to have a great deal in common, there was, in fact, considerable commonality of approach, since both speakers made their cases on the basis of a Christian humanism. While it is true that William Desmond's paper, in places, seemed to conjoin the notion of ethics and religion – and in regard to his proposal of an agapeic service, drew overtly on Christian theology – his proposals were, for the most part, articulated in rationalist terms. Gary McDarby's and Diarmuid Martin's papers, however, were explicitly couched in religious terms.

Gary McDarby began his paper, Digital Prophets: Eating Locusts and Wild Honey Whilst Reading E-mail, with a clear advocacy statement for the benefits of technology,

> "I believe that technology can have a very powerful, influential, and almost seminal impact on the way we develop, and the way we evolve, and I hope some of these stories that I tell you illustrate that."

followed by a statement of his humanism,

> "[E]very single person matters. That, I believe, should be the measure of our economy and of our country. How are we treating everybody, how is everyone benefiting from this?"

and rounded out with a contextualising reference to his religious faith,

> "'Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do unto me'. [Matthew, 25:40].

The substantial part of his paper consisted of personal experience-based stories which drew together and illustrated these three aspects. The stories were engaging, moving, and inspirational. From this platform of Christian humanism, he then proposed thought-provoking and wide-ranging questions,

> "What kind of future do we want to create for the next generation? What kind of people do we wish to nurture? Where are these extraordinary leaders going to come from? What kind of values do we want to live by and demonstrate?… How can technology help this happen?… If you think of some of the stories I have presented to you today, we have fundamental choices to make about where we are going as an economy, and I think the ethics and values dimension on that is fundamental to how we make that choice."

He concluded by citing Mahler's use of the "great hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*" in his Eighth Symphony explaining,

> "[W]hat he was saying is, let's use our collective talents and our intrinsic creativity to be loving, in other words, aspire to those higher things that we know are essentially human."

Diarmuid Martin's paper was entitled, *Has Religion A Role in a Technological Society?*, and at times was rather akin to William Desmond's proposed *esprit de finesse*. Dr. Martin opened by stating that he was approaching the question,

> "…from an overarching aspect, that of the centrality of the human person, which is always a primary focal point when reflecting on ethics and religious thought."

This latter conjoining of "ethics and religious thought" was instructive, as it revealed the explicitly Catholic Christian perspective on "the centrality of the human person" that Dr. Martin's paper would pursue. As the paper unfolded it became clear that Dr. Martin's paper was an exposition of various aspects of Catholic social teaching with regard to the human person – namely, "the inherent dignity of every person", "the universal destination of the goods of creation", and "the preferential option for the poor". This unpacking of Catholic moral teaching, while expertly and clearly done, did implicitly raise the question of how the articulation of explicitly interest-laden perspectives might also still be considered to be "overarching".

Importantly, Dr. Martin noted the reality of contemporary ethical pluralism,
> "[T]here are various views of ethics… [T]he range of issues to be covered in an ethical reflection on the Information Society is much wider than might appear at first sight, or if looked at from just one single viewpoint."

However, given this acknowledgement of the social reality of a plurality of ethics and ethical frameworks, and of the problem of examining ethical questions "from just one single viewpoint", Dr. Martin's paper did not attempt to address the question of why Christian humanism should hold eminence in a context of competing moralities.

While many of the valuable insights in Dr. Martin's paper were derived from Catholic social teaching, they were not dependent on it for their validity. His proposal of "win-win" situations, for example, was much more broadly-based and socially aware than had been previously expressed during the day,
> "There can be enlightened policies which are win-win in the cooperation between countries which are highly developed in information technology and for those who are at a lower level. Increasing information literacy worldwide is good for people, and it is good for economies."

Similarly, his description of the domino-effect of the digital divide was clear and incisive,
> "[W]hen we talk about the digital divide we are not just talking about communications technology on its own. A digital divide influences a whole series of areas in society where information technology is crucial. Where a digital divide exists, other divides will abound: there will be an educational divide, a health divide, an employment divide, an infrastructure divide. In today's world the victims of a digital divide are destined to increasing marginalisation in so many areas."

In addition, he observed that our recognition that exclusion is a moral evil concomitantly requires of us that, "we have to work to show that inclusion is a primordial ethical value", and asserted that, "the fundamental ethical challenge of the digital age is equitable access."

Gary McDarby and Diarmuid Martin's articulation of their ethics on explicit and specific faith terms had the advantage of lending their proposals a certain solidity,

cohesion, and inspirational quality. However, it also raised the spectre of the potential ineffectiveness and non-persuasiveness of their proposals to those not sharing their faith vision. This reality represents a daunting challenge to those who would articulate their ethics from an explicitly religious perspective – if the ethics proposed rely on a specific faith-adherence in order to make sense, are such ethics doomed to be persuasive only to those sharing the same faith?

Mr. Brendan Tangney, Co-director of the Centre for Research in IT in Education, Trinity College Dublin was respondent to Dr. Martin. He observed,

> "He not going to change the world by talking to a couple of like-minded people in a room like this. He is not going to change society by speaking from the pulpit in the way that they have been speaking for the past 'x' number of years. That is not going to bring about the change, because the people that you need to talk to aren't going there anyway."

and he argued that Dr. Martin's exposition of Catholic social teaching had failed to address the question of religion's role in the Information Society,

> "Of course it has a role… The question is how is that role going to be manifested, and how is it going to be made effective and real and actual? How is going to make a difference? That question wasn't answered."

Noting that, "there is a vacuum out there, and that vacuum is being filled by need, greed, fear, and consumption", and that "public opinion left to its own devices will go for the lowest common denominator", Mr. Tangney asserted that the challenge facing religion is the same challenge that faces all sectors of society,

> "The challenge facing us, facing the Information Society Commission, the challenge facing the people from this conference, the challenge facing the Church, is how are we going to provide initiative and leadership in this current era?"

VIII. Conclusions

As outlined at the beginning of this paper, the stated objectives of this conference were:

- To address the question of how we can speak of ethics and values in the Information Society
- To identify the specific ethical challenges presented by the increasing dominance of new technologies
- To identify tasks, responsibilities, and strategies, appropriate to government in terms of providing leadership with regard to values and ethics in the Information Society.

It is evident that the first of these objectives was met, the second partially met, but that the third remains a challenge. In the light of these outcomes, it becomes clear that this conference has presented a solid platform on which to build, and from which to pursue outstanding matters and questions – particularly the issues of unaddressed perspectives, and of the identification of specific tasks, responsibilities, and strategies appropriate to government.

Two reports which could assist in regard to the latter are the ISC report, eInclusion: Expanding the Information Society in Ireland (2003), and the EU Council

(Employment, Social Policy, Health, and Consumer Affairs) Joint Report by the Commission and the Council on Social Inclusion (2004).

Additional topics which were touched on at the conference and which warrant further exploration include the role of public opinion in the formation of public policy, the distinctness of ethics and religion, the role of education, the question of gender in relation to information technology, the reality of moral vacuum, accommodation of difference, and the matter of diversity. All of these topics provide valuable pointers for the direction of future discussion.

Finally, it is perhaps appropriate that the last word should go to Dr. Eamonn Conway, Chair of the ISC Working Group on Ethics and Values,

> "Putting it quite bluntly there are people who benefit from us not asking the kind of questions we have asked today, and there are bodies that benefit from us not asking these questions today. And there is probably…a less than fully human part of ourselves, that is comfortable with us not asking the kind of questions we are asking here today. But I think we have begun a conversation."

Note: All quotations are drawn from audio recordings of the conference taken on the day.

3. Opening Remarks

Minister of State, Tom Kitt, TD

There have been huge changes in Irish society in the last 30 years. In economic terms, we have moved from being a predominantly agriculturally based society to one increasingly based on knowledge. This has had a profound effect, both economically and socially, as can be seen in our major economic growth, improved living standards, increasing affluence, changing attitudes and behaviour. Modern information and communications technologies have been a major driver of this change. The emergence of the knowledge economy is bringing about a fundamental reshaping of our global society. This transformation affects how we organise ourselves, relate to each other, and develop as a society.

Knowledge has always been a driver of economic and social development. Earlier societies depended on knowledge of how to hunt, how to farm, how to build, how to manufacture. However, the capacity to manipulate, store, and transmit large quantities of information cheaply has increased at a staggering rate over recent years. Our digital age has seen a new intensity in the application of knowledge to economic activity, to the extent that it has become the predominant factor in the creation of wealth. It is estimated that between seventy and eighty per cent of economic growth is due to new and better knowledge.

Knowledge has become a key resource. Globally, intellectual property is displacing physical property in importance. There is an emphasis on policies which foster the continuous generation of knowledge and pursuit of learning.

So what, you may ask, has all this to do with values and ethics? Kofi Annan answered this question when he said
"Information technology…is a powerful force that must be harnessed to our global mission of peace and development. This is a matter of both ethics and economics; the new economy can only be productive and sustainable if it spreads worldwide and responds to the needs and demands of all people."

In my previous post as Minister of State in the Department of Foreign Affairs, I established a high level Task Force to advise on the preparation of an ICT strategy for Development Cooperation Ireland. The Taskforce produced a number of recommendations to assist developing countries in their use of ICTs to promote economic and social development. When applied with vision, ICTs have the potential to advance learning, empower the poor, raise living standards, promote greater gender equality and end the digital divide between rich and poor. These are important values that we all subscribe to.

All knowledge and learning depends ultimately on people. The first phase of the Information Society focused on the development of technology, such as network connections. In the second phase, which has now begun, the focus is shifting to larger social questions and changing the ways in which we operate.

Much effort is expended in using IT to make organisations operate better. But we need to ask, "what do we mean by better?". The more deeply we think about such

questions, the more we realise that these are really philosophical and spiritual questions. To take a simple example, judicious use of IT can lead to better, more efficient organizations, where we can make more money or get more time off. But why do we want more money in the first place and what will we do with our free time? What actually matters to people? What makes us truly happy?

Ireland has progressed quickly and we have now reached a most interesting and rewarding phase in our development. However this process has not been entirely painless, and institutions are faced with the challenge to re-connect to the lived experience of people.

In tandem with a trend towards increased specialisation there is a recognition that many of our problems require holistic integrated solutions. This conference is an excellent example of such a cross-sectoral approach. To discuss the impact of technology on our ethics and values we need input from philosophers, business people, research scientists, theologians, social partners and others. This broad range of views should make for a lively debate and I look forward to hearing about the results of that debate in the near future.

4. The Need of Finesse:
   The Information Society and the Sources of Ethical Formation

Prof. William Desmond, Institute of Philosophy, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium

Introduction

Human beings are ethical creatures by nature, concerned with right and wrong, better and worse, what is worthy and worthless. Every human being is formed with some sense of these differences. There is no human being that is neutral with respect to some ethical formation, even though there might be different systems of ethical formation. How does the information age have an effect on processes of ethical formation?

The recent explosion of developments in cybernetics has entailed remarkable transformations of daily life around the globe. But the computer age is itself the result of an immense preparation of an indirect sort. I mean the long-developing achievements in science and technology that undergird a surface that itself fosters the shortening of our perspective of time, itself inseparable from our being sometimes being taken over by a demand for immediate solutions to problems and by an instrumental orientation to things. There is a paradox here: the longer patience that leads to these amazing cybernetic instruments itself can risk undermining the disciplined patience that serves all human achievement, in the long run.

I will say something about how the information society affects, often in unacknowledged and indirect ways, how we think about ourselves, and hence also affects how the process of ethical formation takes place in keeping with our self-understanding. Having first said something about some of the contemporary widespread conditions that influence our ethical formation, I will say something about the sources of ethical formation, in relation to different communal intermediations of ethical value: the family, the economic network of instrumental relations, political community, ethical and religious community (Desmond: 2001, Part IV). Given limitations of space, only a few remarks about each will be possible.

Some Relevant Contemporary Conditions

The following are some of the contemporary conditions I think we need to take into account. First, there is the immense proliferation of different knowledges, a diversity that seems not easy to discriminate in terms of a hierarchy of higher and lower value, more or less ethically essential, peripheral and core. Some post-moderns celebrate sheer diversity, but this is literally undiscriminating.

Second, there is the superior prestige enjoyed by more objectifying forms of knowledge and practice. The information society is impossible without the hard sciences, with the social benefits they yield in terms of technology, medicine, and so forth. This prestige tends to sideline some traditional ideals of ethical formation, for instance, those with a more explicitly humanistic and religious slant. This is a long-running problem about the tensions and relations between the so-called 'two cultures' – the humanistic and the scientific-technical. The availability of instruments of

information gathering and so on, have affected these two cultures, and yet the more objectifying forms of knowledge and practice tend to have the clear edge in prestige.

Third, there is a new form of the elitism of the specialist. The traditional elitisms have perhaps dissolved, and yet despite the official rhetoric of equality and democracy, the information age generates its own specialists and elites, for instance, those who have access to, and master, the media of communication. In fact, most human beings are recipients of the results – users rather than generators or creator. Inevitably the stronger power of initiative and control must lie with the latter. This elitism of the specialist, often hidden or masked by the rhetoric of democratic equality, is in tension with more traditional ideals of humanistic formation and education. The latter, for instance, were not always directly tied to an immediately practical function in society – the point was the cultivation of some sense for the human whole, and indeed the whole in general. This new specialism is often advocated in terms of economic benefits, but without the vision of what it all amounts to, and to where it all leads, we are fore-shortening our perspective on human life as a whole.

Fourth, there is a widespread emphasis on the instrumental value of knowledges, most evidently with the way science itself more and more seems to serve the technical and economic consequences it opens up, consequences more and more calculated into the enterprise of scientific knowing from the outset, which less and less sets out simply to see or simply to know. Everything has a purpose, but sometimes there are, so to speak, purposeless purposes, such as simply to know the truth, and these purposes often, in the longer run, serve a richer sense of human existence. Such purposeless purposes are now too easily sidelined.

Fifth, there is a stress on the more immediately relevant to the neglect of longer vistas. This follows the instrumentalisation of knowledges, for the longer vista, the longer run, often demands a faith in truth or good that is not immediately satisfied or confirmed. This is most evident with excellences that require an enormously long discipline and patience before the realization of human powers achieves its proper flourishing. Think of the long time needed to master the playing of the violin, for instance.

Sixth, we are subject to the press on time. This is not unconnected to the above, and the fact that our forms of democracy tend to be captive to the short term. Nevertheless, the achievement of the subtler, more finessed excellences of the human being require not only talent, and skill, but the willingness to wait a long time for the full 'pay-off'. Waiting does not mean doing nothing, but rather the opposite, doing what is necessary for the goal to be achieved, and not being panicked into giving up when the first inevitable stresses and disappointments appear. The shorter, more immediate view also shortens the constancy of our commitments to such achievements. Always on the move, we know perhaps immediately where we are going, but of the longer run we are often utterly thoughtless.

Seventh, there is the democratisation of life, potentially on a global scale, and not just in economic terms, but in terms of the recognition that all humans have some rightful claim on the fuller promise of human flourishing. This democratic pluralisation creates the problem of how to make more universally available, educational, economic, social, and political opportunities, that in the past often served the few or

an aristocratic minority. Are the ethical ideals of qualitative excellence redundant when we turn to the 'many' – and this understood in the enormously pluralised sense of our current globalising world? This last point is crucial, for it brings out more clearly the difficulty with an ethical formation that is the servant of the highest excellences, while also serving the largest number of humans possible. Can the quality of the first be harmonised with the quantity of the second, or must something give? Is there such a thing as a democratic aristocracy of qualitative excellence, or is everything indifferently of equal worth to everything else? If so, all things being equally worthy, all things are equally worthless. How are we to move beyond earlier social elitisms without abandoning the democratic aristocracy of qualitative excellence?

These are just some of the contemporary conditions that we face in the information age and which pose questions for ethical formation. There are more, and these have more direct bearing on the process of ethical formation, formal and informal, but perhaps it is best to note them as we proceed further. Even if life often seems to groan under the tyranny of immediacy, the expanding reign of instrumental exploitation, and a coarsening of the finesse needed for moral discernment, something more is not only felt as a need, but can be seen to be at work in its own incognito way. Something other is at work, often anonymously, and preventing that collapse into meaninglessness that human life comes to, without some fidelity to the higher excellences promised by an ethical formation worthy of the name.

'Geometry' and Ethical 'Finesse'
I want to step back briefly and say one or two words about the more indirect sources of the information age itself. This is a large issue, but I want to recall that its sources are in the human being's ability to calculate and determine things according to a binary logic in which to the utmost extent possible all ambiguity is excluded, and what is to be reckoned is reduced to the utmost of univocity. This has its roots in philosophical ideals of rationality, of logic, of clear and distinct and univocal cognitions, ideals themselves at the roots of developments in scientific and technical thinking, particularly in modernity.

One might think the information society primarily makes available an array of advanced technical means of information gathering, storage, communication, and so on, that are ethically neutral. The same technical means might be used, for instance, for totalitarian political purposes as for democratic. Does this not indicate an ethical-political neutrality? At one level it seems we are dealing with powerful means that can be directed to different ends. However, I would like to say first, that these developments have roots in something that is not ethically innocent about how we think of ourselves. And second, that that there is another level in which the characteristics of the information age have an effect on the ways in which ethical 9999formation henceforth takes place. It follows from a way of thinking about ourselves and the world; and it affects the way we think about ourselves, both individually and communally. I will say something about this connection of the information society and ethical formation at these two levels of sources and effects.

I think here we have to make use of a distinction similar to the one Blaise Pascal offers between what he calls the *esprit de géométrie* and the *esprit de finesse*: the 'geometrical' mind and the mind of 'finesse'. Pascal was a great scientist and

mathematician and indeed the inventor of the first calculating machine. He was aware of the stringent requirements in this domain, among which are the exclusion of irrelevant ambiguities, and the subjection of inquiry to disciplined investigation, in which the irrelevant intrusion of human, all-too-human, factors has to be prevented. He uses the terms the 'geometrical' mind to refer to such an approach to things. But he believed we need something other than the 'geometrical' mind to deal with human affairs and the things that matter most to human beings, such as ethics and religion. We need the mind of 'finesse'. 'Finesse' can never be reduced to 'geometry'. More often than not for 'finesse', one must go to school with the religious thinkers and the poets, and those who possess practical wisdom or *phronesis*, as the Greeks called it.

'Finesse' is by its nature is an excellence of mindfulness that is singularly embodied. It cannot be rendered without remainder in terms of neutral and general characteristics. It cannot be 'geometricised'. We come first to know of it, know it indeed, by witnessing its exemplary incarnation in living human beings of evident 'finesse'. There is no 'geometrical' 'theory' that could render it in an absolutely precise univocal definition. It refers us to the concrete suppleness of living intelligence that is open, attentive, mindful, attuned to the occasion in all its elusiveness and subtlety.

We take our first steps in 'finesse' by a kind of creative imitation, by trying to liken ourselves to those who exemplify it, or show something of it. This creative likening renews the promise of 'finesse', but it also is itself new, since it is an openness to the subtlety of the occasion in its unrepeatable singularity. Singularity here does not betoken a kind of autism of being, nor does it mean that any communication of its significance to others is impossible. Communicability itself cannot be confined to articulation in neutral generality, or homogeneous universality. 'Finesse' is in attendance on what is elusive in the intimacy of being, but that intimacy is at the heart of living communicability. 'Finesse' may require a love before and beyond purposeless scientific theory, or practical technical invention. But how do you foster that love, if life is dominated by cybernetic 'geometry'?

In the information age we tend to reduce things to manipulability and control. To what extent do we do this also with human beings? From where do ethical dignity and respect come in an era of the manipulability of resources? A important issue for the information society is whether and how the 'geometrical mind' has effected the 'mind of finesse' – introducing not only complications, but misunderstandings that do not do justice to human beings as ethical creatures. As already suggested, the practical successes of the information society are grounded in highly sophisticated instruments of calculation, inseparable from the developments in modern science and technology that have defined especially Western societies for some centuries. These developments have made us look at ourselves differently. We tend to reduce things to manipulability and to resources over which we exert technical control. Does this also apply to human beings?

The question to be put in the broadest sense is the following. The technical means available in the information society grow out of immense developments of the 'geometrical mind', using 'geometrical mind' as a metaphor for a broad sense of science and technology. But has our sense of the 'mind of finesse' been as equally developed? And surely, given what I have already said, ethical formation has to do

with 'finesse', not 'geometry'. What would be the ethical 'finesse' needed to meet the 'geometry' of the information society? Or is this 'geometry' now so much in the dominant position that it tries to usurp the place of 'finesse', and reduce everything to itself, and hence stand in the way to even recognizing that the ethical issues of 'finesse' are issues at all?

The Family, Ethical Formation and the Value of the Intimate
The remarks above are somewhat general, so let me make some more specific remarks relative to concrete areas of ethical formation. Broadly, we might look at the sources of ethical formation in terms of four communities: the family, the workplace and economy, the political sphere, and the space of ethical and religious service beyond will-to-power. The whole sphere of education is another space of relevant ethical formation, and I will make a remark on two on it (Desmond: 2001, Chapters 13-16; Olson, *et. al.*: 11-24). Obviously, limits of space mean I can only make a few pertinent observations.

The family is the most elemental base within which human powers begin to flourish. What we live later is an inheritance of this elemental base, which may give us the ground on which later to achieve what lies beyond the family, though if there are deformations of human power at work here, we may be crippled by these. This seems private, but as is more and more recognised, if the familiar intermediation is not healthy, children have greater difficulties, all along the way, publicly as well as privately. The love of the other here is crucial: we are given to ourselves through these others, often in nameless, incognito ways. No child ever knows the full extent of what it has gained from or being given by good parents. The family has everything to do with nourishing young powers in a secure and protected environment. As Hannah Arendt, for instance, wisely pointed out, if we break down the wall between private and public we can deprive the child of the conditions required for its proper growth.

I will mention this one aspect. It has to be with the fact that the ethical intermediation of the family, while private, is more than private. This is clearly an area of concern in the information age, where the boundary between private and public is all too permeable, for good sometimes, but also for evil. One thinks of the power of television and the internet to set this boundary at nought. One thinks of the way the intimacies of love and sexuality have become manipulable images and commodities which one often finds it impossible to avoid, even if ethically one would want to dissent from the public manifestation of sexual acts. The intimate as intimate asks for 'finesse', but the loss of 'finesse' is evident when the difference of the private and public is overridden, for instance, by the internet. Parents are not always able or willing to exercise responsible oversight. Grown-ups themselves participate in the dubious overriding.

People speak of the break-up of the family, and clearly this is a complex issue. There is a kind of equivocity about the private. It might refer us to something full of the subtlety of intimacy, or to a withdrawal from contact and communication. Just because of this equivocity, 'finesse' is needed to discern the fitting response, and to see opportunities of communication when proper. It is undoubtedly the case that information technology has allowed families to remain in contact over long distances – I think of mobile phones, but also the ease with which email, and emailed photos,

and so on, can be sent. Distance from home is overcome by an immediacy of communication unprecedented in human history.

The other side of this facilitation of communication is the question of the degree to which the information age fosters a kind of merely subjective or withdrawn privacy. I mean one not full of the rich subtleties of the intimate, but a cybernetic solitude of the individual before its machine. Even in communication one remains alone, for the incarnate other is not there before one. Before a machine a feel for the subtleties of intimacy is not likely to be fostered. This may spill over into relations with others more generally. The ease and immediacy with which an image or screen is manipulated may dull us to the recalcitrant otherness of real others, truly fleshed human beings.

Think of this paradox concerning the internet. This is the product of advanced rationality, but it sometimes serves things not at all rational. This is one of the most advanced of technical means of communication and yet it is home to a huge number of pornographic sites. Hard calculative heads, on one side, and on the other, hearts a mess of exploitative eros. The geometry of the first is instrumentalised to exploit the appeal of the second, but with loss of 'finesse' for the meaning of the truly intimate. This loss of 'finesse' for the meaning of the intimate was evident in the way photos of tortured prisoners in the Iraq prison, *Abu Ghraib*, were both taken and distributed. The manipulability of images went with the manipulable degradations of human beings. That some of these images were (quasi-)pornographic, taken with digital cameras, and communicated digitally, gives one pause in one direction. But then there is the fact that the ease of communication meant that what had occurred did not remain hidden, and provoked an outcry of protest. And yet the worry persists about an unnamed collusion between cybernetic and pornographic forms of life. Without ethical 'finesse', does the possibility of cybernetic control hide a secret will-to-power, such that, without robust ethical 'finesse', manipulability easily degenerates into sadism and torture.

Once again, I am not denying that means of communication serve opposite ends also. As mentioned above, the ability to keep in touch more easily, sending photos, videos, and so on. Indeed some of the images of torture emerged for public consideration just through such communications. But, obviously, some of the individuals lacked the ethical 'finesse' to see that there was a serious ethical breach in the whole situation. Over the whole there is an essential ambiguity which is not addressed purely in terms of the technological means themselves, but requires something other – ethical 'finesse'.

One wonders also about, so to speak, an excessive individualisation of the notion of self-satisfaction and self-gratification (rather than a rounded happiness), and how this withdrawn privacy (even when fully in contact via the internet) makes us more than likely to feel comfortable with 'short conditional commitments' that we will set aside without compunction, conditions having changed.

Notice once again the possible reduction of our ethical engagements to something more immediate, and hence the fore-shortened attitude to time. We then prove to be lacking in the longer patience that is needful for the proper flowering of a family, whether of the relations of spouses to each other, or between the children and their

parents. Children need time. What is called 'quality time' is usually a nice theory offered in rationalisation for the parent's lack of time. Real time for children is when the parents are there enough to be forgotten, to be taken for granted. Using the television as a baby sitter is not quite it.

Perhaps we lack the longer patience, because our loves are short. Our loves are not long in the sense of constant and enduring enough for the longer patience which clearly the human being needs more than anything else. Everything in our time is threatened by such shortened love. Behind the shortened love is perhaps a lack of love, in the sense of constant commitment to what one deems worthy, deems unconditional. There is an impatience bred by the cybernetic age – everything must be fast and now. The patience of longer time is necessary, for instance, for a parent who will ask, 'What will I give to the future?'. One is responsible for another, and what is ultimately at stake is the gift of the past and present to the future. The longer view of time is called forth when we begin to live through the life of an other, the child, who will outlive us, as will the coming generations. If in the information age everything must be fast and now, how are we to find the resources for a generosity that extends beyond ourselves? One may not even be around to see the good done, or benefit from what in some small way one has helped set in motion. One might pass on a poisoned inheritance also, of course. A parent must decide: what do I take to be of true or ultimate moment, worthy to be passed on? The rush of the fast and the immediate do not foster the 'finesse' to help with this decision.

This is a question for education also. Normally schooling is considered an intermediate space between the intimacy of the family and the public world. Clearly this is too simple. Without familial support, public education is often less effective. Even the language of the public borrows from the first: we speak of the teacher being *in loco parentis*. This is the task: schooling as the intermediation of human powers beyond the intimate and the private. But if the ideals at work in the more public ethos are inimical to the flourishing of familial life, then it may be cutting the ground from underneath its own effectiveness. This can often well be so when the 'expert' replaces the teacher, and when parents themselves have not seen what a good parent is, and hence have no idea of what it means for themselves to be parents.

A study published not long ago in England indicated that most new teachers leave the profession within three years. What does it say when the brightest are not choosing teaching, or being attracted to it? One knows of promising young scholars getting jobs more lucrative in the private sector – and sometimes they make a choice because of an excessive bureaucratisation and administrative ethos that gets in the way of what they love, study and teaching. Teaching asks for a being for the other, as well as the love of knowing as an end justified in itself. Our societies tend to emphasize self and being for self. The immediate financial gain is not evident in teaching. But in the long run all suffer, most evidently in an information society which must wilt if the educational bases and resources are not renewed again and again. The best minds must serve the renewal of those resources, and not just their short-term exploitation for current uses. Or adjustments are made elsewhere which try remedial solutions. The loss of prestige and authority is connected with the phenomenon of 'burn out'. Once again the core issue is that we are dealing, not only with the present, but with a future beyond oneself, the longer run of human time. And with the question, 'what is worthy to be given on, to hand on (tradition)?'. Ironically, a kind of conservation is needed here.

Call it sustainable, durable, education. I mean here the conservative as the one who is worried about the future, one cares for the future enough to try and hand on what is good now, and what has been good.

Ethical Formation and the Network of Utility:
Serviceable Disposability and the Value of the Useful
When we turn to the world of work, we deal with the social intermediation of powers beyond the intimate. Economic relations, at a deep level, are based on communications, and not only on what we call the service economy. To give and receive, to make, to exchange and sell, all of these are communicative intermediations between many human beings, intermediations not devoid of an ethical charge.

Again, we are not just dealing with will-to-power, though human powers can be instrumentalised. Here in the more public world, the other is often the stranger, to whom we relate with a mixture of trust and distrust. The instrumental relation is unavoidable, which is not to say it is all. Human beings need to use things to be and preserve and perpetuate themselves. Values here are as useful means to ends. Education in an information society here obviously has much to do with the inculcation of useful skills that serve the flourishing of the everyday world – the prospering of the economy, and so on. The importance of a more practical education is here at issue. Like the family, this is a constitutive community for our being human, and hence will always have its place within human flourishing. The diversity of its formations depends on innumerable circumstances, each with different strengths and weaknesses. While modernity has lifted the burdens of work for many, we also live more massively in the world of work than perhaps at any other time. I mean that the intermediation of utility is now global through and through. Modern democratic societies tend to be very utilitarian. Information technology is developed for its usefulness, for instrumental purposes, often tied to economic profit.

An important issue is to what degree this dominance of instrumental purposes functions as the decisive influence on all the areas of human life, reformulating them in its own image and likeness. The useful is necessary, but not everything necessary is useful, in the sense of serving as a means to our ends only. In our time, a danger with the necessary intermediation of utility is that we fall too much under the influence of unconstrained instrumental attitudes, ending up in a society where worth and value are defined by what I would call serviceable disposability (Desmond: 2001, Chapter 14).

What do I mean by serviceable disposability? I mean something that betokens an unfettered logic of use. The value of a thing is alone its use for us – and we, 'us', are defined by some of the characteristics outlined at the outset: 'we' who demand immediate relevance; 'we' who are impatiently caught up in a fore-shortened view of time, and so on. Things are serviceable, but they service us. They are disposable, and once used, they are used up, and further than that for us, useless. Persons are themselves treated in terms of serviceable disposability – human resources that are to serve their use, but once they have done so, are used up, and disposable.

This is a complex matter, but I would suggest that 'use' is made possible by the fact that things are there on offer for us. Things are there, yes, and in a sense give

themselves, before they are used by us. They are available, present themselves as available, that is, disposable in another sense. Succinctly put, gift subtends use. What we receive from the bounty of creation or the world, precedes our creation of our own wealth from the givenness of things. Ethical education has to do not only with the necessary practical skills, but also with the fostering of mindfulness of this givenness and receptivity, and hence operates in the name of services that are not just a matter of serviceable disposability. There are services beyond serviceable disposability. These services are beyond a logic of use and consumption.

Notice how the dominion of serviceable disposability intrudes on the languages proper to the family, the school, the political community, the church and so on (Desmond: 2001, Chapter 14). Some reflections of this might be the language that assimilates the school or university to a business corporation, with the president or head as CEO. It is reflected pedagogically in the rule of educational 'technicians', experts who claim to teach methods or skills, not content – method that might be indifferently applied to any content. But this homogeneity is questionable, since ethical education as 'finesse' has everything to do with discriminations. The mentality of serviceable disposability is creating conditions whose consequences are becoming more evident in the West. I mean, for instance, the shortage of teachers in many countries, and the reluctance of the best to enter teaching. This is connected with the perceived loss of public prestige, and among many with a kind of demoralisation. Is there not here a kind of loss of prestige generally in the serving professions, such as nursing? Why? This service is not serviceable disposability. There is no deficit of idealism, but the deficit of social recognition of worth beyond serviceable disposability has an effect here. Again we find the shortening of time, and not enough of the social patience that works for the longer run.

At the economic level there is the ethical question of whether the great powers of manipulation released in the cybernetic age are made to serve the manipulation of human beings, reduced to human resources, and all of this without 'finesse' enough for the ethical issues involved in relating to human beings as human beings. The ethical importance of work, and its changing character is at stake. We can work from home, or work relevant to one country can be done on the other side of the globe. There are huge flows of capital, transfers of a transnational character, that can hugely impinge on local conditions. There are immense changes in the world of work, in some ways easing its burden, in other ways increasing it – in some ways unleashing great productivity and even creativity, in other ways introducing global homogenisations that, apart from brand name differences, testify to an increasing sameness, or univocalising of life in the world. In addition, workers themselves as units of production are valued for their service but they also come under the dominance of serviceable disposability. Serviceable when they serve a certain economic purpose, and disposable when they have served their usefulness.

The need for the fast and the immediate also means there is a principle of obsolescence at work. The shelf life of a human being is sometimes short. Life in its own last phases incarnates its own obsolescence, but there can be values at work in aging relevant to ethical 'finesse'. But getting old, we are no longer as useful in the same way. Yet there is a 'finesse' that can come with age, and a 'finesse' that sees the value of age. Cybernetic culture is often oriented to the new and the young. Again the

issue comes up of patience and impatience, the shortening of our time frame, the loss of ethical values that require a life long of cultivation.

Of course, there is ambiguity once again in this too. As the population greys, older persons will perhaps be kept working, whether they like it or not. I would not call this forced labour, but there is something peculiar about our world where, having lifted the burden of one kind of labour, we impose burdens of other kinds of labour. It is not clear if we are doing a good 'job' in dealing with this. If there is the granting of a truer leisure, this will require changes in what is deemed worthy or more worthy, perhaps reflecting more the full cycle of a human existence from birth to death. It is true that older, greyer persons do not want to be old and grey. But mutton botoxed as lamb is not a beautiful example of 'finesse'.

Political Community and Erotic Sovereignty:
Ethical Formation and the Value of Immanent Excellence
Further than the more intimate values we often associate with the family and personal relations, and beyond the values of usefulness we associate with work and economics, there are values of a public character that bear on what a community deems as of intrinsic worth in immanently defining itself. In this regard I speak of what I call the community of erotic sovereignty (Desmond: 2001, Chapter 15). When I say erotic, I do not mean just the sexual, and least of all 'erotic' in the coarsened, not to say debased, form that is more and more prevalent. I mean something more like the Greek sense of eros – the full sweep of human desire and self-transcending is at stake, the full sweep of human desire in its integrity and multiplicity, self-surpassing desire seeking excellence, and in some exemplary instances, actually attaining some achieved excellence. What I mean by erotic sovereignty has to do with the communal intermediation of intrinsic or immanent excellence. This is not defined simply by instrumental utility, though in its own way it may be eminently useful. Most work is bound to the web of utility, but this sovereignty is a kind of freer play of power beyond utility. Sovereignty is not servile. It is not just a matter of means and ends in a relative sense, but concerns intrinsic excellences which are their own end. Sovereignty offers us the self-justifying excellences that the network of serviceable disposability lacks, and without which the whole of human endeavour seems finally pointless.

It can take different forms, for instance the sovereignty of a great work of art or artist, or of a great athlete who plays not just for professional success but for glory. Glory marks sovereignty. The philosopher might exhibit sovereignty in thought that shows freedom beyond utility. More usual sovereignties concern the intermediation of social and political power through its leaders motivated by a community of purpose beyond instrumental goals. Immanent excellence of this sort was at the centre of the great political societies of the past. Today one might ask if we see sovereignty too much through the eyes of serviceable disposability. Is service of the economy first, or first service of the people, and of the economy as a means to that overriding service? There are public services, civil services beyond serviceable disposability.

How might the information society impact on this source of ethical formation? There are many issues here, but I confine myself to one crucial question, the meaning of leadership. Is there any such thing as leadership in the information society? Obviously

there are leaders in technical advances and such like, but what of sovereignty in the sense intended? Of course, some commentators now deny the importance of the sovereign state in a time of globalising economics, when boundaries are porous, and international or multinational companies might have economic clout in excess of many sovereign states. Yet the issue persists, and the tangled relation of economic and political power is hard to disentangle. Marxists tend to collapse the difference of the two, in the direction of an absolutised public ownership of property and power. In global capitalism there is sometimes the collapse of the difference in the direction of an absolutised privatised ownership of property and power. How are politics and economics, power and ownership formed and reformed in an information society?

There is more at stake in politics than economics. Being a political leader is not being the CEO of a national economy. This is not obviated by the fact that there may be few political leaders on show. For politics also bears on how a people understands itself, its history and its future, and this bears on what it values as most worthy to be preserved and to be perpetuated. This is ultimately a matter of political 'finesse', not cybernetic or economic 'geometry'. For example, this is evident post-9/11 where, granted the economics of the situation, there is also a question of a way of life defended or attacked in terms of its immanence, excellences, or corruptions. Again observe also the doubleness, in that the Western way of life is supremely corrupt for some, alone worthy of defence for others. The terrorists made use of the network(s) of communication available in an information society, but these means served the end of attacking a way of life in the name of another way of life, and what are claimed to be its superior excellences. Erotic sovereignty has everything to do with the determining and deeming of superior excellence. The judgment between different ways of life and their claims to superior excellence is a matter of ethical, religious, political 'finesse', not a matter of either economics or cybernetic 'geometry'.

Sovereignty has to do with the social circulation of power by which a society intermediates with itself through its representatives. Information technology, ideally and in principle, facilitates this intermediation of social power, by extending the range of access to relevant sources of empowerment. We are conditioned to a rhetoric of equality in democracy but even this does not obviate the need of representatives to help effect the social intermediation of power. The direct democracy of Greece was built on slavery and hence lacked the more universal range of modern democracy. And yet in the latter, just because of its range, there will be some, or a few, who will have more direct access to the sources of social power, whether exercised for the benefit of the many or the few. There will always be the need for one or some representatives to be the means of this intermediation of social power. Hence the issue of leadership – once again a great question in democratic societies, and no less so in an information age.

The information age *per se* does not constitute the superior excellence needed for genuine political leadership, though it will influence the intermediation of power. Consider the use of the internet in recent US elections. Or consider China where access to the internet has been politically guarded. The technical means of getting a different picture of our situation does not constitute the superior excellence, though it may aid it. The same means might be put to dubious uses.

The issue of political power, its manipulability, and its use to manipulate, is 'finessed' by the technical means of the information society, but not necessarily in the direction of ethical 'finesse'. Control of the flow of information is one of the sources of political power. The information age makes this control both easier and harder for political elites. Easier, if you already control the means of communication. Harder, if these means are distributed in a manner allowing less constrained access. The latter is to be seen again in the case of China and the internet. The former we suspect is so pervasive in political campaigns and communications that generally politics itself and its elites are more and more cast in a suspicious light. There is an issue here again for political 'finesse', both for those who are citizens or subjects, as well as for those who are leaders.

For instance, the characteristics of serviceable disposability can intrude into political areas. The political power-brokers enlist the advertisers and spin doctors to help sell themselves to the electorate. Obviously information technology opens up many avenues here – think, for example, of Howard Dean and the use of the internet in the US primaries. But in an information society, there is the old equivocity of the flow of images, how this is controlled, and how the equivocal images are to be presented and interpreted. I think that politics necessarily partakes of an equivocal condition, hence all the more need for political 'finesse' to read the ambiguous signs. Everything that looks cybernetically immediate is always, in fact, intermediated. Thus, to cite one of the most glaring examples, the spin doctors slant the equivocity of images in a certain direction, manipulating to the utmost the resources of the information society. We cannot be always sure how to read these equivocal images, for one is not necessarily in a position to make a considered judgment. One cannot always exercise political 'finesse', simply because there is about this equivocity something one cannot always trust. One has to say, of course, that a similar situation may affect those political leaders exerting power. Who or what are they to trust?

Think of the issue of political 'finesse', on the two sides of the power divide, those subject to it, those exercising it, in relation to the Iraq situation. We need political judgment. From where does this come in a world of too much spin? (This relates to the very old problem of the relation of rhetoric and power.) The question comes up here of political *phronesis* or the judgment of practical wisdom. In the Iraq situation, despite the sophisticated technology, there was the recalcitrance, or absence, or deceit, of human intelligence. The ambiguous situation with the various intelligence communities offered ample evidence that there is a human, all-too-human, factor with all intelligence. Ethical and political 'finesse' were needed on all sides, but there seemed to have been many failures here. Those 'in the know', either knew or did not know. If they knew, they lied, if they did not know, they got it wrong. Whatever else, the sophisticated technologies did not supply trustworthy information in a purely univocal way. The whole issue of weapons of mass destruction showed multiple equivocities which cannot be completely dispelled by information technology alone. Political judgment and leadership are still necessary – even if these turn out to make misguided, or mischievous decisions. Something more is necessary beyond information technology in such an essentially ambiguous world – political 'finesse'.

One of the great ethical-political issues here is the question of trust. A very elemental thing this, but information technology can serve either to foster trust in leadership, or suspicion, or to manufacture counterfeit forms of trust, or suspicion. What and whom

can one trust? But if the very resources of the information society are themselves involved in the equivocity of spin, how can one come to political judgment in a 'finessed' way? Whatever way one answers, it seems clear that the resources of information technology cannot fully deal with what is at stake. Elemental virtues or excellences are a basic pre-requisite: integrity, courage, wisdom, self-control must be embodied by persons in positions of leadership.

Democratic societies have a further complication. We all are equal, we proclaim, yet we need and want leaders. But to be a leader, the person must be both one of us and somehow above us to show us an excellence we inchoately crave. But his or her being above us, we both love and hate, for we want to be above ourselves, and yet we are also reluctant to have anyone above us. The king who does not pander is dethroned. Only the seducer survives. Yet there is no doubting that a society needs its heroes or role models through which it can be shown these superior excellences. A great athlete can function that way, and this not just in the sporting achievement, but in the show of human excellence achieved. A society can sometimes be energised through a small number of such men or women. They show what is possible in actualising an excellence, for they are more than possibility – being realisation here and now. These have a great social pedagogic function. A society can be energised towards emulation of superior excellence through the social intermediation that the show of such human beings makes possible. In earlier societies this show of excellence might be manifest, for instance, in the leadership of the sage or the statesman, or even the poet. Each might be an individual exemplar but none was a mere individualist, in that all served the community in terms of its highest standards of excellence.

What is the show now? Recall what I said above about the fast and the immediate. In a cybernetic age, the momentum is towards a democratic equalisation, but who then will be the 'heroes', if anybody? Information technology tends to generate with speed and immediacy its 'heroes'. Consider the pop idols. Or consider athletes celebrated less for their talents as for the money they make. Or the *reductio ad absurdum* of media-produced 'heroes' – the celebrity of the TV talk shows, people famous for being famous. Superior excellence has again become serviceable and disposable: a new 'star' rises in the sky or in the empty air, serves its brief glory, and the fickle goddess of celebrity turns again the wheel of fortune and they are gone.

There are other superiorities that serve different excellences and that are not thus disposable. Notice again 'finesse' is needed here, rather than a reductive equalisation – not only in the cultivation of these excellences, but in their being recognised. With some excellences there are unexpected benefits but they take a longer investment of time to reach some perfection and a longer time to show themselves. The need for a longer patience, and indeed longer love is needed to support the flourishing of superior excellences. Among those superior excellences is leadership possessed of political 'finesse'. Leaders need to be informed, but information does not make leaders.

The Community of *Agapeic* Service:
Ethical Formation and Porosity to Transcendent Value
This last source of ethical formation bears on values beyond utility, and beyond political will-to- power and its self-completion. I am talking about something on the

boundary between the ethical and the religious. Beyond immanent excellence we are pointed to some sense of transcendent worth, expressed in what I call the community of *agapeic* service (Desmond: 2001, Chapter 16). This is not serviceable disposability or political sovereignty. Neither servile nor sovereign, what is at issue is an ethical service that extends beyond itself for the good of the other. It is less concerned with things or other humans as serviceable for us, but of our being in the service of a good that transcends us, and in an ultimate sense.

One notes a call to transform the uses and celebrations of power such that our temptation to close in on ourselves in self-justification is challenged. The theme here might seem Christian, but this service is not to be confined to one religious tradition. It also sounds like a mere ideal, but I think that, in a deep sense, there is a service of generosity at the core of all communications of value. This communication is at the heart of the family, of teaching, of useful service honestly rendered, of political power responsibly exercised. This kind of transcendence is incognito at work in all the other intermediations of value: the intimate generosity we find in the family; the receptiveness to gift that is presupposed by use, even though immediately covered over by the same use; the need to be given to oneself by a more mature other, before one is able to realise what are one's own higher excellences; one's indebtedness to the justice of a political community for the enabling opportunities that allow one's powers to flourish. There is a certain surplus of good at work incognito that makes possible all the other communal intermediations of value, but that here is more overt.

For example, think of how being a teacher can entail something of a vocation. It is more than a career option, for it asks a certain dedication to the good of the student. The best teachers make themselves available far beyond the fixed schedule of a determinate contract. Elemental availability – being a teacher in the spirit of generosity. This cannot be calculated on a utilitarian model, nor on the model of erotic sovereignty, since it is can extend to the anonymous care for the good of the other, often the other who perhaps will never make a big splash in the world. There is a faith at work here that makes perfect sense, but that is hard to rationalize in the dominant instrumental languages that pervade our public rhetorics. The spirit of this generosity beyond self arises in different forms in different systems. Yet it is hiddenly sustaining, even when it gets no wages in the system. If one does not accept this as part of the vocation of a teacher, then one is perhaps not in the right job. One does many things for nothing – beyond the fact that they are the right things to do, the things that one is called to do. Sometimes the love of the longer time, and the patience that goes with it, is bound to something that is not just of our time alone.

All of the great ethical and religious traditions call us, in some way or other, to a service of the good that exceeds one's own self-interest. The disciplines of religious communities look towards an ethical enactment in ways of life that live the meaning of this service beyond use, servility, and sovereignty. How is this affected by the developments in an information society? Some things I noted do not help: immediacy and lack of patience, withdrawn privacy, the search for manipulability, the instrumentalisation of things and persons, the valorisation of a certain model of what counts as 'success'. Yet what is most remarkable about the information age is the expansion of avenues of communication, of being in connection, and all of these in principle are possible conduits to greater interaction between human beings in the service of the good of humanity.

It may take time for this service of generosity to catch up with the means of communication, but we easily forget how much is made available for human use, for free and for nothing. This is a kind of service of generosity, that in some respects no one owns, and yet that makes itself available for those who have the means of accessing it. Making these means of access more universally available might also be seen as called for by this service of generosity – though I do not forget that what these means communicate is also full of detritus – willy-nilly, we always need 'finesse' to sift chaff and wheat. Educationally, think of the wheat in the enormous amount of information on line – books, journals, articles, bibliographies, newspapers and so on. We think of a service of generosity in terms of its more usual intimate and personal forms, but here we have a form which is transpersonal in one sense, and yet it is only completed in so far as individual persons make contact with what is made available to them. What I am here calling *agapeic* service cannot finally, I think, be separated from its incarnation in living persons and their communities, but the virtual promise of such persons and such communities can be communicated through means that are transpersonal.

One thing seems sure: there is the possibility of a new porosity between human beings, a network without fixed boundaries through which human communications pass, fostering a sense of the common humanity that marks us. No doubt again the ambiguity returns, in that the means of communication can be put to dubiously ethical ends. For example, a terrorist network is also a kind of porous community. Equally, ethical and religious communities can further the work of generous service. Information technology makes those with resources often more quickly aware of the plight of those in need, and aid is often organized to bring some alleviation to people afflicted with disasters. In terms of the interconnectedness of human beings, there are fewer places to hide from the sufferings that befall our fellow human beings. Sometimes this will evoke generosity, but there is also so-called 'compassion fatigue'. Once again we come back to the equivocity of our situation. This is not the equivocity of the information age so much as the equivocity of the human condition. It is brought home to us in its own special shape in an information age, but it has a character that will remain with us as long as we remain human communicators and not just information gatherers. There will be no absolute geometry that will absolve the human being of the call of *agapeic* service. Hearing that call, we need ethical and religious 'finesse' to know how best to respond to it.

One last point: if the information age is too dominated by serviceable disposability, we come to lack what I would call a sabbatical orientation to life. Sabbatical life marks the feeling of a certain receptiveness to the good of life itself, of having been given something, before doing something for oneself. This can seed a sense of our being grateful beneficiaries of good that we do not necessarily deserve or produce through ourselves alone. This orientation has become more and more difficult to sustain as the sweep of time is reduced to the immediacy of the televised sound-bite, as the sense of individuality is contacted to the human being as a machine of appetite that adapts itself and seeks to maximize efficiently its options in the immediate present, and as extraordinarily complex systems of the media, economics, and politics, exploit all the cybernetic resources of our superior geometries to serve this contraction of time and the human being.

We find ourselves, 'objectively' speaking, in an information age. We know more and more about this and about that, we can effect things more and more, and the 'geometrical' mind is glutted. With this, 'subjectively' speaking, seems to go a loss of faith. 'Geometrical' enlightenment seems to produce a dying of the light. As our cybernetic 'geometry' waxes, does our ethical and religious 'finesse' wane? Is there a fidelity beyond this glut, and this loss? A question for 'finesse'; a question showing our need of 'finesse'.

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5. Digital Prophets
   Eating Locusts and Wild Honey Whilst Reading E-mail

Dr. Gary McDarby, Media Lab Europe

I am not an ethicist, so I feel cannot directly contribute to the theme of today's conference. What I propose to do is to tell a few personal stories and let you be the interpreter of their meaning. At the end of the talk I will summarise by asking the questions that these stories have provoked in me.

The previous speaker, Mr. Martin Curley, mentioned our need as a country to create extraordinary leaders. I would like to take this opportunity to draw attention to two exceptional people who have had an extra-ordinary impact on me. The first is Professor Annraoi DePaor, head of the Electrical and Electronic Engineering Department in University College Dublin. Annraoi has had a huge impact on the world. From his discoveries in wind-power and control systems, to his incredible discovery of how the Earth's magnetic field is formed, he has always had a deep impact on those around him. I remember him for how he has devoted his great talents to teaching his students how to improve people's lives with technology in the biomedical field. He runs a laboratory in the National Rehabilitation Centre in Dun Laoghaire and spends far too much of his precious mind and time trying to raise funds for this great initiative. (This kind of initiative should be simple to set-up in Ireland and should have automatic support of public funds). Annraoi taught me that technology can truly have a positive impact on humanity.

The second person is Father Peter McVerry, a Jesuit Priest who works with children who are homeless. He is founder of the Arrupe society and devotes himself tirelessly to the cause of those often forgotten and written off in Irish society. I was privileged to work with Peter in the early nineties for a few months and had my life perspective transformed as a result. To work with Peter means the opening of doors that can never be shut. One gets a view of Irish society that is not pretty, but which is so raw as to be unignorable. Peter also spends far too much of his time trying to raise funds for work that has both short-term and long-term benefit for the individuals involved, and for all of society. What Peter taught me, was that every single person matters.

Which brings to the opening point of this talk. If all this affluence and wealth in Irish society means we forgot only this simple piece of wisdom from the Gospel: "*Whatever you do to the least of your brothers and sisters, you do unto me...*" (Matthew 25:40), then we will have lost something truly precious.

Last year I was asked to give a talk on the future of technology at a well-known consultancy firm. I arrived an hour early, before my talk, to listen to the previous speaker in order to get a sense of the conference. The speaker was a well-known figure whose task it was to present the company with the short-term challenges of making money in Ireland. He presented two possibilities:

The first was that since Ireland was now becoming a culture of "fear and greed" that the company needed to find ways of "nurturing" these instincts. It was important that people felt the need to wear designer clothes and watches, that people needed to have

huge houses with large gardens that required lawnmowers that you would drive, that people needed big cars that drank petrol, and so on. He offered the example of designer toys (e.g. small fully functional cars for children) which were quickly becoming best-sellers.

The second possibility presented was the establishment of a well-regulated sex industry in Ireland. Ireland's wealth was going to attract lots of refugees, and so a well-regulated sex industry would be required to sustain this influx of desperate people. A well-regulated industry would mean that disease could be controlled while profits could be made, and though it might offend people's sensibilities, it was surely better to be open about the issue than to hide it. He got a huge round of applause.

The speaker intimated that both these scenarios were worth looking at, because these had been two outcomes of affluence in other countries and areas of the world previously.

I listened to this talk and felt very uncomfortable. I realized that the talk I was about to give was completely at odds with what I had just heard. I was in the belly of the beast and seriously considered leaving without giving the talk. A break was called and so I made my way to the toilet to try and compose myself. I stared at the mirror in the toilet and tried to imagine how the audience would react to my opening story…

"Imagine a student and a wise person having a discussion. The student asks to be shown a vision of hell and then a vision of heaven. The wise person takes the student into a room where there are lots of starving people. At one end of the room is a large pot of soup, every person has a very long spoon that can reach the soup but cannot get it into their mouth on account of the spoons being so long. As a result everybody is starving and miserable. The wise person explains that this is hell. They then move to a second room that is identical – same spoons, same bowl of soup, but here everyone is sated and happy. The wise person explains that the difference between heaven and hell is that in heaven we learn to feed one another."

What I like about this story is that it emphasises the collective rather than the individual. It also emphasises the concept of working together rather than against one another. Most importantly the spoon (which is an apt metaphor for technological intervention) is used as an enabling device for people, rather than as something used purely for individual gain. The story was certainly at odds with what I had just heard! As I reflected, I realised that the speaker had covered most of a human being's primal instincts: there was fear, or the desire to protect oneself; there was greed, or to eat as much of what you can whilst you can; there was the desire to reproduce – or keep the gene pool growing. These instincts also bore a startling resemblance to how stocks are bought, sold and negotiated. It struck me that this was effectively the *modus operandi* of the crocodile, a reptile which has not changed significantly, from an evolutionary perspective, in millions of years. I could only wonder: where was the higher dimensions of human understanding? Where was the music of Beethoven? Where was compassion and empathy? And fundamentally where was the one attribute that we are coming to recognise after thousands of years as being essential in order to be human. A concept which goes to the very core of who and what we are. Something which we are only just beginning to grasp as the source of everything essential that we do. Something which it seems nobody can do without. Where was love? Purely reptilian

instincts will always remain, and will always serve a purpose, but to ignore love (and our need for love) seemed reckless and even dangerous.

I headed back to the auditorium. Whilst I had been away the facilitator had being giving out spot-prizes like digital cameras and camcorders for trivial questions like what was the title of the previous speakers second slide and suchlike. I calculated that around five thousand euro of prizes had been given out before I took my seat. The auditorium then went silent and I was introduced,
"I would now like to introduce you to Dr. Gary McDarby, a Principal Research Scientist with Media Lab Europe who will tell us even more ways to make money [audience laughter]".
At this point a very famous piece of music started playing. As it happens, I love classical music and recognised the piece. Richard Strauss had composed this tone poem *Also Sprach Zarathustra* as a tribute to Friedrich Nietzsche's famous work of the same name. In the book Nietzsche famously stated that "God is dead", and introduced the concept of the Superman,
"These masters of today- surpass them,
 O my brethren - these petty people: they are the Superman's greatest danger!
 Surpass, ye higher men, the petty virtues, the petty policy, the sand-grain
      considerateness, the ant-hill trumpery, the pitiable comfortableness, the
      'happiness of the greatest number',
And rather despair than submit yourselves.
And verily, I love you, because ye know not today how to live, ye higher men
For thus do ye live - best!"

As I heard the music I suddenly got very angry. Rightly or wrongly, I started my talk by saying that I felt it was really appropriate that the music of Richard Strauss giving homage to the concept of Nietzsche's Superman be played, because all I had heard since I had arrived at the conference was the philosophy of the Superman. I asked was this the kind of people we really wanted to create? Was this the country we wanted to create? This philosophy has had its uses but has huge flaws, namely no focus on the collective, at which point I then told my story! It suffices to say that I may not be invited back!

Story 1: Digital Spirit

Earlier on today you heard the CEO of a new organisation called SUAS speak. SUAS facilitate young people working on short-term projects in the developing world with a long-term view to create the leaders of the future. In 2003 I went to Nairobi with SUAS. Being in the technology sector I was asked to run an information technology training program for the teachers in Gatoto School. This is a primary school in Makuru slum, one of the largest slums in eastern Nairobi. To be honest I was initially very sceptical about how useful an IT course would be in a school that had only just got running water and still did not have electricity. I was wrong.

With the help of some other SUAS volunteers and the local community (a local shop gave us permission to run a long power cable from a socket to the school to power the computers) we organised IT classes after school with all the teachers, on a number of old laptops. As part of the course, we arranged a session in an internet café where all the teachers were to get themselves a free Yahoo account. On the way to the café I sat beside one of the course participants who I had noticed was very shy but was, by far,

the best person on the course. It turned out that she was not a teacher in the school but was in fact the cook for the school. She apologised to me saying that she did not want to tell me this in case she was not permitted to do the course. She wanted to learn computers so as to be able to start a business to support her family. Her story was quite amazing. Even though Gatoto only charges school fees of about a euro per term per student, this was beyond her meagre resources. She had initially volunteered to do the cooking (for almost 1000 people a day) so her children could go to the school for free. She is now a fully employed cook in the school, but earns less than two euro per day.

Over the next few weeks we became friends. I agreed to help her out with her business and we agreed that we would stay in touch by e-mail and keep one another up to date with developments. When I was leaving Nairobi to head back to Ireland she invited me to her house to meet her family. It was an extraordinary experience. Her house was a corrugated shed with no electricity or running water (but she still paid more than half of what she earned in rent to a mafia-like organisation which controlled the land allocation in the slum). She prepared a flask of tea and we had bread and margarine with her family. I had a digital camera with me and she asked would I take a picture of her family. Her husband and three children had never been photographed together before. I took the photograph and promised to e-mail it to her.

There is a story in parts of Africa which says that many people from some of the less well-known tribes are scared of having their photograph taken because they believe that the camera takes their soul. In the light of what happened next I have come to believe that there is some truth to this story.

When I got back to Ireland I forgot to send on the picture. A few months later my friend e-mailed me from Nairobi telling me that her husband had become very ill and had left Nairobi to try to recover in the countryside. A few weeks later again, she e-mailed to tell me he had died of pneumonia. She asked me to send her the picture of her husband as I was the only person in this world that "had his soul", since I had the only photograph of him with his family. I was profoundly affected by the circumstance I found myself in. A simple piece of technology had captured in a strange place and time a very important moment, and I had in the bits of my computer the means to provide some comfort to my friend in a far-off place. SUAS helped me to get the framed photograph to my friend.

Story 2: Digital Oasis

This morning I just came from the Intel Computer Clubhouse on the Media Lab Europe campus in the Liberties area of Dublin. As most of you know Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations has been in Dublin for the last few days, and his wife, Nane, requested a visit to the Clubhouse. She has a strong interest in innovative youth projects for children and visited the Clubhouse this morning. So what is the Intel Computer Clubhouse? It is a place where young people at risk can learn ICT literacy in an informal way, by learning and mixing with experts in ICT skills. It's an after-school learning initiative where state of the art software and hardware is available to the members. Volunteers from local universities and businesses give a few hours a week to work with the members on projects that excite them. There is no right or wrong in the work in the Clubhouse – just experimentation and exploration. Members learn how to use software packages like Paint Shop Pro,

learn how to make their own music (they have their own music studio), learn how to make movies, and even how to build robots. The technical skills are provided by the volunteers, and through this mix of people, perspectives on both sides of the digital divide are changed. The members get to have new role-models, and the volunteers get an insight into the lives of young people who have not had the opportunities they have had. I believe something powerful and positive comes out of this encounter.

This morning a young member who is eleven years of age took Mrs. Nane Annan around the Clubhouse with confidence and eloquence, for an hour. I will not give you the young man's name for reasons of confidentiality, but it suffices to say that when he arrived in the Clubhouse he would have been classified as a classic 'hyper active, low attention-span' child, and he was struggling in school. His family circumstances are extremely difficult, and again it suffices to say that I would behave exactly the same way (or probably far worse) if I was in the same situation – as I am sure would anybody. The Intel Computer Clubhouse has been open for just over a year now and it is wonderful to see the effect the initiative has had on this young man and many others in the project. We need more initiatives like this.

Story 3: Digital Life

Only two weeks ago my friend in Nairobi e-mailed me again. She told me that she had never told me the full story about her situation, because once again she was unsure as to how I would react. She explained that her husband had in fact died of AIDS and that she was also HIV positive. The reason she had wanted to start the business was so that her children would be protected financially in some way. She too was now sick, and had been told that her immune system was deteriorating. She pleaded with me to help her family. When I heard this news I was shocked to the core. Suddenly all these stories of hope crumpled like a house of cards. Suddenly I realised what AIDS was doing to Africa. AIDS does not distinguish between the brightest, the kindest, the youngest – it simply kills whoever cannot afford the cost of treatment. I fell into despair.

The day I received the email I spoke with some friends in SUAS. They recommended that I contact a new Irish organisation called *Réalta* operating out of St James Hospital and Trinity College Dublin, as they might have advice on how to proceed. The name *Réalta* (the Irish word for 'stars') came about after the founding members of the organisation visited a hospital in central Africa where children were dying of AIDS. They asked the nurses in the hospital was there anything they could do to help alleviate the suffering of the children and they replied, *"Provide the hospital with some gold stars so we can reward the children when they do well at something or when they need some encouragement."*

I contacted Réalta and through them was able, via e-mail, to connect with a doctor in Nairobi General Hospital, who in turn was able to meet with my friend and provide her with the necessary treatment. It's a long-term commitment and means that she will be on drugs for the rest of her life, as well as having to have frequent blood tests and other checkups. However she is now full of hope and life, and is recovering well. Hopefully more progress will be made in AIDS drug research and that costs will come down so that this kind of good news story can happen more often. *Réalta* is another organisation struggling for funds. I believe it is another example of an organisation that should be able to seamlessly establish itself and grow in the new Ireland. I call

this story Digital-Life because nothing would have happened without the technological innovation of e-mail. By removing distance and time barriers I could no longer ignore problems that I could tackle.

And so I come to the final point, which amounts to a series of questions:

What kind of future do we want to create?
What kind of people do we wish to nurture?
What kind of values do we want to live by and demonstrate?
How can technology help this happen?

I contend that ethics and values are not only important to these questions, but are fundamental. I believe we are at a turning point in the evolution of Irish society and that a singular focus on the generation of material wealth will undermine our great tradition of being a people-oriented culture. I believe we need new kinds of leaders to embrace a new future where ethics and values are a central part of how we move forward. I believe that technology can play a powerful enabling role in this new future.

As I mentioned earlier I love classical music so I leave you with the text from the first movement of Gustav Mahler's Eighth Symphony, wherein he put a great Latin hymn, *Veni Creator Spiritus* to music:

Veni, creator spiritus,	*Come, creator Spirit,*
mentes tuorum visita;	*let your spirit enter us;*
imple superna gratia,	*fill with grace from above*
quae tu creasti pectora.	*those whom you have created.*
Qui Paraclitus diceris,	*You are known as the Comforter,*
donum Dei altissimi,	*a gift from God on high,*
fons vivus, ignis, caritas,	*living spring, fire, love,*
et spiritalis unctio.	*and unction of the spirit.*
Infirma nostri corporis	*Endow our weak bodies,*
virtute firmans perpeti;	*with eternal strength;*
accende lumen sensibus,	*inflame our senses with light,*
infunde amorem cordibus.	*pour love into our hearts.*

Mahler wanted to call upon the elemental forces to encourage us to be creative in a loving way. He believed that human creativity in its highest from was indistinguishable from love. In this symphony he wanted to express this belief through music. The Eighth Symphony is considered one of the greatest expressions of human creativity ever conceived, composed it in one summer and taking over a thousand people to perform it.

For me it can all be summed up in one simple sentence from the gospels.
"If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."
(1 Corinthians 13:2/3)

I believe that where love is absent deserts are created and that there are many deserts in the world today. I believe that Ireland should be a place where prophets to empower this world in this digital age should be nurtured, and that they should go into those deserts. The reason many of the initiatives I have mentioned today have come about is because we already have great people exemplifying the wonder of being truly human – there has been a long tradition in this country of producing people like this – but they are isolated and often struggling for support. If we were to lose this resource to a fear and greed culture we would lose our soul.

Links

http://biomed.ucd.ie/
http://www.soulsearching.ie/ssarrupe.shtml
http://clubhouse.mle.ie
http://www.suas.ie/
http://www.gatoto.org/
http://mindgames.mle.ie/

6. Has Religion a Role in a Technological Society?

Most Rev. Diarmuid Martin, Archbishop of Dublin

In today's world the terms ethics and values are understood in different ways by different people. To a lesser degree the same applies to the word religion. In my earlier assignment, before returning to Ireland as Archbishop of Dublin, as the Vatican Representative at the United Nations Office at Geneva, I took part in the early negotiations about the U.N. World Summit on the Information Society, which was being organized at the International Telecommunications Union.

In discussing the early draft texts for the Summit, the Holy See suggested that consideration be given to the ethical dimensions of information technology. The reaction was very interesting. The United States Delegate immediately came to me asking if I was referring to questions of pornography, since there had been a recent controversial decision of the US Supreme Court which ruled that the right to freedom of expression limited the ability of the Federal Government to take measures against pornography. He had no sooner gone away when an Asian Delegate came to me and said, "You and I know what we mean when we talk about ethics, but we should be careful because some of these Europeans might think ethics had something to do with labour standards, and we do not want that". Yet another Asian, not normally known to enter into public conversations with the Holy See, came and said that we should be careful in case someone might think that ethics might have something to do with corrupt corporate business practices and he did not think that that was appropriate in a Conference on the Information Society.

Those comments, which were immediate gut reactions, show not just that there are various views of ethics, but that the range of issues to be covered in an ethical reflection on the information society is much wider than might appear at first sight or if looked at from just one single viewpoint. I felt then that for today's reflection I would approach the question of religion and the digital age from an overarching aspect, that of the centrality of the human person, which is always a primary focal point when reflecting on ethics and religious thought.

Information technology is about people, because information is fundamentally about people. The driving force of the digital age, of a knowledge-based economy and society, is human capacity, human creativity, and the innovative ability of people. In the past the 'raw material', as it were, of an economy was land, then capital. Now we cannot use the term 'raw material', because the driving force is an active subject, the human person. Starting out from this overarching principle, I would like to examine three key pillars of Catholic social reflection which I believe offer some basic thrusts for an ethical understanding of the digital age.

The first concerns the inherent dignity of every person. In religious thought all persons were created in God's image, with an inherent dignity which cannot be removed from them. In a more secular domain, the term dignity would possibly be replaced by rights, as a rights-based approach offers certain verifiable criteria for government and public opinion concerning how dignity is realised and protected. In a more personalistic context, dignity might be linked with a term like self-esteem,

which refers to the individual's perception of his or her dignity, and their personal ability to realize that dignity. In an economic area, dignity might be linked with the term capacity, or the more brutal term 'human capital', which looks at the particular contribution which the individual can make to the economy and society, thus realising their dignity.

Taken together, we can see that the first ethical imperative regarding a digital age is that information technology should be used in a way in which the dignity, self-esteem and capacity of each person is enhanced and fully respected. This involves avoiding certain negative uses such as exploitation, the creation of dependencies (and here the whole role of advertising comes in), and the role of openness and transparency. But much more significant will be the way we use information technology to enhance the subjectivity of people, enabling them to be, to the highest degree possible, subjects, the shapers of their own future. People can be the objects of information technology; they can be passive consumers; they must become active subjects in the construction of the digital age.

This is not just pious talk. On an international level, for example, we have come more and more to realise that poverty is not just lack of economic income, but it is the inability to realise human capacity. Development is not just about economic programmes, it means fighting poverty, that is, enabling people to enhance their God-given potential so that they can be fully themselves and realise themselves and the creative and innovative skills which are theirs by right. If the human person, human capacity, and human creativity, are the building blocks of a knowledge-based economy, then investment in those capacities is not just philanthropy, but wise economic investment, and is therefore good for society. Investment in human capacity is a good of the community and not just for the individual. The more humans can realise their own capacity, the more participative society will be and the more secure our societies will be. A digital divide, just like any other divide or form of exclusion – whether it be within a nation or on a world level – always leaves a society less secure and more vulnerable.

It should also be remembered that when we talk about the digital divide we are not just talking about communications technology on its own. A digital divide influences a whole series of areas in society where information technology is crucial. Where a digital divide exists, other divides will abound: there will be an educational divide, a health divide, an employment divide, an infrastructure divide. In today's world the victims of a digital divide are destined to increasing marginalisation in so many areas. The digital age is about people and about people's capacity to be participants in a world where human genius and creativity are the driving forces. I would add just one word, that among the most creative and innovative people in today's world are the poor. People living in poverty show remarkable genius in simply surviving. They show remarkable genius in finding ways of getting out of poverty. Sadly that genius is often overlooked or simply rejected.

A second principle of Catholic Social thought which I would like to address is called the universal destination of the goods of creation, a complicated term which refers to a simple reality, namely that when God created the goods of the earth he created them for the benefit of all. In the past this principle was most often applied by Catholic social thought to access to land or to the distribution of wealth. Today it must be

applied also to intellectual property. Catholic teaching has always defended the right to private property. This was one of the main pillars of its criticism of communism. Private property is an important instrument to help realise the right of individuals to access to, and security around, their basic needs.

There has also, however, been that other principle, the more fundamental one, that the goods of creation are there for the benefit of all. Catholic social thought talks about all private property carrying a 'social mortgage'. Intellectual property rights also carry a 'social mortgage'. This means that, while recognising how intellectual property rights' systems generate creativity and reward of creative talent, personal and corporate rights and interest are always subordinate to basic human need and the needs of the human family. It would be unethical, for example, to place profit or advantage as regards competition, as the sole criteria in evaluating intellectual property regimes. There is a sense in which knowledge is the property of all. Certainly profit and personal possession cannot be blanketedly invoked as an ethical justification for not making accessible, in the hope of gaining higher profit tomorrow, knowledge which can enhance life today.

I participated in the interesting discussion at the World Trade Organization on the theme of access to medicine or public health and its relation to trade related intellectual property systems. The discussion was in fact on applying already existing norms of the WTO which permitted governments to limit intellectual property rights in the face of great human needs. Further debate was needed to address the situation of countries that did not have manufacturing capacity to import generic medicine to respond to their needs. Whereas agreement was eventually reached, the lengthy debate was an example for me of how huge private business interests can place influence on governments, using legitimate and less legitimate means to defend their intellectual property rights, and the huge potential profits involved.

Similar ethical challenges arise when we talk of placing the fruits of information technology at the service of educational and of development in general. There can be enlightened policies which are win-win in the cooperation between countries which are highly developed in information technology and for those who are at a lower level. Increasing information literacy worldwide is good for people, and it is good for economies. Ireland has shown that it can play an important role in providing training for experts from emerging economies in information technology. This will enhance the capacity of the country of origin, which can become both a competitor and a partner.

Similar questions about the ownership of knowledge arise in the case of ownership of media, both in print and electronic. Knowledge has always been considered a source of power. Transparency on media ownership is a matter of public interest and requires specific legislative norms. Today, more than ever before, knowledge is owned privately for interest. Even the knowledge of indigenous people about medicinal plants is being bought and protected by others in the hope of future profit, exploiting the fact that for indigenous people such knowledge was the property of the community, and such ownership finds less protection in current legal systems. Knowledge today is managed and processed in the interests of power, economic and political. One of the negative side-products of the information age has been the emergence of that new form of doctorate, conferred by I know not who, namely, the

spin doctor. Everyone has his or her spin doctor. In many cases this involves just harmless focussing of the message that one has to get across. The question becomes more serious when spin enters into the areas of economic competition or into politics and public life. Spin can in fact create a serious lack of trust in institutions, as the debates on the invasion of Iraq have shown in a particularly obvious way. Access to information is an essential dimension of the democratic process. It is curious to find that in most Western societies there is a growing corpus of law facilitating access to information, while at the same time there is a growing tendency to manage information which surrounds some of the more fundamental dimensions of governance and democracy. Spin should not substitute telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

The final principle of Catholic social teaching I would like to address is that of the preferential option for the poor. This is primarily a theological principle referring to the option of God himself and his special regard for the poor. But it can easily be applied to a modern day digital economy.

Exclusion and marginalisation will not go away by themselves. The path of technological change means that whatever trickles down will trickle down too little and too late to be of real advantage to the marginalised. There has never been social progress without sustained economic growth, but sustained economic growth on its own cannot guarantee social progress. Questions of marginalisation have to be addressed directly in such a way as to focus on how to bring the marginalised into the virtuous cycle of education and participation.

We recognise that exclusion is a moral evil, but we have to work to show that inclusion is a primordial ethical value. Just as a digital divide creates other divides, overcoming digital divides requires that we look attentively at the culture and the broad enabling environment which will permit people to enter into that virtuous cycle of inclusion.   There will never be equitable access to the benefits of the digital era if our education system lags behind that of our neighbours. And I say this not just because our neighbours will soon be our competitors with comparative advantage. I say it because quality education is an essential dimension of being able to fully live as a human person in today's world and to participate in the digital age. Progress in the digital age requires that adequate infrastructures are in place. But infrastructures are not limited to road and wires. There are human and social infrastructures. The quality of literacy that our young people will attain is linked with the overall quality of community from which they emerge. Literacy requires supportive community.

I visited one area of Dublin last week which soon will have three pubs and three betting shops but no doctor and no pharmacy. This morning I attended a seminar on food poverty in Dublin. Progress in the digital age cannot be separated from a policy of a broad response to human needs, because it is only in enhancing people in their fullness that we will really enable them to be themselves, as God created them. This broad response to human needs must also open the path towards something more than the current framework; it must open the path towards the transcendent.

Information technology is the driving force of globalisation. Globalisation will only lead to international security when it involves the widest possible level of ownership and participation and equity.   Part of that challenge will be that of giving people

voice. Voice means giving people the ability to address their problems and to find solutions themselves, making them active creative subjects.

Let me come back to my opening remarks. There are many ways in which we can talk of ethics and values in the digital age. There are areas which some would not normally think of as having ethical implications. There are different approaches to ethical reflection on the digital age. This afternoon I could have launched into a litany of criticism of internet pornography, of insider trading, of internet crime, of exploitation. These are question we must address in the digital era. I preferred to take a different path which looks at the opportunities that information technology offers and at the manner in which people, ordinary men women and children, can and should be enabled to enter into the digital age, as active participants who draw equitable benefit from progress. The fundamental ethical challenge of the digital age is equitable access. This I think is one of the contributions which religion can make to our debates on the digital age. The Church, in Christian theology, sees itself as called to be a witness to the unity of humankind in Jesus Christ. The more we can forge a world where unity emerges, where all share in an equitable way the good things that God has given us, the more we contribute to the building of a broad ethical culture for the information technology at the service of humankind. That is the ethical vision. The challenge is how to generate that new culture. Conferences such as this one today are extremely important in developing that culture and in proposing new policies on a national and international level.

But returning to my days working in Geneva, I remember the Director General of the International Telecommunications Union telling me at the beginning of my mission there how, in the short period of his own mandate, his organisation had radically changed from one dealing primarily with governments to one where the principle partner was the private sector. In setting future policy for information technology we have to remember that the private sector will be the prime mover in this area. Government policy can set a broad ethical and legal framework. That framework will only work for inclusion when it is accompanied by a new spirit of corporate social responsibility. The difficulty is that all too often corporate social responsibility remains an 'optional extra'. It cannot be decreed by government, but it can be influenced by that other great creation of the digital age: international public opinion. Public opinion emerges where people are empowered and given voice around the areas that concern them. International public opinion has shown that it can change policies, prejudices, and even the market. International public opinion is a good example of how human creativity can harness the digital age and achieve social goods, despite all odds. We need policies which place people at the centre of our activities in the digital age. If we do not, people will sooner or later do it themselves and all the spin in the world will not shelter us from our mistakes.

Appendix

Example of Ethics & Values Issues Needing Attention

The Working Group initially held a number of consultative meetings during which various contemporary concerns were discussed. The following list is but a small sample of the type of issues that merit further examination:

- To what extent is personal information, such as one's name, address, ID-number, telephone number and e-mail address, one's own 'property'? Can others use this information without consent?
- New technologies raise serious issues about rights when a person is included in photographs or other recordings.
- New software installations can tamper with previous installations without people's knowledge or consent, and software and even hardware can be sold with built-in obsolescence as well as built-in spy-ware. Who alerts people to this? How can this be addressed and regulated?
- With the Internet and mobile phone technology, it now becomes possible for a business to run almost anonymously so that frustrated customers have little redress.
- Computerisation permits very complex pricing structures to be managed easily (as in mobile phone billing), but it also presents new challenges for customers who wish to understand what they are spending but lack the technological know-how to access this information.
- Increased automation of both public and private services may lead to greater efficiency. At the same time, 'end-users' may feel more disempowered because of less actual human contact with those responsible for the services upon which they depend.
- The application of ICT to medical science is raising a huge number of ethical issues, particularly in relation to the creation, prolongation and ending of human life.
- As ICT in general enters more and more personal areas of human life (for example: dating agencies, banking, counselling), the risks of harm to the individual increase.
- The power of ICT to communicate large amounts of information on a world-wide scale means that any unprotected data can enter the public-domain and the public-domain literally means the entire world.

Information
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