IRIE
International Review of Information Ethics Vol.7 (09/2007)

Charles Ess

Cybernetic Pluralism in an Emerging Global Information and Computing Ethics[1]

Abstract:

I trace the development of an emerging global Information and Computing Ethics (ICE), arguing that ethical pluralism – as found in both Western and Asian traditions – is crucial to such an ICE. In particular, ethical pluralism – as affiliated with notions of judgment (phronesis in Aristotle and the cybernetes in Plato), resonance, and harmony – holds together shared ethical norms (as required for a shared global ethic) alongside the irreducible differences that define individual and cultural identities. I demonstrate how such pluralism is already at work in both contemporary theory and praxis, including in development projects in diverse cultures. I conclude with a number of resonances between this global pluralism and African thought and traditions that thus suggest that such a pluralism may also succeed in the African context, as diverse African cultures and countries seek to benefit from ICTs while maintaining their cultural identities.

Agenda

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[1] This paper was originally developed out of a lecture delivered in my capacity as an Information Ethics Fellow (2006-2007), Center for Information Policy Research (CIPR), University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, November 13, 2006. I have subsequently expanded and modified it in light of various presentations and discussions held during the first African Information Ethics Conference, "Ethical Challenges in the Information Age," 5-7 February 2007, Pretoria, South Africa. I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Elizabeth Buchanan, Director of CIPR, for the opportunity to first develop this paper, as well as to Drs. Elizabeth Buchanan and Johannes Britz, Dean and Professor, School of Information Studies, UW-M, for their kind permission to develop this paper for this venue.

In addition, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the members of my Theme Group, "Cultural Diversity and Development" – Sarah Kaddu, Chibueze Udeani, Retha Claasen, Ismail Abdullahi, Anthony Löwstedt, Coetzee Bester, and Jill Maimela – who graciously discussed, tested, and confirmed the central ideas proposed here.

ISSN 1614-1687

Author:

Dr. Charles Ess:

- Drury University, 900 N. Benton Ave., Springfield, Missouri 65802 USA
- ☎ + 1 417 873-7230 , ✉ cmess@drury.edu, 💻 http://www.drury.edu/ess/ess.html
- Relevant publications:
  - Information Technology Ethics: Cultural Perspectives. S. Hongladarom, C. Ess, (Ed.). Hershey, PA: Idea Reference 2007, 257 p.
  - Neither relativism nor imperialism: Theories and practices for a global information ethics. Introduction (with May Thorseth), pp. 91-95, and special issue on "Global Information Ethics: Cross-cultural Approaches to Emancipation, Privacy and Regulation." *Ethics and Information Technology*, Volume 8, Number 3, pp. 91-154

ISSN 1614-1687

Agenda

I begin **Part I** with sample definitions of computer ethics, information ethics, and professional computing ethics as initial definitions that, as was appropriate at the time of their crafting, are addressed to specialists and professionals. But given that "information processing," including communicating via computer networks, is now undertaken by over 1 billion people on the planet, we need an Information and Computing Ethics (ICE) "for the rest of us." This global reach further requires an emerging ICE that conjoins globally shared norms and values with the values, norms, traditions, and practices of diverse cultures – cultures that are irreducibly different from one another, and must remain so for the sake of preserving their identity. I then suggest that how we develop such a global ICE further depends on whether we will seek out simply commonalities and pragmatic agreements based on shared economic interests, for example, and/or, in the words of the Japanese comparative philosopher Nishida, if we seek to know "the Other" through a *resonance*, a structure of connection alongside the irreducible *differences* defining individuals as distinct from one another. Such resonance intersects with various forms of *ethical pluralism* that meet, I argue, the central requirement of a global ICE to conjoin shared norms with the irreducible differences defining both individual and cultural identities. (We will see in greater detail [Part III] how this pluralism seeks to go beyond the pluralisms developed in contemporary political philosophy by John Rawls and Charles Taylor. In the conclusion [Part IV], I return to how such resonances entail greater ethical demands upon us than the quest for commonalities.)

Part II is a careful examination of *ethical pluralism,* beginning with its Western roots in what I call Plato's *interpretive pluralism* and then Aristotle's notion of *pros hen* or focal equivocals. These pluralisms further require *phronesis*, Aristotle's conception of practical judgment as precisely the ability to discern how shared norms may indeed be understood and applied in diverse ways in diverse contexts. *Phronesis* in turn derives from Plato's use of the *cybernetes*, the pilot or helmsman, as an exemplar of ethical judgment that emphasizes the capacity for *ethical* self-correction – the basis, nicely enough, for *cybernetics* as a central concept in computer science. Happily, both religious traditions (including Islam) and eastern traditions – including Confucian, Daoism, and Buddhism – likewise develop similar notions of judgment, ethical pluralism, and the core metaphors of harmony and resonance that describe pluralism's conjunction of shared norms and diverse interpretations, as made possible by judgment.

Hence, such notions and metaphors may serve as a framework for a global ICE – i.e., one that brings together East and West, African and indigenous traditions, etc. – that sustains irreducible differences alongside shared norms. In fact, such pluralism can already be seen in the contemporary ICE *theories* developed by Terrell Ward Bynum and Luciano Floridi.

In **Part III** we see, moreover, that such ethical pluralisms are instantiated at the level of *praxis* in contemporary ICE in several examples, including: a procedural approach to determining what 'emancipation' might mean in diverse cultures (Stahl) – an understanding supported by a striking example of how women in Jordan have learned to use ICTs for an emancipation that emerges from and meshes with their particular cultural contexts (Wheeler); an open source software developed for the Indymedia movement – one that, as open source, allows itself to be modified to meet local interpretations of open access and free speech (van der Velden); a pluralistic framework for notions of 'privacy' and affiliated codes and laws regarding data privacy protection in both Western and Eastern countries (Ess); and an exploration of Theravadan and Mahayana Buddhist approaches to privacy vis-à-vis modern Western notions of individual privacy (Hongladarom). This last exploration, finally, contributes towards the sort of pluralism that I and Soraj Hongadarom seek to develop – one that, in contrast with Rawls' notion of overlapping consensus, extends beyond the boundaries of liberal states and further allows participants in a dialogue intending to develop a global ICE to "bring their specific backgrounds to the table" (Hongladarom & Ess 2007, xv)

Part IV then seeks to initially outline some specific obligations and duties for a global ICE, beginning with the primarily *negative* rights and duties affiliated with seeking commonalities in our online cross-cultural engagements (e.g., do not violate another person's right to data privacy), and then moving to possible, primarily *positive* rights and duties entailed by seeking to meet "the Other" online in *resonant* ways structured by judgment and interpretive pluralism. Unfortunately, what we must do to establish *trust* and deal with ambiguity as *embodied* beings may not always "translate" easily to online venues. But we may nonetheless, as Hongladarom argues, positively cultivate the sort of character and

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compassion that would *prevent* violation of rights – e.g., to privacy – by reducing our egoistic self-interest and greed. More broadly, we will need to be more aware of how *evil* – defined in part as the systematic dehumanization of "the Other" – may be at work within the very theoretical frameworks we seek to use to foster social justice in a global ICE (Kvasny). We will further need to explore how diverse *religious traditions* may be positively incorporated into a global ICE that seeks to preserve cultural identities (Bhattarakosol). Finally, a number of important resonances between *African* thought and the Western and Eastern traditions already woven together in a global, *pluralistic* ICE suggest – if only in an initial way – that a pluralistic approach to the development of an *African* Information Ethics may likewise succeed in connecting African ethics with shared, global norms, while simultaneously sustaining and fostering the irreducible differences that define African cultures and traditions.

I. What is ICE?

A. Initial canonical definitions

Computer Ethics, as one of the foremost pioneers in this field, Terry Bynum, has carefully documented and explored, begins in the English-speaking West with the work of Norbert Wiener (1948; see Bynum 2000, 2001, 2006). We will see later on that Weiner's work – specifically, his effort to define CE in terms of using our technologies to contribute to human *flourishing* – certainly remains pertinent. In particular, Bynum builds his understanding of CE in part on the work of James Moor, whose famous paper, "What Is Computer Ethics?" includes the observation that problems arise in relation to computers because of "policy vacuums" – i.e., the lack of policies, guidelines, etc., in the face of especially the new ethical issues and social impacts of computing technology (1985, 266). For his part, Bynum subsequently offered the following definition of computer ethics, as based on both Wiener and Moor:

> *"Computer ethics identifies and analyzes the impacts of information technology upon human values like health, wealth, opportunity, freedom, democracy, knowledge, privacy, security, self-fulfillment, and so on."*[1]

B. Information Ethics

Intersecting the focus on computers and computer networks as specific forms of technology is a second definition – one that emphasizes rather the primary fact that computers are used as *information* processors. While the exact definition of *information* – especially in contrast with what many of us take to be different types of knowledge most broadly (including data, knowledge, and wisdom) – is a matter of dispute (e.g., Zins 2007), if we agree in an operational way that what computers process is information, then information ethics "… comprises all of the ethical issues related to the production, storage, access, and dissemination of information" [2]

C. Professional ethics.

Of course, the first people who had to really wrestle with these ethical issues were, as Wiener illustrates, computer scientists. Over the years, professional organizations such as the ACM and IEEE have developed statements of the ethical obligations and standards of the *professionals* responsible for the design, deployment, and use of these technologies.

So, for example, the ACM code of ethics (1992) includes the following:

> *As an ACM member I will ....*
> 1.1 Contribute to society and human well-being.
> 1.2 Avoid harm to others
> 1.3 Be honest and trustworthy
> 1.4 Be fair and take action not to discriminate
> 1.5 Honor property rights including copyrights and patent
> 1.6. Give proper credit for intellectual property
> 1.7. Respect the privacy of others
> 1.8 Honor confidentiality

[1] Bynum, Terrell Ward & Rogerson, Simon: Introduction and overview: Global information ethics. 119

[2] Hauptman, Robert: Ethics and the Dissemination of Information. 121

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The code includes still more specific professional responsibilities, e.g.,:

> 2.1 Strive to achieve the highest quality, effectiveness and dignity in both the process and products of professional work.
> 2.2 Acquire and maintain professional competence.
> 2.3 Know and respect existing laws pertaining to professional work
> 2.4 Accept and provide appropriate professional review.
> 2.5 Give comprehensive and thorough evaluations of computer systems and their impacts, including analysis of possible risks.
> 2.6 Honor contracts, agreements, and assigned responsibilities
> 2.7 Improve public understanding of computing and its consequences.
> 2.8 Access computing and communication resources only when authorized to do so.[3]

To be sure, such ethical norms and obligations are crucial – but as is both clear and appropriate to their origins and intended audience, these norms are addressed primarily to computing *professionals*, i.e., those specialists and experts within the various fields surrounding computation as an intellectual, technical, and/or business enterprise, including computer scientists, systems administrators, etc. Obviously, as the use of computers and computer networks to communicate globally as well as to process information in increasingly diverse ways (e.g., from word processing to online banking; from the various forms of computer-mediated communication [CMC], including email, Instant Messaging, chats, social network sites, etc.; art and entertainment uses, including audio and video production and distribution; shopping; religion online [Ess 2007a], etc., etc.) has become more and more a requirement and presumed feature of everyday life in the developed world – more and more of us who are not computer specialists face an increasing range of ethical issues and difficulties that are not directly addressed by a professional ethics that is powerfully but narrowly focused on the needs and experiences of the comparatively few technical experts.

D. Ethics for the rest of us?

As Barbara Paterson has pointed out:

> *"Deborah Johnson (1999) predicts that because the majority of moral problems will be computer ethics issues, computer ethics will cease to be a special field of ethics (Bynum, 2000). Kristina Gòrniak-Kocikowska (1996) predicts that the computer revolution will give rise to a revolution of ethics and that computer ethics will become a global ethics relevant to all areas of human life. Bynum and Rogerson (1996) and Moor (1998) suggest that the second generation of computer ethics should be an era of global information ethics."*[4]

To say it again: within a very short period of time, ICTs have become increasingly ubiquitous in the developed world – so much so, in fact, that they now have become so interwoven in our lives that we are no longer so astonished, mystified, and occasionally terrified by them: rather, they are becoming more and more like refrigerators and automobiles – technologies that work largely in the background rather than the foreground of our lives. And as we will quickly see (below, "E"), ICTs are likewise diffusing rapidly throughout the world: while in many places they are not likely to become so ubiquitous in the ways that we now take for granted in the developed world - ICTs now connect over 1 billion people on the planet.

But this means in turn that we all use – or will need to use – ICE every day (apologies to "Numb3rs"!).

To my knowledge, however, such a "pedestrian" – rather than specialized and professional – ICE is only now starting to emerge. Certainly, there are many excellent texts and courses now available for teaching ICE (e.g., Tavani 2007) – but, to my knowledge at least, these remain largely in the province of specialized courses in the curricula for computer science and library science. At the same time, at least to my knowledge, the topics and problems of information ethics are not widely represented in the various anthologies used to teach ethics and applied ethics in the U.S. (e.g., Boss, 2005).

So a primary goal of contemporary ICE is to attend and respond to the multiple ethical issues that confront more or less everyone who uses a computer to receive, manipulate, present, and distribute

[3] ACM: Code of Ethics.

[4] Paterson, Barbara: We Cannot Eat Data: The Need for Computer Ethics to Address the Cultural and Ecological Impacts of Computing. 153

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information. The list here is extensive – ranging from:

- simple netiquette and related politeness rules for using email and participating productively in listserves, chatrooms, Instant Messaging, etc.;
- ethical dimensions of social networking software such as Facebook, including how far such communications can be considered private and/or protected under free speech, etc.;
- ethical dimensions of blogs and blogging, such as what may be fairly cited without permission, what requires permission, etc.;
- posting photos and videos online – with or without restrictions, with or without permissions, etc.;

to the "big ticket items" such as:

- privacy issues – both local, as in the post 9/11 United States, and global, as different countries and traditions establish different expectations regarding privacy and correlatively different data privacy protection codes and laws;
- copyright / copyleft and Intellectual Property (IP) rights;
- cross-cultural communication online: freedom of self- and cultural expression vis-à-vis "computer-mediated colonization," violating and/or offending important cultural and religious taboos, etc.
- various issues surrounding such practices as hacking, surveillance, cyber-stalking, "cyberbullying," sexual predation and abuse
- the digital divide and related issues of social justice, etc., etc.

If anything – as ICTs continue to diffuse around the world and throughout our lives, both individually and collectively, we can expect the list of ethical issues to expand proportionately.

E. A global information ethics? Basic requirements

It is helpful to begin with a quick review of the dramatic scope and speed of *global* ICT diffusion.

The Internet, beginning with 213 hosts in 1981, counted ca. 376,000 hosts by 1991. At the time of this writing (April, 2007), there are more than 433,193,199 hosts (Internet Systems Consortium, 2007). Building on the Internet, the World Wide Web was first instantiated in 1991 and expanded to include just 26 servers world-wide by November, 1992 (BBC, 2006): currently, there are over 113,658,468,websites online (Newman 2007). *Culturally*, as late as 1998, the Internet and the Web remained solidly in the cultural domains of its English, European, and U.S. inventors: indeed, ca. 84% of Web users were located in the United States (GVU, 1998). Now, a scant eight years later, over one *billion* (1,114,274,426) 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).

For our purposes, there are at least two immediate consequences of this global diffusion. The first is usually couched in terms of the **digital divide**: the distribution of ICTs globally generally follows pre-existing structures of wealth, power, and status, both between nations and within nations. Certainly, many early proponents of the so-called Information Revolution or the "electronic global village" ardently hoped and argued that ICTs would bring about greater freedom, equality, and economic opportunity – and certainly, we can find heartening examples that support this hope. But by and large, it appears that ICTs work here – as they do elsewhere – as something like social and political *amplifiers*. Because of the associated economic start-up costs and, equally importantly, what Bourdieu has helpfully identified in terms of *social capital* (1977), the poor and socially marginalized face often insurmountable obstacles to joining the so-called revolution. Crudely, but importantly, here – as elsewhere – the poor stay poor and the rich get rich … [5]

[5] The Digital Divide was a primary theme, of course, in our conference, beginning with its central importance for Topic Three, "Development, poverty and ICT." In addition, Ms. Sarah Kaddu (2007) documents in great detail how various deficits in social capital led to a number of very regretable failures in ICT4D (ICTs for Development) projects in Uganda – just one example, unfortunately, of a very broad trend in ICT4D work.

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The second has to do with matters of cultural identity, diversity, and the *irreducible differences* that establish and define the multiple lines between "Us" and "Them". Briefly, as Soraj Hongladarom points out (2007), until relatively recently, Computer Ethics – in parallel with ICTs themselves, as emerging primarily in the Western / North / English-speaking world – have remained largely the work of Western ethicists. Of course, contemporary Western ethical traditions are themselves diverse and in some ways irreconcilable – e.g., to name only some of the most prominent:

utilitarianisms

deontologies

virtue ethics

feminist ethics and ethics of care

environmental ethics.

Nonetheless, these ethical traditions rest upon shared assumptions – first of all, regarding the nature and reality of the *individual* and related assumptions about the relative role and importance of the *community* and other forms of *relationship* to the identity and function of the individual.

As we are about to see, these and related contemporary *Western* assumptions come to the foreground as we consider non-Western ethical traditions, such as

African thought
Confucian traditions
Buddhist traditions
Indigenous traditions
and so forth.

That is, as we undertake the work of *comparative philosophy*, both *shared commonalities* and *irreducible differences* between these diverse traditions become clear and explicit. So, for example, we will see that many of these non-Western traditions share an understanding of the *individual* as a *relational being*, one whose identity and reality essentially turns on his or her relationships with others in the larger community (and, perhaps, nature and/or divinity itself). So Barbara Paterson (2007), drawing on the work of Menkiti (1979) and Shutte (1993), 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 (Menkiti, 1979; Shutte, 1993)."*

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. To grow older means to become more of a person and more worthy of respect."*

Finally,

> *"In contrast to Western individualism and its emphasis on the rights of the individual Menkiti (1979) stresses that growth is a normative notion: "personhood is something at which individuals could fail" (p. 159). The individual belongs to the group and is linked to members of the group through interaction; conversation and dialogue are both purpose and activity of the community."*[6]

Hence, these irreducible differences between cultures are not trivial. Rather, they work to define the differences between cultures – and thereby between individuals as shaped by these cultures. To say it differently, these foundational differences are essential to defining our *identities* as cultures and members of cultures.

I will assume here (though I have argued elsewhere – Ess, 2007b) that persons and cultures have a basic *right to identity*. Such rights are spelled out, for example, in UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity – and, as Rafael Capurro points out, the *Declaration of Principles* of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2003

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[6] Paterson, *op cit.* 157-158. In his keynote address opening the first African Information Ethics Conference, Rafael Capurro (2007) helpfully focused on *ubuntu* as a particular expression of what we may now think of as the more communitarian or collective emphasis described here by Paterson, as characteristic of not only African traditions but, as we will further see, of Buddhist and Confucian traditions, as well as others around the world. I will return to the implications of these linkages for the development of an *African* Information Ethics by way of conclusion.

Linux users will recognize *ubuntu* from the (excellent) Ubuntu distribution of the Linux OS – see www.ubuntu.com.

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explicitly addresses "Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content" in Point 8, including the affirmation that:

> *52. Cultural diversity is the common heritage of humankind. The Information Society should be founded on and stimulate respect for cultural identity, cultural and linguistic diversity, traditions and religions, and foster dialogue among cultures and civilizations. The promotion, affirmation and preservation of diverse cultural identities and languages as reflected in relevant agreed United Nations documents including UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, will further enrich the Information Society.*[7]

Alongside these sorts of commitments to honor and foster the irreducible differences that define our individual and cultural identities – 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. That is,

> just as we require commonly shared technical standards if our computers are to "talk" with one another around the globe;
>
> and just as we require a common language, a shared *lingua franca*, if we are to be able to communicate and mutually understand one another;

so it seems that in an "electronic global village"

> – better, an electronic global metropolis (Hjarvard 2002), in which, as we have seen, ca. 1/6th of the world's population are now able to communicate with one another (more or less) directly and instantaneously –
>
> we will also require a shared *ethics* that guides our uses and expectations surrounding the use of ICTs.

This requirement for a shared *ethos*, we may notice, is itself an assumption *shared* by all major ethical traditions. That is, every major ethical system, both East and West, assumes that a shared ethics or *ethos* is necessary, however much they may vary as to the *content* of that shared *ethos*. So, for example, *deontologists*, especially following the German philosophers Kant and Habermas, take up a rationalist emphasis on (near-absolute) rights, duties, etc., as universal – an emphasis further embedded in such documents as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). As Bernd Carsten Stahl goes on to observe, French moralism in Montaigne and Ricouer is by contrast *teleological*, i.e., oriented towards the goal or *telos* of discerning and doing what necessary for the sake of an ethical and social order that makes both individual and community life more fulfilling, productive, etc., through "the propagation of peace and avoidance of violence" (Stahl 2004, 17). Still again, ethics in the Anglo-American world tends to emphasize a *utilitarian* interest in "the greatest good for the greatest number" as the primary ethical norm towards which all actions should aim – while various *communitarian* views emphasize the good of the community in still other ways, e.g. the Confucian emphasis on communal *harmony* (*te*), the African emphasis on community well-being; the Aristotelian emphasis on harmony, development of the *polis*, etc.; and the Buddhist emphasis on compassion as a *practice* essential both to individual Enlightenment and community peace and harmony.

In addition to what we might think of as a *formal* requirement of an ethical system, i.e., this aim towards a shared set of norms, procedures, etc. – we should also note that there are also *contents* shared among the major ethical systems and religions of the world. So, to begin with, we can find a version of "the Golden Rule" in the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), Confucian thought [e.g., *Analects* 15.23], Taoism, Shinto, Hinduism [*Mahabharata 5:1517*], Jainism, Sikhism, and Native American traditions (Granoff 2003). Other candidates for "content universals" include those offered by Tu Wei-Ming: the Golden rule; a sense of justice / fairness; rules of civility; a notion of wisdom as an important goal in individual development and as a respected quality; and *trust* as a basic social glue. Finally, the venerable James Moor argues that all human groups focus on the values of "life, happiness, freedom, knowledge, ability, resources, and security" - and thereby privacy (2002, 204; cf. Moore 2003 – both cited in Hongladarom 2007, 110).

F. A global ICE: ethical pluralism and "intercultural information ethics"

These two requirements then lead directly to what many of us now regard as a central issue in ICE: if

[7] World Summit on the Information Society (2004). Online: <http://www.itu.org/wsis/>. Cited in Capurro, 2006.

an information ethics is to be genuinely *global* – i.e., achieve normative legitimacy among a wide diversity of cultures and ethical traditions – such an ethics must:

> (a) address both local and global issues evoked by ICTs / CMC, etc. ,
> (b) in ways that both sustain local traditions / values / preferences, etc. and
>
> (c) provide *shared*, (quasi-) universal responses to central ethical problems.

Or, as Soraj Hongladarom puts it more succinctly, specifically with regard to the issue of privacy and in light of the radical differences between Eastern and Western conceptions of privacy:

> *"The task for the theorist is then to search for a system of justification of privacy which respects these diverse cultural traditions, but at the same time is powerful enough to command rational assent of all involved."*[8]

Ethicists and philosophers will recognize that the challenge of creating such a global ethics is in fact an ancient one – and in a little while I will explore two ancient solutions to the problem, namely, Plato's interpretive pluralism and Aristotle's subsequent *pros hen* or "focal" pluralism.

In the context of ICE, our colleague Rafael Capurro articulated this difficulty very early on. As Barbara Paterson points out:

> *"The pressing issue is not providing access to technology in order to turn more people into receivers of information that was created elsewhere and may not be useful to them, but, as suggested by Capurro (1990), it is to find ways that African countries can promote their identities in information production, distribution, and use. In terms of a global information ecology, he stresses the importance 'of finding the right balance … between the blessings of universality and the need for preserving plurality' Capurro (1990)."*[9]

Preserving this *plurality* – in my terms, the irreducible differences that define individuals and cultures – is thus one of the central tasks of what Capurro has subsequently come to call "intercultural information ethics."[10]

One of the conditions of developing such an IIE or global ICE, finally, is that these ethics must emerge from cross-cultural *dialogues*, marked by a fundamental respect precisely for the irreducible differences that define our cultures and our identities. As Barbara Paterson points out, "a great conversation is necessary that transcends limitations of discourse among members of particular social groups" – a conversation that has been called for by Berman (1992), Moor (1998), and as early as 1990 by Rafael Capurro (1990).[11]

G. Variations on the theme: how far ought we go towards "the Other"?

As I have explored these matters over the past few years, it has become increasingly clear to me that we must ask still one more question before proceeding to develop a global ICE – and that is, 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. In my conclusion (**IV**), I will return to these two possible approaches to ICE – and summarize a number of concrete suggestions especially regarding the second possibility (what we will see referred to in terms of a "resonance ethics" or Good Samaritan ethics) that emerge in some of the most recent work on ICE.

1. Minimal standards – emphasis on commonalities

Briefly, we can identify what might be thought of as a set of minimal ethical standards for the electronic global metropolis – ones that emphasize commonalities more than differences for the sake of largely pragmatic economic interests.

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[8] Hongladarom, Soraj. Analysis and Justification of Privacy from a Buddhist Perspective. 115

[9] Paterson, Barbara: *op cit.* 162

[10] Capurro, Rafael: Privacy: An Intercultural Perspective.

[11] Paterson, Barbara: *op cit*. 162.

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As an initial example, Johnny Søraker has pointed out that *pragmatic* arguments – i.e., arguments that appeal to our shared economic interests – are strong candidates for inclusion in a global ICE, precisely because they largely bypass foundational cultural and political differences. So he argues, for example, that both the Western nations and China might be persuaded to agree on less regulation for the Internet at its basic levels (physical infrastructure, TCP/IP protocols, etc.) rather than more, despite the radical differences between them – simply because agreements on sharing identical infrastructures at these base levels are economically less expensive for all participating parties. If there is to be regulation, he argues – especially as based on political or moral concerns specific to a given country – such regulation can be carried out more effectively and economically at the "upper" levels of the Web and the Net, namely, at the layers of applications, etc. (Søraker 2006).

There is certainly warrant in *praxis* for this approach. For example, China has agreed to the Human Subjects Protections endorsed by the World Health Organization as required for medical research – even though these protections are quite alien to the philosophical foundations of Chinese cultures and earlier medical practices. The *motivation* for accepting these Protections was simple: the WTO made acceptance of these Protections a requirement for joining the WTO, as China did in 2001 (Döring, 2003). In addition, as we will see below (**III**. C), shared *economic* interests are driving China and other Asian nations to move towards at least limited but nonetheless recognizable conceptions of privacy and data privacy protection – despite radical differences with the assumptions and values that underlie Western notions of privacy and data privacy protection.

Similarly, as Dan Burk points out (2007), the European Union's (comparatively) rigorous Data Privacy Protection requirements have managed to spread around the world – including into non-Western cultures – in what he characterizes as "viral" fashion. Quite simply, the EU privacy protections include the stipulation that EU countries may not share personal information with countries outside the EU unless those countries also insure data privacy protections equivalent to those specified in the EU Data Privacy Protection acts. Very simply, if countries outside the EU want to enjoy the economic benefits of trade with the EU – insofar as such trade entails the sharing of private data, those countries are then required to meet the EU data privacy protection standards (Burk, 2007). Again, as Søraker has suggested, pragmatic concerns – including economic self-interested – may motivate diverse countries and individuals to agree upon a shared set of standards, despite their radical differences.

Finally, 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 again 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, coupled with the growing *economic* prosperity that makes individual privacy possible – are coming more and more into agreement with their young counterparts in the West. Insofar as there is a shared, indeed, *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.

2. Towards Resonance: online Good Samaritans and a new Renaissance?

But is that all? What happens as the irreducible differences defining diverse cultures and identities are not eradicated or overshadowed by such hybridizations and homogenizations?

Again, how can we craft a global ICE that will preserve such irreducible differences?

As I've suggested, our answers to this question depend in part on how far we believe we ought / need / want to go beyond pragmatic relationships, motivated primarily by economic self-interest, relationships that emphasize our shared *commonalities* – and thus, how far we are prepared to engage "the Other" as Other, i.e., in ways that recognize, respect, indeed foster our irreducible *differences*.

To highlight the contrasts I see at work here, allow me to introduce what I believe is a central – and centrally important – model for encountering "the

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Other" – namely, 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 philosophers as Confucius – as it is also found in Daoist and Buddhist traditions. As well, if our goal in the intercultural engagements made possible by ICTs in the electronic global metropolis is to take up relationships with "the Other" that seek to foster the irreducible differences that makes these *resonances* possible, then we will find that our global ICE will look somewhat more complex – and demanding – than a global ICE based primarily on pragmatics and commonalities.

a. Nishida and resonance

Nishida draws on the language of German philosophy, so as to emphasize that our relationships with one another always take place across the difference of "absolute opposites" [*Entgegengesetzter*] if we are to preserve our identities as irreducibly distinct from one another. But obviously, 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*.

How do we know the Other as absolute Other? In part…

> *"Through the* resonance *[*hankyō*] of my personal behavior [with you] I can know you, and you can know me through the resonance of your personal behavior [with me]."*

This resonance clearly entails relationship - specifically "... a "speaking with one another" [*miteinander Reden*] and an answering to one another." But at the same time, this relationship sustains the irreducible differences required to keep our identities and awareness separate:

> *"Even if I know the thoughts and feelings of the other human being – this is not a simple unification [*Vereinigung*] of me with the other human being: my consciousness and the consciousness of the other must remain absolutely distinct from one another."*

What emerges, then, is the conjunction of what appears to be contradictory - i.e., connection alongside irreducible difference:

> *"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."*[12]

b. Resonance and pluralism

It is important to note – especially for the philosophers and political scientists – that this notion of resonance is deeply implicated with the lengthy and extensive discussion of pluralism in both *ethics* and *political philosophy*. To begin with, as I have developed more fully elsewhere (Ess, 2006a), 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. Attempting to move beyond both a *modus vivendi* pluralism that "lets differences lie," i.e., tolerates difference by not insisting on connection, and John Rawls' notion of "overlapping consensus," Charles Taylor seeks a stronger notion of connection in the face of difference – in part, as Madsen and Strong point out, as Rawls' notion still runs the risk of allowing radical difference to lead to the dehumanization of "the Other" (Madsen & Strong 2003, 12). In order to fully accommodate difference, Taylor takes up a notion of *complementarity* understood as a ***coherency*** between two irreducibly different entities, where this coherency emphasizes a positive engagement between these two as one side enhances and expands on the characteristics of the other. So Taylor says:

> *"The crucial idea is that people can bond not in spite of but because of difference. They can sense, that is, that their lives are narrower and less full alone than in association with each other. In this sense, the difference defines a complementarity."*[13]

Moreover, this strong notion of resonance is not restricted to other human beings. We may further seek – or believe ourselves required to seek – such resonance with

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[12] Nishida, Kitarō: *Nishida Kitarō Zenshū,* 1988ff., Vol. 6, 391f., cited in Elberfeld 2002, 138f. Translation from the German by CE.

[13] Taylor, Charles: Democracy, inclusive and exclusive. 191

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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 complimentarity 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. In particular, in contrast with a Rawlsian approach that requires us, as it were, to leave our metaphysics – our cultural worldview and affiliated values, practices, etc., - at home before we seek to develop an overlapping consensus in the political sphere, as Soraj Hongladarom and I further develop these notions of resonance, harmony, and pluralism, they allow us precisely to bring our metaphysics to the table of ethical discussion (see **III**.D, below).

This understanding of the sorts of *harmonies* we are to strive for, moreover, is not restricted to Nishida's Buddhism and Taylor's political philosophy. On the contrary, as we have seen – and as we will explore still more fully below – such notions of harmony 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, complimentarity, and harmony appear to offer a kind of ethical *lingua franca* that may serve as common grounds for a global ICE. But 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. These additional demands, that is, may be required of us 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.

In particular, these additional ethical requirements may emerge as necessary conditions for a global ICE that includes both shared norms and values, but precisely as these can be (rationally) endorsed from the perspective and standpoint of particular and distinct cultures and individuals. In the next section, I 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.

II. Ethical pluralism West and East

Because the difficulty of developing an ethics that works across diverse cultures and traditions is an ancient problem – we should not be surprised to discover that the ancients in both Eastern and Western traditions have developed often highly sophisticated ways of resolving the apparently conflicting demands between agreement and difference. But what is striking – and, at the same time, heartening for those of us hoping for a global ICE that will conjoin shared norms with individual and cultural differences, including the differences between Eastern and Western traditions – is just that the ancient Western and Eastern solutions in fact closely resemble one another in several fundamental ways. In this first section, I explore these close resemblances – what I will eventually call their resonances and harmonies – as a way of bringing to the foreground, first at a theoretical level, central notions of *judgment*, pluralism, harmony, and resonance as these appear to bridge Eastern and Western traditions in ways that in turn suggest that we may build a global ICE on such notions, and thereby progress towards the goal of an ICE that incorporates both shared norms as well as the irreducible differences that define individual and cultural identities. In the following section, I will then turn to examples drawn from contemporary *praxis* – i.e., norms and values articulated in diverse instances of cross-cultural ICE – that thus make clear that ethical pluralism is not simply a theoretical possibility but also a practical reality in an emerging global ICE.

A. 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, 2006a). On this view, as elaborated especially in *The Republic*, we may conjoin shared

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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.

So, for example, elderly persons suffering kidney disease are treated differently in different cultures and places. In the United States – at least for those able to afford health insurance with good coverage – such a person may reasonably expect to receive the kidney dialysis treatments required to sustain her life, despite their great expense, without restriction, e.g., as determined by age. In the United Kingdom, by contrast – the national health care system has imposed an upper age limit of 65 on patients for whom it will subsidize such treatments (Annis 2006, 310). Finally, in the harsh environment of the Canadian arctic, at least early in this century, an elderly member of the community who was no longer able to contribute to the well-being of the Kabloona community might voluntarily commit a form of suicide (Boss 2005, 9f.). Again, for the ethical relativist, these three different practices might be thought to demonstrate that there are no values or norms shared universally across cultures. Alternatively, however, we can also understand these three practices as three diverse *interpretations*, *applications*, and/or *judgments* as to how to apply a single norm – namely, the health and well-being of the community – in three very different environments and cultures. Quite simply, at least the well-to-do in the United States can afford the health insurance that will provide kidney dialysis without age limit – while a nationalized health system, even in a relatively wealthy country such as the United Kingdom, would quickly go bankrupt unless it imposed limits on subsidized health care. Similarly, in the unforgiving environments of the Kabloona, the well-being of the community would be jeopardized if scarce resources were diverted to caring for those who no longer could contribute to the community – and hence such care is literally not affordable by the community, nor, apparently, expected by the individual.

Secondly, 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). In his later elaboration on Aristotle's understanding of such equivocals, Aquinas illustrates the point more fully:

> *"… there is the case of one word being used of two things because each of them has some order or relation to a third thing. Thus we use the word 'healthy' of both diet and passing water, because each of these has some relation to health in a man, the former as a cause, the latter as a symptom of it."*[14]

So we could say, for example, that a particular diet is healthy$_{(1)}$ – and good kidney functioning may also be said to be healthy$_{(2)}$: but the two terms are not univocals – that is, they do not have precisely the same meaning. On the contrary: with healthy$_{(1)}$, we mean that the diet contributes to the state of being healthy – while healthy$_{(2)}$ means that good kidney function is a reflection of the state of being healthy. At the same time, however, precisely because healthy$_{(1)}$ and healthy$_{(2)}$ 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.[15]

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[14] Aquinas, Thomas: Summa Theologiae 1A. 13, 5. 208

[15] Aquinas's example apparently draws from Aristotle's discussion of *pros hen* equivocals in *The Topics*: "… 'healthy' means 'producing health' and 'preserving health' and 'denoting health,' … (I.xv, 106b35-37: 1960, 315). We should also note that there are important differences between the *pros hen* and analogical equivocals that both Aristotle and Aquinas make use of – but these differences, so

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For Aristotle (as well as for Aquinas) this linguistic analysis is significant because language is assumed to reflect the structure of reality itself. In particular, Aristotle says rather famously that *being* itself is such a focal or *pros hen* equivocal: "…there are many senses in which a thing is said to 'be,' but all that 'is' is related to one central point, one definite kind of thing, and is not said to 'be' by a mere ambiguity" (*Metaphysics* 1003a33; Burrell's translation, 1973, 84). That is, all things *are* – in ways that are both irreducibly *different* and yet at the same time inextricably *connected* with one another by way of reference to a single focal point.

For Aristotle, our ability to negotiate the complex ambiguities of *pros hen* equivocals is affiliated with a particular kind of *practical judgment* – what Aristotle calls *phronesis*. Just as we can recognize and appropriately utilize terms that hold different but related meanings – so *phronesis* allows us to discern what and how general ethical principles apply to diverse contexts, thereby making ethical decisions and actions possible. As Aquinas puts it:

> *"Practical reason … is concerned with contingent matters, about which human actions are concerned, and consequently, although there is necessity in the general principles, the more we descend to matters of detail, the more frequently we encounter deviations…. Accordingly, in matters of action, truth or practical rectitude is not the same for all in respect of detail but only as to the general principles, and where there is the same rectitude in matters of detail, it is not equally known to all."*[16]

This is to say: *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.[17]

Such ethical pluralism, finally, as engaging such structures of connection alongside irreducible difference, and as rooted in a *phronesis* that is precisely the cultivated, experientially-informed ability to *judge* as to how to interpret and apply shared principles to diverse contexts, thereby carries us beyond Hinman's notion of "potential compatibility," and even Rawls' notion of overlapping consensus (again, see **III**.D., below).

In fact, Aristotle's understanding of *phronesis* and thus of ethical pluralism is intimately connected with a central component of computation – namely, *cybernetics*. Of course, 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 what is apparently forgotten or unacknowledged, at least in more recent literature, is 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-

far as I can see, are not significant for the current discussion.

[16] Summa Theologiae, 1-2, q. 94, a. 4 responsio, cited in Haldane 2003, 91

[17] As I have pointed out earlier (2004, 164), *phronesis* for Aristotle is an excellence or virtue *(arete),* that consists in "a truth-attaining rational quality, concerned with action in relation to the things that are good for human beings" (*Nichomachean Ethics* VI.v.6). The Aristotle scholar Werner Jaeger describes Aristotle's notion of *phronesis* as "an habitual disposition of the mind to deliberate practically about everything concerning human weal and woe (1934, p. 83, referring to 1140b4 and 220). We should further note that Aristotle again follows Socrates and Plato here: as Jaeger comments, "To Socrates *phronesis* had meant the ethical power of reason, a sense modeled on the common usage that Aristotle restores to its rights in the *Nicomachean Ethics*" (1934, p. 83).

Indeed, as we are about to see, Aristotle's understanding of *phronesis*, as it derives from Socrates, is thus allied with Plato's use of the *cybernetes* – the pilot or steersman – as an exemplar of ethical or moral *judgment*.

For additional discussion of *phronesis* in recent ICE, see Dreyfus (2001) and Hinman (2004, 61).

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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."*[18]

"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.

Given this conjunction between the *cybernetes* and *phronesis*, where *phronesis* is the ethical judgment capable of discerning what general principles may apply and how they apply in diverse ways as required by diverse contexts – we can then meaningfully speak of a "cybernetic pluralism" in Information and Computer Ethics. I thereby refer to precisely the ethical pluralism that follows from recognizing the role of *phronesis* / practical judgment in attempting to apply / interpret / understand ethical norms in diverse ways (depending on specific circumstances and larger cultural frameworks), one that is self-correcting in primarily *ethical*, not simply *informational* ways.

B. Bridge notions with Eastern thought: pluralism, harmony, and resonance in Confucian thought

Happily, these notions of judgment and pluralism are by no means restricted to these ancient Western thinkers. On the contrary, similar notions are found throughout diverse religious and philosophical traditions – including, for example, Islam (Eickelman 2003) as well as Confucian thought. So Joseph Chan observes that "Insofar as the framework of *ren* [authoritative humanity or co-humanity[19]] and rites remains unchallenged, Confucians are often ready to accept a plurality of diverse or contradicting ethical judgments" (2003, 136). Chan's description of this Confucian pluralism thus closely parallels the interpretive pluralism we have seen in Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas: in particular, Chan emphasizes the point that a shared ethical norm – in the Confucian case, *ren* – precisely allows for a diversity judgments as to how the norm is to be interpreted or applied in a given case: "If after careful and conscientious deliberation, two persons equipped with *ren* come up with two different or contradictory judgments and courses of action, Confucians would tell us to respect both of the judgments" (2003, 137). Here we can see, then, that Confucian thought thus closely parallels especially Aristotle's understanding of *phronesis* and the affiliated understanding that a *plurality* of judgments are not only possible, but are in fact required by the application or interpretation of a given ethical norm across diverse circumstances and contexts. That is – just as Being and the Good, as refracted through *phronesis*, allow for a diversity of legitimate meanings, interpretations, applications – so *ren* allows for different, even contradictory judgments in Confucian thought.[20]

C. Metaphors of resonance, harmony as structure of pluralism: connection alongside irreducible differences.

These close similarities regarding basic understandings of judgment and pluralism, in fact, extend to the central metaphors used to describe such pluralisms. In particular, the German comparative philosopher Rolf Elberfeld 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): we

[18] Republic, 360e-361a, Bloom trans.; cf. Republic I, 332e-c; VI, 489c.

Following standard practice among Plato scholars, page references are to the Stephanus volume and page number.

[19] See Ames and Rosemont 1998, 30.

[20] Similarly, Prof. I.J. Mosala, in his address to our conference, noted that "In culturally diverse communities it is quite likely that everybody will accept these [basic] principles [of information ethics], but the way that they strive to promote them could vary." Ethics and information exchange between diverse cultures. 5

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can further note here that for Plato, justice itself emerges as the proportional *harmony* between the three distinct elements of the *psyche* or self (i.e., reason, spirit, and appetite) – just as justice in the ideal city is likewise a proportional harmony between the three classes (e.g., *The Republic*, 443b-445b).

Turning to China, Elberfeld points out that music – specifically, musical *harmonies* – are centrally important to education, as described in the *Liji* (*Book of Rites* – 3rd ct. B.C.E.). In ways closely similar to Plato, harmony [*he*] or *resonance* [*ganying*] are incorporated in education as a means of perfecting – understood precisely as *harmonizing* – the proper relationships first of all between [*zwischen*] human beings. Such harmony, it is hoped, will then further extend between human beings and the larger order, as well as, finally, between earth and *T'ian* ("heaven" – better, "… an inhering, emergent order negotiated out of the dispositioning of the particulars that are constitutive of it" – Ames & Rosemont 1998, 47). As is well-known, harmony [*he*] among these multiple spheres are the fundamental features and goals of classical Confucian ethics – what Elberfeld calls a "*Resonance Ethics" [Resonanz-Ethik]* (2002, 132-137).[21]

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*]" (2003, 132).

Finally, Elberfeld demonstrates that these understandings of harmony, resonance, and a correlative ethical pluralism are found not only in Confucian thought, but also in both ancient 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.

There is good reason to think, then, that *theoretically* these notions of pluralism and resonance may also be shared cross-culturally – but, unlike simple commonalities, these notions further include the ability to articulate and preserve irreducible differences.

D. Examples of Ethical Pluralism in Contemporary Theories of Information and Computing Ethics

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." Briefly, Bynum has argued that the ethics of both Wiener and Floridi converge towards the central values of: contributing to human flourishing; advancing and defending human values (life, health, freedom, knowledge, happiness); and fulfilling "the great principles of justice" drawn from Western philosophical and religious traditions. In fact, Bynum further points out agreement on these central values in the ethics of such computer ethics pioneers as Deborah Johnson, Philip Brey, James Moor, Helen Nissenbaum, as well as in my own emphasis on using computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies in ways that preserve, to use Hongladarom's distinction (1998, 2000, 2001), "thick" or local cultures (Ess 2005).[22] In this way,

[21] We can further note here that while Plato's understanding of harmony in the *Republic* is focused on harmonies within the human being and then within the human community – Plato draws from the still older Pythagorean belief in "the harmony of the spheres," i.e., a kind of cosmic harmony thought to extend throughout the natural order as mathematically ordered in *musical* proportions. In this way, at least the larger philosophical background of what I have called Plato's interpretive or "cybernetic" pluralism thereby directly correlates with the Chinese notion of a "cosmic" harmony between humanity, earth, and *Tian*.

[22] Soraj Hongladarom takes up Michael Walzer's distinction (1994) between "thick" and "thin" to suggest a model of global uses of CMC that holds both local or "thick" cultures (including local languages, practices, traditions, etc.) alongside a more global but "thin" culture, including the use of English as a *lingua franca* that makes global communication and interaction possible while nonetheless thereby preserving the irreducible differences that define specific cultures (1998, 2000, 2001). I have incorporated this model in my own work, so as to highlight additional examples from CMC usage around the globe that complement and reinforce Hongladarom's original model, as developed initially in the context of his analysis of Thai chatroom behavior.

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these central values serve as contemporary examples of *pros hen* foci – of norms that may be shared across a wide range of thinkers and contexts, thereby issuing in an ethical pluralism that allows for considerable diversity in the interpretation and application of those norms.

Similarly, Luciano Floridi has developed more recently 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. So Floridi says:

> *"First, instead of trying to achieve an impossible "view from nowhere", the theory seeks to avoid assuming some merely "local" conception of what Western philosophical traditions dictate as "normality" – whether this is understood as post-18th century or not – in favour of a more neutral ontology of entities modelled informationally. By referring to such a "lite" ontological grounding of informational privacy, the theory allows the adaptation of the former to various conceptions of the latter, working as a potential cross-cultural platform. This can help to uncover different conceptions and implementations of informational privacy around the world in a more neutral language, without committing the researcher to a culturally-laden position."*[23]

A "lite" ontology, that is, 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. Indeed, Floridi makes explicit here that his notion of a "lite" ontology is intended precisely to avoid the cultural imperialism of imposing a single norm, language or culture across the globe: rather, his vision is of a pluralistic structure of a shared framework – in this case, information ontology as something of a shared language – alongside the diverse languages and practices of diverse cultures:

> *"No universal language or culture should be expected to arise across all the various information societies around the world. However, in the same way as people will increasingly often speak not only their own idioms and native dialects but also some form of basic English good enough to communicate with each other, likewise,* an informational ontology will probably represent the shared koiné among future netizens*."*[24]

The suggestion here that the pluralism intended by Floridi's "lite" informational ontology requires our fluency in (at least) two "languages" – i.e., our own native language, along with a globally shared *koiné* – thereby echoes the similar point made by Brenda Danet and Susan Herring: as the history of cultural hybridization shows, people are indeed capable of the linguistic *diglossia* required to maintain both a local language (and with it, given the integral role of language in defining and articulating a culture's worldview, values, practices, etc.) and a more formal *lingua franca* used for broader communication (Danet and Herring 2003). Moreover, Floridi further echoes here Soraj Hongladarom's strategy of applying Michael Walzer's distinction between "thick" and "thin" to a develop a model of global uses of CMC technologies that, as we have seen,[25] conjoins both local but "thick" cultures (including defining languages, values, practices, etc.) with a global but "thin" culture (including the use, for example, of English as a *lingua franca*) – so that the global, "thin" culture facilitates global communication and interaction, while allowing local, "thick" cultures to continue to thrive and develop (Hongladarom 1998, 2000, 2001). More specifically, we will in fact see in *praxis* the sort of pluralism Floridi outlines here in theoretical terms – precisely with regard to the notion of privacy (**III**.C).

So, while these prominent theorists have thus incorporated strong notions of pluralism into their

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I am further very grateful indeed to Terry Bynum for confirming account of his work that I provide here as an example of *pluralism*: personal email to the author, 27 September, 2005.

[23] Floridi, Luciano: Four Challenges for a Theory of Informational Privacy, 113

[24] *Ibid*: emphasis added, CE.

[25] See note 23.

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approaches to ICE – the critical question remains: can this pluralism work in *praxis* – i.e., "on the ground" in an emerging ICE?

Happily, a number of important examples instantiate such pluralisms in *praxis*. I review these in the next section, to illustrate *how* pluralism works "on the ground" – and that pluralism is not simply a nice theoretical construct, but a realizable component of real-world ethics.

III. Ethical Pluralism in a global ICE: Examples from Praxis

A. Emancipation across culture and gender

Building on his previous work (Stahl 2004), Bernd Carsten Stahl has more recently developed an account of what he calls "critical reflexivity" as a *procedurally*-oriented approach to ICE (2006). Here Stahl addresses the wide range of philosophical problems – including the twin problems of ethical relativism and ethical absolutism – that confront any effort to develop ethical norms to be shared across cultures. Stahl seeks to thereby make possible what he calls "critical research in information systems" (CRIS) – research intended precisely for a world made up of dynamic cultures interconnected with one another through ICTs and the processes of globalization: as neither relativistic nor naively imperialistic, CRIS rather seeks to become critically aware of potentially ethnocentric assumptions in any efforts towards emancipation and development, precisely in order to avoid imperialism. In doing so, Stahl then takes up the central difficulties of defining 'emancipation' in a way that would work cross-culturally. This requires, on his showing, a shift from what we might think of as a content-oriented or *substantive* approach that would attempt to develop a concrete definition of emancipation: any such effort, he points out, will always run the risk of overlooking – or, worse, overriding – local cultural preferences and values. Instead, Stahl turns to a *formal* approach (one rooted in Habermas) that instead 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, Stahl argues, 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). This means more particularly that critical researchers can endorse democratic participation, freedom of speech, and/or stakeholder inclusion. As Stahl points out, "These do not constitute emancipation but they are the necessary conditions of determining what emancipation means" (*ibid*).

Critical reflexivity, as Stahl makes clear, thus requires of us constant reflection on our own basic norms, assumptions, practices, etc., precisely as they appear to *differ* from those norms, assumptions, practices, etc., that define "Others'" cultures: such critical reflexivity is needed, first of all, in order to avoid naïve ethnocentrism in the form of a presumed universality of our own norms, assumptions, practices, etc. – and thereby to avoid the imperialism and colonialism that such ethnocentrism often fuels.

Such critical reflexivity and its allied procedural approach to defining central norms, moreover, directly 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). Even more strikingly, Deborah Wheeler (2006) documents how women in Jordan have been able to take up ICTs in ways that are indeed *emancipatory* – where 'emancipation,' precisely 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. In my terms, Stahl's critical reflexivity and procedural approach to defining central norms such as "emancipation" thus issues here – not simply theoretically but also *practically* – in "emancipation" as a *pluralistic* concept, one that allows for diverse interpretations and implementations across different cultures.

B. Maja van der Velden: "encoding pluralism" (my term) in Indymedia

Maja van der Velden has helpfully documented how a robust form of pluralism has emerged in the development of independent media – specifically, in the form of software written to support open, web-based publishing.

Van der Velden first points out how the *Confederated Network of Independent Media Centers (CNIMC*) developed as a loose conglomerate devoted to supporting its members around the world in their efforts to develop independent media oriented towards social, environmental and economic

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justice. The members of the CNIMC agree upon a shared set of "Principles of Unity," including the principle of Open Publishing:

> *"All IMC's, based upon the trust of their contributors and readers, shall utilize open web based publishing, allowing individuals, groups and organizations to express their views, anonymously if desired."*[26]

But this principle allows for – in fact, as the diverse contexts and settings in which participants seek to realize this principle *require* – diverse *interpretations*, applications, or understandings of the principle: indeed, the very source code written to support their work instantiates a *plurality* of such interpretations and applications. As van der Velden describes it:

> *"The first source code,* Active*, was developed by activists in Australia to run a small activist media center. In the same year, the software was adapted and used for the independent media center in Seattle, Washington, during the activities surrounding the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in 1999. The success of the media center in Seattle led to the establishment of many more Independent Media Centers."*[27]

Perhaps not surprisingly, however, as the *Active* source code was taken up in diverse countries, cultures, and contexts, it was modified to reflect local conditions, including specific legal contexts:

> *"For example, Mir [an instantiation of* Active*] was developed for the German IMC site, reflecting "a legal environment which prohibits racist, hateful, and revisionist speech in ways that necessitates prior restraint story moderation in a way that many IMCs are uncomfortable with" (Hill, 2003, p. 5). Other spinoffs dealt with the authentication process. Active had no authentication process, allowing anonymous postings. This is still possible with IMC software such as* DadaIMC*. Other IMC softwares now require a name, while some also allow you to post under a nickname."*[28]

The result is an ethical *pluralism* at the level of source code:

> *"What the variety of IMC source codes shows is that there are different* interpretations *of open publishing possible within the Principles of Unity. These* interpretations *are politically motivated and "grant us a meaningful form of freedom, the independence to choose the socio-technical terms on which we communicate" (Hill, 2003, p. 8). The ongoing negotiations in the Indymedia network in order to balance unity, difference, and autonomy show that part of these negotiations need to be expressed on the level of the source code, the software programs on which the individual IMCs run. New participants in the Indymedia network can choose which source code serves their values best or develop a new one."*[29]

Again, the emergence of diverse understandings of what open publishing means nicely fits with the structure of interpretive pluralism and *pros hen* equivocals: open publishing in particular and the Principles of Unity in general stand as the ethical focal points of diverse groups in different cultural and legal environments – these groups in turn are able to *interpret* and instantiate what these norms and values mean within those environments, precisely in order to make these values and norms applicable to and workable within those environments.

C. Pluralism in definitions of privacy – U.S. / Germany / Hong Kong / China

As I have documented extensively elsewhere (Ess 2006a), a similar pluralism is emerging – again, on a global scale and across the significant cultural differences defining East and West – with regard to the basic notion of *privacy* and affiliated codes and laws defining data privacy protection. Briefly (but in ways we will explore more fully in the next example), Western conceptions of privacy and data privacy protection rest on a generally *atomistic* conception of the individual as a moral *autonomy* (in Kantian terms, the source of its own law – a founda-

[26] Indymedia Document Project, cited in van der Velden, Maja: Invisibility and the Ethics of Digitalization: Designing so as not to Hurt Others. 86

[27] van der Velden, Maja: Invisibility and the Ethics of Digitalization: Designing so as not to Hurt Others. 86

[28] van der Velden, Maja: *op cit*. 87

[29] *ibid*: emphasis added, CE

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tional conception of Western *democratic* theory). In the United States, as Deborah Johnson has nicely summarized, in the United States we have developed justifications of privacy as both an *intrinsic* good (i.e., one that requires no further justification) and as an *extrinsic* or *instrumental* good: first of all, privacy is needed for the autonomous self in order to develop a sense of self and personal autonomy, along with intimate relationships and then the capacity to engage in debate and the other practices of a democratic society (2001). In contrast with what Henry Rosemont, Jr., helpfully characterizes as this "peach-pit" conception of the individual (i.e., as holding a central, core reality-identity that does not change over time, whatever happens to the surface appearances of the person – 2006) – Buddhist and Confucian (as well as African, as we have seen) conceptions of the self instead stress the person as a *relational* and/or "processional" being (Ames and Rosemont 1998, 22ff.). In particular, in the case of Buddhism, the "peach-pit" or autonomous "self" foundational in the modern West is seen as not simply an *illusion* – but, indeed, as the central *delusion* that is responsible for human suffering. Hence, in societies deeply shaped by Buddhism, such as Thailand and Japan, individual "privacy" is seen *negatively.* So, for example, Japan's *Jodo-shinsyu* (Pure Land) Buddhism emphasizes *Musi*, "no-self," as one of the goals of the religious practitioner. One way to achieve *Musi* – to purify and then eliminate one's "private mind" – is to voluntarily share one's most intimate and shameful secrets. That is: what is seen in the West as a core, *positive* reality, with which are affiliated *positive* rights to privacy, is seen in the case of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism as a deceptive illusion, whose "privacy" is best – and voluntarily – overturned for the sake of genuine salvation (Nakada and Tamura 2005).

In the light of these radical differences, we should expect equally radical differences with regard to conceptions of data privacy protection. To be sure, these differences clearly exist: but at the same time, at least limited privacy rights and data privacy protections are emerging in Thailand, China, and Hong Kong – but justified, as we might imagine, on entirely different grounds than we find in the West. Briefly, at least limited data privacy protection is justified primarily on *economic* grounds: in ethical terms, such protection is seen as an instrumental good – one that contributes 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 2006a).[30]

D. Hongladarom: Theravadan and Mahayana Buddhist approaches to privacy vis-à-vis modern Western notions of individual privacy

More recently, Soraj Hongladarom has taken up these apparent conflicts between Western and Eastern conceptions, with particular attention to the Buddhist traditions (Theravadan and Mahayanan) that have deeply shaped and defined Thai society (2007). To begin with, he extends our understanding of the contrasts between Western and Eastern views by taking up Nagasena's refutation of the *psyche* – the Greek conception of a unifying "soul" or self that synthesizes diverse components of sense-knowledge (sight, taste, touch, hearing, smell) into a unitary experience (Hongladarom 2007, 116ff.). While this appears to radicalize the contrast between Western and Eastern views, Hongladarom goes on to point out that Western traditions *also* include more relational or communitarian approaches that somewhat offset the "peach-pit" notion with an emphasis on one's relationships with the larger community. As we have seen, these approaches include Aristotle's virtue ethics, feminist ethics and ethics of care, environmental ethics, and, finally communitarian traditions since Hegel (cf. Tu 1999; Froehlich 2004). At the same time, Hongladarom shows how Nagarjuna develops a distinction between 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 (*nirvana*, the "blown-out" self) *requires* individual effort and responsibility – manifest, e.g., in the injunction to cultivate compassion towards others (Hongladarom 2007, 118). For Hongladarom, this means that Buddhist societies such as Thailand have a *prima facie* reason to protect the privacy of such (empiri-

[30] Kei Hiruta has developed an extensive analysis and helpful critiques and suggestions to my earlier work on pluralism (Hiruta 2006). I've attempted to acknowledge the saliency of those critiques in the development of this paper – primarily, by shifting away from the political justifications that he finds problematic.

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cal-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, as these are interpreted and understood across the considerable divides between East and West. To say it slightly differently: the irreducible differences marking the contrast between 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 whose privacy requires at least a modest level of governmental protection, especially for the sake of democratic polity) can be seen as diverse *interpretations* or *understandings* of notions of self and privacy – and thereby as conceptions that may nonetheless resonate or harmonize with one another. 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.

Indeed, the resonance emerging here compliments similar alignments or harmonies across East and West, such as the one pointed out by Theptawee Chokvasin between Buddhist versions of autonomy and Kantian and Habermasian notions (Chokvasin 2007, 78f.). For our part, Hongladarom and I have suggested 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. 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.

Finally, these various structures of pluralism – precisely as they require the interpretation or application of a shared focal norm or value within the diverse contexts established by distinctive cultural values, traditions, practices, etc. – distinguish our approach from Rawls' notion of "overlapping consensus" in a political liberalism (2005). For Rawls, we may arrive at such a consensus by bracketing our diverse metaphysical beliefs – leaving them at home, so to speak – and engaging with our fellow citizens simply on the basis of what is politically expedient. Moreover, Rawls' account focuses on what takes place within a liberal state. By contrast, our conception of ethical pluralism extends globally and includes states and regimes that are clearly not liberal or democratic. Despite these radical cultural and political differences, however, we believe that the sorts of focal, *pros hen* pluralism that we have articulated make possible ethical alignments – indeed, *resonances* and *harmonies* – between diverse cultural traditions and ethical systems. In such pluralistic resonances or harmonies, as we have put it most recently,

> *"these diverse systems and traditions do not have to leave their metaphysics at home; on the contrary, they bring their specific backgrounds to the table of philosophical dialogue and debate and search for ways in which their systems could or could not be aligned with the others. In the case of personal privacy, this would mean that the Buddhist tradition and the Western secular tradition compare and contrast their similarities and differences without (echoing Michael Walzer, 1994) each leaving its thick backgrounds and operating with its fellows on thin air."*[31]

IV. Emerging Rights / Duties?

In light of the theoretical foundations and practical expressions of *pros hen* or focal pluralism in an emerging and genuinely global ICE, what conclusions can we draw regarding the rights and obligations that may emerge therein "for the rest of us," as we take up ICTs more and more into the fabric of our lives?

I can see three layers of responses to this question.

[31] Hongladarom, Soraj and Ess, Charles: Introduction. xv

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A. Conflict arising out of irreducible differences is inevitable and not always resoluble

The *possibility* of pluralistic resolutions to ethical conflicts emerging from the irreducible differences defining individual and cultural identities is just that – *possibility*. While we've now seen multiple instances which realize the possibility of resolving ethical differences within the resonance or harmony articulated by a *pros hen*, interpretive pluralism – 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 however much Buddhist approaches to privacy may resonate with Western ones being imported into Thailand – the tradition and affiliated customs of the "surveillance state" may succeed in keeping "privacy" an interesting idea, but not a right articulated and defended in law (2007).

But, there is, to paraphrase Spivak (1999), no reason to throw up our hands – or to acquiesce to ethical relativism and fragmentation (including reinforcement of local identities through violence). Rather, there are at least two ways in which an emerging ICE can respond to the irreducible differences defining distinctive cultural identities.

B. Minimal requirements – shared commonalities

As we have seen, it is possible to begin our encounters with one another globally via ICTs with the reasonable and understandable search for commonalities, including a set of minimal rights and obligations towards one another, justified at least by shared economic interests (what Søraker has helpfully identified as pragmatic arguments – 2007).

So far as I can tell, 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. That is, as Henry Rosemont, Jr., has made very clear – like first-generation rights to life, liberty, and pursuit of property, I can respect your rights by largely leaving you alone (Rosemont 2006).

To be sure, the terms "minimal" and "negative" may sound unnecessarily derogatory here: hence, let me stress that arriving at – and following out – global agreements of these sorts would represent an enormous ethical advance forward in the emerging global ICE. Nonetheless, such minimal rights and negative obligations are only part of the story …

C. Maximal requirements: meeting "the Other" online

More broadly, as I tried to suggest by posing the question towards the end of the opening section (I.G) – 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, as these hold together both similarity and irreducible difference.[32]

Given our desire and/or need to move in these more robust directions, we can perhaps draw at least initial guidance from the following considerations.

1. Cross-cultural communication ethics?

While much is known about cross-cultural communication offline – astonishingly little is known about cross-cultural communication online, including the centrally important task of "building bridges" across

[32] Thomas Herdin, Wolfgang Hofkirchner, and Ursula Maier-Rabler make this same point in developing their model of cultural connection and difference: "Cultural thinking that reconciles the one and the many is achievable only on the basis of an integration and differentiation way of thinking. It integrates the differences of the manifold cultural identities and differentiates the common as well" (2007, 65).

They see such structures of connection and difference at work in Welsch's notion of *transculturalism* (1999), Robertson's well-known notion of *glocalization* (1999), and in the cultural hybridization represented in the "… *new mestizaje* (a term coined by John Francis Burke in "Reconciling Cultural Diversity With a Democratic Community: Mestizaje as Opposed to the Usual Suspects" in Wieviorka (2003)…." (Herdin, Hofkirchner & Maier-Rabler 2007, 65).

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cultures.[33] To be sure, we can learn lessons from successful efforts at such bridge-building. As we have seen, Bernd Carsten Stahl, for example, emphasizes the importance of *critical reflexivity*, a constant reflection on our own basic beliefs, views, practices, etc., as these differ from those of "the Other," if we are to avoid naïve ethnocentrism (2006). More broadly, 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 such 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, as humans have always learned them, 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).

2. Social justice and positive duties: information justice and the cultivation of character?

Any number of observers have argued that the rights-based approaches of the West will not work well in "other" cultures. Such approaches, as we have now seen in multiple ways, emphasize the autonomous individual – apart from his or her connection with the larger community. Such an approach is deeply out of sync with the basic assumptions regarding the individual as a *relational being* first and foremost that shape the more communitarian / collectively-oriented cultures and traditions of Africa, indigenous peoples, those countries shaped by Confucian and Buddhist traditions, etc. In particular, Maja van der Velden concludes her chapter in our anthology precisely by pointing out that "Designing so as not to Hurt Others" means going beyond rights-based approaches (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.) Similarly, Lynette Kvasny (2007) has argued that if we in the United States genuinely

[33] To my knowledge, the most important effort in this direction is the extensive annotated bibliography developed by Leah Macfadyen and her colleagues (Macfadyen, Roche, & Doff 2004). So far as I'm aware, however, no one has developed a comprehensive, systematic, and theoretically grounded set of guidelines and best practices for cross-cultural communication online that would match the extensive literature on offline cross-cultural communication. In Ess (2006b) I attempt to summarize such guidelines on the basis of recent work from the biennial conferences on "Cultural Attitudes towards Technology and Communication" (CATaC) – but these guidelines are oriented exclusively towards website design. In the conclusion here, I attempt to offer some general guidelines that would extend to other online venues of cross-cultural communication: but while these guidelines and suggestions, I hope, are helpful, much clearly remains to be done to develop a literature for online cross-cultural communication that begins to compare with the detail and scope of the literature for offline cross-cultural communication.

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seek to overcome the digital divide – as it affects, for example, African American communities – we must come to grips with the evil of systemic racism: and such racism, she argues, is embedded in the very statistics and demographic categories used by otherwise well-meaning academics and policy-makers in attempting to document the digital divide for the sake of overcoming it.

Indeed, one of the contributors to our volume on East-West Information Ethics – a Thai computer scientist – has argued that in the face of the social and familial fragmentation effected by ICTs, what is needed to raise a new generation of young people who will use these technologies in ethical rather than harmful ways is a restoration of *religion* as an environmental framework (Bhattarakosol, 2007).

These prescriptions, no doubt, will sound odd to Western ears – in part, I suggest, because our mainstream ethical traditions have tended to separate ethics from religion first of all (as they must in the modern Western liberal state), and secondly because our ethical systems tend to emphasize following a minimum of rules that articulate obligations to others, precisely in the name of preserving individual (and largely *negative*) freedoms. Nonetheless, 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. Especially ancient and contemporary feminist virtue ethics and ethics of care move us in these directions, as do the deontological ethics of Kant and others. But let me close by suggesting that, at the risk of violating copyright and trademark – a major U.S. software company has asked the right *ethical* question when it comes to ICTs:

> *where do you want to go today?*

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 second 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, echoing in part the work of Cees Hamelink (2000), 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).[34] 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

[34] That Habermas may be salient in an African context is in fact argued by conference participant Azelarabe Lahkim Bennani, in his "The public sphere's metamorphosis. The triangular relation between the n.g.O, State, and globalization."

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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, after all, are essential to healing the ruptures that follow upon the mistakes we will inevitably make, especially in our first efforts to understand, work, and live with "the Other" – and 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.

While such an education for exemplary persons (to use the Confucian phrase) may be desirable – it is clearly a rare privilege, if not still largely a utopian ideal. Hence, I do not want to argue that everyone must take this second step. To echo Judith Jarvis Thomson's famous distinction between "minimally decent" and "Good Samaritan" ethics (1974), the latter requirements – at least here and now – strike me as morally admirable (what ethicists like to call *supererogatory*) values and acts, but not morally *necessary* or required. That is, while we can establish such duties and goals as exemplary, we cannot *require* them of everyone – first of all, because to fulfill these duties may exceed the resources and opportunities of many persons, especially as they depend on an education and experience with "the Other" (such as living for an extended period of time outside one's own country) that remain luxuries rather than everyday practice for the majority of the world's peoples.

That said, 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 homogenous world culture – what Benjamin Barber famously called "McWorld" (1995)[35] – more and more of us will need to take up the moral postures and communication skills of the Good Samaritan *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.

Where do you want to go today?

thus requires us to further ask:

> *Whom do you want to meet today – "the Other" as s/he is like you, and/or*
> *"the Other" as s/he is both similar to you and irreducibly different?*

And, finally, if the last,

> what *positive* ethical *virtues* – practices, habits, postures, attitudes, etc. – must we cultivate in order to become the sort of *person* who can indeed thus meet "the Other" *qua* Other?

Or, to recall Nishida:

> what virtues must we practice, what sort of *person* must you become, in order to be capable of knowing "the Other" in a *resonant* meeting and response that conjoins commonalities with our acknowledging, respecting, and fostering the irreducible differences that distinguish us (as individuals and as members of diverse cultures) from one another?

I close by noting that these sorts of questions – along with the emphasis on *judgment*, pluralism, and *harmony* in the larger community that they implicate – may well *resonate* in African contexts. As we have seen, such judgment and pluralism are found in Islam (Eickelman 2003) – and hence should be no strangers to the African countries and traditions deeply shaped by Islam. Moreover, we have

[35] Of course, a central focus during our conference was precisely the ways in which Africa and African cultures in particular are profoundly threatened by the homogenizing forces of globalization. This point was made with especial force by our colleagues in Theme Group 8, Ismail Abdullahi (Cultural Diversity, globalization, and ethical issues), Anthony Löwstedt (Cultural Extinction as an Aspect of Current Globalization Trends), and Chibueze C. Udeani (Cultural Diversity and Globalisation).

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further seen that African thought more broadly stresses that persons are "beings under construction": in the terms of both Western virtue ethics and Confucian thought, it takes *practice* to become a more complete human being. By the same token, this *practice* is oriented towards the *harmony* of the larger community – again, a foundational understanding in Western virtue ethics and Confucian thought that appears to be perfectly resonant with African thought.[36]

These strong resonances between the ethical pluralism I have traced out in both Western and Asian traditions, on the one hand, and the broad outlines of African traditions and thought, on the other, suggest – at least as a starting point – that this ethical pluralism may likewise succeed in the African context both to foster the development of shared ethical norms in the domain of Information and Computing Ethics and to sustain and foster the irreducible differences that define both individuals and cultures in Africa. Happily, I can report that much in our presentations and dialogues during the first African Information Ethics conference – including the discussions and findings of our Theme Group on "Cultural Diversity and Development" – provided at least initial confirmation of this hypothesis.

But of course, such pluralism requires precisely the dialogical participation of those who themselves stand in the cultural contexts and histories of Africa in any development of a *pluralistic* global ICE that would seek to discern and articulate shared norms that are, at the same time, interpreted, understood, and applied in diverse ways by diverse individuals and communities – i.e., in ways that precisely and directly reflect, in this case, *African* values, traditions, histories, practices, etc. Given the scope of this ethical pluralism across a wide range of global and radically diverse cultures, and given the strong resonances between African traditions and the other traditions in which pluralism is now well documented – it seems very probable that this pluralistic approach will succeed in the African context as well. First of all, such pluralism would forbid both homogenization and colonization of the sort that has devastated Africa (as well as much of the rest of the world) for too much of her history. But as we have learned in other contexts previously – we will only know if such a global, pluralistic ICE will "work" in Africa as our African colleagues seek to take it up in their own distinctive ways, as one approach among many in their development of an African Information Ethics.

[36] Paterson, Barbara: We Cannot Eat Data. 157f. Cf. Capurro (2007) on *ubuntu*.

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