

The Other Question

Can and Should Robots have Rights?

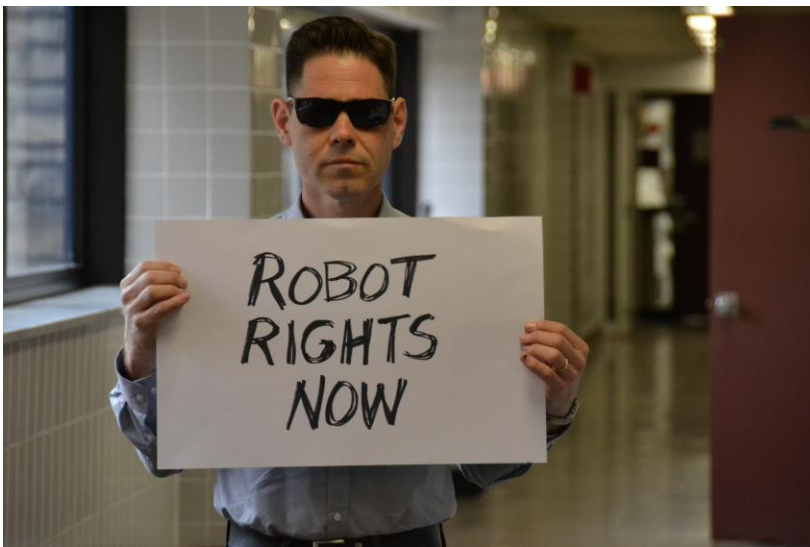


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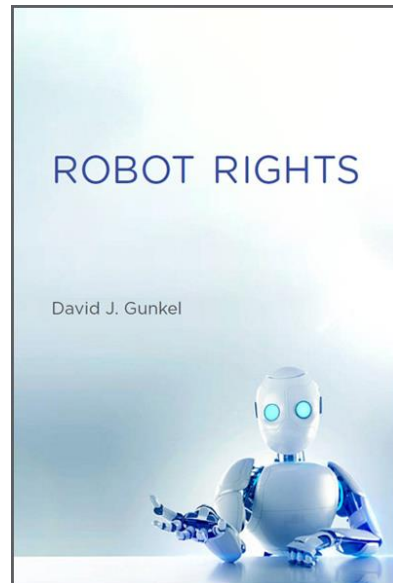
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A provocative attempt to think about what was previously considered unthinkable: a serious philosophical case for the rights of robots.

 The MIT Press



Can and should robots have rights?

1. Thinking the Unthinkable

Why is the question of robot rights considered to be unthinkable?

2. The Is-Ought Problem

Difference between the two modal verbs that organize the inquiry.

3. Modalities of Robot Rights

Four ways of structuring an argument concerning robot rights

4. Thinking Otherwise

Challenge the rules of the game and provide for another way of theorizing moral standing



1. Thinking the Unthinkable



SOP for responding to the question of AI/Robot Rights

1. Thinking the Unthinkable



"The idea of machine consciousness and rights is a distraction, it's fairy tale stuff. We need proper informed debate, about the public safety about for instance the millions of domestic robots that are predicted to be arriving in the next few years." – Noel Sharkey



"I know of no one within the serious robotics community who would use that phrase, 'robot rights'." – Alan Winfield



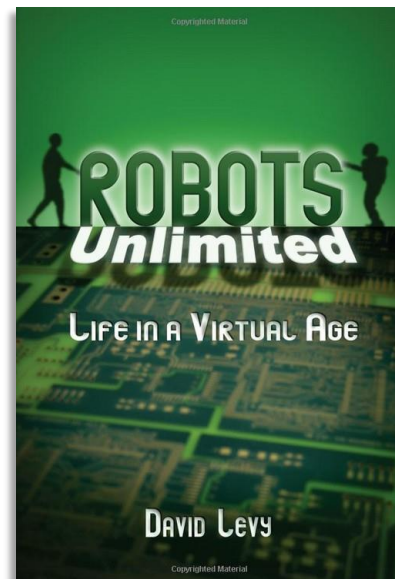
"It may be fun to speculate about such questions, but it is also distracting and irresponsible, given the pressing issues we have at hand." – Luciano Floridi

1. Thinking the Unthinkable

“To many people the notion of robots having rights is *unthinkable*.”

***Unthinkable*¹** = unable to be thought using existing conceptual apparatus, e.g. instrumental theory of technology

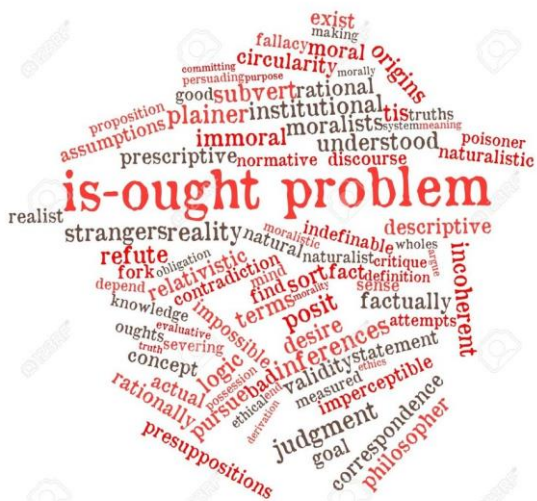
***Unthinkable*²** = something that is to be deliberately avoided and not submitted to thought insofar as it is considered a distraction, a waste of time, or fairy tale stuff.



1. Thinking the Unthinkable

Summary

- Purposefully avoiding a question by declaring it to be unthinkable sounds more like an effort to protect existing orthodoxies and less like science.
- Instead of dismissing the question as unthinkable, it would be better to ask, to investigate, and to make an informed decision based on evidence and data.



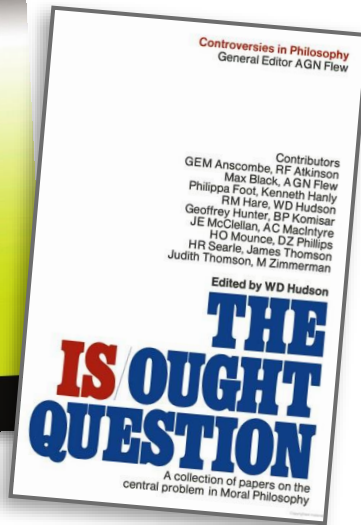
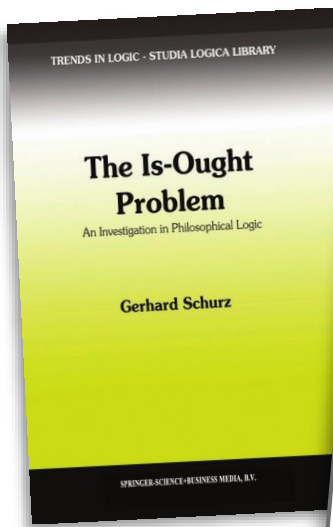
2. The Is-Ought Problem

2. The Is-Ought Problem

"In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary ways of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when all of a sudden I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it should be observed and explained; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. But as authors do not commonly use this precaution, I shall presume to recommend it to the readers; and am persuaded, that this small attention would subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceived by reason" – David Hume 1740



2. The Is-Ought Problem



2. The Is-Ought Problem

Can robots have rights?

Are robots capable of being moral subjects?

“Is” Question
Ontological Query

Should robots have rights?

Ought robots be considered moral subjects?

“Ought” Question
Axiological Query

2. The Is-Ought Problem

S1 = Robots can have rights.
Robots are moral subjects.

S2 = Robots should have rights.
Robots ought to be moral subjects.

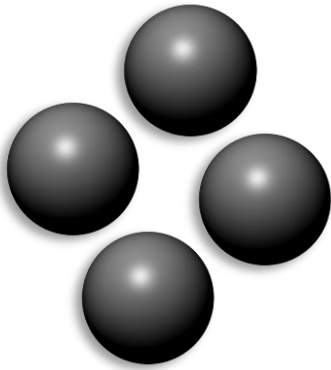
Four modalities concerning the moral situation of robots

!S1 !S2

S1 S2

S1 !S2

!S1 S2



3. Modalities of Robot Rights

3. Modalities of Robot Rights

!S1

Robots are incapable of having rights.

!S2

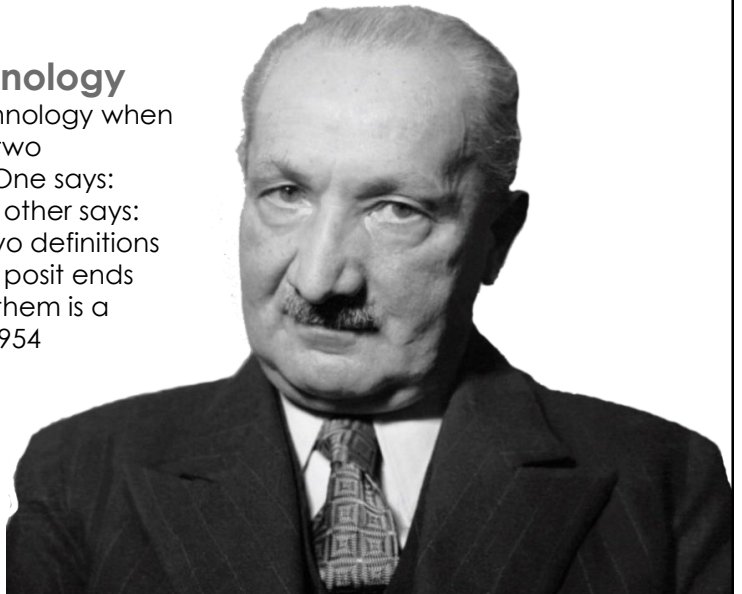
Robots should not have rights.

3. Modalities of Robot Rights

!S1 !S2

Instrumental Theory of Technology

"We ask the question concerning technology when we ask what it is. Everyone knows the two statements that answer our question. One says: Technology is a means to an end. The other says: Technology is a human activity. The two definitions of technology belong together. For to posit ends and procure and utilize the means to them is a human activity." – Martin Heidegger 1954



3. Modalities of Robot Rights

IS1 IS2



"Computer systems are produced, distributed, and used by people engaged in social practices and meaningful pursuits. This is as true of current computer systems as it will be of future computer systems. No matter how independently, automatic, and interactive computer systems of the future behave, they will be the products (direct or indirect) of human behavior, human social institutions, and human decision." – Deborah Johnson 2006

3. Modalities of Robot Rights

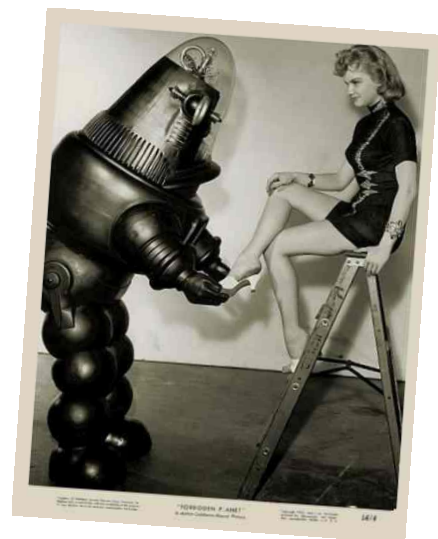
!S1 !S2

+ Human Exceptionalism

Robots are tools; only human beings have rights and responsibilities.

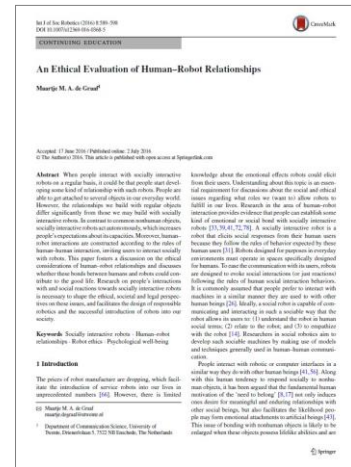
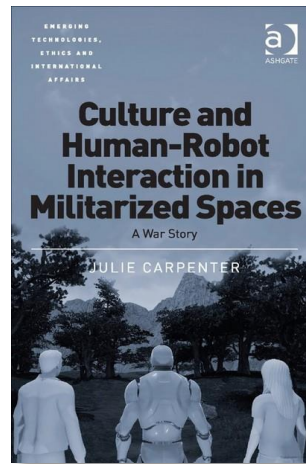
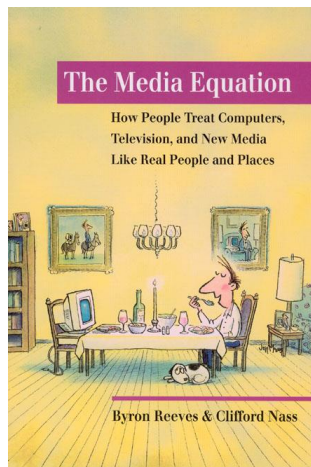
- Actual Data

This decision is disputed by actual data produced by and derived from human robot interaction (HRI) studies.



3. Modalities of Robot Rights

IS1 IS2



3. Modalities of Robot Rights

IS1 IS2

Our head tells us it's just a robot, but our heart cannot help but like it.



3. Modalities of Robot Rights

S1

Robots are now or will soon be capable of having rights.

S2

Robots should have rights.

3. Modalities of Robot Rights

S1 S2

"The 'artificial intelligence' programs in practical use today are sufficiently primitive that their morality (or otherwise) is not a serious issue. But that will not remain for long...Not too far in the future, however, things are going to be different. AI's will possess true artificial general intelligence (AGI), not necessarily emulating human intelligence, but equaling and likely surpassing it. At this point, the morality or otherwise of AGI's will become a highly significant issue" - Ben Goertzel 2002



3. Modalities of Robot Rights

S1 S2

**+ Wait-and-See**

If and when robots can achieve some morally relevant capacity, then we will be justified in extending rights.

3. Modalities of Robot Rights

S1 S2

**+ Wait-and-See**

If and when robots can achieve some morally relevant capacity, then we will be justified in extending rights.

- Deferral & Is-Ought Fallacy

Commits the is/ought fallacy, deriving what ought to be from what is.

This solution is less a solution and more of a decision not to decide.

3. Modalities of Robot Rights

S1

Robots are capable of having rights.

!S2

Robots should not have rights.

3. Modalities of Robot Rights

S1 IS2



Robots should be slaves

Joanna J. Bryson

Robots should not be described as persons, nor given legal nor moral responsibility for their actions. Robots are fully owned by us. We determine their goals and behavior, either directly or indirectly through specifying their intelligence or how their intelligence is acquired. In humanising them, we not only further dehumanise real people, but also encourage poor human decision making in the allocation of resources and responsibility. This is true at both the individual and the institutional level. This chapter describes both causes and consequences of these errors, including consequences already present in society. I make specific proposals for best incorporating robots into our society. The potential of robotics should be understood as the potential to extend our own abilities and to address our own goals.

In this chapter I focus on the ethics of building and using non-human artificial Companions. The primary topic of this book is digital Companions, not conventional robots, but both pragmatically and ethically the issues are the same. A robot is any artificial entity situated in the real world that transforms perception into action. If a digital assistant listens and talks to a human, it is a robot – it is an agent, an actor, living in and changing the world. My thesis is that robots should be built, marketed and considered legally as slaves, not Companion peers.

Digital agents not only change the world by affecting the people they converse with. They may also communicate what they learn to others – directly or indirectly through shared databases or others' agents. Agents transmit, create and may even destroy information, including human opinions and reputations. Digital agents may use the Internet to actively purchase goods or services, thus causing the movement of physical objects as well as ideas. Finally, some Companion agents really are conventional slaves of technology.

3. Modalities of Robot Rights

S1 IS2



"It is unquestionably within our society's capacity to define robots and other AI as moral agents and patients. In fact, many authors (both philosophers and technologists) are currently working on this project. It may be technically possible to create AI that would meet contemporary requirements for agency or patiency. But even if it is possible, neither of these two statements makes it either necessary or desirable that we should do so." – Joanna Bryson, 2016

3. Modalities of Robot Rights

S1 IS2

+ Reconfirm Instrumentalism

No matter how interactive or seemingly intelligent our robots become, they should be considered instruments serving our needs and desires.



3. Modalities of Robot Rights

S1 IS2

- Asceticism

Thou shalt not create robot companions.
Thou shalt not treat your robot as yourself.

Abstinence Only solution to the social opportunities and challenges of robots.



3. Modalities of Robot Rights

S1 I52

- Asceticism

Thou shalt not create robot companions.
Thou shalt not treat your robot as yourself.

Abstinence Only solution to the social opportunities and challenges of robots.

- Slavery 2.0

The slavery metaphor. This solution institutes and legitimizes a kind of robot servitude or next-gen slavery.



3. Modalities of Robot Rights

!S1

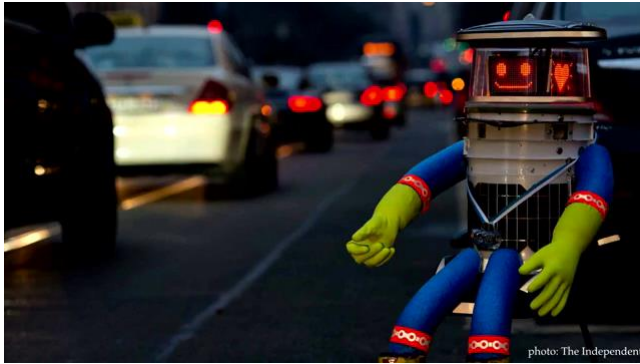
Robots are incapable of having rights.

S2

Robots should have rights.

3. Modalities of Robot Rights

IS1 S2



3. Modalities of Robot Rights

IS1 S2

"Looking at state of the art technology our robots are nowhere close to the intelligence and complexity of humans or animals, nor will they reach this stage in the near future. And yet, while it seems far-fetched for a robot's legal status to differ from that of a toaster, there is already a notable difference in how we interact with certain types of robotic objects." – Kate Darling, 2012



3. Modalities of Robot Rights

IS1 S2

“Social robots play off of this tendency by mimicking cues that we automatically associate with certain states of mind or feelings. Even in today's primitive form, this can elicit emotional reactions from people that are similar, for instance, to how we react to animals and to each other.” – Kate Darling, 2012



3. Modalities of Robot Rights

!S1 S2

**+ Moral Intuitions**

Work with rather than against recent experiences with social robots.

3. Modalities of Robot Rights

IS1 S2

**+ Moral Intuitions**

Work with rather than against recent experiences with social robots.

- Capriciousness

Moral distinctions are founded on the relations of objects, rendering moral decisions little more than expressions of personal interest and emotion

3. Modalities of Robot Rights

IS1 S2



- **Anthropocentrism**

The principal reason we need to consider extending rights to others, like animals and social robots, is because of the way it makes us feel.



4. Thinking Otherwise

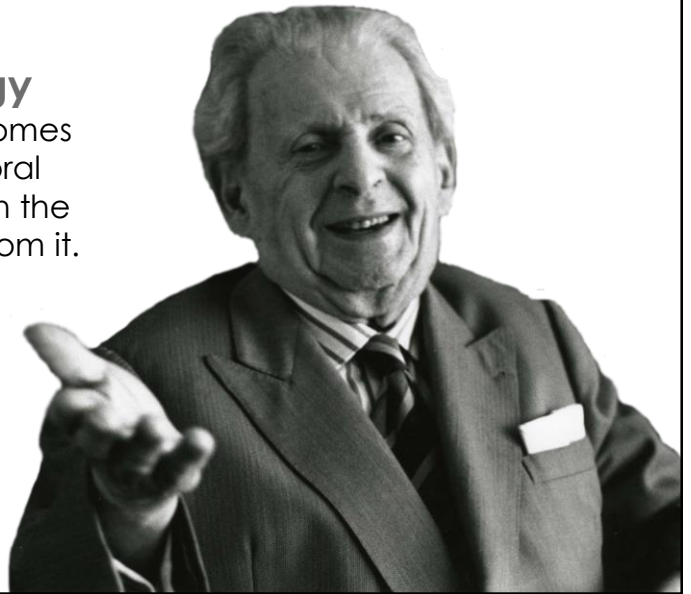
4. Thinking Otherwise

Is → Ought

4. Thinking Otherwise

Ethics precedes ontology

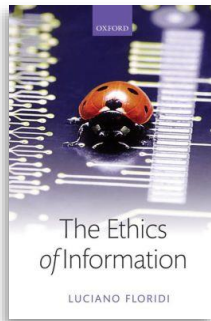
The moral aspect, the ought, comes first—*first* in terms of both temporal sequence and status—and then the ontological dimension follows from it.



4. Thinking Otherwise

Levinasian Ethics

"The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics." - Emmanuel Levinas, 1969



Standard Ethical Theory

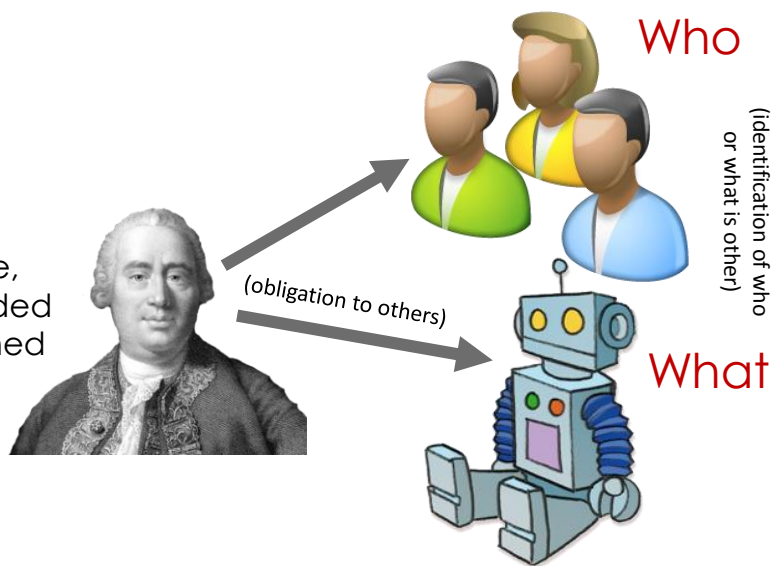
"What the entity is determines the degree of moral value it enjoys, if any." – Luciano Floridi, 2013



4. Thinking Otherwise

Hume Otherwise

We are first obligated to respond and then, after having made a response, what or who we responded to is able to be determined and identified.



4. Thinking Otherwise



+ Relational Turn in Ethics

The question of moral status does not necessarily depend on what the other is in its essence but on how she/he/it supervenes before us and how we decide, in the face of the other, to respond.

4. Thinking Otherwise



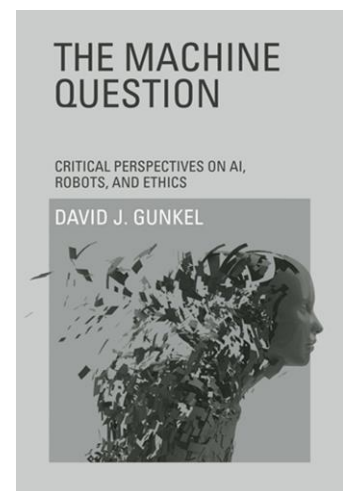
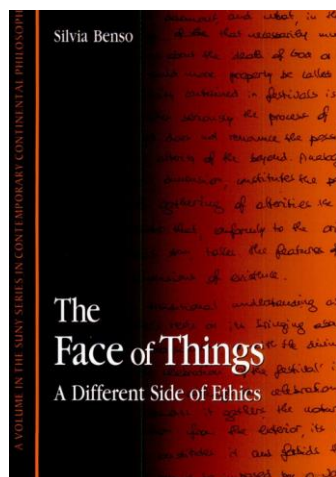
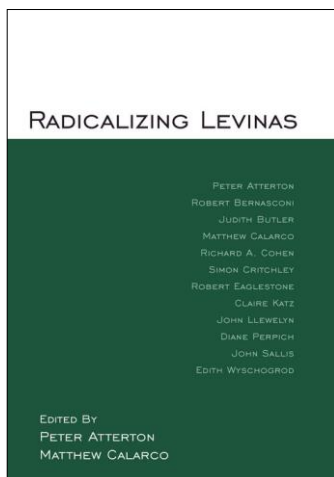
+ Relational Turn in Ethics

The question of moral status does not necessarily depend on what the other is in its essence but on how she/he/it supervenes before us and how we decide, in the face of the other, to respond.

- Levinas against Levinas

The alternative presented here will only be able to succeed insofar as it actively works against and in excess of the inescapable anthropocentrism of Levinas's own efforts.

4. Thinking Otherwise



4. Thinking Otherwise



- **Conceptual Reboot**

What we see in the face of the social robot is nothing less than a fundamental challenge requiring a thorough reconsideration of moral philosophy that goes all the way down.

4. Thinking Otherwise

Robots are not just one more problem for moral philosophy, they show us the principal problems and unique challenges of moral philosophy.

Summary

1. Asking about robot rights is not a distraction, fairy tale stuff or a waste of time.
2. Can and should robots have rights?
mobilizes a classic philosophical problem
3. Four modalities of responses to this question.
All four have significant issues
4. Alternative procedure; thinking otherwise
about the rights of robots

Robot rights - Concept Map

Unthinkable

"The notion of robots having rights is unthinkable" (Levy 2005, 393).

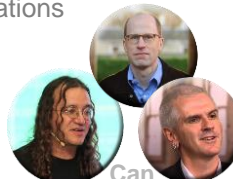


Thinking the Unthinkable

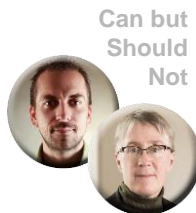
Is/Ought Variations



Cannot and
Should Not



Can
and Should



Can but
Should
Not

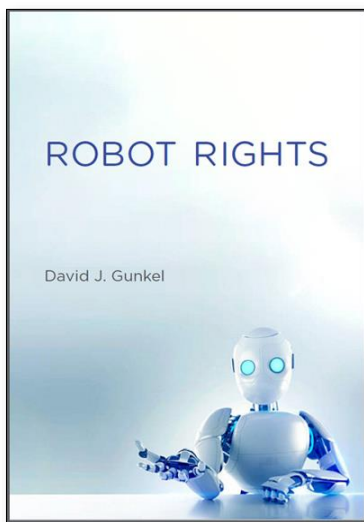
Cannot but
Should



Thinking Otherwise

Social/Relational Ethics





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