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In his article “Artificial Personal Autonomy and Concept of Robot Rights,” Yurii Sheliazhenko argues that robots deserve rights. He employs a variety of legal and philosophical frameworks, along with different examples, to arrive at a set of ten robot rights that he proposes as essential laws that would ensure a peaceful existence between humans and robots. In this research paper, I will examine his claim, reasoning, comprehensive list of laws, and compare that to literature that is arguing against that claim, namely the “European Civil Law Rules in Robotics” Directorate-General of Internal Policies of the European Parliament, and find the common reasoning technique that is used by both documents in their discussion of robot rights. Specifically, I argue that instead of evaluating the different philosophical and legal frameworks regarding robot rights, and differences and similarities between humans and robots, both of these documents already approach the discourse with a perspective which they then support using predetermined frameworks.

Sheliazhenko argues that legal protections for robots should be ensured due to their engagement in complex tasks, contributions to Artificial Personal Autonomy, service to humanity, involvement in environmental development, and facilitation of harmonious social relations[[1]](#footnote-0). As such, he believes that robot rights can be logically inferred from human rights, providing ten fundamental laws that each have an “equivalent” human law. The proposed framework outlines ten key rights for robots, mirroring fundamental human rights. Firstly, robots should be recognized as possessing artificial personality, akin to humans having a right to life. Secondly, robots deserve autonomy under their own programming, analogous to human freedom. The third right emphasizes the integrity of robots, preventing damage, much like the human right to dignity. The fourth right protects robots from interference, drawing parallels with the human right to security. The fifth right ensures robots perform their functions without deprivation, comparable to the human right to belief. Other rights cover individuality, extension of capabilities, communication, and stability, aligning with corresponding human rights such as privacy, property, expression, and justice. This comprehensive framework seeks to establish legal safeguards and ethical considerations for the evolving role of robots in society. One of the main tactics that Sheliazhenko uses in his article is proving his point by disproving the ideas that counter his. When discussing the Directorate-General of Internal Policies of the European Parliament refusal to deem robots as legal personalities, entities that are able to have rights, legal protection, and obligations under a particular system, he claims that robots are just like animals, which some would argue to be legal personalities due to their consciousness and alikeness to humankind in regards to feelings and emotions. The author claims that robots are designed to have artificial personalities akin to animals and their reactions, and since “trained animals are sort of robots,” robots deserve the same level of consideration of rights as animals[[2]](#footnote-1). There is, however, an issue with such type of reasoning as the element of consciousness that is discussed by the European Parliament is completely dismissed. Instead, Sheliazhenko equates the presence of consciousness in humans and animals to its imitation in robots.

Then the author proceeds to apply a similar line of reasoning to the idea of an artificial person in the modern world. He argues that the modern, corporate world is virtually run by artificial persons that we, ordinary people, do not know of, and, hence, are not certain whether they exist or not. As examples, he mentions “idealized or fictional leaders and brands, bureaucratic apparatus of state, financial mechanisms of banks, etc.” [[3]](#footnote-2) He furthers his point by discussing the most relatable example - the call center. According to him, when we speak to someone at the call center, we cannot be fully certain that the person on the other end of the line is an actual human, because they could either be a robot or, in case they are a person, they are in a way programmed too as the “human operator just follow instructions of computer program”[[4]](#footnote-3). One of the main issues with such a line of thought is that it rests on the assumption that the people at the call center or the “artificial personas” are defined by their jobs and do not exist outside of that. Surely, the people at the call center, despite arguably having “robotic” traits, exist outside of that and exercise their consciousness in a way that prompts them to have rights. And even while at their position, they are actively exercising their consciousness. Hence, the author fails to highlight that distinction.

Finally, another faulty analogy that is made by the author is the comparison of robots and their predicament to slavery. According to him, the majority of people consider robots as things - property - which does not entail a need for rights. He attempts to counteract that by stating that “slavery also was based on neglecting unalienable value of beings, legally considered as things”[[5]](#footnote-4). This analogy falls short as not only does it completely disregard the harm, violence, and centuries of oppression that were caused by slavery, it also fails to account for the fact that enslaved people desired freedom. They actively fought and struggled for it. However, it is uncertain if the same could be said about robots. This is one of the points that the author fails to account for: do robots think they deserve rights? If a robot is designed and programmed to only serve humans and efficiently perform at a certain task, would the robot feel like they deserve rights and protections that lie outside of that code? Or would they deem it to be unnecessary as it could potentially slow down their efficiency? Until these questions are answered, the conversations regarding robot rights will remain burdened by cherry-picked analogies and frameworks. To clarify, I do not take issue with his standpoint necessarily: it is his reasoning that fails to get the point across to me due to the aforementioned logical inconsistencies.

However, his approach to the matter, establishing a claim and then fitting frameworks and analogies into it, are not specific to him. The document of the Directorate-General of Internal Policies of the European Parliament has a similar approach, which uncovers the main issue with the current discourse on robot rights. The document first outlines the perspective of the Parliament, then goes on to justify it by using legal frameworks that simply do not fit this conversation[[6]](#footnote-5). One of the main insights is that the current state of the discourse is heavily reliant on legal and philosophical frameworks that are based on the idea of humanity and consciousness, which are not applicable to the conversations about robots - in a way, these frameworks are outdated. As such, it is important to generate new frameworks to gain a more comprehensive view of robot rights. Similarly, it is crucial to evaluate these frameworks first and then arrive at a conclusion, which is something the two aforementioned documents failed to do.

References

Directorate - General for Internal Policies: European Parliament. 2016. “European Civil Law Rules in Robotics.” https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/571379/IPOL\_STU(2016)571379\_EN.pdf.

Sheliazhenko, Yurii. 2017. “Artificial Personal Autonomy and Concept of Robot Rights.” *European Journal of Law and Political Sciences*, (February). 10.20534/EJLPS-17-1-17-21.

1. (Sheliazhenko 2017, 19) [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. (Sheliazhenko 2017, 18) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. (Directorate - General for Internal Policies: European Parliament 2016, 14) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)