1 Moral Mediators
How Artifacts Make us Moral

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ABSTRACT. In recent times, non-human beings, objects, and structures – for example computational tools and devices – have acquired new moral worth and intrinsic values. Kantian tradition in ethics teaches that human beings do not have to be treated solely as “means”, or as “things”, that is in a merely instrumental way, but also have to be treated as “ends”. I contend that human beings can be treated as “things” in the sense that they have to be “respected” as things are sometimes (sections 1-2). People have to reclaim instrumental and moral values already dedicated to external things and objects. To the aim of reconfiguring human dignity in our technological world I introduce the concept of moral mediator (section 4.2), which takes advantage of some suggestions deriving from my previous research on epistemic mediators and on manipulative abduction. Technology moves us to a better world. I contend that through technology people can simplify and solve moral tasks when they are in presence of incomplete information and possess a diminished capacity to act morally. Many external things, usually inert from the moral point of view, can be transformed into what we call moral mediators. Hence, not all of the moral tools are inside the head, many of them are shared and distributed in “external” objects and structures which function as ethical devices.

1 Rational acting in a human unsettled world

Morality could be defined, at the very last, as “the effort to guide one’s conduct by reason – that is, to do what there are the best reasons for doing – while giving equal weight to the interests of each individual who will be affected by one’s conduct: there are not privileged people” [Rachels, 1999].

Moral reasoning could be viewed as a form of “possible worlds” anticipation, a way of getting chances to shape the human world and act in it. It could be of help to prefigure risks, possibilities, and effects of human acting, and to promote or prevent a broad variety of guidelines. Hence, we need 1) to possess good and sound principles/reasons applicable to the various problems, able to give rise to arguments that can be offered for opposite
moral views, and 2) appropriate ways of reasoning which permits us to apply the available reasons in the best way. “Creating ethics” means creating the world and its directions, in front of different (real or abstract) situations and problems. This process requires the adoption of skillful and creative ideas, in order to react in response to new previously unknown cases or in cases of moral conflict. In this way events and situations can be reinvented either as an opportunity or as a risk for new moral directions.

2 Respecting things as people, respecting people as things

In recent times, non-human beings, objects, and structures like technological artifacts and machines have acquired new moral worth and intrinsic values. Kantian tradition in ethics teaches that human beings do not have to be treated solely as “means”, or as “things”, that is in a merely instrumental way, but also have to be treated as “ends”. I contends that human beings can be treated as “things” in the sense that they have to be “respected” as things are sometimes. People have to reclaim instrumental and moral values already enjoyed by external things and objects.

It is well-known that Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative states “Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” [Kant, 1964, p. 88]. When dealing with “The formula of the end in itself”, (pp. 95-98). Kant observes that

[…] man, and in general every rational being exists as an end in himself and not merely as a means for arbitrary use by this or that will: he must in all his actions, whether they are directed to himself or to other rational beings, always be viewed at the same time as an end (p. 95).

Kant’s considerations lead us to the following practical imperative: “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end” (p. 96). In the “kingdom of ends everything has either a price or a dignity. If it has a price, something else can be put in its place as an equivalent; if it is exalted above all price and so admits of no equivalent, then it has a dignity”(p. 102). Things that human beings need have a “market price”; moreover, items that are merely desired rather than needed have an affective “fancy price” [Affektionspreis]. But “[...] that which constitutes the sole condition under which anything can be an end in itself has not merely a relative value – that is, a price – but has an intrinsic value – that is, dignity” (ibid.)
Kant’s wonderful lesson can be inverted: it is possible for things to be treated or respected in ways one usually reserves for human beings. Many things, or means, previously devoid of value, or previously valuable only in terms of their market price or affective price, can also acquire a moral status or intrinsic value. Conversely, just as things can be assigned new kinds of value, so, too can human beings, for there are moral positive aspects of treating people like things, as we shall see.

Anthropocentric ideas, like those that inform Kant’s imperative, have made it difficult for people to acquire moral values usually associated with things and for things to attain moral worth traditionally reserved for people. We said that, in Kantian terms, people do not have to be “treated as means (and only as means)”1. I propose upgrading that idea with a new one – respecting people as things in a positive sense. In this scenario, people are respected as “means” in a way that creates a virtuous circle, one in which positive moral aspects enjoyed by things can be used to reshape moral endowments attributed to people.

Perhaps the first “things” to gain new moral rights in western culture were women, a change that was not universally welcomed. Indeed, the ideas propagated in this direction by Mary Wollstonecraft in her 1792 treatise *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* were initially considered absurd [Singer, 1998]. This sort of ideological conflict has been played out again in the last few decades as animal rights advocates and environmental ethicists have waged a struggle similar to the one women faced in the eighteenth century – that of redefining a means as an end. To achieve that goal, some intellectuals and activists have sought to reframe how various plants, animals, ecosystems – even the land itself – are valued so that they are regarded as “ends” and accorded the rights and protection that status entails. As we will see in the following sections also technological artifacts and machines have been redefined as ends and have acquired new moral roles.

A curious example of the importance of my motto “respecting people as thing” is related to the case of the “endangered species wannabes”. Many people have complained about disappearing wildlife receiving more moral and legal protection than disappearing cultural traditions. A relatively recent US federal statute, the Visual Artists Rights Act of 1990, appropriates the language of ecological preservation when it establishes “rights of attribution, integrity, and the prevention of destruction of art of recognized stature for the creators of certain paintings, drawings, prints, sculptures, or photographs” [Nagle, 1998]. The importance of this analogy lies in the fact that some people consider themselves endangered because they do not feel

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1To further clarify my concern about the moral relationships between “people” and “things” cf. [Magnani, forthcoming, chapter 1].
as if they are treated as well as things (means).

Let us illustrate some ethical issues just related to the relationship between “beings” and “things”.

3 Building ethical chances

Not only researchers in epistemology but also researchers in ethics stress the attention on the role of *imagination* respectively in scientific reasoning and in ethical thinking and deliberations. If we interpret “imagination” just as a process of knowledge gathering and shaping, it can be seen as a process which promotes new cognitive chances leading to see things as we would not otherwise have seen them. To see a “moral world” means to see the world in an original way: ethical understanding involves coming to see some aspects of reality in a particular way that influences human acting in shaping and surviving the future.

Johnson stresses the attention on the cognitive processes which underlie “moral imagination”. “Moral principles without moral imagination become trivial, impossible to apply, and even a hindrance to morally constructive action” [Johnson, 1956]. This means that in ethics analogical and metaphorical reasoning is very important, because of its capacity to “re-conceptualize” the particular situation at hand. Consequently, model-based tools\(^2\) for ethical deliberations should not be considered negative, as subjective, free flowing, creative processes not governed by any rule or constrained by any rationally defined concepts so that we are led to see imagination as an enemy of morality. The role of a sort of a model-based imaginative activity is clear, for instance, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant clarifies the importance of *intermediate* thinking devices able to make human beings capable of linking abstract principles to the real world of experience (cf. the case of the role of imagination in geometrical construction). Relating the discourse to moral rules, Kant develops the idea that a pure moral rule (as a maxim of action) is applied to the concrete experience as a kind of “typification” – a sort of figurative substitute [Kant, 1956]. This typification could be interpreted as a kind of *figurative envisioning* of a non-existing world as a means for judging a given moral situation. Kant denies that

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2 I introduced the concept of model-based abduction in [Magnani, 2001]. The term “model-based reasoning” is used to indicate the construction and manipulation of various kinds of representations, not mainly sentential and/or formal, but mental and/or related to external mediators. Obvious examples of model-based inferences are constructing and manipulating visual representations, thought experiments, analogical reasoning. In this light also emotional feeling can be interpreted as a kind of model-based cognition. Of course abductive reasoning – which is reasoning to hypotheses – can be performed in a model-based way, internally or with the help of external mediators. In this case I am referring to an activity of producing “moral” hypotheses in an abductive model-based way.
this typification involves imagination, for he maintains moral judgment a
matter of pure practical reason, but, as Johnson concludes, “what could be
more thoroughly imaginative than this form of figurative envisioning that is
based on a metaphoric mapping?” [Johnson, 1956]. It is through this kind
of typification that chance production and promotion is enhanced in ethics.
How does this occur?

Beyond rules and principles, hence, also prototypes, schemas, frames, and
metaphors are vehicles of model-based moral knowledge, sometimes very ef-
ficient when facing moral problems. For example, morality as a grammar
represents a typical metaphorical “prototype” exploited in ethics: grammat-
ic principles are in analogy to moral principles like in the simple case of
“speaking well” and “acting well”; action as a metaphorical “motion” leads
to the idea that moral principles would be rules telling us which “action-
paths” we may take, which ones we must take, and which we must never
take (cit., p. 43). When looking for consequences of our moral actions and
deliberations, this envisioning of a non existing world as a means for judging
a proposed action can be performed in a model-based way.

In the following sections I will illustrate how these model-based ways of
moral behavior are related to what I call “moral mediators”.

4 Delegating ethics and the role of moral mediators
In [Magnani, 2001] I have illustrated abductive reasoning (reasoning to ex-
planatory hypotheses) and I have described the role – in science – of what
we can call “thinking through doing”. This surely suggests that reasoning
and inferential processes also have interesting extra-theoretical character-
istics. Also moral inferences have a role in the manipulation of various
external objects and non-human structures as substitutes of moral “feel-
ing” and “thinking” and supplements to them: there is a morality through
doing. In this case the cognitive delegation to external objects, artifacts,
and machines is constitutively ethical, and relates to the creation of what I
call moral mediators.

The existence of this kind of extra-theoretical cognitive behavior is also
testified by the many everyday situations in which humans are perfectly
able to perform very efficacious (and habitual) tasks without the immediate
possibility of providing their conceptual explanation. In some cases the
conceptual account for doing these things was at one point present in the
memory, but now has deteriorated, and it is necessary to reproduce it, in
other cases the account has to be constructed for the first time, like in
creative settings of manipulative abduction in science.

It is difficult to establish an exhaustive list of invariant behaviors that
can be considered ethical manipulative reasoning. Expertly manipulating
non-human objects in real or artificial environments requires old and new templates of behavior that are repeated at least somewhat regularly. Only exceptionally we are referring here to action that simply follows articulated, previously established plans; at issue are embodied, implicit patterns of behavior that I call tacit templates. This variety of “hidden” moral activity is still conjectural: these templates are embedded moral hypotheses that inform both new and routine behaviors, and, as such, enable a kind of moral “doing”. In some situations, templates of action can be selected from those already stored in the mind-body system, as when a young boy notices his baby sister crying and, without thinking, automatically tries to comfort the infant by stroking her head or singing a lullaby as he has seen his parents do many times. In other instances, new templates must be created in order to achieve certain moral outcomes.

The following tacit templates of moral behavior (cf. Figures 1 and 2) present interesting features:

1. sensitivity to curious or anomalous aspects of the moral situation;
2. preliminary sensitivity to dynamical character of the moral situation, and not only to entities and their properties;
3. referral to manipulations that exploit artificial created environments and externally induced feelings to free new possibly stable and repeatable sources of information about hidden moral knowledge and constraints. This template feature is apparent, say, in a discussion of the moral problem of capital punishment when we exploit resources like statistics, scientific research, or information from interviews to gather real rather than faulty information, like the one about the genuine relief the murder victim’s relatives feel when the criminal is killed. In this way a new configuration of the social orders of the affected groups of people is achieved;
4. various contingent ways of spontaneous moral acting. This case contains a cluster of very common moral templates (cf. Figure 1);
5. spontaneous moral action that can be useful in presence of incomplete or inconsistent information or a diminished capacity to act morally.

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3I just list them and describe in some details the templates which are directly related to the construction of moral mediators. For a complete treatment [Magnani, forthcoming].
4On the reconfiguration of social orders that is realized in science (laboratories), cf. [Knorr-Cetina, 1999].
5Analogues of all these manipulative templates are active in epistemic settings: cf. [Magnani, 2001; Magnani, 2002; Magnani and Dossena, 2005].
upon the world. Such action works on more than just a “perceptual” level;

6. action as a control of sense data illustrates how we can change the position of our bodies (and/or of the external objects) to reconfigure social orders and collective relationships; it also shows how to exploit artificially created events to get various new kinds of stimulation. Action of this kind provides otherwise unavailable tactile, visual, kinesthetic, sentimental, emotional, and bodily information that, for example, helps us take care of other people;

7. action enables us to build new external artifactual models of ethical mechanisms and structures (through “institutions,” for example) to substitute for the corresponding “real” and “natural” ones. (Keep in mind, of course, that these “real” and “natural” structures are also artificial – our cultural concept of “family” is not a natural institution.) For instance, we can replace the “natural” structure “family” with an environment better suited for an agent’s moral needs, which occurs when, say, we remove a child from the care of abusive family members. In such a case we are exploiting the power of a artificial “house” to reconfigure relationships. A different setting – a new but
still artificial framework – facilitates the child’s recovery and allows him or her to rebuild moral perceptions damaged by the abuse. A similar effect occurs when people with addiction problems move into group homes where they receive treatment and support. An even simpler example might be the external structures we commonly use to facilitate good manners and behavior: fences, the numbers we take while waiting at a bakery, rope-and-stanchion barriers that keep lines of people in order, etc.

Of course many of the actions that are entertained to build the artificial models above are not tacit, but explicitly projected and planned. However, imagine the people that first created these artifacts (for instance the founders of the group houses for addicted people), it is not unlikely that they created them simply and mainly “through doing” (creation of new tacit templates of moral actions) and not by following already well-established projects. Many of the actions which are performed to build technological artifacts and machine endowed with moral delegations (moral mediators) are of this type.

![Diagram of moral templates](image)

Figure 2. Conjectural moral templates II.

### 4.1 Moral agents and moral patients

Technological artifacts and machines are designed, produced, distributed, and understood in the human world; they are strictly intertwined with the
social interactions of humans: technology affects what people do and how they do it. For example computers possess moral agency because they 1. have a kind of intentionality and 2. can have effects on the so-called “moral patients” that is they can harm or improve the interests of beings capable of having their interests impeded or furthered: “Artifacts are intentional insofar as they are poised to behave in a certain way when given input of a particular kind. The artifact designer has a complex role here for while the designer’s intentions are in the artifacts, the functionality of the artifact often goes well beyond what the designer anticipated or envisaged. Both inputs from users and outputs of the artifacts can be unanticipated, unforeseen, and harmful” [Johnson, 2004].

Some ethicists maintain that entities can be framed as moral patients and as moral agents. Not only human beings but also things can be conceived of as moral patients (as entities that can be acted upon for good and evil) and also as moral agents (as entities that can perform actions and are sources of moral action, again for good or evil).

There are many cases:

1. the two classes are disjoint (no entity qualifies as both an agent and a patient, this is clearly unrealistic);
2. the first class can be a proper subset of the second;
3. the two classes intersect each other; (both cases 2. and 3. are not promising because they both require at least one moral agent that in principle could not qualify as a moral patient (we only have supernatural agents that can fulfil this requirement, for example a God that affects the world but is not affected by the world));
4. all entities that qualify as agents also qualify as patients and vice versa (standard position), and, finally,
5. all entities that qualify as patients also qualify as agents.

The fact that animals seem to qualify as moral patients, that are excluded from playing the role of moral agents requires a change in the perspective 5. In short, certainly “things” (and so artificial entities) extend the class

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\[\text{Floridi and Sanders, 2004}.\] Carstein-Stahl [2004] has recently investigated the problem concerning whether computers can be considered autonomous moral agents. Since computers cannot understand the information they store and manage, they lack the basic capacity “to reflect morality in anything”. He argues on this point introducing an interesting and curious test called “the moral Turing test”.

\[\text{On the legal extension of personhood to artificial agents (for instance shopping websites) cf. the interesting conclusions of the recent [Chopra and White, 2003]. Very}\]
of entities that can be involved in a moral situation, both as moral agents (for instance Internet) and as moral patients that enjoy intrinsic values (for instance a work of art). Of course the properties enjoyed by “things” of being a moral agent or patient are not the same as that of human beings. To make an example, artifacts can be agents of moral actions, but they are neither responsible nor exhibit free will, full intentionality, and emotions like human beings.

I think this distinction between moral patients and agents, certainly correct and useful, nevertheless obliterates the dynamic aspects instead explained following my perspective in terms of moral delegation and externalization. Indeed moral delegation to external objects and artifacts does not take place because a given thing is supposed to intrinsically possess a given set of properties appraised on their own. For example, the Gioconda has no free will, no proper intentions, and so on. However, the way it dynamically interacts with humans, and how they respond to it, is what gives value to it. In this sense, my conception differs from the one that distinguishes moral patient from moral agent.

According to that view, the Gioconda (or an Internet selling system) would be a moral patient, because it does not possess all those features shared (or supposed to be shared) by human beings (conscious will, an actual free will, proper intentions, etc.). However, this view fails to account for the process by which we continuously delegate and give (moral) value to the things that are around us. For example, how could the patient-agent distinction account for the reason why the first present you received from your girlfriend may acquire such a great (intrinsic) value? It could be an old and haggard t-shirt, but it doesn’t matter, indeed.

Moreover, there is an additional reason to prefer my conception about moral delegation described above. The idea that some artifacts and machines should be respected, or should have rights on their own is also based on the claim they perform important cognitive processes, sometimes endowed with instrumental and economical value. They are moral patients and as patients they have to be respected. According to my view, this is a result of a moral mediation. As we delegate to the machines new moral worth, we can use them to depict previously unseen new moral features of cognition, that for human beings acquires a new value and a new extension. Some machines can play the role of moral mediators because they mediate new aspects of human beings’ moral lives.

The patient-agent distinction specially elicits differences: it is very obvi-
ous that the moral agency of computers is not the same as that of human beings, and in this respect it is not different in kind from that of other technologies. It has been argued that computers have a kind of external intentionality (that is expressed in states outside of the body, such as speech acts, written sentences, maps, and other designed artifacts), but they cannot have internal intentionality: their agency can be compared to human “surrogate” agency, such as tax accountants or estate executors [Powers, 2004]. This illustrates the kind of moral character of computer systems by showing that computer systems have a kind of intentionality and have effects on moral patients, hence they are appropriate objects of moral appraisal. In these cases we are faced with a kind of “mind-less morality” [Floridi and Sanders, 2003]. The problem of the moral agency of artifacts also involves the construction of the suitable policies we can (and/or have to) adopt for “punishing” – that is censoring, modifying, re-engineering, removing – them.

I think the more extended concept of “moral mediator” can better encompass and explain the issues above: the moral patients and moral agents are special cases of moral mediators.

### 4.2 Moral mediators

The considerations in the previous subsection “Distributing Morality” indicate the fact that a significant portion of manipulations is also devoted to building a vast new source of information and knowledge: external moral mediators. I have derived this expression from “epistemic mediators,” a phrase I introduced in a previous book [Magnani, 2001, ch. 3], which consist of external representations, objects, and artifacts that are relevant in scientific discovery and reasoning processes. As I have already said moral mediators represent a kind of redistribution of the moral effort through managing objects and information in such a way that we can overcome the poverty and the unsatisfactory character of the moral options immediately represented or found internally (for example principles, prototypes, etc.). I also think that the analysis of moral mediators can help accounting for the mechanisms of the “macroscopic and growing phenomenon of global moral actions and collective responsibilities resulting from the ‘invisible hand’ of systemic interactions among several agents at local level” [Floridi and Sanders, 2003].

More than just a way to move the world toward desirable goals, action also serves a moral role: we have said that when people do not have adequate information or lack the capacity to act morally upon the world, they can restructure their worlds in order to simplify and solve moral tasks. Moral mediators are also used to elicit latent constraints in the human-
environment system. The links discovered grant us access to precious new ethical information. For instance, let us imagine a wife whose work requires long hours away from her husband, and her frequent absences cause conflict in their relationship. She then spontaneously begins to spend more quality time with her spouse in an attempt to save their marriage (cf. Figure 3). The mediating effect of her spontaneous action can cause variables affected by “unexpected” and “positive” events in the relationship to covary with informative, sentimental, sexual, emotional, and, generally speaking, bodily variables.

![Figure 3. The extra-theoretical dimension of ethical chance in marriage.](image)

There was no discernible connection between these hidden and overt variables before the couple adopted a reconfigured “social” order – that is, increased time together – and uncovering such links reveals important new information, which, in our example, might be renovated and unexpected sexual pleasure, astonishing intellectual agreement, or surprising identical emotional concerns on specific matters.

Natural phenomena can also serve as external artifactual moral mediators: when in previous chapters we considered the problem of “respecting people as things”, we were referring to the ability of external “natural” objects to create opportunities for new ethical knowledge, as in the case of endangered species: we have learned something new by seeing how people...
seek to redefine themselves as “endangered”. Many external things that have been traditionally considered morally inert can be transformed into moral mediators. For example, we can use animals to identify previously unrecognized moral features of human beings or other living creatures, as we can do with the earth, or (non natural) cultural entities; we can also use external “tools” like writing, narrative, ritual, and various kinds of pertinent institutions to reconfigure unsatisfactory social orders. Hence, not all moral tools are inside the head – many are shared and distributed in external objects and structures that function as ethical devices.

External moral mediators function as components of a memory system that crosses the boundary between person and environment. For example, they are able to transform the tasks involved in simple manipulations that promote further moral inferences at the level of model-based abduction. When an abused child is moved to a house to reconfigure her social relationships this new moral mediator can help her to experience new model-based inferences – new model-based cognitive hypotheses – (for instance new emotions concerning adults and new imageries about her past abuse).

Moreover, I can alter my bodily experience of pain through action by following the template control of sense data, as we previously outlined, that is through shifting – unconsciously – the position of my body and changing its relationships with other humans and non-humans experiencing distress. Mother Theresa’s personal moral rich feeling and consideration of pain had been certainly shaped by her closeness to starving and miserable people and by her manipulation of their bodies. In many people, moral training is often related to these kinds of spontaneous (and “lucky”) manipulations of their own bodies and sense data so that they build morality immediately and non-reflectively “through doing”.

Artifacts of course play the role of moral mediators in many ways. Let us consider some effects on privacy mediated by certain machines. Beyond the supports of paper, telephone, and media, many human interactions are strongly mediated (and potentially recorded) through the Internet. What about the concept of identity, so connected to the concept of freedom? At present identity has to be considered in a broad sense: the externally stored amount of data, information, images, and texts that concern us as individuals is enormous. This storage of information creates for each person a kind of external “data shadow” that, together with the biological body, forms a “cyborg” of both flesh and electronic data that identifies us or potentially identifies us. I contend that this complex new “information being” depicts new ontologies that in turn involve new moral problems. We can no longer apply old moral rules and old-fashioned arguments to

\footnote{Cf. above footnote 2.}
beings that are at the same time biological (concrete) and virtual, situated in a three-dimensional local space but potentially “globally omnipresent” as information-packets. For instance, where we are located cybernetically is no longer simple to define, and the increase in telepresence technologies will further affect this point. It becomes clear that external, non biological resources contribute to our variable sense of who and what we are and what we can do. More examples dealing with computational and other artifacts as moral mediators are illustrated in [Magnani, forthcoming].

Throughout history, women have traditionally been thought to place more value on personal relationships than men do, and they have been generally regarded as more adept in situations requiring intimacy and caring. It would seem that women’s basic moral orientation emphasizes taking care of both people and external things through personal, particular acts rather than relating to others through an abstract, general concern about humanity. The ethics of care does not consider the abstract “obligation” as essential; moreover, it does not require that we impartially promote the interests of everyone alike. Rather, it focuses on small-scale relationships with people and external objects, so that, for example, it is not important to “think” of helping disadvantaged children all over the world (like men aim at doing) but to “do” so when called to do so, everywhere.

Consequently, “taking care” is an important way to look at people and objects and, as a form of morality accomplished “through doing”, achieves status as a fundamental kind of moral inference and knowledge. Respecting people as things is a natural extension of the ethics of care; a person who treats “non-human” household objects with solicitude, for example, is more likely to be seen as someone who will treat human beings in a similarly conscientious fashion. Consequently, even a lowly kitchen vase can be considered a moral mediator in the sense I give to this cognitive concept.

When I clean my computer, I am caring for it because of its economical and worth and its value as a tool for other humans. When, on the other hand, I use my computer as an epistemic or cognitive mediator for my research or didactic activities, I am considering its intellectual prosthetic worth. To make a case for respecting people as we respect computers, we can call attention to the values human beings have in common with these machines: 1) humans beings are – biological – “tools” with economic and instrumental value, and as such, can be “used” to teach and inform others.

Moreover, both feminist skepticism in ethics and the so-called “expressive-collaborative model” of morality look at moral life as “a continuing negotiation among people, a socially situated practice of mutually allotting, assuming, or deflecting responsibilities of important kinds, and understanding the implications of doing so” [Urban-Walker, 1996, 276]. Of course, this idea is contrasted with the so-called “theoretical-juridical conception of morality”.

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much the way we use hardware and software, so humans are instrumentally
precious for other humans in sharing skills of various kinds; and 2) like
computers, people are skillful problem solvers imbued with the moral and
intrinsic worth of cognition.

5 Conclusions

The main thesis of this paper is that in recent times, non-human beings,
objects, and structures like technological artifacts and machines have ac-
quired new moral worth and intrinsic values. Kantian tradition in ethics
teaches that human beings do not have to be treated solely as “means”, or
as “things”, that is in a merely instrumental way, but also have to be treated
as “ends”. I contend that human beings can be treated as “things” in the
sense that they have to be “respected” as things are sometimes. People
have to reclaim instrumental and moral values already enjoyed by exter-
nal things and objects. This is central to the aim of reconfiguring human
dignity in our technological world. Aiming at illustrating the intrigue of
this ethical struggle between human beings and things I have discussed the
role of objects, structures, and technological artifacts by presenting them
moral carriers and mediators. I maintain this perspective can be very fruit-
ful to approach many other problems related to the relationships between
machines and ethics.

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