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A Buddhist Theory of Privacy

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Preface

This is a book about the philosophical underpinnings of privacy. However, what distinguishes it from most other books on the topic is that it is based on a Buddhist conception. The ideas in the book have had their beginnings in the articles that I have written before, but they are elaborated here in greater detail so it is not just a rehashing of the existing literature. Basically, this means that Buddhist insights serve as a foundation for a theory on privacy. Philosophically speaking, Buddhism is best known for its view that the self is ultimately non-existent, much like a rainbow is non-existent when observed up close. As information privacy is traditionally based on the idea that the individual has autonomy and dignity, which is argued from the view that there is a subsisting core to the individual, the book offers an alternative view that the foundation for privacy could be found on the radical idea that the individual does not have to be metaphysically self-subsistent, and accordingly privacy should be justified more on pragmatic grounds rather than metaphysical ones. Moreover, I also argue that this alternative view offers a more effective way to theorize about some newer forms of privacy that have emerged due to recent advances in technology, such as group privacy.

This short book has been long in the making. The first ideas were conceived back in 2007 and 2008 when I was engaged in a project of searching for a justification for the information privacy while preserving cultural identity. I received an opportunity to travel to Norway and Sweden in the winter of 2008 as an Erasmus Mundus exchange scholar, where I had a large extended period of free time during my teaching duties to start thinking seriously on the topic which eventually presented itself in this book. I would like to thank May Thorseth and Siri Granum Carson, who hosted me while I worked at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim in October 2008, and Göran Collste at Linköping University in Sweden, who hosted me while I moved from Trondheim to finish up the latter part of my stay as the Erasmus Mundus scholar in November of the same year. I would also like to thank Chulalongkorn University for granting me a sabbatical leave from October 2008 to September 2009, which enabled me the time to think more about the work and to do all the necessary research. After that the book

got a long hiatus when I was engaged in other duties, and it is only in 2015 that I finally managed to put up a block of free time to push up this book to the shape it has taken at this moment.

The thanks would not be complete if I failed to acknowledge my debt to Charles Ess, who is both a friend and a colleague who kept pushing and challenging me to sharpen my ideas. We were interested in the topic of intercultural information ethics, and the conferences and seminars that he organized, especially the series of conferences on Cultural Attitude toward Technology and Communication (CATaC—<http://www.cataconference.org/>) played a very important role in my development as a scholar. My thanks also go to Rafael Capurro, who also gave me many opportunities to develop my research capabilities and critical thinking skills. Both Ess and Capurro are deeply interested in privacy and its cultural implications, the topic which develops itself into this book. I am deeply indebted to both of them.

Bangkok, Thailand
October 2015

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Contents

1 Privacy in the World Today	1
References	8
2 Philosophical Foundations of Privacy	9
Introduction.	9
Definitions of Privacy.	14
Privacy and Autonomy.	19
Privacy and Contextual Integrity	21
Privacy and Justice.	23
Privacy and the Individual: The Metaphysics of Privacy	24
Privacy and Private Language	27
Conclusion	33
References	34
3 Cultural Attitudes Toward Privacy	37
Introduction.	37
Privacy in Information Ethics: East and West	38
Different Cultural Attitudes	45
Thailand.	45
China.	48
Japan	50
Africa: Privacy and Ubuntu	54
References	56
4 A Buddhist Theory of Privacy	57
Introduction.	57
Buddhist Theory of the Self (or the Non-self)	58
Buddhism and the Pragmatic Conception	61
Doctrine of Non-self and Privacy.	63

Group Privacy	71
Privacy and Universal Value	74
Conclusion	81
References	83
Index	85