The Machine Question:

PHIL 231 & PHIL 363 Crash Course

(Kinda but not really)

Overview

- Can/should machines have rights?
- What is our concept of morality?
  - What approach do we take?
  - What limitations will we encounter?

Welcome to the Machine

"Where have you been? It's alright we know where you've been."

When, if ever, will we empathize with machines?

If we run one over, will it be considered "destruction of property" or "murder"?

Factory Settings:
The Default Position

- "Robots having rights is unthinkable." – David Levy
- Technology is a means to an end.
- Merely instruments; no independent moral status, nor consciousness.
- Judged by what it can do, rather than what it is in and of itself.

The Question

- For a machine to have rights, it needs to be viewed as a subject rather than a tool.

- Two ways to approach this:
 - Ontologically
  - Ethically

Ontology > Ethics

- The intrinsic property/properties of a being constitutes its moral standing.
- "What the entity is determines the degree of moral values it enjoys, if any." – Luciano Floridi
- The standard approach to separating those with moral status from those without.
- Problems with this approach:
  - Substantive
  - Terminological
  - Epistemological
  - Methodological

Substantive Problems

- What property/properties are necessary and sufficient to have moral status?

- Still figuring out which moral theories are "correct".

- Property of rationality seems appealing (but has some problems).
  - Animals seem to have some rights.
  - Immanuel Kant
    - Animals are not rational, therefore they have no rights.
    - Treated humanely to separate humanity from brutality.
  - Peter Singer: "The question is not, 'Can they reason?' nor 'Can they talk?' but 'Can they suffer?'"
  - Tom Regan's "subject-of-a-life".

DECALFX.COM

Terminological Problems
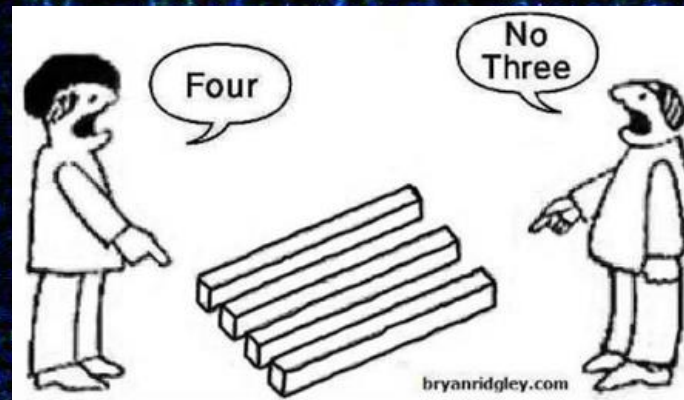
- What is consciousness? Sentience? Rationality?
- Terms have different connotations to different people.
- Daniel Dennett, "Why You Cannot Make a Computer that Feels Pain"
  - Not an issue with technology, but definition.
  - "There can be no true theory of pain, and so no computer or robot could instantiate the true theory of pain, which it would have to do to feel real pain."

Epistemological Problems

- We can have robots simulate emotions, but we cannot determine if the robots *truly* feel pain or merely *simulate* it.

- Paul Churchland: "How does one determine whether something other than oneself… is really a thinking, feeling, conscious being…?

- There are no tests that can definitively prove that there is anyone or anything besides yourself that has a consciousness.

- The Matrix was a world where almost everyone and everything was a simulation.

Enter the Chinese Room

- Programs process input, but don't "understand" them. They aren't "conscious".

- What *is* consciousness?

- Don't we humans live in a universe with rules that we don't understand?

- Don't we follow programming in some way based on what we're told and our experiences?
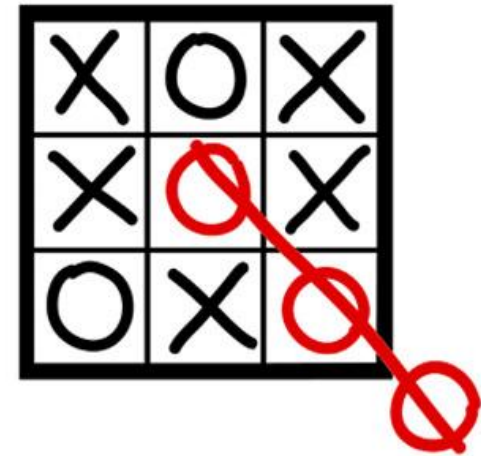
Methodological Problems

- Who determines what other groups receive moral status?

- Humans in general tend to be very flawed with biases and prejudices.

Ethics > Ontology

- The second approach: "Thinking otherwise."
- Assume there's already a need to respond to other beings/things.
- Not "*Can* machines have rights," but "*Should* machines have rights."

Relational

My relationship Status

- single
- in relationship
- dating
- married
- X already ordered
- 37 cats

- Moral status is based on extrinsic relationships rather than intrinsic properties.
- A being/thing's relation to us and how we respond determines moral status.
- Recent studies have shown human subjects empathizing with robots.

Radically Empirical

- No need to address the epistemological "other minds" problem.
- Focus less on others' "minds" and more on their "faces".
- "Properties… are not the intrinsic *a priori* condition of possibility for moral standing. They are *a posteriori* products of extrinsic social interactions."
- Extrinsic relationships more important than intrinsic properties in terms of moral consideration.

Altruistic

- Moral standing no longer granted to others; depends on how we respond.

- Others, and our relationships with others, put our rights into question.

- "This altruism is not just open to others but must remain permanently open and exposed to other others."

- In other words, "be excellent to each other (and party on, dudes)."

Go...
Save yourself from the Zombies

Conclusion (Part 1)

- Social robots are populating our world; knowing where they would morally stand is prudent.
- An ontological approach to the question has critical problems:
  - Substantive
  - Terminological
  - Epistemological
  - Methodological
- Not necessarily a wrong approach, but extremely limited at this time.

con·clu·sion
[kuh n-**kloo**-zhuh] n

1. The place where you got tired of thinking.
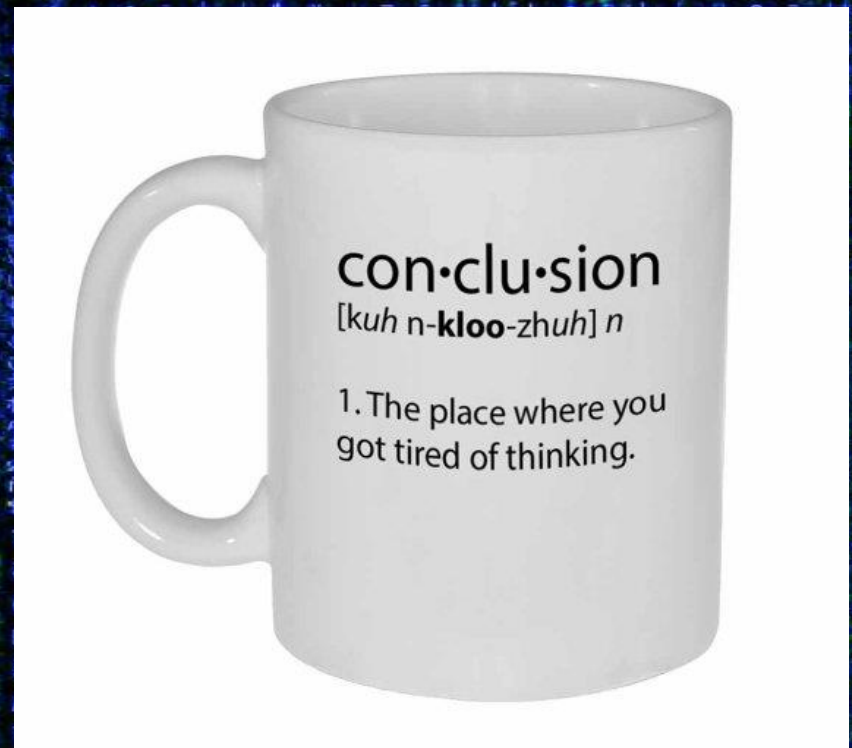
Conclusion (Part 2)

- Ethical Approach:
  - Ethics proceeds ontology.
  - Extrinsics relationships proceeds intrinsic properties.
  - Fewer fundamental problems to solve; less headaches.
- May also leave something to be desired in terms of explaining why we may interact with beings of various moral statuses differently (or perhaps that question is irrelevant to the main question at hand).
- Regardless, the discussion sometimes isn't about finding a good answer, but rather finding a better question.