

Humans, Social Robots, and Mutual Love: An Application of Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics

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Abstract : In our rapidly advancing techno-moral world, human-robot relationships are increasingly becoming a part of intimate human life. Indeed, social robots - that is, autonomous or semi-autonomous embodied artificial agents that generally possess human or animal-like qualities (such as responding to environmental stimuli, communicating, learning, performing human tasks, and making autonomous decisions) - have been designed to function as human friends. In light of such advances, immediate philosophical scrutiny is imperative in order to examine the extent to which human-robot interactions constitute genuine friendship and therefore contribute towards the good human life. Aristotle's conception of friendship is philosophically illuminating and sufficiently broad in scope to guide such analysis. On his account, it is necessary (though not sufficient) that for a friendship to exist between two agents - A and B - both agents must have a mutual love for one another. Aristotle claims that A loves B if: Condition 1: A desires those apparent good (qua pleasant, useful, or virtuous) properties attributable to B, and Condition 2: A has goodwill (wishes what is best) for B. This paper argues that human-robot interaction can (and does) successfully meet both conditions; as such, it demonstrates that robots and humans can reciprocally love one another. It will argue for this position by first justifying the claim that a human can desire apparent good features attributable to a robot (i.e., by taking them to be pleasant and/or useful) and outlining how it is that a human can wish a robot well in light of that robot's (quasi-) interests. Next, the paper will argue that a robot can (quasi-)desire certain properties that are attributable to a human before elucidating how it is possible for a robot to act in the interests of a human. Accordingly, this paper will conclude that it is already the case that humans can formulate relationships with robots that involve reciprocated love. This is significant because it suggests that social robots are candidates for human friendship and can therefore contribute toward flourishing human futures.

Keywords : ancient philosophy, friendship, inter-disciplinary applied ethics, love, social robotics

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