

Book Review

Ethical Issues and Citizens Rights in the Era of Digital Government Surveillance

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ABSTRACT

Over recent years, terrorism has pressed democracy and Westerners to their ethical limits not only regarding torture but also the ways citizens are secretly spied. The use of current digital technologies to monitor lay persons or activists is one of the aspects that triggered a hot-debate in Europe and US. After Snowden`s case, citizenry not only realized the dark side of government, but how slowly democracy is dying. Doubtless, this is the intersection where this book is inserted. Based on 13 high-quality chapters, organized in three sections, editors Robert Cropf and Timothy Bagwell provide to readers with a pungent work containing a great varieties of themes discussing how e-surveillance is often used for Government to enhance security, as well as some individual rights are harmed.

KEYWORDS

Democracy, Fear, Individual Rights, Protection, Snowden, Surveillance, Terrorism

Ethical Issues and Citizen Rights in the Era of Digital Government Surveillance

Robert Cropf & Timothy C. Bagwell

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The three sections, which are oriented to respond the above formulated question, reflect different viewpoint which oscillates from conceptual ethical issues towards legal research and

empirical-applied studies. Entitled “Theoretical perspectives on electronic surveillance”, the first section explores the ethical borders of corruption (Fiske) where the crisis poses to officialdom the exclusivity to fix norms which exempt them to be controlled. This “state of exemption” which is enrooted in America, allows some restrictive policies otherwise would be neglected such as torture, e-surveillance, and other human rights violations. The same applies for the study conducted by Bagwell & Jackson who scrutinized how digital records were manipulated to force loans in the Federally Guaranteed Student Loan Program. To what extent individual rights of students are violated by the manipulation of digital information basis within student loan program is one of the topics addressed here. Besides, the conflict of objective at time of designing information and communication systems to ensure security should be balanced taking into consideration individual rights of citizens (chapter 3 and 4). Rather, the second section is aimed at reconciling the practice of e-surveillance in times of instability and terror. Basically, if people ask government to be protected, and terrorists infiltrate within population, why government are not tacitly allowed to use ICT to spy others? While the concept of privacy in American jurisprudence sets the pace for the advance of democracy, there is a clear tension respecting to how security which is a public right is granted. This was exactly what Snowden’s scandal revealed, prompting an alliance between business corporations and central administration. To my end this represents one of the best sections of the book and the more serious debate I have ever read. Last but not least, section three delves into the ethical problems of e-surveillance in contexts as disabled students or abroad.

As previous argument given, Cropf and Bagwell understand that the electronic surveillance in times of terrorism offers a good platform to prevent terrorist attacks, while posed a serious dilemma unless otherwise resolved, may very well lead to “a panoptic society of surveillance”, where individual rights are left behind. This is the reason why ethics play a vital role in the configuration of ICT use. As Sam Edwards put it, likely the right to privacy is dying, which means that the concept of liberty is in jeopardy. Needless to say this master-full book exhibits an ethical position that alarms on the current neglects of government of individual privacy, at the time it calls for a balanced security-privacy climate of respect. Most certainly, the response to this quandary lies in the first chapter, exclusively with foci on “American exceptionalism”, which was strengthened after 9/11. As Fiske noted, the state of emergencies in US activated old dormant beliefs and cultural values that situates the country as the “uphill city”. This thesis brilliantly suggests that any state of exemption leads presidential branch to override other powers, as judicial power, or even senate. The risks of accepting what should be ethically rejected (in the name of security) represents the germen of corruption.

Given the current political situation in this terms, in *A Difficult World*, Korstanje has argued that capitalism needs from risk (no matter the origin) to legitimize the puritan cosmology of “chosen peoples”. This signals to a vicious circle very hard to resolve, since “the world is conceived as a dangerous place”. From its inception, the roots of American politics were determined by a closed view of future (predestination), which emasculated the obsession for control and surveillance. Since puritans are not familiar with their destiny, which escaped to human understanding, this accentuated needs of stability developed an attachment to future which wakes up uncertainty and anxieties. In this respect, technology serves as the instrument which will colonize the future to produce identity and reaffirmation of social status. Not only Anglo-Saxons are more prone to risk perception than other ethnicities as Latin Americans, but technology resulted from that original fear or weak tolerance to uncertainty (Korstanje 2014; 2015). This explains why technology and risk are inevitably entwined in English speaking countries.

Whatever the case may be, *Ethical Issues and Citizens rights in the Era of Digital Government Surveillance* should be esteemed as a must-read edition, which focuses on the

ethical issues of protection in times of terrorism. This text invites to profound philosophical reflections which serves for sociologists, psychologist, philosophers and any other social scientist who retains concern and interest in the effects of terrorism in daily life. Highly recommendable book!

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Maximiliano E. Korstanje is an associate professor at University of Palermo, Argentina. He is Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal of Safety and Security in Tourism. With more than 650 published papers in peer review journals, Korstanje is concerned in the study of risk, capitalism and mobility. He co-edits 10 journals, and takes part of editorial board list of other 25 specialized journals. From 2010 his biography is a point of entry in Marquis Who's Who in the World. He was awarded as Outstanding reviewer 2012/2013 for Emerald Group Publishing, UK. Because his contribution to the sociology of tourism, Korstanje has been nominated to three honorary doctorates.