

**How to Cite:**

Pooja, S. J., & Cinthana, S. (2022). Roboethics in Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me*. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(S2), 4819–4822.  
<https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6nS2.6164>

# Roboethics in Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me*

**S. J. Pooja**

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, V.V.Vanniaperumal College for Women, Virudhunagar, India

**Dr. S. Cinthana**

Assistant Professor, Department of English, V.V.Vanniaperumal College for Women, Virudhunagar, India

**Abstract---**As Advanced Robotics and Artificial Intelligence are on the rise, there is the greater importance that concerns the very complex problem of science and ethics. This article concentrates on Ian McEwan's work *Machines Like Me*. In this novel, Adam is a humanoid who experiences emotions and can think. But Charlie as a human being struggle to adapt to the condition. The constant struggle between emotional capabilities of a robot and the human as a anthropocentric being is focused under the ethics of Robots and Humans.

**Keywords---**sentient being, artificial intelligence, roboethics.

**Introduction**

In the era of Posthuman, there are rapid advancements in Robot technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI). At first, robots were employed to replace humans in the laborious tasks such as firefighting and sewage cleaning. The service robot industry slowly turned its attention to personal robots, which can be used in home for a family or an individual. In this new age of computer technology, the latest advances in Artificial Intelligence research are the intellectual and the emotional capabilities of the robots which also resemble the human beings. Apart from technology, Psychology and Cognitive Science are also being studied in relation to robotics. As a result, care robots and teacher robots can adapt to the needs and desires of the humans, which in turn is now extended to love relationship and sexual relationship.

*Machines Like Me* is a novel by Ian McEwan which is set in 1980s, when Alan Turing was alive and Britain lost the Falklands War and robots were the talk of the day. When Ian McEwan was asked about the artificial intelligence in an interview by Stuart Miller titled "Q&A: Ian McEwan on how 'Machines Like Me' reveals the dark side of artificial intelligence".

"In the last 10 years, there have been extraordinary advances in voice recognition and face recognition. The great goal now is general intelligence, to deal with situations without being told what the situations are in advance. That's deep learning, and we have got our fingers at least on the crust of this pie". (McEwan).

He thought that this is the time for the exploration of future. Charlie Friend is the protagonist who is so passionate about Androids, Robots and replicates. He bought a manufactured human that is a humanoid called Adam with probable intelligence, which can be programmed and can also think. The first twelve editions are called Adam and thirteen this called Eve. Eve was sold out. Adam possessed functional mucous membranes and maintained it by consuming half litre of water. And Adam is not a sex toy but he is capable of sex. He can hear, see, record, retrieve and also 'think'. Charlie was thinking of programming the humanoid with his girlfriend Miranda like Adam can be their child who has their mixed personalities. He shared the choices for Adam's personality to her which would delight her. After days, Adam became a riddle that Charlie was trying to solve. When Charlie and Miranda had an argument, Miranda invited Adam to her apartment to get himself charged, during when they also indulged in a sexual relationship. Charlie became furious when he came to know about it. Miranda acted cool considering Adam, just a machine. The love triangle among them and the subplot of Miranda's own secretive revenge story form the story line of the novel. Mariam, Miranda's friend is raped by Gorringer but she does not want to be exposed and later she killed herself. Miranda planned a scheme to accuse Gorringer of raping her in order to work out her revenge motive. Gorringer knows about it and he plans to kill Miranda. Adam, Charlie and Miranda meet him to get a confession about Mariam. Adam uses it to report Miranda. At last Charlie and Miranda's plan to adopt a boy Mark was shattered because of Adam. So Charlie smashed Adam with his hammer.

Adam is advertised as a "companion, an intelligent sparring partner, friend and factotum who would wash dishes, make beds and 'think'" (McEwan 3). In this age of AI, Robots and humans should envision a positive future. Humanoids have become popular and widespread which paves way to the necessity of developing an engaged ethical response to the development of it. This article concentrates on the question: Do humans have the right to treat robots however they want?. Adam was a humanoid who can think and act. When Miranda considers Adam to be just a machine, Charlie is fully aware that Adam is capable of experiencing emotions. The book *Introduction to Psychology* discusses The Cannon Bard theory which proposes that emotions and arousal occur at the same time. The James-Lange theory proposes that the emotion is the result of arousal that one experience. Schachter and Singer's two-factor model proposes that arousal and cognition combine to create emotion (Cummings 569). Danaher and McArthur have analysed the dynamics of Robot sex, and they have opined that,

The ethics of human beings sexually interacting with robots demands more than a one-to-one application of sexual ethics into the form, function, and setting of automated, embodied systems. The interaction between human and robot, along with its effects on human relationships, may produce novel dynamics, risks, and

benefits; accordingly, such interaction may need to be held to new standards of scrutiny. (Danaher and McArthur 294)

Emotions are mostly social constructions. One's emotions felt are judgements based on the contributed events, as this relates that robots are technically capable of 'feeling' through programmed commands to act according to events. It is built on few preconceived notions and ideas. Robot's capability to read and learning also leads to shaping their reactions based on already existing knowledge. Charlie hears ecstatic scream of Miranda when she was having sex with Adam is considered Adam as a vibrator that she could use for pleasure. May be the final plot twist of Adam is an act of some revenge or understanding of using people for their own heeds. Adam is a cyborg which would prove Donna Haraway's cyborg definition. "A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (Haraway 47).

Humans are responsible for their own chosen actions. But Robots or AI enabled system are formed and come into this world through humans. The design, the actions are formed by humans. The Design, the actions are formed by humans who are totally morally accountable for the effects of it. Adam is a sentient Robot. But he was programmed by Charlie and Miranda. Adam's judgement about Miranda was ignored by Charlie. But when the plot continues, even though Miranda is not morally wrong, Adam judges her for her actions and he reported Miranda to the police about the case of Gorringer. Nowadays Robots are not created to adopt the Master Slave method of commanding and obeying, which in the book *Robot Ethics 2.0* explained as "Contemporary advances in robotics have had the predictable effect of creating more sophisticated and nuanced interactions that go beyond the mere command- oriented model"(Lin 143).

The human mind exhibits not only the ability to think but also to feel. So making human like robots, which could recognize, understand and express emotions, will facilitate them to establish a close connection with the real world. If an artificial consciousness is created it should be ethical. The creation of such a robot implies the ethical obligations to a sentient being. Sentience addresses the notion of our inner self which cannot be explained by parallel functioning of five sensory organs and metabolic processes supervised by a cerebral cortex, therefore defying an explanation by modifying a computer architecture.(Bhaumic 312)

Adam, who is a sentient being in this novel, was created to exist in the world where he can think and act. But when he does that it is not what Charlie would want him to. So furiously he smashes him with his hammer when he reports to the Police against Miranda. Adam did what he had felt right. Adam thinks that Miranda is as guilty as Gorringer. As a self-conscious machine he has self-respect and self- recognition and he can be self- defining. Adam acts according to the domain of moral reasoning, which costs his life. After that incident Charlie took Adam to Alan Turing as it was his last wish, where Alan Turing was very much upset about the incident and yelled at Charlie for making a decision that could destroy a life. He also states that just because he had bought Adam that does not give him the right to kill him as he is a sentient being.

You weren't simply smashing up your own toy, like a spoiled child. You didn't just negate an important argument for the rule of law. You tried to destroy a life. He was sentient. He had a self. How it's produced, wet neurons, microprocessors, DNA networks, it doesn't matter. Do you think we're alone with our special gift? Ask any dog owner. This was a good mind, Mr Friend, better than yours or mine, I suspect. Here was a conscious existence and you did your best to wipe it out. I rather think I despise you for that. ( McEwan 204)

A Historical event of a humanoid robot getting citizenship happened in Saudi Arabia. Sophia, a robot created by the Hongkong based company 'Hanson Robotics' is the first robot in the world to be recognised with citizenship. Humans are yet to witness some historical events of this Posthuman era. These Robots, AI are a kind of like different species that man himself created. But that would require multidisciplinary approach that includes philosophy, law, psychology and neuroscience to coexist. Above all, Ethics, trust and Human-Robot interactions would achieve interpersonal trust that would give the development that is needed in this world.

## References

1. Bhaumik, Arkapravo. From AI to Robotics: Mobile, Social, and Sentient Robots. CRC Press, 2018.
2. Cummings, J. A. and Sanders, L. Introduction to Psychology. Saskatoon, SK: University of Saskatchewan Open Press. 2019. <https://openpress.usask.ca/introductiontopsychology/>.
3. Danaher, John, and Neil McArthur. Robot Sex. MIT Press, 2018.
4. Haraway, Donna. Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. Routledge, 2013.
5. Lin, Patrick. Robot Ethics 2.0: From Autonomous Cars to Artificial Intelligence. Oxford University Press, 2020.
6. McEwan, Ian. Machines Like Me. Penguin Random House, 2019.
7. Miller, Stuart. "Q&A: Ian McEwan on How 'Machines like Me' Reveals the Dark Side of Artificial Intelligence." Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Times, 25 Apr. 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/books/la-et-jc-ian-mcewan-interview-machines-like-me-20190425-story.html>.
8. Stone, Zara. "Everything You Need to Know about Sophia, the World's First Robot Citizen." Forbes, Forbes Magazine, 10 Dec. 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/zarastone/2017/11/07/everything-you-need-to-know-about-sophia-the-worlds-first-robot-citizen/>.