

## Book Reviews

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### HUMAN & INHUMAN WAR

#### ***Warrior Geeks: How 21st Century Technology is Changing the Way We Fight and Think About War***

By Christopher Coker

Reviewed by Dr. Janne Haaland-Matláry, Professor, the University of Oslo and the Norwegian Defence University College

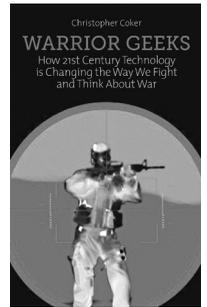
This is a brilliant and difficult book about a rather nightmarish topic, i.e., how technology now enables us to become post-humans, a term that by now has become familiar in debates about certain types of technological advances.

Professor Coker has been preoccupied with the ethos of the warrior and the ethics of war in several previous books. Steeped in classical knowledge of the Greeks and their warrior culture, he also has an in-depth knowledge of modern military technology and its most recent developments. In particular, he is interested in how technological developments in robotics, neuroscience, and cybernetics influence the soldier, and the prospects for what we can term post-human warfare.

This book is the culmination of many years of deep study of these phenomena, and it is not only a very important book but also a deeply disconcerting one. Coker starts by quoting C. S. Lewis's *Abolition of Man*: "Human nature will be the last part of Nature to surrender to Man. The battle will then be won. . . . But who, precisely, will have won it?" (1943). The prospect of post-human human beings is already beginning to be a reality in terms of genetic manipulation and eventually the cloning of humans. The knowledge of humanity, of what we should be as persons, is less and less widespread—fewer heed classical insights into human nature and the virtues, and technological possibility seems to be "good" in the sense that what can be done, will be done. The world looks increasingly less like that of the Greeks and more like that of the geeks, who do not care about ethics, but only about technology, argues Coker. God is dead in this universe as there is no longing for the transcendent, but the possibility to manipulate away pain, fear, and the need for courage. This is, in Coker's comparison, like Mustapha Mond's life in *Brave New World*—with existing, but mostly future technology, the soldier can be rendered into an actor who need not risk anything, fear anything, or sacrifice anything.

What does he mean by this radical and disturbing hypothesis? In his own words:

What I have tried to do in this book is to examine the likely impact of early 21st century technologies—digital, cybernetic, and bio-medical—upon our understanding of how war and our humanity will continue to co-evolve. Throughout this book I have been skeptical of the direction in which we are taking war. I am concerned that if soldiers are denied their private thoughts and are embedded in a cybernetic web they may be denied the chance for personal development . . . if we were ever to sub-contract responsibility for ethical decision-making to robots . . . if we could ever engineer courage or



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blot out conscience through drugs we would severely compromise what we value the most—our individual free will (pages 292-93).

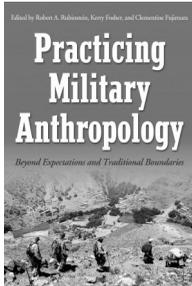
War online, as videogames, drone pilots who kill and go to fetch the kids from kindergarten, drones that can target on their own, robots that take the risk out of battle and make decisions, soldiers whose brains are manipulated through neuroscience to blot out fear and conscience—the list is disturbing and long. This reviewer cannot claim to understand the details of new technology, but Coker writes in great detail about it and illustrates the role it may come to have with science fiction and fiction, ancient and ultramodern. Avant-garde technology is accompanied by works of science fiction, computer games, and films—all of which the classically educated Coker seems to know as well as his classics.

This is a very demanding book, intellectually and conceptually. It is disconcerting because it deals with imminent reality; some of this technology is here now. Drone pilots experience trauma not from being in the battlefield, but from being away from it—they kill, but are not in battle, hence no risk, no danger, and no sacrifice. The ethical issue is the difference between war and murder. Until now, drone pilots have been uniformed, but for how long? Then the work will be wholly “technical,” civilian, and not different from a war game, it would seem. What are the ethical implications of such a development? Lawyers are speaking about humanitarian law applied to autonomous weapon systems—a contradiction in terms, literally speaking.

Coker writes very well; his pen is an elegant one. The reader is treated to a literary feast, and it is not easy to digest the many courses served. The final chapter reflects on technology’s impact. He writes:

Character is at the heart of this change, it is being relentlessly challenged by the march of science. It is being undermined by genetics, by evolutionary psychology, and by neuro-science (the idea that behaviour is determined by modules of a hard-wired brain) (page 293).

This book is not only about warfare under technology’s spell, but, more importantly, about man’s general condition today. It is in the battlefield that the contrast between the Greek and the Geek is most pronounced, for here the human being has always—or so far in history—been asked for supreme courage and sacrifice, for character. If war can be rendered riskless and rid of sacrifice, is it still war? And more importantly, are soldiers in such a war still soldiers?



### ***Practicing Military Anthropology: Beyond Expectations and Traditional Boundaries***

Edited by Robert A. Rubinstein, Kerry Fosher, and Clementine Fujimura

Review by Dr. James Dorough-Lewis Jr., Senior HUMINT Instructor for the Department of Defense and former Social Scientist for Human Terrain Systems

For a researcher in the social sciences, putting one’s career at the service of the military involves a degree of professional risk; however, it is far from the terminal move a vocal minority, especially though not exclusively found within the anthropological community, might have