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2015

Review: *Killing by Remote Control: The Ethics of an Unmanned Military*, edited by Bradley Jay Strawser

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Killing by Remote Control: The Ethics of an Unmanned Military, edited by Bradley Jay Strawser. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013 (264 pages, cloth).

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It is a merit of this anthology that its moral explorations of remotely controlled weapons—with a definite focus on unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or "drones"—go beyond their much discussed employment in targeted assassinations. *Killing by Remote Control* consists of a foreword by Jeff McMahan and three parts with a total of eleven essays. Part One covers background theory and sketches the main moral issues raised by the ethics of drones. In his introductory essay, Bradley Jay Strawser emphasizes that we must differentiate between whether killing by remote control is intrinsically wrong and whether the contingent employment of drones in our world poses insurmountable moral problems. He summarizes a wide variety of moral objections under both these headings, and defends his own view that UAV employment might be obligatory (rather than only justified) when it would prevent pilots being exposed to unnecessary risks (p. 17–20). The second chapter outlines just war theory, realism, and pacifism, and maintains that just war theory is adequate for normatively analyzing UAVs. It is followed by a debate between Asa Kasher and Avery Plaw discussing, among other issues, whether drone usage that reduces the risk to soldiers at the cost of increased (indirect) civilian casualties may be justified. Kasher answers in the affirmative, maintaining that current international humanitarian law has a "civilarian" bias (p. 59).

Part Two concerns "the ethics of drone employment." Three chapters address targeted killing and the use of drones in counterinsurgency. Of particular interest is Plaw's "Counting the Dead," which examines the data concerning the ratio of militants and civilians killed by covert drone strikes in Pakistan. Critics maintain that as many as fifty civilians are killed for every militant killed, while U.S. officials tend to reverse these numbers or even claim that recently no collateral deaths have occurred (p. 131). Plaw examines four databases, discusses their divergences, and concludes that "civilian casualties are moderate to low in relation to suspected militant casualties" (p. 152). More specifically, from 2004–11, the highest average ratio of civilians to militants killed among the databases was 23.85 percent, the lowest was 3.86 percent, and all databases show a significant decline in the ratio in recent years (pp. 138–39). Plaw makes

a strong argument that these ratios show that the principle of proportionality has been satisfied. However, he overlooks the fact that we should take into account the costs of civilians wounded and traumatized by drones flying continuously overhead. Moreover, his assessment assumes what many have questioned: that is, whether Pakistan is indeed a war zone where the military standard of proportionality applies.

The other three chapters of Part Two address UAVs and warrior virtues, the use of UAVs in humanitarian intervention, and UAVs as creating asymmetry. Robert Sparrow argues that UAV pilots as "desk jockey warriors" mostly lack the traditional martial virtues of courage, loyalty, honor, and mercy. He worries that with increased usage of UAVs, and with the introduction of autonomous UAVs, the military might move away from the culture of martial virtues, a culture that he views as indispensable in "reduc[ing] the horror of war and tam[ing] the worst excesses of young men sent out to kill strangers" when, inevitably, boots on the ground are needed in future conflicts (p. 105). Zack Beauchamp and Julian Savulescu argue that the "promise" of drones for humanitarian wars is that they reduce the problem of public aversion to risking the lives of troops for saving foreign lives. A weakness of this argument is that it is doubtful that UAVs could generally be helpful in genocidal situations (consider the Rwandan genocide), a point that the authors sidestep by (questionably) making Libya their case study of how drones could be used effectively in humanitarian wars (p. 119). Uwe Steinhoff argues that the most serious problem of UAVs is that they represent the latest instance of military asymmetry between racist and imperialist whites and all others. Steinhoff writes: "Those black, yellow, or brown people might therefore have a somewhat different perspective on the alleged advantages of warfare by drones. They might think that it is bad enough to be treated like the barbarian enemies but, still worse, to be treated like cockroaches on the receiving side of pest control" (pp. 206–07).

Remarkably, Steinhoff is the only author who places drone warfare within a global political context and pays some attention to the experiences of those who are subjected to the deadly surveillance of UAVs. Other shortcomings of *Killing by Remote Control* are that it does not (extensively) address the threat of UAV proliferation, the opportunity costs of developing robotic warfare, and the military use of UAVs for domestic purposes. These types of shortcomings are most striking in Part Three of the anthology. George Lucas claims that the main new moral issue raised by autonomous weapons as compared to remote-control killing is

their design reliability, while Stephen Kershnar argues that "autonomous weapons pose no moral special problem" because they do not necessarily violate anyone's (attacker/defender/third party) rights (p. 229). Strawser is aware that the two articles offer a limited account, but he argues that their "challenge . . . to the current orthodoxy against the moral permissibility of autonomous weapons among ethicists" serves "my aim in this volume to move the debate forward" (p. 23). All in all, Strawser has indeed succeeded in his aim.