

NEWSLETTER

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The Research Cluster for Applied Ethics Vytautas Magnus University

MEMBERS

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EVENTS

An international workshop on the ethics of human enhancement is expected in the first quarter of the year 2020. The workshop will be hosted by the RCAE.

Conference: Human Rights Issues in the Age of Globalization and Rapid Technological Innovations

On the 12th of June, an international conference on human rights issues in the age of globalization and rapid technological innovations, organized by Vytautas Magnus university, took place. In the conference, presentations were given by dr. Ausrine Pasvenskiene (on the use of technological innovations in education), dr. Paulius Astromskis (on the future of lawyers in light of the new challenges to human rights), Kestutis Mosakas (on the relational and properties-based approaches to machine moral standing), prof. Edita Gruodyte with prof. Darius Amilevicius (on technical and legal issues regarding electronic personality), as well as dr. Milda Zaliauskaite from the "Integration Study on Future Law, Ethics, and Smart Technologies" project (on mentally ill people in the age of globalization and their right to autonomy). The conference also featured a round table discussion regarding the future of AI in law in which dr. Astromskis took part in representing the optimistic side regarding the issue (video recording available [here](#) (in Lithuanian)).

Funding for Research Projects

The RCAE has received funds from the university for their proposed projects! Prof. John-Stewart Gordon and prof. Vladislav Fomin will be conducting a funded research on Responsible Standardization of Smart Systems (RSSS), whereas prof. Gordon and K. Mosakas will be hosting an international workshop on the ethical issues raised by human enhancement. The date of the workshop will be announced on the cluster's [Facebook page](#) as well as [the main website](#).

"Integration Study on Future Law, Ethics, and Smart Technologies" - Project News

Research Trip: Tallinn Law School

Last May prof. Gordon (03-31.05) and K. Mosakas (09-17.05) were on a research stay at the Tallinn Law School in Estonia. During the stay, prof. Gordon gave 3 public talks on AI and ethics: "Introducing Artificial Intelligence - Ethical and Legal Considerations" (10.05.2019), "AI and Legal Personhood" (14.05.2019), and "Moral and Legal Rights for Robots?" (16.05.2019). Tallinn Law School is one of the collaboration partners of the RCAE.

Conference: Criminal Justice Challenges in the Changing Society

On the 16th of May, prof. Gruodyte took part in a local conference on criminal justice challenges in the changing society at Mykolas Romeris university in Vilnius. Together with her colleague dr. Paulius Cerka, she gave a presentation titled "AI in the Context of Criminal Law: The Need for Transforming the Paradigm of Criminal Responsibility".

Philosophy in Lithuania

Conference: Space and Time: An Interdisciplinary Approach

On the 26-28th of September, an international conference "Space and Time: An Interdisciplinary Approach" is taking place. The conference is organized by the institute of philosophy of Vilnius University. To learn more about the conference, see [the event page of Vilnius University](#).

Cluster Member Introductions: Kestutis Mosakas (Research Assistant)

I am the research assistant of the RCAE, a junior ethics researcher of the project "Future Law, Ethics, and Smart Technologies", and a PhD student in philosophy at Vytautas Magnus university.

Getting into Philosophy

I discovered philosophy later than some, as my first degree (BA) was not in philosophy, but in English philology. During the course of my first studies I found that the subject did not resonate with me particularly well and in my final year I was already hung up on philosophy. What gave rise to my original interest in philosophy was the online material on the existence of God. Before that, I had been aware neither of the ways in which philosophers argue, nor the depths to which they often go. But once I obtained a rough understanding of what philosophy was about, I wanted to improve my own critical thinking, and several years after completing my BA studies I started MA in philosophy for that very purpose. Despite not being familiar with most of the classical literature in philosophy (until my MA I had mostly focused on online material, such as audio debates), the studies went really well. What I think helped me the most was my conviction that merely summarizing the ideas of different authors - a common practice among students in Lithuanian universities - was against the nature of philosophy, which made me either try to come up with something of my own, or to examine the existing ideas critically. Even though this kind of attitude had brought me several failures due to my lack of expertise, it ultimately allowed me to become a better thinker.

Current Research

My current research focuses on the moral standing of machines. I have recently submitted a book chapter on the topic and will submit a paper to a special issue of "AI & Society" by the end of this year. My PhD

thesis is titled "Moral and Legal Rights for Intelligent Robots" and tries to answer questions related to the moral and legal status of the sophisticated machines that will exist in the relatively near future.

Why it Matters

I think that the main reason why the topic of my thesis matters is that it is first and foremost concerned with the questions related to moral status and moral rights, which have always been of utmost importance. History has shown us that inadequate understanding of these notions can lead to severe right violations and mistreatment of beings to whom rights are wrongly denied. And while my thesis is primarily concerned with robots, I do think it will contribute in a way that is broader than that - i.e., by offering insights on the issue of moral standing in general. Other reasons that I think make this topic stand out have to do with the current pace of technological development. With robots entering different spheres of human life and becoming socially interactive, the question of rights, as numerous scholars have noticed, is becoming more pressing than ever. It is important to stress that this, as well as many other technology-related problems, need to be resolved in advance - i.e., before the technologies in question actually emerge. Finally, the inquiry into machine moral status may be more fruitful than some skeptics may think, given the generally optimistic predictions regarding the future of AI by experts, as well as the rise of materialism in philosophical anthropology, which sees human beings themselves as purely mechanistic entities.

HONOURS AND AWARDS

Prof. Vladislav Fomin has recently been granted the Exceptional Professor award by Vilnius University. Together with two other professors (prof. Gediminas Juzeliunas and prof. Česlovas Venclovas), prof. Fomin has been acknowledged for leading international standards, promoting innovation and progress, and benefiting the Lithuanian academia. To learn more about the award, see the [VU's news page](#).

Please make sure to follow us on our Facebook page and check our main website for our regular events, which include but are not limited to workshops, public lectures, and conferences.

Our Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/researchgroupappliedethics/>

Our main website: <https://www.applied-ethics.com/>

Website of the "Integration Study on Future Law, Ethics, and Smart Technologies" project: <https://ateitis.vdu.lt/>