Ethical Dimensions of Synthetic Personalities.

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Abstract.

Do we want our characters displaying sexist, racist or violent behaviour? Do we need to consider ethical issues to evaluate whether or not our characters are effective? My thesis approximately states that if we are to have emotional relationships with these artefacts which we are creating then designers must assume some degree of moral responsibility for their creations and their creations’ ‘lives’. For, these artificial lives may be tightly interwoven with natural lives, i.e. humans. As such, as with natural-natural interactions there are some kinds of behaviours which consensual society would deem inappropriate. For example: sexism, racism and violence can be morally reprehensible and, pragmatically, entirely inappropriate to meet the goals of some kinds of interactions. One, albeit utopian and liberal view, would be that we are at the forefront of a new virtual frontier where, through careful choice of all means at our disposal, we could ‘right a few wrongs’. That is, we could re-interpret the Real World to be more ‘idealised’ – as we would like to see it. Hence, part of the evaluation of animated characters should include an ethical element and not simply evaluate their technical or other competencies’ effectiveness. As such, in my paper, aside from stating this position I muse over the associated issues of what makes a successful agent, the utility of stereotypes (of agents and humans), agent dissemination of private information and finally how would we feel when our agent companion is terminated? All these questions and moral dilemmas seek to highlight the need for an informed view of agents beyond the mere technical and into the realms of the social. After all, we are creating these artificial personalities from an anthropocentric position for a reason. It would be unfortunate, and possibly catastrophic, if the human in the equation of our Brave New World was not considered equally.