Objective
This week we will begin our investigation of moral patiency. As you will recall from the introduction, all ethical interactions involve two components—the originator of morally significant decisions or actions (the moral agent) and the receiver of these morally significant decisions or actions (the moral patient). In previous weeks, we have examined whether machines can or should be considered moral agents or originators of morally significant action. In other words, we asked what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for a machine (an algorithm, a robot, an AI, etc.) to be held responsible and/or accountable for the decisions or actions it initiates. This week we look at the other side of the equation and ask whether we have responsibilities to our machines. In other words, we want to examine the necessary and sufficient conditions for another entity, like a machines, to be considered another “person” with some level of moral and legal rights.

Readings
David Calverley, Imagining a Non-Biological Machine as a Legal Person
Joanna Bryson, Robots Should be Slaves

Questions
1) Both essays utilize and rely on influential legal concepts like “human,” “person,” and “property.” Define each one of these terms: Human, Person, and Property. When is a human being a person? Could a human being something other than a person? Under what conditions have human beings been considered property? How is it that corporations can be considered persons? And if corporations can be persons, could a socially interactive robot be a person? And if so, what would be the social, legal, and/or moral consequences of this decision?

2) Bryson and Calverley occupy opposing positions in the debate concerning machine moral patiency. Bryson takes the standard instrumentalist approach, arguing that machines, no matter how intelligent or empathetic they appear to be, are nothing more than technological instruments and should be treated as such. Calverley takes the opposite viewpoint, arguing that it might, at some point, make sense to extend the rights of persons to machines. Which of these arguments do you find most persuasive? Whose point of view do you find more reasonable and ethically sound? Why?