2024-2025 Lincoln-Douglas Value Debate Resolution Introduction

Contents

Resolution wording may undergo minor amendment if deemed necessary prior to the start of the 2024-2025 competition season.

Resolved: In combat, the use of automation should be valued above the use of military personnel.

Background

Technology, or tools, have been made and used by humanity to great effect since the ancient times. Tools like the lever and wheel have enabled us to do things we could not otherwise do on our own. As humans made advancements in technology, tools could work on their own without human operation or supervision. In the home, we can use automation to make rice, bread, coffee; or wash clothes and clean dishes at the push of a button, replacing hours of effort in manual labor. At a commercial level, many factories have enhanced human labor on production lines with robotic arms to automate workflows with precision, speed, and consistency. As technology advanced with greater processing power and more advanced sensors, the automation of tasks has started to replace not just actions but thinking, decision-making, and learning. Now it is possible for planes and cars to operate independently during cruise phases of the journey. In special situations, cars can enter the highway on their own, and planes can land on their own. In some cities like San Francisco, companies like Waymo operate self-driving taxi services.

When we look at a context of combat, we see nation states deploy automation in the form of drones (UAV's), and smart weapons (e.g. Israeli Iron Dome, Israeli Harpy loitering missile, and the US Phalanx). If we look back in history, given that LD values debate often is not bound to geography or time, we find pre-modern uses of automation in combat. This includes Remote-Controlled Explosive Devices (French Crocodile Schneider Torpille Terrestre, Wickersham Land Torpedo, and Leichter Ladungsträger Goliath), Automated Defensive Systems (Greek Fire Projectors and Chinese chu-ko-nu), and Siege Engines (Ballistae, Trebuchets, and Catapults). There are many more examples to explore. In fact the US military has had some form of automation over the past 80 years.

Resolution Definitions

Combat (noun): "A fight or contest between individuals or groups" ([Combat Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster](#)).

Note: In exploring this resolution, students might consider that the parties involved could be a single person, a small group, a large group, or even a nation state. Also, the engagement can be physical or non-physical such as psychological, diplomatic, or economic combat.

Automation (noun): "application of machines to tasks once performed by human beings or, increasingly, to tasks that would otherwise be impossible. Although the term mechanization is often used to refer to the simple replacement of human labour by machines, automation generally implies the integration of machines into a self-governing system." ([Automation | Technology, Types, Rise, History, & Examples | Britannica](#)).

Note: In exploring this resolution, students might consider the application of machine automation to tasks such as logistics, surveillance, communication, or combat decisions such as the steps involved in a "kill-chain".

Military Personnel (noun): "someone who serves in the armed forces; a member of a military force" (Vocabulary.com Dictionary) https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/military%20personnel

Note: This definition encompasses non-combatants military roles such as medics, mine-sweepers, logistics, etc..

Foundational Definitions

It can be surprising to find that in philosophy, definitions are difficult to come by. In learning the foundations to help you explore this year's resolution, some terms that are not in the resolution but foundational to the issues at hand are "technology" and "persons." These terms will help you better understand and justify your choice between the two sides of "automation" and "personnel".

The following definitions are just starting points; you will need to investigate further to understand the issues involved in this debate.

Technology is a tool or "a means to ends" and a way of interacting with the world or "a human activity". (Heidegger, M. (1954). The Question Concerning Technology). Retrieved from https://www.philtech.michaelreno.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/HeideggerTheQuestionConcerningTechnology.pdf).

A **person**, according to philosopher Boethius, is "the individual substance of a nature". (Boethius. (1345). Liber de Persona et Duabus Naturis, Chapter 3. Retrieved from https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0677%3Aloebline%3Dpos%3D26)

You can explore further definitions through the bible, and other philosophers such as St. Thomas Aquinas, John Locke, and Immanuel Kant.

Related Concepts

Kill chain: sequence of decisions and actions that may result in human fatalities. The chain includes finding, tracking, targeting, and engaging the target, and then assessing the outcomes of the action.

Responsibility gap: an AI ethics concept that describes the problem in which the actions of an autonomous machine causes harm and no one can be blamed for it, even though blame is appropriate, because humans are no longer involved in the decision chain.

Meaningful human control (MHC): a view that argues for preserving human judgment and input while employing autonomous systems.

Human-out-of-the-Loop: The human is not directly part of the decision-making process, and the machine can act without input and process many variables with speed beyond the capacity of a human combatant or operator.

Human-in-the-Loop: The human is directly involved in the decision-making process, and the machine can act only after human input is provided. Human combatants or operators have life experience and an intimate comprehension of humanity to make informed decisions that affect the life of another human.

Resolutional Analysis

Students should weigh the priority of using automation versus personnel to perform actions and make decisions in combat. Some areas of conflict include:

Efficiency and Precision: Automation can lead to more precise military engagements, potentially minimizing unintended damage and better fulfilling the 'jus in bello' principles of war. This could result in an increase in the effectiveness of military operations.

Minimizing Harm: The accuracy and precision of automated systems in identifying combatants versus civilians could potentially reduce collateral damage. The benefits of automation are contingent on the current state of technology and potential improvements.

Reliability and Security: With the right redundancies and safeguards, automation could potentially prevent or mitigate failures. However, there is a risk of over-reliance on automation and overconfidence in technology leading to strategic errors.

Ethical and Moral Concerns: The removal of human agency from the decision-making process introduces ethical concerns. These include questions of accountability, the value of human judgment, and the potential dehumanization of warfare.

Human Rights: Legal frameworks that govern warfare, such as the Geneva Convention, may have implications for automated warfare.

Dignity and Compassion: While advancements in AI might allow for some level of empathy or decision-making based on more than just algorithms, it's important to consider whether this can truly replace human judgment and compassion.

Actor:

While not explicitly defined, students could consider a range of actors. They can look at those directly involved in combat, those who oversee combat decisions, the designers of automation, and international bodies.

1. **Governments and Military Commanders:**
   - Governments and military leaders play a pivotal role in determining combat strategies. They decide whether to prioritize automation or personnel based on national security interests, available technology, and ethical considerations..
2. **Soldiers and Operators on the Ground:**
   - Operators on the ground face real-time combat situations. Their judgment influences the use of automation or the reliance on personnel. They adapt to dynamic scenarios, assess risks, and execute orders.
3. **Design Engineers and Software Developers:**
   - Engineers and developers design automation systems. They determine algorithms, decision-making processes, and fail-safes. Their choices impact how automation behaves in combat. How can they ensure automation follows ethical guidelines, minimizes harm, and can be accountable? How can they anticipate unknown situations beyond the parameters of programming?
4. **International Organizations and Conventions:**
   - Global bodies like the United Nations and international humanitarian laws set norms for warfare. How does automation align with these principles?

Remember, this is only a sampling of possible actors. Students can consider a variety of angles over the course of the season.

Affirmative Framework:

Utilitarianism: Utilitarianism focuses on maximizing overall happiness or utility. It assesses actions based on their consequences. AFF would see prioritizing automation leads to fewer human casualties, thus increasing overall well-being. Automation brings efficiency, precision, and reduced risk to soldiers..

A sampling of affirmative values:

1. **Minimizing Harm:** By relying on automation, we decrease the exposure of human personnel to danger. Both soldiers and civilians benefit from reduced risk during combat. This aligns with a moral obligation to protect lives while achieving mission objectives.
2. **Efficiency:** Automation can significantly enhance military operations by executing tasks with high precision and minimal error. This improvement greatly enhances combat effectiveness. Operations conducted with speed and scale, facilitated by automation, may lead to shorter conflicts with minimal collateral damage, thus reducing unintended harm to people.
3. **Civility:** Automation enables a more civilized approach to warfare. It ensures that both opposing sides can eventually transition back to normalcy after the conflict subsides. By adhering to consistent protocols, automation strictly follows the general rules of war. In contrast, human personnel are susceptible to variations and mistakes due to the unpredictable nature of war, as well as the effects of fatigue, stress, and burnout.

Affirmative Philosophies:

Consequentialism argues that the morality of an action is based on its outcomes or consequences. In the context of combat, if automation leads to fewer human casualties and less suffering, then it is morally preferable. Automation is preferable because it reduces harm and promotes overall happiness by saving lives (See Mill, J. S. (1863). Utilitarianism. London, Parker, son, and Bourn.).

Pragmatism values practical consequences and real-world effects as the primary basis for determining meaning, truth, or value. If automation in combat leads to greater efficiency, accuracy, and speed, then it is the more pragmatic approach. Automation is preferable because it is more effective in achieving the objectives of combat such as neutralizing threats quickly and accurately (See James, W. (1907). Pragmatism: A new name for some old ways of thinking. Longmans, Green and Co).

Virtue Ethics emphasizes an individual's character as the key element of ethical thinking, rather than rules about the acts themselves or their consequences. Automation is preferable because it is an expression of the virtues of prudence and justice: prudence, because it involves making wise decisions about the means to achieve ends; and justice, because it can help distribute risks more evenly across combatants (Aristotle. (1925). *Nichomachean ethics: Book II*. (W.D. Ross, Trans.). The Internet Classics Archive. http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.2.ii.html (Original work published 350 B.C.E)).

Negative Framework:

Deontology: This framework focuses on moral duties and principles. It would oppose removing the moral responsibility for life-and-death decisions from humans, and instead hold that such decisions should always be made by humans, who can be held accountable for their actions.

A sampling of negative values:

1. **Human Dignity:** Ensuring that life-and-death decisions remain in human hands preserves the dignity of individuals. The weighty question of taking lives should be deliberated by fellow humans, not delegated to machines. Upholding human dignity necessitates maintaining accountability and ethical responsibility in combat decisions.
2. **Nuanced Judgment:** Humans possess empathy, moral reasoning, and the ability to understand context beyond mere algorithms with which machines operate. In complex and dynamic combat situations, human combatants can make ethical decisions that consider intricate factors. Personnel bring nuanced judgment that machines are unable to perceive or replicate.
3. **Preserving our Humanity:** Automating combat may make the decision to go to war easier, as the risk to human soldiers is reduced. However, it also distances the effects of war and death, rendering conflict sanitized. This fundamental shift alters how people perceive the value of other human lives, potentially undermining our shared humanity.

Negative Philosophies:

Kantian Ethics argues that we have a duty to treat individuals with respect. Humans are not mere means to an end; they are ends in themselves. Moral reasoning and empathy guide our actions, preserving human dignity. Automation lacks agency and consciousness, potentially devaluing human life (Kant, I. (1785). Grounding for the metaphysics of morals).

Existentialism emphasizes human agency and conscious decision-making as critical. It values individual freedom and responsibility and rejects determinism; we define ourselves through our choices. Relying solely on automation removes our autonomy (Sartre, J. P. (1943). Being and Nothingness).

Marxism warns against the detachment of personnel from direct action impacting ethical responsibility. It warns against alienation from labor due to

mechanization. Automation detaches us from the consequences of our actions, eroding moral responsibility toward human lives (Chambre, H. and McLellan, . David T. (2024, April 23). Marxism. Encyclopedia Britannica).

Heidegger's Phenomenology Heidegger might argue that automation, lacking the consciousness and awareness inherent in "being-in-the-world", acts without the kind of moral consideration that humans are capable of. Humans must remain involved in lethal action to ensure moral responsibility and authenticity. (Heidegger, M. (1927). Being and Time).

Postphenomenology focuses on human-technology relations and would argue that the question is not whether lethal action should be conducted by automation or personnel, but how the relationship between the two can be understood and ethically managed. (Ritter, M. Postphenomenological Method and Technological Things Themselves. Hum Stud 44, 581–593 (2021)).

Summary:

The crux of the conflict lies between the use of man or machine in combat. On one hand, automation has many benefits such as more precise military engagements that could minimize unintended deaths. On the other hand, there are downsides to automation such as the removal of human agency from the process which introduces ethical concerns. Students must decide which value should guide us in navigating between the benefits and downsides of man versus machine in the context of combat situations.

Suggested Reading

1. [This is Technology Ethics (podcast)](#) / [(book)](#)
2. [Deep Utopia (book)](#)
3. [2084 (book)](#)

4. [How autonomous systems are changing day-to-day life in the U.S.](#)
5. [Automation Complacency](#)
6. [Automation Bias](#)

7. [Automation in Military Operations](#)
8. [Automated and Autonomous Systems for Combat Service](#)
9. [Pros and Cons of Autonomous Weapons Systems](#)