Foreword

The rapid development and spread of information technology has led to the publication of a large number of books, both authored and edited, on the social and ethical questions that this technology has raised. This work has been dominated by the cultures in which the technology originally developed; that is, primarily in the United States of America and Western Europe. Common themes (e.g., privacy and intellectual property) have been discussed from a Western perspective. This is not a criticism, and given the number and seriousness of the issues raised, it is an important and perfectly reasonable approach. But this approach on its own is not adequate in the world of the 21st century.

The impact of Information Technology is now felt throughout the world, and it is important that this impact be studied from a variety of perspectives. This technology, and particularly the Internet, has bought about the collision of ideas as never before. International trade and business and international relations in general have necessitated some understanding among cultures, but prior to the Internet, relatively few people were involved. Now potentially anybody can interact with individuals from other cultures and can have an effect on a large number of them, as illustrated by the recent case of the publication of cartoons in Denmark that were offensive to many in the Islamic world.

Soraj Hongladarom and Charles Ess are to be highly commended for editing the first collection on the ethics of Information Technology that studies the issues from a variety of cultural perspectives. A wide range of backgrounds is brought to bear on the problems: Thai, Chinese, Turkish, European, and North American. This gives perspectives from religious traditions from both the East and the West and a range of topics different from that found in most other collections. There are discussions of some core problems in Information Technology ethics (e.g., privacy and intellectual property) but from different cultural points of view, and of the digital divide, the ontological problem of entities with moral status, cultural and ecological aspects of computing, human hybridization, autonomy, the design of technology, health care and the role of Information Technology, online communities and democracy, and Thai culture and Information and Communication Technology. These chapters with their various perspectives provide excellent new insights that generally have not been brought to bear on problems in Information Technology ethics.

Both editors have excellent credentials to edit a work of this kind. Each has published widely on multicultural and multidisciplinary topics in the ethics of Information Technology as well as in other areas, and has a deep knowledge of both Eastern and Western traditions. The chapters reflect this. *Information Technology Ethics: Cultural Perspectives* will be an important book that will extend the boundaries of the field of Information Technology ethics and, hopefully, will stimulate much more discussion of this kind. The world of the early 21st century needs it.

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