Essay on Tavani 12

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In chapter twelve, Tavani brings up two important questions when discussing the future and what it may bring in terms of ‘machines’ making ‘human’ decisions. The first question is, can we design ‘machines’ capable of making moral decisions? With the second questions being, should we design such machines? In the following I will provide my own take on the issue as well as some points brought up by the author.

First, I’d like to address the question of can we design a ‘machine’ that would have the ability to make moral decisions? This is a very tricky questions because the answer is almost certainly not going to reveal itself any time soon and people could definitely argue it wither way. But, I personally believe that we could never make a machine, that is non-human, which could make the same level of moral decisions we humans make. To me, a single human seems to be leaps and bounds beyond the most powerful super-computer that hasn't even been come up with. And that’s just one person. All the human beings on the planet must have an astonishing ability to perceive, compute, and react all in an organic system, which could never be matched by a machine. In addition, I feel like a human could not build something that exceeds its own creativity.

But, for whatever reason, let’s say yes, we can build a ‘machine’ that is capable of making moral decisions. Do I think we should? This question is even MORE complicated than the last. Getting all the technical stuff down would be the easy part compared to the task of deciding if this is a good idea to let loose. And, what I’m about to say may sound like a blanket answer, because it is. In this case I believe it really, really depends on what the situation is. Whether the technology in question is being used for good or for bad is a huge component in deciding whether we should build a ‘machine’ capable of moral decision-making.

In the text, Tavani bring up the point of how we could possibility tell if a machine is capable to make moral and ethical decisions, and talks about the work of Allen, Varner, and Zinser (2000) and their concept of a “Moral Turing Test” (MTT) which could be used to assess the machines ability to make or in the words of Allen et al. “ACT” in a certain situation. The test would basically contain question like, “what would you, robot, do given this situation?” And we would somehow have to find a way to interpit what the robot was saying they would do and whether we find that “acceptable” or not (Tavani, pg. 401, 2013). He also says that finding a way to determine if the machines are moral is less important than designing the machine in the first place. Which I disagree with.

Overall, I think this question has no real answer, and we will just have to wait and find out. I really feel like we are not going to see something at the human level for quite a while. The subject is very interesting though because it prompts so many thought provoking questions about human’s ability to advance technology and where we think we are headed in years to come.