

AI Robots & Ethics 2015/16

Dr. David J. Gunkel

Week 7

Objective

This week we will conclude our investigation of moral patiency. The goal of this week's reading is to examine critically the concept of moral patiency in general and the various efforts to ascribe moral patiency to machines in particular. To put it in the terms developed last week, we will want to know when and if machines can be more than mere instruments or tools of human decision-making and action. We will want to know when and if a machine (an algorithm, a robot, an AI system, etc.) can be considered a legitimate "person" with moral and legal rights that would need to be respected. We will, therefore, investigate the philosophical assumptions and consequences of patient-oriented moral reasoning and evaluate the various proposals to extend the concept of "moral patiency" to machines. The goal of this week's reading, therefore, is to understand the moral opportunities and challenges of using a patient-oriented approach to asking about and resolving the machine question.

Readings

David Gunkel, *The Machine Question: Critical Perspectives on AI, Robots and Ethics* (93-157)

Questions

1) Patient-oriented ethics, like that modeled by the animal rights movement, have at least four potential difficulties: terminological problems, epistemological problems, ethical problems, and methodological problems. Define and/or characterize these four problems. How does each one complicate the patient oriented approach to deciding the question of machine moral patiency? And what, if anything, can be done to remediate these difficulties?

2) When we look things from the perspective of moral agency, we focus on questions of responsibility and accountability. When we look at things from the perspective of moral patiency, we focus attention on the question of rights. But the question regarding rights can be asked in at least two different ways: *Can* robots have rights? *Should* robots have rights? How would you respond to these two questions? And how does the form of the question—a difference in the choice of verb ("can" vs. "should")—affect the mode of inquiry and its possible outcomes?