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putting information at the heart of ethics results in an “ontocentric” theory, concerned with what things are, in contrast to the “situated action ethics” of the standard utilitarian, contractualist, and deontological alternatives. This ontocentrism issues in a very broad understanding of what commands moral respect: “From an IE perspective, the ethical discourse now comes to concern information as such, that is not just all persons, their cultivation, well-being and social interactions, not just animals, plants and their proper natural life, but also anything that exists, from paintings and books to stars and stones; anything that may or will exist, like future generations and

solve a foundationalist crisis in computer ethics by getting at a single notion that can make sense of all the rest. We should be skeptical, however, of the notion that ethical discourse and understanding is caused by the quest for

such foundations. "Theory typically uses the assumption that we probably have too many ethical ideas, some of which may well turn out to be mere prejudices. Our major problem now is actually that we have not too many but too few, and we need to cherish as many as we can" (Williams 1985, 117). It would be most ironic if a philosophy that asserts the fundamental value of information as such should be eager to abstract from the concrete information needed to make one's way in the world. We experience a world of incommensurable and conflicting values, and we must be careful not to smooth this over in first principles of ethical theory. Virtue ethics eschews foundations and proposes we start where we are. This approach will occasion objections of relativism. Just how diverse human virtues actually are is an empirical matter, but in principle virtue ethics embraces a narrow

of thought challenging the notion that ethics requires impartiality and universality—to name just a very few obvious and illustrious cases, we have Kierkegaard and Nietzsche and Emerson in the nineteenth century, and Foot and Williams and Nussbaum and the whole resurgence of virtue ethics since. With this pedigree, unrepentant opponents of universalism and impartialism cannot be cast as mere fringe characters. Furthermore, this alternative historical emphasis indicates that the drive to be universal and impartial is a newcomer to ethical discourse, and it remains to be seen whether it will ultimately be judged a wrong turn.

Even the figures that seem to be most friendly to IE are at best mixed in

Floridi 2006, 31), but both traditions appreciated the importance of grounding moral concern in the good life. The Stoics exerted tremendous influence on Nietzsche and Emerson, both of whom regard the rejection of impartiality and universalism as not only consistent with but even essential

After all, the referee acts wrongly who decides the game based on whom he likes better rather than the competitors' performance according to the rules of the game. While nothing could be more obvious, note that this reasoning is what Floridi calls "situated action ethics." It is no coincidence that notions of impartiality and universality make their greatest impact in the

make sense of the particular unfolding story it is. As Murdoch writes:



“overall good,” no matter what one’s specific value theory says, since the consequentialist approach to ethics implies the agent who is committed to doing the right thing must be prepared to abandon his own constitutive

ethics, these arguments are particularly telling against IE's uncritical acceptance of impartialism and universalism, since IE purports to value construction, and integrity is a constitutive virtue of a valuable structure.

To understand the ethical cost of abandoning the concrete perspective of actual agents, it helps to reflect on the sentiment expressed by Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov* regarding the proposal that an eternal harmony of the universe answers the problem of evil. The usual conclusion of the Argument from Evil is that God does not exist, since an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-good God would not permit the evil we see in the world. One standard retort, captured powerfully and poetically in the answer from the whirlwind of the book of Job, is that God knows what He is doing even if the particulars of God's plan are often beyond our limited understanding. The usual counterargument says assertions of God's plan are

including others in my very constitution. By far the most celebrated and widely discussed counterexamples to the pervasiveness of impartiality

ships, and with good reason. In cases of love and friendship, “the agent’s own historical singularity (and/or the historical singularity of the relationship itself) enter into moral deliberation in a way that could not even in

tax break for a married couple filing jointly is a legal benefit for the husband or for the wife. Thus, the friend is valued for her own sake, and not as an instrument or from duty. Make no mistake about it, there is excellent reason to make friends; friendship is a construction that makes each of us greater than we could be apart. It follows that I have excellent

outcome” as it relates to benevolent concern for others’ welfare: “It is not that in the guise of ‘the best outcome’ [the idea of maximum welfare] stands *outside* morality as its foundation and arbiter, but rather that it

should flourish as the thing it is, in which case the object-level judgments of virtue ethics and IE may have an identical extension. But that is *particularly* not the way things proceed from the start. As soon as one speaks

to a sufficiently concrete level of abstraction, we find a raucous competition between the flourishings of various info entities, and even a competition between alternative descriptions of the same info entity.

Before proceeding, we need to acknowledge the role in IE of particular

matter little, if at all" (Nussbaum 1995, 121). Floridi has sometimes resisted describing IE in such terms, but it is not clear what else to make

from an objective perspective" (Floridi 2006, 26). This language of

nature and no flourishing. From a point of view such that it has a nature and can flourish as the thing it is, it does not command any particular respect (by hypothesis, it will never fulfill its function as a windscreen), and it may even cry out to be smashed (the flourishing of a target). Perhaps the boy behaves wrongly unless he smashes it!

This may sound like an objection Floridi has repeatedly tried to address—that IE either is not a precise or clear guide to action or leads to relativism. However, my point is much deeper: Whatever observations may seem to make sense from the point of view of the universe are irrelevant to the project of a human life. IE can guide action, but it guides us badly by suggesting an equality that does not exist at the *relevant* level of abstraction. While previous critics of IE have generally admitted IE's impartialism or universality as important values, virtue ethics disagrees on these first premises of the IE project, and that transforms the nature of the critique. For example, Stahl questions IE's claims to universality by noting that one's level of abstraction expresses an ontology and, "as the choice of the LoA [level of abstraction] is not determined and given that it determines ontological commitments, it seems that an agent is free to choose, albeit indirectly, the ontology of a phenomenon. This allows the interpretation that an agent acts to determine which information entities exist (are

relevant) and therefore need to be considered in ethical decision making."





a dog? In contrast, suppose the *Mona Lisa* is on my floor. Now, there is no question that I should not permit my dog to chew on it, and there is no question that a sensitive agent will perceive the story of this information entity and what it means to respect its integrity and flourishing without anthropomorphizing or personification. Since there is no narrative center of gravity for the chew toy, it does not merit my respect, and cataloguing its trajectory through time and space is not meaningful. A chronicle is not a history, because it is not a story. But the story of the *Mona Lisa* centers on itself as a thing in its own right (and not just as the creation of

rather than as the birthright of its being as an information object. The importance of coherent storytelling is not meant to deny the reality of information in the absence of the storyteller: it points us to the fact that

**Sociopoiesis: Justice Means Competition Is Cooperation**

Some information entities craft their own stories, including the stories that define them. These entities will always merit the respect described

above since they will have some center of narrative gravity that is at the

same time a narrator and potential interlocutor. As already noted, there are no sharp boundaries between individuals so defined. Our lives quite literally overlap as expanding circles of influence intermingling with

Liberal institutions, however, more successfully accomplish this by establishing the

only mechanism capable of leveraging the vast amounts of tacit, local, and distributed information that is needed for wise sociopoiesis. Liberal rights facilitate market relations that supplement friendships and supplant competition as combat, and market institutions harness the wisdom of crowds as information-processing technologies of the highest order. "Market institutions" must not be understood in a narrowly economic sense, since they include the distributed processes that constitute the

1994, 47). If we remain open to whatever possibilities and arguments we may confront when we start where we are, there is nothing *narrowly*

ethical concern has to be addressed to us as a concern *of us*, it does not follow that every concern is *reducible* to self-concern.

This responds directly to Floridi's defense of ontological equality, which "consists in shifting the burden of proof by asking, from a patient-oriented perspective, whether there is anything in the universe that is intrinsically and positively worthless ethically and hence rightly disrespectable in this particular sense, insofar as its intrinsic value is concerned?" (Floridi 2009, 102)

made manifest by cowards” (Emerson 1982c, 176). Far from disproving one’s individual greatness, our encounters with Nature underline and confirm the heroism implicit in becoming who we are. “The hero always

*Regu Dphila 2000* "Do We Have Moral Duties Towards Information

Objects?" *Ethics and Information Technology* 10:109–114.

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