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Performing Robots

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Robot Ethics in War: Navigating the Irony and Dilemmas

In a world full of peace and love, there are still several instances of human conflicts around the globe, including wars. After several large scale global military conflicts that lost countless lives of young soldiers, human society began to turn their attention to usage of robots in war. The concept of robots in warfare has evolved dramatically over the years, raising complex ethical questions that challenge our understanding of both machines and morality. The irony embedded in the definition of a robot as "a machine resembling a human being" questions the ethics behind the appropriate application of robotics in wars. Examining Isaac Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics, proposed in 1940, provides a diverse perspective on the ethical considerations surrounding artificial intelligence and warfare.

The definition of a robot contains a fundamental contradiction, highlighting the paradoxical nature of these machines in the context of war. On one hand, a robot is described as a machine resembling a human being, suggesting a certain level of anthropomorphism. On the other hand, the term "robotic person" implies a mechanical and unemotional demeanor, distinctly non-human. This duality underscores the complexity of integrating machines into human conflicts, as it prompts us to question the blurred boundaries between the human and the mechanical.

In 1940, Isaac Asimov formulated the Three Laws of Robotics in his 1942 short story "Runaround" (included in the 1950 collection I, Robot), providing a framework for ethical robot behavior. These laws are as follows:

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.

2. A robot must obey the orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.

3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

Asimov's laws were designed to ensure the ethical behavior of robots, prioritizing human safety and well-being. However, the implementation of these laws in robots with human-level artificial intelligence introduces thought-provoking questions.

Imagine a scenario where the Three Laws of Robotics are integrated into robots with advanced artificial intelligence. These laws can lead to contradictions regarding human conflicts. For instance, if a robot is ordered to protect one group of humans, it may cause harm to another group, leading to a conflict between the First and Second Laws. Negotiating these ethical dilemmas becomes increasingly challenging as the complexity of human interactions and conflicts grows.

One of the primary intentions behind Asimov's laws was to prevent robots from causing harm to humans. Yet, when considering their application to human wars, concerns emerge about completely preventing robot participation in the act of harming humans. Can the Three Laws of Robotics truly act as a reliable rule to the ethical use of robots in wars, or will they remain more of theoretical principles when confronted with military necessities?

The complexity of wartime scenarios introduces an additional interrogation to the implementation of the Three Laws. What if a robot is assisting human forces in a war without directly causing harm to other humans? The distinction between direct and indirect harm becomes obscure, and the ethical obligations of robots becomes unsure in situations where harm may unintentionally result from their actions.

Navigating the ethical landscape of robots in war poses a challenge that transcends the mere definition of a machine resembling a human being. The irony embedded in this definition mirrors the intricate interplay between humanity and technology. Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics arise ethical dilemmas when confronted with the realities of warfare. The thought-provoking queries surrounding the integration of these laws into robots equipped with human-level artificial intelligence emphasize the ongoing necessity for discourse and meticulous contemplation as we discuss the evolving confluence of technology and ethics on the battlefield.

References

"Robot." Lexico, Oxford University Press, www.lexico.com/definition/robot. Accessed 18 Dec. 2023.