Harm of Tesla Autopilot

Tesla autopilot is a self-driving system offered by Tesla that can do lane centering, adaptive cruise control, self-parking and can be summoned to and from a garage or parking slot by the user. It is equipped with eight surround cameras, twelve updated ultrasonic sensors and a forward-facing radar. I will analyze the possible harmful implications of Tesla autopilot from two aspects, which are safety issues and social impact.

Tesla is not safe enough now and still have a long way to go. Tesla claims that all Tesla vehicles have this system which can perform at a safety level substantially greater than that of a human driver. Though it is a self-driving system, Tesla says that every driver is responsible for remaining alert and active when using it and must be prepared to take action at any time. This is not what we expect for a full self-driving system in that such a system should free our hands and it can perform safely and normally even though we fall asleep in the car. However, some people get lulled into a false sense of security and don't put their hands on the wheel when using autopilot, resulting in traffic accidents. This system is not fully developed and using it with too much trust is dangerous because many of the autonomous features are still in the beta-testing phase. It can't be trusted in some emergency or unexpected situations, such as traffic jams caused by construction zones, where lanes may disappear or merge, or stopped vehicles due to accidents blocking the way, the traffic lights not working properly. These are all the situations where Tesla autopilot may not work properly and need human to take action. Thus, Tesla autopilot is not a "full" self-driving system and can be unsafe without human taking action. It still has a lot of things to improve and test, to make sure this system is 100 percent safe and reliable.

Tesla autopilot will have some negative social impact if used widely. Nowadays, it is not used much by people and we still mostly rely on human drivers. However, imagine when it becomes more common, some social impacts will emerge. First, there will be a huge unemployment of drivers, such as Uber drivers. Uber can just tell the car to pick up the customer and take them to wherever they want to go. Also, since autopilot enables everyone to reach their destination without a driver, the driver licenses are of no use. This will cause workers in a driver's school to lose jobs. This problem is also talked about in our last two readings which indicate that the common use of this AI system will cause unemployment and inequality which the government has to come up with public policies to deal with. Second, since AI systems are not human, they can just do what the program or code tells them to do without capability of reacting to sudden or unexpected situations. Also, a system can't always run properly, they may crash suddenly or perform improperly. This is a serious issue for Tesla autopilot because it may cause severe harm to people sitting inside the car or the pedestrians. In such situations, since people in the car may don't know how to drive, they can't take action to prevent the accident from happening. If a traffic accident involving human lives happens due to Tesla autopilot, then the public will get into a panic and no one will dare to use fully self-driving cars. Thus, besides the unemployment and inequality, another important problem the public needs to face is how to correctly adapt this technology and make sure everyone benefits from it.

The safety issues and social impacts are connected. In fact, it is hard to make Tesla autopilot as common as I imagined in the last paragraph. It will take a lot of effort to make people fully trust this system. I believe a person sitting in a human-driving car will feel safer than sitting in a self-driving car, since they feel everything is under control by the human driver and there won't be any danger. Though Tesla autopilot is really convenient, it is still in its early age and many tests are still in process. I think Tesla has to test for each possible situation in driving and provide the testing results to public so that people can consider it as reliable. When people try new technologies, besides the convenience, they care most about the safety issues, and if the current information about this technology is not enough to make them think the technology is safe to use, they won't try it.

In a conclusion, Tesla autopilot may have harmful implications on safety and social impact. The technology is not good enough to make sure it will be safe even without the human driver's actions. In some unexpected situations, this AI system may not be able to react fast and properly enough to save people's lives. If this system is commonly used, there will be problems of unemployment and inequality. Also, if some safety problems occur, the public will no longer trust this technology and the society will get into a big mess. However, Tesla autopilot is a really convenient technology that can assist the drivers in parking, changing lanes and navigating. Also, Tesla has claimed that they will work hard to improve this system, so we can have some expectations about how well it can perform.