

## The Value of Information as Ontological Pluralism

Massimo Durante

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**Abstract** In my paper I will focus my attention on some philosophical aspects of the Information Ethics displayed by Luciano Floridi. Floridi's Information Ethics has the methodological merit of providing the interpretation of the Informational Turn with a solid philosophical basis, the roots of which deserve a careful investigation. In this perspective, I will analyse a key question, which is essential not only from a theoretical but also from a practical (moral, political and legal) point of view, i.e. whether or not Floridi's construction of information is consistent with a pluralistic conception of Being.

**Keywords** Ontological pluralism · Information ethics · Equality principle · Informativeness · Data · Evil · Being · Goodness · Moral respect

How great a share variety has in producing beauty may be seen in the ornamental part of nature. The shapes and colours of plants, flowers, leaves, the paintings in butterflies' wings, shells, seem of little other intended use than that of entertaining the eye with the pleasure of variety. All the senses delight in it and equally are averse to sameness. The ear is as much offended with one even continued note as the eye is with being fixed to a point or to the view of a dead wall.

William HOGARTH,  
*The Analysis of Beauty*, 1810,  
Chap. II, *Of Variety*.

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M. Durante (✉)

Department of Law, University of Turin, Via S. Ottavio, 54, 10124 Turin, Italy  
e-mail: massimo.durante@unito.it

## 1 Introduction

Information plays, nowadays, an ever increasing decisive role, in the globalised world, from a wide variety of points of view, that is, social, political, cultural, legal, economical, moral, etc. (Castells 1996, 1997, 1998; Benkler 2007; Floridi 2010). The networked digital reality is made of information, which is the basis upon which we formulate expectations, we make evaluations, we take decisions and we act in the world. What is more, our moral and legal responsibility tends to become proportionate to the degree of information we are provided with (Floridi 2008a; Durante 2009). The evolution of the Information and Communication Technologies continuously reshapes the limits of the Information Society and it raises ethical and legal questions and issues of new generation. In the present contribution I will focus my attention on the Information Ethics displayed by Luciano Floridi. Floridi's Information Ethics has, according to my understanding, a methodological merit, namely, it provides its interpretation of the Informational Turn with a solid philosophical basis, the roots of which deserve a careful investigation. In this perspective, I will analyse a key question, which is essential not only from a theoretical but also from a practical (moral, political and legal) point of view, i.e. whether or not Floridi's construction of information is consistent with a pluralistic conception of Being.

## 2 The Information Ethics of Luciano Floridi

Luciano Floridi's (2007) Information Ethics (IE) is an ontocentric, patient-oriented, ecological macroethics, which suggests reconsidering the issue of agents' interaction from a wider perspective than that exclusively based on the role of human agents, which obeys to a rigid methodological anthropocentrism. The informational approach accounts for a different understanding of the interaction between agents and patients or reagents, reshaping those notions on more solid ontological bases (Floridi 2008a, 21):

All entities, *qua* informational objects, have an intrinsic moral value, although possibly quite minimal and overridable, and hence can count as moral patients, subject to some equally minimal degree of moral respect understood as a *disinterested, appreciative and careful attention*.

This approach does not only illustrate how interacting agents and patients communicate by means of positive or negative messages: thanks to its ontocentric perspective, the informational philosophy offers a distinct, unified perspective for the status and regime of all entities that inhabit the new informational environment: the infosphere.

On the basis of the *ontological equality principle*, those entities are informational entities that should be morally treated and respected as part of the informational environment to which they belong as informational systems. In other words, all entities deserve a minimal, overridable level of moral respect *qua* informational objects. Consequently, the ontocentric and infocentric convergence suggest the aims

of Floridi's information ethics. Firstly, its goal is to be "impartial and universal because it brings to ultimate completion the process of enlargement of the concept of what may count as a centre of moral claim" (Floridi 2008a, 12). Secondly, as a result of its characters of impartiality and universality, this perspective offers a field-independent macroethics that "rectifies an excessive emphasis occasionally placed on specific technologies, by calling attention to the more fundamental phenomenon of information in all its varieties and long tradition" (Floridi 2006, 256). Thirdly, the enlargement of the concept of what deserve a minimal level of moral respect require us to extend the limits of our own care and responsibility towards all the informational objects that inhabit the infosphere.

A comprehensive normative framework is therefore able to regulate the life-cycle of information within the infosphere in an impartial, universal, field-independent way. This framework is based, on the one hand, on the moral analysis of the concept of informational entropy as the most ominous form of evil and, on the other hand, it is structured according to four moral laws that regulate the level of entropy in the infosphere. Whereas informational entropy makes reference to any kind of destruction or corruption of informational objects, that is, any form of impoverishment of being (Floridi 2008a, 11), the four moral laws command that (Floridi 1999, 2003):

0. Entropy ought not to be caused in the infosphere (null law);
1. Entropy ought to be prevented in the infosphere;
2. Entropy ought to be removed from the infosphere;
3. The flourishing of informational entities as well as the whole infosphere ought to be promoted by preserving, cultivating, enhancing and enriching their properties.

What is important to notice about this framework is that entropy refers to informational objects (and not only to information as such), while the four moral laws do not always refer to informational objects but to the infosphere as a whole: "The duty of any moral agent should be evaluated in terms of contribution to the sustainable blooming of the infosphere, and any process, action or event that negatively affects the whole infosphere—not just an informational object—should be seen as an increase in its level of entropy and hence an instance of evil" (Floridi 2008a, 24).

### 3 The Ontological Equality Principle

According to my analysis, the ontological equality principle plays a decisive role in Floridi's IE, since it sets the study on information in an ontological perspective that provides a philosophical basis for an ethical theory. This principle seems also to contain, at a first glance, a provocative statement, since it says that *all* entities deserve a minimal level of moral respect, for the very simple fact that all entities are entities (i.e. *informational objects*). Because of its centrality and significance, this principle has been recurrently submitted to several criticisms. This criticism can be summarized in the following terms: (1) not all entities deserve to be respected; (2) entities are not to be respected *qua* entities but for different, additional reasons; (3) the moral equation between entities is disturbing and untenable; (4) the ontological equality principle is likely to turn into an indiscriminate protection of the *status quo*;

(5) the attribution of moral value to all entities violates the dictate of Moore's law, which separates the sphere of being from that of value (Moore 2004).

I will not deal here with all these forms of criticism. Floridi has already done it several times (Floridi 2008b). More precisely, in his analytical attitude, Floridi has always limited himself to reply to all these critique within the limits of the issue at stake. Since this work has already been done, in my view, quite fruitfully, I would like to concentrate my attention to some implicit philosophical premises implied in such critiques. I believe that this attitude can lead me, at the end of the present examination, to bring to light a philosophical dimension, which is implicit in Floridi's IE but has been too often overlooked or underestimated: Floridi's ontological pluralism.

In this perspective, I would like to start, however, from what is Floridi's reply to the accusation of naturalistic fallacy being implied within the ontological equality principle. For the reason above-mentioned, we make reference to the ontological equality principle, even if this accusation has been often addressed to Floridi's ethical ontocentrism as such. I will refer to a long quotation from Floridi's reply (Floridi 2008b, 202) to Hongladarom (2008), which seems to me of great importance:

As Hongladarom remarks, an ontocentric approach is often threatened with the naturalistic fallacy. This presupposes a value-empty or value-neutral reality, from which then not a single drop of morality could be squeezed, on pain of contradiction. The 'no ought from is' principle, with its Humean roots, is perfectly fine. If Being (or reality or nature or indeed the infosphere) is interpreted as being entirely and absolutely devoid of any moral value [...], then any moral value, any goodness, and the corresponding ethical orientation that we long for, must come from elsewhere. A drained and dry container cannot fill itself. But if the ontic source, from which we seek to draw some moral guidance, is not empty, if, following Plato and Spinoza for example, we acknowledge that Being and Goodness are intrinsically intertwined well before any metaphysical or ethical discourse attempts to rescind them, then trying to extract values and the corresponding moral lessons from Being becomes a very natural process. One may try to find guidance and inspiration in the life of the universe without committing any logical fallacy.

Floridi's reply is very clear in its main tenet: Being and Goodness are intertwined and hence any moral value does not come from elsewhere. Moral value or goodness is intertwined with Being as an intrinsic or first-order property. This intertwining is, in my view, a first part of a larger and more comprehensive reply to this question. In fact, a full reply has to include an interpretation of Being and Goodness. Floridi provides us with such interpretation, by stressing many times that Being and Goodness are to be interpreted, in his theory, in informational terms (remind: this is not a proposition on some *noumenal* nature of Being, which is beyond scope; infosphere is more simply Being considered informationally, i.e. an informational interpretation of Being). If we lose sight of this fact, we end up projecting on Floridi's ethics and philosophy of information the shadows of other accounts of Being and Goodness (and of their possible intertwining). As Floridi clearly formulates it (2008b, 201): "‘Esse est information’, where here information is not a semantic but an ontological concept (imagine a structural pattern)".

In this perspective (i.e. from the informational standpoint), I would like to stress a crucial point that concerns exactly the question of an ontological pluralism conceived in informational terms. More explicitly: the philosophical problem is not only, as many seem to believe, whether or not Being is in itself justified, i.e. whether Being possesses an intrinsic value as a result of the equation between Being and Good. Rather, the problem is whether or not IE endorses a *pluralistic* conception of Being and Good. It appears quite clearly to me, even if surprisingly, that many scholars overlook or underestimate Floridi's theoretical and ethical choice for pluralism or even they treat such choice as a separate chapter of his reflection, which does not provide any theoretical and ethical basis and explanation for his treatment of the ontological equality principle.

In fact, in the criticism placed upon the ontological equality principle there is always implied an implicit premise that is never fully brought to light and discussed. Scholars treat and understand the nature of Being (of the Infosphere) as if the variety of informational objects (i.e. the richness of the Infosphere or the pluralism of Being) and the proliferation of reality in different objects and levels of abstractions were only a second-order property, an added quality that supervene in a second moment, as from the outside, to give a further qualification of Being or of the Infosphere. This is in my view the crucial point of Floridi's conception of the ontological equality principle and of scholars' criticism placed upon such principle: the way the variety of informational objects, the multiplicity of the informational reality, is treated.

I do think—and I will try thereafter to demonstrate it—that Floridi believes that the variety of informational objects, i.e. the multiplicity of the informational reality, is not a degradation of (the unity of) Being but is, on the contrary, its full expression and exaltation. The expression 'Being is' translates in Floridi's terms into the expression 'the Infosphere is rich', where richness is not a system or a sum of variables of the Infosphere but its primary property. This does not prevent obviously the Infosphere from being *more or less* rich, in the same sense in which Floridi notices, in line with Cartesio, that something, be it more or less extended, still is a *res extensa*. The richness of the infosphere is not a matter of degree, but the proper ontological definition of such informational environment.

I believe that many critics are not appropriately perceived the question of pluralism for the reason that they have overlooked the intrinsic value of information and the nature of the informational objects qua *informational* objects. Many scholars have been mainly concerned with the question of the intrinsic value of informational objects, merely considered as entities (hence the criticism placed upon the ontological equality principle), and have lost sight of the fact that such an intrinsic value, however it may be defined, should concern an intrinsic quality of information and of all entities viewed as *informational* objects. This is the origin of many misunderstandings as regards to Floridi's IE.

#### 4 Information and Informativeness

In order to grasp Floridi's line of reasoning, we should not approach IE as a fragmentary theory made of several statements that are each other autonomous. On

the contrary, there is always in Floridi's theoretical construction the attempt to be rigorous and systematic. To be rigorous, Floridi endorses an analytical approach that requires him to precisely define all the theoretical tools (i.e. ideas, concepts, argumentations, premises) he deploys, in order to construct his own speculative system. We can disagree of course with Floridi's main theoretical tenets but it is difficult to claim not to understand them (as stated, the problem with Floridi's IE is not much a question of possible misunderstandings. Rather, it is more often a problem of either overestimation or underestimation as to his main standpoints). To be systematic, Floridi knows he needs to endorse a strong *philosophical premise* that could provide a rational, accepting basis for his theory and its own developments. I believe this basis resides in the notion of information, as conceived in its philosophical nature and in its correlated attitude to inform, that is, in its informativeness (i.e. the value itself of information).

For this reason, we have to concentrate our attention on a philosophical aspect of the concept of information that appears to me of a crucial importance: this is the conceptual statute of the *data* that information is necessarily made of. Let me start with citing Floridi (2010, 22):

The fact is that a genuine, complete erasure of all data can be achieved only by the elimination of all possible differences. This clarifies why a datum is ultimately reducible to a *lack of uniformity*. Donald MacCrimmon MacKay highlighted this important point when he wrote that 'information is a distinction that makes a difference'. He was followed by Gregory Bateson, whose slogan is better known, although less accurate: 'In fact, what we mean by information - the elementary unit of information - is a difference which makes a difference'. More formally, according to the *diaphoric interpretation* (*diaphora* is the Greek word for 'difference'), the general definition of a datum is:

Dd) datum<sub>=def.</sub>  $x$  being distinct from  $y$ , where  $x$  and  $y$  are two uninterpreted variables and the relation of 'being distinct', as well as the domain, are left open to further interpretation.

According to Floridi (2010, 22–23), this *lack of uniformity* that characterizes and defines data can be applied in three main ways: (1) in the *real word*; (2) between (the perception of) at least two physical states of a system or *signals*; (3) between two *symbols*. Floridi (2010, 23) makes it precise, by saying that the data in (1) "may be either identical with, or what makes possible *signals* in (2), and signals in (2) are what make possible coding of *symbols* in (3)." Many other precisions should be introduced to fully understand the relation between the occurrence of syntactically well-formed data and the coding of symbol or to grasp the distinction between data and environmental information, but this is not the point here. What we should notice and think over is how is structured the philosophical vocabulary that is used to account for the meaning of information intended as a set of data.

This vocabulary is centred around three terms: *lack*, *difference* and *relation*. We have to concentrate our attention on those terms, since their interplay is meant to trace the conceptual perimeter of a pluralistic conception of information.

## 5 Lack, Difference and Relation

First of all, the crucial idea of a lack of uniformity does not imply an idea of lack as a negative term, that is, as a degradation of being, like a vacuum or incompleteness. This lack is neither the lack of an entity (the *ontic lack* that is manifested by the destruction or the mere absence of an entity: e.g. when we look for something we have lost) nor the lack of being (the *ontological lack* that is manifested, in Heideggerian terms (Heidegger 1996), by the concealing of truth: the fact that such concealment that does not let an entity *be* what it is). The lack of uniformity is neither a lack of entity, since data must not have necessarily a material nature (“Although there can be no information without data, data might not require a material implementation”, Floridi 2010, 61); nor it is a lack of being, in the sense above-mentioned, since the lack of uniformity (the “fractures in the continuum”, Floridi, 2010, 61) lets data *be* what they are, that is, it lets data be *informative*. However paradoxical it may appear, this lack of uniformity *enriches* the world instead of impoverishing it: “The universe is fundamentally composed of data, understood as *dedomena*, patterns or fields of *difference*, instead of matter or energy, with material objects as a complex secondary manifestation” (Floridi, 2010, 62).

This brings us back to the second word we have highlighted, that is, difference. It is not possible even to recall, in the present context, all the philosophical implications of this concept. However, it has to be noticed how strategic is the role played in the contemporary philosophy by the concept of difference, which paves the way toward any pluralistic ethical or epistemological theory. This is precisely the reason why the concept of difference makes, here, its own appearance: it is a first-order property of data (ontological lack of uniformity) that can be possibly endorsed by material objects (ontic lack of uniformity), which remain a complex secondary manifestation. In other words, contrary to many scholars who conceive difference as the secondary manifestation of the variety of material objects (and therefore by analogy, but wrongly, of informational objects), difference primarily concerns the ontological lack of uniformity, i.e. the reason why data are what they are: that is to say that data are informative, because are patterns or fields of differences. In this perspective, difference is viewed as the way the richness of being expresses itself in informational terms. Data are informative because are patterns or fields of differences: this means that they are informative since they enrich the world with something different or, to put it in another way, they add something different to the world, i.e. something *new*. This newness is not necessarily an ontic newness: that is, patterns or fields of differences do not necessarily entail the creation or the implementation of new material objects. This newness is relational: it is brought about by the formation of new relations of distinctness between variables.

This leads us to consider the third concept we have previously placed emphasis on, that of relation. Information always requires data and therefore new relations of distinctness between variables. When destroying information (*rectius*: informational objects), we are not only destroying an object in its informational status. We are depriving the universe of relations between variables, which are implemented in informational objects. The informational environment is made also of the web and

threads of those relations, the intrigue of which is a considerable part of the richness of being in its pluralistic dimension. Pluralism grows out of an increasing number of differences (i.e. different informational objects, different points of view or levels of abstraction [LoAs, see Floridi 2008c]) as well as of new relations between variables. When destroying informational objects, not only we erase differences, but we tear also the threads of those relations, with a result of a stratified impoverishment of the infosphere and of pluralism: in effect, pluralism is not only concerned with the elimination of the secondary manifestations of the variety of informational objects (implemented in material objects), but it is embedded in the ontological roots of the infosphere.

In this perspective, the ontological equality principle is not to be regarded as a mere and indiscriminate protection of everything exists, a sort of blind levelling that equalizes every instance of life and world. On the contrary, it has to be understood as an affirmation of an ontological pluralism that conceives the informational universe of objects as a sum of differences and relations. This interpretation is backed by the idea itself of informativeness, which expresses the value of information and is based on the above-mentioned concept of *newness*. Before focussing the attention on the notion of ontological pluralism in the next paragraph, something has to be said with regards to this idea of informativeness. I will not make direct reference here to Luciano Floridi's treatment of this idea (Floridi 2010, 47–49), but to an insightful notation of Jannis Kallinikos (2006, 53–54), which helps me explaining this point:

In order to be informative, information must be able to add a distinction and confer something new on what is already known. In this respect, the value of information, what may be called its informativeness, is indeed a function of the kind of 'news' it is capable of conveying, and 'news' differs substantially with respect to what it adds to that which is already known. As a rule, the value of 'news' is traceable to its unique (contingency) and novel (time) character.

I would like to adapt Kallinikos' epistemological assertion and put it in ontological terms, which do not alter, I believe, the meaning of his own statement: 'information add a distinction (i.e. "concrete and relational points of lack of uniformity", Floridi 2010, 63) and confers something new on *what is already*. In this respect, the value of information, what may be called its informativeness, is indeed a function of the kind of 'news' it is capable of conveying, and 'news' differs substantially with respect to what it adds to *that which is already*. As a rule, the value of 'news' is traceable to its unique (contingency) and novel (time) character'.

Kallinikos stresses that information not only involves a distinction but also an addition that confers something new on what is already (known): the value of information, its informativeness, is for that reason inconsistent with the representation of the infosphere as an environment where everything should be protected and conserved, on the basis of the ontological equality principle, *as it is*. According to our interpretation, everything deserves a minimal level of respect and protection in the infosphere, for the very simple reason that it is what it is in informational terms, that is to say, since brings about a distinction that confers something new on what is already (known). This does not amount at offering a further, additional reason, in order to acknowledge a minimal level of respect towards informational objects, since



this reason is already ontologically rooted in what structural entities are as informational objects, that is, as “cohering clusters of data, understood as concrete, relational points of lack of uniformity”. Does the value of information, i.e. a distinction that confers something new, always deserve a minimal level of respect and protection? It is precisely in the terms laid down by such interrogative that we can understand why Floridi’s ontological equality principle has to be correctly interpreted as a form of ontological pluralism.

## 6 The Ontological Pluralism

Floridi (2008a) has always stressed that the impoverishment of the infosphere depends on the destruction of informational objects and not of information as such. This statement has to be correctly understood: it means that the impoverishment of the infosphere is tragically real and it does not leave the world as it finds it. However, it does not conceive the destruction of informational objects as whatever else ontic destruction: indeed, it considers such destruction from an ontological point of view as the destruction of objects qua *informational* objects, namely, in what they are informational. It is precisely the value of information that is destroyed, that is to say the relational points of lack of uniformity: a sum of differences.

Thanks to the differences that each informational object is meant to introduce into the infosphere, Being is not, in Floridi’s view, a catalogue of objects that strive to protect and conserve themselves (an indiscriminate and conservative attitude towards the *status quo*). On the contrary, Being grows out of the flourishing of differences that allow informational objects to be what they are, namely, to be recognised in their own identity, that is to say, to be distinguished from each other. What many scholars fail to acknowledge is that Floridi’s ontology, which IE is based on, is not only *hospital* (i.e. it attempts to widen the class of entities that deserve a minimal level of respect) but it is, first and foremost, *pluralistic* (i.e. it is aimed to broaden the set of differences that develop and enrich the infosphere from both an epistemological and an ecological standpoint).

This form of pluralism is ontological, since it does not concern the differences that make entities to vary according to (the multiple set of) second-order qualities that are mere qualifications of the same entity (the same ‘seat’ can be white or black, cheap or expensive, etc.). It concerns the differences that make entities to be what they are and to differ from a set of related objects: there is no ontological pluralism, i.e. the richness of Being, without a *principium individuationis*, which is conceived, here, in informational terms. The multiplicity of the ontological pluralism (the Spinozian ‘multitude’) is made of, according to the IE, a sum of differences *and* a sum of relations (“relational points of lack of uniformity”). The proliferation of LoAs is ultimately based in those sets of differences and relations which enable the same entities to be differently recognised out of different relations (of cohering clusters of data). This point is important, since it shows us that the multiplicity of informational objects and, correspondently, of LoAs is not entrenched with any form of relativism. On the contrary, it is the *richness* of the informational status of the object (a sum of differences and a sum of relations) that governs the multiplicity of representations of the object itself.

Floridi's endorsement of a pluralistic approach (both to epistemology and ethics) is not a matter of a subjective preference (for pluralism) but is deeply rooted in his ontological equality principle, that is, in the correlation between the proliferation of points of view (i.e. of LoAs or systems of observables) and the proliferation of reality (i.e. of informational objects). This correlation—this point is crucial—is made, *simultaneously*, of a sum of differences (points of lack of uniformity) and of a sum of relations (relational, cohering clusters of data). It is not an added, supervening property but an intrinsic quality of the infosphere, that is, of conceiving and treating the cosmos as an informational environment. Thanks to this correlation, Floridi's endorsement of pluralism is neither simply theoretical (i.e. there are many irreducible and incomparable points of view or explanations but their multiplicity is never understandable as a property of the infosphere) nor simply naturalistic (i.e. there are many irreducible and incomparable objects but their multiplicity is never understandable as a quality of the informational environment).

Floridi's endorsement of pluralism is ontological, since it based on the correlation between a theoretical and a naturalistic pluralism, which at its turn is deeply rooted in the informativeness of each informational object. In other words, this correlation is based on an intrinsic property that belongs both to the theoretical and the naturalistic conception of the informational environment: this first-order property is the informativeness, the value of the ecological information, its intrinsic capability of conferring something new, different, to the world, by creating a multiplicity of relations. Informationally interpreted, Being is not at all something monolithic and full of uniformity. On the contrary, it grows out of a sum of differences that make differences, to employ Bateson's terms. The informational viewpoint is important for a different, pluralistic conception of Being. As we have pointed out, 'Being is' means informationally 'Being is rich'. This last statement means that Being develops and grows out of a sum of differences and of relations: Being possesses its own history, which is not to be necessarily viewed as a *becoming*, a constant passage from being to non-being. The history of Being, interpreted informationally, is made of its own richness. This implies a different conception of history itself.

In the western tradition, we are acquainted with a conception of history conceived in terms of a true record of memory (a transcription or conservation of the past) more than thought of in terms of a progressive enrichment of Being. However, in both traditions, history is viewed as *magistra vitae*, a set of teachings that come from the richness of experience. This form of richness—a difference that makes difference: Bateson's definition of information seems to me a perfect description of the essence of history—is made possible precisely by the ontological pluralism of information. There would be no pluralistic evidence and account of what has been (*res gestae*), without a strong, informational protection of all differences that make difference, of all *cohering clusters of data, understood as concrete, relational points of lack of uniformity*. This brings us back to our starting point: the protection of what exists is only the necessary but starting point of an ethical approach. Ethics is never concerned with the mere, indiscriminate protection of the *status quo* but with our care and responsibility towards all what is and may be, that is to say in informational terms, towards what is rich, because different and new.

As a final point, the ontological equality principle has to be interpreted, on the basis of a correct interpretation of informativeness, i.e. of the value of the information, as a firm, clear defence of an ontological pluralism, according to which Being is not synonymous of a static and self-referential conception of reality. On the contrary, Being is a synonymous of a reality, interpreted informationally, that possesses its own dynamic and pluralistic history. It is precisely that informational richness of Being that allows history to be *magistra vitae*. This is the reason why I would like to conclude my analysis, in the last section, with a historical example, which tells us more than it is intended to do and is, because of this attitude, more interesting than every other deliberate criticism put on Floridi's IE.

## 7 Conclusions: The 'Nazi example'

In order to sum up the issues and arguments I dealt with, I would like to recall an episode, mentioned by Floridi, which seems to me highly instructive. I quote Floridi (2008b, 191): "I still recall one conference in the nineties when a famous computer ethicist compared me to a sort of Nazi, who wished to reduce humans to numbers, pointing out that Nazi used to tattoo six-digit identity tags on the left arms of the prisoners in their Lager". I do not want to discuss here the content of the accusation that Floridi had been charged with. He has already replied to it. What has captured my attention is the very fact that many people happen to refer to the Nazi evil, when they are intended to charge someone with a morally loaded, strong and irrefutable accusation. I would call this the 'Nazi example', that is, an example that is both striking and irrefutable. The force of suggestion of such example, i.e. the reason why it is striking and so often cited, is rooted in the monstrous and horrifying nature of evil it spells out, to which none would like to be associated with. Why is also a self-evident example, an instance of evil, which cannot be rebutted, and not even put into discussion? In other words, why is not only an instance of evil but, first and foremost, an instance of an indisputable evil? It is not because the Nazi evil was blatantly evil (that would be recursive). Rather, it is for a subtler reason: it is because it has become patently evil even the simple idea of *negating* that the Nazi evil was evil and that it was so blatantly evil (the so-called Negationist thesis). Of course, this is plainly justified, but I wonder how it happens that a historical event represents something blatantly evil, not only for what happened, but also as far as it is negated by the historiography.

I believe it becomes so when anybody (or at least a large number of people) endorses the idea that nobody should remove, cancel or hide whatever historical trace is left of the Nazi period and evil project, since the mere fact of *negating* these traces, i.e. of having these traces erased, is *in itself* judged as unashamedly evil. In other terms, it becomes so if and when anybody recognizes that the traces of the most ominous and monstrous evil (as the Nazi evil) have not to be negated or erased in their informational status, since they bear a crucial witness of such a tremendous evil. The indelible mark, the tattoo of six-digit identity tags impressed upon the body of Jewish prisoners (an information over the reality that becomes an information as reality), is part of that tremendous evil and should be obviously condemned and

*negated as such*, that is, as a part of that instance of evil, being a “new name”, a “gratuitous violence”, a “pure offence” (Levi 1989, 119).

However, it has to be preserved in its informational status, which makes it immoral to negate it or having it erased. It is precisely in this sense that Floridi’s IE is not concerned with the reduction of humans to numbers or information, but with the preservation of the informational status of even that “indelible mark upon the body which uniformly signified difference” (Gilman 1991, 219): that tragic indelible mark that bears witness of such *difference*, as long as prisoners and historians had preserved it from erasure (from *entropy*, to employ Floridi’s terms). Therefore, that “indelible mark of evil” turns out to have also a moral value and significance *as informational object* (and only as such). To preserve an informational object does not mean, according to us, to protect an object per se, and which can be in addition described in informational terms. On the contrary—the Nazi example explains it—it means to preserve an object in what it is informational, i.e. in what it adds a difference, a lack of uniformity. Here, that difference is what makes the truthfulness of the historical tale to be possible, relevant and instructive: the historical tale refers to “a difference that makes a difference”, which can no longer be neglected, negated and erased.

Thus, it would be blatantly evil to negate the informational status of what has been blatantly evil. It is thanks to an informational attitude if we want to preserve even the trace of what leads us to the memory of evil. Since we attach a moral value to that informational attitude, it is so important to us to have no informational objects erased. Thanks to the ontological pluralism, i.e. the protection of differences, endorsed by the ontological equality principle of information ethics, an informational object, even the one that is an “indelible mark” of evil, plays a crucial role in making us recognise why that instance of evil is an irrefutable example of a blatantly evil. This is what Floridi’s IE stands for, and which Primo Levi best acknowledged, *avant la lettre*, in his inspired words recalling how much this informational attitude is a matter of personal responsibility (Levi 1989, 119–120):

At a distance of forty years, my tattoo has become a part of my body. I don’t glory in it, but I am not ashamed of it either; I do not display and do not hide it. I show it unwillingly to those who ask out of pure curiosity; readily and with anger who say they are incredulous. Often young people ask me why I don’t have it erased, and this surprises me: why should I? There are not many of us in the world to bear this witness.

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