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Book review

The Regulation of Cyberspace: Control in the Online Environment

By Andrew D. Murray

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The Regulation of Cyberspace: Control in the Online Environment, Andrew D. Murray (Routledge Cavendish, £ 31.99, ISBN 978 0 415 42001 3)

In the 'Regulation of Cyberspace: Control in the Online Environment', Andrew D. Murray explores the different types of control mechanisms, including design & market controls; self-regulation; and traditional legal rules, employed to govern cyberspace. He also investigates whether the application of systems theory and system dynamics to the field of cyberspace can generate a more organic model of regulation.

The aim of the book is to produce a truly European voice in the debate relating to the regulation of cyberspace. It is aimed mainly at undergraduates and post graduate students (at masters' level). It may also be of some marginal interest to research students who are carrying out research in the field of governance of the internet.

The book is divided in three parts, namely, mapping the cyber-regulatory environment; regulatory tools and digital content; and regulating cyberspace: challenges and opportunities. The first part of the book outlines the main tenets of the various theories which are relevant to the theme of the book including cyber-regulation theories, regulation theories, systems theory, socio-legal regulation theories and social-technical-legal regulation theories.

In the second part of the book, the author charters, at length, the history of the development of the Internet. He subsequently focuses on the supply of digital content through networked environments. Finally, he examines the plethora of issues raised by various online features as online communities and digital products and how these are currently regulated.

The third and final part of the book concentrates on explaining how systems theory and system dynamics may shed new light on the regulation of cyberspace. The principal message of the book is found in this section of the book. In the view of the author, regulatory intervention can not be regarded as a single act which either fails or succeeds, depending on the 'subjective standards' of the regulator. On the contrary, the regulatory intervention should mirror the environment it is aimed at. In the case at hand, regulatory intervention should be based on a 'dynamic model' that reflects the dynamic and complex nature of cyberspace. The intervention is followed by feedback by all the actors who influence the environment including the regulator, the regulatee and the consumer. A new intervention is designed to address the point of feedback raised by the previous intervention and process is carried out over a period of time until resolution of the issue.

The author set himself a mammoth task at the start of the book as his aim was to voice out a European perspective in the debate relating to governance of cyberspace, which has so far been mostly dominated by American scholars. He partly achieves this aim as he contributes to the advancement of scholarly thought on this point by linking the debate to systems theory and system dynamics. This association is a novel one which sheds some insight on why current regulatory interventions are failing. However, his position remains somewhat vulnerable as he neither applies this emerging insight in context nor backs it up with an empirical study. He would have consolidated his stance if he applied this fresh understanding to solve some of the issues he identified

in earlier parts of the book (e.g. protection of digital products). Hence, the promise of a truly European perspective is only partly delivered and is left to tread on very thin ground.

Notwithstanding this point, the book is a good starting point for readers who are interested in the regulation of cyberspace. It explains complex theories as cyber-paternalism in succinct and clear terms and makes ample use of diagrams to explain intricate theses as systems theory. The book is written in an accessible language and is interspersed with anecdotes which will no doubt engage the younger reader. Finally, this book meets the needs of its target audience (undergraduate and post graduate students) in terms of content, price and format.