

Drone Warriors, Revealed Humanity and a Feminist Ethics of Care

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Introduction

I see mothers with children, I see fathers with children, I see fathers with mothers, I see kids playing soccer.

Anonymous operator of a US Air Force Reaper drone
flown over Afghanistan (Bumiller 2012)

How should the operators of armed drones conduct drone strikes? Specifically, how should those individuals make decisions (about killing another human being) in a way that avoids unjust harm to people within a strike zone? Our chapter approaches this question with an expanded notion of what constitutes 'just' drone warfare, using the feminist idea of an ethics of care to move beyond the traditional confines of Just War morality. Such expansion is worthwhile because it has the potential to illuminate injustices resulting from violent drone use which might otherwise remain obscure and unaddressed. It is an approach premised upon recognition of two morally significant claims. The first is a general claim that, when violence in war is targeted against one person, the potential unjust effects upon innocent others are not necessarily limited to immediate injury and death. Survivors of that violence can still suffer the lasting and non-physical harm of, for example, being deprived of a caregiver (the physical victim of lethal violence) upon whom they depend. The second claim is drone-specific: that, prior to a long-range targeted killing, an armed drone equipped with a satellite-linked video-camera has the capacity to reveal to its operator the prosaic humanity of a targeted individual. The features of that humanity include, critically, the human relationships in which a particular individual is embedded. In combination, these two claims

generate a distinct ethical concern: that a drone operator might decide to kill an individual in circumstances where he or she would thereby knowingly deprive dependent civilians (for example, family members) of a vital source of care.¹

In the conduct of war, *jus in bello* requires discrimination and proportionality, and these principles for decision-making rest upon the abstract concepts of 'combatant' and 'non-combatant' (or 'civilian') (see Frowe 2011, 95–117). However, to rely exclusively upon abstract moral reasoning is potentially insufficient in the context of a drone-based targeted killing. This is because such reasoning cannot account adequately for the emotions felt by a conscientious drone operator who is put on notice (by means of a video-camera) that the destructiveness of a drone strike would extend to the destruction of unique human relationships. Our chapter therefore advances an idea for improvement: an operator's *jus in bello* decisions should be augmented by an ethics of care, an approach to moral reasoning originating in feminist thought. In contrast to the way Just War decision-making is traditionally approached by reference to abstract principles, care ethics focuses on people not as abstract others but as real individuals with particular needs, and its ontological emphasis is on persons in relation to each other. So, for the operator of an armed, camera-equipped drone who richly perceives the humanity he or she has in common with a targeted individual, and whose actions are guided also by care ethics, the issue for decision becomes: for whom should I care, and what is the caring response, when I am deciding whether to kill? The answer, we argue, should draw upon a thickened concept of 'harm' to civilians; one which recognises the potential for relationships of care to be destroyed by wartime violence.

The chapter begins by acknowledging the problem of non-physical harm to civilian survivors of violence, which is so often overlooked by Just War thinkers. It then explains why a drone operator's prolonged observation of a targeted individual's prosaic humanity (including the features of her or his personal relationships) presents a peculiar moral challenge for that operator. The second section describes the origins, character and distinctiveness of an ethics of care as a mode of moral reasoning, and the chapter concludes with a discussion of care ethics being applied in violent contexts including the use of armed drones.

Just War, Drone Violence and Non-Physical Harm

Just War morality is the centuries-old framework according to which war is traditionally judged and governed (Walzer 2006). It assesses violence by reference to two sets of principles: *jus ad bellum* (the justice of resorting to

war) and *jus in bello* (the just conduct of war). For present purposes, the moral agency of drone operators is the central concern. And, as they make no decisions on whether war should be resorted to in the first place, the focus is on *jus in bello*. This set of Just War principles includes the ethical requirements that instances of violence during war should: (1) discriminate between combatants (who may legitimately be targeted) and civilians (who may not); and (2) be anticipated to generate a level of harm (including unintended harm to civilians) that is proportional (not excessive) in relation to the expected military benefit. In ethics-oriented literature on armed drones, when attention turns to *in bello* matters, scholars have tended to inquire into whether, how and by how much drone technology increases or reduces the amount of unjust human harm caused by political violence. One possibility is that drone technology, incorporating powerful target-identification capabilities, has the moral advantage of enabling a degree of discrimination and proportionality in the use of force that is greater than what is achievable using other weapon platforms (Vogel 2010). Or, drone technology might instead induce morally inferior uses of force because drone operators, if they are morally disengaged from the killing process, are less likely to act with restraint, resulting in the exposure of civilians to more risk of harm (Alston and Shamsi 2010; Calhoun 2015).

Such application of Just War morality traditionally rests upon a thin conceptualisation of harm. That is, when ethical judgements are made – about whether harmful effects are being directed discriminately, and whether expected harms are proportional to expected benefits – ‘harm’ is generally understood to mean physical injury or death. It follows from this that reducing the risk of civilian harm occurring in a drone strike could simply be approached as a technical challenge. By arming a drone with a smaller munition, for example, a narrower blast radius would be likely to endanger fewer innocent bystanders in the vicinity of a person being targeted (Marks 2012). Or, such harm could be reduced by the taking of ‘exceptionally rigorous steps’ in the targeting process to avoid exposing civilians to risk (see Rodin 2006). For example, former US president Barack Obama insisted that, prior to any drone strike, ‘there must be near-certainty that no civilians will be killed or injured’, and he described this as ‘the highest standard we can set’ (Obama 2013). Setting aside the obvious objection that *certainty* is the highest standard, the same ‘standard’ problem can be seen to persist here: that the traditional concept of *in bello* harm is a thin one. If a thicker concept of harm were adopted, there would be more scope to discern and address the range of possible injustices arising in war.

One area worthy of greater consideration in moral reasoning is the causing of non-physical harm to civilians. Regarding the use of armed drones,

evidence has emerged that the mere *threat* (and fearful anticipation) of physical harm can itself harm civilians psychologically. In parts of Pakistan, for example, civilian victimhood has manifested in a constant and debilitating fear of being struck by ever-present US drones (Friedersdorf 2012; Amnesty International 2013). Beyond this, we argue that it is important also to extend the concept of harm to the experience of a civilian who survives the actuality of violence against a targeted individual. That civilian should still be considered a victim if they have thereby been violently deprived of a caregiver's support. The value of such consideration is that it pays greater attention to humans as *relational* beings, in contrast to the way Just War thinking has traditionally envisaged harm and humans in abstract terms (see Kellison 2019). Human relationships, often involving the giving and receiving of care, have always been vulnerable to destruction in war. However, the operator of an armed drone is arguably better positioned than any other kind of warrior in history to observe the features of particular relationships among the people who inhabit prospective strike zones. In making moral decisions from this unprecedented vantage point, he or she is potentially put on notice that the targeted killing of one individual would adversely affect innocents who are apparently and critically dependent upon a targeted individual's care.

A remotely controlled drone equipped with missiles is an instrument of violence, but it is morally significant also as an instrument of observation. Although the aircraft is geographically far removed from its ground-based operator, the targeted victim of a drone-launched missile is visually brought close to that operator by a mounted camera transmitting video imagery back to base via satellite. And visual proximity, rather than physical remoteness, is what matters more for the purposes of our discussion. Often, the images a drone operator sees include both friendly troops and the enemies with whom they are engaged, because armed drones are frequently used to provide air support during the conduct of ground-based combat missions. We will return briefly to this scenario towards the end of the chapter, but for now our focus is directed towards drone use in places outside what would traditionally be considered a conflict zone. Here, the US government in particular uses drones for the 'targeted killing' of individuals identified as terrorists. In this circumstance, before the planned killing occurs, a drone's video-camera will have enabled its operator to observe closely, and for a prolonged period, a prospective target. Sometimes, the operator will have witnessed behaviour that is somehow linked to a military threat against the drone-using state, and more often he or she will have abundantly perceived (over consecutive hours, days or weeks) many of the everyday features of the targeted individual's life. In this way, the humanity – prosaic and immediately unthreatening – of that individual is revealed and illuminated,

such that any effort by a drone operator to dehumanise a 'target' is made more difficult.

Constantly watching the ordinariness of a particular person's life being lived can sometimes eventually produce a feeling of 'knowing' that person. For example, former US drone operator Matt Martin has recalled of one experience: 'Sometimes I thought I knew as much about this man [the target], my nemesis, as I knew about my wife' (Martin 2010, 296). And, as Mark Coeckelbergh has argued (2013, 97), that 'knowledge of the opponent' has the effect of confirming 'his humanity, personality, embodiment, and vulnerability'. The significance of such 'tele-intimate' violence in terms of its rebounding impact on drone operators is only beginning to be understood (see Williams 2015; Clark 2019). One possibility is that the taking of a closely observed human life might sometimes be so upsetting as to cause 'moral injury'. That is, after executing a drone strike, drone operators might judge themselves so harshly as to be undone by their own sense of virtue, becoming victims of a debilitating conviction that they have done wrong and have ceased to be a good person (Enemark 2019).

For present purposes, a drone operator's emotional response to what he or she sees and does is relevant, but only in the context of a broader moral concern for human relationships. What matters most here is that the existence and uniqueness of those relationships are sometimes made obvious to a drone operator. This occurs when, for example, drone operators 'watch targets spend time with family and friends and even playing with their children' (Lee 2020). At other times, the prospective target of a drone strike might be observed playing with a dog, drinking tea, making love to his wife or attending a wedding or funeral (Freeman 2015; Abé 2012; Hurwitz 2013; Daggett 2015, 371). Then, if the strike goes ahead, its effects in the context of human relationships are made obvious too. Former US drone operator Heather Linebaugh (2013) has recalled how she 'watched dozens of military-aged males die in Afghanistan, . . . some right outside the compound where their family was waiting for them to return home from the mosque'. Sometimes, in the conduct of post-strike damage assessments, operators see that the wives and children of a targeted individual are also among the dead. Or, they behold from on high the lamentations of grieving family members below. As one UK drone operator explained in an interview with Peter Lee (2019, 179):

we may watch 'Target A' for weeks, building up a pattern of life for the individual: know exactly what time he eats his meals; drives to the Mosque; or uses the ablutions . . . what we also see is the individual interacting with his family – playing with his kids and helping his wife around the compound.

When a [missile] strike goes in, we stay on station and see the reactions of the wife and kids when the body is brought to them. You see someone fall to the floor and sob so hard their body is convulsing.

The civilian survivors of drone violence can be seen to have suffered a non-physical harm: the destruction of a relationship characterised by care and support. And yet the thin concept of harm that traditionally informs Just War thinking would lead to the conclusion that no injustice occurred: civilians were spared injury and death. This, we argue, is not enough in the peculiar context of drone warfare. Rather, moral reasoning needs to account for the way a drone's powerful video-camera reveals a prospective target's humanity as manifested in unique human relationships. Accordingly, we propose augmenting Just War thinking in this context with an approach to morality that originates in feminist theory: the ethics of care. In establishing its suitability, three aspects of care ethics are especially worth emphasising: its feminist rejection of a gendered hierarchy of modes of moral thought; the challenge it presents to abstract moral reasoning; and its relational ontology.

Ethics of Care

The origin of care ethics is usually traced to the late-twentieth-century work of American psychologist Carol Gilligan. This work was inspired by deficiencies she perceived in her colleague Lawrence Kohlberg's investigations into moral development in children. Kohlberg had claimed that his test results showed that girls progress more slowly than boys towards acquiring moral maturity. However, the prevailing assumption behind this finding was that moral maturity was signified by a moral agent's capacity to detach herself or himself from the context of the specific ethical dilemma being confronted, and to make a moral judgement by reference to what general rules or values ought to apply to any similar situation. Gilligan denied this assumption about the superiority of abstract reasoning, arguing that reasoning focused instead on the dynamics of particular relationships was a fully developed moral perspective rather than an intermediate one to be surpassed. In her 1982 book *In a Different Voice*, Gilligan claimed that her own empirical studies into the moral development of children revealed the existence of two different moral 'languages': a language of 'justice' characterised by abstraction and impartiality, and a language of 'care' characterised by a concern for responsibility within personal relationships. The 'different voice' was that of care, and Gilligan found it to be mainly associated with females (Gilligan 1982). She argued that women's moral development is largely established through their relationships with men and through caring for their children, and her aim was to

see 'female' ethics taken seriously (Gilligan 1982, 17). This aim was shared by the philosopher Nel Noddings, who, in her 1984 book *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, distinguished the traditional 'approach of the father' from the 'approach of the mother' (Noddings 1984, 36–7):

The first moves immediately to abstraction where . . . thinking can take place clearly and logically in isolation from the complicating factors of particular persons, places, and circumstances; the second moves to concretization where . . . feelings can be modified by the introduction of facts, the feelings of others, and personal histories.

As pioneers of an ethics of care, Gilligan and Noddings were both clearly advancing a feminist claim of gender equality: that 'male' and 'female' modes of moral reasoning are *equally* valid. However, the problem with their claim was that it risked reinforcing social prejudices that care itself is a women's activity and that only females are *essentially* disposed to be caring. For this reason, later theorists of care ethics have deliberately moved away from an essentialist logic that 'feminises' care. Instead, they have argued that a care-oriented approach to moral reasoning, which has historically been subordinated by gendered hierarchies in society, should now be equally open to women and men (Held 2006, 20; Tännsjö 2008, 115; Levine 2010, 143; Sander-Staudt and Hamington 2011, x; Thomas 2011, 137).

It is important also to emphasise how care ethics presents a challenge not only to the presumed superiority of abstract moral reasoning but also to its presumed adequacy. The moral language of 'justice' that Gilligan referred to is the language which features in the two mainstream perspectives of Western moral theory: consequentialist reasoning as reflected, for example, in the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham and J. S. Mill, and deontological reasoning as exemplified by the ideas of Immanuel Kant. The first mode of reasoning sees moral decision-making driven by cost–benefit analyses and an aim to maximise good consequences, and the second requires decision-making that discharges set duties and prioritises respect for human rights. And, although the Kantian rejects the morality of instrumental reasoning while the utilitarian embraces it, each kind of thinker is rationalistic in their approach. That is, both perspectives tend to be supported by a traditional assumption that 'the more abstract the reasoning about a moral problem the better because the more likely to avoid bias and arbitrariness, the more nearly to achieve impartiality' (Held 2006, 11). And yet, for care ethicists, the problem with applying abstract and universal principles like Bentham's Principle of Utility or Kant's Categorical Imperative is that this involves assuming that people are interchangeable units and that moral judgements

can be derived in a manner akin to deducing a mathematical problem. It reflects, perhaps, what Jenny Edkins (2016, 2) has condemned as 'a politics that misses the person, a politics that objectifies and instrumentalises', because it treats people as objects to be classified and managed rather than as unique human beings.

Moreover, the pursuit of perfect impartiality when applying abstract moral reasoning is also potentially a problem if it requires us to 'reject emotion in determining what we ought to do' (Held 2006, 24). By contrast, the application of an ethics of care 'relies upon contextualized knowledge and wisdom, informed by principles, but honed by practical experiences and empathetic appreciation of and response to others' (Sander-Staudt and Hamington 2011, ix). In this way, care ethics rejects as simplistic any notion that moral life is a matter of following specific abstract rules, and instead it emphasises consideration of 'the relationships and roles within which people find themselves, and . . . the somewhat fluid and context-dependent nature of moral responsibilities' (Groenhout 2014). Critically, then, care ethics values rather than rejects human emotion, although this is not to say that every emotion is valued or is equally valuable. Rather, as Virginia Held (2006, 10) has argued, 'such emotions as sympathy, empathy, sensitivity, and responsiveness' are 'the kind of moral emotions that need to be cultivated not only to help in the implementation of the dictates of reason but to better ascertain what morality recommends'. People tend to feel these emotions *towards* other people, which brings our discussion of care ethics to the third relevant aspect: its relational ontology.

An ethics of care (as given by one human being to another) is necessarily founded on a concept of the self as relational. This involves a recognition that a person's identity and subjectivity are developed not in isolation but rather through interactions with others. Since birth, each of us has depended for our very survival upon care received from others, and throughout our lives we arguably need relationships with others 'as a basis on which we can grow, learn and experience well-being' (Barnes et al. 2015, 3). Acknowledging this need leads to an understanding that relations of interdependence remain a fundamental feature of human existence. In a sense, people *are* their relationships with one another; they are *essentially* socially enmeshed. It follows that moral decisions regarding any and every individual must be made in the context of someone's embeddedness in familial and other social relations. Morality, then, can be seen to exist not in a series of universal principles that can guide action but 'in the practices of care through which we fulfil our responsibilities to particular others' (Robinson 2011, 4). In contrast to a mode of moral reasoning that envisages 'abstract others', an ethics of care 'allows focus on real individuals with needs that differ from other real

individuals' (Widdows 2011, 266). In addition, by making relationships rather than individuals-in-isolation the key consideration, a care ethics perspective illuminates sources of human suffering that might otherwise remain obscure. From a security perspective, according to Fiona Robinson (2011, 10), it is vital to understand the human subjects of security as 'beings in-relation' for whom relations of care occupy a position of centrality in moral life and in day-to-day activities. When those relations are damaged or destroyed, she argues, 'security is threatened' (Robinson 2011, 10). Thus, to be deprived of a caregiver is to be rendered insecure and, if the deprivation is deliberate and violent, to suffer a moral harm.

Care and Political Violence

An ethics of care – characterised by a feminist origin, a challenge to abstraction and a relational ontology – has been applied in a variety of spheres of human endeavour: for example, medicine and healthcare, environmental conservation, the legal profession and business (Held 2006, 9; Sander-Staudt and Hamington 2011; Adhariani et al. 2017). However, it might be difficult at first glance to see how a care-oriented morality could gain traction within the context of political violence. This context rather seems fated to be a care-free zone in human affairs. Historically, much of the violence wielded in wartime has been inspired and sustained by destructive gender stereotypes that, for example, promote the idea that combat is a valid way for men to accomplish masculinity aggressively. Conceptualising human beings in the abstract can facilitate processes of dehumanisation that often make warriors less reluctant to kill. And war in general is probably the gravest example of human relationships breaking down and being replaced by mutual hostility. Against such a backdrop, it would be implausible indeed to claim that violence can be dealt with 'simply by caring' (Held 2010, 116). Instead, the application of care ethics to problems of violence would involve a kind of thinking about Others that differs from the kind that traditionally has helped legitimise war as a political practice. Even if this different kind of thinking is unable wholly to delegitimise and thereby eliminate war itself, it carries the potential at least to improve the justness of wartime methods of violence.

Sara Ruddick's notion of 'maternal thinking', for example, relies not only on abstract moral principles but mainly on a moral agent's recognition of the needs of others in particular contexts. For Ruddick, the problem with 'analytic fictions' in Just War thinking is that they work to make "'enemies" abstract enough to be killable' (Ruddick 1989, 150). And yet this criticism of the traditional approach to wartime morality does not necessarily denote

a preference for pacifism; care ethics is not inevitably subsumed into a pacifist morality. Rather, as Ruddick has argued, a 'peacemaker' who 'will never celebrate violence' may nevertheless 'act violently in careful, conscientious knowledge of the hurt she inflicts and the costs to her as well as her victim' (1989, 138). Accordingly, a violent actor in war who is guided by an ethics of care will retain their 'capacity to empathize with the victims of violence' (Held 2010, 122). Doing this is compatible with an acceptance of *jus in bello* norms such as the requirement for violence in war to be proportional. But the protective effect of adhering to those norms would be strengthened, arguably, by a care ethics emphasis on 'the overriding context of caring relations between human beings that are so obviously shattered by war' (Held 2010, 125).

One type of wartime activity in which the dual application of Just War morality and care ethics potentially makes some sense is a counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign. According to Jillian Terry, the problem with theorising COIN exclusively by reference to Just War principles (for example, *jus in bello*) is that ethical analysis of violence becomes disconnected from how COIN is actually experienced by insurgents and local civilian populations. She therefore advocates an ethical reorientation towards 'a feminist ethics premised on care, empathy, and relationality' (Terry 2015). Thinking only in abstract terms about 'discrimination' between 'civilians' and 'combatants' is less meaningful (and less useful) than thinking *also* in relational terms, because (Terry 2015):

Counterinsurgents have complex relationships with both civilians (who are not simply bystanders but rather active members of the community to be coerced and enlisted by both the counterinsurgents and insurgents themselves) and combatants (who often are not simply enemies but can be sources of information or even allies, and are sometimes members of the same community the counterinsurgents have been tasked with helping).

With ethical decision-making focused on these 'complex relationships', the potential result is that counterinsurgent violence to neutralise threats is wielded less readily and more carefully than would be the case in a more straightforward wartime scenario. COIN conducted in this way could involve, as Daniel Levine (2010, 148) has argued, counterinsurgents 'cultivating a mindset that approaches the [local] population as people with meaningful needs and aspirations' in a way that tends 'to "humanize" them and make the use of violence against them more distasteful'. Moreover, to fulfil an associated commitment to those people to avoid violence whenever possible, the caring counterinsurgent might willingly endure additional physical risk to themselves (Levine 2010, 152). Thus, traditional adherence

to *jus in bello* restraint, combined with a caring disposition (which intuitively seems anathema to successful warfighting), could generate two moral advantages: a reduced risk of harm to civilians, and an increased likelihood of COIN success (assuming the latter is morally important).

Even so, a downside risk must also be acknowledged: that applying an ethics of care in wartime might, like the historical practice of caregiving itself, become subordinated through instrumentalisation. In this regard, there is a cautionary tale in the occasional issuing of ‘condolence payments’ to local civilians affected by violence during the post-2001 US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to the US government, these discretionary payments are intended as an ‘expression of sympathy for death, injury, or property damage caused by coalition or US forces generally during combat’ rather than an ‘admission of legal liability or fault’ (GAO 2007, 13). A US legal officer in Iraq, for example, ‘could offer up to \$2,500 to the families of dead civilians, up to \$1,500 for serious injuries, and up to \$200 for minor injuries’ (Gregory 2020, 160). Such amounts seem scarcely commensurate with the suffered loss, and yet they appear at least to constitute some acknowledgement that human suffering in war extends beyond physical injury and death. For this reason, some scholars claim there is a moral case for genuinely compensating civilian *survivors* of wartime violence (Holewinski 2013; Bazargan-Forward 2017, 173), provided that human lives are not thereby cheapened and perpetrators of violence are not enabled to ‘buy their way out of moral guilt’ (Schulzke 2017, 159).

The greater disadvantage that potentially remains, however, is that condolence payments will reinforce the notion that objectifying (lost) human life can be a means to an end. According to Thomas Gregory (2020, 175), the use of these payments has become ‘a weapon of war, a tool that could be used to manage or mitigate the strategic costs of civilian casualties’. If so, this practice does not signal the advent of an escalating effort to see *caring* for civilians as an inherent good, and nor does it herald a more expansive approach to taking moral responsibility for civilian harm. Rather, Gregory claims, there has been ‘no great awakening of humanitarian sentiment’ among coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, who have expressed no commitment to ‘learn from their mistakes’ and make meaningful changes to the way in which war is conducted (Gregory 2020, 175). If, then, greater care-oriented effort towards moral reform of warfare is needed, the question arises: how might the practical conduct of war be improved if *jus in bello* morality were genuinely augmented with an ethics of care? In the next section, we address this question by focusing on how the operator of an armed, camera-equipped drone might exercise a greater degree of care for civilians in advance of making life-and-death decisions.

Revealed Humanity and a Drone Warrior's Ethics of Care

A caring drone operator needs first to be a feminist in the sense that he or she recognises care ethics as different from but not inferior to Just War morality. Such recognition allows a caring disposition and *jus in bello* principles to be applied in combination, and the intended effect of this is to achieve a greater degree of restraint in the wielding of drone violence than would otherwise be exercised. To the contrary, it could be argued that achieving more restraint requires Just War morality to be displaced by care ethics. In Ruth Groenhout's view, for example (Groenhout 2014):

whatever it means to be a truly caring person . . . it most certainly does not mean that one always rigidly follows certain abstract rules of action. . . . a care ethics account of moral reasoning rejects abstract principles because they often get in the way of responding in . . . caring ways.

For present purposes, however, we maintain that it is more useful to regard care ethics as an added layer of morality; a complement to a traditional, principled 'justice' stance rather than an alternative in competition with it. This viewpoint accords with that of other care ethicists who claim that the 'care' and 'justice' approaches to morality, as originally presented by Gilligan, are neither mutually exclusive nor essentially antagonistic. Although an ethics of care rejects dogmatic and exclusive reliance upon abstract principles as guides to action, 'it need not promote aversion to principles altogether' (Sander-Staudt and Hamington 2011, xv). And it may be, as Held has argued, that 'an adequate, comprehensive moral theory will have to include the insights of both the ethics of care and the ethics of justice' (Held 2006, 16).

When it comes to the exercise of drone violence by individual drone operators, the ambition of greater restraint would be pursued by augmenting *jus in bello* adherence with an ethics of care, and it would be founded on a thick conception of non-combatant harm. A care-oriented *jus in bello* would require the avoidance of physical *and* non-physical harms to civilians, and the latter would include the harm of being deprived of a caregiver. Such a conception of harm is made available, and is arguably required, by the manner in which the humanity of potential strike victims is revealed to a drone operator via video-camera. In effect, the drone's camera helps the agent of violence to concretise and contextualise the object of violence, dispelling notions of Otherness in war. In the past, some drone operators have reportedly attempted to counteract the humanising effect of the drone's camera. For example, in 2015 the former US Air Force (USAF) airman

Michael Haas explained why operators of US drones flying over foreign territories sometimes referred to young children appearing in video footage as 'TITS' (terrorists in training): 'You did anything you could to remove their humanity' (Walker 2015). By contrast, a caring disposition is undoubtedly morally superior to a dehumanising one, so the operator of an armed drone should instead seek to respond to rather than resist what the video-camera reveals about humanity and its relational essence.

The justifiability of using armed drones will probably continue to depend upon being able to sustain the claim that these weapons are highly discriminate, so there is a military-ethical imperative for the associated camera technology to improve. And as the revelation of others' humanity to drone operators thereby becomes richer and more detailed, the difficulty of dehumanisation seems likely to increase. Considered in the abstract, the 'target' of a drone strike is conceptually isolated from potential civilian 'collateral damage'. But in reality, the two can be (and be seen to be) connected by interpersonal relationships. Moving beyond the abstraction that characterises a strict *jus in bello* approach to wartime morality, incorporating an ethics of care would enable greater sensitivity to 'contextual nuance and particular narratives' (Held 2006, 10). The drone's video-camera is highly conducive to such sensitivity because, in the circumstances of a named individual's 'targeted killing', it confers upon the drone operator an unprecedented ability to observe the everyday life of a prospective target playing out in unique fashion.

Often, an individual being targeted for a drone strike will continue to live among the broader population, remaining materially enmeshed within a family and/or neighbourhood. After engaging in activities which the drone-using observer might judge as posing a threat, that individual will return to participate in 'regular' family life, before perhaps leaving to engage again in those activities (see Levine 2010, 146). This means that, prior to a planned strike, a drone operator will have witnessed at length the various prosaic acts that confirm the target's humanity. And, more importantly, the spectacle of that humanity will sometimes include the ordinary transactions of family and/or neighbourly relationships. In turn, this might occasion the drone operator to be reminded of her or his own relationships with parents, children or friends, and the moral value thereof. Where the relationships between a prospective target and other humans nearby incorporate a dynamic of caregiving (for example, parenting), the prolonged observation of this dynamic puts the conscientious drone operator on notice: *even if* civilian injuries and deaths could be avoided in a strike against the targeted individual, the strike would still inflict upon related civilians the non-physical harm of being deprived of a caregiver. A child who survives will have lost a

parent, and a surviving wife will have lost a husband (or vice versa). Thereafter, it is reasonable to expect those innocent individuals to be cast perhaps into the care of any surviving relations or, worse, into a life of being uncared for altogether.

The material consequence of this form of harm is barely recognised in the aforementioned practice of making condolence payments to civilian survivors of wartime violence. A US military lawyer interviewed by Gregory (2020, 163) explained:

If a man dies, and the woman is left with three kids, well I'm going to give her \$2,500 because she needs everything she can get; she can't work because she's got four mouths to feed, and the money earner is dead.

Clearly, though, this 'caring' response to actualised victimhood is inadequate in the long term. From a care ethics perspective, a better response to civilians' care needs, if they are *observed in advance* by a prospective perpetrator of violence, is to refrain from knowingly severing caregiving relationships in the first place. In the acquisition of knowledge (through seeing) that a targeted individual is caring for family members on an ongoing basis, a drone operator's moral responsibility to avoid civilian harm (a loss of care) acquires greater weight as against the moral responsibility of neutralising a military threat. In which case, even when it would be *permissible* (purely as a *jus in bello* matter) to kill someone, a drone operator should refrain from doing so out of concern that innocent dependents should continue to be cared for. Critically, this is *not* a caring response to the targeted individual *qua* military threat. Rather, it is a caring response to non-threatening others whose vulnerability to the loss of a caregiver has been made clear (via video-camera) to the drone operator. If, for example, the target is evidently the father of a child who relies on him for care, the drone operator in turn should care for that child by sparing the father's life.

In different circumstances, the moral requirement to exercise care in this way would not arise. Where a targeted individual's interpersonal relationships are not observed in detail by a drone operator, the impulse and duty to care about preserving the caregiving function of those relationships will be absent. Here, it is worth acknowledging that a commonplace use of armed drones is to provide close air support (CAS) to friendly troops who are in contact with the enemy. In this circumstance, any pre-strike observation of a threatening enemy combatant by a drone operator is likely to be fleeting rather than prolonged. Consequently, there is little or no opportunity for the operator to be prompted morally to account for any *evident* relationships of care that might exist as between a particular enemy combatant and particular

local civilians. Even so, in this context an ethics of care could still be applied in recognition of a drone operator's relationship with fellow members of her or his military organisation. Reportedly, CAS provision tends to be what drone operators find most satisfying about their work as military professionals. For example, as USAF psychiatrist Colonel Kent McDonald told the *New York Times* in 2011: 'These guys are up above firing at the enemy. They love that, they feel like they're protecting our people. They build this virtual relationship with the guys on the ground' (Bumiller 2011).

This account accords with Levine's observation that 'the warrior ethos', embodying a strong notion of interdependence, 'resonates with care ethics' because warriors are encouraged to 'look on their comrades-in-arms as something like family' (Levine 2010, 153). In a COIN context, moreover, Levine (2010, 154) has insisted that 'the caring relationship' between counterinsurgents and local civilians does not replace 'the relationships that counterinsurgents have with their comrades-in-arms'. However, if this is so, it serves as a caution that 'care' might not be regarded as 'innocent' in wartime in the sense of being necessarily and only for the benefit of potential civilian victims. In combining care ethics with *jus in bello* morality, it is therefore important to be mindful of a countervailing risk: one warrior's excessively caring disposition towards her or his comrades might lead to a moral overvaluing of force-protection. If, in calculating the *in bello* proportionality of using an armed drone, the value of preserving friendly troops' lives were afforded too much weight, the zealous wielding of excessively 'protective' violence could become harmfully detrimental to any nearby civilians.

Conclusion

Most discussions of missile-armed drones focus on their capacity to enable killing across vast geographical distances. In this chapter, we have instead focused on the drone as a camera-equipped instrument of war, because the moral significance of drone violence lies in the potential for someone not only to be killed from afar but also to be closely observed. The video-camera mounted on a drone has an unprecedented power to reveal a distant target's humanity and its relational essence. This, we argue, compels drone operators to think differently and more deeply about the morality of their violence. The video-powered revelation of humanity puts them on notice that, sometimes, a drone strike would cause physical harm to a targeted individual *and* non-physical harm (the loss of a caregiver) to innocents in a relationship with that individual.

A feminist ethics of care reminds us that, ethically, relationships matter. In contrast to Just War morality, care ethics focuses on people not as abstract

others but as real individuals with unique needs, and its emphasis is on persons in relation to each other. A care-oriented mode of moral reasoning, which just happens to be historically associated with feminine stereotypes, is not a lesser mode, just a different one, and it is as valid as other modes. Indeed, to care for others is normal. In the exceptional circumstance of war, however, this ingrained social impulse is largely suppressed through the brutalising process of military training and by ongoing practices of dehumanisation that purportedly make it easier to harm others.

When it comes to the wartime use of camera-equipped drones, the restoration of humans' caring responses is arguably both possible and necessary. In the augmenting of principled *jus in bello* reasoning with an ethics of care, there may be scope to achieve a greater degree of humane restraint in the exercise of drone violence. For a caring drone operator, who must somehow respond to the on-screen spectacle of others' caregiving relationships, it would not be enough to act violently in the expectation that innocents would be spared from injury or death. Rather, that operator would be disposed to refrain from taking action if it would clearly deprive those innocents of a critical source of ongoing care. In this way, he or she would honour a concept of civilian harm which is thicker than that which traditionally informs Just War thinking. Provided that a caring disposition is only exercised for the benefit of civilians and not at their expense, the application of a drone warrior's ethics of care potentially constitutes a moral improvement to the conduct of war.

Notes

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1. For present purposes, a 'drone operator' is one of the two people directly involved in remotely controlling the aircraft and its payload from a ground station: the sensor operator, who controls the mounted video-camera, and the pilot (seated adjacent) who controls flight. Typically, the sensor operator focuses the camera and aims the targeting laser before the pilot pulls a trigger releasing a missile from the drone, and he or she then maintains aim as the missile descends.

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