

AI Robots & Ethics 2015/16

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Week 8

Objective

As we have discovered in our investigations, moral relationships involves an agent who is responsible for originating an action and a patient who receives this action and is accorded certain rights in the process. Moral theory is typically formulated either from the perspective of moral agency (i.e. the agent oriented ethics of virtue ethics, consequentialism, deontology, etc.) or in terms of moral patiency (i.e. animal rights philosophy and environmental ethics). The final two weeks of the online component of our course will consider two recent innovations in moral thinking that endeavor to think at the limit or even beyond this standard arrangement. This week we will be reading an influential essay from Luciano Floridi, which introduces the concept of “Information Ethics” or IE. IE, as you already know from last week’s reading, proposes an extreme form of a patient oriented ethics that Floridi argues is more universal and inclusive than any previous forms of moral philosophy. He therefore proposes it as an all-encompassing moral theory that would accommodate everything—living organisms, natural objects, future generations, and technological artifacts. The objective of this week’s investigation is to evaluate the opportunities and challenges of this new moral theory for establishing an ethics that can accommodate machines, AIs, and robots.

Readings

Luciano Floridi, Information Ethics: On the philosophical foundation of computer ethics

Questions

1) As its name indicates, Information Ethics focuses attention on “information” as both a property and unit of analysis. This is a significant alteration in the way of organizing moral philosophy. Why does Floridi focus on “information?” How does IE operationalized the term “information?” And what are the advantages and potential disadvantages of using “information” in this manner?

2) Information Ethics proposes a moral theory that Floridi argues is “ontocentric.” This formulation is designed to challenge other centrisms in the history of moral thinking—anthropocentrism, animocentrism, biocentrism, etc. What is ontocentrism? What advantages does it have for moral philosophy, especially a moral philosophy that endeavors to include consideration of technological artifacts? Are you convinced of IE’s potential to establish what Floridi calls a “more universal ecological ethics” that excludes nothing from moral consideration? Do you see any problems with or unintended consequences from this new form of moral “centrism?” Does IE’s ontocentrism have any problems either as a moral theory or in its practical applications?