

## LETTERS

Editor.

In his interesting article "Artificial Intelligence and Ethics: An Exercise in the Moral Imagination," Michael LaChat says that the basic outline of Shelley's *Frankenstein* needs to be recapitulated "even if, as is usually the case, the reader has seen only the poor image of the book in movie form." Contrary to what Mr. LaChat says, I think the poor image most people have of the book is sufficient reason to give a short outline of the original story. Doing this, we find one or two arguments that were not mentioned in LaChat's article but are relevant to the matter of ethics and artificial intelligence.

An outline of Mary Shelley's story follows: A creature is built which is intelligent and capable of suffering, that is, feels lonely, is aware of its death, and at the end of the story gets tired of its life. Dr. Frankenstein does not love his creation. He abhors it and flees from it, paralyzed in a feeling of guilt for what he did but unable to take responsibility for it. The creature is rejected not only by its creator but by all humankind. It feels lonely and asks its creator for a companion. The creator refuses this. The balance of the story is a dialogue between Dr. Frankenstein and his creature, which ends with the death of Dr. Frankenstein and the creature's announcement that it will commit suicide.

The story raises the question of whether the capacity for suffering is necessary in order to be intelligent. This question might be seen as one about the nature of intelligence, but it might also be seen as a question about ourselves, that is, whether we are willing to regard as intelligent a being without the capacity to suffer, feel lonely, and so on.

Put this question to one side in this exercise of our moral imagination, and suppose we create a being capable of suffering and loneliness. Then, making this creation places a moral demand upon humanity. If our creation misses human company, then we have to give it company. Given the problems of some contemporary and historical multiracial societies, this element might require more openness of mind than some people can muster. In the special case where the new type of intelligent being, the new "race," is created by us, the relation between this new type of being and us gets an extra dimension. If certain of the being's attributes or the weirdness of its appearance—extreme ugliness in the case of Frankenstein's creature—causes rejection by human beings, why did we create it that way? The parallel of Shelley's story with the biblical story of creation is obvious, as is the contrast. The creature has a right to be loved by its creator and has a right to companionship. Can we be that perfect?

A second point I would like to raise in connection with Shelley's story is that in our knowledge of the other's suffering, we are in the same position with respect to intelligent artifacts as we are with respect to intelligent beings created

the natural way: There is no way of *proving* that the other suffers. To know that the other suffers, we have to close the gap between us in an act of empathy. Only then can we begin to think of genuinely helping the other. Whatever his other attitudes, Dr. Frankenstein knows that his creation suffers and knows it in the way he knows human beings suffer.

Closely connected to this is the point that just as we have the moral obligation not to err on the wrong side in the fulfillment of our obligations toward suffering human beings (that is, we should not fail to fulfill our obligations toward them just because we think they are not *really* suffering or, worse, because we haven't been able to prove that they are really suffering), we ought not to err on the wrong side for the wrong reason in the case of suffering artifacts. This point is true regardless of the fact that there is no sort of Turing test for suffering (we and presumably they too can suffer without showing any behavior) and we will never know for sure, at least not by proof, that these beings are even capable of suffering. How are we going to solve *this* problem?

Roel Wieringa  
Department of Computer Science  
Free University  
Boelelaan 1081  
1081 HV Amsterdam  
Holland

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*Letters to the editor should be addressed to the letters editor at AI Magazine, 445 Burgess Drive, Menlo Park, California 94025, and should include the sender's complete address and telephone number. Not all letters will be published. Those that are will be edited and, if necessary, excerpted.*

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### No More Space on Your Bookshelves?

This issue of the *AI Magazine* completes seven volumes, 24 issues and over 2200 pages of print. If you put all the issues in your bookcase, they take up a fair amount of space, and therein lies a typical complaint. I know of one member who conserves shelf space by removing all the ads in each issue with a razor blade, saving only the meaty stuff. We are concerned about the use of such finger threatening tactics, and offer the following alternative.

During the first quarter of 1987 we will be offering a reprint collection, containing all the articles (and only the articles—no advertisements, announcements, calls for papers, research in progress, book reviews, etc.) that appeared in Volumes 1 through 5, (1980 through 1984). This soft cover book will contain about 675 pages, and will be approximately the thickness of one volume of IJCAI proceedings. The price will be in the range of \$35 to \$50. Depending on the demand for this service, we may do the same thing with Volumes 6 and 7 (1985-1986) and make that collection available later in 1987. Watch this space for further news.

—Bob Engelmores