Another Case against Killer Robots

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Background

- Increasing concern about **lethal autonomous robotic weapons**.

- Two opposing views about their ethical nature.

  - Autonomous weapons are inhumane.
  - It is rather ethical to use them.
Questions

• Is there anything particularly unethical about lethal autonomous weapons, compared to, for example, drones or missiles?

• More generally, is there any reason against any autonomous (or even automatic) killing machines, not only against autonomous weapons used in war?
Goal

• To articulate a reason against killer robots, including lethal autonomous weapons.
Drones equal War Crimes

http://upstatedroneaction.org/index.html
Weapons with Greater Autonomy

http://www.hrw.org/node/111291/section/4
Cases for lethal robotic weapons

• It is possible to make robots who will observe the Laws of War.

• Robots can be more ethical than human because they are not disturbed by emotions like fear, hatred etc.

• To protect people’s lives is a duty of a nation, and so it is ethically bad if a nation exposes its soldiers to unnecessary risks by not using robots.
Governing Lethal Behavior in Autonomous Robots

Ronald C. Arkin
Moral competence can be roughly thought about as the ability to learn, reason with, act upon, and talk about the laws and societal conventions on which humans tend to agree.

Algorithmic morals on the battlefield

http://www.kurzweilai.net/can-robots-be-trusted-to-know-right-from-wrong
Nations confront killer robots challenge

At the first multilateral meeting ever held on killer robots, nations have recognized the need to confront the challenge of fully autonomous weapons that could select and attack targets without any human control. The call issued by the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots for a preemptive ban on these fully autonomous weapons has become a central feature of the international debate.

A total of 87 countries participated in the four-day informal meeting of experts on “lethal autonomous weapons systems” by the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) at the United Nations (UN) in Geneva, which concluded on the afternoon of Friday, May 16 (71 states parties and signatories to the convention and 12 observer states). Representatives were also present of the Red Cross (ICRC), and of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots.
Cases against lethal robotic weapons

• Robots cannot distinguish noncombatants from combatants.
• Robots make war an easy choice for policy makers.
• It is unclear who would be responsible for the crime by robots.
Cases against lethal robotic weapons

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What if these problems are solved?
Situations other than war where killing a person might be accepted

- Suicide
- Euthanasia
- Death Penalty
Can robots be an executioner?
Cases against lethal robotic weapons (again)

- Robots cannot distinguish noncombatants from combatants.
- Robots make war an easy choice for policy makers.
- It is unclear who would be responsible for the crime by robots.

These types of objections do not seem applicable to the robot executioner.
What is a robot?

• Artificial
• Possibly autonomous or automatic
• Possibly human-like
• Labourer

Karel Čapek
Structure of Labour

Labourer → Labour → Product → Consumer → Money → Employer → Money → Labourer → Pain
Structure of Robot Labour

Labour \rightarrow Product \rightarrow Consumer

Pain \rightarrow Robot \rightarrow Employer

Money \text{ (Employer to Robot)}

Money \text{ (Consumer to Employer)}
Structure of War

Fight — Security — Citizen

Soldier — Money — Nation

Death
Injury
Psychological stress
Sense of guilty
PTSD
e tc.
Death
Injury
Psychological stress
Sense of guilty
PTSD
eetc.

Structure of Robot War

Fight

Security

Citizen

Robot

Nation

Money

Money
Psychological stress
Sense of guilty
PTSD etc.

Structure of Execution

Executioner → Executioner
Security

Citizen → Nation
Money

Executioner → Nation
Money
Structure of Execution by Robot

Execution → Citizen

Robot

Psychological stress
Sense of guilty
PTSD etc.

Security

Money

Nation

Money
Why is the robot executioner evil?
Why is the robot executioner evil?

Because it creates greater psychological distance between us and those executed.
Reflection on the outcomes

Questioning and rethinking the norms

Modifying the norms

Morality cycle

Reasoning based on the norms

Decision making

Action

Typically, Action leads to Decision making, which then leads to Reflection on the outcomes. Following this, Questioning and rethinking the norms may occur, leading to the Modifying the norms stage. Intimate empathy is crucial here.
Replacing humans with robots may create greater physical and psychological distance from us to the outcome, making it harder to have intimate empathy.
Distance affects our moral thinking


Weapons and Distance

Hand
Club
Spear
Sword
Gun
Arrow
Rifle
Artillery
Bomber
ICBM
Drone
Robot

Cf. Coeckelburgh, "Drones, information technology, and distance: mapping the moral epistemology of remote fighting"
To sum up

• Morality should change over time and across the cultures. Instead of adhering the existing norms, we have to rethink them when necessary.

• We should keep a close eye to what our action lead to, and to those affected by our morally significant action.

• Employing robots may get in the way of this process.

• So when we delegate a morally significant task to a robot, we have to be careful not to let it blind our eyes.
``Mittler zwischen Hirn und Händen muss Hertz sein."
Fritz Lang, *Metropolis* (1927)