



New Friends

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What do care robots reveal about technology?

(for those who see it)

Rieks op den Akker

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Abstract

Ethical issues raised by the idea of social robots that care point at a *fundamental* difference between man and machine. What sort of “difference” is this?

A common mistake in thinking about machines is to see them as something that is what it is (intelligent, autonomous, working, usefull) beyond the human intelligence and human practice. They are however outside objectivations of human intelligence.

However advanced a technical artefact is it will always be limited by the “state of the art”. The working of “social intelligent” artefacts is based on simulation, suggestion and impression management.

Conclusion

We propose a semiotic view on modern technology and understand technological beings essentially as *outside* objectivations of our intellectual meaningful relations in social practices.

The semiotic view on modern technology suggests a conceptual framework for thinking about the moral issues raised by social robots. It reveals the fundamental limitations of any technical system however “smart”.

It is our responsibility to see these limitations when we use a system. Thinking about morality in technology we should carefully distinguish between the general abstract value free technical ideas and their application in devices used in concrete value laden situations. We cannot foresee how technical ideas will be applied and used and how they will impact human practices. What we can and what we should is to understand what a technical view is and what values are outside its scope.