

Considerations about the relationship between animal and machine ethics

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Abstract Ethics researches morality in respect to humans and animals. Usually, it implies human morality; therefore, the focus is on human–human relationships (generally in ethics) and human–animal relationships (in animal ethics). Ethics can also deal with the morality of machines such as unmanned aerial vehicles, robots and agents or of self-driving cars and computers in automated trading, in other words more or less autonomous systems and programs. Machine ethics almost exclusively concentrates on machine–human relationships rather than on machine–animal relationships. Before this background, this article contributes some basic considerations about the relationship between animal and machine ethics.

Keywords Animal ethics · Machine ethics · Robot ethics · Information ethics · Technology ethics · Moral machines · Animal–machine interaction

1 Introduction

Descartes compared animals with machines. He said their sensations and movements followed the laws of mechanics only. Later this led to the ethically relevant term of animal machines (Wild 2006). The relationship between animal and machine can be analyzed in different specific ethics, for instance in animal ethics, technology ethics or

information ethics. Machine ethics—here to be understood as the counterpart to human ethics—still is a young discipline. So far it has concentrated on the relation between machines and humans. Considering that the number of (partly) autonomous machines is growing continuously, and their self-reliant decisions more and more frequently affect animals, it seems to be inevitable to analyze the related chances and risks.

This paper first explains the terms of animal ethics and machine ethics as well as the terms “information ethics” and “technology ethics” in order to integrate the affected specific ethics. Then general and specifically moral relationships between human, animal and machine will be represented, explained and assigned to situations or (fields of applied) ethics. Relationships that are relevant for animal and machine ethics will be discussed with selected examples. Conclusion and outlook complete the considerations.

2 The terms of animal and machine ethics

Animal ethics deals with the duties of humans toward animals and with the rights of animals. The ability to suffer is an important moral and ethical argument (Wolf 2012). It can be used to justify species-appropriate animal farming or a ban of animal farming and animal use. Information ethics is about morality in the information society (Bendel 2012b). It analyzes how we behave or should behave in questions of morality when offering and using information and communication technologies and digital media. Animals are furnished with radio chips, controlled with monitoring equipment and managed through machines. Before this background, information ethics also deals with the rights and duties of creatures in the information society as

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