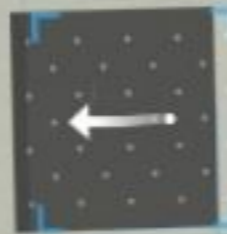The quantum magnet that could scrub carbon from the air

TECH ADDICT

THE PRICE OF LIFE

How driverless vehicles make life and death decisions

Space tourism: is Mars your next holiday destination?

THE PRICE OF LIFE

How driverless vehicles make life and death decisions

When a driverless vehicle foresees an accident, the car's computer makes life and death decisions – for example deciding which of two pedestrians to hit. But the exact process by which cars make these decisions is not very well understood.

Martin Forlong, of CrowneCars, tries to clarify: "In these situations, the car's imaging system gathers data to determine the pedestrian's age, gender, life expectancy, etc. in the blink of an eye."
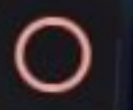
This data is parsed through the public record "to determine marital status, employment record, life expectancy and whether they have children." The car then assigns a 'value' to each possible victim based on criteria like their contribution to society: "we put a premium on lives that will save other lives, like doctors and nurses."

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All this may sound very reasonable. But Felix Gamble, head of Anti-Automation League (AAL) says the system has no right to make such judgements: "Somebody with a criminal record is not necessarily less valuable to society than a doctor. That kind of information is irrelevant to the sanctity of human life."

But Forlong dismisses such claims: "We want our cars to make the best possible choices, and that means acting on the basis of all the information they can gather. The more, the better."

EXIT