Introduction: The conditioned human

> Neither violence nor power is a natural phenomenon, that is, a manifestation of the life process; they belong to the political realm of human affairs whose essentially human quality is guaranteed by man's faculty of action, the ability to begin something new. And I think it can be shown that no other human ability has suffered to such an extent from the progress of the modern age.
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> <div align="right">Hannah Arendt, On Violence (1970: 82)</div>

'What are we doing?' Hannah Arendt posed this question as a guiding theme for her reflections in *The Human Condition*. It's a simple, yet comprehensive question that carries both an ethical and a political demand. The question necessitates a pause for thought, a moment for reflection. It requests an evaluation of actions and the contexts within which they take place. This question is concerned as much with *what* is happening in the present as it is concerned with *why* this present might be as it is. In such a vein, this book is motivated by questions about the 'what' and the 'why' of contemporary technologies of violence and the underpinnings of their ethics. The emergence of new technologies for violent practices – from lethal drones to so-called 'killer robots', to weaponised Artificial Intelligence – presents a challenge to mainstream accounts of ethics in international political theory and raises important questions: what is this present in which technology stands poised to subsume humanity? And how can we recognise, decipher and understand more clearly what we are doing in this technological present? When acts of political violence become introduced as technologically justified practices, the need to interrogate the foundations that underwrite the politics and ethics of such violence arises anew. In 1962, Sheldon Wolin posed the question thus: 'Do the social and political forms of any given age constitute a particular method for adjusting to violence?' (2009: 39). He asked this question so that techniques to limit the unprecedented potential for violence in his time could adapt not merely to dealing with symptoms but with the causes.

This book is motivated by the perplexities of our contemporary wars, in which new practices and technologies of violence are presented as a more ethical and superior way of killing. This turn to argue for a more ethical way of killing in war is emphasised in debates on the use of lethal drones and the development of new autonomous weapons systems. The previous US administration under Barack Obama went to great lengths to characterise the use of lethal Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) – more commonly known as drones – as ethical, lawful and prudent instruments in countering terrorism. Similarly, proponents of autonomous military robotics in the US Department of Defense (DoD) and elsewhere argue that the use of Autonomous Weapons Systems (AWS) – or killer robots – could make warfare in general more ethical and humane than in previous periods of human history. The emergence of ostensibly moral technologies of violence presents a challenge to mainstream conceptions of ethics in International Relations and International Political Theory. Current frameworks of just war traditions, ethics of war or international law, for example, all struggle to grasp, let alone challenge, the ethical implications of lethal drone strikes and the drive to establish killer robot armies. And where scholarly debates over the ethics of such weapons do take place, they are often confined to discussions of legality and effectiveness, ending up mired in problematic equations of fact with value. This impasse, along with the military discourse that surrounds lethal technologies, raises important questions about what is at work in the relationship between such technologies, their uses and the ethical justifications given for practices of political violence. In particular, what enables the framing of an instrument for surveillance and killing as an inherently ethical instrument? What kind of sociopolitical rationale underpins such a framing? And how does this rationale itself engender new regimes of high-tech killing? *Death Machines* addresses these questions by offering an analysis of how the production of techno-biopolitical subjectivities undergirds contemporary forms of technologised warfare.

In order to do this, I draw on the work of Hannah Arendt, who had an astute grasp of the biopolitical and scientific-technological implications of the modern human condition. To date, a range of scholars have drawn on Arendt for analyses of biopolitical dimensions of violence. However, a systematic account of her work on biopolitical trajectories and technologies remains underdeveloped in current scholarship. In the first part of this text, I establish such an account and I argue that the Arendtian analysis draws out a duality at work in the biopolitical shaping of subjectivities – the politicisation and technologisation of life itself on one hand, and the emergence of biological imageries that inform metaphors and processes of politics on the other. This helps us better understand how

contemporary ethical frames of political violence are produced and shaped. The second part of the book is then concerned with the possibility of ethical thinking in a biopolitical present that is mediated heavily through technological interfaces and networks, specifically in modern warfare. My focus is on how modern subjectivities are produced through technological and biopolitical mandates, how such subjectivities shape contemporary understandings of politics and violence, and how these understandings, in turn, foster a type of ethics that supports increasingly technologised modes of political violence. In this way, my concern is to uncover how mechanisms of contemporary politics not only turn life and death into a technical matter but also impose limits on the way we conceive of and are able to contest the ethics of contemporary warfare. In short, by building an Arendtian biopolitics framework to situate a critique of contemporary conceptions of ethics of violence, this book offers two contributions: it supplements existing accounts of biopolitics as political rationales and offers a new way to theorise and disrupt justifications for technology-driven processes of violence in present-day warfare, such as the increased use of lethal drone strikes and the advent of AWS in war.

Postmodern perplexities

Motivated by the perplexities of a modern political life preoccupied with biological and reproductive processes, and largely under the sway of scientific-technological authority, in which the capacity to annihilate all life on earth had become a technological possibility, Arendt's chief aim was to understand humans in a specific sociopolitical context and their capacity and potential for political action therein (1998: 3). Her concern with understanding what it is we are indeed doing in the modern world comprised a range of perspectives and anxieties – some unique to her time, and others for which she proved to have her finger on the pulse of a future time, including matters of scientific and technological advancements that pose pressing challenges today. Arendt took part, for example, in a symposium on an emerging cyber sphere, held in New York in 1964. The symposium hosted a broad range of participants, from computer scientists to civil rights activists and, allegedly, 'at least one spy', with the aim of debating the 'cybercultural revolution' and its potential sociopolitical implications (Bassett 2013). Similarly presciently, in her text *On Violence*, published in 1970, Arendt considered the possibility of military robotics explicitly and commented on the potential political implications of autonomous robot soldiers in the not-too-distant future (1970: 10). Both aspects – the cyber sphere and autonomous and intelligent weapons systems – pose new and urgent political and ethical problems for us today.

Many of the puzzles relevant to Arendt's time have accelerated in our own time. Over ninety countries are in possession of military drone technology, many developing or acquiring lethal strike capacity for their unmanned vehicles; the pursuit of fusing human tissue with technological circuitry for an ever-more technologised and resilient 'Super Soldier' is long under way (Mehlman et al. 2013); the development of AWS with ever greater levels of decision autonomy is ostensibly inevitable (Ackerman 2015) and the development of human-level Artificial Intelligence (AI), and consequently artificial super-intelligence is quite possibly only decades away (Bostrom 2014). Individually, and combined, these technologies have the potential to transfigure both civilian and military life, customs and practices in dramatic ways. In particular, the emergence of technologies of violence that have normalised practices that hitherto had been considered immoral – such as the targeted killing of individuals as a prophylactic measure to combat terrorism – demands that we make it a priority to reconsider the ethics on which such practices rest 'from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears' (Arendt 1998: 9). The speed with which new technologies for killing are developed and deployed in the war on terrorism makes this task all the more urgent today.

No longer officially termed 'the global war on terror', US operations relating to the fight against terrorism have been subsumed under the euphemistic moniker 'Overseas Contingency Operations' since 2011.[1] This represents a clear shift away from the emergency operation of war as a response to atrocities or in anticipation of an imminent attack, and suggests a much more enduring (military) administration for the control of risk, terror and contingencies. This is especially reflected in the use of drones for lethal strikes carried out by the CIA against targets in countries that are not officially engaged in war with the United States, including Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan. Contingency operations make a different approach possible. As John Kaag and Sarah Kreps have observed: 'Contingent targets emerge at unexpected moments in any variety of places. Targeting these individuals requires not mass invasion, but so-called surgical strikes, that are made without declaring war on a foreign state' (2012a: 280). Not large numbers of boots on the ground but rather a professional surgeon is called upon here. This type of medical incursion becomes the predominant mode of interventionist violence, which assists in forging new normalising narratives, in which assassination, as a practice, appears to have become a normalised foreign policy option. This has been an expanding practice since the Obama administration made drone strikes the interventionist tool of choice; since Donald Trump has become Commander in Chief, the use of lethal drones has expanded, and restrictions on their use have been loosened. All indications point toward a relatively

unrestrained use of lethal drones by the US and its close allies in the near future.

The logic implicit in the fight against contingency in the war on terrorism presents an ethical struggle *per se*, wherein underlying and divergent value systems, narratives and administrative perspectives inform both the practices and the goals of warfare. At stake in this moralised battle is nothing less than humanity itself – not merely the survival of humanity but its values and, importantly, its progress. It is the threat to the corpus and advancement of humanity that both mandates new technologies designed for 'better', more ethical warfare and simultaneously unsettles established norms of what is morally permissible and impermissible. The use of lethal drones in the fight against terrorism is emblematic of the drive towards new forms of allegedly ethical warring. Posited as technology that can fulfil the tripartite liberal mandate to be 'legal, ethical and wise', as spokespersons for the Obama administration repeatedly declared (Brennan 2012a/b; Carney 2013), drones have since gained a dimension as weapons that no other new military technology has hitherto acquired – virtuousness in their own technological right, bestowed with the 'real promise of moral progress' (Statman 2015). At the time of writing, the US drone war regime has been expanding its reach for over a decade, producing ever more 'zones of war' (Walzer 2016: 14) and the debates remain heated as to whether lethal drones are the most ethical or an inherently unethical weapon of war. There is no simple answer to this, but, as Kaag and Kreps note: 'when it comes to war, if it is easy, it is probably not moral' (2012b).

Putting aside the question whether drones or other military technologies are ethical or not, my aim here is to look at whether the changing nature of military technologies makes us think about ethics differently; whether they widen or limit the scope for ethical concern and ethical deliberation about violence in warfare; whether they shift our thinking about violence as a political instrument. In short, the book is concerned with how techno-biopolitical subjectivities might shape our capacity to think ethically. In this, my first task is to ensure that our theoretical frameworks are robust enough to be able to understand our contemporary condition adequately. The second task is then to map the subject of concern – here the ethics of violence – on to these frameworks. Reaching across disciplines, this book adds to existing scholarship by first constructing an extended frame of biopolitics which considers the impact of technology on modern society, through the work of Arendt, with which then to identify and excavate the rationales that inform ethical considerations for new technologically driven practices of political violence, such as the use of drones and military robotics for lethal acts. The questions this text tackles are threefold: How do techno-biopolitical logics shape contemporary

subjectivities? How is it possible that violent technologies are framed as inherently ethical? And what are the limits to ethical thinking in a technologically conditioned society?

In attempting to answer these questions, Arendt's diagnosis that '[m]en are conditioned beings because everything they come in contact with turns immediately into a condition of their existence' (1998: 9) is crucial. The human condition is thus a perpetually co-constitutive affair: ideas, structures, artefacts, rules, routines – all that comes into existence with the human condition – becomes part of the human condition and enters the world's reality. In turn, 'the impact of the world's reality upon human existence is felt and received as a conditioning force' (Arendt 1998: 9). This applies to biopolitical structures as much as it does to the technologisation of modernity. In their potential to shape human subjectivities, both have intermeshed consequences for what we understand our selves, our politics and our ethics to mean. In a highly technologically mediated society, this applies to everyday life as much as it does for matters of war. For the investigations in this book, I identify three co-constitutive and interlaced elements to the contemporary human condition: biopolitics, technology and ethics.

Biopolitical conditioning

In analyses of political violence, biopolitics refers to institutionalised mechanisms and discourses of power over the body and biological functions at the individual and the population level, whereby political government and life government are folded in with one another for the administration of life politics. In the master and meta-mandate to secure the health, prosperity, survival and progress of a population, biopolitics is inseparably entwined with concerns and practices of control, prediction, and prevention. It is also reliant on distinct technologies of security, which facilitate the norms and practices that come to govern societies. Contemporary analyses of biopolitics employ predominantly a Foucauldian perspective of the technologies of political power, in which government and life government become 'imbricated with one another' for the administration of life as politics (Lazzarato 2002). Where traditional sovereignty imposes its power on the general public, governmentality imposes a normalising generality on to the individual and society as a sociopolitical body. The biopolitical administrative technologies in Nazi Germany's totalitarianism represent the most radical example of such modalities, but contemporary forms of life management, such as biometric identification schemes for populations in conflict zones, like the Biometric Enrolment and Screening Device, or physiological screenings,

at immigration controls also reflect this category. A new form of politics crystallises with the implementation of biopolitical modalities as the basis for governmentality: life and 'the political' conflate, war and politics merge; the mandate to secure the health, prosperity, survival and progress of a population becomes not only the master-mandate for politics but also its meta-mandate.

Drawing on Michel Foucault's analyses, the work of Michael Dillon has been instrumental in highlighting this relationship and its continued relevance in contemporary politics. In this context, Michael Dillon and Luis Lobo-Guerrero point out that a politics that claims the protection of life is simultaneously always also a politics that seeks to secure life – a politics of security (Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero 2008). In its aim to render life secure, biopolitics is inseparably entwined with concerns and practices of control, prediction and prevention and is reliant on distinct technologies of security that facilitate norms and practices, which come to (self-) govern societies. Such norms, practices and technologies range from surveillance policies and border control mechanisms to regulatory policies on dietary requirements, to such extreme punitive measures as extraordinary rendition, torture or – as of late – targeted killing programmes, for the 'security' of a population. Where the biopolitical logic leads to a demarcation between a population that is to be 'secured' and that which might pose a risk to a population's health, prosperity and the overall development of its internal processes, security technologies become the primary apparatus for the institutionalised aim to render secure what is fundamentally unsecurable: life itself (Evans 2013; Dillon and Reid 2009).

Investigating global governance in liberal modernity as global biopolitics, Dillon, together with Julian Reid, builds on the modern reversal of Clausewitz's observation, which deems war to be the continuation of politics by other means, and diagnoses biopolitics to be a continuation of war by other means, enabled by a myriad of technological inventions and institutions that liberal societies have come to accept and perpetuate as the norm (Dillon and Reid 2009). Developing this analysis of a biopolitical paradigm in contemporary modernity further, Reid's work analyses the biopolitical implications of the global war on terror in light of life as rendered both pacified and mobilised through various tactics and modalities of biopolitics. His assessment of liberal modernity characterises the twenty-first century human as one 'whose security is threatened by its refusal to question the veracity of its distinction between what does and what does not constitute a life worth living' (Reid 2006: 12). Dillon and Reid take their lead from Foucault when they recognise the radical indeterminacy of life, its underlying contingency, to be at the centre of what modern biopolitical modalities and *dispositifs* aim to control, if not

eradicate, in an ever-present and never-ending contestation. And they interpret this continual contestation in biopolitics as a warlike struggle over the aporia of an inherent indeterminacy of life in a security-driven society. In such accounts of the biopolitical rationale, war thus becomes immanent to liberal society by two means: on one hand through institutional structures within liberal society that are informed by the originary military structures upon which technologies of disciplines and biopolitics were modelled in Foucault's analysis, and on the other through perpetual and pervasive power struggles over life's indeterminacies at various levels of society (Foucault 1991; 2004). It thus becomes part of the security apparatus to render life as technologically manageable as possible. Reid critically argues that modern biopolitical life is in essence a logistical life, 'under the duress of the command to be efficient, … and crucially, to be able to extol these capacities as the values which one would willingly, if called upon, kill and die for' (Reid 2006: 13).

Where the efficiency and functionality mandate is paramount in a biopolitical rationale, the logic relies equally on the 'other' to the efficiency and functionality mandate – failure and vulnerability. As Brad Evans stresses in his study of liberal biopolitical terror, the political logics of biopolitics seek to ascertain predictable outcomes for an inherently unpredictable entity: life. The object of this logic is formed by 'precarious and vulnerable subjects' whose sheer biological conditions of mortality and finitude posit the central problem and concern of biopolitics (Evans 2013: 196). This, in turn, renders life a perpetually irresolvable problem. And precisely in this lies the conundrum, as Evans notes; the 'entire discourse on security is paradoxically underwritten by an appreciation that life can never be made fully secure' (Evans 2013: 196). The inherently aleatory, plural and contingent nature of humans, in co-existence with others, renders them at risk and stands in stark contrast to the desire to secure life. Where efficiency and functionality are requirements for the continued security of the life process of humanity, vulnerability and failure become dangerous imperfections that put life as such, as a political project, in peril. In the logic of always-immanent and contingent threats to human life, through aleatory and unsecurable elements, security strategies must first conceptualise and define the human as a biopolitical being for the management of contingency and risk avoidance (Evans 2013: 45).

This encompasses a precarious rationale: as biopolitics renders life problematic in terms of its potentialities, its inherently aleatory and unpredictable nature; in terms of its lack of certainty, its vulnerability in finiteness and mortality, it is not only rendered perpetually at risk but also poses a continual risk (Evans 2013: 87–90). Evans frames this perpetual risk in terms of terror. This terror contained within life, the terror of the

unpredictable, is thus woven into the very fabric of biopolitical life as a ubiquitous threat. It is, according to Evans, a latent terror that is contained in the tension between the securitisation mandate that seeks to ascertain life, and the inherent unpredictability and volatility of one's existence in the world (2013: 30). However, the perception of unpredictability, uncertainty and vulnerability as a perpetual threat is in itself conditioned by narratives which stipulate that certainty, security and control over aleatory processes can indeed be brought about, and only then is every potentiality perceived as lack of control, becomes a threat, and turns into latent terror. And as Evans notes, in a liberal political context we seek to mitigate this terror with violence as a political strategy, as a 'creative' solution to eliminating and reducing threats through technological prophylaxis, whereby drones and other automated and autonomous military robotics serve as a panacea for all such problems by enabling their violent eradication.

The biopolitics–technology complex that provides the technological ecology within which biopolitical subjectivities are shaped is crucial here. The human in a technology-driven biopolitical age is not only determined by rationality but first and foremost captured in scientific terms and rendered analysable, predictable and knowable. In his writings and lectures, Foucault engaged predominantly with technology as *dispositifs*, as institutions and mechanisms of power, and was interested to a much lesser degree in the material aspects of science and technology as biopolitically informed and working upon the world. Some have critiqued the Foucauldian concept of biopower as relying on a thoroughly outmoded understanding of how technology – material technology – functions (Braidotti 2011: 329; 2013: 117; Haraway 1997). This is reflected in many contemporary engagements with biopolitics. While literature drawing on Foucault's *dispositifs* for the (self)-control and management of populations addresses the techniques relevant for, and used in, securitisation practices in the context of war, it engages little with the very material aspects of rapidly developing technologies and their permeation of the sociopolitical (Western) realm. As Rosie Braidotti points out, there is, indeed, a discrepancy between Foucault's biopower and the contemporary structure of scientific thought (Braidotti 2011: 329). The contemporary structure of scientific thinking is significant in the biopolitical context, as it conditions the biopolitical human subjectivity. To date, scholarship that looks at the biopolitics–technology–violence nexus in terms of both biopolitically *and* technologically constituted subjectivities, and the ethical justifications they produce for violence, is rare. Especially accounts interrogating biopolitics and its relation to material technologies have remained sparse.[2] I argue that Arendt has usefully engaged with the structure of scientific and technological thought in a life-politics-centric modernity and her thoughts

offer a way to analytically access the co-constitutive nature of biopolitics and material technology for the examination of the ethics of political violence today. Through her work we can better understand the techno-logical conditioning of the biopolitical subject and the acceptance of spe-cific modes of political violence.

Technological conditioning

Recognising the immense potential of the impact of technology, Arendt neither condemned nor condoned scientific and technological develop-ments as such, but was critically concerned with the political question of the use of these technologies. 'What we are doing' with the capacities of new technologies and scientific advancements, set within a biopolitcal context, not only is a 'political question of the first order' but, when it comes to warfare and practices of political violence, becomes also a press-ing ethical question (Arendt 1998: 3). Arendt's broad yet detailed inquiry into both biopolitics and the perils of a technocratic society renders her a rich resource for the continued 'project of understanding' of our biopoliti-cally informed modernity (Parekh 2008: 6). Arendt presciently, and perhaps speculatively, engaged with questions about technology and technology's impact on the human in various lectures and essays during the 1950s and 1960s.[3] Today it is clear that technology has a considerable impact on human life, politics and warfare and there is a growing body of work seeking to investigate the influence of technology on these spheres of life. Scholarship that looks specifically at the influence and impact of ever-accelerating technologies on contemporary politics and society has only begun to blossom within the last ten years.

    From communications technologies to the implantation of microchips into brains to improve performance and brain activity to the use of remote-controlled, unmanned weapons systems to super-intelligent AI, technol-ogy is advancing at a pace that exceeds the political, legal and ethical frameworks upon which we have hitherto built our co-existence in a shared world. While the interplay of humans and machines has a long history, there has been a change in the hierarchical relationship that ensues. Humans no longer merely create their machines, but are increas-ingly constituted by them, as humans and machines merge faster than ever (Coker 2013: xv). As Christopher Coker observes, in the context of new technologies of warfare, at stake is no longer the 'interface of the human being and technology' but rather 'the integration of technology into the human being. This is something that is new' (2013: xv). The mutual integration of human and machine is new because it places the human in charge of the technological progress not only at the periphery

of the human but of humans themselves, as if 'man had been suddenly appointed managing director of the biggest business of all, the business of evolution – appointed without being asked if he wanted it, and without proper warning and preparation' (Agar 2010: 3). It is new because it shapes us as humans, and, in turn, shapes our human interactions. It is also new because it requires us to urgently rethink what it means to be human in an anthropo-technical context in which, as Peter Sloterdijk suggests, 'technology puts humanity at risk but will also save humanity by creating superior human beings' (Sloterdijk 2009). Indeed, the question arises whether, in this anthropo-technical context, we are faced with a different, a new configuration of biopolitics and the violence this facilitates. An Arendtian perspective of the technologically informed logos of biology – bio-logos – not only as the basis for human subjectivity but also as the basis for conceptions of political practices provides us with the tools to understand the biopolitical rationales at work in this.

Inscribed in the technological logos is a scientifically informed biological logos of processes, which Arendt picked up on when she notes, referring to Werner Heisenberg's 1958 essay *The Physicist's Conception of Nature*, that technology appears as a natural ecology, a biological process, rather than a human artefact toward greater power (Arendt 2006b: 274). It is the technological mindset that produces ideas of 'nature as an expression of a universal machine, an algorithmic immanence', and simultaneously provides the blueprint for ever greater simulations of natural, biological processes (O'Connell 2017: 76). It is in this assimilation of living entities with technological processes that the merger of the two can advance and 'allow us to transcend [the] limitations of our biological bodies and brains' (Kurzweil 2016: 148). This is the foundation of contemporary forays into military robotics.

In other words, the political economy of technologies of violence and biology is entwined. The interplay of biology and technology suggests that political subjectivities are shaped along corresponding lines. We conceive of computers, machines and technology as logical extensions of (limited) human sensory and physical capacities in an ever-wider realm of applications, including warfare. The all-pervasiveness of the technological environment, modelled on and within the human logic, is now shaping and conditioning the human logic in return. Not only are human subjects and their subjectivity framed in bio-technological terms of understanding biological processes as computational processes. In this view, we are information systems, in both body and brain functions, whereby the depersonalised and deindividualised logos of machines comes to be seen as an ideal. But also, collectives of people are conceived of in abstracted technological terms and within a symbolic order of codifications and mathematical

signifiers as repositories of information and codes in a cybernetic assemblage. This, as Evans points out, has 'profound bearings on the question of what it means to be a living thing, as life is seen to be able to generate beyond itself' (2013: 72). Braidotti makes a similar point and notes that 'the zoe-centred egalitarianism that is potentially conveyed by the current technological transformations has dire consequences for the humanistic vision of the subject' (Braidotti 2013: 141). In short, we should train our analytical lens on how we understand ourselves as humans and among other humans in the technological production of life and the contemporary merger of the human with machines.

In his critique of techno-subjectivities, Jean Baudrillard notes that 'man and machine have become isomorphic and indifferent to each other: neither is other to the other' – machines that, in Baudrillard's assessment, promote homogeneity, reproduction, replacement, prevention and prophylaxis for the 'technological purification of bodies' (2009: 143, 68). Not only is technology biologically informed but, in this, it also poses the ideal and politically powerful means to enable the logos of prevention and prophylaxis so crucial to the securitisation mandate of a biopolitical modernity. A growing technological drive thus also promotes an ever-greater drive towards preventive and prophylactic practices. Yet biopolitical technology relies on a logic that exceeds humans and their capacities. And it is here that a peculiar turn in contemporary modernity appears to take place, as the hierarchies of the human and machines shift and the two begin to fuse not merely performatively but also functionally and philosophically (Coker 2013: 18). This strand of thought is picked up again in Chapter 6, where I suggest that new technologies are increasingly placing the human in a space of functional obsolescence, or, rather, humans place themselves in such a space, specifically in the context of war and political violence. Technology, shaped and informed by scientifically established biological and neurological patterns, is hailed to be able to perform human functions more accurately, faster, more efficiently and, as some commentators posit, also more ethically. In this rationale, humans are grasped not only in their essence as biologically ascertainable beings but also as fallible in their aleatory humanness, and, likewise, humanity as fallible in its inherent alterity and unpredictability. The rationale of technology seeks to mitigate these fallibilities and flaws to ensure the continued performativity, functionality, progress and process of humanity and humans therein, tacitly attesting to an notably diminishing belief in human judgement and human choice in the aim to secure life (Coker 2013: xvii). Encapsulated in this is, however, a diminished horizon for meaningful political action – that is to say political action not as management and administration of

populations and resources but as acts and practices of interaction through 'communication between singular entities and collective assemblages' (Braidotti 2011: 341). This curtailment of political action is made manifest through set of limits to plurality (as technology relies on homogenisation), a limit to language (as technology relies on the 'language' of code and abstraction) and a limit to contestability (as technology is posited not only as politically and ethically neutral but superior) in the quest to make the human and humanity more efficient, functional and secure.

The accelerated use of and dedication to the employment of lethal drones exemplifies this prevention mandate, and the underlying rationale for the use of drones reflects the biopolitically informed technology drive, as technological fixes become ever more attractive in the securitisation mandate. The dominant mindset in Washington and Pentagon circles clearly reveals such thinking. I discuss this more thoroughly in Chapter 7. Firmly held by proponents of the technology to be 'ethical and effective',[4] drones are framed not only as technologically superior to traditional weapons systems, in terms of efficiency and effectiveness for the achievement of goals in warfare, but also as performing acts of war more morally, valuably and wisely. Drones are, so the argument stipulates, able to conduct necessary acts of violence with better precision, greater ability to discriminate in terms of targets and with less human cost (in terms of both lives and money). They offer the ideal technology to take out threats and combat human evil before its risk-infused potentialities become realised. They are, in short, the ideal tool to technologically secure the very processes of a biopolitically conditioned and technologically informed sociopolitical body. Extending this logic further, proponents of lethal AWS suggest that such machines could conduct the act of necessary killing more efficiently and – already alluded to – more ethically.

The techno-biopolitical subjectivity and ecology provide the cartography for a securitisation rationale that is difficult to challenge or contest, ethically and politically. Not only does such human-centric technology condition human subjectivities toward a greater acceptance of a technology outlook or mentality, in creating a greater ontological reliance on analysability, predictability and the production of certain outcomes, but it also conditions the technological ecology within which acts of political violence are framed as necessary technical acts for the securitisation of progress and survival for the human and humanity at large. Evans argues that the imposition of 'moral imperatives on a society so that certain productive ways of living become normalised to the point that they are not even questioned is a sure way of embedding secure practices. Such moralisation is what allows biopolitical practices to take

hold' (2013: 198). Violent biopolitical practices of securitisation, morally mandated by the need for survival and the continuation of progress for humanity, facilitated by techno-thanatological weaponry that is rendered as inherently ethical, should give us pause to think about justifying narratives of these practices. This, in turn, should give us pause to think how the biopolitical-technological nexus that shapes human subjectivities in technological terms informs certain contemporary perspectives of the ethics of political violence.

Ethical conditioning

In her work, Arendt sought to engage with the problem of evil and the unmooring of morality in a secular modernity – specifically against the background of the murderous regimes in Nazi Germany (Canovan 1995: 156). However, her work is largely void of distinct ethical theories, even though there is a tendency among her readers to consider her as a 'moral *thinker*' (Kohn 1990: 105). The absence of ethical theories in her work does not, however, mean that she was unconcerned with issues of ethics and morality.[5] On the contrary; throughout her work, she thought through the problems of politics, revolutions, totalitarianism and the human condition as such, continually concerned with the relationship between morality, law and politics in the private and public spheres. Having witnessed the 'total collapse of the "moral" order not once, but twice', Arendt grappled with the fact that people in Nazi Germany could adjust to a different set of moral principles upon which it seemed perfectly acceptable to do what had hitherto been forbidden and illegal, and, once the tables had turned, and the Nazi regime had been defeated, that ideas of moral right and wrong would change once again without much effort or any lengthy indoctrination (Arendt 2003a: 54). In other words, the ontology of morality is tested when that which was hitherto a crime has become socially sanctioned as a legal act (Bauman 2012: 210). This extreme form of adjusting from normality to abnormality and back was a clear indication for Arendt that neither personal nor political morality was sufficiently rooted and neither religion nor philosophy could avert the dangers of 'moral nihilism' (Canovan 1995: 174). In this she identified a crucially modern turn wherein morality is reliant on, and always temporarily enshrined in, rules, customs, regulations, codes and guidelines. Only in her later life, during her work on *Life of the Mind*, did she begin to more deeply address the core of the problem of morality, a task she never managed to complete before her death in 1975. Although her discussion on morality and politics remains incomplete and, perhaps for that reason, strongly contested (Butler 2009a; Kateb 1984), her considerations point to a precarious relationship between

ethics and politics in modernity, which can be seen in the legitimising of practices of acts of political violence, such as targeted killings, previously considered to be immoral and illegal (Butler 2009a; Kateb 1984).

Even though Arendt's work at this juncture cannot offer theoretical analyses that speak directly to the specific problems of the ethics of political violence today, the biopolitical framework built from her work serves to examine the biopolitical rationales that inform such modern forms of ethics and the human subjectivities upon which they rest. The inexorable relationship between human subjectivity and ethics requires that we make humans and how human are constituted, and constitute their environment, a distinct part of the analysis of ethics (Campbell and Shapiro 1999: xi). Specifically where the continued merger of the human with technological innovations produces a biological-technological subjectivity that shapes the human condition, and humans are conditioned in turn, the question arises how this further conditions our engagements with others in terms of ethics, as well as what types of ethics and politics this produces. As scientists strive to 'investigate ways in which the human and machine may co-evolve, both functionally and performatively, and how we may even be able to biologically re-engineer ourselves' (Coker 2013: xiii), the effects this biopolitically informed techno-subjectivity might have on the ethics of political violence are paramount. And if we accept that 'modern ethics is a species of the metaphysics of subjectivity' (Campbell and Shapiro 1999: xi), and that biopolitically conceived and shaped technologies condition human subjectivities today, it becomes clear that ethics, as conceived in modernity, must be examined against the biopolitical background of the techno-subjectivities that condition the human in modernity.

Ethics in international politics has to date predominantly been conceived in terms of applied ethics (Nardin 2008: 15) and is chiefly concerned with the search for 'a singular ethical theory that could be devised in the abstract and applied in the concrete' (Campbell and Shapiro 1999: viii). While a number of post-structuralist scholars sought to address ethics in terms that consider aspects of contingency, alterity and potentiality, particularly so in the late 1990s, the events unfolding in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 appear to have initiated a drive toward thinking of ethics in international politics in more practical terms, giving priority to the application of ethical principles in and of warring. Such practical approaches often mirror scientific processes, or algorithmic logics, in trying to secure 'correct' outcomes. This is represented particularly in the hyper-rational logic of current discourses on the ethics of war. Consider, for example, how Yitzhak Benbaji's analysis of self-defence as a convention of war engages with the subject through an algebraic syntax, setting the parameters for his computational analysis as follows: '[s]uppose

that at a time t+1, Y poses a threat to X's life, aiming to eliminate an unjust threat posed by X at t' (Benbaji 2008: 477). Benbaji then continues to posit various IF/THEN propositions by which certain laws of wrongful or justified actions are ascertained.

The algorithmic considerations of acts with ethical content rely on a law-like structure in ascertaining ethical conduct. Here, this is the laws of mathematical reasoning. Enshrined in codes, laws and regulations, correct ethical conduct can thus be sought through algorithmic reasoning and abstracted for the application in a range of national and international political contexts. Discussion of the ethics of war, humanitarian interventions and most recently the use of automated military technology reflects such an ethico-legal framework for ascertaining which acts are ethical. This, again, is also a pertinent aspect in discussions on the use of lethal military robots that are capable of increased levels of decision-making functions, including the decision to target and kill humans. Advocates and producers of lethal autonomous robots suggest that installing an 'ethics module', which would faithfully incorporate the laws of war and other relevant international legal frameworks, would render war more humane and less messy (Arkin 2009b, 2010). According to this logic, robotic kill decisions could be made more safely and humanely and therefore, ethically. The logic of an ethics module is reliant on a conception of ethics as codifiable, as ascertainable, and as producing clear, secure and, ideally, certain outcomes. In our biopolitical and technological context today then, not only do we seek to secure humans, in their aleatory, vulnerable and uncertain characteristics, but ethical relations between such humans must also be ascertained, secured, made controllable. Such ethics is both limited and limiting. It is ethics as a mere technical problem.

The reliance on codes and the structures of law in the ethico-legal construct of this practical variant of ethics has the potential to eclipse an engagement with that which cannot be secured in ethics, with the actual content of the moment of ethical interaction and an engagement with concerns that do not fit into the programmes of ethical administration conceived in any ethico-legal constructs. Where the ethical language is simultaneously also the language of code, subordinated to the attainment of a specific ethical end, it becomes altogether meaningless, or paralysed, in Agamben's terms (2000: 116). As Coker notes, '[l]anguage matters, otherwise one becomes like Hardy's Jude who thought that you could understand Greek if you cracked a simple code in the professor's safe keeping' (2013: 297). Language matters also, because it is the means with which political contestation can ensue, and with it, ethical contestation. Where language is replaced by the 'meaningless formalism of

mathematical signs' (Arendt 2006b: 274) we lack the proper political and ethical language to contest the contents of ethics and its meta-ethical underpinnings meaningfully, for 'speech is what makes man a political being' (Arendt 1998: 3). Here again the tension between politics as management and politics proper is relevant. Where politics is understood as action, ethics is implicit. For Arendt, politics arises from the encounter with the other, in a public context. In this encounter lies not only the potential for politics but, within it, the demand for ethics also arises. Melissa Orlie perceptively traces this relationship in her critique of contemporary conceptions of ethics:

> The determination of ethical conduct … emerges, at least in part, through thinking with others not as a thought experiment but as a locatable political practice. Ethical conduct requires more than thinking about the limits of the self, it also demands ethical political work on those limits. (Orlie 1997: 196–7)

Applied ethics and an ethics that resides in the unmediated plurality of the encounter seem to be located at opposite ends of ethical sensibilities and practices, and the techno-subjectivity shaped by biopolitical rationales gives precedence to the former rather than the latter in seeking to secure ethical outcome. An ethics of encounter must take into consideration the very unpredictability that arises out of political and social situations, each in its own context. It is thus that Campbell and Shapiro suggest, along with others, that international political theory 'should promote an ethics of encounter without commitment to resolution or closure', whereby 'our responsibility to the other' should serve as the basis for ethical reflection (1999: xvii). Judith Butler frames it similarly when she suggests that '[e]thics is less a calculation than something that follows from being addressed and addressable in sustainable ways' (2009b: 181).

This book aims to open a space to rethink the ethics of certain practices of war and counter-terrorism today by recognising, examining and critiquing the biopolitical perspective that facilitates a human techno-subjectivity which views ethics either in code or as technologically neutralised, which may allow us to move beyond the biopolitical subjectivity condition. There is much to be done in rethinking ethics in contemporary international politics in order to avoid the paradoxical condition that ethical considerations are relegated to the margins of moralising international politics. To conceive of tangible solutions must remain a future aspiration and motivation for continued research and engagement with the topic. It is far beyond the scope of this book to offer concrete suggestions as to what the ways forward should be. This is for another

time. What *Death Machines* seeks to accomplish, however, is to provide a pressing critical perspective as a point of departure for further inquiry.

Structure of the book

The book's chief concern is with how techno-biopolitical rationales condition us as contemporary subjects, on one hand, and to examine and critique the emergence and meaning of the ethics of violent technologies, on the other. It is through this type of interrogation that 'we can set aside the universalizing moral entrapments of liberal humanism, which reduces political ethics to a question of relations among already compliant political subjects' and aim to think through what it is that we are, in fact, doing (Evans 2013: 11). In this spirit, the book seeks to examine how the biopolitical rationale, set forth through an Arendtian account, informs politics, violence as politics, ethics and the shaping of human subjectivity. The book unfolds in two parts and eight chapters. The first part, constituted by Chapters 1 to 4, engages in an Arendtian exposition to posit the theoretical framework for the book's central analysis. The second part then departs from an exposition of Arendt's work and draws on the biopolitical framework established in order to examine how the techno-biopolitical rationales shape the ethics of certain, technology-driven, political practices today.

Chapter 1 places Hannah Arendt as a biopolitical thinker and establishes an Arendtian framework that unfolds the biopolitical analysis contained in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, *On Revolution* and, importantly, *The Human Condition*. The chapter establishes key terms and concepts and extracts two crucial trajectories relating to life politics in Arendt's work: the prioritisation of life processes in modern politics and the mathematisation of life and its processes to yield biologically analysable and calculable subjects and subjectivities. In this, the chapter sets out to establish the crucial tension that emerges in modernity when the cyclicality of life processes, upon which biopolitical practices are modelled, meets with a mandate for the progress of the human and humanity. Finally, I address some of the objections and scepticisms of Arendt as a biopolitical thinker in this chapter, and stress that the conceptual understanding of 'politics' in Arendt's work must be distinguished from a contemporary and already biopolitically informed apprehension of the term as governmental management and administration.

In contemporary scholarship the notion of biopolitics is typically associated with the late work of Michel Foucault. An exploration of Arendt's analysis of modern biopolitics serves less as a corrective than an additional dimension to offer tools with which to understand the shaping of

contemporary, technological, subjectivities. Chapter 2 therefore delineates where Arendt and Foucault intersect and where they diverge in their analysis of biopolitcs. Here, I first map out parallels in their engagement with the shift of life into politics, linking these to their respective use of other key concepts (such as essence, telos and power). This then serves to establish where Arendt is useful for additional insights that exceed Foucault's work and highlights the relevance of Arendt's threefold insights to this discussion, stressing how such a view provides for a form of biopolitical analysis that concerns more than mere governmental management or administration.

With a conceptualisation of the shift of life into politics in Arendt's work set up, modalities of both politics and violence can then be situated and understood more clearly within the context of a biopolitical modernity. Chapters 3 and 4 establish the consequences of the techno-biopolitical rationale for the possibility for politics, and the role that violence plays in a biopolitical way of understanding politics. In both chapters, Arendt continues to be an instrumental interlocutor to stress the tension that emerges in a biopolitically informed political modernity that understands politics as professional administration, contrary to an Arendtian understanding of politics proper. Chapter 3 unpicks the anti-political essence of biopolitics by engaging with key aspects that are necessary for politics in the Arendtian account and that become inhibited and obstructed in a biopolitical modernity for the possibility of politics. The main argument I make in this chapter is that, in such a regime, the possibility for political action and contestation is narrowed through mandates that oppose key aspects of politics, such as plurality, speech and a tolerance of uncertainty. I also highlight how such impediments to politics proper promote the emergence of political violence as a means of producing predictable outcomes. Chapter 4 extends the argument that the anti-political essence of contemporary biopolitics opens up a pathway for instrumental violence, enabling violent practices to appear as expedient tools in the administration of humanity. In this chapter, I focus more closely on the place of violence within techno-biopolitical regimes. I begin by excavating the linkages between Arendt's biopolitical analysis and her writings on power and violence. I then argue that the anti-political essence of contemporary biopolitics opens up a pathway for instrumental violence, enabling violent practices to appear as expedient tools in the administration of humanity. Finally, I suggest that such an understanding of violence-as-politics overlooks the futility of violence as a political practice in important but rarely acknowledged ways.

The violence-as-politics instrumentality reverberates in ethical justifications of violence. It is here that it is necessary to transition away from

Arendt to explore the contemporary status and ethos of the ethics of political violence. In Chapter 5, I engage in greater detail with the specific form of ethics that is produced in a biopolitically informed sociopolitical context. The chapter delineates how aspects of the biopolitical framework permeate and shape justifications of violent acts and the ethics of war and armed conflict. It further problematises the conception of ethics as predominantly conceived in practical terms, as a form of applied ethics, framed in terms of code and algorithmically ascertainable rules of conduct, specifically in the context of ethics in politics today and outlines the rise of medical narratives that provide the justifying framework for violent acts of intervention as preventive measures. I argue that such a conception not only reduces ethics to a technical practice (rendered as code and facilitated through algorithmic operations) but also puts ethics beyond contestation through its reliance on professionalism and ostensibly superior modes of technology. The result, I suggest, is an *adiaphorised* form of ethics that not only justifies but in many cases also legislates for violent interventions on the basis of a deep techno-biopolitical logic.

Considering the techno-biopolitical human subjectivities emerging from the conditioning outlined earlier, and with a view to current and future trends in military technologies, I unpick in Chapter 6 the co-constitutive relationship between biology and technology, with a focus on technological enhancement of the human and military robotics for the purpose of armed conflict. Developing the problem of the human–technology–ethics nexus, this chapter establishes how the human is rendered and understood in algorithmically analysable terms in today's practices of war and political violence. It traces human life as conceived in and as code and delineates the biopolitical ideology of the progression of the human in terms of capacity, functionality and performance. The chapter suggests that this biopolitical techno-subjectivity is shaped to fit into a biopolitical sociopolitical context of development and progress and gives rise to the functionality mandate of life. This is notable in modern forms of warfare where the human is increasingly considered to be the weakest link, framed either in terms of danger or in terms of inadequacy. I argue here that there is a notable philosophical shift in the role the human assumes in relation to technology. Finally, I argue that the resulting appearance of the human as a 'weak link' in contemporary warfare serves to further advance the legitimation and deployment of new violent technologies.

The use of armed drones for targeted killing is the most current and clear manifestation of the legitimation of these violent practices and technologies. In Chapter 7 I argue that lethal drone technology and the military practices associated with it constitute the starkest indication to date

of just how deeply anchored violent technologies are within contemporary biopolitics, as well as how morally dubious it is to make claims of ethical superiority on their behalf. The chapter thus provides a detailed, real-world illustration of the influence that advanced biopolitical technologies exert on practices of war and conflict, as well as a normative critique of the biopolitically informed justifications for violence that such technologies tend to produce. I conclude the book with a call to move beyond technologically informed conceptions of ethics, and to engage more proactively with possibilities for an ethics of responsibility. In so doing I return to Arendt's notion of politics proper, arguing that its constituents – uncertainty, plurality, vulnerability – are the *sine qua non* of ethics proper, and that with a properly political form that reaches beyond biopolitical logics we might be able to restore some ethicality to contemporary ethics. This, I argue, is crucial if we wish to retain the ability and responsibility to answer the question: 'What are we doing?'

Notes

1 For consistency of terminology, however, I use the phrase 'war on terrorism' throughout the book.
2 Timothy Campbell's recent study on 'technology and biopolitics from Heidegger to Agamben' presents an insightful exception (Campbell 2011), as does Braidotti's work (2011; 2013).
3 Notably Arendt's essay 'The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man', in *Between Past and Future* (2006b) focuses on the consequences of modern technology for the role and status of the human within a human-made world.
4 As put forward in an Oxford Union debate on the motion: 'This House believes drones are ethical and effective'. The conjoined adjectives ethical and effective are indicative of a certain conflation of the categories ethical and efficiency in the current discourses on drone warfare.
5 As Ursula Ludz highlights, Arendt was in fact very concerned with the creation of the basis for a 'new political morality' even though she never explicitly stated so out of modesty (2007: 802).