

PERSON, THING, ROBOT



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DMC Theater, LSU Digital Media Center

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ABSTRACT

Robots and other kinds of artificial intelligence (AI) are a curious sort of thing. On the one hand, they are designed and manufactured technological artifacts. They are things. Yet, and on the other hand, these things are not quite like other things. They seem to have social presence. They are able to talk and interact with us. And many are designed to mimic or simulate the capabilities and behaviors that are commonly associated with human or animal intelligence. These technologies therefore invite and encourage zoomorphism, anthropomorphism, and even personification. In the book *Person, Thing, Robot* (MIT Press, 2023), David J. Gunkel sets out to explore and answer the vexing question: What exactly are these things? Rather than try to fit robots and AI into the existing moral and legal categories by way of arguing for either their reification or personification, however, Gunkel argues for a revolutionary reformulation of the entire system, developing a new approach to technology ethics and law that can scale to the unique opportunities and challenges of the twenty-first century and beyond.

SPEAKER BIO

David J. Gunkel (PhD Philosophy) is an award-winning educator, researcher, and author, specializing in the philosophy of technology with a focus on the moral and legal challenges of artificial intelligence and robots. He is the author of over 90 scholarly articles and has published fourteen books, including *The Machine Question: Critical Perspectives on AI, Robots, and Ethics* (MIT Press 2012), *Of Remixology: Ethics and Aesthetics After Remix* (MIT Press 2016), *Robot Rights* (MIT Press 2018), *Person, Thing, Robot: A Moral and Legal Ontology for the 21st Century and Beyond* (MIT Press 2023) and *Communicative AI: A Critical Introduction to Large Language Models* (Polity 2025). He currently holds the position of Distinguished Research Professor in the Department of Communication at Northern Illinois University (USA) and Professor of Applied Ethics at Łazarski University in Warsaw, Poland.