

The Dangers of Artificial Ethics

Artificial intelligence is becoming more integrated into American society, making its use in the military an urgent ethical issue. While AI has clear advantages in efficiency and safety, its role in making moral decisions presents serious risks. Ethical standards vary greatly across cultures and individuals, which makes it hard to decide whose values should guide AI systems. Although AI performs well in routine and data-driven tasks, its involvement in national security decisions could lead to dangerous outcomes if not carefully limited.

AI has proven useful in military medicine and operational efficiency. Andy Robertson notes that AI can provide fast and accurate medical diagnoses, which is crucial in battlefield conditions where time is limited. AI's ability to process large amounts of data helps medical personnel make quick, informed decisions. Similarly, Merrill Rice discusses AI's role in aviation safety, pointing out that fatigue, spatial disorientation, and hypoxia are major causes of pilot accidents. AI systems that analyze EEG data can detect hypoxia in real time, helping to prevent accidents and save lives. Robertson also highlights that AI can handle administrative tasks like scheduling and record management, allowing medical professionals to focus on patient care. In demanding military environments, this efficiency is very beneficial.

Despite these advantages, AI's biggest weakness lies in its ability to make ethical decisions. Efforts to program ethics into AI systems, such as ASIMOV, are inherently risky because moral standards are subjective. Rebecca McCarthy argues in "Full Metal Racket" that definitions of ethical behavior differ significantly, and history shows how moral certainty can lead to atrocities. McCarthy also discusses President Trump's push for American leadership in AI development. While technological leadership isn't always harmful, global competition may prioritize speed over caution, increasing the risk of reckless deployment.

Warfare complicates AI ethics even further. Though war is inherently violent, militaries try to regulate it through rules of engagement. Teaching AI to navigate these contradictions is almost impossible. As McCarthy warns, soldiers might avoid responsibility by claiming they acted because “the computer told me to.” John Keller raises similar concerns, questioning where human judgment should end and machine authority should begin. As commanders become more comfortable with AI, the line between assistance and control may become dangerously blurred. Teaching ethics to AI is problematic because AI does not learn or reason like humans. Humans develop moral understanding through emotions, guilt, and consequences, while AI relies solely on programming and pattern recognition. Paul Scharre describes a 2019 DARPA experiment in which Marines easily tricked an AI threat-detection system with somersaults and cartwheels. This case shows how easily AI can fail in unpredictable situations. In ethical contexts, such failures could lead to disastrous results, as AI may prioritize logic over empathy.

Despite these risks, military AI development is unavoidable. Other global powers, especially China, are heavily investing in AI. Michael Horowitz and Lauren Kahn note concerns within the policy community about China’s goal of becoming a global AI leader by 2030. They argue that limiting high-risk applications while promoting international cooperation could lessen global instability. Such restraint could help ensure that AI’s inevitable role in warfare does not escalate conflict unnecessarily.

In conclusion, AI will likely play a role in future warfare, making its responsible development essential. AI provides significant benefits in medicine and efficiency, but it should not be allowed to make ethical decisions without strict limits and human oversight. With careful regulation and accountability, AI can remain a valuable tool rather than a dangerous authority. These safeguards are necessary to guard against poor design and misuse of military AI.

Works Cited

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