

East–West Perspectives on Privacy, Ethical Pluralism and Global Information Ethics

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Introduction: the Manichean Problem

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are both primary drivers and facilitating technologies of globalization—and thereby, of exponentially expanding possibilities of cross-cultural encounters. Currently, over one *billion* persons throughout the planet have access to the Web: of these, Asian users constitute 35.8% of the Web population, while Europeans make up 28.3 % of world users—and North Americans only 20.9% (Internet World Stats, 2007).

Our histories teach us all too well that such encounters—especially concerning potentially global ethical *norms*—always run the risk of devolving into more destructive rather than emancipatory events. Specifically, these encounters risk pulling us into one of two contradictory positions. First of all, naïve ethnocentrism too easily issues in imperialisms that remake “the Other” in one’s own image—precisely by eliminating the irreducible differences in norms and practices that define distinctive cultures. Second, these imperialisms thereby inspire a relativistic turn to the sheerly local—precisely for the sake of preserving local identities and cultures.

Hence the general problem: how we might foster a cross-cultural communication for a global ICE that steers between the two Manichean polarities of ethnocentric imperialism and fragmenting relativism?

A Global ICE: Basic Requirements

This difficulty is not new with ICTs and ICE—but is complicated by the fact that ICTs, most especially the Internet, embed and foster the cultural norms and communicative preferences of their Western roots (see Ess

2006a, 2006b, 2007b.) By the same token, as Soraj Hongladarom points out, until relatively recently, Computer Ethics have remained largely the work of Western ethicists (2007, 110).

But of course, there are sharp contrasts between the basic assumptions underlying Western ICE and those defining world traditions and cultures as shaped by Confucian thought, Buddhism, Indigenous traditions, etc. To begin with, in contrast with the modern Western emphasis on the atomistic *individual* as a primary reality, many of these traditions understand human beings as *relational* beings, ones whose identity and reality essentially turns on their relationships with others in the larger community (and, perhaps, nature and/or divinity itself). So Barbara Paterson suggests that in general, “In African philosophy, a person is defined through his or her relationships with other persons, not through an isolated quality such as rationality...” (2007, 157). This means in turn that “African thought sees a person as a being under construction whose character changes as the relations to other persons change.” (*ibid*) This notion of the human subject as a relational being is likewise found in Confucian thought (see Ames and Rosemont 1998, 49).

These irreducible differences thus work to define the differences between cultures—and thereby between individuals as shaped by these cultures. These foundational differences are thereby essential to our *identities* as cultures and members of cultures. Given that persons and cultures have a basic right to identity (Ess 2006a), this immediately means that we are obliged to honor and foster the irreducible differences that define our individual and cultural identities. At the same time, however, as we seek to develop a *global* ICE, we must do so in ways that simultaneously foster and sustain a *shared ethos* or set of ethical practices.

How far ought we go towards “the Other”?

We must ask still one more question before proceeding to develop a global ICE: How far do we want / need / ought to go to meet “the Other”? This question is central because our responses to it will determine how far we may remain satisfied with an ethics that emphasizes *shared* assumptions and obligations *only*—and how far we may be willing, if not required, to take up additional ethical obligations necessary in order to honor and foster the irreducible differences that define our cultural and individual identities.

In the following, I begin to sketch out the characteristics of each of these responses.

Minimal standards—emphasis on commonalities

What we can think of as a set of *minimal* ethical standards for a global ICE emphasize commonalities more than differences for the sake of largely pragmatic economic interests.

These minimal standards begin with what Johnny Søraker has described as *pragmatic* arguments, i.e., arguments that appeal to our shared economic interests. Such arguments are strong candidates for inclusion in a global ICE, precisely because they largely bypass foundational cultural and political differences (2006). Such arguments seem to work: for example, as a condition of joining the World Trade Organization, China has agreed to the Human Subjects Protections endorsed by the World Health Organization as required for medical research: even though these protections were quite alien to the philosophical foundations of Chinese cultures and earlier medical practices, the *economic* advantages of WTO membership were too great for China to turn down (Döring, 2003).

Moreover, we may expect a global ICE to include agreements on *identical* values and standards because globalization—as fueled by ICTs themselves—fosters a cultural *hybridization* and the creation of “third identities” (i.e., syntheses of two distinct cultural values, practices, beliefs, etc.) that represent precisely a shared, global identity. One of the clearest examples of such a third identity is in the domain of *privacy*. As a number of commentators have observed, young people in Asian countries—specifically Japan, Thailand, and China—increasingly insist on a Western-like practice of *individual* privacy, one that directly contradicts traditional Asian notions (see Nakada & Tamura 2005, Rananand 2007, and Lü 2005, respectively). Clearly, young people in these countries are influenced by their exposure to Western notions of *individual* privacy: and, insofar as there is an increasingly *identical* set of understandings and values surrounding notions of *individual* privacy in both East and West, then we may expect that a global ICE will be able to develop a single, (quasi-) universal set of norms and practices for protecting that privacy.

Maximal standards: resonance

But insofar as the irreducible differences defining diverse cultures and identities are *not* eradicated or overshadowed by such hybridizations, we are left with the difficulty of crafting a global ICE that will preserve such differ-

ences. As I've suggested, to do so depends in part on how far we believe we ought / need / want to go beyond pragmatic relationships that emphasize our shared *commonalities*—and thus, how far we are prepared to engage “the Other” *as* Other, i.e., precisely in ways that recognize, respect, indeed foster our irreducible *differences*.

A central model for encountering “the Other” in this second way is provided by the Japanese Buddhist and comparative philosopher Kitarō Nishida's understanding of *resonance*. This notion of resonance, we will see, is of interest in part because it represents a notion that is shared between such Western philosophers as Plato and Aristotle, and such Eastern traditions as Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist thought.

Nishida and resonance

Nishida draws on the language of German philosophy, emphasizing that to preserve our identities as irreducibly distinct from one another, our relationships with one another always take place across the difference of “absolute opposites” [*Entgegengesetzter*]. But if only sheer difference defines our relationship—then there will be no connection or unity [*Vereinigung*]. To describe human relationships as a structure that holds together *both* irreducible difference *and* relationship, Nishida turns to the term and concept of *resonance*. As with its musical definition, a resonant relationship entails a connection that simultaneously sustains the irreducible differences required to keep our identities and awareness separate: “The mutual [*gegenseitige*] relationship of absolute opposites [*Entgegengesetzter*] is a resonant [*hankyō*] meeting or response. . . . Here we encounter a unity of I and You and at the same time a real contradiction.” (Nishida 1988, 391f.; cited in Elberfeld 2002, 138f. Translation from the German by CE)

As I have shown elsewhere, resonance and an affiliated pluralism are central to the work of eco-feminist Karen Warren (1990) and specifically the information ethics of Larry Hinman (1998). Similar notions of resonance emerge in contemporary political philosophy, most specifically in the work of Charles Taylor (2002) and his notion of strong complementarity (see Ess, 2006c). Such complementarity, moreover, is not restricted to other human beings. We may further seek—or believe ourselves required to seek—such resonance with the larger community, and/or the natural order, and/or perhaps even divinity (so far as we believe divinity to exist). Broadly speaking, the further we understand our interrelationship with “the Other” to extend, the more extensive our ethical obligations will become.

Between Nishida and Taylor, then, we can discern models of resonance and complementarity for our engagements with “the other”—whether in human, natural, and/or divine form—that insist on preserving and fostering the irreducible differences that define our identities as distinct from one another, while simultaneously sustaining relations that, ideally, foster the flourishing of all.

This understanding of the sorts of *harmonies* we are to strive for, moreover, guide the ethical and political thought of a range of world traditions, including Aristotle, Confucian thought, African thought, etc. At the same time, this emphasis on harmony is likewise a theme shared by contemporary virtue ethics, ecofeminism and environmental ethics. Hence these notions of resonance, complementarity, and harmony appear to offer a kind of ethical *lingua franca* that may serve as common grounds for a global ICE. But again, we will

also see that the ethical demands and obligations these notions entail go well beyond those that follow from an initial—but minimal—emphasis on commonalities alone, as we seek to foster engagements with “the Other” via ICTs distributed globally in ways that preserve the irreducible differences at work in such resonant relationships.

To see how this is so, I first turn to the possible ways—first in theory and then in *praxis*—of developing such a global ICE, one that constructs a *pluralism* constituted by shared ethical norms and values alongside multiple *interpretations* or *applications* of these values as refracted through—and thus reflecting and preserving—irreducibly different cultural traditions, practices, etc.

Ethical pluralism West and East

The difficulty of developing an ethics that works across diverse cultures and traditions is an ancient problem: the ancients in both Eastern and Western traditions have developed often highly sophisticated ways of resolving the apparently conflicting demands between agreement and difference. At the same time, the ancient Western and Eastern solutions in fact closely resemble one another in several fundamental ways.

Ethical Pluralism West: Plato, Aristotle, phronesis and “cybernetic pluralism”

Both Plato and Aristotle—and subsequently, Aquinas—responded to this complex requirement in at least two key ways. To begin with, Plato develops a view that I have characterized as “interpretive pluralism” (Ess, 2006c). On this view, as elaborated especially in *The Republic*, we may conjoin shared ethical norms with irreducible differences by recognizing that diverse ethical *practices* may represent distinctive *interpretations* or *applications* of those shared norms. Such differences, that is, do not necessarily mean, as ethical relativists would argue, that there are no universally legitimate ethical norms or values: rather, such differences may mean only that a given norm or value is applied or understood in distinctive ways—precisely as required by the details of a given context as shaped by a particular tradition, cultural norms, and practices.

Aristotle builds on Plato's teaching in several ways, beginning with his notion of *pros hen* or "focal" equivocals. Such equivocals stand as linguistic middle grounds between a homogenous *univocation* (which requires that a term have one and only one meaning) and a pure *equivocation* (as a single term may have multiple but entirely unrelated meanings—for example, "bat" can refer both to a winged mammal and a wooden stick used in baseball). *Pros hen* or focal equivocals, by contrast, are terms with clearly *different* meanings that simultaneously relate or cohere with one another as both point towards a shared or focal notion that anchors the meaning of each. Aristotle uses the example of "healthy" to illustrate his point: "... the term 'healthy' always relates to health (either as preserving it or as producing it or as indicating it or as receptive of it" (*Metaphysics* 1003b2-4; cf. 1060b37-1061a7). So we could say, for example, that a particular diet is healthy₁—and good kidney functioning may also be said to be healthy₂; but the two terms are not univocals—that is, they do not have precisely the same meaning. On the contrary: with healthy₁ we mean that the diet contributes to the state of being healthy—while healthy₂ means that good kidney function is a reflection of the state of being healthy. At the same time, however, precisely because healthy₁ and healthy₂ refer to the same "state of being healthy" that, as a shared *focal* point, thus grounds their meanings—their differences in meaning are thus conjoined with a coherence or connection alongside these differences.

For Aristotle, our ability to negotiate the complex ambiguities of *pros hen* equivocals is affiliated with a particular kind of *practical judgment*, i.e., *phronesis*. Just as we can recognize and appropriately utilize terms that hold different but related meanings—so *phronesis* allows us to take a general principle (as the ethical analogue to the *focal* term ground two *pros hen* equivocals) and discern how it may be interpreted or applied *in different ways in different contexts* (as the ethical analogues to the two *pros hen* equivocals—i.e., that are irreducibly different and yet inextricably connected). But what *phronesis* thereby makes possible is an *ethical pluralism* that recognizes precisely that shared ethical principles and norms will necessarily issue in *diverse* ethical judgments and interpretations, as required by irreducibly different contexts defined by an extensive range of fine-grained details.

In fact, Aristotle's understanding of *phronesis* and thus of ethical pluralism is intimately connected with a central component of computation—namely, *cybernetics*. Most of us are familiar with the term—as originally developed by Norbert Wiener—as referring to the ability of computer systems to self-regulate and self-correct their processes through various forms of feedback mechanisms. But we need reminding here that "cybernetics" is derived from Plato's

use of the *cybernetes*. The *cybernetes* is a steersman, helmsman, or pilot, and Plato uses the *cybernetes* as a primary model of *ethical* judgment—specifically, our ability to discern and aim towards the ethically-justified path in the face of a wide range of possible choices. So Plato has Socrates observe in *The Republic*:

... a first-rate pilot [*cybernetes*] or physician, for example, feels the difference between the impossibilities and possibilities in his art and attempts the one and lets the others go; and then, too, if he does happen to trip, he is equal to correcting his error. (*Republic*, 360e-361a, Bloom trans.; cf. *Republic* I, 332e-c; VI, 489c.)

“Cybernetics,” then, means more originally the capability of making *ethical* judgments in the face of specific and diverse contexts, complete with the ability to self-correct in the face of error and/or new information. This is to say, the *cybernetes*, as a model of *ethical* self-direction, thereby embodies and exemplifies the sort of ethical judgment that Aristotle subsequently identifies in terms of *phronesis*—i.e., precisely the ability to discern what general principles may apply in a particular context—and *how* they are to be interpreted to apply within that context as defined by a near-infinite range of fine-grained, ethically relevant details.

Bridge notions with Eastern thought: pluralism, harmony, and resonance

These notions of judgment and pluralism are found throughout diverse religious and philosophical traditions—including, for example, Islam (Eickelman 2003) as well as Confucian thought (Chan 2003). Moreover, Rolf Elberfeld (2002) has extensively described how the metaphors of *harmony* and *resonance* appear in both Western and Eastern traditions, beginning with Plato’s account of the role of music as critical to education in *The Republic* (401d). The metaphors of *resonance* and *harmony*, moreover, are clearly structures of pluralism: that is, these notions explicitly entail structures of connection alongside and in the face of irreducible difference. Specifically, the Chinese term *ying* (resonance) means precisely “a conjunction [*Zugleich*] of unity [*Vereinigung*] and division [*Trennung*]” (Elberfeld 2002, 132).

Finally, Elberfeld demonstrates that these understandings of harmony, resonance, and a correlative ethical pluralism are also found in both an-

cient and contemporary Daoism and Buddhism (2002, 137f.) And, as we have seen, the highly influential Japanese comparative philosopher Nishida Kitarō takes up the Japanese version of resonance [*hankyō*] as key to our knowing one another as human beings.

Hence it is clear that these notions of pluralism and resonance are shared cross-culturally—but, unlike simple commonalities, these notions further include the ability to articulate and preserve irreducible differences.

Pluralism in Contemporary ICE

Indeed, there are at least two examples of such pluralism operating in contemporary theoretical work, beginning with Terrell Ward Bynum’s synthesis of the work of Norbert Wiener and Luciano Floridi in what Bynum calls “flourishing ethics.” (2006) Similarly, Luciano Floridi (2006) has developed a conception of what he calls a “lite” information ontology—precisely with a view towards avoiding a cultural imperialism, on the one hand (resulting from unilaterally and homogenously applying a single ethical framework across all cultures), while also avoiding, on the other hand, a merely relativist insistence on a local framework only, one that would thereby remain fragmented and isolated from other cultures and frameworks, as the effort to preserve their irreducible differences would (mistakenly) insist on avoiding all shared, putatively universal norms and values. A “lite” ontology can serve as a shared framework that allows precisely for a *pluralistic* diversity of understandings and applications of a shared notion of informational privacy, as, in effect, the focal, *pros hen* notion referred to by specific understandings and implementations of privacy within specific—and irreducibly different—cultural settings.

In addition to strong notions of pluralism in these prominent ICE theories, a number of important examples instantiate pluralism in *praxis*.

Pluralism in Praxis

As a first example: Bernd Carsten Stahl develops “critical reflexivity” as a *procedurally*-oriented approach to ICE, one intended precisely to avoid the Manichean polarities of homogenization and fragmentation that confront any effort to develop ethical norms to be shared across cultures. In doing so,

Stahl takes up the central difficulties of defining ‘emancipation’ in a way that would work cross-culturally. This requires a *formal* approach that emphasizes creating “...procedures that allow the individuals or groups in question to develop their own vision of emancipation or empowerment” (2006, 105). Such a procedural approach has the advantage that “the critical researcher will not prescribe certain features that she believes to be emancipatory, but that she gives the *research subjects* the chance to define *their* version of emancipation” (*ibid*, emphasis added, CE).

Such critical reflexivity and its allied procedural approach thereby issues in a *pluralism* that recognizes and respects the irreducible differences defining individual and cultural identities. Stahl sees such pluralism emerging from the application of this procedural approach to debates regarding government and the democratic uses of ICTs (2006, 105). In addition, Deborah Wheeler (2006) documents how women in Jordan have been able to take up ICTs in ways that are indeed *emancipatory*—where ‘emancipation,’ as Stahl describes, emerges from the agency of local actors who seek to determine the meanings and practices of ‘emancipation’ that make sense and work best within their specific cultural frameworks and real-world contexts. Stahl’s critical reflexivity and procedural approach to defining central norms such as “emancipation” thus issues here in *praxis* in “emancipation” as a *pluralistic* concept, one that allows for diverse interpretations and implementations across different cultures.

Similar examples of pluralism can be noted—e.g., Maja van der Velden’s account of how such pluralism may be encoded in the source code of software used by diverse Indymedia groups around the world—such that each group is able to modify the software to meet local conditions and requirements, while preserving its main features (2007). More broadly, I have argued that such pluralism can be seen at work in notions of privacy as defined within Western contexts (using the U.S. and Germany as examples) and Eastern contexts (focusing primarily on China and Hong Kong). Here, the pluralism at work serves to reflect and preserve profound differences between Western notions of the individual as a primary, but atomistic reality, and Confucian notions of the self as a relational being. As we might expect, these differences lead to very different data privacy protections. While limited in comparison with Western rights and protections (that emphasize the importance of privacy rights for *individuals* as rational autonomies participating in democratic governance), privacy rights and data privacy protections are nonetheless emerging in Thailand, China, and Hong Kong (justified primarily as data privacy protections contribute towards *economic* development as online commerce becomes increasingly important in these economies). In

this way, we again see a pluralistic, *pros hen* structure emerge. Privacy and data privacy protection serve as the ethical focal points towards which both Western and Eastern societies orient their laws—but each society *understands* and *interprets* the meaning of privacy and data privacy protection in ways that fit their specific context, traditions, values, norms, practices, etc. (Ess 2006c).

As a last example, Soraj Hongladarom has taken up these apparent conflicts between Western and Eastern conceptions, with particular attention to the Buddhist traditions (Theravadan and Mahayanan) of Thai society (2007). Hongladarom moves beyond the initial contrast between the Western emphasis on the atomistic *individual* vs. Eastern conceptions of the individual as a relational being (Confucian thought) or, as in Buddhism, as a mistaken belief altogether (one that is, indeed, at the source of human dissatisfaction). Hongladarom draws on Nagarjuna's distinction between the self as an empirical-conventional reality, on the one hand, and ultimate reality on the other: given this distinction, Buddhism is perfectly capable of endorsing and taking the individual self as real—at the empirical-conventional level. Indeed, the Buddhist striving towards Enlightenment (as the dissolution of the “self”) *requires* individual effort and responsibility—manifest, e.g., in the injunction to cultivate compassion towards others (Hongladarom 2007, 118). Hence Hongladarom argues that Buddhist societies such as Thailand have a *prima facie* reason to protect the privacy of such (empirical-conventional) individuals, especially as part of a movement towards establishing a more democratic society in Thailand. That is, the Buddhist injunction, in which each person is responsible for his or her own liberation, thereby sustains notions of equality and democracy that are at least closely similar to those developed and endorsed in Western societies.

In my terms, there emerges here yet again an interpretive pluralism regarding conceptions of the self and privacy as *pros hen*, ethical focal points: in such a pluralism, modern Western notions of the self (as an ultimate reality whose privacy is a positive good) and Buddhist conceptions of the self (as an empirical-conventional reality) are understood as diverse *interpretations* or *understandings* of focal notions of self and privacy—and thereby as conceptions that may nonetheless resonate or harmonize with one another. Indeed, Hongladarom and I have further argued that this harmony further extends between the Buddhist notion of *Attasammapanidhi*, of ethical self-direction and self-adjustment, and Plato's model of the *cybernetes*, the pilot or steersman who symbolizes a similar capacity for ethical self-correction (Hongladarom & Ess 2007, xix). Finally, Hongladarom points out that Buddhist ethics closely resemble Western-style virtue ethics and the pragmatic

ethics of Richard Rorty (1975). Hongladarom's analysis thus identifies and reinforces a further deep resonance between Western and Eastern thought—namely, between Western virtue ethics (whether in Socratic, Aristotelian, and/or contemporary feminist forms) and the ethical systems of Confucian thought and Buddhism.

Taken together with the previous examples of privacy East-West, the Thai example again marks out in *praxis* as well as in theory the possibility of a *global* ICE—one constituted by shared ethical focal points (i.e., shared norms, values, etc.) that are nonetheless articulated and instantiated in diverse ways as these focal points are interpreted and applied in distinctive cultural contexts.

Emerging Rights / Duties?

In light of the theoretical foundations and practical expressions of *proshen* or focal pluralism in an emerging and genuinely global ICE, what rights and obligations might emerge as we take up ICTs more and more into the fabric of our lives?

I can see three layers of responses to this question.

1. Irresoluble conflict

While multiple instances demonstrate the possibility of resolving ethical differences within a pluralistic resonance or harmony—manifestly, not all such conflicts will allow for such resolutions. So, for example, Dan Burk (2007) documents the intractable differences between U.S. and European Union approaches to copyright—with the U.S., *property-oriented* approach currently dominating over the E.U., *author-oriented* approach. Similarly, Pirongrong Ramasoota Rananand suggests that the tradition and affiliated customs of the Thai “surveillance state” may succeed in keeping “privacy” an interesting idea, but not a right articulated and defended in law (2007).

2. Minimal requirements—shared commonalities.

Again, it is possible to begin our encounters with one another globally via ICTs with the straightforward quest for commonalities, including a set of minimal rights and obligations towards one another, justified at least by shared economic interests (Søraker 2007). What emerges from this approach

is what Westerners will recognize as familiar but primarily *negative* obligations: *don't* violate another person's privacy, right to intellectual property, etc.—by *not* sharing passwords and/or hacking where you don't belong, copying illegally, etc.

3. Maximal requirements: meeting “the Other” online

More broadly, our emerging and global ICE depends very much on how far we want / will / need / ought to go in meeting “the Other” online. Presuming that we seek to meet with and engage “the Other” in a more robust way—i.e., one defined by our willingness to acknowledge not only commonalities but also the irreducible differences that define our individual and cultural identities—we are apparently required to move to a more complex mode of thinking and behaving, one shaped precisely by the structures of pluralism and harmony.

To move in these more robust directions, we can perhaps draw at least initial guidance from the following considerations.

Cross-cultural communication ethics

Broadly speaking, two of the most important factors of successful cross-cultural communication that sustains the irreducible differences defining individual and cultural identities are *trust* and the ability to recognize and effectively respond to the linguistic *ambiguity* that thereby allows for a *pluralistic* understanding of basic terms and norms as holding different interpretations or applications in diverse cultures (Ess and Thorseth, 2006). Such pluralism allows precisely for a structure of both shared commonalities and irreducibly different understandings and practices that emerge from our distinctive cultures: thereby, pluralism and ambiguity are necessary conditions for cross-cultural encounters with one another that preserve these irreducible differences as part of the *resonance* that describes such engagements. Unfortunately, these dimensions of trust, ambiguity, and resonance may be *hindered* rather than fostered by online environments (cf. Søraker 2006; Grodzinsky & Tavani 2007).

Moreover, these elements of human communication finally require the now familiar work of *judgment*—beginning with judgments as to how far or close one's meaning is understood by “the Other,” and in turn, how far one understands the meanings of the Other: even though we may use the same

word or term, their differences in our diverse cultural settings require very careful attention and *judgment* to determine whether or not we are sliding into equivocation and mis-understanding. But: earning and sustaining trust, successfully recognizing and comfortably negotiating linguistic ambiguities, and utilizing the needed judgment in establishing and sustaining *resonant* relationships that preserve our irreducible differences—these capacities are not easily captured in analytical frameworks, much less taught in any formal way. They can, of course, be learned through example and experience with *embodied* teachers: but this again means that the most important elements of successful cross-cultural communication may not be best learned in the *disembodied* context of contemporary online venues (cf. Dreyfus, 2001).

Information justice and the cultivation of character?

Numerous writers have argued the rights-based approaches of the West will not work well in “other” cultures. As we have seen, such approaches emphasize the autonomous individual as distinct from the larger community. Such an approach sharply contrasts with the basic assumptions regarding the individual as a *relational being* that shape the more communitarian / collectively-oriented cultures and traditions of Africa, indigenous peoples, those countries shaped by Confucian and Buddhist traditions, etc. (Cf. van der Velden 2007, 83). For his part, Hongladarom argues that the more radical Buddhist solution to the problem of protecting privacy is not simply to erect laws and create technological safeguards: it is rather to attack the root cause of our motivations to *violate* privacy in the first place—namely, egoism and its affiliated greed (2007, 120f.)

Conclusion

In short, a global ICE that seeks to move beyond shared commonalities (and comparatively negative) requirements will apparently call upon us to take up a range of *positive* obligations and duties, as these are required if we are to preserve irreducible differences while simultaneously engaging in dialogue with “the Other.” Happily, these *positive* obligations and duties are not entirely foreign to the Western traditions: both ancient and contemporary feminist virtue ethics and ethics of care move us in these directions, as do the

deontological ethics of Kant and others.

As we work—individually and collectively, and especially cross-culturally to develop a global ICE, part of our response, as I hope I’ve shown with some clarity, depends on how we respond to a central question:

how far am I prepared to go today—i.e., how well am I prepared to take up relationships with “the Other” that entail not simply comparatively straightforward commonalities and pragmatic agreements, but further entail the difficult efforts to understand and negotiate ambiguity and irreducible difference, precisely in the name of preserving individual and cultural differences—

perhaps, as Paterson argues, even preserving the environment where such negotiations will require the skills—learned only slowly and over a lifetime—of judgment,

and the cultivation of compassion and care?

Again, the cultivation of such virtues is not entirely alien to Western traditions: on the contrary, I have argued elsewhere for the necessity of an *education* that fosters Socratic critical thinking and moral autonomy, as key to moving beyond one’s own culture towards a more encompassing understanding of a wide diversity of cultures—a movement captured in Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, and further exemplified in our notions of Renaissance women and men who attain multiple cultural, linguistic, and communicative fluencies that allow them to comfortably live and work with “Others” around the globe. *Contra* “cultural tourists” and “cultural consumers” whose ethnocentrism may only be reinforced rather than challenged by their online engagements, such a Socratic-Renaissance education would further foster, following Habermas and feminism, an empathic *perspective-taking* and *solidarity* with one’s dialogical partners—including our sister and fellow *cosmo-politans* (world citizens). Of course, such education aims towards the development of *phronesis*, the practical wisdom required to negotiate the multiple contexts of ethics and politics, with the goal of achieving *eudaimonia*, human contentment, and harmony in one’s own society and the larger world (Ess 2004, 164). And, in terms that have emerged here, such an education would further highlight the importance of moving beyond pragmatic commonalities and shared economic interests to the pluralism of the *cybernetes*, the one who is able to discern what ethical course to pursue in a specific context—including the often radically diverse contexts of irreducibly distinct cultures—and who is able to correct her errors when they are made. Resonant with Socratic, Aristotelian, and feminist virtue ethics, such an education would further seek to foster the virtues of compassion and care. Such compassion and care are essential to healing the ruptures that follow

upon our inevitable mistakes in our efforts to understand, work, and live with “the Other” –most especially as we venture out into new linguistic and cultural settings. Such compassion and care, finally, are essential to building and sustaining the *trust* essential to all human interactions.

ICTs continue their apparently inexorable expansion throughout the world—meaning, they are taken up by more and more people in diverse cultural contexts and settings. It seems certain that if we are to avoid a homogeneous world culture—what Benjamin Barber famously called “McWorld” (1995)—more and more of us will need to take up the moral postures and communication skills of the *cybernetes*, rather than simply pursuing commonalities, pragmatics, and economic self-interest. Perhaps the dramatic scope and speed of cross-cultural encounters made possible precisely by ICTs might help more and more people recognize the need for such exemplary ethics and cultivation of character: but such hopes, of course, must recognize the multiple ways in which most of our online engagements rather foster the minimal obligations entailed by seeking out simply shared interests and pragmatic commonalities, especially as these engagements are oriented towards easy consumption.

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