Chapter 15
The Value of IT-Enabled Globalization

This chapter, like the previous one, also deals with issues that go beyond ethics as principles for social cooperation. We just saw that the environment raises issues that go beyond social cooperation. Likewise, value does not depend directly on social cooperation but rather on interest and point of view. In Chapter 4, The Basis of Ethical Principles, I characterized a good or valuable object as one that, to a greater degree than average, answers to the interests one has in the object from a certain point of view. Thus a good disk drive is one that answers to the interests of a computer user in safely storing information. When an object is defined in terms of its function, the value of that object simply consists in its performing that function to a greater degree than average. That is, good antivirus software must prevent and destroy viruses well; good keyboard cleaner must clean keyboards well.

Often the point of view from which value is to be determined is assumed to be our own point of view, or that of our group. Most disagreements about value are in fact disagreements about the appropriate point of view to use for evaluation. But within a point of view, value is not subjective. Whether something is valuable from a point of view is a matter of fact. Thus if a bank robber and an investor disagree about whether a bank is a good one, they are not expressing merely subjective preferences. The bank that answers to the bank robber’s interests is one with lax security and an easy getaway route. So the bank robber will deem such a bank, a good bank. But if this bank has squandered its capital on credit...
default swaps,\(^2\) the investor will deem it a bad bank. The bank that answers to the investor’s interests is one that is stable and provides a good return on his money. Both judgements of value are correct. The bank is both good and bad--from different points of view.

In this chapter, I consider fairly large questions of value. First, what is the value of globalization? I will consider both economic value and cultural value. Under cultural value, I will discuss the question of whether the coalescence of cultures is a good or bad thing, and in what respects. My second question is, what is value of technology and of information technology? I will consider this question from three different points of view: The point of view of humanity; the point of view of the ecosystem; and the point of view of \textit{being}. The point of view of \textit{being}, which is the point of view of the coming to be and passing away of all things, may be unfamiliar. I include it because it is the highest point of view and thus has priority over others. And I believe it provides the basis for a compelling argument to limit corporate power. The third question combines the answers to the first two: What is the value of IT-enabled globalization?

THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF IT-ENABLED GLOBALIZATION

IT can contribute value to globalization in two ways. First, it can enable other value produced by globalization, mainly economic value. Second, it can contribute to the value globalization produces on its own.

There is probably no question that globalization has produced economic growth. There is considerable question about whom the growth has helped. Peter Singer cites several expert opinions and concludes that data is not currently available for a clear view of the economic impact of globalization on the poor. One study found that, although income inequality between nations has increased in the last two centuries, it would have increased even more without globalization. A second study by the World Bank found that globalization benefited the majority of the population, but made things worse for the bottom 40 percent. Yet a third study found that income inequality has decreased during the era of globalization, but cautioned that this decrease might be the result of technological advance rather than globalization. (Singer 2004, 88-89)

However, it is not clear how to separate out the value of technological advance from the value of globalization. The primary way in which economic globalization increases value is through efficiencies of integration. And much global integration is completely dependent upon IT. Supply chain integration and financial integration to the degree now present in the global economy would simply not be possible without IT. There are other important enablers of the economic integration of globalization such as government policies and trade regulations. But without IT, a significant portion of globalization could not have taken place.

From the point of view of the Global Economy Difference Principle, the concern is whether or not globalization has made the worst off even more worse off. Paul Collier’s discussion suggests that this is not the case. His “bottom billion” have missed the boat for the benefits of globalization, but they have not been driven further downward by globalization itself. According to Collier, the factors responsible for their not benefiting from globalization include a highly unstable political environment (and consequent unstable economic environment), the tendency of abundant natural resources to make democracy malfunction, poor governance, and unfavorable geographic location. (Collier 2007) These are internal