

# Robot Ethics: Illusions, Challenges and Rewards

Amanda J. Sharkey

University of Sheffield, UK

**Abstract.** In this talk, I introduce the topic of Robot Ethics: pointing out the growing use of robots in social roles, and the need to identify and consider the ethical issues involved before they are too well established. From ancient times to the present day, robotics has depended on creating the illusion of life. This illusion is exploited in the development of robot companions, and is helped by the human tendency to be anthropomorphic and to behave as though robots were able to understand and respond to them. The risks posed by the development of robot companions for older people, and for children were considered. The main risks of robot companions for older people were identified as being: loss of human contact, loss of dignity, deception, loss of privacy, and loss of autonomy. However, for some people, such as those with dementia, robot companions such as the Paro robot seal can result in health and well being benefits. There are a related set of ethical concerns about the introduction of robots as companions, or teachers of children. These include those related to human autonomy, attachment, deception, privacy and social learning. A brief review of underlying ethical theories is provided that included the Capability Approach. It is concluded that despite the serious ethical concerns raised by the idea of robot companions, there are some circumstances where robots could be used to improve the lives of vulnerable older people, or children with special needs, by increasing their access to some of the capabilities that make life worth living.