

The Challenge of Autonomous Weapons for War Termination - Rethinking the Moral Costs of War

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Abstract:

The narrative of 'clean warfare' through autonomous weapons systems promises a minimization of moral costs, in part through the technological ability for precise targeting and adherence to the principle of discrimination in bello. Even if this narrative holds, the use of autonomous weapons systems over time leads to a decoupling of moral costs. The focus increasingly shifts to the real costs of war as a 'clean' war becomes more of a technological war of attrition. This challenges Moellendorf's concept of moral costs ex bello, as war is no longer determined by ethical considerations but by the availability and affordability of autonomous weapons systems. As a result, only economically strong actors may be able to conduct 'clean' wars, shifting the discussion of just war from an ethical to a real-economic perspective.

Bottom-line-up-front:

The use of autonomous weapons systems requires a reassessment of moral costs and a more careful evaluation of the realistic chances of success ad bellum. It also underscores the need for a more thoughtful balancing between the principle of necessity ex bello and the moral costs ad bellum.

Problem statement:

The Just War theorist Darrell Moellendorf discusses the concept of moral costs in relation to the question of when wars should be terminated (ius ex bello). According to Moellendorf, wars must be ended when the anticipated moral costs ex bello disproportionately outweigh the war aims ad bellum.

While this argument holds in traditional warfare, it is challenged by the use of autonomous weapons systems. Ultimately, the question arises of how wars can still be justly ended in the age of autonomous warfare without abandoning Moellendorf's concept of moral costs.

So what?:

In light of the ex bello challenge posed by autonomous weapons systems, Just War theorists must reassess the ethical framework of war termination, balancing moral costs and technological realities.

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