

A Vindication of the Rights of Robots

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Abstract

Whether we recognize it or not, we are in the midst of a robot invasion. The machines are now everywhere and doing everything. As these various mechanisms take up increasingly influential positions in contemporary culture—positions where they are not necessarily just instruments of human action but a kind of interactive social entity in their own right—we will need to ask ourselves some rather interesting but difficult questions. At what point might a robot, algorithm, or AI system be held accountable for the decisions it makes or the actions it initiates? When, if ever, would it make sense to say, “It’s the robot’s fault”? Conversely, when might a robot, an intelligent artifact, or other socially interactive mechanism be due some level of social standing or respect? When would it no longer be considered nonsense to inquire about the rights of robots?—and to ask the question: “Can and should robots have rights?” Although considerable effort has already been expended on the question of machines and responsibility, the other question, the question of robot rights, remains conspicuously absent or at least marginalized. In this presentation, David Gunkel, author of the books *The Machine Question* (MIT Press 2012), *Robot Rights* (MIT Press 2018), and *How to Survive a Robot Invasion* (Routledge 2020) offers a provocative argument for giving serious consideration to what has been previously regarded as *unthinkable*: whether robots and other technological artifacts of our own making can and should have a claim to moral and legal consideration.

Biography

David J. Gunkel is an award-winning educator and scholar, specializing in the philosophy of technology with a focus on the ethics of emerging technology. He is the author of over 85 scholarly articles and has published thirteen books, including *Thinking Otherwise: Philosophy, Communication, Technology* (Purdue University Press 2007), *The Machine Question: Critical Perspectives on AI, Robots, and Ethics* (MIT Press 2012), *Of Remixology: Ethics and Aesthetics After Remix* (MIT Press 2016), *Robot Rights* (MIT Press 2018), and *How to Survive a Robot Invasion* (Routledge 2020). He currently holds the position of Distinguished Teaching Professor in the Department of Communication at Northern Illinois University (USA). More info at <http://gunkelweb.com>