

Week 9

After reading Danaher's paper it is clear to me that the divide among people thinking robots should have significant moral status comes from the idea of comparing them to beings such as animals. I want to challenge this and state why I believe it is unreasonable to compare the two entities and what it truly means to have moral status in the first place.

Let's first answer the question which is what makes up a robot and an animal. This came to me when the author said "The manufacturers of robots will get their creations to mimic certain behavioural cues that we associate with beings with significant moral status, but because of the internal nature of the robots, these behavioural cues will not correlate with (or supervene upon) the metaphysical properties that we think ground moral status" (Danaher pg13). An animal is made up of biological cells and incurs feelings, things like pain, happiness, and other emotions. Robots on the other hand are man-made and are not alive in that same sense. While it is true that a robot can mimic emotion, at the end of the day, they do not have a sense of self which is the basis of moral status. One argument that I read in this article painted the picture that if your spouse were to have their biological parts gradually replaced with equivalent technological parts, at one point would you consider them losing moral status? I believe that in this situation, you would have to look towards the underlying being which inevitably was someone 100% biological and someone who evolved over millions of years to adapt to their environment.

It would be misleading to apply the same moral standards to robots and animals as they have different ontological and ethical statuses. The countless efforts humanity takes to protect the welfare and rights of animals based on their overwhelming capacity to suffer and flourish cannot be attributed to robots which do not share the same interests or vulnerabilities. Humans are still animals at the end of the day albeit separated due to our exceptionalism in various fields and we should remember that animals take part in similar activities as we do which might be a reason why people feel more connected with animals than they do with robots. Things like solving social problems, expressing emotion, using language for example. So, what does all of this mean for robot rights? It paints a picture where robots are merely a tool, created by humans to aid in our desires to become more and more exceptional in society. The worries of them becoming sentient or having feelings comes from the lack of understanding that robots and AI may act any way they want, mimic any human emotion they want, and quite literally mimic humans as a whole, but that entire time, they cannot understand any of it.