Ethics for Drone Operators: Rules versus Virtues

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Introduction

Militaries are by tradition rule-guided organisations, and mostly for good reasons: setting rules makes clear to military personnel what they can and cannot do, and it provides outsiders to the organisation, say the local population in a mission area, with some security regarding the way they are treated. An example is the prohibition of torture, a ban that is to be maintained regardless of how expedient it might be not to do so. Some decisions, and the matter of torture is again a good illustration of that (but so is the use of certain types of weapons, such as chemical and biological weapons, or expanding bullets), we do not leave to the discretion of the individual soldier. Rule-based ethics point to the importance of having universal, categorically binding moral norms. On the other hand, such rule-based approaches have as an important downside that rules lack flexibility and are often mostly ineffective when there are no witnesses around. Also, rule-following can impede the ability to see the moral aspect of what one is doing, while that ability is evidently essential to morally sound decision-making. Hence the notion that rules should leave soldiers with some leeway in that decision-making, if only to keep them from committing so-called 'crimes of obedience' (Kelman and Hamilton 1989). It is probably for that reason that one textbook on military ethics, meant for educating military personnel, unambiguously states that 'in any situation where law and ethics set different standards, a member of the military profession will follow the higher standard, inevitably the one required by ethics' (Coleman 2013, 268).

Making good use of this leeway presupposes a good disposition, though, and it is at least partly for that reason that many militaries see a virtue-based

approach to teaching military ethics as an important complement to rules imposed from above in an effort to make their personnel behave ethically. Where rule-based approaches, interpreted narrowly, mainly aim at securing compliance, virtue ethics asks for a lot more, including the kind of super-erogatory acts the military depends on. What is more, virtue ethics assumes that character can be developed: virtues are to be understood as dispositions that can be acquired through training and practice.[1] This appeals to many military trainers and educators because such an approach sits rather well with the way most militaries see themselves: as being in the business of character-building. Finally, virtue ethics is in keeping with the tendency of many Western militaries to move away from a largely functional approach in their ethics education and towards a more aspirational approach that aims at making soldiers better persons, mainly based on the view that bad persons are not likely to become morally good soldiers – although they could of course still be effective ones (Robinson 2007; Wolfendale 2008, 164).

In theory, utilitarianism is a possible third candidate for underpinning the ethics education for military personnel, but in practice it is seen by most as being particularly unfit for that purpose, mostly because 'an outcome-centred approach may lead all too easily to military expedience as the sole guide to actions in war' (Bonadonna 1994, 18). Utilitarianism not only holds that we should base our judgement of whether an act is morally right or wrong (and hence also whether it should be done or not) upon the fore-seen consequences, but also, much more revolutionary, that everyone's life and happiness should weigh equally. Its critics seem to hold that utilitarianism is not bad *per se*, but that the utilitarian calculus is likely to be mis-applied in a self-serving way.[2] Military ethicist and political philosopher Michael Walzer has pointed out, as have many others, that the valuing of 'each and every person' in the same way will not work when 'solidarity collapses' (Walzer 2004, 39). Precisely that is what happens in war, where we cannot but expect to see little willingness to take the consequences to all parties into account equally.

The ethics (and specifically the Just War theory) that is to guide politicians and military decision-makers during armed conflict consists of a mix of rule-based elements (such as the prohibition of certain weapons, and discrimination between civilians and combatants) and, despite Walzer's misgivings, more utilitarian ones (proportionality, chance of success). However, as we have already noted, most militaries today consider an aspirational virtue ethics approach as the best way to underpin the ethics education of military personnel that are actually carrying out military operations (Robinson 2007). The question is whether this approach is also the best one for the moral education of drone operators, and if it is, what virtues

should hold central place in that virtue-based education. The more general, underlying question is whether what counts as a military virtue is place and time dependent; at first sight, a convincing argument can be made that this is not the case. Some military virtues are valued at all times and in all places – mainly because they perform an important function in or for the military. Martial courage is, of course, the obvious example here, being the quintessential military virtue. But if we take a closer look at courage, it also becomes clear that armed drones bring us to a whole new ball game: its operators do not seem to need any physical courage at all. Regarding other important military virtues appearing on military lists (see Robinson 2008), such as loyalty, discipline or obedience, it is at the minimum unclear what beneficial role these could have for operating armed drones.

If we for the moment assume that traditional martial virtues such as physical courage are not the most relevant for drone operators, there are at least three possible answers to the question of what we do need. One could argue: (1) that the virtue approach is the right one, but that we need virtues that are better suited for military personnel flying drones than are the traditional, rather bellicose ones; or (2) that not only is the virtue approach the right one, but the traditional virtues by and large suffice – with the caveat that the use of drones does ask for new interpretations of these virtues; or, finally, (3) that virtues are of little help here and that we need something different altogether, presumably rule-based or utilitarian ethics, or a combination of both.

'New' Virtues for New Tasks

If we assume that the existing conceptions of current militaries' virtues are of little use in regulating the conduct of drone operators, devising a new list of virtues would be a first possible way forward. In this line of thought, drone operators do need virtues, but not necessarily the traditional military ones. The virtues we teach military personnel are to fit their particular job, and the virtues that drone operators need are most likely to be more about exercising restraint than about demonstrating virtues such as courage, loyalty and discipline. Such virtues of restraint are less military-specific and could, for instance, be found among the more 'general' cardinal virtues. Interestingly, of the four cardinal virtues of courage, wisdom, temperance and justice, only courage has hitherto made it to the traditional lists of military virtues and values, albeit not only in its Aristotelian form of physical courage on the battlefield, but also as moral courage. Wisdom, temperance and justice have not made it to most lists of military values but are today probably as necessary as courage is (see Skerker et al. 2019). These virtues

have a wider scope than the traditional military virtues, and incorporating them could have the collateral benefit that it would bring those parts of the military that would subscribe to these cardinal virtues into closer alignment with society at large. Respect, incidentally, is a virtue that is listed by many militaries, but is evidently also deemed important in larger society. Opting for a set of virtues that is closer to the four cardinal virtues would also give us a set of virtues that does justice to the ancient idea that one cannot have one virtue without the others, and that all the virtues are interrelated. Being just is of little value if one lacks the courage to defend justice, for instance, while courage is not of much use without practical wisdom to guide it. The haphazard lists of virtues that militaries now subscribe to (see Robinson 2008) miss these interconnections.

Yet one could also argue that devising a new list of virtues from scratch is perhaps a bridge too far for what is, for the most part, a relatively traditional organisation. That the existing military virtues are ill-aligned to the operation of armed drones does not necessarily mean we have to opt for different ones. Instead, one could also identify the weaknesses of the existing virtues and see if the way militaries interpret these traditional virtues can be improved. Although most militaries today cling to fairly traditional interpretations of the virtues, other readings are of course possible. The question is then not which new virtues the military should promote, but in what form the existing ones should best be understood.

Interpreting the Old Virtues in New Ways

A second way forward would be to interpret the existing virtues somewhat differently; more precisely, less narrowly than is commonly the case (see Schulzke 2016, 195–6). The gist of the codes, oaths and values (which, even if their actual influence is limited, at the minimum do communicate what an organisation thinks is important) as currently formulated in most militaries mainly pays attention to the organisation and colleagues. There is little in them that regulates the behaviour of soldiers towards civilian populations. The virtue of courage is especially interesting in the context of unmanned warfare. As was noted above, at present most conceptions of military courage include moral courage, instead of being limited to more martial (physical) forms of courage. So it seems that courage means different things in different contexts. Aristotle, for instance, famously defined courage in his *Nicomachean Ethics* as the mean between rashness and cowardice, and he thought that this virtue is especially needed in battle – the idea that a brave man does not fear a noble death in war (Aristotle 1962). This conception of courage as a mean was well suited to the ancient Greek

phalanx formation, as either an excess or a deficiency of courage would destroy the organised whole that it was. But this martial notion of courage is clearly worlds apart from what Mahatma Gandhi envisioned when he pleaded for courageous but non-violent resistance to British colonial rule in India – that plea was about moral courage.

Some years ago, Jesse Kirkpatrick (2015a; 2015b) and Robert Sparrow (2015a) had an interesting although somewhat semantic discussion on the question of whether drone operators possessed the virtue of courage. If a definite conclusion had to be drawn from that discussion, it would be that these operators do need courage, but more in the form of moral courage than of martial courage. Seeing that drone operators run no significant physical risk (at least not in the current asymmetric conflicts), the term 'martial courage' is out of place here. Moral courage is an important sub-species of the virtue of courage as it asks us to uphold our principles even if others disagree and perhaps hold us in contempt for sticking to them. As Ian Miller defines it, moral courage is 'the capacity to overcome the fear of shame and humiliation in order to admit one's mistakes, to confess a wrong, to reject evil conformity, to denounce injustice, and to defy immoral or imprudent orders' (Miller 2000, 254).

It is virtues such as these that have to provide guidance to military personnel in morally ambiguous situations, seeing that providing general rules and guidelines for such complex situations will not work – militaries seem now and then even disinclined to provide them (see, for instance, Whetham 2017). Peter Lee (2019) gives an excellent example when he describes how an acting sergeant on her first day in a supervisory role overseeing a Reaper drone crew stuck to her judgement, against the opinion of all present, that an alleged parcel placed on the back seat of a motorbike piloted by a Taliban target was in fact a child – which in the end it turned out to be. (She would have been equally courageous, of course, if the supposed parcel turned out to be precisely that – a parcel. But in that case it would perhaps have been more difficult to muster that same amount of moral courage at another time.)

What is interesting here is that physical courage is primarily (though certainly not only) something one's superiors and colleagues benefit from. Moral courage has a wider reach and is, in line with the aforementioned distinction between an aspirational and a functional approach, more about being a better person than about being an effective soldier (compare: Robinson 2007, 22; 2008, 1). This form of courage is important to the military not only because it needs personnel who will dare to blow the whistle if necessary, but also because it benefits from having soldiers who dare to correct colleagues who they think are acting wrongly, or even to report

them if necessary. Its beneficiaries, today, are not only military colleagues, as is predominantly the case with physical courage, but, as Lee's example of the acting sergeant clearly shows, also the outsiders (for example, civilians in the vicinity of a planned drone strike) the military is there to protect. Moral courage can only perform that function if militaries allow room for it, however. The good thing is that militaries today rarely fail to at least pay lip service to moral courage, and they generally claim to deem it a plus to have among their personnel principled people who dare to blow the whistle if necessary or to stop a colleague who is about to commit a wrong. But although their definitions of courage include moral courage, in reality military organisations all too often offer a fairly unfriendly environment for acting on moral principles, especially when adherence to these principles appears to conflict with organisational interests or mission success. That drone pilots are probably less subject to the forces of peer pressure and group loyalty than other members of the military could make it easier for them to gather the moral courage that is needed to make right decisions or to display loyalty to principle instead of group loyalty (Lee 2012, 15).

Loyalty is as often mentioned on lists of military virtues as courage is. But that same loyalty that militaries value so much is at the same time a cause of both unethical conduct and attempts to cover that conduct up. To improve matters, militaries could interpret loyalty in such a way that it includes loyalty to a profession or principle, not just loyalty to one's group and organisation, as we now often see (see Olsthoorn 2011). Loyalty to one's professional ethic, instead of to one's organisation and colleagues, is nothing more or less than what is commonly understood to be one of the key characteristics of a professional, something military personnel claim to be.[3] Of course, the position of a professional in a civilian occupation is essentially different from military personnel in a conflict zone. Civilian professionals are able to put the interest of their clients above everything else without putting themselves in harm's way, whereas soldiers cannot at all times act in the interest of the local population without incurring more risks to themselves. For that reason, especially when we consider the fact that in the eyes of many the predominant task of most military organisations is still the defence of national territory, the emphasis on loyalty to the organisation is not that surprising. The interesting thing here is, of course, that drone operators can take the interests of outsiders into account with no extra risk to themselves, and in that way the fact that the risks for this category of military personnel is effectively nil might open the door to a more professional – in the meaning of impartial – attitude. One could even wonder whether, at a time when many armed forces consider the promotion of universal principles as their main ground for existence, the development of

a truer professionalism, with the main focus of loyalty being the soldier's professional ethic instead of their organisation, is still too far-fetched.

Respect, finally, was mentioned previously as a virtue valued by both the military and society at large. A closer look, however, reveals that respect in the military is now and then limited to respect towards colleagues. The US Army describes respect as, among other things, 'trusting that all people have done their jobs and fulfilled their duty' (US Army n.d.). This definition seems to implicitly limit respect to colleagues. Here, too, a less narrow interpretation seems in place.[4]

Rules and Utility Instead of Virtues

A final way ahead would be to reconsider whether virtues in fact form the best underpinning for the ethics education of drone operators in the first place. We have seen that the traditional military virtues are of themselves already more inward looking than the cardinal virtues, but also on a more theoretical level that virtue ethics is fairly self-regarding. Virtue ethics focuses on the agent and his or her character and flourishing, even in situations (and war is probably such a situation) where an outcome-centred approach would seem to be more appropriate. Aristotle's idea of virtue is on the whole a lot less attentive to the needs of others than is the utilitarian notion of the greatest happiness for the greatest number or the rule-based maxim to treat others in the same way you want them to treat you.[5] Now, as we have seen, military ethicists often criticise utilitarianism because it would make military expedience outweigh all other concerns (see, for instance, Snow 2009, 560), but in fact the consequentialist precept that the consequences to all persons should weigh equally could, if taken seriously, lead to a fairer distribution of the right to life. Utilitarianism does not condone the maximising of our own utility, as some seem to hold, but that of all. This means that soldiers should take as much care, and run as much risk, to avoid casualties among enemy civilians as they would do for their own civilians (Shaw 2005). Although the holding of such an impartial view might be expecting too much from regular soldiers in a regular war in defence of one's own country, in many of today's operations in which armed drones are used one probably should be able to do so a bit more easily. Even when enemy forces do little to avoid civilian casualties, or even target them deliberately, utilitarianism is not about fairness, but about minimising the damage of warfare (Shaw 2005, 139–40).

As to rule-based ethics, in recent years, both Schulzke (2016) and Renic (2018, 194) have argued that more emphasis on rule-based approaches is in place in the case of drone operators – the first-mentioned mainly on the

ground that alternative interpretations of the military virtues that would fit drone warfare are so different from the current ones. In defence of the somewhat more rudimentary form of rule-based ethics (rudimentary because it disregards the good intention most forms of rule-based ethics ask for)[6] that we encounter in most militaries, one could argue that pointing out what is permitted and what is not, and what the consequences of transgressing these rules are, should also have a role in the ethics education of military personnel operating drones. Failing to do so can be costly for perpetrator and victim alike – something that can be overlooked in an ethics education that focuses too much on character development. That universal rules lack flexibility is not always a problem; torture, as we already noted, is at present forbidden under every circumstance, and flexibility here could quickly bring us onto a slippery slope. As said in the introduction to this chapter, we do not leave the decision on these matters to individual soldiers, however virtuous they might be. The Just War tradition is primarily founded on an ethic that stresses the importance of such universal, categorically binding moral rules (though, as we have noted before, there are unmistakably also some consequentialist elements within the Just War tradition). Clear rules have the additional benefit that they can turn potential moral dilemmas into tests of integrity: it is clear what is the correct way to proceed, yet there is pressure (from peers, or the prospect of furthering one's own interest) to follow a different course of action (Coleman 2009, 105–6).[7] Recent research has shown that military personnel who lack guidelines to deal with such morally critical situations experience more moral dilemmas, increasing the likelihood of moral injury (Schut 2015). This risk of moral injury is something that drone operators face too. Although in the past some argued that killing might get a bit easier with the increased physical and psychological distance between soldiers and the battlefield (see, for instance, Olsthoorn 2011, 126), we now know that '[p]hysical separation from the combat zone does not [. . .] automatically lead to emotional disconnection. The crew of a Tornado flying at low level above an enemy contact may be more emotionally disengaged than the Reaper crew' (Lee 2012).

Risk and the Military Profession

In earlier days, bows, catapults and firearms have been vilified for being the weapon of choice of cowards, yet it seems that armed drones push things even further by doing away with risk altogether – which raises interesting questions about the extent to which risk is fundamental to the (image of the) military profession and whether the elimination of risk will change it. Although the use of drones is at first sight not very different (as long

as such systems are not fully autonomous, that is) from using a manned aircraft to drop a bomb from a high altitude, their rise makes it possible to engage the enemy from such a safe distance that it reduces the risks for their military operators to about zero. This reduction in risk to personnel could make one wonder whether the military profession becomes a less honourable one as a consequence, as honour often involves acting against one's own self-interest (including the preserving of life and limb) to further a higher interest. The difference between running a limited risk and running no risks is perhaps not merely gradual: 'For men to join in battle is generally thought to be honourable, but not if they are so situated as to be able to kill others without exposing themselves to danger whatever' (Welsh 2008, 4). The *Time* magazine journalists Mark Thompson and Bobby Ghosh (2009) have observed how people in Waziristan (the region in Pakistan where US drones have killed many Taliban leaders) see the use of drones as dishonourable and cowardly.[8] And, according to military ethicist George R. Lucas (2016, 175), 'the removal of any risk of harm to the military [. . .] seems grotesquely unfair, persecutory, oppressive, abusive, and therefore morally repugnant', reminding us of 'the Death Star from Star Wars'.

Some militaries are aware of that problem and attempt to draw the use of armed drones into the realm of honour. A 2016 article in the *New York Times* reported, for example, how (Schmidt 2016):

> [f]or years, the military's drone pilots have toiled in obscurity from windowless rooms at bases in suburban America, viewed by some in the armed forces more as video game players than as warriors. But in a reflection of their increasingly important role under President Obama, the drone operators will now be eligible for military honors akin to those given to pilots who flew over the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan.

This new award can also be conferred upon US military personnel who launch a cyber-attack, the article continued. Although all of this – honouring the courage of what are sometimes somewhat derogatively called 'cubicle warriors' – might sound somewhat odd to many people, it fits well with the rise of ways of warfighting in which soldiers are exposed to less risk. In the same article, we read that '[a]ccording to the Pentagon, the first seven Medal of Honor awards for service in Iraq and Afghanistan were given to those who had died. But since 2010, all 10 people who have received the Medal of Honor have been living at the time it was awarded' (Schmidt 2016).

Most observers, however, will still feel that the use of armed drones is difficult to reconcile with what is commonly understood by the term 'honourable': incurring risk to oneself seems to be a vital part of that concept. Fighting one's

adversary from a low-flying manned aircraft would indicate an acceptance of risk to oneself, but if that would also increase the risk to the local population one might ask what the point is. Dismissing the use of drones because their use is free of risk for the attacking side and thus dishonourable might, as a result, boil down to accepting higher risks to oneself *and* the local population just to prove your honourableness (see Strawser 2010). As that would be a distinctly unsatisfying option, we have to ask ourselves whether the language of honour is suited to describe drone warfare to begin with (see Goldstein 2015, 75). That the drawbacks of military honour are as numerous as the advantages might form another reason to leave honour out of the equation (see Sparrow 2015b, 390). What defines warriors is not so much their acceptance of risk as the restraint with which they exercise violence (see Renic 2018) – which brings us back to our earlier conclusion that for drone operators abiding by the rules is perhaps as important as exercising virtue.[9]

Contrasting supposedly risk-averse drone operators with the assumed death wish of, for instance, a suicide bomber is not going to be particularly helpful, though. Such a comparison echoes the occidentalist rhetoric of a feminine West that al-Qaida and ISIS are always eager to embrace. Buying into that 'you love Pepsi, we love death' rhetoric implies not only that drone operators are not honourable because they do not put their life at risk, but possibly also that we should deem their 'opposites' (the death-seeking suicide bombers) honourable – not a conclusion many of us would want to accept. Risk aversion is not bad or dishonourable in itself; it is only a problem in so far as it comes at the cost of increased risk to the outsiders (civilians in foreign territories) that the military should defend if it wants to live up to its professed ambition to be a force for good. Perhaps the real issue deserving of our attention is that we are generally more concerned about casualties among our fellow countrymen and countrywomen than among unknown persons in faraway countries – this is perhaps to some extent understandable and natural, but certainly not moral. Or honourable, for that matter.

Conclusion

Apart from some academics who have a clear preference for virtue ethics, rule-based ethics or consequentialist ethics, in real life most people tend to see a role for both virtues and rules, and they consider the consequences of an action as well (see Nagel 1986, 166). They are probably quite right in doing so, and one could even argue that those involved in professional ethics education are more or less duty-bound to take a fairly comprehensive approach towards teaching ethics. That means paying attention to rules,

virtues and consequences, but also to situational factors that make unethical conduct more likely to occur.[10] What is clear, though, is that some of the traditional martial virtues such as courage and loyalty are in their current interpretations less relevant for today's drone operators. In particular, the obsoleteness of physical courage – the willingness to incur risk to life and limb – in unmanned warfare has led to some not too helpful comments on its honourableness. Nonetheless, we do need to look for alternatives to the traditional military virtues, and in this chapter a few possible ways ahead have been outlined.

Notes

1. Virtues are typically described as stable character traits that are worth having, often working as correctives to our self-regarding inclinations (Foot 2002, 8–12). Most virtue ethicists hark back to the time-proven work of Aristotle, who held that we become virtuous by actually performing virtuous acts. Performing courageous deeds grows courage, for instance. It is this Aristotelian view on virtues that underlies most literature on military virtues too. As Robinson has explained: 'The approach adopted in most armed forces is that of "virtue ethics", with their philosophical origins found in Aristotle. Essentially, virtue ethics seeks to ensure moral behavior by instilling certain virtues (loyalty, honesty, and courage) to create good character. Consequently, many military academies have adopted an approach based on Aristotelian virtue ethics' (Robinson 2007, 29).

2. As one author writes, 'utilitarianism would lend itself to abuse in precisely those kinds of situations in which ethical safeguards are most needed, and should, for this reason, be stricken from the list of viable alternatives for the military' (Snow 2009, 560). According to Stephen Deakin (2008, 84): 'the utilitarianism ethic often does not work in a military community. It is not the ethic of a virtuous person desiring to do good in every circumstance [. . .]. Rather, it is the ethic of a highly educated rational calculator who is constantly considering whether an action is harmful to the Army or not, and, inevitably, what he can get away with.'

3. Loyalty to the organisation is the main aspect of military professionalism that is somewhat at odds with what a 'regular' professional ethic entails and, in the past, some have for that reason maintained that the military profession was ill suited to develop into a 'true' profession (see, for instance, Doorn 1975). Armed forces socialise their employees thoroughly into the organisation, which contributes to the strong loyalty military personnel feel towards each other and their employer. The fact that military personnel are predominantly trained in-house, whereas other professionals (such as doctors) as a rule receive most of their formal professional training before entering their job, makes this socialisation into the organisation (instead of into a profession) easier. As a consequence, different militaries have different organisational values (often still service-specific), but there are as yet no values of 'the military profession' as

such. By contrast, the values and standards of 'regular' professionals stem from universities and professional associations, not from their particular hospital or law firm (Mintzberg 1983, 192).

4. Military ethicist Timothy Challans describes how 'early drafts of the Army's 1999 leadership manual included the notion of respect; in fact, the key feature of respect was that of respecting the enemy on the battlefield. That idea did not survive the staffing process, and even a cursory check of the manual today will reveal that only Americans are mentioned as being recipients of this important value of respect' (Challans 2007, 163).

5. For Aristotle, the good life took precedence over the moral life (Nagel 1986, 195, 197). The virtue of justice is a possible exception; Aristotle deemed it the most complete virtue because the best person is not one 'who practices virtue toward himself, but who practices it toward others, for that is a hard thing to achieve' (Aristotle 1962, 1030a).

6. Although not asking anyone to go beyond the call of duty, rule-based ethics, especially as conceived by its main protagonist Immanuel Kant, can demand quite a lot from military men and women. In this understanding, moral duties are to be followed because one accepts them by choice, not because they are imposed from the outside and backed by sanctions (see also Martinelli-Fernandez 2006, 56–7).

7. Although the distinction between ethical dilemmas and tests of integrity is an important and meaningful one, the situations in which this apparently straightforward distinction is blurred are the most interesting. For instance, it is generally thought that the loyalty one feels towards colleagues is nothing more than a pressure that can create a test of integrity. Loyalty is then viewed as the suspension of independent judgement, or the 'willingness not to follow good judgment' (Ewin 1992, 412). But if loyalty amounts to a value, and for most members of the military it does, then there might be a dilemma again (see also Coleman 2009, 112).

8. Two weeks after the 9/11 attacks, Susan Sontag (2001) made a somewhat similar (and much criticised) remark: 'If the word "cowardly" is to be used, it might be more aptly applied to those who kill from beyond the range of retaliation, high in the sky, than to those willing to die themselves in order to kill others. In the matter of courage (a morally neutral virtue): whatever may be said of the perpetrators of Tuesday's slaughter, they were not cowards.'

9. In addition, one could argue, as Michael Robillard has, that 'the value of *military effectiveness* should be held in higher esteem than that of mere physical risk in battle [. . .]. [T]he ultimate mission of the military should be effective national defense and not heroism for heroism's sake. Accordingly, the strategically effective logistician, drone pilot, or informational officer should be held in equal *if not higher* regard in the military of the twenty-first century than that of the tactical level infantryman' (Robillard 2017, 217, original emphasis).

10. Like other military personnel, drone operators are subject to situational forces that are much stronger than those most of us will ever encounter. Their ethics education should aim not only at furthering virtues, or respect for rules, but

also at giving insight into the factors that make unethical conduct more likely to take place. Factors such as negative peer pressure, dehumanisation, stress, sleep deprivation, the national and organisational culture, and also the amount and kind of training and education received perhaps influence our conduct more than our character does (Doris and Murphy 2007). The social psychologist's advice to avoid morally challenging situations is clearly not very helpful for drone operators, but with more knowledge about the influence of these factors, militaries can do more to make the erosion of moral standards less likely to occur. The insights social psychology offers should hence have a place in the moral education of UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle) personnel. However, some of these factors might have less influence on drone operators than on regular military personnel.

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