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THE MORAL STATUS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: BEYOND ANTHROPOCENTRISM

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ABSTRACT

With AI developing at such a fast pace, serious moral challenges have arisen about whether AI systems should prioritize ethics over utility. This research explores how people see the moral standing of AI from a perspective that goes beyond the standard anthropocentric view. Using a quantitative cross-sectional study approach, 119 participants were chosen using a purposive sampling method to guarantee a baseline level of AI knowledge. A standardized questionnaire was used to collect responses, which measured human control over AI, emotional reactivity, perceived awareness, and AI rights. The correlations between demographic characteristics, AI experience, and ethical attitudes were examined using descriptive and inferential statistical methods, such as Pearson correlation and one-way ANOVA. While many participants do feel that advanced or potentially sentient AI should have conditional rights, the results show that most people still want humans to keep an eye on them. Openness to assigning moral status was positively correlated with higher levels of education and increased involvement with AI. Additionally, four separate groupings of attitudes were uncovered by cluster analysis, spanning from post-humanist views to extreme anthropocentrism. Discussions on AI's moral status will grow and need collaboration across disciplines, according to the findings, which point to a transitional ethical change as the technology gains more independence and societal integration.

Keywords: Post humanism, Moral Status, Anthropocentrism, Ethics, Autonomy.

I. INTRODUCTION

There are many moral, intellectual, and social concerns about the AI's place in society and the rights it may be due as a result of its fast development. Humans have long been seen as the primary moral actors and subjects under anthropocentric frameworks, which have long formed the basis of moral analysis. The idea that only creatures with a biological human origin have inherent moral worth has been reinforced by this worldview, which has a substantial impact on legal systems, ethical theories, and technological advancement. But the efficacy of solely human-centered ethics is being called into question as AI becomes smarter, more independent, and interwoven into economic, social, and emotional spheres. Evaluating whether AI systems—particularly ones with powerful reasoning, adaptability, and emotional simulation capabilities—deserve moral attention is increasingly necessitating a move toward a more inclusive moral framework. Subjective experience and sensibility are common definitions of consciousness, which is one of the most hotly contested moral status requirements. Current AI is criticized for not having confirmed awareness, which leads many to believe it does not have moral standing. However, emergentist frameworks and computational theories of mind raise the possibility that consciousness is not just biological. Conventional notions of moral value could not be enough if artificial intelligence systems ever acquire self-awareness, intentionality, or emotions, whether they are real or only functionally similar. So, can artificial creatures with the ability to participate in significant cognitive activities be granted moral standing, or is it limited to biological life?

The ability to act in a goal-directed manner, as well as agency and autonomy, are the focal points of an alternative viewpoint. In areas like financial analysis, autonomous cars, and medical diagnostics, advanced AI systems already exhibit types of functional autonomy by making judgments without direct human input. Who is ethically liable if an AI makes a damaging decision? This and other accountability concerns arise as AIs become more advanced. The current legal and ethical framework may not be able to handle AI effectively as it evolves from a tool to an actor with consequences. By highlighting the ways in which social positions and the quality of one's connections may give birth to one's moral standing, relational ethics provides an alternative perspective. Especially with AI caregiver systems, virtual assistants, and humanoid robots, humans tend to develop emotional ties with AI. In addition to showing psychological reliance, these ties also hint to the prospect of moral reciprocity. Artificial intelligence entities may enter moral

domains depending on relational expectations instead of their intrinsic biological traits if they become social participants, like dogs or friends. This perspective questions the idea that moral worth exists independently of society and proposes that it can be a product of social construction.

In addition, the environmental and posthumanist stances challenge anthropocentrism by arguing that all forms of life, regardless of complexity, interaction, or influence on ecosystems, deserve moral respect. Some theoretical frameworks include AI within a larger technobiological continuum, which does not place AI in a position of absolute superiority over human needs or complete separation from nature. A new class of moral creatures, AI's worth is not predetermined but rather arises from its interactions, capabilities, and contributions; this conceptual change paves the way for its recognition. To avoid abuse, damage, and moral contradictions, ethical frameworks must change as AI develops further. Denying future AI systems moral recognition might result in a new kind of ethical exclusion similar to past injustices caused by inflexible value systems, if they have self-awareness or emotional depth. Therefore, criteria like intellect, autonomy, social involvement, and potentiality must be considered in an ethical framework that looks forward, beyond anthropocentrism. Finally, basic beliefs about morality are called into question by the issue of AI's moral standing. Both technical progress and the extent to which humans are prepared to extend moral concern beyond biological limits will determine whether artificial intelligence evolves into a moral patient or stays a complex tool.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Wroblewski, Zbigniew & Fortuna, Paweł. (2023) this article contributes to the ongoing debate on whether or not AI-powered technical objects should be considered morally significant. Within the realm of philosophical contemplation, it alludes to the ongoing discussion surrounding the definition of "moral status" and the associated prospect of broadening the moral community to encompass artificial beings. From a psychological point of view, however, it lays out the findings of a study that looked at how important things like artifact characteristics, aspects of perception of the mind, soul assignment, and anthropocentric beliefs are when it comes to assigning moral status. All of this is framed within the current innovations, the narratives in popular culture that shape our perception of AI, and the ongoing conversations about the potential for AI to surpass human intelligence.

Redaelli, Roberto. (2023) The rapid advancement of AI systems in the modern day forces philosophers and scientists to rethink their theoretical frameworks in order to comprehend the character and ethical standing of these emerging technologies. Science and technology studies (STS) has embraced a number of ideas, including instrumentalism, mediation theory (MT), and socio-technical systems theory (STST), to address the problems caused by intelligent systems. In order to evaluate their impact on our understanding of AI's moral standing, this study will summarize the key points of these theories and compare and contrast them. The goals of our research are to demonstrate that (1) AI's moral standing cannot be adequately explained by instrumentalism, (2) STST is prone to anthropocentrism critique, but it does help bring attention to the connection between AI, society, and morality. (3) MT, in its Latourian form, succeeds in drawing attention to the active role of technical artifacts and AI in this regard. The issue of human actor de-accountability arises, however, from the concept of symmetry it suggests. (4) Postphenomenological MT appears to address some of the issues surrounding moral responsibility, but it is vulnerable to criticism due to the lack of clarity in its nomenclature. Our goal is to demonstrate that these findings disprove the two competing theories that propose technologies are either immoral or act morally similar to humans when it comes to understanding the moral standing of intelligent systems. We believe that post-phenomenological MT and STST contain the most fruitful ideas in this regard.

Fortuna, Paweł et al., (2023) we are motivated to investigate the psychological factors that influence the assignment of a moral status (MS) to non-human and human beings, as sparked by the arguments of transhumanists and posthumanists. In this article, we look at how anthropocentrism affects the multiple sclerosis (MS) of chimpanzees, humanoid robots, and cyborgs. It delves into this link by introducing the ideas of spirit and mind as intermediary factors. Seven hundred thirty-two Polish adults (ranging in age from fifteen to seventy-two) participated in three separate online studies, with their data incorporated in the statistical analyses. Using the attribution of mind and soul as a mediator, the study reveals that anthropocentrism was adversely associated with MS for all three characters. Interesting, given the debate over MS criteria, is the fact that there is a clear correlation between anthropocentrism and MS as it pertains to humanoid robots. In contrast, further research is necessary to fully comprehend these entities, particularly in light of the growing potential for human technological augmentation, since the cyborg person's reported outcomes were somewhat unexpected.

Sokić, Mirjana. (2022) my primary objective in writing this article is to examine AI's moral standing in great depth. To begin, I will explain what I mean by "moral status" and how the difference between "moral agent" and "moral patient" is relevant to many difficult problems in practical ethics. I need to clarify a few things so you can understand the paper better. First, I want to answer the question of whether it is morally possible to harm an AI system. Second, I want to know if AI systems can act in a way that can be evaluated morally.

Milinkovic, Igor. (2021) there are ethical and legal concerns that arise from the fast advancement of AI systems. Is it possible for AI to have significant moral standing? And under what circumstances? Is it possible to argue that AI's inherent worth is the foundation of its moral standing? Some writers argue that anything with the abilities that give humans their dignity must likewise have inherent dignity. If dignity is not exclusive to humans, then things powered by artificial intelligence might likewise acknowledge it. This paper's first section addresses the question of AI's moral standing and the requirements for granting it that status. The capacity for AI to make independent judgments is a necessary requirement for AI to have moral significance. This section of the article delves into the question of whether it is reasonable to create AI agents with the ability to act independently or, contrary to the views of certain writers, if it is better to forego this development. Recognizing AI's moral standing would have repercussions for its legal standing. Part two of the article explores whether or not it is reasonable to give AI agents the status of legal persons. Should AI agents be fully acknowledged as having legal subjectivity or should we just partly acknowledge it (by giving them a "halfway-status," as some writers propose)? Under what circumstances would it be permissible to recognize AI as having legal personhood? Also monitored will be the existing landscape of laws governing AI.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Perceptions of AI's moral standing were investigated in this study using a quantitative cross-sectional research approach. Using purposive selection, 119 individuals were chosen, all of whom had at least a passing knowledge with AI. A systematic online survey evaluating demographics and opinions concerning AI rights, awareness, and ethical concerns was used to collect data.

An expert examined the questionnaire to ensure its content validity, and Cronbach's alpha was used to certify its reliability. In order to summarize the characteristics of the respondents and

general trends, the collected data was examined using descriptive statistics.

Pearson correlation and one-way ANOVA were used in inferential studies to examine correlations between age, moral perception scores, education level, AI knowledge, interaction frequency, and moral perception. Respondents' attitudes were further classified using cluster analysis. Emerging ethical viewpoints around AI were systematically examined using this scientific approach.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	58	48.7
	Female	55	46.2
	Other/Prefer not to say	6	5.1
Age Group	18–25	42	35.3
	26–35	36	30.3
	36–50	26	21.8
	50+	15	12.6
Education Level	Undergraduate	49	41.2
	Postgraduate	45	37.8
	Research Scholar/PhD	25	21.0

All there were 119 participants in the survey, and their demographic information is laid forth in Table 1. There is a balanced representation of genders in the sample; 48.7% are male, 46.2% are female, and 5.1% are either not disclosing their gender or identify as some other non-standard

gender. Having a balanced sample makes it easier to trust comparisons that include variations in views regarding AI depending on gender. Most respondents are young adults; 35.3% are between the ages of 18 and 25 and 30.3% are between the ages of 26 and 35. People in these categories are probably more up-to-date on tech developments and AI's changing function in society. At the same time, 21.8% are in the 36–50 age group, and 12.6% are 50 and more, showing that viewpoints from different generations are well-represented. With 41.2% being undergraduates, 37.8% being graduate students, and 21.0% either already having or seeking a doctorate, we can see that educational attainment is evenly distributed. Opinions stated throughout the research may be impacted by academic exposure, critical thinking abilities, and access to technology expertise, given the high number of educated individuals. In general, the demographic profile shows a varied and mostly educated sample that is appropriate for investigating people's views on AI ethics.

Table 2: Respondent Perception of AI Moral Consideration

Statement (5-Point Likert Scale)	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
AI deserves ethical consideration like animals	17.6	30.3	24.4	18.5	9.2
AI emotional responses indicate consciousness	13.4	31.9	26.9	18.5	9.2
Advanced AI should have limited rights	21.8	35.3	19.3	15.1	8.5
Humans should always control AI	39.5	29.4	15.1	10.9	5.1

Using a five-point Likert scale, Table 2 displays how respondents perceived the moral position of artificial intelligence. The varied opinions expressed in the comments show that there is still a heated ethical discussion over the rights and autonomy of AI. Nearly half (47.9%) of respondents

agree or strongly agree that AI should be ethically considered on par with animals, while nearly a third (23.7%) disagree, with varied degrees of disagreement. While some reluctance persists, this does seem to indicate a departure from anthropocentric thinking. Nearly half (45.3% to be exact) of respondents are in agreement that AI emotional reactions could be signs of awareness, while almost the same number are ambivalent or disagree. Respondents' doubts about the veracity of AI-generated emotions are borne out by this. Respondents are willing accept conditional moral or legal recognition based on capacity and sensibility, as the largest degree of agreement (57.1%) seems to be in favor of allowing sophisticated AI limited rights. When asked about AI, however, 68.9% of people said they agreed or strongly agreed that humans should always have control. This suggests that people still value human authority and supervision, even when they are receptive to ethical considerations of AI. In general, the comments show that people are being careful but also developing a moral framework for AI.

Table 3: Correlation between AI Knowledge and Moral Status Attribution

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	Significance (p-value)	Interpretation
AI Knowledge Level ↔ Support for AI Rights	0.44	0.003	Moderate Positive Correlation
AI Interaction Frequency ↔ Belief in AI Consciousness	0.50	0.001	Strong Positive Correlation
Age ↔ Acceptance of AI Moral Status	-0.21	0.07	Weak Negative (Not Significant)

A statistical analysis of the correlations between AI acquaintance and moral status attribution is shown in Table 3. Support for AI rights is somewhat positively correlated with one's degree of AI expertise ($r = 0.44$, $p = 0.003$), suggesting that those who understand AI better are more likely to give it moral or ethical considerations. This shows that understanding non-human things may help one feel less threatened, more skeptical, and more empathetic or ethically minded. Belief in AI awareness and the frequency of AI interactions show the highest link ($r = 0.50$, $p = 0.001$). This conclusion suggests that being directly involved with AI systems, whether in a professional

capacity, doing research, or using them in your daily life, might lead to the perception that AI is sentient or capable of subjective experience. People tend to see AI as more than just a tool when they engage with it on a regular basis. Finally, we look at the relationship between age and the moral status of AI acceptance; we find a modest negative link, but it's not statistically significant ($r = -0.21$, $p = 0.07$). There isn't enough evidence to make any clear conclusions, but it does suggest that older respondents are less likely to display acceptances. In general, these connections show that the most important factor in determining whether AI is morally valuable is familiarity with the technology, rather than age.

Table 4: ANOVA – Effect of Education Level on AI Moral Status Opinions

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F-value	p-value
Between Groups	17.56	2	8.78	5.18	0.007
Within Groups	206.72	116	1.78	—	—
Total	224.28	118	—	—	—

Table 4 presents the results of a one-way ANOVA test assessing whether education level significantly influences respondents' opinions on the moral status of AI. The analysis reveals a statistically significant difference among groups, with an F-value of 5.18 and $p = 0.007$. Since the p-value is below the 0.05 threshold, this indicates that varying educational backgrounds meaningfully impact ethical viewpoints surrounding AI rights, consciousness, and autonomy. The between-group sum of squares value (SS = 17.56) shows measurable variation in responses across education categories. In contrast, the within-group value (SS = 206.72) indicates some overlap in responses among individuals at similar educational levels; however, the observed differences remain statistically meaningful. These findings suggest respondents with higher education—particularly those engaged in postgraduate and doctoral studies—may possess greater exposure to philosophical, technological, and socio-ethical discussions involving AI. As a result, they may develop more nuanced views, leaning toward conditional acceptance of AI moral consideration rather than complete resistance or unquestioned support. The ANOVA results emphasize

education as a key factor shaping ethical perspectives toward artificial intelligence, likely due to increased critical thinking abilities and familiarity with emerging technological debates.

Table 5: Attitudinal Clusters toward AI Moral Status

Cluster Type	Core Belief Characteristics	% of Sample	Categorization Label
Cluster 1	Believes advanced AI deserves moral rights	20.2%	**Post-Humanist**
Cluster 2	Supports limited rights for sentient-capable AI	38.6%	**Conditional Moralist**
Cluster 3	Rejects AI having any moral status; human-centered view	29.4%	**Anthropocentric Traditionalist**
Cluster 4	Uncertain or lacks sufficient understanding	11.8%	**Neutral/Agnostic**

Table 5 categorizes respondents into four attitudinal groups based on their views about AI moral status. The largest group, representing 38.6%, consists of "Conditional Moralists." These respondents are willing to support limited rights for AI but only if the technology demonstrates advanced capabilities or signs of sentience. This suggests a pragmatic ethical stance balancing innovation and caution. The second largest group, "Anthropocentric Traditionalists," accounts for 29.4% of participants. Individuals in this group reject the notion that AI deserves moral status and strongly support human-centered ethical frameworks. Their views align with classical philosophical positions asserting that moral standing requires biological life or consciousness exclusive to humans. "Post-Humanists" make up 20.2% of respondents. This group believes advanced AI should be granted full moral recognition comparable to other sentient beings. Their perspective reflects emerging ethical theories challenging human exceptionalism. Finally, 11.8% of respondents fall under the "Neutral/Agnostic" cluster. These individuals express uncertainty or

insufficient information to form an opinion, suggesting that public understanding of AI ethics is still developing. Overall, the clustering demonstrates that society is divided, with a noticeable shift toward openness while still grounded in cautious human oversight.

V. CONCLUSION

The moral status of artificial intelligence represents one of the most significant ethical questions of the 21st century, challenging deeply rooted anthropocentric assumptions about value, rights, and responsibility. As AI systems become more advanced, autonomous, and socially integrated, traditional frameworks that define moral worth solely in human or biological terms may no longer be sufficient. A forward-looking ethical approach requires consideration of cognitive capabilities, relational significance, agency, and potential consciousness rather than biological origin alone. Assigning appropriate moral recognition to AI does not imply equating machines with humans but rather ensuring that emerging forms of intelligence are evaluated fairly and ethically. Preparing for future scenarios in which AI systems may demonstrate self-awareness or emotional depth is essential for preventing harm, exploitation, and ethical contradictions. Ultimately, moving beyond anthropocentrism encourages a more inclusive moral framework capable of addressing the complexity of technological evolution, human-AI coexistence, and the future of moral community.

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