Hope in the Information Society

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Potential Dangers of the Information Society

Where can we find hope in today's information society? To answer this question satisfactorily one must be clear as to its presupposition. To find hope in the information society means that there appears to be something wrong with it, so that one needs to search for hope in such a society. In this paper I would like to outline some of the perils of today's information society and to point out that, though the perils are real and very strong, we nonetheless can overcome them through concerted action which I shall outline in the sections to follow. In short, I would like to show that there is a realistic, practicable hope in today's information society, but such a hope can never come into fruit without effort. Hope does not come through a total negation of the technology, nor does it come through a blind adherence to it. Rather realistic hope can

obtain only through concerted effort to understand the implications and impact of the technology. As for the cultures of the Third Word, where the potential dangers of the technology appear grave, hope can come through strengthening of local resources and searches for ways to co-opt the technology and to adapt it into the cultures' particular life-world.

Human society is increasingly characterized by an increasingly pervasive use of technologies, notably among which are the information and communication technologies (ICT's). Today in Bangkok one could hardly fail to be giant billboards exhorting commuters to log on the Internet and visit one web site or another. Name cards increasingly carry email addresses as well as personal web sites. In Thailand, new Internet cafés spring up everyday like mushrooms in rainy season. Nowadays it is estimated that there are around four million people on the Internet in the country, up from just one or two million just a few months ago. These events and numbers are just superficial indicators of a deep change that is going on throughout the world.

Technologies are obviously becoming more and more important, or at least they are becoming ubiquitous. Since there is no time in human history that this kind of profound pervasiveness of technologies, especially those connected with information and communication, occurs, human beings need to reflect and think hard about what kind of life, what kind of society we as a species are creating. This thinking calls for a bold vision and an imaginative construction of possible scenarios more than ever before, since the situation we are facing is totally new and we cannot rely solely on lessons of the past. We cannot just compare the current situation to a historical event in order to

find out what to do. We need to find this out for ourselves. And in order to do that one needs to realize the kinds of dangers that are posed by ICT's. Once we are aware of the potential dangers, we would then know how to cope with them before they have a chance to cause any harm to us and to our societies and cultures.

On the one hand, the influxes of the information technologies seem to be a very good thing indeed. Doctors in rural areas, for example, can speedily consult with their expert colleagues far away for help in diagnosing and treating diseases. Students benefit greatly from the vast open library of resources on the Internet. Business people strike up deals through e-mail communication. Lovers living in different hemispheres get in 'virtual' touch through the chat and videoconference programs, and so on. The possibilities seem to be endless. However, these benefits of the information technology carry with them a set of potential dangers that could negate all the benefits if care is not taken to pre-empt them and ward them off. I would like to categorize these dangers into three kinds: (1) Dangers arising from the influx of material from one culture that is viewed to be offensive to another culture, and (2) The 'digital divide' between those who have the means to connect to the Internet and those who don't. I shall discuss each of these dangers in turn, starting with the first one, dangers arising from introduction of foreign elements into a culture.[1]

Loss of Cultural Diversity

An obvious example of the first kind of danger posed by ICT's is the plethora of pornographic material one finds readily available on the Internet. In fact to term pornography 'a kind of material from one culture deemed offensive to another culture' seems to be too weak, since some kind of pornography, such as child pornography, is an abominable stuff that must be eliminated entirely and immediately. Thus it is offensive to any culture no matter what. However, in other cases (e.g., 'soft' pornography) the standard varies among cultures. The Europeans in general tend to be more lenient toward such matter than Asians, for example. But in any case, if one's focus is on a culture where standard of what is acceptable in pornography is very high (that is, there is hardly any pornographic material that is acceptable in that culture), then the influx of pornographic material that does not conform to the standard of a particular culture creates a danger to that culture. The danger is clear when the influx threatens the value system of that culture. Since it is very difficult, if not entirely impossible, to control the Internet, this influx of offensive material could pose a real danger to the culture at the receiving end. Usually a society controls the information it deems unworthy of attention or downright subversive from its members. This does not necessarily mean that such a society is autocratic; however, it shows that the society is concerned with the well being of its members, especially the young. But the Internet makes it virtually impossible to control the flow of information. In a way this possibility of free flow of information can be a very good thing, as the flow could increase the level of informedness of the members of the society, which is useful in their deliberations in public affairs. However, within such

unimpeded flow there could be hateful or racist messages or web sites, or child pornography, or other obnoxious material. A society has a stake in regulating this type of information, the type justifiably abhorred by most of its members. With the Internet, however, it is close to an impossibility to regulate the flow.

Pornography is not the only case where information coming into a culture from outside its domain can create disruption in the value system of that culture. The Internet has been widely touted as a vehicle of the values of democracy, egalitarianism, human rights, rule of law, which are perceived by many to be prerogatives of the West. These prerogatives, however, are also perceived to include consumerism, individualism and iconoclastic attitudes toward the past and tradition. In any case it is quite clear that as a universal conduit of thoughts, images, and other multimedia streams, the Internet can be very powerful in relaying ideas and information across the globe, carrying with it the messages and the glimpses of the rich and the powerful, which naturally arouse the desire to imitate in those who are denied the same privileges.

The danger of the Internet in this case is not unlike that of the technologies of the earlier generation such as the radio and television, especially the latter. Villagers viewing images of the rich flaunting their wealth and privileges naturally have the desire of living like them. Living traditionally, the villagers may not have any need for a refrigerator in their houses. But when they learn of refrigerators they may want to have one in their homes too. For they naturally want the comfort that refrigerators can bring. More importantly, they want to realize the images shown them through

the television. Since the Internet is a much more powerful medium of communication than the television (for it allows for two way communication as well as 'asynchronous' means of communication where messages can be stored for retrieval later on), the potential of the Internet to create this kind of disruption in the traditional way of life could be much stronger. One can imagine that, once connected to the Internet, villagers will have lost an important part of their traditional way of living. This is so because of the introduction of computers into their lives and of the content of the Internet itself. The content of the Internet, what is being communicated through the network, can have a profound influence on how villagers think and act.[2] Televisions can bring images of the rich and the powerful, together with the advertisements enticing villagers to become consumers. The Internet does not rely on central broadcasting stations to the same extent as does the television, but its influence is much more subtle. Villagers will be able to view electronic commerce web sites, which allow them to buy things with just their mouse clicks. They can have the objects of their desire here and now and have them delivered to their home, all this without having to leave their computers to go out and buy them.

More dangerous than these desires for imitation or the ease with which one can buy (and sell) things, though, is the potential of the Internet to be a 'brain washer'. In *Reinventing the Wheel*, Peter Hershock believes that the Internet is a machine for 'colonizing the consciousness.'[3] Wherever it is found, so it seems to Hershock, the Internet brings about profound changes in the thinking, attitudes and belief systems of the inhabitants of the culture

where it is introduced. Values associated with the Internet, as I have just discussed, seem to be libertarian and individualistic ones.[4] This has its beginning in the origin of the Internet as a medium for academics and researchers, and from its very beginning as a military network designed to withstand nuclear attack. When one part of the network is destroyed, the network is programmed to circumvent the damaged area and find an alternative route of communication. This characteristic of the technology thus tends to be associated with those who are suspicious of authorities and who want to have their own way without interference from outside. If this is indeed the inherent culture of the Internet, then the end result of its penetration into the world's cultures could be a kind of homogenization such that important and meaningful cultural differences could well be obliterated. The image of the 'cyborgs' in the Star Trek series come to one's mind. In Star Trek, inhabitants of entire planets are turned into clones of each other called 'cyborgs', each of which completely lacks individuality and personality entirely and acts only according to the commands sent them by the mistress who controls them. Humans are turned into bees, except that in Star Trek the 'queen' is a thinking and scheming individual. If this can indeed be the case, then hope can be found nowhere.

The Embedded Values of Technology

In *Questioning Technology,* Andrew Feenberg has the following to say:

> Technologies are selected by the dominant interests from among many possible configurations. Guiding the selection process are social codes established by the cultural and political struggles that define the horizon under which the technology will fall. Once introduced, technology offers a material validation of that cultural horizon. Apparently neutral technological rationality is enlisted in support of a hegemony through the bias it acquires in the process of technical development. The more technology society employs, the more significant is this support. The legitimating effectiveness of technology depends on unconsciousness of the cultural-political horizon under which it was designed. A critical theory of technology can uncover that horizon, demystifying the illusion of technical necessity, and expose the relativity of the prevailing technical choices.[5]

What Feenberg has in mind is that technology incorporates social values and the norms and structures of the society in which the technology is introduced. A particular kind of technology entails and is entailed by a particular kind of social and cultural order. Thus, in the case of the ICT's, those technologies are inseparable from a particular kind of social and cultural order, and what is emphasized is that the choices of a kind of technology is not constrained by any force outside of individual or social deliberation. Obviously the social and cultural order associated with the ICT's are those that are based on the utilization of the technologies themselves. This order cannot be found in that of the traditional villagers where there are no electricity, computers or

telephone networks. Once the ICT's are introduced to a culture, profound changes, or at least clashes between the newly introduced phenomenon and the old way of doing things and seeing the world, invariably happen in that culture. This is so because the ICT's carry with them their own 'culture' so to speak.

This situation potentially points to a danger. If the ICT's already incorporate their own culture, clashes usually ensue their introduction into local cultures. Not only does the ICT's carry the content which as we have seen could be disruptive of the traditional way of life. More importantly and more dangerously, the ICT's *themselves* are sources of such disruption, if Feenberg's analysis here is correct. No matter what kind of messages they carry, the very presence of the ICT's could bring permanent changes in the locales they are introduced. In this case, the ICT's are not merely a tool serving any purpose depending the intention of their user; instead they themselves can *change* their user in a significant way.

Thus, technologies embed a set of values already. These values are those for which the technologies were designed in the first place. Mary Tiles and Hans Oberdiek cite several examples to show this. The shape of the negotiating table for parties engaging in a war is usually round because the round shape signifies that the parties are equal in power. The raised throne of the king signifies that the king is more powerful and more exalted than others. Microwave ovens are associated with the value of convenience and speed which food is cooked. Here food is valued more as a necessary nourishment which needs to be done fast, rather than part of an elaborate ritual for people

who have enough leisure time to enjoy sumptuous meals.[6] Tiles and Oberdiek see that the microwave oven 'imposes' its value of speed and conveniences in food preparation on everyone using it.[7]

Since technologies are created to serve a purpose, it is quite straightforward to see that they already embed a set of values. Furthermore, as technologies are often created by the more powerful sector of the society, they tend to serve the interests of that sector. It is not too far fetched to imagine that, once the Internet penetrates to a overwhelming proportion of population in a country, its role as a packaged container of a set of values, which often clash with traditional ones, will become more prominent.

The Digital Divide

In a meeting of G-77, a group of 133 developing nations worldwide, there was a complaint that the digital divide was about to exacerbate the problem of disparity between the rich North and the poor South to an alarming level. According to Ambassador Arthur Mbanefo of Nigeria, chairman of the G-77, "one-fifth of humankind is not enjoying the fruits of the revolution in science and technology." Louise Frechette, the UN's Deputy Secretary General, reported that "the average per capita income in the world's 25 richest nations (about 25,000 dollars each) is 58 times that of the 50 poorest." Moreover, "[w]hile Switzerland, for example, has a per capita income of about 43,000 dollars and Japan about 38,000 dollars, Ethiopia's per capita income is about 150 dollars and Malawi's 210 dollars." And in the area critical to the

social and economic development of societies—namely research and development—85 percent of total world spending (about 400 out of 470 billion dollars) occurs in rich countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). This, Frechette said, represents an investment of 2.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in Japan and the United States, while the average in Latin America, Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa is only 0.3 percent. Fachette concluded that the areas where research and development were most needed were those that lacked them the most, and the only way to close this gap between the rich and poor countries was to close the 'knowledge gap', which, she proposed, could be achieved through providing the populace of the developing countries with access to the ICT's.[8]

This disparity between the rich and the poor in terms of utilization and access to the current information technologies is known as the 'digital divide.' What is being divided is the possession of the means that make connection to the information and communication technologies possible. Recently there have been a lot of discussions on the growing disparity between the digital 'haves' and 'havenots'. The former are the rich and educated sector of the society which enjoys the benefits brought by the technologies and the latter are those poor and uneducated who lack the same benefits. The digital divide thus fits rather uncomfortably with the loss of cultural diversity as dangers of the information society. To say that the digital divide is a danger facing the information society is to presuppose that the technologies are good things and their benefits should be equally shared and utilized by all sectors of the society. However, as we have discussed in the previous section, it is dubious at best

that the information technologies will bring about all benefits and no harms to the cultures and the mindsets of the people. If the Internet had the inherent capability of homogenizing cultures and of making us all to be cyborgs, then if the digital divide persisted, then presumably only the rich and educated would become cyborgs and not the poor rural villagers who do not have access.

However, the benefits of the ICT's are too visible to ignore. In Thailand there is an ongoing discussion on the benefits of bringing the Internet to each and every sub-district in the country, if not to each village. One benefit which is mentioned often is that, when villagers are connected, they can learn of the current and future prices of a wide variety of crops. This enables them to base their crop selection decision on a more secure footing than ever before. If they know that the price of cassava, for example, is going to plummet, then they will decide not to plant cassava this year and do something else based on the information obtained from the Internet. Another benefit is that the Internet enables villagers to get connected among themselves. They can form discussion groups centered around a mail server which collects and distributes mails from one member of the group to every one else in the group. A result is likely to be that villagers in remote areas can share information and experiences with one another on an endless variety of topics. They can exchange tips and suggestions on how to plant certain kinds of crops, where to obtain the best deals on loan and fertilizers, and so on. Alternatively, they might even use the mailing list to coordinate forming of interest groups or pressure groups counteracting with the authorities in order to voice their demands.

Such are the rather obvious benefits that ICT's could bring. However, without a proper means to diffuse the technologies deeper into poorer areas, there is no hope that these benefits will ever materialize for those who do not have access. The possibility of hope here seems to depend on how governments can provide for the basic infrastructure which makes Internet communication possible. But is the diffusion of the Internet into rural areas a cause a cause for hope or for despair? The Internet has clear benefits, but also clear dangers. What should be done in all this complexity?

The digital divide is a case of inequality that is afflicting many parts of the world. What is a cause for concern is the growing disparity between the rich and the poor. The strengthening globalization process seems to wider the gap wider and wider. If no concrete action is taken now, this growing gap could well be a cause for social disruptions, conflicts and violence on a massive scale. Now I think this is the top danger facing the world today. The recent incident where the world's economic leaders met for the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland amidst very tight security, and the parallel World Social Forum in Brazil shows quite clearly that the world is being torn apart into two warring camps—which I would like to call the globalization and the anti-globalization party. Many of the world's problems today, including the digital divide, are but reflections of this global tension and conflict. On the one hand, the rich are getting richer. They manage to get on top of globalization and reap benefits from it. On the other hand, the poor, marginalized, and the underprivileged suffer terribly under globalization. They see that globalization does nothing to alleviate poverty or create a sustainable environment; on the

contrary, they perceive that the engine of globalization, which can be found most visibly the works of the multinational corporations, is about to destroy the ways of life and the livelihoods of billions in the world who cannot get the same benefits as do the rich inhabitants of the so-called developed world. The digital divide thus has an affinity with our first kind of danger. The influx of ICT's have a serious impact on the identity of local cultures, and by tying these dangers up with the globalizing process, we can see that the way current ICT's are being employed make it an ideal engine of globalization. Those who manage to 'surf the waves of globalization' stand to benefit from it; they are on one side of the digital divide. It is conceivable that the culture of these people might even change to adapt to the globalizing trends. On the contrary, those who resist the globalizing tide stays on the other side of the digital divide. These people usually cling to their traditional ways of life and will not let go too easily.

The statistics above points to the potential danger facing the world today. The growing disparity between the rich and the poor countries could be very destabilizing. One can easily imagine what kinds of problems will arise if this problem is not addressed very soon. Since the ICT's belong to the class of expensive economic goods that are distributed unevenly among the world population, much as CD players or cosmetics are, the 'divide' appears to be one between the rich and the poor in general rather than something peculiar to the ICT's alone. One could easily cite the same kind of statistics as above for other types of technology, such as the use of modern pharmaceuticals or microwave ovens and come up with roughly the same uneven distribution. Hence, in a

way the digital divide is but a symptom of the well known case of income disparity between the average population of the rich and the poor countries. The point is that, if the argument in the first section of this paper on the cultural implication of the ICT's is tenable, then it would appear that the digital divide is not as much a cause for concern as Frechette and Mbanefo think. On the other hand, those who perceive the digital divide to be a serious problem would tend to think that the problem of potential loss of cultural identity is ranked in a lower priority. If the digital divide is but an aspect of the usual problem of income inequality between the rich and the poor countries, then to see it as the more serious danger of the two (when compared with the problem related to loss of cultural diversity) would seem to mean that one gives a higher priority to modernization, to raising the standard of living of the poor so that the gap become narrower. On the other hand, if one prioritizes the first problem over the digital divide, then it is conceivable that one would prefer the traditional way of life of local cultures of the South before the advent of the ICT's over the hectic way of life of those in the North. In short, the loss of cultural diversity and the digital divide seem to be two problems which are incompatible with each other.

Where Hope Can Be Found

Immanuel Kant once wrote that one of the main questions facing humanity is "What may I hope?"[9] Kant formulated this question as a combination of the theoretical and practical interests of reason. That is, after

presenting the theory concerning the limits of knowledge and the establishment of practical ends through the use of pure reason, Kant asks what one may hope if one does what one ought to do. For Kant, the question relates to happiness or the quality of being worthy of being happy as the ultimate goal of pure practical reason. If one does what one ought to do, then one is qualified to hope for happiness. The key here is that one has to do what one ought to do first; otherwise one is quite hopeless.[10]

Kant's question is related to the demand of morality. One *may* not hope for anything if one is not moral. Thus, in our case, when we are looking for hope in the information society, our first concern must then be to find a ground upon which our condition as a member of the information society is a moral one. In other words, since it is ultimately us humans who ultimately direct the goals and directions of technology, our conditions as moral agents thus determines whether humans may hope for the realization of their ideals. Thus, it is where the demands of morality are met that hope can be found.

The discussion above on loss of cultural diversity and the digital divide seems to show that they represent two horns of a dilemma. If loss of cultural diversity is an undesirable situation, then if it is indeed the case that the ICT's will definitely bring about such loss, then the ICT's are not a good thing. Moreover, if the digital divide is an undesirable situation, then it would seem a desirable option to introduce the ICT's to every community in the globe. I would like to suggest that hope can be found if these two alternatives are made compatible with each other. The best hope, I submit, in today's information society is where each culture is respected and is not swamped by the tide of the

monotonous global culture. Not only that, but the benefits of the ICT's must be brought to a larger number of communities so that the disparity is diminished.

This calibration of seemingly incompatible paths can be obtained when one realizes that the ICT's do not actually homogenize or monotonize the world's rich store of various cultures. If the ICT's do not make all cultures the same in every aspect, then one can close the digital divide without thereby endangering cultural diversity. Some culture may prefer to keep their identity, and at the same time desire the benefits brought by the Internet and other ICT's. I have written elsewhere that Thai culture, for example, found a way to do just that.[11] The trick is to realize that what is brought in by the Internet, its cultural assumptions, could be kept at a distance while its benefits are enjoyed. One needs to be aware of the embedded values and cultures that come with the Internet, and then to find a way to co-opt the Internet into the life-world of one's own culture. For example, if the Internet is used, not solely for advertising foreign products or enticing members of a local culture to elements of foreign cultures, but to promote the values and the belief systems of that local culture itself, then this could be one way toward hope. In short, a way must be found so that the Internet and other ICT's are integral to the local cultures themselves. As for the critique that the ICT's have embedded in them specific sets of values and beliefs that might not be compatible with those of the local culture, this charge can be avoided, I think, when one realizes that those specific values are in fact germane to the culture where the Internet first took shape. Values such as excessive individualism and libertarianism typically associated with the Internet are in fact those of the academics and

research lab workers who formed the first group of people on the Internet. But there is nothing that makes them necessary for the Internet. Certainly some kinds of values, such as openness and equality, are tied to the Internet due to its nature. But that does not imply that the Internet is a heaven for excessive individualism, globalism and monoculturalism. Openness and equality should be the values of each culture already, in the same way as honesty and integrity, which are respected everywhere. Excessive individualism (and anti-social attitude), however, is more tied to the image of the Internet fed by the media rather than something that the Internet needs to carry when it spreads from one culture to another.

If this argument is tenable, then the way toward hope is through the realization that the Internet and other ICT's are not bound by the idea that they need to impose a certain, specific set of beliefs and values everywhere. Perhaps one of the gravest dangers facing humankind is the belief in technological determinism, the idea that technology determines human life and society, and that human and social agency has no way to counter that.[12] Once this belief in technological determinism settles in, there is no hope left. We must be aware that technology is but a part of what we as a species create for our use; we must not allow it to spin out of control and to assume its own logic and dynamics.

Since technology embeds certain kinds of values, what needs to be done then is to adapt the technology so that they embed the *right* kind of values, rather than those we do not want. Doing this, we do not have to abandon the technology. Luddism is not an option in today's world, I think. In case of the Internet, what a local culture, such as Thai or Sri Lankan or Indian,

could do is to bring it into the fold of the culture's own horizon. Firstly the content of the Internet should be produced more in the local language. Right now there are a growing number of web sites in Thai language. This condition is helped by the fact that Thai people in general do not know English very well and would prefer to connect to the Internet in their own native tongue. Since the technical obstacle against the use of Thai scripts on the computer was overcome many years ago, nowadays a significant proportion of Thai Internet 'surfers' do not need to use English in their surfing at all, or they need only a portion of it. This is so because the most popular activity on the Internet for Thai surfers is chatting with their peers, and the language is almost invariably Thai. And since language is closely tied to culture, we thus have a way to gain benefits from the Internet and preserve cultural identity at the same time. The second way toward hope in the information society is that there should be more local content on the Internet. Culture is a symbolic system, and exists at various levels. One way for it to exist is on the Internet (not exclusively, of course). In the case where a culture has already decided that the Internet is beneficial to the culture and adopts it for use, the next step is to produce local content so that the Internet could bind members of the culture together through the content. The third way of instilling the right kind of values in the Internet is to find a way for the Internet to become integral to the existing social and cultural environment of the local culture where it is introduced. Just as the Internet can be part and parcel of the American culture, it can also be part and parcel of Thai or Indian culture too. One can imagine that Thai culture, for example, has a certain kind of systematic relation and practices, and

the Internet could fit into that mold. Thai society has a distinct food culture; Thai food being appreciated worldwide. The Internet could contribute to this aspect of Thai culture through its role in promoting Thai restaurants or acting as a repository of cooking recipes, and so on. What works for the Thai case (I take this to be only an example) clearly works for other cultures too.

Conclusion

If my proposal is on the right track, then I believe the information society is not a hopeless one. Even though there are many potential dangers, there are ways to cope with them and to instil the sense of hope in the members of that society. More than ever before, our contemporary age is one where we strongly need hope. Faced with the prospect of the potential loss of cultural diversity, of being swept away by the current of globalization, one might feel that there is no hope left. But there is ground for the optimistic attitude. And it is a solidly supported ground too. This ground is based on our realization that technological determinism is a wrong idea. Technology does not determine our condition; on the contrary it is we who need to control the goal and direction that technology has to take. The prospect of doing so successfully may seem daunting, for it appears that those who actually control the technology are the rich and the powerful of the world, and the knowledgeable to create it to serve the rich and the powerful, but as technology would be nothing if not incorporated into the actual lives and practices of the population, concerted effort is needed to counter the force that technology

might have. That is, technology would never become integrated within the lifeworld of a culture if the culture were threatened by its existence. Resistance against unwanted technology can be very strong indeed, and any attempt to shove the technology to those who reject it is clearly impossible. The resisting society only needs a common understanding and a common will. Or if the society finds that the technology beneficial for its ends and purposes, a way can be devised to obliterate the unwanted consequences of the technology while the society co-opts it into its lifeworld. Hope must be worked for by everyone who wants it.[13]

Notes

[1]Jonathan Friday mentions another danger of the Internet, its potential for allowing criminals to commit theft and fraud ("Who's Afraid of an On-Line Society?" *Ends and Means,* available at http://www.abdn.ac.uk/philosophy/cpts/friday1.hti, accessed on February 20, 2001). Gordon Graham points out that the Internet is likely to breed 'anarchy' or the release of free spirits which are difficult to control or to civilize ("Anarchy and the Internet" *Ends and Means*, available at http://www.abdn.ac.uk/philosophy/cpts/as4.hti, accessed on February 20, 2001, and *The Internet: A Philosophical Inquiry* [London: Routledge, 1999]), pp. 84-102). Since theft and fraud are not unique to the Internet (though in some cases it makes committing them easier), I will not discuss them in this paper. As for Graham's point, this may be due to the fact that the Internet is still a young phenomenon, and its anarchic potential may be due to its inception in the Western culture. One can imagine that if the Internet is brought to the East and

become integrated within the East, it might lose this potential, or the potential might not be as strong. Graham writes that the Internet is likely to produce 'moral fragments' where there is no effective control of behaviour since every surfer can seek out those having the same interests and preferences, bypassing the need for social control. Thus according to Graham it would seem that the Internet offers little hope, if any. However, Graham's argument ignores an important factor in that for such bad things as child pornography to exist on the Internet, there must already be bad people to perpetrate such crimes. And it is unclear whether the Internet actually *makes* them bad. The Internet may make distribution of child pornography easier, but it seems far fetched to argue from the freedom of information afforded by the Internet to the conclusion that the Internet creates moral anarchy.

[2]In "An Overview of Information Ethics Issues in the World-Wide Context" (*Ethics and Information Technology* 1(1999): 193-201), Elizabeth Buchanan details many specifities related to the adverse impact of the Internet on world's cultures. She writes "[w]ith mass releases of information, information that continues to be homogenous and often monotonous, individual thought is diminishing and communcal integrity is lessening" (p. 198).

[3]Peter Hershock, *Reinventing the Wheel: A Buddhist Response to the Information Age* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), p. xii.

[4]Gordon Graham discusses this issue quite extensively in *The Internet: A Philosophical Inquiry,* pp. 128-150.

[5]Andrew Feenberg, *Questioning Technology* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 87.

[6]Mary Tiles and Hans Oberdiek, *Living in a Technological Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 56.

[7]Mary Tiles and Hans Oberdiek, *Living in a Techological Culture,* p. 57.

[8]"Third World Nations Complain of New Digital Divide," Availabe at http://www.apnic.net/mailing-lists/s-asia-it/0004/msg00015.html. Accessed on February 16, 2001.

[9]Immnuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* Transl. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1929): A 805/B833.

[10]Immnuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* Transl. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1929): A 805-6/B833-4.

[11]See Soraj Hongladarom, "Global Culture, Local Cultures and the Internet: The Thai Example" *AI & Society* 13(1999): 389-401, and "Negotiating the Global and the Local: How Thai Culture Co-opts the Internet" *First Monday,* 5(8) 2000. Available at http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue5_8/hongladarom/index.html.

[12]See Kenneth C. Laudon, "Ethical Concepts and Information Technology (Ethics and Computer Use)" *Communications of the ACM* 38.12(1995), for a succinct discussion of technological determinism in ICT's.

[13]This paper is part of the research project on "Computer-Mediated Communication and Thai Culture: A Philosophical Analysis", supported by a grant no. BRG/14/2544 from the Thailand Research Fund.