
Global Information Justice: Rights, Responsibilities, and Caring Connections

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ABSTRACT

THE GOAL OF GLOBAL INFORMATION JUSTICE (GIJ) IS TO conserve nature and to preserve humanity through the creative uses of the technologies of information, knowledge, and memory using the practices of rights, responsibilities, and caring connections. This article presents the concept of global information justice and describes it in three different but complementary ways—as an ethical ideal, as an organizing principle for a model for analysis, and as a direction for policy making. First, as an ethical ideal, GIJ has as its aim the use of new technologies to preserve humanity and to conserve the natural world. The analytic model relates key issues—access, ownership, privacy, security, and community—to each other and to the goal of GIJ. As an approach to policy making, GIJ is presented as the foundation for policy creation, implementation, and the establishment of normative practices. The concept of global information justice is illustrated with articles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948), with the works of international scholars and advisors meeting in the late 1990s (UNESCO INFOEthics Congresses) and their continuing efforts through UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization), the International Center for Information Ethics (ICIE), and other groups. This presentation can only serve as an introduction to global information justice and to the research agenda and policy needs that will arise as the future unfolds.

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LIBRARY TRENDS, Vol. 49, No. 3, Winter 2001, pp. 519-537

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of global information justice (GIJ) is to conserve nature and to preserve humanity through the creative uses of the technologies of information, knowledge, and memory (see Figure 1) using the practices of rights, responsibilities, and caring connections.

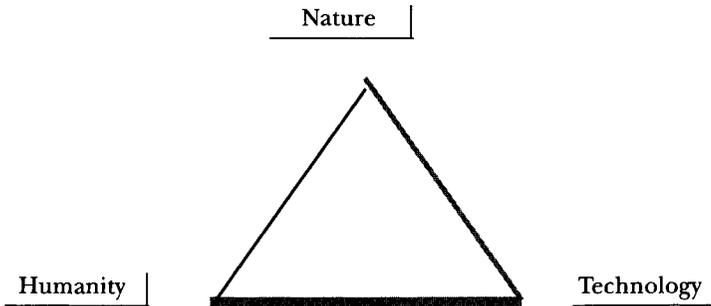


Figure 1.

This article presents the concept of global information justice and describes it in three different but complementary ways—as an ethical ideal, as an organizing principle for a model for analysis, and as a direction for policy making. First, as an ethical ideal, GIJ has as its aim the use of new technologies to preserve humanity and to conserve the natural world. The analytic model relates key issues—access, ownership, privacy, security, and community—to each other and to the goal of GIJ. As an approach to policy making, GIJ is presented as the foundation for policy creation, implementation, and the establishment of normative practices. The concept of global information justice is illustrated in several articles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) with the works of international scholars and advisors meeting in the late 1990s (Unesco INFOEthics Congresses), and their continuing efforts through Unesco, the International Center for Information Ethics, and other groups. This presentation can only serve as an introduction to global information justice and to the research agenda and policy needs that will arise as the future unfolds.

BACKGROUND

Almost ten years ago in Barbara Moran's *Library Trends* issue on leadership (Smith, 1992), I discussed the concept of information ethics—"Infoethics for Leaders: Models of Moral Agency in the Information Environment." At the end of that article, I described librarians and other information professionals as ethical selves in the global information environments who would "need to negotiate among competing interests and

to assert their professional expertise in a constructive and forceful manner” (p. 565). In the last decade, information ethics (IE) has grown substantially as a field in applied ethics. One of the most significant characteristics of the area has been its global orientation. From the very beginning, with the 1988 article by Rafael Capurro, in 1996 with a special issue on global information ethics in *Science and Engineering Ethics* (Bynum & Rogerson, 1996), and most recently with the founding of the International Center for Information Ethics, IE has been an international discipline devoted to guiding information professionals and global policy makers and to informing and empowering citizens of the world.

During this same decade, the emergence of the consumer Internet, with its enormous potential to connect people as well as to pose a threat to personal privacy and human identity, has heightened public awareness. With globalization now a household word as well as a subject of increasing controversy, any notion of global information justice may seem to be an oxymoron or at least a naïve ideal imagined by utopian academics. Yet others would argue that, without consideration of social return as well as financial return, economic growth and continuing prosperity may not be sustainable.

Human rights, another contested issue on the world stage, evokes similar responses of optimism and pessimism. Yet, in 1998, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was celebrated, and its call for international action reaffirmed. The theme of global information justice runs through the UDHR and can be appreciated in the twenty-first century even more than it was fifty years ago. Privacy, information transfer across borders, free exchange of ideas, protection of intellectual property, and the right to know everything—from one’s own genetic blueprint to someone else’s criminal record—are among the issues that need to be addressed with respect to diverse values and competing interests.

The spirit of global information justice is caught in the Preamble to the UNESCO Constitution (see Figure 2) with its notion that peace must be founded on intellectual and moral solidarity beyond various political and economic conditions.

“Peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world, and (that) the peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.”

Figure 2. From the Preamble to the UNESCO Constitution.

DEFINING GLOBAL INFORMATION JUSTICE

Global information justice, broadly speaking, is the notion that preserving humanity and conserving the natural world must be the controlling focus of new information and communications technologies (see Figure 3). Instead of determining the direction of humanity and nature, new technologies are seen to be in partnership with humanity and nature. In this way, GIJ affirms the UDHR and extends its mandate of protection to nature, animals, soil, water, plants, and potentially to human-made or machine-made entities.

Conserve Nature, Preserve Humanity through the creative uses of Information and the Technologies of Information, Knowledge, and Memory.

Figure 3. Global Information Justice.

In "Information Technology and Technologies of the Self," Rafael Capurro (1996) sets forth this challenge to employ new technologies in order to balance the needs of humanity and the natural world (see Figure 1). Unlike those who assume that technology itself drives and determines humanity and nature, Capurro argues differently in favor of employing various technologies of the self (such as books, automobiles, and radios) balancing them against each other rather than completely subordinating one to the other. Instead of depending upon a "code-oriented morality alone," Capurro, following Foucault, suggests also a "self-oriented morality" (p. 22). He says that, with new technologies, people have the opportunity to be "not simply agents but . . . as individuals and as communities, moral subjects of our actions. We are not an unchangeable 'I' or 'we,' but an intersection of possible choices in a process of becoming, individually and socially, ourselves within a field of linguistic and institutional practices. For example, instead of seeking to master the natural world, humanity can employ technologies to heal and transform the planet for ourselves and for future generations" (pp. 24-25).

OVERVIEW OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The Ideal: Rights, Responsibilities, and Caring Connections

Like the ideals in the UDHR (see Figure 4), the ideal of global information justice (see Figure 5) calls for attitudes and actions that are hard to achieve. Implementation is only possible if individuals, groups, institutions, and nations are able to go beyond law and rights and move to mutual responsibility and caring concern. The practical basis for this affirmation is concern for survival of the planet and of all living beings, including

animals, plants, and potentially sentient machines. While favoring the survival of any particular human, animal, or machine could be questioned, the starting point for this argument is that survival, for a start, is a general good that may be modified in its specifics. Recognizing that a perfect balance cannot be found between conflicting parties and competing interests, the ideal of global information justice seeks to provide ways to negotiate differences in order to move toward workable solutions rather than to declare winners or losers. GIJ enlarges the analytical space for considering claims beyond the legal rights of the favored party. Accepting some measure of social responsibility for all of humanity and nature takes one step beyond entitlement. Caring, concern, and empathy takes another and more bold step toward establishing bonds of “friendship” beyond the more limited notion of reciprocal self-interest (Capurro, 1996, pp. 24-25). Consider a difficult case as an example:

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- Exert personal/individual autonomy
 - Assure an adequate standard of living
 - Own and sell property
 - Develop personality through education, work, leisure, and the arts
 - Privacy
 - Protection of rights to creative and scientific achievements
 - Freedom of expression and ideas
 - Freedom to change religion, opinions, and nationality
 - To marry and found families
 - To leave one's country
 - Join with others in associations, including trade unions
 - Participate in government

Figure 4. Life, Liberty, and Security of Person.

- Rights: Law and Entitlements
 - Responsibilities: Duties, Social Responsibility, and Social Conscience
 - Caring Connections: Community, Friendships, and Relationships

Figure 5. Aspects of Global Information Justice.

Scenario 1: A group of publishers and other content providers need to convert and manage printed texts for use on the Web. Labor costs in the developing world are far cheaper than in more developed economies, and quality is adequate. Employing the ideal of global information justice, companies would (choose one):

1. abide by the laws of all involved countries;
2. plan an orderly and humane transition from one place to another;

3. assess the impact on the short-term and long-term welfare of the developing countries, their peoples, and their environment and provide tangible support;
4. monitor the working conditions of all countries involved;
5. take top executives to visit all production centers; or
6. all of the above.

The detailing of this scenario should make everyone slightly uncomfortable. From a business perspective, any or all of these choices may seem completely unrealistic. For potentially displaced workers, a plan for an orderly and humane transition may be a poor second to continuing employment. For those concerned about the human welfare of low cost laborers, these attempts at concern may appear to be no more than window dressing for a systemic problem. Raising awareness of top executives of the conditions of workers may seem totally useless. None of these alternatives nor all of them together are entirely satisfactory. It might be tempting to let the market take its course. Would anything significant be lost? Using the principle of global information justice, the answer would be yes. The chance to balance competing interests would be lost. A GIJ solution would call for the well-being of all parties to be considered and not just the privileged few. Consider a second example:

Scenario 2: In opening trade relations with a former adversary, some groups have expressed concern for the disregard of intellectual property rights and others with the lack of environmental standards. There is tension between those who would delay until some workable solutions can be put in place and those who contend that any delay would be harmful to all involved. Concerned parties should (choose one):

1. refuse to participate in trade until the issues are addressed;
2. participate while debating the issues;
3. postpone discussion of the issues until the economy in the trading country improves;
4. recognize that one country cannot force standards upon another; or
5. none of the above.

Again, thoughtful people on all sides of these issues can see how difficult it is to negotiate across borders and with parties with conflicting values. This example suggests the need for a broader approach than is possible when dealing with specific examples. Therefore, an analytical model is needed to describe key issues in relation to each other and to the goals of preserving humanity and nature while respecting technologies and their creators.

ANALYTICAL MODEL

One of the best ways to stimulate critical thinking and gain insights for discernment and decision-making is through the use of models. Al-

though models can exclude data and blur perspective, they also can focus attention on key concepts and their relationships. We will use the shape of a star as the model for the themes of global information justice with one theme at each point (see Figure 6).



Figure 6.

There are a variety of ways that the points could be arranged. If the points are across from each other, they could indicate tensions. Access, for example, can be across from Ownership, Privacy, or Security. Two or more on one side could suggest complementarity. Privacy and Security could be on the same side; Access and Community could also be together. In addition, all of the themes share the interior space of the star, indicating that their issues are overlapping and not easily separated in practice. This is a heuristic model in the sense that it is proposed as exploratory and intended to invite potential contributions to refine it and suggest applications. Competing analyses and applications should be welcomed on the journey to clarify the aims and the scope of global information justice. Here the model will be described in the broader context of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

THE CONTEXT: FREEDOM, JUSTICE, AND PEACE

The Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (see Figure 2) highlights the freedoms affirmed by President Franklin Roosevelt in World War II. All of these—the freedom of speech and of belief and the freedom from want and fear—are related to the uses of these new technologies both for humanity and for the natural world.

The Preamble affirms human dignity as a basic right in its “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” It also strongly asserts an aversion to the evil consequences of “disregard and contempt for human rights.” These, it continues, “have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind.” Therefore, its primary declaration is in “the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people.” As a result, the United Nations pledges itself to “the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms.” Thus, the General Assembly sets forth the articles to foster “a common understanding of these rights and freedoms.” The following discussion will detail many of these issues in relation to the five major themes of global information justice.

MAJOR THEMES: ACCESS, OWNERSHIP, PRIVACY, SECURITY, AND COMMUNITY

In seeking justice in the international information environment, conflicting values and competing interests are a given. These conflicts are well illustrated by tensions, for example, between the publics’ need to have access to timely information and the rights of those who gather data and create interfaces to protect their proprietary products. Also, privacy rights are bound to conflict at times with the interests of others to have access to personal information whether for public health purposes or to evaluate an individual for a job or bank loan. Secure and accurate databases promote a stable community to the extent that such security does not thwart reasonable access. These intertwining issues confront ordinary working people as well as the leaders of government and industry. The stakes for these parties, however, are often at odds. Tensions among stakeholders shape decision-making and policy creation. In most cases, resolution is not a simple matter of choosing between the right and the wrong but more of prioritizing or ordering commitments to stakeholders and providing for those disadvantaged by a specific decision or policy. With such hard choices *in mind*, the various articles of the UDHR will be examined (see Figure 7).

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access (Access and Freedom of Expression—Article 19) • Ownership (General Property and Intellectual Property Rights—Articles 17 and 27) • Privacy (Articles 3 and 12) • Security (Articles 17 and 27) • Community (Human Dignity and the Rights of Human Development, including education—Articles 22, 26, and 27) |
|--|

Figure 7. Key Global Information Justice Themes in the UDHR.

Access—Article 19

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” Without access to information, regardless of the delivery medium or the intervening borders, it would be difficult to assure freedom of opinion and expression. Likewise, freedom of speech and of belief flows from access. Access is also the foundation for defending the right to read and for resisting efforts at censorship.

Access is often paired with equity in discussions of the digital divide when access is denied or subverted for people who do not have the money or the skills to use new technologies for educational and employment purposes. An extreme case for access might involve promoting public policies to support free computers so that more people can participate in building an information democracy.

In the international arena, assuring access is seen as one way to equalize the fortunes of the information poor with the information rich in order to move beyond the restrictions of ideological and geographical barriers. The other side of this coin is the danger of eliminating native cultures, languages, and identities in the rush to conform to a global standard. To assure intellectual freedom to impart ideas across boundaries, there is the challenge of conflicting ideas colliding and creating conflicts that would be difficult to resolve. In this sense, intellectual freedom may become a narrow street where crashes can happen and often will. Only mutual respect for diversity and tolerance for pluralism can safeguard peace when these freedoms are exercised around the globe.

OWNERSHIP—INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS— ARTICLES 17 AND 27

Article 17.1

“Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.”

Article 17.2

“No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.”

Article 27.2

“Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.”

The core information right affirmed by these articles is the protection of intellectual property with the sub-theme of social benefit. Western capitalistic countries take individual property rights very seriously, but this is not a universal value. Even in the West, some people with easy access to digital information, such as music on the Internet, are challenging

traditional notions of who owns what. In a world of extreme inequalities, particularly when the technological resources of the advanced economies are contrasted with resources in developing countries, the rights to own and control both real and intellectual properties may not always be in the best interests of society. If one takes the side of the noble hacker, who declares that information must be free or freed if necessary, then it is possible to urge loosening the bonds that have limited access to certain intellectual properties. For example, could more pervasive use of educational resources, such as magazines or software, be justified to improve the education of the populace? To whom is "fair use" really fair and is it a hindrance to learning? Would there be some better way to compensate authors and publishers? To take another step, some would argue that it is impossible to stop the free flow of information in a digital age, so we might as well find ways to move beyond concepts such as copyright and patents.

The tensions here between access and ownership are not adequately addressed by legal systems. In international disputes over the distribution of videos, software, or ideas for products and services, there may be conflicting legal claims, complex issues of trade, and matters of defense and national security to be considered. In addition, it may not be possible to discover, prove, or enforce the claims of original owner. While a reasonable reward may be due, it may not always be received. Thus, in affirming this article of the UDHR, the dimensions of mutual responsibility and caring concern may be more useful to the long-term discussion. Similarly, on issues of privacy and confidentiality, there may be a firmer ground established if principles of mutual respect and responsibility—e.g., for protection of genetic information—govern legal deliberations without using the law to punish after the fact when serious damage to selves and societies is already done.

PRIVACY—PERSONAL PRIVACY, CONFIDENTIALITY, AND HUMAN IDENTITY—ARTICLES 3 AND 12

Article 3

"Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person."

Article 12

"No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence . . . Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks."

Articles 3 and 12 assert that laws should protect privacy and, by implication, punish those who interfere or attack the sphere of personal privacy, and yet it may be more appealing for some to risk legal remedies than to take their chances with the court of public opinion. Some companies that tried to sell extensive personal profiles of consumers without permission have found themselves quickly out of public favor. At the same

time, many consumers seem glad to trade personal information to join a Web group or to enter a contest. These are complex issues that cannot be treated adequately here. However, this might be a good time to explore how laws may be complemented by other pressures when the universe is wired enough to monitor public perception and the opinion of businesses as well as of individuals.

SECURITY—ACCURACY AND INTEGRITY OF SYSTEMS AND DATA

Security for information and information systems enables the building of trust that is essential to the successful delivery of services and for the protection of privacy, of access, and of property rights. Cybercrimes and mischief-making threaten the stability of public and private interests. Destructive hacking, vandalism, and denial of service undermines whole systems and vital societal functions.

The need to ensure security and to keep ahead of forces that would compromise integrity may in the future require more and more investment of financial and human resources. As in the case of threats to privacy, security is more a matter of prevention than of cure. Damage done by viruses or by theft of records or proprietary information is very hard to undo. Similarly, the best approach may be to seek to address the needs of conflicting parties so that the attraction of compromising security is diminished. Again, as with privacy, seeking social consensus rather than legal remedies may be the most effective approach. Fire walls, encryption technology, and government regulation may discourage encroachments but inequities of access and resources may aggravate competing or disadvantaged parties to risk sanction in order to free captive knowledge. Again there is the need to negotiate among all potential stakeholders. Finally, cultivating community and striving for tolerance and mutual regard across cultures and regions, although seemingly idealistic, may be the most practical approach to security.

COMMUNITY: EDUCATION, CULTURE, AND HUMAN PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT—ARTICLES 26, 27, AND 28

Article 26

- “1. Everyone has the right to education
2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.”

Article 27

- “1. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the

community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author."

Article 28

"Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized."

These articles affirm the importance of both individual development and preserving diverse social groups. Education that fosters human personality is necessary for the individual to be able to participate in the cultural, social, and scientific life of the community. Yet education dominated by commercial interests or by the English language may threaten vulnerable local languages and cultures. The right to education and the freedom to learn should go together with education for social responsibility and caring connections in the international quest for peace.

Building community in the global information environment is sometimes associated with information democracy. But the idea of information democracy, like the digital divide, is a term that suggests noble aims but may conceal a subtle elitist utilitarianism that is self-serving for a small powerful minority.

FROM THE MODEL TO POLICY MAKING

Echoing these five themes, recent discussions in Unesco forums and in professional and scholarly arenas illustrate that securing rights is best accomplished when conflicting parties assume mutual responsibilities for the common good. Decision-making (as a solution to a specific problem) involves prior analysis and discernment and finally ends in reflection and reshaping for the next challenge. Policy making (as a set of practices to approach a general or specific issue) uses these same procedures on a larger scale. The aim of GIJ in both cases is to achieve understanding and guide actions while respecting rights, encouraging responsibility, and promoting caring connections. GIJ serves as a goal toward which stakeholders with conflicting interest can strive. As a framework for policy making, GIJ may be a way to put ideals into practice even with tentative trial solutions. Firm policies may then grow from experience.

For example, in a Unesco group, loosening copyright and other intellectual property restrictions for developing countries was proposed. If such a recommendation was tried, it would likely only be as a tentative experiment. Though an experiment, if it works well, it might be tried again.

UNESCO INITIATIVES: GLOBAL INFORMATION JUSTICE FOR POLICY MAKING

UNESCO, through its instrumentalities, is more concerned with

responsibility and caring connections than with governance. Although UNESCO seeks to influence member states, it does not exert governing or enforcement authority. Therefore, persuasion and consensus building are its primary tools. Like the UDHR, the words of UNESCO may seem to be weak weapons when up against corporate capitalism, environmental degradation, and the chaos of war and poverty. However, in the long run, words may be able to exert the force of conscience on a wired planet where conflicts may not be amenable to conflicting value systems and competing laws and armies.

Through the UNESCO WEBWORLD site, the Communications, Information, and Informatics (CII) division is able to inform and promote its projects related to legal and ethical issues (see Figure 8). In addition to the CII initiatives, UNESCO sponsors the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (see Figure 9). UNESCO also sponsors the International Bioethics Committee (Figure 10) with its Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights (see Figure 11).

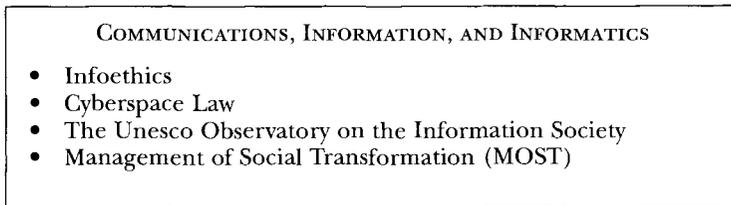


Figure 8. UNESCO Webworld.

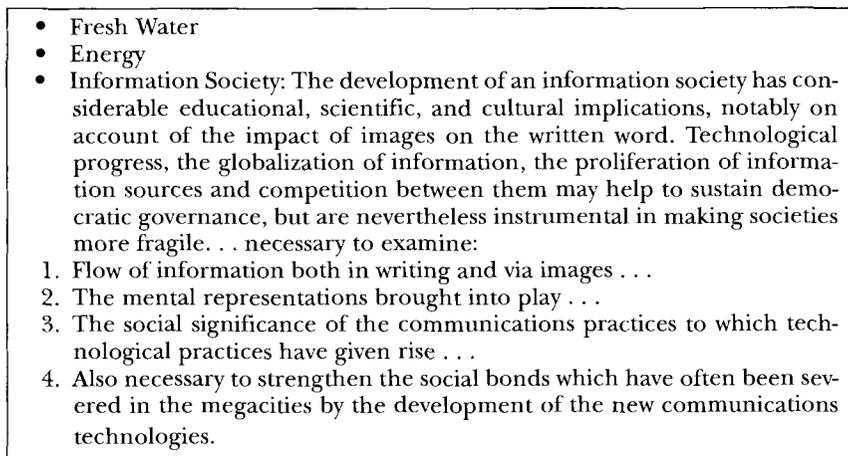


Figure 9. The World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology; Created in October-November, 1997; Twenty-Ninth UNESCO General Conference.

Admittedly, bioethics has developed in a context in which scientific and technological progress is being widely called into question as an intrinsic source of good. Nevertheless, there is a need to reconcile this concern with the imperative of freedom of research. Bioethics not only mirrors the preoccupations of a world seeking to strike a balance between nature and development, achieve harmony between individuals and society and safeguard the human species, but is also the expression of the great expectations raised by science. Today, the bioethics movement transcends borders since the concerns it expresses inevitably take on an international dimension.

Figure 10. Ethics of Life.

FROM THE INTRODUCTION

Recognizing that research on the human genome and the resulting applications open up vast prospects for progress in improving the health of individuals and of humankind as a whole, but *emphasizing* that such research should fully respect human dignity, freedom, and human rights, as well as the prohibition of all forms of discrimination based on genetic characteristics . . . (italics in original).

Figure 11. Universal Declaration on the Human Genome (Draft).

INFOethics Congresses

In the first two Congresses and in the third planned for November 2000 (see Figure 12), access was the major focus. On a global scale, the challenges of access require both technical and political barriers to be removed. When access rights are paired with human rights, then basic human dignity is compromised if access is denied. The recommendations of the 1997 Congress (see Figure 13) also strongly supported education as a way to raise public awareness and to ready particularly non-English speaking peoples for a multimedia future (see Figure 14).

Before and after Congresses one and two, participants and others were able to debate the issues through a virtual forum on the Web. These Web sites continue to be useful. In addition, after the second Congress, an active participant, Rafael Capurro, created a Web site (The International Center for Information Ethics—ICIE) to continue the discussion and to gather resources for future meetings. The International Center for Information Ethics is now moving beyond cyberspace to find an institutional home in the United States through legal incorporation as a non-profit entity and consequently holding face-to-face events in real time. These and other follow-up activities continue. The work of the roundtables at the 1998 Congress group easily around the five key themes of global information justice (see Figure 15).

- Access: Government? Insurance Companies? Individuals?
- Ownership: Who owns the Code? Personal information?
- Privacy: Can privacy be protected? Discrimination avoided?
- Security: Can systems be secured?
- Community: Enhance ties without sacrificing personality development and the natural world.

Figure 12. Bioinfoethics—Genetic Information Ethics.

- Give Net access to poor countries
- Create country-specific information centers in info poor countries
- Support a World Information Ethos
- Promote public awareness
- Assess information resources and needs of poor countries
- Promote the economic interests of non-English-speaking countries
- Include information ethics in curricula
- Encourage decentralized as well as centralized international activities

Figure 13. Recommendations from the First Congress 1997.

- Theme A: Accessing Digital Information
- Theme B: Preserving Digital Information and Records
- Theme C: Preparing our Societies for the Multi-media Environment

Figure 14. Themes of the First Congress.

Access and Expression	Roundtable 1: Information in the public domain; inequality of access, criminal abuse of public access Roundtable 2: Multilingualism, diffusion of diverse cultures, reduce the dominance of English
Ownership including Intellectual Property	Roundtable 4: Proprietary rights versus public access; Propriety rights of indigenous rights
Privacy and Confidentiality	Roundtable 3: Privacy in the international agenda
Security	Roundtable 3: Need for trust and reliability in information networks Roundtable 4: Security rights
Community including Education	Roundtable 5: Information Literacy—educating teacher and children, concerns for distance learning Roundtable 6: Social, economic, and multicultural responsibilities; global governance, social exclusion (the digital divide); call for consensus building with civic, industry, government, and information profession leadership

Figure 15. Recommendations from the First Congress 1997.

MAJOR THEMES OF THE UNESCO INFOETHICS 1998 ROUNDTABLES IN RELATION TO GLOBAL INFORMATION JUSTICE

Since the first Congress in 1997, there has been enormous growth of the Web and its communications potential. The need for a global information infrastructure that fosters multilingual and multicultural exchange is keenly recognized in both the for-profit and the non-profit sectors. Handheld and wearable devices connected to wireless networks hold much promise for access. Yet the dangers of homogenizing world cultures still exist.

The International Center for Information Ethics is now moving beyond cyberspace to find an institutional home in the United States through legal incorporation as a non-profit entity and consequently holding face-to-face events in real time. Another interest of UNESCO has been in the ethics of life and a new area of applied ethics, bioinfoethics.

Building Policy Frameworks for Bioinfoethics

A sampling from various policy statements suggests the convergence of themes around the uses of information and knowledge in the natural and the man-made world. Nature and humanity both depend on the free flow of scientific knowledge and its responsible use.

CONCLUSION

As an overarching idea, global information justice has the potential to join conflicting interests and guide the actions of both the more and the less privileged. Take, for example, the conflict between individual privacy and public access to information. If law, contracts, or entitlements are employed, then the party with the dominant right usually prevails with some loss to the other parties involved. If the principle of maximum happiness is applied, then the larger number or the stronger interests will win. Often this means the group trumps the individual, thus compromising the rights of the individual. If, on the other hand, the moral imperative of right action is followed, then either privacy or access must be chosen as the foremost value. In this case, if one is chosen, the value of the other is lost. Although these examples are simplistic, they do illustrate that another approach may be needed to address complex contemporary problems. Yet the values represented in these three examples are well established in Western tradition and are worthy of inclusion in the model of global information justice.

GIJ assumes that cultural differences shape the ways that various people relate to information and its role in society. Nevertheless, GIJ also posits the ideals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as worthy goals in moving toward a practical international consensus on issues such as intellectual property rights. GIJ accepts the claims of conflicting local and national legal systems but calls on all parties to move beyond law to pro-

mote relationships of sharing and mutual responsibilities for the natural world and for human welfare.

In the future, it is possible that the fields of medicine, business, and environmental ethics may find common ground in what could be described as bioinformation ethics or bioinfoethics, uniting concerns for biological systems and information systems. Some questions that might be addressed within the combined framework include:

- Who owns the information that empowers medical choices?
- Who can have access to accurate information about the environment?
- Who decides if profit always rules in marketing products that may be unsafe to humans or toxic to the natural world?
- Is the quest for information democracy and bridging the digital divide an advantage for the disadvantaged or another ploy of the elite powerbrokers?
- Do the needs of the global information environment trump individual rights of privacy?
- Do terrorists' threats to cripple the international human and nature-based infrastructure justify government surveillance?
- Can cyberspace be free and safe at the same time?
- Do children require special treatment on the Internet? Is filtering a solution?
- Should there be any controls exerted on hate speech and using electronic communications to incite violence?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Limitations of the Present Study

Whenever a new concept is described, certain things are inevitably left in while others are left out. In the case of global information justice, the emphasis here has been on the broad outlines of the more abstract aspects of the concept. GIJ as an ideal, as the focus for the analytical model, as the driving goal for decision-making models, and as a foundation for building policy introduces the notion that many of the puzzles and problems raised by new technologies can be approached with a unified ethical framework. Besides the shortcomings of a brief abstract overview with its macro rather than micro perspective, the limitations of this presentation are many. The most obvious ones are related to any analysis of a new field of study in the midst of constant change. It is hard to imagine the challenges of the future with unexpected configurations of technological innovations and unanticipated political and social settings. For example, the terminology and the models used here are experimental and tentative. However, terminology can be redefined and models can be reshaped. These terms and concepts are somewhat arbitrary as are the political and philosophical assumptions that underpin the basic premises. For example,

consider the artificial distinctions between the terms nature, humanity, and technology. Humanity is part of nature; technology springs from humanity activity in the natural world. With machines becoming more and more intelligent, what does it mean to be alive, to live? Is it based on chemistry or consciousness? How distinct from nature can humanity be? Is the environment synonymous with nature? How separate is technology from humanity and nature?

This introductory presentation has not been a discussion of the historical, philosophical, and ethical traditions upon which these ideas are based. For the most part, the major Western utilitarian and deontological traditions and their elaborations in contemporary applied ethics (Rawls, 1971) provide the foundations for the ideal of GIJ and the analytic model. The UNESCO initiatives are also grounded in Western traditions although they seek to be open to other traditions and cultures.

Little quarrel is made here, although it could be, with mainstream Western political thought with its bias in favor of democratic capitalistic systems and the value placed on private property and individual independence and autonomy. However, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UNESCO statement challenge some of these tenets. To be truly global, non-Western, communitarian, or other perspectives will deserve further attention.

It was also not possible to discuss in depth the rich literature that has grown in the last decade in medical (Fletcher, 1965), environmental (Leopold, 1987; Nash, 1988), and computer ethics (Johnson, 1985) as these contributions relate to information ethics (Hauptman, 1988; Mitcham, 1995; Smith, 1997) and to GIJ issues, such as the dominance of English on the Web or the problem of hate speech.

The Research Agenda

However, the research agenda for further study is promising. How will issues of global biological information justice emerge out of the work of, and the public response to, the Human Genome Project? Using the concepts and models presented here, it would be possible to organize deliberations about access, ownership, and other issues in defining another new area of applied ethics—i.e., justice.

Other topics would include the continuing work of UNESCO through its various programs. For example, the UNESCO INFOethics Congresses and other similar meetings will likely increase and would be a useful way to track GIJ issues over a longer period of time.

Finally, it is likely that, in the next decade, the ethical challenges discussed in this presentation will become more and more prominent in public as well as academic and policy discourse. This move toward consumer information ethics, paralleling similar movement in medical, environmental, and business ethics will be worth analysis and application.

Human freedom, individual and cultural identities, world peace, and even planetary survival may be at stake. The idea of global information justice may be a guide toward advantageous ends for all.

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