

NEW RULES FOR THE NEW AGE

By Dia Nair 6C

The court was jam-packed. Emily was present with her parents and so was Dan's family. The mood was somber. The court and the jury had been deliberating this matter for over three months now. It was the judgment day. Emily's thoughts trailed back to the day of this crisis.

It was an unusually chilly morning that day. Snow had fallen continuously overnight. The calendar read 23rd of December 2028. Emily was overexcited and had huge plans to go Christmas shopping at Oxford Street.

She got ready and her parents had booked a cab. The mobile application on her father's phone read 'your driverless car arrives in two minutes'. Up she jumped and dashed through the main door, within seconds they were in the cab and away. The driverless cab had barely crossed two streets, when a truck driving in front of the cab applied a sudden brake. Given the snow in the road, it seemed impossible that the car would avoid a direct collision with the truck.

Emily and her parents were paralyzed with fear. She could see a group of young kids on the right side of the road and a man riding a cycle on the left side of the road.

The car however took a sudden left turn and hit the man on the cycle, knocking him off the cycle and banging his body forcefully against a wall on the left side. As blood dripped down his forehead, anyone could tell that he wasn't ever going to wake up again.

'Emily look, the court is about to begin,' Emily heard her mum say as she came back to reality. The judge banged the gavel and thus began the proceedings for the day. He said,

"This was in many ways a very difficult subject to pass a judgment upon. Both sides have presented a very detailed analysis of the case. Having applied a detailed thought and with the inputs from the jury, this court has come to the conclusion that no one can be accused of malice for the death of Dan [*who was the cyclist*]. Since technology is designed to avoid accidents and human harm, an action that is derived by the situation can at best be termed as instantaneous act without intent of malice. The court passes a judgment accordingly." Dan's mother broke down in tears.

Emily and her parents left the courtroom with heavy hearts. In many ways they were a part of this crucial event, which resulted in today's judgment. Emily couldn't contain her curiosity and asked her father if this judgment could be challenged in higher courts. Her father replied, "Yes, of course, the case could potentially be challenged. However, the bigger question is whether its time for new rules to be designed to deal with such situations in the future." There was utter silence thereafter until they reached home.

Switching on the television, Emily was dumbstruck to find the media interest in this case. Every media news channel was streaming this case and majority of the society was of the opinion that new rules need to be framed to better handle such new age technology driven issues.

This subject took center stage when Emily and parents sat down for dinner as well. Emily said to her mother,

“Mummy, why is this such a big problem to solve?”

“If you take back your thoughts to the moment, you would note that the car could have taken three distinct decisions that day. First, to carry on straight and collide with the truck. This would have put three of our lives in danger. The second option the autonomous car had that day was to run over the kids. But for some strange reason the car swerved left and this resulted in the death of Dan. This is the core issue. The matter is of ethics. Who decides, as to whose life should be saved and whose life should not? Its such a big issue in today’s time where technology drives everyone’s lives in many ways.” answered her mother.

A few months passed. One evening Emily’s father came back from office and was ecstatic. He called Emily and her mother and said, “The parliament has passed a groundbreaking bill today. As per the new law applicable for driverless cars, every decision taken by the car hereafter shall be interpreted as the decision taken by the car company. In a situation similar to ours, as per any new court ruling, the car company would be sued for dangerous product. However today’s judgment also creates a very major problem for the autonomous vehicle manufacturers. Many car manufacturers would now be cautious to create and introduce innovative products to market. We would have to wait and see how the situation pans out.”

As she walked towards her room, many thoughts crossed her mind. How a machine decided to save her family’s life and instead put a life of an innocent cyclist in danger? How the new law would change driverless car’s technology forever? Would it mean the end of driverless cars or is it the dawn of a much sturdier technology to follow? Is it not ultimately a matter of ethics and morality? Wouldn’t too many laws choke innovation and too less regulation put people’s lives in danger? What is the right balance and how would matters evolve from here? One thing was however quite clear to her. New age technology demanded new laws to govern them. However, a right balance was equally important. With so many unanswered questions draining her mind, Emily gradually slipped into her sleep. She was satisfied with the final outcome of this case. To her it seemed quite reasonable and the only way to turn to in this type of situation. That is what mattered the most.