Chapter 3
Technology and Government:
The Pursuit of Governmental Technologies in the Present

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ABSTRACT

This chapter develops an argument of both technology and government as historically determined phenomena within what has been called liberalism. Technology helps the government to make clear and assist with individuals' choices. The author asks the question about the existence of an alternative ideological framework to guide the use and implementation of both government and technologies and defines possible ways forward for the pursuit of citizenship in societies.

INTRODUCTION

One of those many challenges currently posed to almost every sector of society is an increasing complexity associated with information flows and communication channels in which society is currently embedded.

The ever increasing capabilities of information processing and communication has been associated to a widespread belief that there is universal access to information and communication technology (ICT) for everybody in society. Therefore, it was concluded that it is a matter of developing appropriate technical skills in order to constitute a platform for public decision making and running of public affairs based on ICT.

This chapter unveils some of those hidden grounds upon which relationships between government and technology could be understood as being driven by a will to power that inevitably knots together technology and government. The assumed neutrality and transparency based on the ICT incorporation in running public affairs requires to be assessed from a more critical standpoint which could address technology as a socio-historical outcome of a process of political and cognitive struggle concentrated in the dominance of the world.

In order to do that, a brief account of current society from a technological-driven perspective and the way in which society can be ruled provides

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an ideal type of society which will be contrasted with current affairs and tendencies regarding the incorporation of ICT in government. The contrasts will allowed us to reveal how far the process of a technological driven society is opening up a new way of ordering society as a whole. Concluding remarks refers to some of the side-effects of such processes in the present.

TECHNOLOGY IN THE PRESENT

There is not doubt that technology plays a key role in the conduction of our current affairs. It could be argued that technology allowed us to grasp a new way of being human. Technology makes us free from external constraints and internal shortcomings to deal with the world. In this sense, technology can be understood as the constitution of a "world of second order" based on certainty and predictability. Indeed, the claim of technology as a vehicle for alienation of human beings from their own contexts of meaning or life, has been a common complaint among social theorists who considers the whole process of technology as being beyond the control of human being, at least in the current state of affairs. Of course, there is another group of advocates who claim that technology is an inevitably process in which human being is engaged in the realization of a natural condition for human being to become "homos faber" (Arendt, 1958).

However, these claims are misleading. On the one hand, technology has been considered as leading towards a determinism of society in which power is channeled and exercised by a very exclusive elite based on technical reasons. In this sense, scientific knowledge and technology have been a birth mark of authoritarian processes based on power-knowledge as it was explained by Foucault. The process of linking knowledge as a constitutive part of the rationale upon which society is designed and governed implied a growing role for the experts and an ever diminishing role for the multitude or masses. In this regard, technological determinism would drive human being to a comfortable life but without freedom. It could be understood as a totalizing life in which human beings become stranded from themselves in order to adapt to a complex technical world. A second possibility opens up a way towards an understanding of technology as providing an ever changing arena for the debate and collective construction of the future by considering technological devices and rationale as the most advanced stance of human beings in building up their own constitution as "homo sapiens". (see Feenberg for a complete account on this perspective) (Feenberg, 2002)

The wide range of possibilities upon which we can consider technology as an "iron cage" based on instrumental rationality or the most advanced ground for a debate about the civilization processes in which human being engages is just a revealing sign of the holding sway of technology and discourses associated to it in current times. It ranges from a despair based on an inevitable destiny driven by a rationality beyond human control to a hope based on a capability of correcting and improving the human products by humankind itself. Therefore, it seems that technology is inevitably tied to a conception of power. In a nutshell, technology potentiates human beings in a web of relations in which actions are possible due to a will to power.

Briefly, it implies that a way in which technology holds sway in human action is based on a will of control and predictability. It is important to remark that technology is considered here as a complex socio historical product in which discourses, devices and modes of enquiry are intertwined and bring together a unity called "technology". There are two particular dimensions of technology upon which this chapter is grounded. They are the role of discourses and modes on inquiry in the historical development of a link between technology and government.