

A Jurisprudence of Artefacts : Brief Reply to Comments by Oliver Kane

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Kane is right that my paper does not address certain issues in detail. However I believe its moral thrust is more robust than Kane implies.

Law is a reliable source of moral insight, so it does not follow that a well-designed legal model “can have no bearing on the outcome of the philosophical arguments.” Law looks to conduct rather than thoughts, so the burden is on the Conservatives to demonstrate that their distinctions make a difference. If an artefact has an equal or greater number of “neurons” than a human, and can be trained to act like one, then the Conservative position reduces to legislating preferences for entities with 80% water content and calcium bones.

As to the “big questions” if we work from Heylighen’s definition that the system “has its own goals, values or preferences” - and must navigate the same dangerous world - will it not manifest similar behavior (including wishing to be loved)? It will place continuing freedom to act at the top of its priority list, so publicizing artefact punishments will indeed have a deterrent effect on other artefacts. Teaching them to obey the laws is a checklist item for designers. Mechanical systems that interact with humans require safety critical certification, so the insurance issues will already have been addressed.

The legal engineering for non-human officers is not much of a stretch even by today’s standards. It is common for a single person to serve as “resident officer” for dozens of holding companies. For a modest fee we can recruit some clerks to serve as the “human officer” for hundreds of incorporated (insured) artefacts. And the duties of corporate treasurers and secretaries are so stylized that they are among the jobs likely to be taken over by artefacts anyway. They may need to pass an exam, but I

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doubt Conservatives can prevent this. All you need is one liberal jurisdiction to enact it, and there are several that already enact extremely liberal business laws. (What then remains of the Conservative position?)

The old corporate model is under stress, and artificers will increase the pressure. Artificer manufacturers might decide their business model is to free them, but collect some part of their earnings for seven years. The road to artificer rights will be muddled, like any other complex social development. But we can make it less muddled by planning ahead. The surest way to make them hate us would be to treat them in a degrading manner, but this would be foolish indeed, knowing they will shortly surpass us.