

# Should robots have rights?

As robots become more human-like, do we need to make sure they are well treated?

**RIGHT ON**  
Rights are freedoms that we are all entitled to. They give us a good quality of life. For example, in the UK we have the right to go to school and the right to clean drinking water.

## What you need to know

- Robots will soon be doing many more jobs in our daily lives and some of them will look and behave like humans.
- Members of the European Parliament (politicians who make laws for EU countries) have recently proposed rules on how we should deal with robots as they become more intelligent.
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) is when a machine, like a robot, can adopt intelligent, human-like behaviour.

Robots can act as though they have emotions.

**TREAT WITH CARE**  
In 2015, after seeing a video of a man kicking a lifelike robot dog to show how good its balance was, lots of people said they had found it upsetting.



Robots already do lots of jobs, such as making car parts or detonating bombs. Robot technology is progressing fast and machines will soon be used in other roles, for example, to teach schoolchildren and to perform surgery in hospitals. Not only do some robots now look like people but they also act as if they have emotions. Some can even laugh and cry. It's possible that at some point in the future, robots could actually become more intelligent than us. As a result, members of the European Parliament have now proposed rules for robot makers. They say that robots should be designed so that they will not hurt a human. They should also have a kill switch so they can be shut down if they become dangerous. Some people think that, as robots become more like humans, they should have rights; for example, they should not be hit or kicked.

### Robots are just wires and circuits

If robots had rights, it would imply that they are as important as people, but they aren't. Robots are not living beings – they are made of wires, circuits and computer programs. They don't suffer or feel pain so it doesn't matter how they are treated. They have been invented by humans to make our lives easier. If they were given rights, they could become less useful. We may have to stop using them for dangerous jobs like bomb disposal, for instance. Some people believe that robots could become more intelligent than humans. They could refuse to obey our instructions, turn on us and even threaten our survival as a species. Professor Stephen Hawking, the famous scientist, has warned that this could really happen. If robots had rights, we would have less control over them.

### Robot rights are good for society

If a machine looks and behaves like a human, it deserves to have rights like a human. We give animals rights so they are not treated cruelly – why should robots be treated any differently? Acting humanely and treating others respectfully helps our society run smoothly. Besides, if a robot played a part in your daily life, you may begin to care about it, as you would a pet. Young children may not understand the difference between a human and a lifelike robot, so if a robot was hit or destroyed, it would be upsetting for them to see. It could also give children the impression that this sort of behaviour is acceptable towards humans. In the future, robots may be so advanced that they can feel pain so it's better to give them rights now, to prevent them from being ill-treated in the future.

### YES 3 reasons why robots should have rights

- 1 If robots look like humans and behave like humans they should be treated like humans.
- 2 We should treat everything, including robots, with respect because it is better for our society that way.
- 3 We may grow to care for some robots and could get upset if they are treated badly.

### NO 3 reasons why robots should not have rights

- 1 Robots do not have real emotions or feel pain, so it does not matter how we treat them.
- 2 Robots have been invented to help us – if they have rights, they may not be as useful to us.
- 3 Giving robots rights could put us in a weaker position if they become more intelligent.

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