

## **The Ethics of AI in Warfare**

Major powers including the USA, China, and Russia are rapidly developing AI-powered lethal autonomous weapons (LAWs), sometimes called "killer robots." These are AI-controlled drones or ground-based robots that identify and kill military targets without any direct human action.

LAWs are being developed to react faster than humans, operate without fatigue or hesitation, and reach targets with more accuracy and precision. In recent trials, AI systems have outperformed humans: in one US military simulation, an AI pilot defeated an expert human pilot 5/5 times.

Supporters claim it's only a matter of time before these systems outperform human soldiers across the board, which could be a decisive advantage to win a war. They compare this to past advancements in warfare, like gunpowder, where nations that refused to adapt were defeated. If one nation refuses to deploy "killer robots" due to morality, their nation and people could be defenseless against another warring country that uses LAWs. They argue that use of killer robots would take human soldiers off the battlefield, leading to fewer casualties and lives lost at war. Additionally, unlike human soldiers, machines cannot commit atrocities like torture or sexual violence. Since machines do not suffer from fatigue, panic, or revenge, they may actually follow the rules of war more consistently than humans. They claim that LAWs could theoretically reduce unlawful killings rather than increase them.

Some opponents, though, argue that machine algorithms should never be given the power to end lives. Others claim that LAWs could make unpredictable errors and execute innocent civilians. If there is faulty programming, civilians may be killed by the AI before the error is found. Additionally, AI has been shown to exhibit racial and gender biases, favoring lighter skin tones and males. Critics say these hidden biases could result in the death of innocents just for the way they look. LAWs also may make war easier and more frequent, as fewer fatalities at war could reduce public pressure that would normally deter war. Finally, LAWs could be especially susceptible to sabotage or hacking, both from the inside by domestic terrorists or from an enemy. If killer robots are hacked, the consequences could be catastrophic, possibly even more so than not using them at all.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Is it ethical to use AI weapons in warfare?
2. If enemy countries deploy killer robots, should survival and national security outweigh any ethical worries about deploying similar weapons in response?
3. If an AI weapon kills a civilian, who is responsible? The programmer, the commander, or no one at all?

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## **Lock boxes in Schools: Solution to Cellphone Distraction or Infringement on Autonomy?**

To address the problem of cellphone usage in classrooms, more and more school districts across the country are implementing a lock box system: schools collect mobile devices at the beginning of the day and keep them in unopenable boxes (or pouches) until the last bell rings. Proponents of this approach argue that removing phones helps improve concentration, benefits students' interpersonal skills, and positively impacts educational outcomes. Others believe this approach makes schools less safe and infringes on student rights.

On the one hand, school districts are introducing bell-to-bell cellphone bans for good reason. Teachers and parents want students to maintain a higher level of focus during class time and minimize distractions. When students are texting instead of paying attention, teachers can't be as effective in imparting knowledge and encouraging participation. Eliminating the presence of hand-held devices also reduces the likelihood of cheating and fosters a more hands-on learning environment. Without phones, students tend to be more mindful and present, which in turn can alleviate stress and enhance mental health and well-being. Rather than relying on search engines and artificial intelligence tools, students are challenged to think creatively and engage more deeply with the material. Moreover, schools with cellphone bans report that students are engaging more actively with one another rather than spending time on their phones during lunch and other free periods, helping to alleviate the loneliness and isolation that has grown among teens since the widespread use of smartphones.

On the other hand, critics argue that phone bans limit students' abilities to communicate with family members, peers, and school staff, especially in times of emergency. They also point out that students often depend on their phones as a way to navigate the school: assignments, lesson plans, meeting locations, and course schedules are constantly updated, requiring timely access. Without phones, students may find it difficult to stay up to date with important information and key announcements. Many students rely on phones for online access, and some argue that these students especially need training in how to use their phones effectively, training that will not happen if phones are banned in school. Opponents of cellphone bans also argue that students will always find distractions, regardless of the measures that are put in place. Eliminating phones will simply shift the distraction to something else, such as personal or school-sanctioned laptops. Virtual private networks (VPNs) and mirroring functionalities, which allow users to wirelessly connect to their phones from a computer, are just a few examples of the ways that students can avoid restrictions on technology.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Is banning phones from classrooms ethically acceptable? Are there less restrictive alternatives that as effectively meet the goals of cellphone bans?
2. What are the limits to students' rights to autonomy? When is it ethically permissible for schools to make decisions for students, such as the use of cellphones?
3. Do cellphone bans raise equity issues?

Written by Charles Lugo, age 15  
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## **Defacing Art as a Form of Protest**

Climate change is an increasingly pressing issue. With historically high temperatures around the globe, intense wildfires, and severe hurricanes, we're already seeing some of its effects. Hundreds of organizations are trying to draw attention to the issue by protesting peacefully and educating the public. However, when met with inaction, some protesters have turned to more disruptive forms of protest. A few incidents have gained attention worldwide. For example, two members of the group *Just Stop Oil* threw tomato soup at Vincent van Gogh's "Sunflowers" in 2022. As civil disobedience becomes a more common framework for protesting, questions arise about its morality and effectiveness as a form of activism.

During the *Just Stop Oil* protest involving van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, one of the protesters delivered a speech while glued to a wall near the painting, asking visitors whether they were "more concerned about the protection of a painting or the protection of our planet and people." Many activists consider these kinds of tactics necessary because other peaceful and non-disruptive methods have not been effective. They seek swift, effective publicity to convey the urgency of their cause, and involving works of art has become a pathway for them to reach this goal. "No art on a dead planet" is a popular slogan, which summarizes protesters' views on the issue.

Others oppose these protests, especially people involved with the targeted museums, which have faced great financial repercussions from the protests — having to pay for the restoration of the artwork, hiring additional staff members for security, and enacting proactive measures such as adding protective glass to paintings. The immediate consequences of the protests have also included heavy fines and jail time for protesters. Along with pointing out the protests' negative consequences, people also question their effectiveness. They argue that these kinds of disruptive tactics actually undermine the ideas and credibility of the organizations carrying out the protests and are therefore counterproductive. Critics question whether it is ethical to damage artwork, which originally had nothing to do with climate change, to draw attention to this cause.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Are these kinds of disruptive protests ethical? Why or why not?
2. If disruptive protests are not ethical, how can those in power be held responsible?
3. How should we balance the importance of one cause over another? Is there an objective way to do this?
4. What is the role of motive when deciding the appropriate consequences for an action?

## **Should developing countries prioritize economic growth or environmental preservation?**

The world is experiencing adverse effects due to climate change and sustainability is emerging as the most essential goal for countries. According to the International Institute of Sustainable Development, "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." For example, in Brazil's Amazon rainforest, the most biodiverse place on earth, hundreds of billions of trees absorb carbon emissions and reduce global warming. However, Brazil is also a developing country where millions live in poverty, depending on industries like logging and ranching for their livelihood. Should Brazil prioritize the conservation of vital ecosystems or focus on development that could improve the lives of many families?

Those who support an emphasis on the economy argue that nations should not be expected to worry about the environment when their people lack basic necessities like food and healthcare. Many developing countries have been centered on the primary sector, which includes agriculture, fishing, and mining. A new industrial project may damage natural resources but can also create thousands of jobs leading to more investment. Additionally, advocates claim that it is unethical for wealthier nations, many who became rich through exploiting nature, to force poorer countries to slow their growth. Some believe that these more advanced countries should pay for environmental conservation abroad, allowing developing countries to focus on their economies. This path might be the best sustainable development for some countries because it meets their own needs.

Opponents contend that environmental damages to nature are irreversible and global. Apart from short-term benefits, industry has led to habitat loss, increased greenhouse gas emissions, and pollution that harms locals as well as global citizens. Climate change disproportionately impacts developing nations, aggravating natural disasters. Furthermore, Brazil may have an ethical duty to protect such a vital place, especially when its effects could spread throughout the world. This decision may be in their best interests, as a failing environment can also destroy the economy. Johannes Zutt, World Bank Director in Brazil, explains, "Climate shocks could push between 800,000 and 3,000,000 Brazilians into extreme poverty as soon as 2030. It is crucial that Brazil accelerate investments towards a resilient and low carbon growth pathway." A potential solution may be to embrace the economic possibilities in a world that is leaning to greener methods, including expanding on renewable energy sources, which have become cheaper with innovation.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. In what circumstances should/shouldn't developing countries prioritize their economic growth over the environment?
2. Can economic growth and environmental conservation be solved together, or are they mutually exclusive?
3. Do developing countries have the same responsibilities to solve issues as wealthier nations?
4. Is it ethical to harm the lives of future generations to benefit those alive now?

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## **Returning History: The Ethics of Artifact Repatriation**

To whom should important cultural artifacts belong? Artifact repatriation is the return of cultural property to their place and cultures of origin. Numerous museums and academic institutions around the world currently display disputed cultural artifacts that were originally obtained through acts of looting in periods of colonialism and coercion. These artifacts are usually significant and relevant in cultural, historical, or religious sectors of their places of origin, which poses challenges surrounding cultural identity and heritage. Arguments for and against repatriation center around property rights, colonialism, access to history, and conservation of artifacts.

Advocates for repatriation argue that many cultural artifacts were removed under colonial rule and coercion, and that returning these artifacts acknowledges historical wrongs and represents a form of reparation. They assert that refusing to repatriate artifacts would perpetuate colonial structures in the status quo, contributing to a never-ending cycle of domination. Advocates also contend that cultural objects are important parts of heritage and cultural identity, therefore the return of these objects would expand self-determination and autonomy in a postcolonial world. The denial of cultural identity is further complicated by the reality that that encyclopedic museums housing looted artifacts, such as the British Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, are located in the Global North, places that are extremely costly to visit for most people and inaccessible to communities of origin, thus preventing these communities from interacting with their own history and heritage.

Those who oppose repatriation argue that the repatriation of artifacts would lessen global cultural education and risk damage to fragile objects. They contend that artifacts are a part of a shared human heritage, and that encyclopedic museums such cultivate broad cultural understandings by displaying artifacts from around the world, with the location of encyclopedic museums in large cosmopolitan cities allowing for greater international interaction with numerous cultures and fostering multicultural pedagogy. Critics also find that source countries do not have the necessary equipment or personnel to safely preserve artifacts; thus it is imperative for the safety of the objects to remain where they are now. The question of contemporary borders and ownership claims also arises, as most of the ancient societies from which the artifacts were taken do not retain their original borders, causing legal disputes over which country should receive the artifact(s).

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. To what extent does repatriation act as a form of reparation? Can it ever serve as a sufficient redressing of colonial violence?
2. Is global access and cultural education more important than source community access and heritage?
3. How should disputes revolving around legal ownership of artifacts be resolved when the artifact is culturally significant in multiple countries?

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## Academic Integrity

Cheating is defined as “acting dishonestly or unfairly in order to gain an advantage.” However, many American children and young adults seem to think of cheating as a normal, if not acceptable, action towards gaining a desired result.

Cheaters are not predominantly low-scoring, below-average students. The majority of high-school cheaters today are actually high-performing, college-bound students. And they aren't necessarily only cheating on tests. A recent study found that while 22% of students reports having cheated at least once on a test, 43% admits to providing or receiving “unauthorized collaboration” on homework.

The continued proliferation of technology and web-based research and interaction, including the popularity of social media sites such as facebook, plays a role in today's culture of cheating. Some students consider facebook to be one big study group, using it often to network with classmates and solicit assistance. Reliance on social media may also work to normalize the type of “virtual” cheating that looks more like helping out a classmate than smuggling in exam answers.

Unauthorized collaboration at the university level is also highly prevalent, sparking a dialogue about what constitutes cheating. According to Don McCabe, a Rutgers Business School professor, “The number of self-reported cheaters has decreased at the college level, but that merely reflects the increasing number of students who think there's nothing wrong with borrowing work.” Claiming that the definition of cheating is changing, he states that most students view homework as a collaborative effort and that finding answers online or through friends is an example of being resourceful. Some students even argue that they should be allowed to collaborate; after all, in the post-graduate workplace, people are often encouraged to work together to maximize their resources.

Trevor Harding, a professor at California Polytechnic Institute, has documented a definite shift in students' conception of cheating. He discovered something he calls the “technological detachment phenomenon.” Although most students agree that bringing a cheat sheet into an exam is cheating, most think it is acceptable to bring a graphing calculator with pre-programmed equations.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Should students be allowed to collaborate on homework assignments? If so, under what conditions? Under what conditions, if any, is cheating morally permissible?

