



Response to Emotions and Automation in a High-Tech Workplace: a Commentary

Madelaine Ley¹

Received: 28 February 2023 / Accepted: 3 March 2023 / Published online: 11 March 2023
© The Author(s) 2023

It is with much gratitude that I received Umbrello’s commentary, *Emotions and automation in a high-tech workplace: a commentary*, on my previously published paper, *Care ethics and the future of work: a different voice*. Umbrello, in his usual thoughtful manner, provides a thorough overview of my argument and we both seem to agree that care ethics, with its attention to relationality, well-being, and emotions, is a useful and urgent addition to the growing debate on work and robotics.

The commentary highlights three areas where my work would benefit from further depth and nuance. I will keep my response to these comments brief, as I generally agree with Umbrello. The areas he highlights are worthy of further investigation and I encourage others to take up this challenge to continue the application of care ethics in technology, robotics, and work.

First, Umbrello argues I might have provided a more balanced treatment of robotic technology by including the possible benefits of robots more often and drawing on Industry 4.0 and 5.0 literature, which reframes robots as empowering tools rather than separate entities that take over jobs. Indeed, Industry 4.0 and 5.0 offer a more positive view of robotics that shows the potential robots have to help workers. It would be wonderful to see further research into care ethics and Industry 5.0, especially as the latter will trigger significant changes to relationships at work. A critical mind, however, must be kept when engaging with this literature, as the shift from robots as threat to robots as tool may simply be a rhetorical tool, thereby falling into the trap of “care washing” (Chatzidakis et al., 2020).

Second, Umbrello notes that while the paper frequently references Care Centered Value Sensitive Design (CCVSD) (Van Wynsberghe, 2013), there is not a sufficient explanation as to what is lacking in this framework. Indeed, in the writing of the paper I myself continually questioned whether I should simply apply CCVSD. I felt, however, that adhering to one design theory would too quickly narrow the focus of the research, thereby undermining the purpose of the paper, which was to provide a broad

✉ Madelaine Ley
m.j.ley@tudelft.nl

¹ Ethics/Philosophy of Technology Section, Faculty of Technology, Policy, and Management, Department of Values, Technology, and Innovation, Delft University of Technology, Jaffalaan 5, 2628 BX Delft, the Netherlands

introduction of care ethics to the field of robotics in the workplace. Design research like CCVSD focuses, unsurprisingly, on design and consequently tends not to take up deep political arguments, social critiques, or phenomenological accounts. This is not to say that design theories are insufficient, but rather that they are not the only way to approach care ethics, or technology ethics, in general. My hope is that care ethics is taken up in a variety of ways within robot ethics, not just in the form of CCVSD.

Third, Umbrello quite rightly points out that my argument falls into the is/ought trap by claiming that relationality *is* foundational to being human and therefore it *should* be respected. In truth, I find myself in one of those wonderful moments in philosophy where I am confronted with a possible misstep at the foundation of my thinking. My intuition tells me to proudly commit to my is/ought conflation, but I will need further thinking on this.

Author Contribution The author assumes full responsibility for the manuscript.

Funding This research was supported by Ahold Delhaize. All content represents the opinion of the author(s), which is not necessarily shared or endorsed by their respective employers and/or sponsors.

Data Availability N/A.

Declarations

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate N/A.

Consent for Publication N/A.

Competing Interests The author declares no competing interests.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

- Chatzidakis, A., Hakim, J., Litter, J., & Rottenberg, C. (2020). *The care manifesto: The politics of interdependence*. Verso Books.
- van Wynsberghe, A. (2013). Designing robots for care: Care centered value-sensitive design. *Science and Engineering Ethics*, 19(2), 407–433. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-011-9343-6>

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.