

Introduction to the Third International Conference for the Philosophy of Information (ICPI 2017) [†]

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[†] Presented at the IS4SI 2017 Summit DIGITALISATION FOR A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY, Gothenburg, Sweden, 12–16 June 2017.

Published: 31 July 2017

1. Introduction

“Partition of existential field” is the highest paradigm of philosophy; and only changes in the highest paradigm can constitute the revolution of philosophy. Since philosophy of information (PI) has triggered radical change in the highest paradigm of philosophy, it will bring about fundamental transformation in philosophy, thus leading to the revolution of philosophy.

Under the direction of Professor Kun Wu, Director of the International Center for the Philosophy of Information at the Xi'an Jiaotong University, the 3rd International Conference for the Philosophy of Information (ICPI 2017) was held as an integral part of the International Summit of the International Society for the Study of Information in Gothenburg, Sweden, 12–16 June 2017. The title of this year's Summit was: DIGITALISATION FOR A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY: Embodied, Embedded, Networked, Empowered through Information, Computation & Cognition (is4si-2017)! It echoed, updated and reinterpreted the preceding Summit in 2015: THE INFORMATION SOCIETY AT THE CROSSROADS. Response and Responsibility of the Sciences of Information, at the Vienna University of Technology, June 3–7, 2015.

Specific for this year's Summit was that it emphasized the connections, networks and ecologies of interrelated phenomena—with the accent on the process of sense-making in the contemporary world, from information (and its basic constituents—data), and information processes: computation in the world (computing nature on its physical, chemical and biological levels) that lead to cognitive and social computing. Information, computation and cognition have been taken as a triad and elucidated through networks of theories and practices of the society for the study of information.

The 1st International Conference for the Philosophy of Information (ICPI) was held in Xi'an, China in October, 2013, and the 2nd in Vienna, Austria in June, 2015, both under the direction of Professor Wu. As previously, this year's ICPI was held in conjunction with the 6th International Conference on the Foundations of Information Science, under the direction of Professor Pedro Maríjuan.

The response to calls for papers for the 3rd International Conference on the Philosophy of Information was very successful. The Conference attracted 49 papers, 38 of which were presented at it. The papers' topics mainly refer to six aspects:

1. Discussion of information philosophy and the revolutions and transformation fields of philosophy;
2. The studies on information ontology, information epistemology, information paradigm and informational thinking;
3. The unification of information philosophy and information science;
4. Discussions on information civilization, information ecological transformation and its contemporary value;
5. The study on the information idea and information methodology in Chinese ancient philosophy and art;
6. The study on positive and negative effects that information philosophy and information scientific technology exert on society.

The resulting program of the ICPI this year was extraordinarily rich, with a common ‘spirit’ that permitted the emergence of groups of subjects in broad open categories. A few are noted here:

- Ecology as a central concern of the Philosophy of Information (PI)
- The rapid changes, perhaps amounting to revolution, not only in information and PI but in Philosophy itself
- The impact of PI in the domains of language, meaning and systems
- PI in the new areas of Intelligence Science and Sustainable Development in Science

The remainder of this year’s Introduction to the ICPI is in two parts: the first is a statement by Professor Luciano Floridi, now at the University of Oxford. Floridi is the pioneer of the Philosophy of Information in the West as Wu is in China. More than just a statement, this can be seen as a Manifesto, appropriate to the revolutionary developments in both information and the philosophy of information that will be described by Professor Wu, other members of his school and Western colleagues.

The second part of the Introduction is the Opening Remarks made by Professor Wu.

2. Statement by Professor Luciano Floridi

Unfortunately, I shall not be able to join you for this interesting conference. So I am glad to be able to contribute a message instead, to share a few thoughts, and wish everyone a fruitful meeting.

As you know, the philosophy of information is going from strength to strength. Gone are the days when one had to explain what it was, and why it mattered. Today, we meet students who refer to the philosophy of information as if it were obvious that this is the topic they study and research, and why it is interesting. They are right.

The number of projects, centers, and people developing new ideas in the philosophy of information keeps growing. I am not surprised. It is a popular subject. And I find this reassuring. It means that there is hope.

We are surrounded by fake news, mad politicians and irresponsible demagogues, misinformation about the future, scaremongering warnings about technological sci-fi scenarios, ignorance, obscurantism, populism, isolationism, protectionism and reactionism of all kinds. Inequality, intolerance, and anti-globalism are turning into anti-cosmopolitanism. The four pillars of our societies—peace, toleration, freedom, and justice—are constantly challenged by new incarnations of old fascisms and religious fundamentalisms. After the second world war, many new “beginnings”—of widespread education, of better standards of living, of more peaceful cohabitation, of safer, healthier and longer lives, of more democratic systems—made our philosophical culture complacent and disengaged. At the end of last century many “ends”—of dictatorship in several countries, of apartheid, of the cold war—made us lower our intellectual guard.

We thought that the Enlightenment’s mission had been accomplished, or was soon going to be. We were wrong. And we have now been knocked down, even in some of the most liberal and democratic corners of the world. We must stand up again and resume the fight against our worst inclinations and temptations.

Clearly we need a massive dose of good philosophy to redress the situation. And we need it now. But what should philosophy today be if not a philosophy of information? Information societies are being cobbled together without a plan. There is a huge deficit of ideas, projects, and values. We are doing things without thinking first and sometime not even after. “Fail fast fail often” has become a strategy and a social policy. Its costs are immense.

We need clear, innovative, and audacious thinking about all sorts of issues to transform the current, frustrating sickness into healthy growing pains. We need philosophy at its best, to provide the conceptual design required to grasp the essence of our current challenges and propose well-informed, cogent solutions. We need to reinstate a culture of knowledge and polite, informed dialogue.

We must understand how mature information societies can improve on the current system of nation-states to cope with global challenges that have outstripped any nation’s reach. We have to revisit the architecture of human rights, in order to make privacy, security, and freedom of speech

compatible with each other within the infosphere. We should update our views about human nature and dignity in light of new forms of artificial agency. Above all we need to think carefully and proactively about what human project we want to pursue. I am sure each colleague can easily expand this list.

People often complain that everything is moving too fast to be planned or regulated. But the real problem is not the pace of historical changes, but the direction they take. The faster we move into the future the more we need to control very skillfully where we are going.

We owe this titanic intellectual effort to past generations, whose efforts and sufferings brought us here, and to future generations, who will judge us for the amazing opportunities we are enjoying and should not waste. We know that now is the time to take the right direction in building our information societies, their cultures, and institutions. Future generations will live within an infosphere that we are shaping today. There won't be a second chance.

This is exciting. But there is no time to waste. And we cannot indulge in irrelevant theorizing. Stop scholasticism now; such self-indulgence is no longer funny, it is irresponsible, and the world cannot afford it. Our philosophy of information must be foundational, about all the informational issues that are shaping our world, our understanding of it, and our interactions with it and among ourselves. And it should be applicable, although not applied. Applied, empirical philosophy is often bad science, bad philosophy, or both. Like basic research in medicine, good philosophy is realistic, concrete, and translatable into applicable solutions for the real world. It cannot be a mere academic exercise. I hope the conference will be an opportunity to engage with the world and to do some good philosophy of information. I wish you a very successful meeting. And I look forward to our next opportunities of interaction.

3. Opening Remarks by Professor Kun Wu

Under the joint efforts of International Society of Information Studies (is4si), the Chinese Council of is4si, the International Research Center for Information Philosophy at Xi'an Jiaotong University and relevant universities and institutes, the 3rd International workshop of Information Philosophy is opening. The first conference was held in Xi'an of China in 2013, and the second was held in Vienna of Austria in 2015. These conferences were held successfully and received high evaluations from academic colleagues of different countries and garnered huge positive responses.

Today, we convene in Gothenburg of Sweden to hold the third Seminar. Many of the scholars present have experienced the last two conferences. We already are old friends. Let us congratulate our friendship and collective research interests!

The Kingdom of Sweden is a great country. She possesses a rich cultural heritage alongside well-developed modern cultural institutions. She is democratic, liberal, open and lenient. She is beautiful and fertile, and her people live long and healthy lives. For me and my friends in China she holds the image of an idyll. I am both honored and excited that today we can glimpse this beauty.

Since the latter half of the 20th Century, the worldwide revolutions taking place in information science, information technology, information engineering, information economy and information society, and the waves of the socialization of information and informatization of society have been comprehensively renovating the systems of politics, economy, education, management, military and culture of human society. Furthermore, they are completely changing the ways of survival, daily life, communication and thinking of people and their conceptual patterns. This comprehensive and integrated transformation will lead to a brand-new era of civilization—the era of information civilization. The philosophy of information, born in the 1980s, reflects the spirit of this new civilization.

In this context, we set "The Philosophical Spirit of Information Era" as this session's theme. As early as the 1980s, I wrote these sentences: "any era will produce a philosophy reflecting the spirit of its time." ... "The philosophy reflecting the spirit of our time is information philosophy."

In October, 2014, the academic seminar of philosophical spirit of information era was convened in Xi'an China. Apart from Chinese scholars, the American Scholar, Dr. Joseph E. Brenner and the

Danish Scholar, Professor Søren Brier submitted papers to the conference, at which Dr. Brier made a video speech.

Currently, there is a substantial drive toward building a unified information science. A unified information science is a general information science, and the basic research view cannot be limited to some specific information study fields that have already been defined. Rather, it should be an integrated and comprehensive study of a multitude of relevant research fields. At present, we can divide those different information study fields into information science (including cognitive and intelligent science), information technology, information engineering, information education, information management, information economy, information society, information ecology etc. Information philosophy should be foundational to all the aforementioned fields of theoretical study. Only by standing at the level of general philosophy can we integrate concrete information studies scattering at different hierarchies, in order to realize the rational construction of unified information science.

We are already aware that some scholars claim the unified information science cannot be established, due to the fact that fundamental disputes on the concepts of information and the interpretations of the information theories have already been presented at different levels of various information subjects. Our response is that if we just consider those information subjects at the level of specific sciences and technologies, it is reasonable to draw the conclusion that they are different—just as individuals are unique. However, our philosophical research perspective can overcome specific differences, revealing the most general and universal character of information. The view denying the universal character of information not only neglects the unification among these differences, but also fundamentally eliminates the study of information philosophy.

“The Establishment Conference of the Chinese Branch of International Society of Information Studies” was held in Beijing in April, 2016. Prof. Yixin Zhong, who was elected as the president of Chinese Branch in that conference, formally put forward the conception of “information ecology”. In the light of this conception, the various aspects of information studies mentioned above can be unified in essence. Another session called “information ecology forum” presided by Prof. Yixin Zhong will also be held in this Summit. We believe that through our collective efforts, and through exploring the unified foundation of categorized information study disciplines in different levels, will be able to achieve the grand ambition of building a unified information science, revealing the spirits of science and philosophy in information era.

Currently, human civilization is undergoing an essential transformation. The conflicts between different cultures, economies, societies, ecologies, ideologies and values have become more numerous and fierce. These obligate us to study and reflect deeply at the philosophical level, in order to guarantee the sound development of the system of human civilization, to further promote the prosperity of human society, and democratic, liberal and wonderful lives for all human beings.

It is very inspiring to have scholars from different countries gathering again to collectively explore the theories and practical objectives that we are pursuing! I extend my best wishes to a successful conference! And I hope our delegates have a pleasant and fruitful gathering in Gothenburg!

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.



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