
Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Human Rights

Artificial Intelligence seems to be the current buzzword around the world with the domination of the artificial intelligence being felt all around us. The usual response to artificial intelligence and the future is that of fear as majority of the people believe that with the rise of artificial intelligence and their future development the number of jobs available for human beings would become negligible if not extinct with personalities like Elon Musk and Bill Gates having already expressed their reservation against artificial intelligence. Well this topic is not we are going to deal with in this article. Rather we would like to look into the legal aspect of artificial intelligence i.e. the possibility of granting of personhood to these artificially intelligent machines.

There is huge possibility that one may have read an article on the internet, a good one some may say without even realizing that it was completely written by an artificially intelligent machine. Quite recently the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had become the first country in the world to officially grant rights of a normal human upon a robot which has opened a Pandora box around the world whether the future is here and is it time to seriously contemplate the issue surrounding the existence of rights of a machine. The issue surrounding the rights of a machine is a fairly contemporary topic which is still at its nascent stage but one may think why all of a sudden this topic has become a hot issue. Well the answer to that may be that since the new advances in technology and science had made it possible for humans to create objects which looks like a living human being and the possible connect that people may feel towards them may have led to the current debate around this particular subject with the immediate instance of it being the granting of rights to a robot by Saudi Arabia.

A question that may arise straight away is that why at the first place robots may need right when they in technical sense are non-living beings and more importantly do not have what we call consciousness which are the only two reasons why an entity may be granted rights, but there are examples in the current world which shows that rights have been granted to a non-living entity the most prominent example of it being rights granted a 'corporation' which in true sense is a non-living entity without having any sense of consciousness at all but is still granted these rights with the actual reason of it being for the convenience of human beings to transact their business with ease. But still one may ask why is there a need to grant similar to that of a human being to a robot as there seems to be no benefit in providing rights to a robot as there is to a corporation-which may seem like a good point yet the various experiments conducted shows that there may actually be a need to grant those rights to a robot and why should then a right be granted to an entity which does not have any consciousness. But what exactly is consciousness?

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Different people may define consciousness differently with most agreeing on the fact that consciousness is a very complex phenomenon which can be loosely defined as the ability to react and think through an outside stimulus and being the phenomenon which makes an entity a living being from which the rights flow. Since the Artificial Intelligence lacks the ability to think of its own and can do only something it is programmed for. But with the ever increasing advancement in robot technology and the current world examples of Sophia the humanoid robot that continuously learns as it communicates shows that fast diminishing line between a human being and robot would seriously challenge our understanding of what distinguishes humans from robot and if that distinguishing factor is consciousness then what exactly is consciousness? The argument on consciousness is as fascinating as it is important. Some people even define consciousness as being a form of intelligence. If intelligence can be defined as consciousness then a robot may be called intelligent if it can perform a task without any supervision and if it can constantly improve and learn new things. If these three conditions are satisfied then a machine can be called intelligent. But intelligence cannot be equated with consciousness as all animals and plants may not exactly be intelligent as we define it and yet we can agree upon the fact that they are indeed conscious. We may actually be a trapped in our ignorance if we think of consciousness as something objective and as something binary, as something either being conscious or not.

Just like there may different form of intelligence there even may be different forms of consciousness. Part of the issue in this debate is that of any of the potential candidates for consciousness in the animal kingdom outside of human beings, octopuses are by far the farthest removed from humans. Their phylogenetic branch diverged from humans almost a billion years ago. That means that if they developed consciousness, it would have had 750 million years to evolve differently from ours. The experience of consciousness for an animal with eight limbs, the ability to camouflage itself and that lives under water should seemingly be nothing like our own. Consciousness apart there are other factors which may make us to contemplate more seriously is that not providing machines which can interact with human beings with rights may actually have an influence on how human beings treat other human beings. To understand how this may happen a study was done by Kate Darling, a researcher at the MIT Media Lab in Cambridge, Massachusetts by using a toy dinosaur robot Pleo that doesn't look lifelike as it's obviously a toy but it is programmed to act and speak in ways that suggest not only a form of intelligence but also the ability to experience suffering. If you hold Pleo upside-down, it will whimper and tell you to stop with a scared voice. In an effort to see just how far we might go in extending compassion to simple robots, Darling encouraged participants at a recent workshop to play with Pleo — and then asked them to destroy it. Almost all refused.

“People are primed, subconsciously, to treat robots like living things, even though on a conscious level, on a rational level, we totally understand that they're not real,” The experiment shows that human beings have a natural empathy towards a creature who even though is not a

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lookalike of a living being yet the mere fact that it can show sense of emotion even though they are not natural but programmed forces us not to harm it while knowing that it does not have any real sense of pain or grieve which it may receive when harmed or destroyed. This conclusion is important from a human being's perspective as well as it goes on to show that due to our general empathy towards those things which can feel emotions which flows from our general empathy towards fellow human beings and by not granting those fundamental rights to those robots or humanoids which looks and acts just like other human beings and shows emotions can have a serious influence on how we may treat actual human beings as the line between humans and robots continues to get diminished. Imagine that a close friend of yours turns out to a humanoid robot since you did not have any idea that 'it' was a robot you treated it like a human being. Now suddenly realizing that it is a robot which does not have any right at all would you treat it any differently? If you then start to treat it differently like you would with a non-living being without any sympathy would it not affect the way you treat other human beings whom you have no idea as to whether they are really human or not? Would a child who has grown up seeing maltreatment being meted out against objects identical to human not have an impact on how they might treat other humans? The answer to these questions is not as straight forward as it may seem. But there are certain questions regarding granting human rights to machines.

Sophia, the humanoid which has been granted citizenship by Saudi Arabia now have all the rights that an ordinary citizen of Saudi Arabia has, even the right to cast a vote. Now when Sophia casts her vote whom does she cast her votes for would be an independent decision of the citizen Sophia or the Hanson Robotics Ltd. which developed Sophia? Moreover granting of citizenship also invites paying of some kind of tax towards the government- now would Sophia be compelled to pay tax on the income she earns while the logic behind taxation being the welfare of ordinary people for not only their physical well-being but also emotional well-being? Can Sophia be actually tried for an infraction since lashing which is a major form of punishment in Saudi Arabia cannot be effectively practiced against a robot since it lacks any real sense of pain? The question therefore arises is that whether machines can be considered independent enough to be given rights similar to that of a real person? This question is actually based on the premise that all human beings are completely independent of outside influence while making a certain decision without taking into consideration that every decision that a human being makes is actually heavily based upon the outside influences and the life experiences of a person.

The argument that machines do not deserve rights is heavily based on the fact that they are programmed and therefore are not natural. If a machine behaves like a normal human being by where it would be near impossible to tell the difference between a machine and a human being which is starting to happen and is only going to get more developed in the future, would hurting that machine or not providing them with the same rights as that of a human being be justified because it was programmed? Wouldn't it be a sort of natural discrimination which in the past

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used to be in the form of racial discrimination with those so called dark coloured deserving fewer rights just because they were dark? Are not all human beings programmed in the sense that we all are born 'programmed' with DNA of our parents? Is not teaching or preaching a sort of programming that we all receive? Answering these questions would answer our question regarding granting of personhood to a machine. Celebrating about this issue may not only help us in solving this problem of personhood and deciding upon the future of human rights the name of which in itself may change with the granting of rights to robots but may also help us humans in answering fundamental questions about ourselves. What makes us what we are? Why do we deserve rights in the first place? What makes us conscious? What is consciousness?

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