

Making Sense of... **Autonomous Vehicles**

Overview:

- Autonomous, or self-driving, vehicles are an emerging area of interest for automobile and technology companies alike, including Tesla, Google, BMW, and Uber, among others
- Progress has been steady in the development and deployment of self-driving vehicles, particularly in certain regions and cities
- Proponents say that autonomous vehicles will a) lessen traffic, b) offer help those for whom driving is not possible or difficult, and c) may be safer than human-operated vehicles
- Some critics cite recent accidents as evidence of the potential dangers of autonomous vehicles, while others note that traffic may actually be worsened with self-driving cars – either way, critics argue that we need to slow down implementation until the technology improves
- Various ethical issues underlie the development and engineering of the cars and the systems in which they'd operate, complicating matters further

Required Reading:

- [How Driverless Cars See the World Around them](#), NY Times
- [Why Self-Driving Cars Must Be Programmed To Kill](#), MIT Technology Review
- [The Ethical Challenges Self-Driving Cars Will Face Every Day](#), Smithsonian
- [In Self-Driving Cars, a Potential Lifeline for the Disabled](#), NY Times
- [Cities Need to Take the Wheel in Our Driverless Future](#), Wired
- [Uber's Fatal Self-Driving Crash: All the News and Updates](#), The Verge
- [What Moral Decisions Should Driverless Cars Make](#), TEDx/Iyad Rahwan (Optional)
- [Look Ma, No Hands: What Will it Mean When All Cars Can Drive Themselves?](#), The Guardian (Optional)

Questions for discussion:

- Who are the beneficiaries of a move towards autonomous vehicles? Think about individuals, organizations/companies, and international/national/local parties.
- After reading the articles above, what are your thoughts on the “trolley problem?” How do you think an issue like this should be considered, and who should be involved in these conversations?
- What are the competing interests at play when it comes to the issue of automation of vehicles? Who has the most powerful voice(s)? Who do we hear from less (or not at all) on this topic?
- What are the priorities of the different stakeholders on this issue? From the varying perspectives (government, varying demographic groups, business leaders, scientists, city planners...), what matters most to each group? Where do you see conflicts?
- What safety issues should be considered on this topic? Who are our experts?