Chapter 15

Infosphere to Ethosphere: Moral Mediators in the Nonviolent Transformation of Self and World

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the complex, overlapping ideas of two prominent Italian philosophers, Lorenzo Magnani and Luciano Floridi, with the aim of facilitating the nonviolent transformation of self and world, and with a focus on information technologies in mediating this process. In Floridi’s information ethics, problems of consistency arise between self-poiesis, anagnorisis, entropy, evil, and the narrative structure of the world. Solutions come from Magnani’s work in distributed morality, moral mediators, moral bubbles and moral disengagement. Finally, two examples of information technology, one ancient and one new, a Socratic narrative and an information processing model of moral cognition, are offered as mediators for the nonviolent transformation of self and world respectively, while avoiding the tragic requirements inherent in Floridi’s proposal.

1. SELF, POETRY, AND INFORMATION

Without adequate reasoning, even well-intentioned moral actions may fail – or, worse still, cause harm – and the best way to facilitate adequate reasoning is to confront problems with flexible and well-fed minds - Lorenzo Magnani (2007, p. 165)

Luciano Floridi has “defended a view of the world as the totality of informational structures dynamically interacting with each other”, in which the world as information ecosystem, the “infosphere”, and all individual inhabitants are essentially interconnected “informational entities” with any given thing’s “least intrinsic value” “identified with its ontological status as an information object” as determined by an “analysis of being in terms of a
minimal common ontology, whereby human beings as well as animals, plants, artifacts and so forth are interpreted as informational entities” (Floridi, 2011b, p. 564, 2002, p. 287, 2006, p. 33), “To be is to be an informational entity” (Floridi, 2008, p. 199). On Floridi’s picture, living things are also informational entities, “inforgs”, informational organisms, with human beings nestled amongst them as “interconnected informational organisms among other informational organisms and agents, sharing an informational environment” (at 4:53), and with that informational environment characterized by its degree of entropy (Floridi, 2011a, 2010, 2006). Entropy is important to Floridi’s information ethics as it is central both to the role of human beings in the informational environment, and to the problem of evil, understood as increasing entropy (Floridi, 2006, 2002, 1999).

Floridi understands human beings as homines poietici - selves whose defining capacity is to create order, from which derives the relationship between entropy and evil, for example the identification of evil with the destruction of order (i.e., violence), and with each self emerging “as a break with nature, not as a super connection with it” (Floridi, 2006, 2011b, p. 560). Moreover, homo poieticus is unique in her/his reflexive awareness of this distinctive status, as an island of order within a sea of disorder, and with this recognition he/she is able to identify similar entities:

Selves are the ultimate negentropic technologies, through which information temporarily overcomes its own entropy, becomes conscious, and is finally able to recount the story of its own emergence in terms of a progressive detachment from external reality. There are still only informational structures. But some are things, some are organisms, and some are minds, intelligent and self-aware beings. Only minds are able to interpret other informational structures as things or organisms or selves. And this is part of their special position in the universe (Floridi, 2011b, pp. 564-565).

The “progressive detachment from external reality” is a process undertaken by minds, human beings, as they understand their place amongst other informational entities, a process aided and accelerated by information communication technologies (ICTs). Floridi holds that ICTs are making possible a “fourth revolution” in human self-understanding, following Copernicus, Darwin, and Freud. Note both that these first three plots an inward trend, from humans understanding their place amongst the stars, to their position within evolutionary time on Earth, to their selves as products of physical and metaphysical relationships, and that this fourth revolution follows this trend, as ICTs aid humans not only in understanding themselves, but in actively designing and constructing them. Floridi writes that:

ICTs are, among other things, egopoietic technologies or technologies of self construction, significantly affecting who we are, who we think we are, who we might become, and who we think we might become (Floridi, 2011b, p. 550).

As part of their “special position in the universe” (note: not some limited domain therein), detached from reality and from this perspective, through technology, increasingly empowered to both study and shape it, humans have a “vocation for responsible stewardship in the world” (Floridi, 2006, p. 34).

The more powerful homo poieticus becomes as an agent, the greater his duties and responsibilities become, as a moral agent, to oversee not only the development of his own character and habits but also the well-being and flourishing of each of his ever expanding spheres of influence, to include the whole infosphere (Floridi, 2006, p. 32).

Accordingly, Floridi stresses not only the egopoietic, self-construction potential afforded by ICTs, but also the world transforming, eco-
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