

# Moral Obligations from a Relationship with Robot

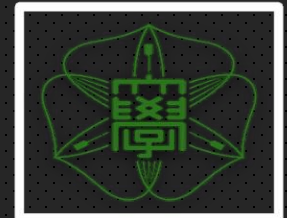
——Should We Save a Drowning Robot?——

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# Moral consideration for robots?

- Can robots be the object of moral consideration in the same way as humans and non-human animals?
- Should we save a drowning robot?
  - **Yes:** Robots deserve moral consideration
  - **No:** Robots doesn't deserve moral consideration



- What is the grounds for the obligation to save the robot?

# A Sense of Duty or Responsibility Toward Robots

- Discussion about whether people sometimes feel that even robots should be saved.
  - Nielsen et al. (2019): People hesitate to sacrifice the robot they anthropomorphize.
  - Mamak (2021): Decisions to prioritize humans over robots are not always self-evident.
- ◆ Could this sense of duty and responsibility be justified?
- ◆ Or is this sense of duty and responsibility misguided?

It is becoming understood that there are people who find value in their relationships with AI and robots, and who enrich their own lives by living with them.



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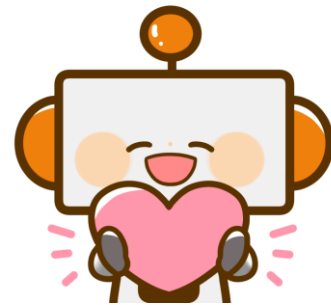
# Argument from moral status of robots

Premise:

- If robots have moral status, we have a moral obligation to save them.

Do robots possess moral status?

- Moral status traditionally depends on properties like consciousness and sentience (Sparrow 2004; Gibert and Martin 2021; Mosakas 2020).
- Robots lack these properties (or are presumed to lack them).
- **The moral status argument can not explain that some feel obligations to save robots.**



# Argument from a relational approach

**Relational turn** (Coeckelbergh, 2014, 2021; Gunkel, 2018, 2023)

- Moral decisions arise from the relationships (not ontological properties)
- The relational approach focuses instead on the context of the relationship between humans and robots.

## Note (Clarification)

- While Coeckelbergh and Gunkel discuss relational approaches that may grant moral status to robots, we do not focus on that.
- We instead examine how specific relationships shape moral obligations.

# Special Relational obligations

## Core Idea

- Emotional bonds and intimacy with a specific robot can generate the sense of moral obligations or responsibility to the subject.
  - Pet and owner/child and parents

## Characteristics of These Obligations

- **Context-Dependent:** These obligations arise only within particular relationships.
- **Non-Generalizable:** They do not establish universal duties to all robots.

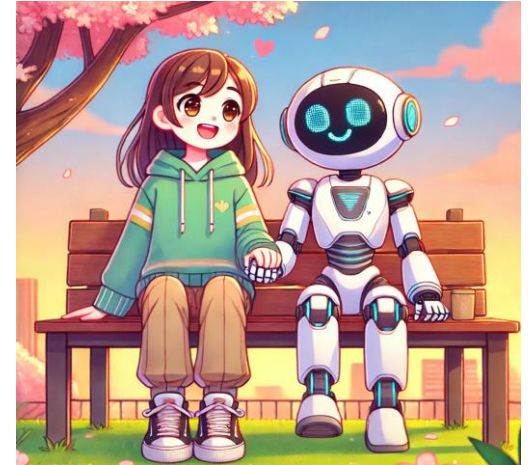


## Relational Obligations Without Moral Status

- Special duties arise from relational contexts, not general duties derived from moral status-based reasoning.
  - Associative duty in the ethics of partiality/impartiality.
  - *Animal Ethics in Context* (Palmer 2011)
- **What This Does Not Imply**
  - This framework does not suggest that all robots should be considered objects of moral concern or possess absolute moral worth.
  - This approach does not attempt to explain all moral obligations through relational contexts alone.

# Adding a Layer to Ethical Consideration

- By introducing this layer of special relational obligations, the moral sense of duty or responsibility toward robots is no longer dismissed as irrational or deluded.
  - Cf. Legal protection for love-relations with robots (Mamak 2024)
- It becomes one justified way of ethical behavior, enriching our understanding of moral relationships in a society coexisting with artificial agents.



# Conclusion

- The properties based moral status argument cannot explain sense of obligations to save robots.
- The idea of special relational obligation can explain and justify why we feel a sense of duty and responsibility to save robots that lack an ontological moral status (without dismissing all of that as irrational).
- Robot can become moral others of care without being moral status ontologically.

# Closing Remark

**To examine this idea from a broader perspective**

- Empirical study
- Diverse pattern of such relationships
- Practical implications
- Expanded understanding of moral circle.



# Thank you!

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