

Ethical challenges for self-driving cars

Jean-François Bonnefon (Toulouse School of Economics, Institute for Advanced Study in Toulouse, and Center for Research in Management, Toulouse)

Abstract

Even if self-driving cars prove safer than conventional cars, their widespread adoption is imperiled by a moral challenge. If a crash is unavoidable and the car must decide whether to save its passengers or to save pedestrians, what should it do? Minimize casualties (even if it means harming its passengers), or protect its passengers at all costs (even if it means harming a greater number of pedestrians)? Studying problems of this sort, we identified a no-win situation for manufacturers of self-driving cars. Either they offer cars that protect their passengers at all costs, and they invite moral outrage (because people have a strong feelings that self-driving cars should minimize casualties impartially); or they offer cars that minimize casualties impartially, and they scare consumers away (because people want their own car to protect them first). I will describe these findings, discuss the reaction of car manufacturers, and talk of our ongoing work, including the Moral Machine website which already attracted several millions of users.