



# Review of Data Ethics, C. Stükelberger / P. Duggal

A report based on the WSIS  
2023 launch event

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## **Keywords**

Information ethics, emerging digital technologies, data, ethics.

## **Abstract**

This review is based on an expanded version of the session outcome document we prepared for WSIS. The outcome was providing a summary of the session: Data Ethics and the Ethics of Digital and Emerging Technologies – Building Trust, Serving Humanity – Globethics, which was held a few days earlier from 16:00 to 16:45, Monday, 13 March 2023 at the Geneva International Conference Center, under the auspices of the ITU (see: WSIS Forum 2023: Data Ethics and the Ethics of Digital and Emerging Technologies – ITU Video Portal / <https://www.globethics.net/events/wsisis-forum-2023> / <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsisis/forum/2023/Agenda/Session/203>).

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## 1. Introduction

As articulated in the session outcome document<sup>1</sup>, Globethics has been working for 10 years on information ethics in partnership with successive editions of the WSIS forum. This is a review of *Data Ethics*<sup>2</sup>, the latest work authored by the Swiss theologian, renowned researcher on applied ethics and emerging technologies and founder of Globethics, Christoph Stückelberger. Stückelberger also holds the position of President of the Board of Foundation of Globethics and served as the main editor of the volume. He worked in close collaboration with Pavan Duggal, co-editor. Dr Duggal is the President, Cyberlaws.net, Cyberlaw Asia and Mobilelaw.net, Chief Mentor, Blockchain Law Epicentre, Chairman, International Commission on Cyber Security Law and Globethics Board Member.

It is not necessary to read a six hundred page book to find direct evidence of the importance of the overall theme of this impressive piece of wisdom. Almost every day we can discover in the media, how communication technology is constituting much more than a deep paradigm shift, disruptive challenges in social practices and education. The question of banning access to ChatGPT, a popular new software, which generates text on any subject in response to a query, for example, which is quickly becoming a mainstream

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<sup>1</sup> Session 203: Data Ethics and the Ethics of Digital and Emerging Technologies – Building Trust, Serving Humanity – Globethics, <https://play.itu.int/event/wsis-forum-2023-data-ethics-and-the-ethics-of-digital-and-emerging-technologies/>; also: <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2023/Agenda/Session/203>. Editorial assistance/proofreading: Amélie Ekué, Allison Pierok. Event organisation: Ruth Marlyn Grace Sidabutar, Lucy Howe Lopez, Christoph Stückelberger. Coordination of the session: Ignace Haaz.

<sup>2</sup> Stückelberger, Christoph / Pavan Duggal (Eds.). 2023. *Data Ethics: Building Trust. Serving Humanity with Values*. Geneva: Globethics Publications, ISBN 978-2-88931-523-9 (online version), ISBN 978-2-88931-524-6 (print version), DOI:10.58863/20.500.12424/4273108

temptation (see: New South Wales and Queensland public schools in Australia). Only a few months after the world discovers this new information technology, the immediate concerns articulated by many are not only justified, but also becomes spin, underlining the urgency of unbiased reflections and competency on the matter.

One of the ways to constructively address this challenge could consist of creating an international civil society framework of monitoring, of ethical mentoring of individuals and institutions, holding regular international meetings, which serve in assessing the quality of monitoring and of the social needs for any given emerging digital technology. By preventing the possible blind spots and risks associated with emerging digital tech, we meet at WSIS, once a year, a moment, which is sufficient, - provided the very fast development of the phenomenon and concern about the everyday consequences of the massive use of emerging technologies, - only under condition of serious work done on the long run. Globethics Foundation decided on January 2023 to take two steps forward:

First, 1) as international not-for-profit foundation with ECOSOC status and international centers worldwide focusing on ethics the need to focus on emerging technologies has been distinctively recognized in the clear refocusing our new Strategy 2023-2027. Globethics as an international non-governmental organization, working for ethical leadership through its academic and public engagement, made the decision through our highest constituencies for the coming years to work on emerging technologies. Registered in Geneva, Switzerland, it is an independent, not-for-profit foundation, with an international Board of Trustees, and centers around the world. In having a range of concrete research programs and international and interdisciplinary publications on emerging technologies, Globethics aspires to integrate all most innovative ways of dealing with ethical wisdoms of cultural, religious, philosophical and humanist inspiration in order to weave through them, but also through their differences, bridges between worldviews on ethical issues.

Second, 2) we are renewing our commitment to high quality research and publication on information ethics. Since many years but in particular our joint

2013 Declaration on Ethics in the Information Society, the groundwork done in 2018 on cyber ethics and the development of our online library collection on cyber ethics freely accessible and downloadable worldwide<sup>3</sup>. Globethics succeeded in turn first in 2022 and 2023 to release two further original research works. Edited by Drs Erin Green, Divya Singh and Roland Chia, *AI Ethics and Education*<sup>4</sup> and the newest *Data Ethics*, edited by Christoph Stückelberger and Pavan Duggal<sup>5</sup> demonstrate ten years of constant efforts in following the evolution of digital communication technologies and their impact of the human social life and education.

## 2. Towards WSIS+20 and WSIS beyond 2025: action lines

The 2023 meeting at WSIS has shown the importance of pursuing our mission and work on ethics and the emerging information technologies, bringing on-board cutting-edge research from all continents, all cultures and religious-spiritual-philosophical beliefs and worldviews, with serious scientific grounding and also inspiring poetical existential meaning for our concrete conditions of living in our communities and ways of life<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Access: <https://repository.globethics.net/handle/20.500.12424/31>.

<sup>4</sup> See in particular No. 10 in the Education Ethics Series: <https://www.globethics.net/education-ethics-series>.

<sup>5</sup> See specially the last two No. of the Global Ethics Series as well as previous volumes on information ethics and social media ethics: <https://www.globethics.net/global-series>.

<sup>6</sup> We thank all the moderator and panellists: 1) Moderator: Dr Ignace Haaz, Managing Editor, Globethics Publications.

2) Speakers: Dr Dr h.c. Christoph Stückelberger, President and Founder, Globethics, co-editor of *Data Ethics: Building Trust How Digital Technologies Can Serve Humanity*. Geneva: Globethics, 2023.

3) Dr Pavan Duggal, co-editor of *Data Ethics: Building Trust How Digital Technologies Can Serve Humanity*. Geneva: Globethics, 2023; Barrister, Supreme Court of India, President, Cyberlaws.net, Cyberlaw Asia and Mobilelaw.net, Chief

There are new emerging trends and challenges, which means we need to reflect on how new achievements and opportunities in the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines to date opens a horizon for the future.

Globethics's Strategy launch on 5 April 2023 aims at reaffirming our serious efforts in monitoring the impact of information and emerging technologies on educational quality, economic prosperity, political atmosphere and quality of life. The event will be conducted in a simultaneous manner across all our regional centers, showing the coordination of our efforts and contextualization of our resources.

The Globethics *Journal of Ethics in Higher Education*, launched in 2022 as a biannual, open access digital journal, is a scholarly platform for international and cross-cultural exchange and high-profile academic contributions, including in languages other than English, on cutting-edge ethical issues pertaining to the higher education sector. The scope of the journal is to bring to the fore a diverse and engaging scholarly discourse also on the emerging

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Mentor, Blockchain Law Epicentre, Chairman, International Commission on Cyber Security Law and Globethics Board Member.

4) Dr Greta Balliu, Member of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Ethics in Higher Education*, Institut interdisciplinaire d'éthique et des droits de l'homme, Chaire Unesco de la diversité et des droits culturels, Université de Fribourg et Observatoire de la diversité et des droits culturels, Fribourg, Switzerland.

5) Dr Erin Green, is the Communications and Asia-Pacific Coordinator for Pax Christi International, an author, philosopher, theologian, communicator and expert in the social impact of AI and related technologies. She is passionate about understanding how AI is changing our world, and making sure we all work for the common good.

6) Mr Gilles Bach, is a consultant in the data, AI, Internet of Things space and on digital and core transformation, and innovation, and a member of the Globethics Global Pool of Ethics Experts and course instructor at Globethics Academy, inter alia for the open course on Cyberethics.

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ethical preoccupations around the increasing use of Internet-based technologies and integrity-based research at all levels of academia<sup>7</sup>.

The vision of ethical leadership for a just, inclusive and sustainable world is at the core of the Globethics strategy 2023-2027.

The specialised Globethics e-library with its more than 75 collections, more than 150 journals, and 3.6 million curated publications provides video tutorials on the use of our open access resources (+Globethics's own publications series and standalone publications).

Globethics is also an accredited provider of online and blended learning, offering through its *Academy* quality open and executive course programmes, *inter alia*, on Cyberethics, Responsible Leadership, Ethics in Higher Education for Teaching Professionals, and Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development<sup>8</sup>.

In April 2023, Globethics will launch the second volume of its *Research Ethics Series*, realized in collaboration with the Institute of Research and Action on Fraud and Plagiarism in the Academia (IRAFPA), based in Geneva, which is a pole of excellency on information risks in higher education, with its 18,000 subscribers, and yearly workshops and trainings<sup>9</sup>.

### 3. Tangible outcomes

Among the key outcomes from research work done on *Data Ethics*, our researchers have pointed out:

- The need to train and institutionalise data ethics officers (see Enrico Panai, <https://doi.org/10.58863/20.500.12424/4276012>);
- The new type of criminal harms and wrongs related to the exponentially increasing (mis)use of the metaverse engendering

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<sup>7</sup> Visit <https://www.globethics.net/jehe>

<sup>8</sup> Discover: <https://www.globethics.net/de/courses>

<sup>9</sup> See: <https://www.globethics.net/research-ethics-series>

consequently new types of legal protection measures, see Divya Singh: Sexual Assault in the Metaverse: Caveat Universitates (“Universities Beware”), <https://doi.org/10.58863/20.500.12424/4276067>);

- Satellites and Sea Cables: The Ownership of Data Carriers and Geopolitical Implications by A.I Prakash, <https://doi.org/10.58863/20.500.12424/4276065>;
- African value and a new and better intelligence in global AI inclusion discourse as normative ethics perspective, a study by A. Gwagwa, E. Kazim & A. Hilliard, <https://doi.org/10.58863/20.500.12424/4276016>;
- Complementary findings in this volume can be consulted and downloaded free of charge: <https://www.globethics.net/data-ethics>.

#### 4. Actionable plan

- Globethics Publications follows a publication plan of 20 to 30 publications on ethics per year, among which a large number is on ethical issues related to emerging digital technologies.
- Over the past 3 years we gathered PhD theses from Nigeria on media ethics and we are closely collaborating with teachers and researchers from the Department of Mass Communication, on the African continent and plan many new research and publication projects for the years to come.
- As 2022 outcomes see: Dr Peter Eshioke Egielewa, see his article in JEHE 1(2022), <https://doi.org/10.26034/fr.jehe.2022.3378>; the author is releasing in 2023 new research on mass media ethics in the Nigerian context.
- Globethics is also running a project on ethics excellence in higher education as assessment exercise. Discover about it in the following article: Making Ethics Effective in Higher Education in Africa and

Beyond, by N. Balgobin, <https://doi.org/10.26034/fr.jehe.2022.3391>.

Under the title: Empowering Partnership: Ethics in Context, by C. Housel, H. Makinda, S. Ackah (et al.), <https://doi.org/10.26034/fr.jehe.2022.3392> Globethics staff members present the crucial importance ethics networks and partnerships in context.

- The analysis by Globethics Managing editor on “Ambivalence, creative investment, publishing and development”, I. Haaz, <https://doi.org/10.26034/fr.jehe.2022.3380> helps to address critically some of the difficulties in running an international publishing house, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, concerned by both quality work and fair access to service for authors from the majority world.

## 5. Concluding suggestions for thematic aspects that might be included in the WSIS Forum 2024

- Globethics is committed to its thematic priorities, i.e., ethical standards in higher education; sustainability and environmental justice; ethics of digital and emerging technologies; inclusive peace and responsible governance. These thematic areas might constitute valid suggestions for consideration related to the WSIS Forum 2024.

## 6. WSIS Data Ethics book launch discussion

The 2023 WSIS launch event was an opportunity to introduce *Data Ethics* to scholars, advocates, and policymakers gathered in Geneva and around the world through online streaming. Geneva was a significant place for the launch of this publication, not only as a hub of the information society, but also as the new place where global dialogue on values can take place, made possible through the internet and digital communications. WSIS conversations take



place through the active participation and proximity of civil society and other institutions, including Globethics.

In his opening remarks, main editor Christoph Stüchelberger, reflected on his 20-year mission to increase access to information in developing countries in the area of ethics. From first efforts in 2003 to the WSIS launch, Globethics now has the largest online library on ethics worldwide with its 3 million documents. In launching its own publication series, Globethics has continued in this spirit of increasing fair access to information and knowledge. Fast developments from the information society, the knowledge society, continue to propel this work further.

At the same time, Stüchelberger remarked, fears are increasing. Some people urge resistance, based on fears of surveillance, hacking, and harassment, creating a divide between digital believers and those who remain unconvinced. It's appropriate that trust is a recurring theme in digital discourse, because we are convinced that this is one of the key issues on the table. Mistrust is not necessarily bad, but if it is overwhelming it can hinder regulation and standards that we so clearly need.

The collection *Digital Ethics* serves humanity, serves values. In an expansive 600 pages it brings together 45 articles with contributions from all continents. Together we reflected on data as we saw it. This included, naturally, data storage and security, but the more we dug into it, the more we saw that data is *everywhere*. Data is the fuel of the twenty-first century, just like oil in the century before this one, electricity for the nineteenth century . . . and copper some 2000 years ago. Eight chapters on values, trust, and laws help frame the significance of data for finance, security, world peace, data governance, and geopolitics.

Data is now influencing all sectors of society, and in all societies we grapple with the question of what is good and what is bad. How can we develop benchmarks? The answer given in *Data Ethics* looks at the data revolution in terms of strengthening support for core values such as equality, peace, sustainability, justice, and resisting abuse of data technologies. On the other hand, the collection also scrutinizes the dangers of data including dominance,

oppression, exploitation and encourages responses that are inclusive, interdisciplinary, and global.

Building bridges between tech skeptics and tech enthusiasts is ever-more critical as data – and consequently data ethics – touches all aspects of life, from physics, business, culture, religion, and more. Questions about data are also inextricably and fundamentally questions of anthropology and spirituality. Who am I if not a composite of data?

In this view, how does data help us become better humans? It helps a lot in supporting access to education, information and formation, resisting the abuse of power, and even supporting the right to forget.

In his remarks, Pavan Duggal also stressed the significant impact of data on this moment in history, noting that we are all surrounded by growing cyber attacks from all directions. Cyberspace is a growing space for conflict, for both state and non-state actors – a direct result of the data economy in which we are now immersed. Everyone has been transformed, Duggal continued, into a global author, a global transmitter, and global broadcaster of data. Sleeping and waking, day-in and day-out, we are dealing with data.

The relationship between data ethics and legal, policy, and regulatory issues is inextricable. There are lots of issues prompted by ChatGPT and other AI language model programs, a wake-up call for all of those expecting machines to be ethical. Other emerging technologies like blockchain also give rise to new ethical questions, including use in cybercrime and cybersecurity. We are all connected to the Internet, but without a security perimeter.

Similarly, the Metaverse is expected to be the new paradigm of the world, a world where we will be talking with our digital avatars in augmented or virtual reality. These avatars are starting to do a lot of unethical things, not the least of which is digital rape. We are all relying on Web 3.0, but perhaps presuming too easily that it will all be ethical. Things are further complicated when we look at the darknet the methodologies at work in this often mysterious digital ecosystem. Laws and those who enforce them have much work to do in keeping pace with these challenges.

Duggal also emphasized that we are living, internationally, in a complete policy vacuum. There is no international law on cybersecurity, and distinctive national laws varying in scope and ambition. Some countries are also trying to implement ethical standards, for example, in the form of Tallinn Manual 1.0 and Tallinn Manual 2.0.

As order is beginning to evolve, states are becoming very powerful. In this new power ecosystem, data ethics needs to be given appropriate appreciation. *Data Ethics* makes just such a necessary contribution, including in pushing the evolution of legal and other jurisprudence concerning data ethics. This collection is the beginning of a new journey, one that will see the crystallization of principles, norms, and other aspects of data ethics.

Coming from the perspective of interdisciplinary theology, Erin Green, also addressed the significance of *Data Ethics* for understanding AI and digital justice more broadly. Noting in particular the scope of the volume, Green expressed appreciation for the diversity of scholars represented in the collection as an indispensable antidote to the dominance of Eurocentric values and voices in debates about data and its impact on our lives.

Green scrutinized the notion of trust and the role it plays in debates about regulation of AI and other emerging digital technologies. Both technology companies and regulatory bodies often invoke trustworthiness as a key benchmark in developing digital technologies and related regulations. The appeal to trust, however, is often made by companies and governments that have revealed themselves, repeatedly, to be untrustworthy. Exploring the nature of trust and how it can be upheld in complex systems is critical for data ethics. The effort made in *Data Ethics* to bring this to the fore is, therefore, critical.

Green remarked that another strength of the collection was bridging cultural and linguistic bridges on issues that impact people across the world. For example, the AI arms-race is widely characterized in terms of US-China relations, but dialogue between researchers is limited. This volume helps bring such diversity of experiences into contact and enhance the capabilities of ethics researchers to understand contexts other than their own. Such

contribution to wider ethics discourse about data is indispensable and helps democratize the discourse and make it increasingly accessible.

Turning to economic ethics, Dr Greta Balliu explored the significance of the volume for human rights, with an emphasis on education and development. She looked at ethics in relationship to the creation and preservation of digital public spaces and how we can preserve human rights there. The growth of data and digital tools around super communities, institutions, and other transnational sectors, generates the right to participate but also new responsibilities. These digital spaces both create and exacerbate digital divides. These divides point toward the complexity of social justice in a digital age and the need for intersectional reflection. Similarly, digital justice must be seen in the context of gender equity, environmental sustainability, economics, justice, intergenerational relationships, and so much more.

As repeatedly underscored in *Data Ethics*, human rights and human dignity must not be forgotten or displaced. This extends to the creation of digital identities and how these relate to the broader flourishing of social justice and human rights. This is one of the greater challenges of our digital age.

Closing the panel session, Gilles Bach turned to questions of cyberethics and technology. He noted that we are in midst of a triple-phenomenon – the explosion of data generation and collection, exponential sophistication of algorithms, and also the spread of these algorithms across all types of devices.

The stakes are huge and we have a historical responsibility to take this seriously and implement concrete checks and balances. We need to proactively scale controls at all levels, remarked Bach. This includes measures regarding the privacy of data, biases existing in data sets, and the general quality of the purpose, scope, and design of algorithms. This can be achieved through regulation as well as a digital transformation strategy, with *Data Ethics* providing one such template for better data governance for any organization. It remains, unfortunately, true that most organizations don't have a true effective data governance strategy.

Corporate responsibility is another important aspect of data governance, including understanding and implementing ethical controls for data.

Connections between organizations and the world of ethics can help achieve this. Transdisciplinary committees are one way we can really bring the world of ethics to the rest of the world. It is only with such robust strategies in mind that we will be able to remain human and humane while also having the development of all these new technologies.

Returning to the specific contribution of Globethics to the issues raised in *Data Ethics*, Stückelberger recalled the significance of having a global network for ethics. It's a platform for cooperation, one where everyone can contribute, comment, and participate in the development of data ethics. Whether you come from the private sector, civil society, or government agencies you can contribute to building a strategy for data ethics. When it comes to data ethics, we are all stakeholders.

## 7. Bibliography

Stückelberger, Christoph / Pavan Duggal (Eds.). 2023. *Data Ethics: Building Trust. Serving Humanity with Values*. Geneva: Globethics Publications, ISBN 978-2-88931-523-9 (online version), ISBN 978-2-88931-524-6 (print version), DOI:10.58863/20.500.12424/4273108

## 8. Short biography

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