



THE ANOSMIC EXECUTIONER: SYNTHETIC INTERFACES, CHEMOSENSORY SELFHOOD, AND THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL DELETION OF MORAL AGENCY IN GAMIFIED WAR

Nikhil Agrawal

Department of Philosophy, Maa Manikeshwari University, Bhawanipatna

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra30373>

DOI No: 10.36713/epra30373

I. INTRODUCTION

The Knowledge Gap of Gamified Execution within the temperature-controlled sterility of domestic living space, a human operator manipulates localized hardware to attain a hyper-specific, screen-bound objective. Neuromuscular reflexes fire with terrifying precision after thousands of hours of repetitive operant feedback to fine-tune the algorithmic conditioning. Press down a micro-switch. Graphical indicators immediately register a luminescent confirmation of target elimination, flooding the subject's neurobiology with a synthetic, dopaminergic reward. A few thousand miles away, utterly divorced from this localized motor function, an automated aerial platform delivers a kinetic payload that reduces organic human tissue to unrecognizable particulate matter. This hypothetical—a civilian unwittingly weaponized by the state apparatus to carry out remote strikes under the strict phenomenological guise of recreational gaming—demands rigorous philosophical interrogation. It is an extreme, diagnostic case study of the pathology of contemporary mind-machine interaction.

Traditional ethical frameworks have systematically appraised the morality of violence in terms of the parameters of cognitive volition and visual proximity. They are completely useless against the modern digital prosthesis. The gamified interface does not simply visually hide the target; it aggressively severs the operator from the somatic reality of the execution. The architecture of the system is designed to create a state of complete sensory anesthesia in the human actor trapped in a carefully staged audio-visual simulation. The subject is physically insulated from the material devastation their own labor creates. What happens to the internal architecture of the human ethical subject when the physical consequences of action are surgically removed from their immediate sensory environment?

To grapple with this epistemic abyss, we must move beyond purely cognitive theories of moral agency and engage with the profoundly somatic foundations of human ethics. Gamified interfaces systematically starve the operator's chemosensory selfhood, thus erasing moral culpability. We forge empathetic connection and acknowledge moral gravity not only via optical processing but via the visceral, olfactory, and tactile anchors of our physical reality. Smell and physical proximity tie the human conscience closely to the harsh reality of the physical world. It replaces the chaotic, metallic smell of blood and concussive reality of destruction with the engineered "taste" of algorithmic victory. Human ethics is neutralized at

the biological level before cognitive judgment can even take form. The synthetic environment is actively replacing our deeply evolved, organic aversion to intra-species violence. Can a mind, wholly divorced from the sensory residue of death, still possess a guilty conscience?

II. THE MIND-MACHINE INTERFACE: ALGORITHMS AND THE EPISTEMIC VEIL

The human sensorium is heavily dominated by visual processing. Modern graphical user interfaces actively leverage this biological bias to manipulate strict epistemic boundaries. The high resolution monitor acts as a hyper-efficient sensory filter, aggressively sanitizing the visual field of all chaotic, morally resonant data. Physical trauma raw goes away. Rendered polygons, high-contrast topological maps and algorithmically generated hit-markers replace living targets, all moving erratically and panic-stricken. Such a translation is much more than a graphic representation. The display is an epistemic veil of totalization meant to protect the user from the psychological friction of ending a life. The interface methodically neutralizes the biological triggers for empathetic recognition by transforming the viscera-soaked reality of localized kinetic strikes into hygienic, Cartesian abstractions. Operators see only a sterilized mathematical topography. The screen isolates the conscience of the subject by making the human victim ontologically invisible.

The peripheral hardware used by the operator has a strict phenomenological status. As Martin Heidegger wrote about the *Zuhanden*, the "ready-to-hand" quality of functional tools that we use in our surroundings. A hammer is so powerful that when it strikes directly on a nail, the weight of the wood handle and the metal head are totally absent from your conscious mind. The tool becomes a functional, transparent extension of the human hand. Gamers undergo this somatic phenomenon in a highly radicalized form. After thousands of hours of intense, repetitive neuro-muscular conditioning, the mechanical keyboard and the optical mouse disappear completely into the operator's forward-looking intentionality. Flesh and plastic and the underlying circuitry are combined in one seamless acting apparatus. But in this digitally mediated void a physical paradox of terror arises. The localized hardware is seamlessly integrated into the body schema of the subject, but the final physical effect of its use is utterly divorced from the immediate sensory environment. The operator attains complete kinesthetic control of a machine whose physical effects they can never touch, see, or smell. Agency is mostly geographically scattered.



The removal of the delay between human input and the response of a remote algorithmic process, creates an incredibly seductive psychological trap. The high input polling rates and perfectly synchronized audio-visual feedback fool the central nervous system into registering a false state of local presence. The consciousness projects itself into the digital geometry of the map, and accepts it as a tangible spatial reality inhabitable. It takes tremendous, ongoing computational power to engineer this particular cognitive illusion, to keep an ongoing, uninterrupted loop of synthetic validation going. The flashing indicators on screen, the instant auditory feedback—the crisp, engineered “ping” of a successful kill—delivers the precise neurobiological satisfaction of a physically completed job. The human brain is more than willing to accept these artificial signals as conclusive evidence of local efficacy. It's a brilliant, terrifying hack of human biology.

Complete sensory isolation from the remote target site guarantees the ongoing success of this architectural deception. In this context, epistemic blindness is never an unintended side effect of the technological system. Its fundamental design principle is ignorance. The architects of the gamified interface must obsessively shield the operator from the brutal friction of physical reality, to maintain uninterrupted operational efficiency. Any real material feedback would endanger the structural integrity of the whole military apparatus. Any sudden lag in video transmission or brief graphical anomaly that reveals the real structural failure or raw audio of human agony would instantly shatter the flawless simulation. Such sensory violation would violently awaken the dormant moral subject. The tele-robotic machine can only maintain its lethal efficiency through active and continuous algorithmic erasure of the physical world. How does one morally blame a subject deliberately imprisoned in a made-up hallucination?

III. CHEMOSENSORY SELVES AND THE ORIGINS OF MORAL AGENCY

Western ethical philosophy has a terminal obsession with cognitive rationality. For decades analytic scholarship has viewed moral decision-making as a disembodied, algorithmic calculation, as if humans evaluate ethical dilemmas much like a processor executing a logic tree. We have to get out of this Cartesian trap, completely. Ethical being is a radically somatic phenomenon. We sense the moral urgency of an act in the gut long before the prefrontal cortex parses the abstract syntax of a categorical imperative. Empathy is not a mathematical equation. This is a dense biological resonance. It requires the most extreme physical integration with the surrounding material world.

To chart the total breakdown of agency in the gamified drone operator entails an interrogation of the profoundly neglected lower senses. Olfaction and gustation are the most primitive epistemological anchors that the human organism has. They passively do not receive neutral data. They are building our foundational ontological security actively. We touch reality directly, without awareness. Our physical environment leaves chemical signatures. Every encounter weaves complex scented narratives that skip conscious cognitive filtering, speaking directly to the amygdala to establish proximity, danger and shared humanity. Scent is a power that demands an unavoidable recognition of common physical space. To smell another

human being, or the destruction of their habitat, requires inhaling the same atmospheric molecules. It is a biological intimacy not of one's own free will.

This chemical intimacy is violently severed by the gamified military interface. The unaware operator, locked within the climate-controlled sterility of a domestic or bureaucratic space, breathes only filtered, artificial air. They only interact with cold plastics and conductive metals. There's no visceral, olfactory feedback of physical destruction. Cordite doesn't exist in the digital simulacrum. Neither does powdered concrete, burning hydrocarbons, or aerosolized blood. The operator is utterly anosmic to the catastrophic suffering they inflict. The human brain cannot properly interpret the terminal magnitude of a remote event without abrasive sensory data. The digital interface precludes the emergence of a responsible moral subject by denying the nervous system the raw, chemical material for ethical cognition.

Rather than providing real physical feedback, the system feeds an engineered and highly palatable sensory diet to the operator. The operator looks at the screen, munching on highly processed carbs and synthetic energy boosters, flooding their neurobiology with an ethics of synthetic taste. And artificial consumption takes the place of the grueling, exhausting sensory feedback of real physical work. This makes for a terrifying phenomenological paradox. The operator is in a state of absolute physiological comfort as he unleashes brutal kinetic violence. The subject's nervous system is lulled into a state of passive, infantile security by ingesting synthetic sensory data, the taste of engineered sweeteners, the sound of compressed audio chimes, the sight of saturated digital colors. The body is being fooled by the environment.

Now contrast this engineered sensory vacuum with the historical phenomenology of localized fighting. In the past, traditional warriors fought in a sea of chaotic sensory information. The deafening acoustics of artillery, the concussive pressure waves of localized detonations, and the suffocating smell of ruptured viscera firmly anchored the combatant in the horrifying reality of their own violence. These sensory inputs are so abrasive that they biologically render the psychological denial of moral consequence impossible. The physical body records the trauma of execution in all its severity, even as the rationalizing mind tries to justify it with patriotism or duty. The somatic shock of proximity produces an unavoidable moral friction.

The tele-robotic apparatus fundamentally changes the biology of killing by removing the operator geographically and sensorially from this physical chaos. Human ethics, famously argued Emmanuel Levinas, begin in the physical, unmediated encounter with the “face of the Other.” The face makes an absolute, silent demand against murder. But what happens to this ethical demand if the Other has no face, no voice, and leaves no chemical trace in the air? Empathy gets easily starved in a sensory void. By removing the visceral anchors of chemosensory selfhood, the state can sidestep the biological friction of human conscience altogether. The operator sends a digital command. They cannot smell anything. They don't taste of anything. The ghosts they make don't smell at all.



IV. THE MORALITY OF SYNTHETIC SENSORY FEEDBACK

The modern behavioral architecture optimizes dopamine through very refined feedback loops. This mechanism does a far more insidious job than simply keeping users within the gamified drone interface. The operator practices an ethics of synthetic taste, a curated, algorithmic diet of immediate neurological rewards that effectively obliterates any competing somatic intuition. Every successful confirmed strike, viewed via high definition infrared feeds, is met with an optimized auditory chime and a bright, geometric visual flash. These synthetic stimuli hijack the dopamine system, making kinetic destruction feel like the satisfying completion of a complex puzzle. The system gives you this immediate, rewarding feedback to provide a digital "taste" of victory that feels real to the neurochemistry of the human brain.

This dopaminergic feedback is a powerful tool of moral suppression. The human is born with an inborn resistance to killing, not just a cognitive position, but a visceral, deeply evolved somatic alarm system triggered by sensory distress. We have a natural biological resistance to the disruption of any other biological system. The gamified interface sidesteps this alarm by enclosing the lethal event within layers of artificial 'achievement.' The satisfaction of a high score actively prevents the subject's neurobiology from simultaneously processing the grief or horror of the remote event. The synthetic reward literally replaces the somatic ethical signal. A mind cannot simultaneously experience the thrill of successful algorithmic play and the pain of empathetic resonance

In this technological structure, the operator consumes the aesthetics of the hero, while performing the function of the executioner. They are trained to connect the end of a target with the thrill of individual excellence, agility and cognitive superiority. Such aestheticization of violence is a potent anesthetic for the conscience. The target is never seen as a human subject who can suffer, but rather as a rigid objective within a performance-based system. Any ethical concerns are overridden by the primary desire to keep up a high level of mechanical performance within the simulation. The internal standard of success is completely defined by the internal logic of the game itself.

Think of the ease with which the human organism adapts to these perverse sensory environments. The operator, over enough exposure to these synthesized feedback loops, begins to categorize all external reality through the lens of the interface. The crazy, unpredictable world is one long series of targets to be cleared, the slow, deliberate work of peace is low-stimulation, non-rewarding background noise. This leads to a state of chronic sensory desensitization. The subject gets sucked into the high-frequency, high-reward cycles of the military machine, and the messy, slow-moving reality of human existence starts to seem dull or irrelevant. What is left of the ethical subject when his reality is reduced to nothing more than the pursuit of the next synthetic dopamine rush? The tragedy here is the complete reversal of human value. The human victim is reduced to a mathematical hurdle to be cleared in order to progress to the next higher level of operational success. This reduction is not a matter of choice but an unavoidable consequence of the sensory diet provided to the operator. The interface removes the harsh, unmanageable

reality of physical presence, and allows the operator to remain in a state of continuous, blissful ignorance. Because the machine gives them an endless stream of digital justifications, they never have to face the concrete weight of their decision. The synthetic feed is just right to keep the operator's enthusiasm, their alertness, their utter, totalizing moral blindness.

V. THE ANOSMIC EXECUTIONER DISEMBODIMENT AS MORAL DELETATION

The lack of sensory input in the tele-robotic device is not just a technological constraint; it is an epistemological violence. State architects are actively engineering an artificial anosmia. They systematically blind the operator to the material fallout of their bodily labor. Humans need the brutal, unmediated friction of a shared environment in order to calibrate complex moral judgment. To take away this vital friction from the nervous system is to nullify the ethical subject at the biological level. This sensory blackout is not a flaw of design by accident but the basic need of gamified execution that we have to understand. The operator performs a motor function in a localised... The target is open to complete biological destruction. Between these two nodes is a vast sensory emptiness, put there deliberately.

But a re-examination of the original thought experiment reveals a devastating ontological trap. Our unwitting gamer has tremendous mechanical agency and no phenomenological moral agency. They generate destructive kinetic energy, but their minds are totally locked in a chemical feedback loop of positive reinforcement and geometric shapes. Classical legal frameworks would be correct to exempt them from strict culpability. This legal absolution, however, totally ignores the deeper phenomenological tragedy. The subject has been violently evacuated. They have been surgically bypassed for their ability to resonate with empathy. An interface replaces flashing luminescent indicators for the agonizing physical reality of human death. They do. They don't understand. In so doing, the state engages in a deep moral theft, locking cognitive faculties within this hermetically sealed simulation. The operator works just like a microchip or a hydraulic actuator: an unconscious, instrumental mechanism of force.

How long can an architectural lie be maintained in the human mind? The gamified system depends entirely on maintaining a hermetic seal against infiltration of the real. Any leak of raw sensory data would instantly threaten to shatter the illusion. The raw sound of a crying survivor, or the unmediated sight of a chopped off arm, would shatter the dopaminergic feedback loop with a violentness. So the algorithm has to be a merciless censor. It constantly purifies the incoming data stream, providing the operator with a heavily curated, sanitized picture of the combat zone. The machine lies to protect the operational efficiency of the operator. The human is reduced to a biological peripheral, enslaved to the mathematical imperatives of the targeting algorithm. The violent tear in this epistemic veil we must inevitably confront. Visualize the precise point at which the simulation is halted. The unwitting operator eventually discovers the terminal truth of their recreational involvement. The golden, pixelated notification of a high score suddenly becomes a literal, biological body count. This realization causes a trauma



very unlike the traditional post-traumatic stress. Combat trauma in the classic form results from massive overstimulation of the sensorium in a physically dangerous environment. Gamified trauma comes from a retroactive cognitive dissonance. It's the sudden, crushing weight of physical reality violently imploding on a previously synthetic framework. The psychic architecture constructed solely on artificial dopamine rewards just collapses.

This retroactive moral injury destroys the subject's ontological security. The aesthetic of autotelic play offered a heavy insulation in terms of the operator's actions during active play. To find out the truth is to have to reprocess thousands of hours of so-called recreation as sustained, state-sanctioned murder. The artificial anosmia creates a sensory vacuum abruptly filled with the imagined horrific reality of the victims. The mind, deprived of the real chemosensory experience of the battlefield, hallucinates desperately the missing data. The trauma is completely unanchored without somatic grounding in the actual event. It floats as a hideous abstraction that the nervous system cannot physically digest. We are seeing the unwilling birth of the anosmic executioner, a killer denied even the grim dignity of recognizing his victim. The interface promised a frictionless user experience, but instead delivers an inescapable, disembodied nightmare. Who is guilty of this structural theft of human innocence?

VI. CONCLUSION: RECLAIMING THE SOMATIC SUBJECT

Replacing multisensory reality with an anesthetic simulation destroys the embodied framework necessary for human moral judgment. Humans do not operate as floating computational nodes executing disembodied logic trees. We are deeply biological entities whose ontological security relies heavily upon localized environmental feedback. Scented narratives—the complex, chemical exchanges occurring between a biological subject and their immediate physical atmosphere—anchor our ethical responsibilities directly to the material world. When an interface intentionally induces artificial anosmia to sanitize a kinetic strike, it performs a radical epistemic lobotomy upon the user. The operator transforms into a mere hydraulic extension of state violence. Empathy cannot survive a sensory vacuum.

Future trajectories in tele-robotic design point toward even greater degrees of sensory alienation. Military architectures consistently prioritize frictionless operation to maximize lethal efficiency. They substitute the chaotic, abrasive friction of physical reality with dopamine-optimized audio-visual loops. This specific engineering philosophy fundamentally misunderstands the biological mechanics of human conscience. A completely frictionless interface behaves as an inherently psychopathic mechanism. It demands lethal action while actively withholding the biological data required to process grief, guilt, or physiological restraint. We risk engineering a vast bureaucratic machinery where mass casualties are exacted by operators who register absolutely zero somatic distress.

Reclaiming the somatic subject demands a violent rejection of these hyper-sanitized architectures. True ethical design in mind-machine interaction must intentionally reintroduce sensory friction. It must force the remote operator to confront the material consequences of their labor, even if that

confrontation severely degrades overall operational efficiency. The preservation of moral agency requires an interface that refuses to lie to the human nervous system. We must ask how engineers can construct technological frameworks that accurately translate the abrasive, chemosensory horror of the physical world back to the remote operator. If we fail to resolve this phenomenological deficit, the gamification of warfare will permanently sever the human conscience from the mechanics of execution.

REFERENCES

1. Barwich, A.-S. (2019). *A Critique of Olfactory Objects*. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01337>
2. Chalmers, D. J. (2006). *Perception and the Fall from Eden*. *Perceptual Experience*, 49–125. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199289769.003.0003>
3. Coeckelbergh, M. (2013). *Drones, information technology, and distance: mapping the moral epistemology of remote fighting*. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 15(2), 87–98. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-013-9313-6>
4. Keller, A. (2016). *Philosophy of Olfactory Perception*. Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-33645-9>
5. Tapson, K., Doyle, M., Karagiannopoulos, V., & Lee, P. (2021). *Understanding Moral Injury and Belief Change in the Experiences of Police Online Child Sex Crime Investigators: an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 37(3), 637–649. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-021-09463-w>
6. Young, B. D. (2014). *Smelling phenomenal*. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00713>