

## Comparative Philosophies in Intercultural Information Ethics

### *Abstract*

The following review explores Intercultural Information Ethics (IIE) in terms of comparative philosophy, supporting IIE as the most relevant and significant development of the field of Information Ethics (IE). The focus of the review is threefold. First, it will review the core presumption of the field of IIE, that being the demand for an intermission in the pursuit of a founding philosophy for IE in order to first address the philosophical biases of IE by western philosophy. Second, a history of the various philosophical streams of IIE will be outlined, including its literature and pioneering contributors. Lastly, a new synthesis of comparative philosophies in IIE will be offered, looking towards a future evolution of the field. Examining the interchange between contemporary information ethicists regarding the discipline of IIE, the review first outlines the previously established presumptions of the field of IIE that posit the need for an IE as grounded in western sensibilities. The author then addresses the implications of the foregoing presumption from several non-western viewpoints, arguing that IIE does in fact find roots in non-western philosophies as established in the concluding synthesis of western and eastern philosophical traditions.

### *Keywords*

Information Ethics, Intercultural Information Ethics, Information and Communication Technologies, pluralism, hermeneutics, metaphysics, comparative philosophies.

»The problem is not a technical one, but one of social exclusion, manipulation, exploitation and annihilation of human beings« (Capurro 2007: 8)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Capurro, »Information Ethics for and from Africa,« *International Review of Information Ethics*, Vol. 7, 2007, pp. 1–13.

## I Introduction

Intercultural Information Ethics (IIE) is the most significant development of the discipline of Information Ethics (IE). IIE is also arguably an untapped resource for one of the most relevant contributions to comparative philosophies facing an information society and an information culture. The following review is multitiered. Its concluding task looks to contribute to a foundation for a comparative philosophies discourse around the subject of IE by exploring the significance of an intercultural understanding of the place of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Towards that end, a review of the literatures and philosophies of the field will be outlined, conceived as such by information ethicists from around the globe, explicated below in sections four through six. It will look at intercultural perspectives on ICTs from both the point of view of globalization and localization, outlined in section three ›Philosophy and Information & Communication Technologies.‹ Preceding and concluding the review of the field, an account of ICT culture as originating from and being presumed through western and otherwise developed cultures will be critiqued, and it will be posited that IIE is equally pertinent to, and as will be argued, rooted in, all cultures. The above argument will be crafted and envisaged through a concluding synthesis of comparative philosophies from Buddhist and western-influenced IIE traditions that endeavors to bridge a notable chasm in the field of IIE, namely the foundational divide between information ecology and hermeneutics, as outlined towards the latter part of section three and section six.

## II The Roots of Intercultural Information Ethics

IIE finds its origins in UNESCO, 1997, with the ›First International Congress on Ethical, Legal and Societal Aspects of Digital Information‹ (Carbo 1997), organized by the Government of Monaco.<sup>2</sup> The congress hosted over two hundred participants from fifty-four countries who came together to discuss concerns of digital information access and preservation, and consisted of a wide spectrum of interna-

<sup>2</sup> T. Carbo, ›Info-Ethics: First International Congress on Ethical, Legal, and Societal Aspects of Digital Information, March 1997, Monaco,‹ *International Information & Library Review*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 1997, pp. 111–260.

tional professional expertise from numerous fields, from law to librarianship to IT to journalism. The gathering prompted an awareness of the need for the establishment of an organized global initiative to regularly address the current state of the digital society, where UNESCO was encouraged to pursue the task through its INFOethics initiative. Since that time, the UN has followed the commission through the establishment of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), held consecutively in 2003 (Geneva) and 2005 (Tunis), where an international and intercultural effort to address and overcome the digital divide supports the goal of an Information Society for All.

On the academic end, IIE is traced back to the inception of the Cultural Attitudes towards Technology and Communication conference, established in 1998 by Charles Ess and Fay Sudweeks, held biennially; and the establishment of the International Center for Information Ethics (ICIE), an international academic community formed in 1999 by Rafael Capurro around the exploration of the field of information ethics. While Cultural Attitudes towards Technology and Communication (CATaC) explores ›how diverse culture attitudes and communication preferences shape the implementation and use of information and communication technologies‹ (CATaC 2014),<sup>3</sup> ICIE is a center for publication and discussion that focuses on connecting the global information ethics movement around philosophical foundations for the field (ICIE 2014).<sup>4</sup> The founding goal of ICIE is the attempt to bring together the disparate reaches of the field's intercultural infancy into a collaborative community (Froehlich 2004).<sup>5</sup>

The history of *Intercultural Information Ethics* (IIE) as a separate discipline of its own, apart from even the wider scope of IE, and the inter-discovery of fragmented pockets of localized explorations in ICT based IE, is only about a decade old. The burgeoning discipline represented by both academic and practical elements of IIE was, in 2007, united in partnership between UNESCO and the International Center for Information Ethics, and in a series of conversations regard-

<sup>3</sup> CATaC Conferences, ›Culture, Communication, Technology‹ (URL: <http://www.cataconference.org>, last accessed on 15 December 2014).

<sup>4</sup> International Center for Information Ethics (ICIE) (URL: <http://icie.zkm.de/research>, site last updated February 2, 2013; last accessed on February 21, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> T. Froehlich, ›A Brief History of Information Ethics,‹ *BiD: textos universitaris de biblioteconomia i documentació*, Vol. 13, 2004 (URL: <http://bid.ub.edu/13froel2.htm>; last accessed on 13 January 2015).

ing the nature of an Information Ethics for and from Africa, the union saw the establishment of a new field coalesce from merely an academic venture into a globally recognized new discipline. However, the above association is only one of a number of initiatives that shape the foundations of IIE. Along with UNESCO, ICIE and CATaC, IIE finds its early and ongoing home in ETHICOMP, a conference established by Simon Rogerson, Terry Bynum and the Centre for Computing and Social Responsibility (CCSR) in 1995, as well as the CEPE Conference – Computer Ethics: Philosophical Enquiry (1997), and lastly the Oxford Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics, established in 2003 under the support of the Uehiro Foundation on Ethics and Education in Japan.

A growing intercultural awareness of the need for a foundational and unified intercultural philosophy begs consideration. Any attempt at developing an IE without first recognizing and then reconciling westernized philosophical monopolies to the exclusion of, for example, Buddhist philosophical world views proves futile. Pak-Hang Wong, who has written extensively in the field of IIE, and whose interest in Chinese philosophy and ethics gives him a valuable insight into the non-western applications of IIE, contends that the existing discussions and dialogues in IE are dominated by ethical contexts unique to western cultures whose ethical structures are not necessarily compatible with the numerous differing cultural frameworks around the world. Wong states, for example, that in western ethics, »the arguments for the protection of privacy are often based on the individual's autonomy; these arguments may sound peculiar for Confucian cultures, which generally weigh the collective, common good over and above the benefit of individuals« (Wong 2009: 1).<sup>6</sup> The argument will be made herein that such differences are not necessarily divisive.

Worth quoting at length in its entirety is Rafael Capurro's concise summary of the field of IIE:

We need an intercultural debate on information ethics in order to critically discuss the limits and richness of human morality and moral thinking in different societies, epochs and philosophic traditions as well as on their impact on today's social appropriation of information technology. This would open different paths of theory and practice that would weaken the ambi-

<sup>6</sup> P. H. Wong, »What Should We Share?: Understanding the Aim of Intercultural Information Ethics,« *ACM SIGCAS Computers and Society*, Vol. 39, No. 3, 2009, pp. 50–58.

tions of information technology, no less than the pretensions of moral codes and ethical thinking, and open at the same time different kinds of strategies when dealing with the digital divide. This debate presupposes a patient and respectful philosophic dialogue that should not take place under a consensus compulsion of reaching universality also because universality remains, to put it in Kantian terms, a »regulative idea« that cannot be reached by any kind of moral codes. The role of ethics is to enlighten or weaken not only local moralities but also the pretension of universal principles with regard both to their unquestioned presuppositions and especially as far as they are practically misused for local interests. This is not a plea for moral relativism but an incentive to enlighten our minds and lives with regard to the open space of thought and the groundless world we share, which allow us to remain in an endless process of intertwining society, nature and technology, looking for flexible norms that regulate rather than block such a process. (Capurro 2008: 172)<sup>7</sup>

### III Philosophy and Information Communication Technologies

ICTs have the potential to both support and undermine efforts towards developing an equitable global citizenship. In part, such a dichotomy arises from the decentered nature of what will be defined further below as »digital citizenship,« a type of cosmopolitan citizenship that not only differs from, but is opposite to the traditional political philosophy of cosmopolitan citizenship that looks to a single world state. Citizens of a digital cosmopolitanism, referred to here as the »netizen,« rather than the citizen, understands their global identity in terms of both localization, *and* cosmopolitanism. In other words, they are a netizen among »information societies« (plural), rather than a citizen in an information society (singular). They are not held to terms of nationalism nor state, but instead to their localized place within a global digital community, and while they hold no particular allegiance to state or nation, they all the same identify fully with their cultural heritage. They are existentially grounded rather than geographically or politically grounded, and thus the options for identity offered them in »cyberspace« surpass, what in their view, are the ever-increasing, non-tangible, and unattainable identities offered them through traditional terms of nationalism and global citizenship.

<sup>7</sup> R. Capurro, »On Florida's Metaphysical Foundation of Information Ecology,« *Ethics and Information Technology*, Vol. 10, Nos. 2–3, 2008, pp. 167–173.

They are both citizen and stranger at all times, especially in their own land.

However, while ICTs enable global dialogue, awareness, education, and new forms of being-in-the-world, they also enable the widespread abuse of privacy, autonomy, anonymity, and security (Capurro 2013: 3).<sup>8</sup> The greatest and most relevant example of such abuse centers around issues of surveillance, now the complex contemporary concern of IE in general and IIE globally. Such concerns are demonstrated best in the contemporary phenomena of WikiLeaks and the NSA surveillance revelations, the fallout of which is just beginning to be addressed (Bielby 2014).<sup>9</sup> While democracy ideally realized should enable trust, the mere presence of ICTs, never mind the abuse of them, potentially undermines the foundational cultural and psychological stalwarts behind democracy itself where the dynamics of the distribution of political power and the ›rule of the people‹ become muddled in an ICT-saturated world of open access to mass information, resulting in a distrust of power structures in general. Charles Ess and others demonstrate the preceding claim in a discourse that defends privacy as being foundational to democracy.

Ess writes, ›privacy is important as a means to develop a sense of self and personal autonomy first of all – along with the intimate relationships, and other capacities and abilities important to this singular autonomy. Thereby, privacy funds the basic elements required for participating in a democratic society – i. e., personal autonomy/freedom and then the capacity for dialogue, debate, etc.‹ (Ess 2006: 223).<sup>10</sup> Deborah Johnson states in her *Computer Ethics*, ›one of the critical ways that an individual controls his life is by choosing with whom he will have relationships and what kind of relationships these will be [...] Information mediates relationships. Thus when one cannot control who has information about one, one loses considerable autonomy‹ (Johnson 1985: 65).<sup>11</sup> While ICTs supposedly allow govern-

ments to protect their citizens from ›terrorism‹ through high-tech monitoring security surveillance systems (the term ›terrorism‹ often a convenient demonization of dissidents and oppositions), the means to doing so can become a vice at a moment's notice where the mass ›monitoring‹ of individuals for national security purposes becomes a gross erosion of anonymity, as outlined by Ess, Johnson, and the information philosopher Luciano Floridi. To lose control of our information is to lose control of who we are, a premise first offered by Johnson, and recently taken up by Floridi who also contends that our being consists of our information. Robert Herritt sums up Floridi's premise, ›you are your information, which includes everything from data about the relations between particles in your body to your life stories‹ (Herritt 2014).<sup>12</sup> Thus the relationship between anonymity, autonomy and privacy, at least from an IE perspective, is as follows – our autonomy is synonymous with our information, and any breach of privacy is both a breach of autonomy and anonymity when that which we choose to conceal or to reveal is removed from our own control (Capurro 2014).<sup>13</sup> From both psychological and philosophical perspectives, such an erosion undermines more than simple privacy, it also undermines the prerequisite of autonomy at the core of our humanness, and thus threatens the very dignity of our being‹ (Ess 2006: 223). Chikako Endo, a scholar who has written and taught at both Oxford and Kwansai Gakuin Universities, addresses at length the relationship between autonomy, government, and democracy. The correlation is developed in a number of her published and unpublished materials, first tackled in her doctoral dissertation for Oxford University, *Autonomy and Citizenship: Implications for Citizenship Education* (Chicago: 2008a).<sup>14</sup> In an unpublished paper presented at the 2008 Political Studies Association Conference, ›The Idea of Autonomy in Liberal Democratic Citizenship: Autonomy and Citizenship in Plural Societies,‹ Endo informs us that we must be able to first govern our own selves freely without coercion in order to externally reflect and thus participate in a democracy as an autonomous indivi-

<sup>8</sup> R. Capurro, ›Information Ethics in the African Context,‹ *Information Ethics in Africa: Cross-cutting Themes*, Vol. 7, 2013, pp. 7–20.

<sup>9</sup> J. Bielby, ›WikiLeaks and the Dissolution of Information: Accountability to Information Entropy,‹ accessible at: [https://www.academia.edu/8635117/WikiLeaks\\_and\\_the\\_Dissolution\\_of\\_Information\\_Accountability\\_to\\_Information\\_Entropy](https://www.academia.edu/8635117/WikiLeaks_and_the_Dissolution_of_Information_Accountability_to_Information_Entropy) (last accessed on 23 October 2014).

<sup>10</sup> C. Ess, ›Ethical Pluralism and Global Information Ethics,‹ *Ethics and Information Technology*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 2006, pp. 215–226.

<sup>11</sup> D. Johnson, *Computer Ethics*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1985.

<sup>12</sup> R. Herritt, ›Google's Philosopher,‹ *Pacific Standard*, Dec 30, 2014. (URL: <http://www.psmag.com/navigation/nature-and-technology/googles-philosopher-technology-nature-identity-court-legal-policy-95456/>; last accessed on 5 January 2015).

<sup>13</sup> R. Capurro, ›Shapes of Freedom in the Digital Age,‹ Sept. 3, 2014 (URL: <http://www.capurro.de/kastamonu.html>; last accessed on 4 January 2015).

<sup>14</sup> C. Endo, *Autonomy and Citizenship: Implications for Citizenship Education*, Chicago 2008a [doctoral dissertation, Oxford University].

dual. As she qualifies, »we can come to reflect on our commitments and potentially revise them through such encounters. Without this capacity to evaluate and potentially revoke our second-order desires, our beliefs according to which we direct our first-order desires could simply become an expression of habit and complacent belief rather than one of conscious self-government and self-direction.«<sup>15</sup> It is only as an autonomous being that one is capable of reflecting on otherness, the prerequisite to any informed citizenship, and thus the prerequisite to democracy.

However, it is within the above presumed concerns that IIE is brought to a halt, not in the absence of answers to the above noted quandaries, but rather in the uncritical assumption that said issues are in fact the globally agreed upon concerns of IE. Ethics, as a discipline, is deeply entrenched in western history, tradition and culture, and the uncritical application of day-to-day presuppositions about the nature of reality, *being*, and »right« and »wrong,« appear so automatically and are so subconsciously engrained. And thus, as abstracted by Johannes Britz, while the field of IE as historically developed under a western worldview can be exemplified in three main notions, those being the *freedom of speech*, *freedom of access to information* and *freedom of the press* (Britz 2013: 3),<sup>16</sup> a direct overlay of such foundations at a global level is a gross misrepresentation of the subtleties of other cultural and historical worldviews and ethical systems.

The above recognition is one of the founding concerns of IIE. While traditional ethical philosophies (whether we are referring to the western tradition – ancient Greece onward, or an eastern tradition – Confucianism, for example), are forced to self-reflect on their own tradition when faced with another, they can only do so *within* the parameters of their own tradition. The western tradition, for example, has attempted to assess the nature of morality from its own localized perspective. It has critiqued its biases in detail, establishing what is referred to as *descriptive ethics* (asking the question – what it is that people *think* is »right«). From descriptive ethics it has established what is referred to as *normative ethics*, a critical exploration of morality

<sup>15</sup> C. Endo, »The Idea of Autonomy in Liberal Democratic Citizenship: Autonomy and Citizenship in Plural Societies,« University of Oxford, Presented at the Political Studies Association Conference, 2008b (URL: [http://www.pol.ed.ac.uk/psa\\_postgraduate/abstracts](http://www.pol.ed.ac.uk/psa_postgraduate/abstracts); last accessed on 6 January 2015).

<sup>16</sup> J. Britz, »Understanding Information Ethics,« *Information Ethics in Africa: Cross-cutting Themes*, Vol. 7, 2013, pp. 1–6.

(what people *ought* to do), but recognizing even therein the biased nature of the task, thus delving into *applied ethics* (how does one put a critical morality into *practice*?). Finally it has considered the realm of *meta-ethics* (an exploration of the biases behind the *terminology* itself – commonly typified as »what does »right« even mean?«).<sup>17</sup> However exhaustive, the entire process speaks yet to a specific cultural horizon, namely ethics as per Greco-Roman, Christian, and otherwise western traditions.

Regarding the futility of uncritically applying the western ethical tradition to a global scale, Soraj Hongladarom and Johannes Britz note in their introduction to Volume 13 of the International Review of Information Ethics, *Intercultural Information Ethics*, that:

The main area of discussion and debate within intercultural information ethics centers around the age-old philosophical problem of universalism and particularism. The sets of ideas promoting Western style of individualism are predicated upon the more foundational belief that these ideas are universal in nature. It does not make much sense to promote autonomy and liberty of individuals if these individuals are restricted only to a few groups (such as the European whites), because that would totally defeat what these ideas stand for. On the other hand, those arguing for the traditional hierarchical society ideas presumably also believe that their ideas are universal. (Hongladarom, and Britz 2009: 3)<sup>18</sup>

The World Summit on the Information Society envisions IE through a truly global-centered approach that addresses what it sees as the most critical elements of a fair and equitable globally informed community. Its eleven key principles, as listed in its Declaration of Principles, explore: »the role of governments and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development, information and communication infrastructure; access to information and knowledge; capacity building; building confidence and security in the use of ICTs; enabling environment; ICT applications; cultural diversity and identity; linguistic diversity and local content; media; ethical dimensions; and explorations of international and regional cooperation (WSIS 2003, 2005)«.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> As explored by the National Open University of Nigeria course syllabus for *Comparative Ethics in a Pluralistic Society* (URL: [http://www.nou.edu.ng/NOUN\\_OCL/pdf/SASS/CTH%20423%20.pdf](http://www.nou.edu.ng/NOUN_OCL/pdf/SASS/CTH%20423%20.pdf); last accessed 17 April 2014).

<sup>18</sup> S. Hongladarom, and J. Britz, »Intercultural Information Ethics,« *International Review of Information Ethics*, Vol. 11, 2009, pp. 2–5.

<sup>19</sup> »Declaration of Principles: Building the Information Society: A Global Challenge in

However, as noble as the above agenda is, encompassing the vast array of potential dynamics involved in the development of an equitable global citizenship, it is ultimately still theoretically biased. As per the First Regional Conference for the Asia and Pacific Region on the Ethical Dimensions of the Information Society (12–14 March 2008, Hanoi, Vietnam), Peter Malcouronne comments on the principles highlighted above, specifically regarding the Asia-Pacific region:

Ethnic diversity in the Asia Pacific region is unequalled. We have hundreds of millions of Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Shinto, Sikh and Buddhists; we live under feudal kings, socialist prophets and capitalist roaders. Our differences pose unique regional challenges to reaching a consensus on Information Society Ethics. Would we be able to reach a consensus amongst ourselves? And if we did so, the concerns of our region are likely to be very different to those, say, of Europe. Indeed is a meaningful International Code of Ethics possible, even desirable? (Malcouronne 2008: 2)<sup>20</sup>

Predictably so, the above concern was realized in full when in a press release of the Civil Society for WSIS during the 2003 Geneva Summit it was revealed that there was significant discord among governments around even the first article of the common foundation of the Summit declaration regarding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As stated in the release regarding the struggle over human rights:

Not even the basis of human life in dignity and equality, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, finds support as the basis for the Information Society. Governments are not able to agree on a commitment to basic human right standards as the basis for the Information Society, most prominent in this case being the freedom of expression. (Civil Society 2003)<sup>21</sup>

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the New Millennium, World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), Geneva 2003/Tunis 2005, Document WSIS-03/GENEVA?DOC/4-E, 12 December 2003 (URL: <http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/official/dop.html>; last accessed on 3 May 2014).

<sup>20</sup> P. Malcouronne, *First Regional Conference for the Asia and Pacific Region on the Ethical Dimensions of the Information Society*, 12–14 March 2008, Hanoi, Vietnam (URL: [https://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rcct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CB8QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fportal.unesco.org%2Fci%2Fen%2Ffiles%2F27201%2F12142152553Final\\_Report\\_Hanoi\\_Conference.doc%2FFinal\\_Report\\_Hanoi\\_Conference.doc&ei=3FuzVKmPM4XVoASv-ICIBQ&usg=AFQjCNE0EWW1j83k9L7giuUBvmw2RF8YVg&bvm=bv.83339334.d.cGU](https://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rcct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CB8QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fportal.unesco.org%2Fci%2Fen%2Ffiles%2F27201%2F12142152553Final_Report_Hanoi_Conference.doc%2FFinal_Report_Hanoi_Conference.doc&ei=3FuzVKmPM4XVoASv-ICIBQ&usg=AFQjCNE0EWW1j83k9L7giuUBvmw2RF8YVg&bvm=bv.83339334.d.cGU); last accessed on 13 January 2015).

<sup>21</sup> Civil Society Statement at the End of the Preparatory Process for the WSIS 14

The difficulty of an IIE surpasses even the disparity among governments representing their localized geographical regions. While governments traditionally represent particular cultural traditions, a digitally globalized society complicates those traditional structures. As Hongladarom and Britz note, »when we really look deeper into the matter, we find that there can be as much difference within these geographical regions themselves as there is among the separate regions« (Hongladarom, and Britz 2009: 2). These differences are religious, cultural, and philosophical, and they are as many as they are varied. As Wong states in regards to Confucianism, »it is often forgotten that Confucianism is not simply fixed rules derived from the canons; but, it is itself a school of thought that contains various sub-traditions, e.g., Neo-Confucianism, New Confucianism, etc.; and, the problem of complexity multiplies once we consider Chinese culture as a whole, which is constituted by Confucian, Daoist and Zen, and each has their own moral systems« (Wong 2009: 4). When the above is also considered in terms of geographical multiculturalism and the interplay of equally dispersed subcultures as expanding uniformly around the globe, the vast complexity of the matter begins to manifest.

The initial consideration of an IIE, much like any ›international‹ study, attempted to focus on various cultural differences from the perspective of geographical locality. However, insight into the nature of globalization, especially as precipitated by an ICT-saturated, global culture, quickly revealed a lack of such convenient borders. It in fact revealed the birth pangs of the dissolution of said borders with the delivery of a new and hitherto unknown spectacle in governance, namely that of *digital* Global Citizenship and the concept of the netizen. This wider concept of a ›digital citizen‹ seeks to surmount an arcane understanding of political citizenship. Here, traditional ideas of cosmopolitanism are revisited through questions of digital identity and online being-in-the-world, demanding a readdress of everything from patriotism to ideas of the face-to-face. The very nature of globalization entails a new clash of cultures not from a butting up of previously separated nation states of cultural, religious and geographical origin, but rather a clash of these same cultures in terms of new forms of localization and inter-geographical cosmopolitanism in the

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November 2003 (URL: [http://www.worldsummit2003.de/download\\_en/CS-press-statement-14-11-03-final.rtf](http://www.worldsummit2003.de/download_en/CS-press-statement-14-11-03-final.rtf); last accessed on 3 November 2014).

world, of multiculturalism, of subcultures within culture, all propagated by ICTs.

In *Teaching about (and with) Digital Global Citizenship* C. F. Risinger notes that, »While national identity is certainly not going away, there is a growing support for a form of global citizenship, and technology has become a major and even transforming force within this movement« (Risinger 2014: 1).<sup>22</sup> While the definition of global citizenship may seem somewhat ambiguous to begin with, especially in terms of how its existence could ever legally trump the rights and duties of national citizenship, the digital manifestation of global citizenship has prompted a reevaluation of what citizenship entails in the digital age. Graham Longford proposes a radical digital global citizenship philosophy. Longford believes that the very nature of cyberspace is both self-governing and structured towards enabling global citizenship in what he terms the *politics of code* (Longford 2005: 1).<sup>23</sup> His concept of digital global citizenship is reminiscent of a kind of Heideggerian ontology, offering both cyberspace and digital citizenship as present-at-hand, where the code of cyberspace is pre-existent in its very design. As Longford states, a digital global citizenship must look towards »the ways in which citizenship norms, rights, obligations and practices are *encoded* in the design and structure of our increasingly digital surroundings« (*ibid.*).

Because of the prevalence of ICTs and their tendency towards bridging cultures (whether for good or bad), and their overarching influence in both localized and globalized settings, the above supposition of a present-at-hand digital citizenship ought to be considered carefully. *If* ICTs are the predominant catalyst to a contemporary cultural zeitgeist, and *if* they presuppose a ready-at-hand digital citizenship, then it could be argued that the predominance of a digital global citizenship must inevitably trump, if not at least work in tandem with, any previous form of national citizenship. Longford concludes, »Genuine technological citizenship in the digital era entails a critical awareness of how code constitutes the conditions of possibility for different norms, models, and practices of on-line citizenship, along

with the capacity to resist and reshape-to *hack*, if you will-the prevailing terms and conditions of cybercitizenship if they no longer serve our needs« (*ibid.*).

In Capurro's work on communication theory (specifically his monumental *Messages and Messengers: Angeletics as an Approach to the Phenomenology of Communication* [2007]), the hermeneutical dichotomy between message and communication (as established in the western continental tradition of philosophy) is opened up to establishing cross-cultural and intercultural communication as couched specifically in terms of ICTs.<sup>24</sup> Hermeneutics, originally worked out ontologically by Martin Heidegger and perhaps subsequently illuminated by Hans-Georg Gadamer, and demonstrated through the fields of cybernetics and communication theory by theorists Claude E. Shannon, Warren Weaver, Norbert Wiener, and Marshal McLuhan, in many ways represents the foundations of both IE and IIE. The new field of *angeletics* looks to »what extent the internet creates a new *angeletic* space, giving rise to new synergies of messages and messengers beyond the hierarchical structure of mass media« (Capurro 2011: 1). Tadashi Takenouchi approaches the task through what he terms hermeneutic information studies or hermeneutic informatics (Takenouchi 2004: 2, 6),<sup>25</sup> an approach that captures the study of information in terms of communication and dialogue, based on Heidegger's original re-envisioning of being-in-the-world. Thus through Capurro and Takenouchi, one encounters the crossroads between ICTs and the *hermeneutical circle*, a basic hermeneutical premise positing that any understanding as a whole is established by reference to the individual parts, but in turn, any understanding of each individual part must be referenced back to the whole, and that this iterative process becomes the ongoing dialogue that allows the *truth* of a matter to emerge. *Angeletics*, as a basic theoretical foundation to IIE, posits the possibility of navigating the cyberspace of digital citizenship as well as bridging intercultural differences in global political bodies such as UNESCO and WSIS.

<sup>22</sup> F. C. Risinger, »Teaching About (and With) Digital Global Citizenship,« *Social Education*, Vol. 78, No. 5, 2014, pp. 241–242.

<sup>23</sup> G. Longford, »Pedagogies of Digital Citizenship and the Politics of Code,« *Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology*, Vol. 9, 2005 (URL: <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/journals/SPT/v9n1/longford.html>, last accessed on 13 January 2015).

<sup>24</sup> R. Capurro, and J. Holgate (eds.), *Messages and Messengers: Angeletics as an Approach to the Phenomenology of Communication*, Paderborn: Fink, 2011.

<sup>25</sup> T. Takenouchi, »Capurro's Hermeneutic Approach to Information Ethics: Ethos in the Information Society and the Development of »Angeletics,« *International Journal of Information Ethics*, Vol. 1, 2004 pp. 1–8.

#### IV Privacy and Intercultural Information Ethics

From discord in terms of freedom of expression to mutually incompatible concepts of privacy, a global philosophical foundation for IIE is yet wanting. The complexity of a unified definition of the merits of privacy alone from an IIE perspective is lacking. The foundations of the very concept of privacy cannot be substantiated in commonplace evaluations. What do, for instance, North American and African cultures have in common regarding ideas of privacy? What about African and Thai cultures? Ess underlines philosophical notions of privacy in Japan where the Buddhist worldview encourages the rejection of one's connection to self through the practice of denying one's self its privacy, all toward the goal of purification *from* self (Ess 2006: 9). Such acts encourage a disclosure of shame and secrecy, a necessary act that frees the self. By such cultural terms, there is neither the desire for nor the expectation of privacy. Alongside other historical causes of cultural transformation due to intercultural exchange, the gradual global-wide proliferation of ICTs is contributing to a slow transformation of traditional values in Asian countries under western influences, adding a complexity to an already exponential escalation of the intercultural face-to-face (*ibid.*).

Toru Nishigaki weighs in on the nature of IE in Japan. Nishigaki highlights that IE in Japan, to date, is concerned mainly with maintaining the status quo of society, and stresses that there is no drive in Japanese IE as there is in its western counterparts towards an ontology of being-in-the-world (outlined below in section V), instead looking simply towards how ICTs should be incorporated into already established cultural norms and expectations. He differentiates however, this general application of IE in Japan from his own understanding of the consequences of ICTs on Japanese society (Nishigaki 2006). Nishigaki takes a critical look at the western ontological presuppositions of a coherent self and contrasts it to the Japanese idea of no self, juxtaposing the two perspectives towards the possibility of a ›middle way.‹ Where many western ontologies consider the wellbeing of self *as primary*, in contrast, Buddhist philosophy does not adhere to any confirmation of a coherent self, looking instead to an ethics where, as in China and Thailand, the relationship between the individual and the community takes precedence (Nishigaki 2006: 2).<sup>26</sup> Here, the in-

<sup>26</sup> T. Nishigaki, ›The Ethics in Japanese Information Society: Consideration on Fran-

dividual and the community are entities that exist in convention only; a concept explained in part six below, where the only ethical exchange that can exist does so according to affording the best solutions to a mutual common good.

To obfuscate the matter, Andrew A. Adams, Kiyoshi Murata, and Yohko Orito, contend that the idea of privacy has always existed in Japan, but that the cultural fluctuations of technology and law have distorted the traditional cultural Japanese norms of privacy. As stated:

In keeping with this recent trend to demonstrate that the Japanese do have concerns about privacy, we claim that there is a strong sense of information privacy in Japan which has long been a part of the culture [...] it is our contention that this legal development is not indicative of a new emergence of privacy concerns within Japanese society, but a response to the failures of social norms that previously guaranteed such privacy. These failures have been brought about by economic and technological shifts. (Adams, Murata, and Orito 2009: 328)<sup>27</sup>

Soraj Hongladarom explores the concept of privacy specific to information ethics through the Buddhist thinkers Nagasena and Nagarjuna whose writings represent Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism respectively. Hongladarom complicates the debate by arguing against the very western assumption of a private self and hence privacy as a reflection of that self. The concept of privacy, according to Hongladarom, exists only *conventionally*, but not ontologically, an assertion influenced by the above two schools of Buddhism. He points out that since the self does not exist in an ultimate sense, then neither can the rights belonging to the self exist (Hongladarom 2007: 112).<sup>28</sup> Hongladarom understands the Buddhist conception of ›no self‹ as advantageously offering pragmatic solutions to the IE privacy debate in that an exploration of privacy can take place without its presumed attachment to self, offering an idea of privacy, even from a Buddhist perspective, that accommodates convention, and thus ultimately allows protections against the same abuses outlined in the western ethical

cisco Varela's *The Embodied Mind From the Perspective of Fundamental Informatics, Ethics and Information Technology*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 2006, pp. 237–242.

<sup>27</sup> A. A. Adams, I. Murata, and Y. Orito, ›The Japanese Sense of Information Privacy, *AI and Society*, Vol. 24, No. 4, 2009, pp. 327–341 (URL: [http://opendepot.org/209/1/Adams\\_Murata\\_Orito\\_v4.pdf](http://opendepot.org/209/1/Adams_Murata_Orito_v4.pdf); last accessed 13 January 2015).

<sup>28</sup> S. Hongladarom, ›Analysis and Justification of Privacy from a Buddhist Perspective,« S. Hongladarom, and C. Ess (eds.), *Information Technology Ethics: Cultural Perspectives*, Hershey, Pennsylvania: Idea Group, 2007, pp. 108–122.



perspective. While the above notion excludes self in the ontological western sense of *beingness*, it recognizes the physical entity that constitutes a self. As Hongladarom puts it, »According to Nagarjuna, the self as an inherently existing entity does not exist, strictly speaking, but as an empirical entity, it certainly does« (*ibid.*: 109). Privacy too exists as a »right« for this empirical entity, but only in a conventional, not ontological, sense. As far as an exploration of IIE goes, the critical difference between western and Daoist, Confucius, and Buddhist notions of self and the potential of privacy being accorded them resides in the presumed *beingness* or lack of self apart from its value, where the value of a being exists only in its reflection as an entity co-existing and interacting among other living entities. While Nagarjuna would recognize the entity that is a self as being a part of and interacting with other entities, such a self is only of value in reflection to its presence among other entities and its political value. Hongladarom clarifies:

Privacy is justified in Buddhism through its being a necessary element in the realization of democratic ideals that require individuals to be respected and accorded a certain number of rights that would allow them to function effectively in the task assigned to citizens in a democratic polity, such as deliberation and participation in public policy process. In such a scenario, violation of individual privacy would mean that the violator gains an unfair power over the individual; thus, the basic underlying principle of democracy would be undermined, the principle that individuals are equal in power in need of some space within which they can live, think, and communicate freely. (*ibid.*: 112)

## V Pluralism in Intercultural Information Ethics

Charles Ess speaks to the above noted foundational tenets of IIE in terms of ethical pluralism. The aforementioned arguments regarding the ungrounded nature of global ethics lead to the conclusion that any stand on the truth of ethical claims whatsoever becomes culturally subjective, since it appears now that truth only exists in the eye of the beholder. Ess notes, regarding truth and cultural differences:

A first response, in the face of these irreducible differences, is that of ethical relativism. Such relativism, of course, pits itself especially against an ethical dogmatism – the usually ethnocentric belief that universal ethical standards indeed exist, that these are known to a particular person and/or ethnos, and that these standards must indeed be acknowledged as universally legitimate, i. e., as normative for all people in all times and all places. This dogmatism simply condemns all different views, claims, approaches, norms, etc., as

wrong because they disagree with the one set of putatively universal truths and values. The resulting intolerance of all such different norms and claims inspires precisely the relativist effort to establish and justify tolerance towards a wide diversity of views, beliefs, practices, and cultures. The relativist can do so, however, only at the cost of actively denying the possibility of ethical standards and norms that may be compelling and legitimate for more than the individual and/or specific ethnos. (Ess 2006: 1)

How then does one come to terms with *intercultural* ethical truth? How does one maintain information societies rather than submitting to an idea of *an* information society? How do cultures exist both locally and globally, globally in terms of the digital cosmopolitanism outlined above? Ess argues that succumbing to relativism is as good as abandoning any hope of arriving at an IIE. Instead he advocates for a pluralism that looks to a multiethnic, global city where the avoidance of compromises is critical, specifically, the move beyond mere tolerance or token inclusion, the consequence of which is nothing more than a state of ignorance. In his estimation, a non-engagement with »otherness« does nothing towards enhancing the knowledge of one's world, mutual or otherwise. Ess explores, instead of tolerance, the move to a place of authentic sharing, a type of pluralism he defines by a state of shared multiplicities. Ess notes that if mere tolerance of differing values inevitably leads to »ghetto«-like divisions within a global city, resulting in a form of cultural alienation which inevitably leads to conflict through force in the end despite such tolerance, then pluralism must look towards a value structure built around not just agreements of difference, but also on a sharing of differences that avoids the fragmentation that so often accompanies »tolerance« (*ibid.*: 2). This is not to deny that some level of compromise must inevitably take shape in the interaction, but that the compromise not be forced begrudgingly, and in fact be a type of mutually edifying compromise. Thus, Ess looks towards models of connection and »complementarity« in what he deems an active engagement that results in both sides connecting through self and identity but doing so without the negation of irreducible differences. The goal is *irreducibility* not *irreconcilability*. Ess states, »complementarity relationships preserve and enhance the irreducible differences that define distinctive individuals, cultures, and civilizations« (*ibid.*: 3).

Ess further develops his thought in terms of pluralism in IIE, looking to the origins of western tradition and Greek philosophy itself in order to escape the numerous strains of western tradition that

might otherwise cloud any shared origins between western and eastern philosophy. He engages Plato and Aristotle as forbearers of the above pluralism whereby Plato's *cybernetes* (the origin of Wiener's Cybernetics, and thus of IE) and Aristotle's *phronēsis* (practical wisdom) offer more than just a methodology to IIE, but also a common starting place for IIE through parallels to eastern, specifically Confucian, thought. Ess quotes Joseph Chan as making the crucial point regarding the similarity between what Plato and Aristotle understood as *practical wisdom* and what the Confucians deemed *rén*, the Confucian virtue of shared humanness that focuses on the connection between two subjects of an action. As Chan summarizes *rén*, »If after careful and conscientious deliberation, two persons equipped with *rén* come up with two different or contradictory judgments and courses of action, Confucians would tell us to respect both of the judgments« (Chan 2003: 137).<sup>29</sup> This deliberation is the very act of Greek *phronēsis*, where rather than employing an uncritical tolerance, and thus avoidance of differences that create a cultural ›peace,‹ an accountable engagement is instead pursued and a *pointed* and *deliberate* encounter results in a mutual edification of Self and Other based on irreducible differences, not irreconcilable differences.

Yet even here, the practical application of IIE is still in need of work. In addressing the aim of IIE, Wong critiques Ess' pluralism. Regarding Ess' conclusions he writes, »it is unclear exactly what counts as maintaining cultural diversity and respecting different moral systems [...] and when the norms are considered to be shared« (Wong 2009: 2). Wong sums up the IIE debate thus far, especially as culminating in Ess' pluralism, as offering two possibilities, one unattainable, the other attainable only under certain conditions. He explicitly outlines the debate concerning establishing an IIE in terms of either »shared norms, different interpretations« or »shared norms, different justifications,« where cultural norms are established differing only in interpretation of said norms or justifications of such, respectively (*ibid.*: 5). His critique is that any such shared point of origin of reference succumbs to metaethical moral relativism unless this point of origin is first clearly identified and agreed upon. Doing this, however, would require a detailed and successful outline that, as ex-

<sup>29</sup> J. Chan, »Confucian Attitudes towards Ethical Pluralism,« in R. Madsen, and T. B. Strong, (eds.), *The Many and the One: Religious and Secular Perspectives on Ethical Pluralism in the Modern World*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, pp. 129–153.

emplified in the above noted case of WSIS' failure to develop even a foundation for universal human rights, remains thus far non-existent. Wong attempts to overcome the above deadlock by replacing ethical *norms* with common cultural *values*, but admits that a detailed explication of what those values should be is yet needed (*ibid.*: 7.).

## VI Information Ecology and Intercultural Information Ethics

As global consciousness (or at least awareness) increases through the exposure of previously closed ethical systems to intercultural otherness, an inevitable evolution of IIE will begin to look at cultural and intercultural perspectives of the interface between not only ICTs and human agency but between ICTs and other agents as well, including artificial agents (robots, cyborgs), environment, and the ethical and moral agency of non-human beings (like animals), and indeed such perspectives have already found their roots in the IE and IIE tradition. Where western interpretations of *being* have thus far limited moral agency to human beings, perpetuated by western notions of dualism and human superiority as ›divinely designated,‹ the interface with eastern philosophies demands now an accountability of western ethics to life removed from religious and metaphysical moralities and notions of human superiority.

Leading IIE in environmentally inclusive moral agency are the notions of Luciano Floridi's *infosphere* and Terrell Ward Bynum's notion of ›Flourishing Ethics‹ (FE). Where Bynum advocates for two modes of flourishing ethics based on the ethics of Aristotle, those two modes being ›human-centered FE‹ and ›general FE,‹ Floridi looks to a post-analytical flourishing of *being* through a metaphysics of inclusive moral entities that make up the entirety of what he calls the *infosphere*, an interactive continuum of reality consisting of the positive and negative outcomes of information entropy. While Bynum advocates for understanding flourishing ethics in the traditional Aristotelian sense (human-centered FE) he also insists on differentiating that traditional sense from a Flourishing Ethics that applies to »every physical entity in the universe, including humans,« otherwise labeled as General FE (Bynum 2006: 158).<sup>30</sup> Floridi understands his ethics in

<sup>30</sup> T. W. Bynum, ›Flourishing Ethics,‹ *Ethics and Information Technology*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 2006, pp. 157–173.

terms of information entropy where all things consist of and are formed of information, assigning them moral agency and attributing all entities, living or otherwise, a more-or-less equal standing as being deserving of ethical consideration and capable of moral agency, and it is the moral action of each entity that either detracts from or adds to the entropy of the infosphere (Floridi 2002a, 2000b, 2007).<sup>31</sup> Though coming from western ethical traditions, both Floridi and Bynum's ecological ethics are possibly conducive to, for instance, certain Buddhist or Hindu worldviews.

Philip Brey, however, takes issue with Floridi's all encompassing IIE, arguing that while grand in theory, Floridi's IE, specifically his concept of information object as morally entitled, cannot be grounded or supported, at least in terms of information objects possessing a metaphysical intrinsic value in of themselves. Instead, Brey allows a possible reconciliation of Floridi's value-based information entity by replacing his value-based metaphysics with a respect-based alternative. Rather than each information entity being entitled to moral respect because of an ontological entitlement, the support for which Brey contends is missing in Floridi's work, Floridi's infosphere of objects can rather be afforded equal moral respect as being equally valued *by* other information entities. As Brey contends, »inanimate things in the world deserve moral respect, not because of intrinsic value, but because of their (potential) extrinsic, instrumental or emotional value for persons« (Brey 2008: 10).<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps it could be surmised that Brey's reevaluation of Floridi's information entity actually brings Floridi closer to bridging eastern and western IIE within common roots in that a respect-based infosphere reflects Hongladarom's Buddhist idea of reality *convention* rather than reality *actualization*, specifically his necessity of *no self* and also the negation of concepts attached to the supposed self, in the case of Hongladarom's work, the attachment being the false pretense of the concept of privacy as intrinsically existent. Here one can afford Floridi a platform bridging his own western-based post-analytic me-

taphysics to Hongladarom's Buddhist-influenced foundation of non-being. Perhaps it is in such dialectics that a possibility for a cohesive IIE exists, bridging two traditions that, on one hand, recognize the complexities of the pluralism debate, outlined above in Ess and Wong's critique and valuation of such, and on the other hand a hope for mutual perceptions of information ecology between western and eastern traditions as per Brey's bridging of Floridi's infosphere to the pragmatic grounding of *convention*. It is also conceivable that through the establishment of such a platform, IIE can then begin to explore, through *convention* via information ecology, the possibility of intercultural communication per hermeneutical horizons along a common trajectory of the Heideggerian-based work of Capurro and the traditional information ethicists of the hermeneutical tradition.

## VII Conclusion

While traditional IE assumes a western founded philosophy and an intrinsic positive value to ideas such as privacy, complimented by democratic and capitalist concerns of *ownership* and *rights*, and assumes a fundamental and existential *self*, IIE is confronted by a global morass of supposedly unremitting differences between eastern and western thought that threatens the very undoing of everything that IE has thus far established under its western tutelage, including the value and nature of *self!* Fortunately, IIE finds roots in non-western philosophies as well as western, as outlined above, allowing room for the exploration of a common intercultural ground for IE. While the larger scope of IE readily looks to wider implications of the address of the en-masse arrival of ICTs, pause must first be afforded to working out an IIE whereby the sudden sharing of a cultural-techno world awaits a fair advocacy. Such questions are yet to be addressed, or are currently being surveyed in the field and will formulate the evolving directions of IIE within the wider playing field of comparative philosophies. It may yet prove that IIE ultimately and eventually provides the resolve that bridges the long-suffering chasm between the varying philosophical approaches to IE.

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<sup>31</sup> L. Floridi, »Information Ethics,« *Philosophy in the Contemporary World*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2002a, pp. 39–45; »On the Intrinsic Value of Information Objects and the Infosphere,« *Ethics and Information Technology*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 2002b, pp. 287–304; »Global Information Ethics: The Importance of Being Environmentally Earnest,« *International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2007, pp. 1–11.

<sup>32</sup> P. Brey, »Do We Have Moral Duties Towards Information Objects?« *Ethics and Information Technology*, Vol. 10, Nos. 2–3, 2008, pp. 109–114.