Religion and Robots

CS 4002 – Robots and Society

From Kurzweil 99
Religion and Robots?

- Seems at first blush an odd mix
  - What are relevant questions?
- Effect of robots on religion
- What is a spiritual robot?
- Can a robot have a religion?
- Should robots have their own religion?
- Can a religious order find a place for robots?
- Can a roboticist be religious?
- Can a religious rite be performed by/for a robot?
  - Confession?
  - Baptism?
  - Marriage?
Coin-operated Robot at Japanese Temple

Robot Officiant
Robot Monk

Bless U2
How do we define religion?

re·li·gion

rēˈli�̩(ə)n noun
1 : the service and worship of God or the supernatural
2 : commitment or devotion to religious faith or observance
3 : a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices
4 : a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith

From Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary
Is it possible for a robot to be religious?

• By definition as a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices
  – it would seem so
  – Belief-Desire-Intention (BDI) model already an integral component of autonomous agent research
• Is acting religious enough to be religious?
  – Can a robot appear to be religious? A possible new form of Turing test?
  – How can you tell if a person is truly religious?
    • By noting if they observe certain rites?
    • By hearing what they profess?
    • By observing their behavior?

Golems

• Roots in early Judaism
• An animated being crafted from inanimate material.
• “Creation of those who were very holy and close to God”.
• Having a Golem servant was seen as the ultimate symbol of wisdom and holiness

Why is this not an issue for animals?

- Or is it?
- Should robots just be viewed as another animalistic species, if even that?
Sandra the orangutan, freed from a zoo after being granted 'personhood,' settles into her new home

By Alaa Elassar, CNN
Updated 4:38 AM ET, Sat November 9, 2019

CINCINNATI — A 43-year-old orangutan who was granted legal personhood in Argentina has been relocated to a new home in Wichita, Florida.

Patti Regan, director of the Center for Great Apes where Sandra the orangutan is now living, told CNN she has been “inquisitive, calm, engaged and interested in her new surroundings” since her arrival on Tuesday.

“Sandra was shy when she first arrived, but once she saw the swings, toys, and grassy areas in her new home, she went out to explore,” Regan said in a press release.

Sandra, a 33-year-old orangutan settling into her new home at the Center for Great Apes in Florida.

The orangutan captured the world’s attention when she was at the center of a 2015 Argentina court case.

New Zealand river granted same legal rights as human being

After 140 years of negotiation, Māori tribe wins recognition for Whanganui river, meaning it must be treated as a living entity

Prince Harry paddled down the Whanganui river during a visit to New Zealand in 2015. Photograph: Chris Jackson/Getty Images

In a world-first a New Zealand river has been granted the same legal rights as a human being.
The Whanganui River is not the only instance of a natural resource being granted legal personhood in New Zealand. In 2014, the Te Urewera park, the ancestral home of the Tuhoe people, became the first natural feature in the country to be recognised as a legal person. In 2018, Mount Taranaki – a 120,000 year-old stratovolcano sacred to the Maori – was awarded the same status. But the Whanganui River has been perhaps the most influential: following the decision in 2017, the Ganges and Yamuna rivers in India and all rivers in Bangladesh also received legal rights – although, in India, the decision was later revoked.

From BBC 3/20/2020

Brooks’ View

- “We are special” …. Or not
  - Earth not center of universe
  - Evolution
  - Now, robots?
- Some religions have been able to accommodate the first 2 within their boundaries, but what about the 3rd?
- Harsh critics of this view… Penrose, Dreyfus, Searle..
- The last refuge of humanity is our possession of emotions, but alas they are under attack by machines as well
- Summarizing his POV: “resistance is futile”
- Robots will be better in everyway than us
Knuth’s view

• “God may well be bound by the laws of computational complexity, even if granted (as I do) that the Bible is God’s inspired word.”
• “Infinity is not necessarily one of God’s attributes.”

A Vatican Priest’s Perspective
(Jose Galvan)

• Technoethics
  – Mankind is technical by nature
  – Technology can add value to the very essence of mankind
  – Ethical questions surround this added value
3 Theorems of Technoethics

1. The objective of technology is to increment human relationships both with a physical dimension and a spiritual one.
2. When experimental science becomes technology it then becomes spiritual (the humanization of science by technology).
3. The more a machine is developed the more it is taken for granted. It disappears into the background.

TE Application to a humanoid robot

- Humanoids are the perfect symbolic machines.
  - Capable of reproducing the complete symbolic spectrum of human beings

  Ethical dimensions of humanoids

- Reproducing human symbolic functions is not reproducing human beings.
- “Humanoids can never, and I repeat never, substitute human beings”.
- “If you use a humanoid to substitute a specific human action, which has its genesis in free will, then it is ethically incorrect”
- “The humanoid then, is the most sophisticated thinking machine able to assist human being in manifesting themselves, and this is ethically very good”.
- “Even though the movement is mechanically perfect, a humanoid caress will be always repeatable, not ethically correct”
Another roboticist’s inspiration

• Matthew 3:9
  And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

• Luke 19:37-40
  And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen;

  Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.

  And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples.

  And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.

But what if we ourselves become robots?

• Moravec and Kurzweil state this is our gateway to immortality.
• If they are us, how can they possibly be treated differently?
• Is this even possible?
• If so, is this ethically appropriate?
Moravec’s Transmigration

- Neuron by neuron surgical replacement, leaving your skull empty and your mind inside a computer.
  “For the squeamish” there are alternatives:
- High-resolution brain scan -> new you While you wait.
- Alternatively a wearable computer, monitors *everything* you do. When you die the program placed in a mechanical body “that then smoothly and seamlessly takes over your life and responsibilities”.
- Or record data through corpus collosum, eventually replace your brain over time, initially just listening, then suggesting, then in control.

Prostheses

- At what point is a person not human when replaced part by part by machinery.
  - Robocop?
  - 6 million $ man
- Is the brain sacred? Or is it just the hardest to replace?
Theological Objection to Turing Test

- Thinking is a function of the soul. Machines have no souls, so cannot think.
  - Moravec argues that “concept of soul starts with the subjective sense of consciousness”
- How does a machine get a soul? “We might grant a conscious soul to a robot by interpreting its behavior as expressing the action of such a soul: the more humanlike its interaction with us, the easier the attribution” [Moravec]

Ethical arguments against a soul in a machine

- Social ethicists state it is a parody of human behavior, lacking links, history, and relationships. Never experiencing birth and growth.
- Functional mechanists may object on the basis that robot’s internals do not represent thoughts or feelings (e.g., just lookup tables).
- Theologians might require the approval or blessing from a higher authority.
- Moravec counters: “It may be appropriate to say “God” has granted a soul to a machine when the machine is accepted as a real person by a wide community”.
- Your thoughts?