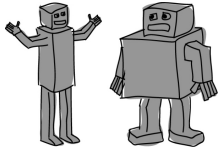


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By: Tudor Vieru, Science Editor



Robot ethic guidelines should be implemented at the international level before they become readily available to consumers
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Ethics Rules for Robots Need to Be Established

Robots are more and more used in every day life

Today's issue of the Journal Science is home to a troublesome plea of University of Sheffield Department of Computer Science professor Noel Sharkey, a robot advocate, who says that ethic guidelines for the correct use of robots has to be set in place before they become an affordable commodity worldwide and will be produced in far too greater numbers to regulate.

Children are the scientist's main concern, in that more and more companies worldwide are starting to produce artificial machines that can take care of children while their guardians are away. Furthermore, while this may seem convenient for parents, Sharkey argues that it can have a devastating effect on the children themselves, who become deprived of human presence and could find themselves unable to interact normally with other individuals in the future.

The elderly are also subject to some of the same risks, especially considering the fact that some nursing homes already use robots to make their lives easier. There are such contrivances as robotic bath tubs, which wash and rinse those unable to do these things for themselves.

Military applications is one of the main reasons that robots exist today, and the researcher makes the observation that the intentions armies worldwide have, namely of creating a machine capable of incapacitating others on the battle field in an instant, are very dangerous to apply. "The ethical problems arise because no computational system can discriminate between combatants and innocents in a close-contact encounter," he argues.

Robots "are set to enter our lives in unprecedented numbers. We were caught off guard by the sudden increase in Internet use, and it would not be a good idea to let that happen with robots. It is best if we set up some ethical guidelines now, before the mass deployment of robots, rather than wait until they are in common use," Sharkey adds.

These guidelines should best be set by international law, so that robot manufacturing companies worldwide fall under their jurisdiction. It's estimated that 11.5 million robots will be produced by 2011, marking a more than two-fold increase from the 5.5 million deployed to this day.