

### 3 The Case for Sexbots

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Sexbots will not just be life-sized sex toys. Some people do imagine them this way, and as a result are somewhat puzzled by the question of whether or not it should be legally or morally permissible to own them, given that we do not generally raise a similar question with more familiar sex toys. While there are certainly many parallels between sexbots and sex toys, a sexbot promises to provide a sexual experience that is significantly more realistic and intense than what can be obtained merely through the use of a sex toy. This is both because of its physical similarity to a human and due to the level of humanlike interaction it would (theoretically) provide. Sexbots will be qualitatively different from other kinds of sex toys, and this difference raises distinct philosophical issues.

The difference is reflected in public attitudes. People have strong reactions to the prospect of sexbots, ones that far exceed any reactions provoked by more familiar sex toys. In February of 2013, the polling firm YouGov conducted a poll, sponsored by the Huffington Post website, that asked people about their attitudes toward robots. It was a relatively large (one thousand adults), random sample. One question asked: "If it were possible, would you ever have sex with a robot?" Only nine percent said yes. Eleven percent said they were not sure, and the remaining eighty-one percent (figures were rounded by the polling firm) said no.<sup>1</sup> The poll also asked: "If it were possible for humans to have sex with robots, do you think that a person in an exclusive relationship who had sex with a robot would be cheating?" A total of 42 percent said yes, and 26 percent said they were not sure. Only 31 percent said no.<sup>2</sup> Other surveys have produced similar results. Overwhelming majorities consistently say they would not have sex with a robot.<sup>3</sup>

The polling data unfortunately does not give us any specific insights into why people answered the way they did. We do not know how many respondents have a considered moral objection to sex with robots, as opposed to those who simply consider it distasteful. And we do not know what, if any, rationales any of the respondents

would provide for their negative attitudes. While I cannot offer any further insights on why people are as a matter of fact averse to sex with robots, I will identify several philosophical justifications that might be given for opposing sexbots. I will argue that these justifications are not sufficient, on balance, to establish that the development of sexbots should be viewed as harmful. On the contrary, we should view their development as something that should be welcomed and promoted, and we should actively combat any stigmas that exist against robot sex. In sum, I propose that the invention of sexbots will be a good thing, and that society on the whole will end up better off for it.

### 3.1 A Right to Sexbots?

There is a simple, rights-based argument in favor of sexbots that some people might consider decisive. According to this rights-based argument, sex with a robot is something that people will generally do in the privacy of their own homes, and it causes no direct harm to others. It is therefore covered by the more general right to privacy that people possess in a free society. The laws in nearly all liberal democracies now recognize a right to privacy that offers significant protections for private sexual behavior. For instance, in 2004, the United States Supreme Court, in a decision granting homosexuals the right to engage in consensual sex, commented that such a right “has been accepted as an integral part of human freedom” in numerous liberal-democratic jurisdictions around the world.<sup>4</sup> A 2008 federal court decision, which overturned Texas’s law against “obscene devices” (sex toys), said of the Lawrence decision: “The right the Court recognized was not simply a right to engage in the sexual act itself, but instead a right to be free from governmental intrusion regarding ‘the most private human contact, sexual behavior.’”<sup>5</sup> According to this line of reasoning, many of the arguments against sexbots are misguided from the outset, since they presume the legitimacy of something that is in fact illegitimate, the interference by society in the lives of individuals, in matters of strictly private concern. Defenders of the rights-based view appeal to a principle that many take to be at the basis of a liberal, democratic society: the harm principle. This principle was most famously formulated by John Stuart Mill. As he put it in his book *On Liberty*: “The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.”<sup>6</sup>

A rights-based argument for sexbots faces challenges, however. First of all, individual rights are never absolute. It may be that sexbots have an impact on society that, on balance, outweighs the privacy interest of their owners. Not everyone will agree that the use of sexbots is an entirely private matter. It is worth remembering that sexbots

involve commercial transactions, and it is generally thought that our right to privacy is much more limited once we enter the commercial sphere. We have laws and regulations governing many sorts of commercial transactions, even though they concern products that are meant to be used in private. Defenders of such laws point out that these products must be manufactured, marketed, and sold, and all of these activities take place in the public marketplace and involve other people in various ways. Even if people are not forbidden outright from owning sexbots, we might think that, like the products involved in other sorts of commercial transactions, sexbots would be potentially subject to various kinds of restrictions and regulations.

Second, I am interested not just in legal restrictions, but also in moral judgments. Few people think that the right to privacy is as stringent when it comes to morality. We have the legal right to engage in many activities that deserve no positive encouragement and that indeed may rightly be the subject of condemnation by others. Infidelity is a private matter, for instance, but we still make moral judgments concerning those who engage in it. If we want to defend sexbots, we must show that they can survive criticism on moral, as well as legal, grounds.

Third, even for those positively predisposed to the idea of sexbots, the conclusion established by the right to privacy is too limited. The right to privacy establishes only that we should tolerate sexbots, whereas I believe a case can be made for a stronger conclusion. I said at the outset that I believe the invention of sexbots will be not just morally neutral, but will in fact be, on balance, a positive good. I am advocating not just that we tolerate them, but that we actively encourage their development, support their distribution, and work to overcome stigmas associated with them. While an individual's right to sexual privacy is important, it cannot on its own establish this stronger conclusion. Indeed, the appeal to privacy is in one sense an admission of defeat. When we resort to it, we are effectively conceding that we cannot provide reasons in favor of the practice we are defending. But I believe that when it comes to sexbots, we can do just this.

### 3.2 Hedonic Arguments

One potential reason we should welcome the development of sexbots is that they promise to deliver direct hedonic benefits. Put more simply, people will enjoy having them, and there is reason to believe they will be happier on balance as a result. I take it as a premise that sexbots will offer people a realistic and intensely satisfying sexual experience, one that approximates at least in many ways sex with a human partner. And this will benefit them in various ways.

Other things being equal, sex is considered by most people to be a good rather than a bad thing. A life with more sex is generally preferable to one with less. And various studies have suggested that people generally get less sex than they would like, and would be happier if they had more. One study has concluded that for the average person, increasing the frequency of sexual intercourse from once a month to at least once a week offers as much additional happiness as an increase in salary of \$50,000 per year.<sup>7</sup> It is reasonable to conclude that the possession of a realistic sexbot will, at least for many people, lead to an increase in the absolute quantity of sexual experiences. Sexbots thus have the potential to maximize both the amount of hedonic satisfaction, and, as a result, the level of overall happiness, in the world.

Greater levels of sexual satisfaction, on top of their impact on people's levels of happiness, contribute to better health outcomes. High levels of sexual activity correlate to weight loss, lower stress levels, better heart and blood-pressure outcomes, lower rates of prostate cancer for men, and better sleep. People who have more sex quite simply tend to live longer, healthier lives.<sup>8</sup> Some of these benefits can be achieved through solitary sex or the use of existing sexual aids. However, others are the result of the physical exertion required for sex with a partner, and the sense of psychological well-being that results from partnered sex. Research has shown that sex with a partner has certain psychological benefits that masturbation cannot achieve.<sup>9</sup> We do not fully understand the reasons for this, and so we cannot say whether robot sex will achieve the same benefits as partnered sex. However, I think it is plausible to say that sexbots will deliver at least some of these benefits. For instance, robots will require the same level of physical exertion as sex with a human partner. Indeed, they could be programmed to require more. And the touch and feel of another person seems to activate a certain sort of physical reaction in us that (at least as the technology develops) may be achieved with a robot. The full psychological experience of partnered sex may never be precisely imitated with a robot. Indeed, we may think this would be for the best. But it is reasonable to believe that robots can deliver health benefits that significantly exceed those available through the use of more familiar sex toys.

### 3.3 Anti-Hedonism

Such hedonic arguments may not convince many detractors. The appeal of these arguments depends crucially on a proposition that many people reject, which is that sex can be seen purely as a vehicle for hedonic satisfaction. There are several reasons why we might reject the idea that sex can ever be seen solely as a means of attaining physical pleasure. First of all, there are those who see the purpose of sex as necessarily

procreative. According to procreationism (as it is sometimes called), any sexual activity that is inherently non-procreative, as sex with a robot must be, violates this natural purpose of sex, and is therefore immoral. Sex is, as John Finnis, puts it, “an instrumental good” that is meant to be “in the service” of procreation.<sup>10</sup> Such people do not generally insist that each individual sex act must be intended to produce children. Rather, they argue that acceptable sex acts must belong to the class of acts that could potentially be reproductive. Kant says that “natural sex” is that as a result of which “procreation of a being of the same kind is possible.”<sup>11</sup> Using the language of natural law theory, Finnis says that sex is morally acceptable to the extent that it instantiates a “biological union” between a man and a woman. He defines such a union in this way: “Biological union between humans is the inseminatory union of male genital organ with female genital organ; in most circumstances it does not result in generation, but it is the behavior that unites biologically because it is the behavior which, as behavior, is suitable for generation.”<sup>12</sup>

Strict procreationism has by now become a minority view, its adherents mostly motivated by religious reasons. However, there are two other approaches to sex that are not tied to religious faith, both of which give us philosophical reasons for opposing sexbots. I consider these to be of more concern for my own position. First, there are those who think that sex should be reserved for contexts where two people have an emotional bond with one another. David Benatar calls this the Significance View. As he presents this view: “for sex to be morally acceptable, it must be an expression of (romantic) love. It must, in other words, signify feelings of affection that are commensurate with the intimacy of the sexual activity. On this view a sexual union can be acceptable only if it reflects the reciprocal love and affection of the parties to that union.”<sup>13</sup>

Second, there are those who adopt what we might call the Reciprocity View. Proponents of this view do not insist that sex express love, but they do require that sex acts should involve two people, and reflect a mutuality and reciprocity of desire between the parties involved. Jean-Paul Sartre offers an analysis of sexual desire based on what he calls “a double reciprocal incarnation”: “I make myself flesh in order to impel the Other to realize for herself and for me her own flesh, and my caresses cause my flesh to be born for me in so far as it is for the Other flesh causing her to be born as flesh.”<sup>14</sup> Thomas Nagel, taking Sartre’s analysis as his point of departure, argues that sexual activity that does not include such reciprocal desire is a form of perversion:

I believe that some version of this overlapping system of distinct sexual perceptions and interactions is the basic framework of any full-fledged sexual relation and that relations involving only part of the complex are significantly incomplete. ... I believe that various familiar deviations

constitute truncated or incomplete versions of the complete configuration, and may therefore be regarded as perversions of the central impulse.

In particular, narcissistic practices and intercourse with animals, infants, and inanimate objects seem to be stuck at some primitive version of the first stage. If the object is not alive, the experience is reduced entirely to an awareness of one's own sexual embodiment.<sup>15</sup>

Roger Scruton offers a similar analysis of desire and arousal to Sartre's: "Arousal is a response to the thought of the other, as a self-conscious agent, who is alert to me, and who is able to have 'designs' on me."<sup>16</sup> He says that to see sexual arousal and sexual pleasure as purely 'physical' is to reduce us to what two followers of Melanie Klein call, in a text Scruton cites, mere "desiring machines."<sup>17</sup> Like Nagel, he sees this as a form of perversion, or as a corruption of our character. Similarly, John Finnis objects to any act in which "one's body is treated as instrumental for the securing of the experiential satisfaction of the conscious self."<sup>18</sup>

People who adopt one of these anti-hedonic views of sexual activity might see sex with a robot as a particularly intense, and perhaps dangerously appealing, form of autoeroticism. Many philosophical defenders of these views explicitly argue that masturbation is morally impermissible. For Roger Scruton, masturbation is immoral because it "involves a concentration on the body and its curious pleasures"—indeed, an "obsession ... with the organs themselves and with the pleasures of sensation."<sup>19</sup> John Finnis also holds the Kantian view (which he draws from Aquinas and natural law theory) that masturbation entails a surrender to one's purely "physical self," and thus an abandonment of the "choosing self" that makes us human. It is, for this reason, a degradation of our nature.<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that all of these arguments are clearly ones that have some resonance among the public. There remains a high level of public concern regarding masturbation, and, while no liberal jurisdictions forbid masturbation per se, several states continue to make "obscene devices" (sex toys) illegal.

To dismiss all forms of masturbation as morally impermissible will, however, strike many people as extreme. I think there will be some people who are sympathetic to one or more of the anti-hedonist positions, but who construe them in a more moderate way, such that they are not troubled by masturbation, but still object to sex with robots. They will be disturbed not by the similarities of robot sex and autoeroticism, but precisely by the dissimilarities. They will think robot sex approximates partnered sex far too closely—but partnered sex of the most objectionable sort. This is to say, it is a form of casual sex totally devoid of any emotional connection, and indeed of the possibility of such a connection.

We might raise an objection here: Why, we might wonder, does robot sex count as "real," dyadic sex, rather than as mere physical release? One answer is, because people

will tend to see it as such, because of the way in which they naturally view robots. We can look here at research on research by Sherry Turkle, who has argued that robots are different than other forms of technology because they are what she calls “relational artifacts.”<sup>21</sup> Relational artifacts are non-living objects that are, or at least appear to be, sufficiently responsive that people naturally conceive themselves to be in a mutual relationship with them. They therefore affect our sense of self, our emotional well-being, and our relationships with other humans in ways that other forms of technology do not. Turkle has looked at studies of people interacting with robots in various settings, and this empirical work suggests that many of us have a natural, even irresistible, tendency to project human intentions and emotions onto such objects, to attribute to them some sort of soul or essence, and to form an emotional bond with them. She points to one study of human-robot interaction that observed a high percentage of their subjects attributing to robots some kind of “technological essence” (75% made this attribution), a “lifelike essence” (48%), mental states (60%), and social rapport (59%).<sup>22</sup>

If it is empirically true that people tend to see robots as a special kind of object, sex with a robot potentially becomes more than a mere autoerotic act. It includes an entity with which we may naturally, at least in our own minds, form a certain kind of relationship, and which is therefore distinct in kind from, and more dangerous than, other sorts of sex toys. We are having “real” sex with an entity with which we can never form a true, reciprocal bond, but which we can easily become deluded into thinking has some sort of genuine personhood.

On this view, what is objectionable about nonreciprocal sex is not that it treats sex as a mere physical release, but rather that it deploys an “Other” as an object for our own gratification. Sex with a robot is perverse in the way that, according to proponents of the Significance or Reciprocity Views, sex with a child or an animal is. In sex acts of this kind, we do not merely gratify ourselves, we do so by objectifying another being, one who can never be a proper subject equal to us -- even if we do this only in our own mind. One of the wrongs of nonreciprocal sex is obviously that such objectification can harm the Other. But even if we do not think that the Other involved is capable of being harmed during a particular sex act, nonreciprocal sex makes sex itself into a vehicle for objectification, and it implicitly condones such objectification as morally legitimate. It can also generate an attitude toward objectification that can spill over into our human relationships. Kathleen Richardson argues that there is an inherent moral link between sexbots and the use of sex workers, and quotes from an author whose study of sex work concludes that: “... a denial of subjectivity occurs when the experiences and feelings of the ‘object’ are not recognized.”<sup>23</sup> Robot sex thus in some

way “enacts” an extreme form of sexual objectification. In psychoanalytic terms, sex with a robot allows us to indulge and foster our incomplete, narcissistic desires in a way that legitimates such desires.

It is at least partly an empirical question to what extent nonreciprocal sex will actually cause us to view our human sexual partners as less than full subjects in their own right. However, I do not think the people making this objection to sexbots have concerns that can be resolved on purely empirical grounds. There is also the explicitly moral question of what sorts of practices we as individuals and as a society condone, even if we do not indulge in them ourselves. The concern is that, by allowing or indeed encouraging sex with robots, we as a society are condoning sexual objectification more generally. This has both symbolic and practical importance. Practically speaking, people may become more likely to view their human partners simply as sex objects, and we may begin to weaken the power of sex to act as an expression of intimate, reciprocal connection between two partners.

Since the empirical question cannot yet be resolved, I do not think it is possible to offer decisive counterarguments against this view of robot sex. But I do think we can encourage those who are sympathetic to it to balance it against other considerations. I want to argue first of all that, in cases where sex is difficult or impossible to obtain, sex with a robot, even if it is less than ideal, is better than total deprivation. Second, far from harming our ability to have reciprocal or significant sexual encounters, robots may make people more able to engage in reciprocal, significant sex. They can thus have a positive effect on balance, by opening up the possibility of serious sexual relationships with fellow human beings.

### 3.4 Distributive Arguments

Inequality has become a key topic of concern among academics and policymakers. Yet few commentators have noted how uneven is the distribution of sexual satisfaction. It has been the great achievement of theorists such as Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum to point out that the list of basic goods, the distribution of which we should care about, goes beyond the satisfaction of people’s rudimentary material needs. According to such modern egalitarians, we should try to ensure that everyone is able not just to feed and clothe themselves, but to access a variety of goods, such as education and leisure, which form key components of a flourishing human life.

If we accept that there is a plurality of basic human goods, we should, I think, be willing to acknowledge that some degree of sexual satisfaction belongs among them, and that it represents a significant hardship to deprive someone of this good



unnecessarily. Sex is increasingly recognized as a basic human good. For instance the World Health Organization recently endorsed a “Declaration of Sexual Rights” drawn up by participants attending the 13th World Congress of Sexology in 1997. According to the Declaration:

Rational and satisfactory experience of sexuality is a requirement for human development. ... Sexual pleasure, including autoeroticism, is a source of physical, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual well-being. It is associated with a conflict-free and anxiety-free experience of sexuality, allowing, therefore, social and personal development.<sup>24</sup>

My proposal is this: whether or not we see nonreciprocal sex as harmful to individuals and society, we should also be willing to recognize that enforced sexual deprivation is a harm worth attending to as well, and that this weighs heavily in favor of sexbots. Even if people would prefer a human partner, they might well prefer robot companionship to total celibacy. We should at least be willing to give them that choice. This is particularly true since sexual deprivation affects those who are most vulnerable to other forms of inequality as well.

There are a number of reasons why some people may face serious, even insuperable, obstacles in finding a companion. First of all, there is the challenge of demographics. Some societies, most notably China, possess dramatically uneven gender ratios overall, which leaves large numbers of straight men with little or no opportunity for sexual companionship. Simple mathematics dictates that where the gender balance of a society is uneven, significant numbers of heterosexual people will not be able to find serious relationships. Members of sexual minority communities are equally at the mercy of their demographic environment. There are many places, such as small towns, in which gays and lesbians have little opportunity to find relationships. The problem is often compounded by stigmas that make it difficult and even dangerous to seek out a partner.

There are also many people who are forced to live in single-sex environments, the majority of whom are heterosexual. First, there are prisons. The global prison population numbers around nine million people. Even those prisoners who are married often have difficulty obtaining private time with their spouses. Second, there is the military. Over twenty million people are currently in active service in the military. By no means are all of these military personnel entirely isolated from potential partners, but it is certainly more difficult for many of them to meet people to have sex with. They are often segregated by gender and cut off from the general population. Though, at least in Western countries, the militaries have begun to accept an increasing number of female recruits, the gender ratios are still skewed, and many armed services have implemented anti-fraternization rules preventing relationships among those on active duty. There

are many other environments that are exclusively or predominantly single-sex, such as mining camps. While such single-sex environments and uneven gender ratios might be seen as a burden primarily to heterosexuals, they also tend to be ones where, not accidentally, gays and lesbians face stigmas. For example, the military is a notably difficult place for members of LGBT communities.

Many people also have mental or physical issues that limit their ability to find intimate partners. People with severe anxiety surrounding performance or body image, an incidence of sexual trauma (such as rape or incest), adults with limited or no experience, or people who have transitioned from one sex to another, may find that their anxieties about sex inhibit their ability to form relationships. People can also be the victims of stigmas due to their appearance or lack of experience.

Like other forms of inequality, sexual inequality has a widespread impact on society. When individuals, especially young males, are deprived of the prospect of sexual companionship, they can become a significant source of social instability. Numerous studies suggest that single men are significantly more likely to commit crimes than any other demographic groups, and are in general the main contributors to social disorder.<sup>25</sup> People who are single and without the prospect of companionship are also more depressed, and depend more heavily on social services.

We might wonder to what degree the mere possession of a sexbot can alleviate the psychological and social costs of sexual deprivation. It is not a perfect solution. We cannot say in advance what the precise impact will be. This will have to be determined empirically. However, I would like to suggest that a sufficiently realistic sexbot would be much better than nothing, and that it has the potential to measurably impact the psychological, social, and economic costs of sexual deprivation. Whatever our views on sex, then, if we care about the unequal distribution of basic goods, we should welcome the development of sexbots.

If we agree that sexbots are desirable as a means of addressing a particular form of inequality, we might worry about access. Sexbots will be expensive, and so they might in fact exacerbate existing inequalities by giving the rich access to even greater avenues for sexual satisfaction. This is certainly something that may need to be addressed. Short-term access—in essence, “robot sex workers”—could potentially be quite affordable, and could even be subsidized if their benefits were widely acknowledged, just as some jurisdictions have begun to subsidize access to sex workers and to sex surrogates for those with disabilities or with psychological issues that impede their ability to form relationships.

### 3.5 Relationship Arguments

Defenders of the Reciprocity View argue that we should encourage partnered sex as the healthiest or most moral form of sexual activity. But sexbots have the potential to strengthen people's human relationships in various ways and enhance the sex people have in these relationships. This provides another reason for friends of this view to remain open to sexbots.

First, sexbots can help prepare people for human relationships. They can help people build a sense of comfort with sex and increase their confidence in their own sexual abilities. People who struggle with gender orientation may find that the use of robots helps them achieve comfort with the type of partners they prefer. I have already said that people who have experienced sexual trauma often find it difficult to form intimate relationships. Sexbots might help people overcome such trauma through sexual experiences that are safe and controlled.

Sexbots can also provide people in relationships a way to address various problems they might face in their relationships. First of all, there is the problem of desire discrepancy. Desire discrepancy is the social science term for a phenomenon familiar to many people within long-term relationships: when one person wants sex more frequently than the other, and this leads to tension in the relationship. Therapists report that desire discrepancy is one of the most common problems experienced by couples, and it is one that can create significant tensions within relationships.<sup>26</sup> A sexbot can provide an outlet to the high-desire member of the couple. This outlet would not only benefit this partner, it could strengthen the relationship more generally. It could relieve pressure on the low-desire partner and might therefore decrease his or her feelings of guilt, and it could likewise diminish resentment by the high-desire partner. The sex that the partners have with one another can thus be mutually desired and mutually fulfilling.

Sexbots could also strengthen existing relationships by reducing tensions around the kind of sex the partners desire. Sexbots could allow people to play out fantasies or indulge in practices that are of no interest to their partners. Indeed, some of these practices may be ones, such as sadistic sex, that we could not reasonably expect any person to endure. By giving someone an outlet for these specific desires, sexbots remove the pressure on that person's partner to fulfill them. By providing an outlet for desire, sexbots also have the potential to decrease rates of infidelity. Infidelity has many causes, but two of the leading ones are dissatisfaction with the amount of sex available in the relationship, a problem discussed above, and the desire for novelty and variety in our

sexual partners. Affairs are a leading cause of destroyed relationships, and researchers have identified the perceived need for sexual variety, and dissatisfaction with the amount of sex available in the relationship, as two key reasons for infidelity.<sup>27</sup> The possession of a sexbot could potentially address both of these problems.

Finally, sexbots could have educational value, which can benefit a relationship by increasing the partner's level of satisfaction. They could be programmed to teach their owners positions, techniques, and other practices that they would never have thought of on their own, or to experiment with ones that they might have been reticent to try with their partner. Thus, sexbots can play a role in increasing relationship satisfaction and strengthening intimacy.

There is an objection that might be made to the argument that sexbots can strengthen relationships. We might worry that someone's possession of a sexbot could in fact undermine her relationship, either by diverting her attention away from her partner or by making her partner feel betrayed. We can recall the poll I cited at the beginning of the article, which found that less than a third of people are willing to say that sex with a robot would not be cheating. Certainly there is considerable potential for sexbots to increase tensions within relationships, especially where partners hold divergent attitudes towards them. One person may see it as a meaningful outlet for physical pleasure, but the other may suspect that there is the potential for their partner to form a bond that might undermine their own intimacy. Indeed, some of the very factors I identified as advantages with sexbots, such as their willingness to perform acts a human partner would not, may give that partner reasons for jealousy.

Couples will ultimately have to determine on their own whether the costs of obtaining a sexbot justify the benefits. Philosophically, I admit, that sounds rather like a cop-out. However, the debate here is whether we should welcome the invention of sexbots and do what we can to hasten their arrival. Obviously no one will be forced to obtain one. It will be an option for couples who think it will work for them, and if you believe that people are by and large the best judges of what is best for them, we should as a general rule try to give them more options rather than fewer. Robot technology has great potential, and I think people will be capable of seeing its risks. The technology is therefore likely on balance to be adopted by more couples who benefit from it than by couples whose relationships are harmed—and so it will on balance be a net gain for society. Thus, we should be willing to endorse my conclusion: That the development of sexbots should be encouraged, and barriers and stigmas to their adoption should be removed.

### 3.6 Conclusion

The basic argument of this chapter can be put simply. Sexbots are coming, and this will be, on net, a good thing. People will enjoy having them, and they will be happier as a result. I do not claim that I can allay all the concerns about sexbots that might be raised by someone who believes that sex must be part of a significant romantic relationship, or that it must instantiate a reciprocal connection between two people. However, I do think that even those who hold these positions should be able to see advantages to the development of sexbots. I have argued that sexbots can be a solution, if admittedly an imperfect one, to sexual deprivation, and that they can potentially help people prepare for, and maintain, long-term relationships more easily than those people could have done without them. For these reasons, the development of sexbots should not just be tolerated, but actively encouraged.

#### Notes

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