

# DIGITAL POLITICAL ETHICS F. BUDI HARDIMAN: A HERMENEUTICS OF DIGITAL LIFESTYLE BASED ON *WU WEI*, *MESOTES*, STOICISM, AND COMMUNITARIANISM

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**Abstract:** The digital revolution has profoundly transformed the ways in which human beings think, communicate, and act. Amid the rapid and boundless flow of information, humanity faces an ethical crisis characterized by the loss of reflection, empathy, and social responsibility. Indonesian philosopher F. Budi Hardiman responds to this situation by developing a framework of digital political ethics that aims to guide humans to remain free and responsible subjects amidst technological dominance. He proposes four ethical orientations: digital *wu wei*, digital *mesotes*, digital stoicism, and digital communitarianism. This article provides a hermeneutical analysis of Hardiman's thought, comparing it with the ethical traditions from Eastern philosophy (Laozi), Greek classics (Aristotle and the Stoics), and modern thinkers such as Emmanuel Levinas, Charles Taylor, and Byung-Chul Han. The study reveals that these four orientations shape not merely individual virtues but also a humanistic digital lifestyle that emphasizes calmness, balance, inner resilience, and corporeal solidarity. The article further situates these ideas in the socio-political context of Indonesia, where digital spaces have become arenas for the formation of new public morality.

**Keywords:** Digital ethics, F. Budi Hardiman, corporeal encounter, humanistic digital lifestyle, hermeneutic reflection

**Abstrak:** Revolusi digital telah mengubah cara manusia berpikir, berkomunikasi, dan bertindak. Di tengah arus informasi yang cepat dan tanpa batas, manusia menghadapi krisis etika yang ditandai oleh hilangnya refleksi, empati, dan tanggung jawab sosial. Filsuf Indonesia, F. Budi Hardiman, merespons situasi ini dengan mengembangkan kerangka etika politik digital yang menuntun manusia untuk tetap menjadi subjek yang bebas dan bertanggung jawab di tengah dominasi teknologi. Ia menawarkan empat orientasi etis: *wu wei* digital, *mesotes* digital, stoikisme digital, dan komunitarianisme digital. Artikel ini

menganalisis secara hermeneutis gagasan Hardiman dengan membandingkannya dengan tradisi filsafat Timur (Laozi), Yunani klasik (Aristoteles dan Stoikisme), serta pemikir modern seperti Emmanuel Levinas, Charles Taylor, dan Byung-Chul Han. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa keempat orientasi ini tidak hanya membentuk etika individual, tetapi juga gaya hidup digital humanistik yang menekankan keheningan, keseimbangan, keteguhan batin, dan solidaritas corporeal. Artikel ini juga menempatkan gagasan tersebut dalam konteks sosial-politik Indonesia, di mana ruang digital menjadi arena pembentukan moral publik baru.

**Kata kunci:** Etika digital, F. Budi Hardiman, corporeal encounter, gaya hidup digital, hermeneutika reflektif

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## Introduction

Digital technology has now become a fundamental structure of human life. According to a 2024 report by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (*Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia*, APJII), internet users in Indonesia have reached 220 million, or approximately 78.19% of the population, with an average usage time of eight hours per day (APJII Report, 2024). These data illustrate that the lives of Indonesians have become deeply digital. However, behind this progress, a new paradox has emerged: the more connected people are, the more fragmented they become; the more abundant the information, the shallower reflection becomes, accompanied by intellectual laziness. Superficiality replaces depth.

F. Budi Hardiman refers to this condition as a “crisis of political ethics in the digital era,” namely, a situation in which humans lose control over themselves because their actions, opinions, and moral choices become determined by algorithms and network logic (Hardiman, 2020: 115–130). The digital world indeed opens opportunities for the democratization of communication, yet it also generates new forms of symbolic violence: hate speech, political polarization, and cancel culture. In Hardiman’s terms, human beings now live as *homo digitalis*—beings whose existence is intertwined with networks of disembodied communication (Hardiman, 2020: p. 120). Human existence

no longer necessarily unfolds through encounters, but through digital technology.

This crisis is not merely a technological problem, but an anthropological and ethical one: human beings lose the capacity to pause, to listen, and to act reflectively. They are preoccupied with responding to notifications and incessant streams of information, which arrive like a tsunami. As a result, the human mind and soul become exhausted and noisy. Therefore, Hardiman proposes four ethical orientations: digital *wu wei* (non-coercive action), digital *mesotes* (the golden mean), digital Stoicism (inner fortitude), and digital communitarianism (embodied social solidarity). These four orientations constitute guidelines for a digital lifestyle that enable human beings to remain subjects, rather than objects, of technology (Hardiman, 2024: online lecture).

This article aims to interpret Hardiman's four concepts of digital ethics through a reflective hermeneutical approach and to situate them within the context of Indonesian society. In principle, a renewal of the interpretation of political ethics in the digital era is required. Accordingly, this paper seeks to demonstrate how digital political ethics can shape a digital lifestyle that is humane and social.

This study employs a library research method with a reflective hermeneutical approach, following Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004, p. 310). This approach emphasizes that understanding a text is not merely a matter of explaining its literal meaning, but of revitalizing its meaning within a contemporary horizon. The era of digital life is interpreted while continuing to uphold human dignity and worth, positioning human beings as subjects. Ultimately, this study yields a result in the form of a new political ethics that can be appropriated by society as a lifestyle in the digital era.

In what follows, the author outlines the hermeneutical steps employed in this article. First is the step of pre-understanding (*Vorverständnis*): reading Hardiman's texts and the classical ethical tradition with an awareness of the Indonesian social context.

Second, textual dialogue is conducted by bringing Hardiman's ideas into conversation with the philosophies of Laozi, Aristotle, Stoicism, Levinas, and Byung-Chul Han, thereby producing meanings that can be appropriated. Third, contextual application is elaborated by translating the results of interpretation into the situation of Indonesia's digital society—particularly in the domains of education, public policy, and social communication.

The reflective approach is chosen because it is relevant to the character of Hardiman's thought, which combines critical philosophy and existential hermeneutics, wherein ethical understanding emerges from a dialogue between text, subject, and world. This approach also encourages the critical questioning of the nature of the digital world in its relation to the subject.

### **Digital *Wu Wei*: An Ethics of Action Without Coercion**

*Wu wei* (無為) in Taoism means “acting without coercion” or “action in accordance with the order of nature” (Laozi, 1963: Chapter 48). In the digital context, digital *wu wei* does not imply passivity, but rather conscious action without aggression—action without reaction. Hardiman adapts this concept to resist the reactive and emotional culture of the online world (Hardiman, 2020, p. 121).

The digital world is characterized by speed and by the pressure to be “constantly responsive.” Every comment, piece of news, and post demands an immediate reaction. This is what Byung-Chul Han describes as the *Burnout Society*, in which individuals lose spaces for pause, compelled to remain perpetually productive (Han, 2015). In this context, digital *wu wei* becomes an ethical therapy: the courage to stop, to take distance, and to think before acting. A space of silence—calm, still, and mindful—brings clarity and tranquility.

In Indonesia, this principle is particularly relevant for countering the culture of political virality. Society is often trapped in spontaneous reactions to political issues without prior clarification. As a result, hoaxes generate commotion and misguided actions. Digital *wu wei* teaches reflective discipline: action that does

not arise from impulse, but from awareness. As Laozi writes, “In stillness, all things move naturally” (Laozi, 1963: Chapter 57).

Thus, digital *wu wei* shapes a digitally conscious human being who is not swept away by currents of hatred and who is capable of embodying reflective virtue amid the noise of the media. The digital human is not reactive, yet remains endowed with critical capacity and clear thinking.

### **Digital *Mesotes*: The Ethical Middle Way in an Age of Extremes**

Aristotle posits that virtue is *mesotes*—the middle way between two extremes: deficiency and excess (Aristotle, 2016, p. 45). In the digital world, these two extremes take the form of total digitalism and digital nihilism. The former venerates technology as if it were a savior; the latter rejects it as a curse. Each possesses its own strengths and weaknesses.

Hardiman positions the human being as a subject who must regulate the balance between technology and freedom (Hardiman, 2020: 148). Digital *mesotes* rejects both the extreme of being “always online” and that of “total digital rejection.” It guides human beings to use technology with awareness and moral limits. It involves choosing the middle path by discerning between what is good and right, and what is bad and wrong.

In the context of public policy, the principle of digital *mesotes* signifies maintaining a balance between the protection of personal data and freedom of expression. Data security, human rights of the subject, and freedom must be held in equilibrium. Freedom should not be sacrificed for the sake of security, nor should security be sacrificed for freedom. Government must not fall into digital authoritarianism (excessive surveillance), yet it must also not allow informational anarchy (Floridi, 2013: 47).

As a nation grounded in the philosophy of deliberation (*musyawarah*) and mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), Indonesia ought to place technology in a moderate position: as a tool for humanity, not a replacement for human beings. Digital *mesotes* thus becomes a principle of ethical policy that prioritizes balance

between innovation and values. It constitutes a balance between human freedom and security.

### **Digital Stoicism: Tranquility amid Algorithmic Chaos**

Stoic philosophy teaches the importance of focusing on what is within one's control and accepting what is not (Aurelius, 2002, p. 78). In the midst of a digital world saturated with “mass emotions,” digital Stoicism constitutes a wise attitude for preserving inner tranquility. The noise of information exhausts the human heart and mind and deprives them of stillness.

Hardiman observes that digital media foster “engagement without reflection.” Human beings react to everything, even before thinking (Hardiman, 2020: 126). They become increasingly reactive to information without verification or confirmation. It is precisely here that digital Stoicism teaches an ethics of self-control: not everything needs to be commented on, not every piece of news must be believed, and not every attack requires a response.

This attitude is particularly relevant in the fields of education and public service. In education, digital Stoicism entails forming the character of learners to think critically before sharing information. In bureaucracy, it means maintaining integrity amid the pressures of digital public opinion. Government institutions must not dismiss their officials without prior verification and clarification. As Marcus Aurelius writes, “Be calm within yourself; therein lies your strength” (Aurelius, trans. Gregory Hays, 2002: 143).

Thus, digital Stoicism is not an escape, but a moral discipline that protects human beings from moral exhaustion caused by information overload. It functions as a form of therapy amid the noise and the tsunami of information.

### **Digital Communitarianism and Corporeal Encounter**

Among Hardiman's four orientations, digital communitarianism represents the culmination, as it addresses humans as fundamentally social beings. Hardiman emphasizes that digital communication tends to be “disembodied”—causing interpersonal relations to lose physical presence, faciality, and empathy

(Hardiman, 2010, p. 162). Human beings are often perceived as tools, objects, or numerical supports for economic or other interests.

Here, Hardiman enters into dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas, who argues that the human face is the foundation of ethics: “The face commands: you shall not kill” (Levinas, 1969: 198). In virtual communication, the face is transformed into an image; the body becomes data. As a result, empathy weakens and responsibility evaporates. Concern for others gradually fades.

For this reason, Hardiman stresses the necessity of corpo-real encounters—real encounters among human beings who are embodied and face-to-face (Hardiman, online lecture, 2024). The digital world must not replace the body; rather, it should function as a bridge toward concrete solidarity. Virtual encounters must be balanced by physical encounters.

The phenomenon of digital volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic serves as an example of digital communitarianism: virtual empathy is transformed into concrete action (Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, 2021). An ethical digital space is one that fosters encounter rather than isolation. In Indonesia, this resonates with the value of *gotong royong*: solidarity is expressed not only in the online sphere, but also in concrete actions in the real world. Ultimately, human beings require the warmth of care, not the feeling of alienation.

### **The Indonesian Context and Social Relevance**

Hardiman’s digital political ethics is highly relevant to Indonesian society, which is currently experiencing a crisis of digital civility. This implies that conventional political ethics must be renewed. In the digital era, moral literacy that foregrounds human dignity is required. A 2024 report by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology indicates that hate speech and political hoaxes increased by 27% during the election year (Kominfo Report, 2024). This crisis is not merely a legal issue, but also a moral one.

By adopting Hardiman’s four digital ethics, we may affirm the following:

1. Digital *wu wei* entails cultivating awareness and empathy in public communication.
2. Digital *mesotes* signifies guiding moderation in the use of social media and in state policy.
3. Digital Stoicism means shaping the character of digital citizens who are patient and responsible.
4. Digital communitarianism involves strengthening body-based social solidarity and concrete action.

These ethical orientations can serve as a foundation for digital moral education in schools, religious institutions, and public organizations. Digital ethics education should not be limited to technological literacy alone, but should involve the formation of reflective, critical, and socially conscious individuals who are aware that every click carries moral consequences. Digital literacy thus becomes an imperative for Indonesian society.

A number of empirical studies and official reports indicate that the development of digital technology in Indonesia has not been fully matched by the ethical readiness of society. Official reports such as the APJII Survey (2023) and the Digital Literacy Index / reports of the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kominfo, 2024) provide quantitative evidence of high internet penetration alongside challenges in digital literacy. For example, APJII records a significant increase in internet users, while Kominfo's Digital Literacy Index reveals variations in literacy readiness across regions and age groups.

Academic studies likewise underscore these ethical challenges. In her article *Freedom to Hate*, Merlyna Lim (2017: 411–427) explains how algorithms and digital enclaves foster polarization and hate speech in Indonesia, a phenomenon that resonates with Hardiman's analytical framework of the disembodiment of communication. Such empirical findings support the argument that ethical literacy must be strengthened alongside technical literacy.

Several international studies highlight similar concerns. Luciano Floridi, in *The Ethics of Information* (2015: 47), argues that human beings now live within the infosphere, an informati-

onal space that shapes a new moral reality. Meanwhile, Christian Fuchs (2013: 56), in *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, emphasizes how digital capitalism transforms users into commodities whose data are traded. These findings reinforce Hardiman's claim that digital issues are not merely technological, but ethical and political.

Furthermore, UNESCO's research (2023) on *Digital Citizenship Education in Southeast Asia* indicates that Indonesia occupies a middle position in terms of critical digital literacy. Government digital literacy programs have thus far focused primarily on technical aspects and cybersecurity, but have not sufficiently addressed moral dimensions and social responsibility. In this context, Hardiman's four ethical orientations (*wu wei*, *mesotes*, Stoicism, and communitarianism) can serve as a moral framework that complements national digital literacy policies.

Digital ethics is not only the responsibility of individuals, but also of the state. The Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology for 2020–2024 emphasizes the need to develop a digital society that is “ethical, cultured, and productive” (Kominfo Report, 2020: 45). However, the implementation of this policy continues to face challenges, including weak inter-agency coordination and a low level of reflective culture within society.

A 2024 study by the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN) on Digital Transformation and Public Ethics found that civil servants and teachers still experience difficulties in balancing professional ethics with digital behavior.<sup>9</sup> Cases of social media misuse by civil servants serve as indicators of the urgent need for digital ethics training grounded in Pancasila values.

In a similar vein, the *Pancasila Student Profile* program (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2023) already includes dimensions of critical reasoning and noble character, yet it has not explicitly integrated digital ethics.

If Hardiman's four ethical principles are systematically integrated into educational practice, digital ethics can be transformed into a formative process rather than a set of abstract norms. Through the principle of digital *wu wei*, learners are trained to regulate impulses and resist the pressure of instant reactions that dominate digital environments. Digital *mesotes* introduces the ethical discipline of moderation, enabling learners to respond proportionately and thoughtfully rather than excessively or indifferently. Digital Stoicism further reinforces moral education by cultivating inner resilience, emotional self-control, and responsibility in the face of online provocation, misinformation, and algorithmic pressure. Finally, digital communitarianism directs learners beyond individual self-regulation toward social responsibility, encouraging them to translate online awareness into concrete empathy and embodied solidarity. Together, these four principles provide a coherent ethical framework that equips learners to navigate digital life critically while remaining grounded in moral reflection.

The implementation of digital ethics grounded in Pancasila values and informed by Hardiman's philosophical reflections has the potential to strengthen the character of digital citizens in a holistic manner. Such an approach aligns ethical formation with Indonesia's foundational commitment to human dignity, social justice, and communal responsibility. Rather than focusing solely on technical competence or cybersecurity, this model emphasizes the cultivation of reflective judgment, empathy, and moral resilience. Digital citizens shaped by this framework are not merely skilled users of technology, but morally aware subjects who recognize that every digital action carries ethical consequences. In this sense, digital ethics education becomes a strategic investment in the moral sustainability of democratic life, enabling individuals and communities to engage the digital sphere responsibly, humanely, and critically amid the accelerating influence of algorithms and networked communication.

## Conclusion

F. Budi Hardiman's digital political ethics offers a distinctly humanistic framework amid the accelerating waves of global

digitalization. By articulating four ethical orientations—digital *wu wei*, digital *mesotes*, digital Stoicism, and digital communitarianism—Hardiman constructs a synthetic ethical vision that bridges Eastern wisdom, Greek rationality, and modern philosophical reflection. This synthesis responds to the ethical disorientation produced by algorithmic governance, hyperconnectivity, and the erosion of reflective judgment in digital life. Rather than rejecting technology, Hardiman reframes it as a moral arena in which human agency must be reclaimed. His framework emphasizes self-restraint, balance, inner resilience, and social responsibility as core virtues for navigating digital environments. In doing so, digital political ethics moves beyond instrumental concerns toward a normative vision of technology that restores human dignity, moral autonomy, and ethical subjectivity in the face of increasingly automated and depersonalized systems.

Within the Indonesian context, this ethical framework finds concrete resonance in living cultural values such as *eling lan waspada* (mindful vigilance), *tepa selira* (empathic sensitivity), *nrimo ing pandum* (responsible acceptance), and *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation). These values provide fertile ground for the appropriation of digital political ethics as a lived moral practice rather than an abstract theory. Through this perspective, the digital human being is no longer reduced to a passive user or data-producing object, but emerges as an ethical subject accountable to the self, to others, and to the shared world. Digital political ethics thus becomes a call to praxis: an invitation to inhabit digital life with awareness, balance, moral steadfastness, and corporeal solidarity. In this sense, it offers a normative horizon for cultivating a humane, reflective, and socially responsible digital society.

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