INTRODUCTION

The emergence of advanced telecommunication technology, digital and social networking leads to a philosophical reconsideration of our social life and ethical values. The question of privacy as ethical and social value has at length received the attention of scientists, legislators and philosophers (DeCew, 2006). As Alan Westin (1967) observes in his influential book Privacy and Freedom: “few values so fundamental to society have been left so undefined in social theory or have been the subject of such vague and confused writing by social scientists” (p. 7). In particular, the problem of information privacy has been closely related to informational self-determination and the claim or the ability of individuals and groups to determine for themselves when, how, and what kind of information about themselves is shared with or communicated to others (Westin, 1967). The normative approach of informational self-determination focuses on the action of moral agency and the evaluation of ethical decision. However, a self-directed virtue ethics approach of self-determination has not been acknowledg-
edged in modern discussions. Plotinus’ notion of self-determination is related to intellectual freedom and autonomy: to be self-determined means to take steps towards our inner-self and to discover our own principles of thought that govern our intellectual freedom and autonomy (Stamatellos, 2011). Plotinus’ notion of ethical virtue moves the emphasis of moral decision from the sphere of moral action to the intellectual quality of the self prior to moral activity (Stamatellos, in press). In this paper, I shall argue that Plotinus’ virtue ethics approach of self-determination could be enlightening in modern philosophical discussions of information privacy.

The Right of Privacy

In modern studies, divergent views have been expressed about the moral and legal right of privacy. The most important of these views have been presented and summarized by DeCew (1997, 2006). On the one hand, critics of the privacy right have questioned its importance. As Thomson (1975) states, “it is a useful heuristic device in the case of any purported violation of the right to privacy to ask whether or not the act is a violation of any other right, and if not whether the act really violates the right at all” (pp. 313-314). Moreover, excessive forms of privacy such as anonymity may protect the guilty, cover deception and fraud and so may appear dangerous to personal life and social stability. An example of this is the feminist critique of the use of privacy to cover up abuse and control of women (MacKinnon, 1989).

On the other hand, supporters of the privacy right accept its significance as a moral value that paves the way to human freedom and social stability. It has been argued that privacy should be defended on the grounds of control over our personal information (Parent, 1983). In addition, privacy has been regarded as essential for human dignity (Bloustein, 1964), intimacy (Innes, 1992; Gerstein, 1984), human freedom and independence (DeCew, 2006). Privacy is also considered as a social value with moral significance, fundamental to individual integrity and personal autonomy (Bloustein, 1964), as well as to the self-development of the individual in interpersonal relationships such as love, friendship and trust (Fried, 1970; Gerstein, 1978). Privacy is further analyzed as an intrinsic value (i.e., privacy desired for its own sake) and an instrumental value (i.e., privacy desired as a means to other ends) (Tavani, 2007). Whereas privacy has been considered as an instrumental value that serves the intercultural core value of security (Moore, 2001), it has also been regarded as an intrinsic value necessary to achieve important human ends such as trust and friendship (Fried, 1997); an intrinsic value that promotes democracy and social goods (Regan, 1995).

Alan Westin (1967) considers privacy as a human value related to four human rights: solitude (i.e., the right to be alone), anonymity (i.e., the right to have no public identity), intimacy (i.e., the right to act in private) and reserve (i.e., the right to control your personal information). Herman Tavani (2007) offers three definitions of privacy: accessibility privacy (i.e., freedom from unwarranted intrusion into one’s physical space), decisional privacy (i.e., freedom from interference in one’s personal affairs, choices and decisions) and information privacy (i.e., control over the flow of personal information). Privacy could be generally related to different forms of personal protection and identification such as territorial privacy (i.e., protects domestic, professional, civil and recreational environments); location privacy (i.e., privacy of an individual’s location); bodily privacy (i.e., respect of an individual’s body); personal privacy (i.e., protects an individual’s personal identity); communication privacy (i.e., protects an individual’s personal communication); information privacy (i.e., determination of an individual’s use and dissemination of personal data) (Stamatellos, 2007).

Information privacy is predominantly related to the rise of modern technology and it is noteworthy that this issue has been emphasized since the late 19th century. Warren and Brandeis (1890) observed a moral problem in the rise of new media technologies that cause not only a threat to the private life of the individual but
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