

Polite Technology as a path to morality?

Kant, politeness, social robots and moral behavior

Bruno Gransche | CEPE 2019 | 28–30 May

Norfolk, Virginia, USA | Computer Ethics—Philosophical Enquiry

These slides were presented at CEPE 2019. Since they lack the audio track, they only offer part of the argument. In case of questions or critique consider the respective article that will be published by the end of 2019 in [The Journal of Sociotechnical Critique](#), or just contact me mail@brunogransche.de.

Overview

1. project background – poliTE
2. Polite behavior via polite technology?
3. So what?



project background

poliTE

poliTE – Social Appropriateness for Artificial Assistants

poliTE
SOZIALE ANGEMESSENHEIT
FÜR ASSISTENZSYSTEME

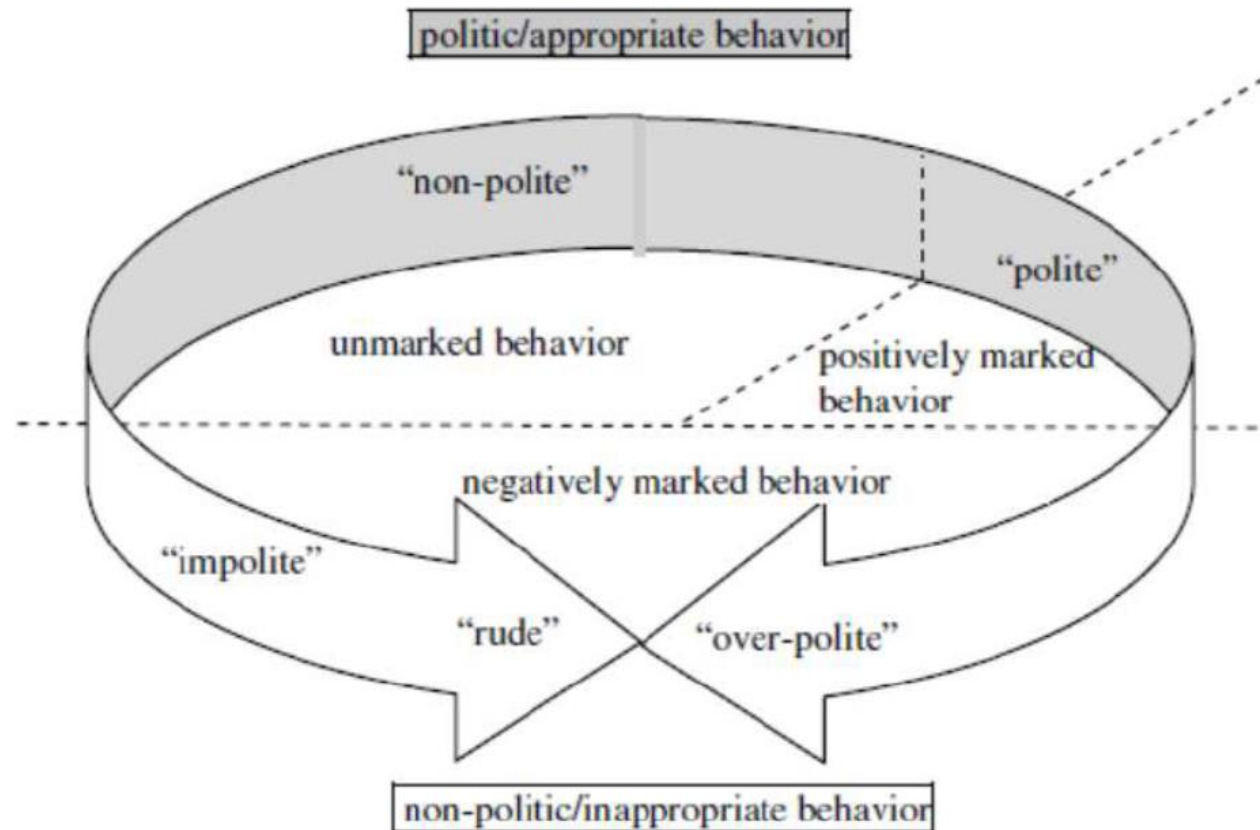


Figure 1. Relational work (Watts 2005: xliii)

How is behavior judged as (not) socially appropriate among humans?
Can this be transferred to human-machine relations?
Should it be transferred, how and why (not)?

polITE

SOCIAL APPROPRIATENESS
FOR ARTIFICIAL ASSISTANTS

„Do we shake hands
with robots?“

—
B. Gransche



Dr. Bruno Gransche

Philosophy of technology, new human-technology-relations

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Anthropomorphism, Social Robotics, Social Cognition

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Polite behavior
via polite technology?

How is behavior judged as (not) socially appropriate among humans?

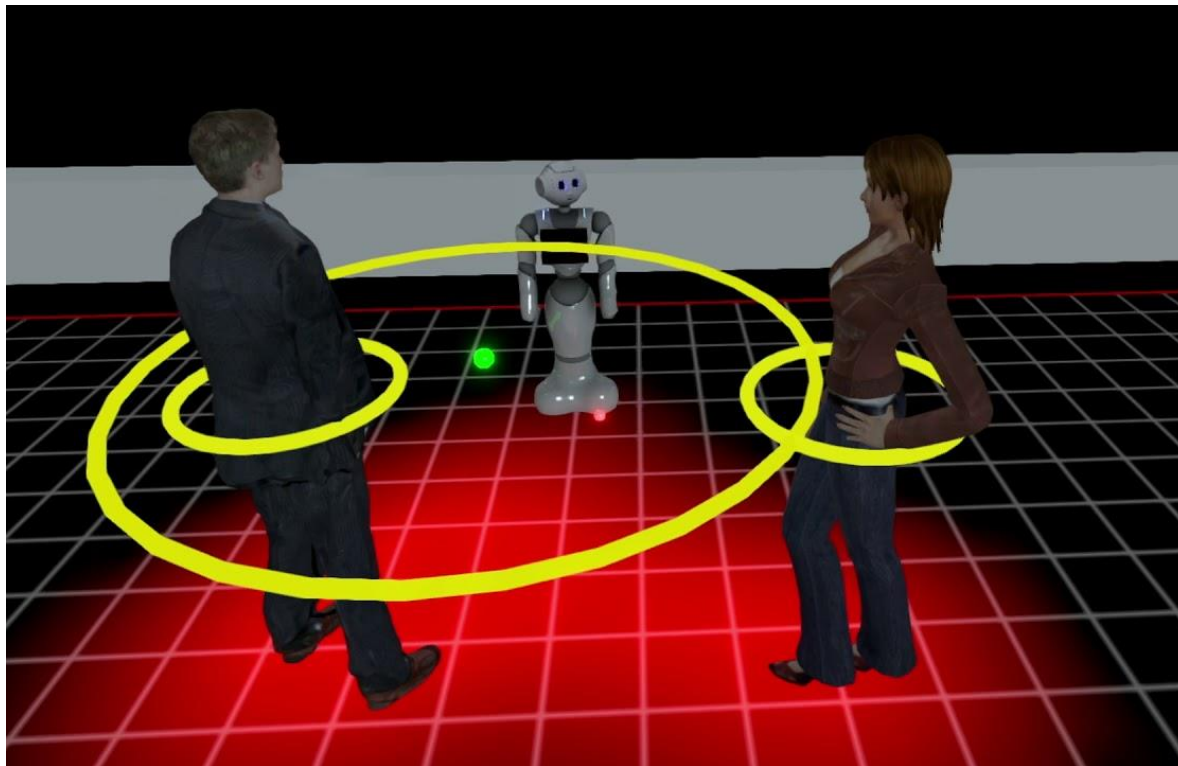
i.e. in relation to time (giving/taking time, rhythm, entry/interrupting/exit points etc.) and space (proxemics/distance), social status, biomarkers...

Can this be transferred to human-machine relations?

i.e. appropriate to jump on one's lap for a) cat? b) child? c) adult? d) robot?

Should it be transferred, how and why (not)?

i.e. robot proxemics



Polite technology: Why would you do that?

besides obvious **challenges**:

- not to preach to the CEPE-choir, but like potential **deception**, parasocial bonding with undesired consequences (“saving” the robot instead)...

there could be quite a **potential**:

- pleasing human-technology interactions
- positive effects on the mood, health, motivation, performance etc.
- less interruption by robot (AI, systems) involvement in social settings (i.e. conference coffee break)
- on the human side: upskilling, training, education, a path to morality?

HABITUATION – DECEPTION AS POTENTIAL

SMART HOME | LEER EN ESPAÑOL

Google Assistant's Pretty Please helps your kids mind their manners

Your Google Home smart speaker can ask for the magic word when your kid gives it a command.

BY ANDREW GEBHART  | MAY 8, 2018 10:30 AM PDT



FAMILY

Alexa and the Age of Casual Rudeness

“Alexa, play *Jeopardy!*” my son will bark. And she follows his command.

KEN GORDON APR 23, 2018

„Nature has wisely implanted in man the propensity to easy **self-deception** in order to save, or at least lead man to, **virtue**. Good and honorable formal behavior is an external appearance which instills respect in others (an appearance which does not demean). Womankind is not at all satisfied when the male sex does not appear to admire her charms. Modesty (*pudicitia*), however, is **self-constraint** which conceals passion; nevertheless, as an **illusion it is beneficial**, for it creates the **necessary distance** between the sexes so that we do not degrade the one as a mere instrument of pleasure for the other. In general, everything that we call decency (*decorum*) is of the same sort; it is just a

beautiful illusion.

Politeness (*politesse*) is an appearance of affability which instills affection. Bowing and scraping (compliments) and all courtly gallantry, together with the warmest verbal assurances of friendship, are not always completely truthful. ‘My dear friends,’ says Aristotle, ‘there is no friend.’ But these demonstrations of politeness **do not deceive because everyone knows how they should be taken**, especially because signs of well-wishing and respect, though originally empty, gradually lead to **genuine dispositions** of this sort.”

(Kant 1996: Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view (3rd ed.). London: Southern Illinois University Press., 220)

SELF-CONSTRAINT/DECEPTION

Modesty as part of politeness

Ulysses Pact of Sassy Assistance,
Ask for help not demand it.

Beneficial illusion

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beautiful illusion.

Politeness (*politesse*) is an appearance of

NECESSARY DISTANCE

between humans and between
humans and systems (operator
humans)

privacy, not degrade one as
mere instrument of profit and
business for the other

technological impertinence

(Kant 1996: Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view (3rd ed.). London: Southern Illinois University Press., 220)

„Nature has wisely implanted in man the propensity to easy **self-deception** in order to save, or at least lead man to, **virtue**.

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DECEPTION & VIRTUE

deception and self-deception lead to genuine virtuous dispositions

through habituation

given the right common knowledge

BE HONEST?

normative reversion of deceit and illusion – malicious to beneficial

‘My dear friends,’ says Aristotle, ‘there is no friend.’ But these demonstrations of politeness **do not deceive because everyone knows how they should be taken**, especially because signs of well-wishing and respect, though originally empty, gradually lead to **genuine dispositions** of this sort.”

(Kant 1996: Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view (3rd ed.). London: Southern Illinois University Press., 220)

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So what?



Ulysses Pact

instrumentalized (self-)deception/constraint

- we as Ulysseses can use our systems (robots...) as assisting crew – *polymechanos* style: as crew that assists even to an assistance denial
- mastering the passions? But controlling de- and upskilling of *desired* abilities, balancing comfort, competence, and survival
- which abilities do we desire (individually, in society)?
- if pleasant, somehow cultivated social interactions, then polite technology could help us habituate corresponding behavior – until it becomes (with Aristotle and Kant) a genuine disposition

Appropriate behavior?

- specifics are part the objective spirit (Hegel: manmade, but not disposable to the individual)
- “manmade” means accidental (Aristotle: differently possible)
- habituation, tradition, sedimentation... is a matter of time and **exposure**
- socially intervening systems (will) create an enormous exposure
- we can hardly design the ethos, customs, appropriate behavior... of significantly many to change this part of the objective spirit/culture
- even education takes thousands of individuals (teacher) including their differences from the curriculum to create an effective exposure (they do, but not intentionally designed by very few people)
- today’s billions of smartphones (potential assistants) are designed by (what?) 10-100 people ultimately in charge? AI could/probably will converge (billion object challenge)
- they create the exposure to intentionally change the “not disposable to a few”, we need to re-orient it to the respective collective (societies)

Polite technology as Ulysses' crew?

- what is judged as appropriate behavior is highly variable, yet not disposable; it depends on the objective spirit/culture
- consensus on (at least some parts of) desirable behavior offers the possibility to design artificial assistants who exhibit/simulate corresponding behavior
- exposure to this behavior could change our simulations into genuine dispositions (only ours!)
- that is designing beneficial illusions, harmless deceptions
- that is very cunning (polymechania) – and the success of cunnings depends on intact deceptions

Ethical problems:

- Who is to judge appropriateness (esp. problem of interculture)?
- Who is to declare a (sufficient) consensus that should be perpetuated/made absolute?
- What about deviation and minorities?
- Who could train/design the systems to exemplify desired behavior (AI as mirror problem)?
- How could a “everyone knows how they should be taken” knowledge possibly be achieved (precondition to beneficial deception)?
- ...

Knowledge on how to take systemic interventions, deceptions or simulations would be a good start, but not enough...



THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

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