Call for Papers: IS Philosophy Special Issue
Philosophy and the Future of the IS field

Guest Editors

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Philosophy in information systems (IS) is undergoing a renaissance. Philosophical papers on the principles for conducting interpretive field research (Klein & Myers, 1999), research approaches and assumptions (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991), causality in research (Markus & Robey, 1988), theorizing the information technology (IT) artefact (Orlikowski & Iacono, 2001), methodological problems in research (Lee, 1989), and the nature of theory in IS (Gregor, 2006) are among the most cited and visible IS articles, indicating the significance to the IS community of philosophy-related issues. The issues of relevance (Benbasat & Zmud, 1999) and identity of the IS field (Benbasat & Zmud, 2003) remain current (Fedorowicz, 2013; Hassan, 2011). These same philosophical issues are debated vigorously in the Communications of the AIS journal, thanks to the late Paul Gray, who encouraged a spirit of open discussion on issues such as the relevance of IS (Gray, 2001), the core of the IS field (Gray, 2003) and the wisdom behind self-citing practices (Gray, 2009). At the International Conference for Information Systems (ICIS) 2012 conference, four out of the eight panels were philosophical discussions, including on alternative genres for research, and the design science and sociomaterial paradigms. The Special Interest Group on Philosophy of Information Systems (SIGPHIL) workshops during the last four ICIS conferences in Shanghai, Orlando, Milan and Auckland consistently enjoyed packed attendance. Hirschheim, Klein and Lyytinen (1995) published a classic on the philosophy of IS development while Mingers and Willcocks (2004) published another book on the historical and critical analysis of alternative approaches and philosophies. Top IS journals continue to sponsor special issues on the merits of alternative philosophies (Mingers et al., 2013; Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2014). Theorizing is attracting much attention in IS, triggered in part by the debates on the notion of "Native IS Theories" and the role of theories in research (Straub, 2012; Avison & Malaut, 2014; Gregor, 2014; Markus, 2014), leading to the ECIS conference establishing a permanent "Advancing Theories and Theorizing in IS Track" in 2014 designed to encourage new theorizing approaches. The European and Australasian IS tradition have always supported research in philosophy (e.g., Walsham (1995) on interpretive research, Myers (1997) on qualitative research and Mingers (2001) on pluralism in research, the Australian National University hosts an annual workshop on Information Systems Foundations since 2005) and continue to shape the IS field’s
philosophical landscape. Other special issues in EJIS cover all of these developments, especially on theorizing and reexamining the field’s assumptions. Philosophy in IS has come a long way since the inaugural conference on philosophy and research methods in Manchester (Mumford et al., 1985).

Despite the breadth of issues addressed above, they are just the beginning of what’s possible when a field of study engages its philosophical side. These concerns that currently occupy the attention of the IS field are glimpses of the potential of epistemology and metaphysics, two well-known areas in philosophy (e.g. see Avenier & Thomas (2015) for a detailed framework). Historically, these areas of philosophy were fountainheads of knowledge that inspired new fields of study. For example, in the late 18th century, the philosopher Herder (2002) can claim to have virtually established whole disciplines which we now take for granted. It was mainly Herder’s ideas about the dependence of thought on language, and the deep variations in language and thought across historical periods and cultures (Treatise on the Origin of Language published 1772) that inspired Humboldt (1971) to found modern linguistics. Herder is also credited with developing modern hermeneutics through his student Schleiermacher and the general conception and interpretive methodology of modern anthropology. If Herder’s philosophizing resulted in the establishment of several disciplines, imagine the possibilities if the IS field engages in all areas of philosophy—metaphysics, epistemology, axiology and ethics, and aesthetics.

Examples of areas in metaphysics that have not been explored to any great depth are the philosophy of technology and the philosophy of information. What Keen (1980) referred to as the field’s “dependent variable”—information—carries implications far beyond the typical correlational research connotations; as Keen notes, “[s]urrogates for improved information, such as user satisfaction or terminal hours of usage, will continue to mislead us and evade the issue of a theory of information for MIS” (p. 9). Information can no longer be viewed as mere symbols, but as a demiurgic power making “possible the construction, conceptualization, semanticisation and finally the moral stewardship of reality, both natural and artificial” (Floridi, 2003, p. 645). So optimistic was the outlook for IS that Keen (1991, p. 27) said IS should be at the “forefront of intellectual debate and investigation about the application of information technology across every aspect of business, government and society.” As a core concern of the IS field, one would expect a thorough treatment of what technology means in IS. However, historically the IS field has neglected technology (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008) and today still debating what “Information Technology” means as well as its relationship to IS (Lee et al., 2015; Alter, 2015; Paul, 2007; Baskerville, 2012). Lee (2010) notes that these two are not the only key concepts that the IS field has neglected to its detriment. It is for intractable problems like these that philosophy is most fecund and inspiring. For instance, after the very high profile security breaches experienced by Target and Home Depot in the United States, it should be clear that the traditional paradigm of monitoring and blocking threats can no longer be relied on to prevent these security
breaches. A new approach is needed to address the increasingly expanding space of exposure created by an ever-expanding network. Users experience the same kind of disruption in their privacy as more and more private information are being digitized and are being aggressively analysed by Big Data. What is considered normal for privacy and security is rapidly disappearing and the IS field desperately needs to reimagine what’s normative, ethical and moral, and arrive at an ethical and theoretical grounding of privacy and security capable of addressing these contemporary issues (Mingers & Walsham, 2010; Stahl, 2012; Stahl et al., 2014; Stahl, 2013).

Another emerging area of IS philosophy that speaks for the finer side of human needs beyond its functionalist utilitarian tradition is aesthetics (Cyr et al., 2009; Tractinsky, 2004). The sources for such IS knowledge extend to disciplines that the IS field has yet to engage, such as architecture (Lee, 1991; Lee, 2010) and the humanities. There is little in the sciences that did not have its foundations in the humanities. What can the natural sciences claim without its roots in natural philosophy? What can the social sciences speak of without referring to history? And what can any science establish without founding it in language? From these sources of knowledge comes inspiration in the form of the philosophy of design, arts and law. Visualization, human computer interaction, animation, simulation are but a few areas in IS that depend on aesthetics.

In a way, philosophy in the information systems (IS) field is a paradox. On the one hand, it is within philosophy that the most interesting and insightful discussions are taking place; however, younger researchers are not only deterred from writing philosophy papers, it is viewed with some degree of disapproval. Philosophy papers are notoriously difficult to get published, especially in top journals. At one major US university, a doctoral seminar on the philosophy of science course that was previously required for all PhD students is no longer required for accounting and management. As the former MIS Quarterly editor-in-chief who is teaching that course noted, “Professors who have been trained in only the statistical and who have not received serious exposure to other traditions will, of course, teach and expect the same of their students,” placing blinders on those students from seeing alternative views. Such a stance toward philosophy is misplaced because historically, philosophy has never been averse to mathematics or statistics, as the philosophers of mathematics and statistical analysis, like Pascal, Pierce, Whitehead and Russell, have attested. In order for the IS field is to escape any blinders that might be placed on it, and produce knowledge that is original, socially relevant and influential, our researchers need to conceive and explore alternatives to current ways of thinking. This can only be achieved if we understand, identify and challenge the assumptions underlying that research (Slife & Williams, 1995), and philosophy offers guidance along that path (Hassan, 2014). As philosopher Karl Jaspers (1954, p. 12) puts it:
There is no escape from philosophy. The question is only whether a philosophy is conscious or not, whether it is good or bad, muddled or clear. Anyone who rejects philosophy is himself unconsciously practicing a philosophy.

An intellectual revolution is possible by confronting the social forces and practices behind the philosophy. Once these philosophies and forces are understood, strategies on moving forward form the next step in transforming the IS field into a vibrant and socially relevant discipline (Hirschheim & Klein, 2012; Klein & Hirschheim, 2008). As the IS field makes inroads towards contributing to the stock of knowledge, philosophical choices that the members of the IS community make will decide the future of the field. One of the goals of this special issue is to raise the level of philosophical discourse among younger researchers and “new thinkers” towards igniting an intellectual revolution capable of addressing all the issues facing the field. It is not difficult to write up a philosophy piece when it is mere regurgitation of the language and arguments of the paper’s philosopher of choice. In part, it is this kind of writing that not only puts off journal editors and reviewers, but also rarely contributes to any meaningful progress. It is a lot more challenging but rewarding to the field if the discussions surrounding philosophy are empirically and practically demonstrated. In other words, the special issue is not just looking for any philosophy paper; it is looking for philosophy papers that connect directly to the demands and concerns of both the field and the society it is in. This connection of philosophy to the IS field and society as a whole will be a criterion for entering submissions into the review process and eventual inclusion into the special issue.

Philosophical papers can take the form of essays, logical argumentation, reviews, scientometric research, interpretive, hermeneutic, ethnographic, grounded theory, discourse or content analysis, empirical or conceptual. Submissions may address the following topic areas but need not be limited to them:

- Metaphysics and ontology
- Philosophy of information
- Philosophy of technology
- Philosophy of design
- Process ontology
- Non-dualist ontologies
-Informational systems or systems of information
-Rethinking the provenance of organizational sciences
-Rethinking use, success, and other core concerns of IS

Epistemology
-The relevance of philosophy to IS
-Paradigms of IS research
-Intellectual traditions and hegemony
-Intellectual ideals of IS research
-Originality in IS research
-Conceptual formation and IS constructs
-The goals of IS research
-Different ways of knowing
-Alternative forms of causality
-Teleology in IS research
-Professionalism and the IS body of knowledge

History, Axiology, Ethics, Morality, Privacy and Security
-Ethics and information systems
-Encroachment of IT into the lives of people
-Teleology and deontology approaches
-Information use and misuse
-Virtual ethics
-Discourse ethics
-Humanities enriched IS
-Historiographical approaches to IS
Aesthetics

- Philosophy of aesthetics in IT
- Balance of form, utility and beauty in IS
- Design aesthetics
- Visual aesthetics
- Emotional human needs in technology

Please feel free to contact Nik, John or Bernd for any questions regarding the CFP.

Important submission dates:

Initial CFP and solicitation of manuscripts: June 30, 2015 to December 31, 2015
EJIS submission system open for submissions: January 15, 2016 to June 30, 2016
Screening decisions / send out to reviewers: July 1, 2016 to Aug 31, 2016
Decisions on revisions / rejections from 1st round: Sept 1, 2016 to October 31, 2016
Due date for authors to submit 2nd round of revisions: December 31, 2016
Decision on revisions / rejections from 2nd round: January 15, 2017 to March 31, 2017
Due date for authors to submit 3rd round of revisions (should only be minor / moderate, no
major revisions at this point to make SI): May 31, 2017
Final publishing decisions, hand-off to publisher for proofs processing: June 30, 2017

References and Representative Papers

ALTER S (2015) The concept of ‘IT artifact’ has outlived its usefulness and should be retired

AVENIER MJ AND THOMAS C (2015) Finding one’s way around various methodological
guidelines for doing rigorous case studies: a comparison of four epistemological

AVISON D AND MALAURENT J (2014) Is theory king?: Questioning the theory fetish in

587-591.


Hassan NR (2014) Paradigm lost ... paradigm gained: a hermeneutical rejoinder to Banville and Landry's ‘Can the Field of MIS be Disciplined?’ *European Journal of Information Systems* 23(6), 600-615.


MYERS MD (1997) Qualitative research in information systems, ISWorldNet, available from.


ORLIKOWSKI WJ AND IACONO CS (2001) Research commentary: desperately seeking the 'IT' in IT research--a call to theorizing the IT artifact. *Information Systems Research* 12(2), 121-134.


