

The Army Ethic and the Greater Moral Narrative

Section I

Introduction to Basic Ethical Theory and How It Relates to a Military

In 2012 the Study to Assess Risk and Resilience in Service members launched an investigation into the high levels of mental illness, strain, and suicidal tendencies among members of the military. The finding of the studies was surprising and far reaching—the year in which the study began 295 Americans died in combat related deaths, while 349 in the same span of time took their own life (Willingham). In short, the study found that servicemembers as a demographic are five times more likely to exhibit some sort of mental health problem compared to their civilian counterparts (Willingham). The military is filled with people who fit this mental health profile which has a significant impact on the way that the servicemembers interact with the emotional, mental, and moral domain of their life. In fact, a burgeoning discipline has recently emerged in studying the effects of moral injury incurred among servicemembers after combat. Books like *Afterwar* by Nancy Sherman explore this topic analyzing the significance of moral injury as a possibly overlooked problem for soldiers. Needless to say, appreciating the moral domain of warfighting is a vital, albeit often overlooked part of the modern military in America. This to say, fighting for a good cause, understanding in full the consequences of actions even outside a typical western moral setting, and caring enough to enforce moral decision making has become a new focus in the military at large.

Most Americans believe that their Military's claims to be the greatest, most effective fighting force in history. In light of this claim, an important aspect of maintaining that narrative centers on the US Military being the proverbial "good guys." Interestingly, this two

word phrase is a very loaded assertion. Claiming to be good in international activities is becoming increasingly complicated. Moreover, a nation cannot be considered an agent of equal moral scrutiny as an individual—this to say that nations are forced to answer much tougher moral questions than individuals on a regular basis. A single person, for example, simply by virtue of being an individual does not have the ability to instigate international war, secure treaties, prevent national genocides, and maintain an active defense. Rather, it is the nation that holds these heavier and more complicated tasks and the moral weights that come with them. In America, arguably the most visible arm of this reality is the American military. For the remainder of this paper, I will specifically address these concepts as they relate to the Army as its own entity. Even more narrowly, I want to use these topics to challenge the normative authority of its Ethic.

The Army has pursued great lengths to advertise and ascribe to “good” principles. And this is the focal point of a very interesting, dangerous, yet urgently needed question: for the US Army, what does it mean to be good? To answer this, a conversation of metaethics, social and philosophical context, history, and epistemology is necessary. In light of this pursuit, a handful of important sub-questions will also be answered which I will use to guide the structure of this paper. In section II I will ask: what is an ethic and what does it mean for an organization? In section III I will attempt to capture the Army’s Ethic in a descriptive sense. In section IV I will cover the major issues that arise in disseminating morality via organizational hierarchy, and investigate whether the Army and its Ethic fall trap to any of these issues. And finally, in light of any analysis regarding the development of the Army Ethic, in sections V and VI I will ask: what sort of steps can be taken to improve the use of such doctrine among the ranks of the organization, if taking such steps is warranted at all?

I hope that as I work through this paper I can first provide a robust and interconnected bedrock of information and language which can help in understanding the conclusion and actual analysis of the thesis. I do not want to pose any sort of normative evaluation of my own without first presenting and building on the current conversation and reasons for the Army Ethic. It is my genuine desire to remain epistemically humble as I challenge an important facet of the modern American military which is by no means unintelligent. More than anything, I attempt to offer a vantage point that might be outside the familiar as I question if the Army as an organization (to which I belong) could approach the concept of ethical development in a completely different form which would better equip its members for the morally ambiguous.

Section II

What as an Ethic and Where Does It Come From?

Origins of the Normative

Before even asking what the Army Ethic is, developing an understanding for an ethic in general is widely beneficial. The topic of ethics is rooted in the search for what one ought to do (Solomon 5). In their simplest state, different ethical frameworks will prescribe or argue for a certain way of doing things. Resting in these frameworks are ethical theories which help to categorize and understand the larger conversation from certain points of view (Solomon 5). Examples of these theories are consequentialism, deontological ethics, relativism, or utilitarianism just to name a few. Each framework will provide a manner in which to evaluate a decision along some moral path often to help make decisions in what feels like the morally ambiguous. Eventually, both in people and groups, I will argue in later sections that this habit will lead to a sense of what is right and wrong. Sometimes, these principles will be extrapolated

over time and a sense of inherent morality will develop. Certain things become immoral and others moral. Ethics, then, is perhaps more appropriate to consider under social ontology than as its own separate study because the concept of doing things a certain way is so deeply rooted in social norms and pressures. Moreover, the reason for these social pressures are hardly understood in one fell swoop. For example, some of these pressures are rooted in intuition, others efficiency, some control, and even others necessity or survival. Furthermore, an ethic is only as valuable as its ability to be communicated, a task that has not always existed in the sophistication that it does in the modern age. According to the Blackwell Companion to Ethics the need to describe and defend developing moral trends in a society occurs when “accepted duties...clash, and deeper, more general principles are needed to arbitrate between them” (Silberbauer 3). As a matter of simply agreeing to come together, societies no matter how small or large must have the ethical conversation: how are we going to judge and limit behavior and more importantly, why are these assertions correct? This all leads to deeper levels of moral control or behavior modification thereby encouraging more norms, pressures, and rules. For this essay, I will largely bend toward a view which accepts ethics as a socially ontological and cognitive phenomenon. This to say, I believe that ethics and resulting morality is the process of codifying of a group’s norms, often understood in conjunction with individuals’ cognitive development. In later sections I will further investigate this personally held belief as I use contemporary theories to springboard into new ideas about morality.

At this point, a very important dialogue is needed specifically on this metaphysical problem of truth. Quickly, I wish to consider: what is moral truth? This question must be addressed but doing so can in and of itself create heavy division and confusion. Entire branches of philosophical inquiry, in fact, differ on the answer to this question some wondering if it is even a

question to be asked in the first place. In this paper I will largely use the perspective of an individual which would be situated in a contemporary American setting. I refer narrowly in this paper to the perspective of these people. This demographic comprises the overwhelming cross-section of the American population. Because of this assumption, I am able to use what Susan Wolf would call a “Common Sense Morality.” In her essay “Moral Saints” she argues that most conceptions of modern western morality are rooted in the notion of valuing others’ well-being over one’s self (Wolf 420). Americans, I argue, largely fall into this category. She reduces the possible forms in which a moral person who serves others and maximizes well-being to two characters: the Loving and the Rational Saint (Wolf 424). These characters both accomplish unilateral service and well-being maximization, but their reasons for accomplishing these objectives are different. The main motive is their intention for service, one out of duty and the other abounding care (Wolf 424). I believe that most Americans hold the soldier idealistically to be loving saints though this is largely not the case, many joining the Army for purely practical purposes. However, her assertion that western morality is rooted in others’ well-being is vital for understanding the way in which many think about morality, and I will use this as the building blocks for the context in which the Army Ethic is to become situated.

What I am not saying here is that morality is de facto rooted in maximizing well-being, but from a historical standpoint in western culture, such a narrative is often what it means to be good. This pulls at general intuition in order to create normative prescriptions about societal behaviors. This assessment of general moral trends is abrupt, but wildly important to the understanding of the moral terrain among a people. Situating the conversation of an ethic within the framework of a trending consensus of thought, means that ethics and morality can be observed as inherently descriptive instead of normative as they are often understood. All this to

say, codifying generally accepted behavior is a very different practice than legislating those practices under laws and policies. Yet, this is often why many of these moral norms are birthed—to regulate behavior. Therefore, in order to match the emerging culture, ethical norms arise to describe then guide proper behavior in certain situational contexts. This would mean that people essentially yield themselves more often than not to the general consensus of what good means to the most people within their community, and agree to elevate this culture item to normative status. This is only a possible way to interpreting ethics and it is not being assessed in this paper as either good or bad, but simply as significant to the developing conversation. And here the conversation about truth becomes a little more difficult. I understand the gravity of the position that I am developing as it is somewhat radical with respect to the greater moral conversation. I wish to pursue this idea, however, throughout the remainder of this paper.

As noted above, moral law is inherently challenging to universalize as many of these principles are, I believe, actually birthed from social cues. This is problematic as laws are meant for universal application and may require authority—it is why they are in fact laws! However, what may feel like a moral good to one person, may not be for another, producing a reality in which many different people are using different moral languages. However, in the interest of cooperation, I believe here emerges an intersection of the common sense morality mentioned above. These loosely agreed upon and affirmed social cues, then, are the dominating force of a culture's moral behavior. A society must, therefore, produce a common language for the myriad personal moral laws that exist in each individual against the dominate trends of their respective society. The acknowledgement of this confusing and difficult moral terrain is captured efficiently under a concept known as epistemic relativism. Epistemic relativism assumes that for each individual, truth is only possible for that individual because, “no matter how much we try to

establish a consensus, we constantly seem to fail” (Tannsjo 7). This must also be met with the humility, as Tannsjo says, “Even an opinion that seems perfectly justified today may come to be rejected tomorrow” (10). With this broad yet hopefully sufficient introduction to the ethical conversation, the Army Ethic is now prepared for brief introduction and academic investigation.

Moral Terrain in the Army

When it comes to the Army, then, an ethic is established, I believe, for two main reasons. First, to professionalize and codify good standards and discipline, and second, to deal with a very specialized and practically impossible philosophical paradox: how can an organization be just if it kills human beings, period? I believe that this is the cultural context from which the Ethic has been birthed. And this is a focal point to the developing narrative of the Army Ethic that I would like to spend a large portion of this paper investigating. However, I require a significant caveat at this point. Many (and I must add with intimidating and persuasive arguments) fundamentally disagree with this narrative which I am building here; that is, the narrative that an ethic arises in the name of justifying and understanding the monopolized right to killing that the military owns. For many, the purpose of the ethic is about professionalism, having its roots in the post-Vietnam era. Professionalization has to do with behavior inside the army, while killing is a viable state-sanctioned right which “precedes” the conversation of ethics (who finds a home in Just War Theory) as LTC Mike Saxon noted in a recent email conversation (Saxon). He says, “I think ‘the Army’ seeks to be a professional organization, and that being professional includes an ethic, and that ethic includes certain values. I think the question of ‘killing’ precedes any of that, with the justification being the sort that is provided by just war theory” (Saxon). I consider this assumption, though, to actually be a major part of the diverging narrative around which I am building this thesis. I fundamentally believe that the desire for an ethic stems from the need to

justify killing. While under Just War Theory, the Army's right to kill in justified war is affirmed, I believe that the burgeoning liberal, western democratic mentality asserts that taking of all life is morally objectionable or at least questionable. This pressure toward the Army, therefore, requires a move from within the Army to stay relevant with this moral evolution. As such, the Ethic is built around explaining the right, need, and moral application of violence on behalf of the nation. When people speak to the morality of an army, Just War Theory, limitations to violence in war, and an ethical application of force, there is one specific reason that a moral code would be so emphasized. This reason is to attempt to rectify the military's right to kill, the dominating moral landscape of the liberal, western world, and the military's assumed necessary right to a monopoly on violence in the state. This type of perspective clashes with the one needed to adopt what I would dub a more classic just war perspective—a perspective which has been deliberately chosen to guide the Army (Saxon).

This clashing idea, however, is not entirely new. Foundations for it can be found in Jeff McMahan's famous "Collectivist Defenses of the Moral Equality of Combatants." McMahan notes that in order for a war to occur, at least one side must be unjust—in fact, if two states were just it would seem that they would not go to war with one another in the first place. More often than not, instead of just one belligerent being unjust, both or all of the parties involved are unjust. Logically then, this means that most combatants and most participants (individuals and collectives alike according to McMahan) are morally culpable for perpetrating seeming immoral behavior by killing people—which is always considered immoral in almost every other context (McMahan 58). Following this logic, I would assert that only those who fight for humanistic reasons on the just side are exempt from moral scrutiny, yet they remain part of the moral tragedy. This is only McMahan's view and does in fact buck the larger just war narrative about

the moral status of combatants. For this conversation, however, his essay is a peg point from which to investigate war through the lens of moral tragedy. His essay can help my narrative that war is often deemed necessary and even unavoidable, yet tragic in which well-intending actors must perform that which is almost universally immoral (namely killing). This leads to viewing war as a moral tragedy in which no one cannot circumvent incurring moral responsibility. And because this is a reality that is naturally uncomfortable a remedy must be levied. Otherwise, it might mean that our soldiers, armies, and policymakers are, therefore, logically immoral. The response: create an ethic defining the desired moral abilities and capacities for this specialized society. Thus, I argue that the true reason for the conversation surrounding the ethics of the US Army is not the inherent aspiration to virtue as is often understood. Rather, it is to rationalize a contradiction in the national-cultural morality of respect for human life, and that of the state's exclusive right to violence.

Continuing with these assumptions, the question must be asked then: is the narrative that the state must monopolize violence itself a cultural product rooted in social constructions? This to say, is this imperative that is fundamental to armies—their requisite to monopolize violence—a legitimate claim or perhaps something else, like an appeal to control by governments? Or rather, is it a worthwhile and inherently virtuous endeavor worthy of pursuit? Because, if in fact this assumption is not valid (that the state must monopolize violence in the name of security for the collective), then the urgent need to rectify a combatant's moral culpability is reduced to rubble. Here I must assert that I am asking a question, understanding the gravity of the challenge that is being levied. I do find it worth momentary investigation, however. But, as of now, the most logical response to this modified argument would be to fundamentally change the identity and purpose of the military. Currently, the Army is in fact recognized legally as a “specialized

society” (as the Supreme Court refers to all of the branches of the military) that requires a specialized way of doing certain things, and certain ways of doing special things—the greatest of which, I believe, is killing (Parker v. Levy). In fact, the foundational tenants for the Army Ethic is rooted in both a legal and moral framework.

Table 2-1. The framework of the Army Ethic

The Framework of the Army Ethic		
	Legal Foundations <i>(codified)</i>	Moral Foundations
Army as Profession <i>(Laws/values/norms for performance of collective institution)</i>	Legal-Institutional The U.S. Constitution Titles 5, 10, 32, U.S. Code Treaties of which U.S. is party Status-of-Forces Agreements Law of Armed Conflict	Moral-Institutional The U.S. Declaration of Independence Just War Tradition Trust Relationships of the Profession
Individual as Professional <i>(Laws/values/norms for performance of individual professionals)</i>	Legal-Individual Oath of: Enlistment Commission Office U.S. Code – Standards of Exemplary Conduct UCMJ Rules of Engagement Soldier's Rules	Moral-Individual Universal Norms: Basic Rights Golden Rule Values, Creeds, and Mottos: "Duty, Honor, Country" NCO Creed, Civilian Creed 7 Army Values Soldier's Creed, Warrior Ethos
NCO UCMJ	noncommissioned officer Uniform Code of Military Justice	U.S. United States

This reality leads to a further dichotomy in which the modern world finds itself—especially America. As seen in the chart, the Ethic has roots in a legal framework for combatants as well as moral-ethical

foundations. Legally, the modern military adheres to an amalgam of laws and treatise which over time have come to constrain behavior in war (ADRP 1 2-3). The intent, I believe, is to provide a clear boundary in which to remain in the name of a pervading western sense of right and wrong. However, this is the crux of a very important conversation to follow. Because much of this law is created by the US due to the various geo-political situations throughout history, are these laws anything more than social development as discussed above? And if this is the case, what does this mean for the inherent normativity that is ascribed to the Army Ethic? I believe that this illuminates a reality about the Army Ethic which is significant: from a certain perspective, the Ethic is a compilation of well-developed social norms due to the history of modern war. And this will lead to the next section about the Ethic: if this is true, can a descriptive work on social ontology actually be used with normative force?

Section III

What Exactly Is the Army's Ethic?

A Brief Overview

In this section, I will outline in more detail what exactly is the Army Ethic. This conversation will be largely aided and helped along by the introduction into the moral-ethical terrain of the modern world which has been discussed to this point. Briefly mentioned in the last section, this conversation for the Army is captured in ADRP 1, a series of Army publications written in doctrinal form for the education of its members. I want to begin this section by stating up front what I believe to be the bottom line of the doctrine, and reverse engineer it from there. Concluding this analysis, I will then attempt to shed some light on its current utility to the army and why it ascribes certain values or omits others. At this point I want to examine and challenge it as a normative tool. This is the context from which the rest of the paper will reference.

Therefore, after deliberate consideration and investigation on the matter I believe that the most simplified version of the Army Ethic is the imperative for the American public to trust the Army. More than trust between its members (which is part of the conversation), ADRP 1 espouses overall the importance of the nation continuing to trust the Army to perform its mission in the manner that they ascribe—sworn to the Constitution and obedient to lawful orders delineated via the Chain of Command (Vermeesch). This is literally the bedrock, credit, and value to which the Army depends to continue not only to exist but operate in accordance with its developing identity as protectors of liberty everywhere. This trust stems from the realization, first, that in a post-Cold War era world in which arms, military industry, and an ever ready military is a necessity, the resulting standing Army must remain a servant to the people sworn to codified tenets like the Constitution. At some point, the Army is left to fill in a role created for it

outside of itself. And, from a personal perspective, the Army is very good at adapting to whatever constraints put on it and maintain an unwavering commitment to accomplishing the mission. I believe that the Army will do whatever it is asked and basically get it done. To which point, those asking it to accomplish a mission must respect the vigor and commitment they will receive when they issue a task. From the perspective of the leader, the greatest imperative is to “accomplish the mission while maintaining trust in and toward my organization.” For example, whether or not the invasion of a country is justified is not necessarily the prerogative of the soldiers, rather, it is to accomplish that mission while maintaining the nation’s trust. If the Army is asked to invade a nation it will, and it will most likely succeed. From there, the presiding diplomacy, strategy, and policy does not initiate from within the Army. The Army is a large collective of doers and executors of orders. And, as a collective, are very adept at doing that. As a result, the concept of morality as it relates to the Army is from this perspective, once in combat, how can the Army accomplish its missions according to pervading moral norms, necessity, and international laws? For the Army this means maintaining the trust of the people and specifically restricting killing to combatants. This is really the heart of the Army’s professional ethic, and all sub-ethical-prescriptions orient this macro-imperative. In order to accomplish this narrative, the Ethic is written in a very logical, deliberate manner.

A Brief Reflection and Turning Point

At this point in the paper, a big move is about to be made in analyzing the Army Ethic. This move is going to be from understanding the ethic to critiquing it according to its ability to be normative. The following will be a long discussion on the application of the Ethic and three main issues that arise from this process which inhibit ADRP 1 from carrying the normative force which it requires. These are the problems of universalizability, socialization, and cognitive

development. While elements of each of these exists in the other, they warrant their own investigation. A section on each of these problems along with an analysis of their existence in the Army will be conducted in the following sections. In investigating the three common traps which inhibit an ethical conversation from passing into the realm of normativity, the Army Ethic will be scrutinized for its ability to circumvent these pitfalls. The direction of the rest of this paper is to investigate my intuition that the Ethic lacks normativity. And for each of these sections, the shortfall to carrying normative force is overwhelmingly similar. My main critique in each section is that because the Ethic does not morally inform its members based upon the larger moral conversation that has been unfolding for centuries, it cannot provide a base for normativity. Because it is a document which is written by and for the organization based on its history, it does not have the ability to enter into the normative realm but is rather inherently descriptive.

Section IV

On Universalizability, Social Development, and Cognitive Growth

Problem 1

How the Problems Implicit in Social Development can Inhibit Moral Education

The Army is a network whose basic building blocks are people, more importantly the varying degrees of relationships among those people. More often than not, however, these relationships are far too small for the Army as a collective to utilize or even recognize. Philip Pettit coined an idea in his essay, "Groups with Minds of Their Own," that many large organizations can come to have an identity, make decisions, and enforce norms that are contrary to the desires of each of the group members hold individually. Pettit believes this is not because of groupthink, peer pressure, or social cues. Rather, it is because the group itself can develop an autonomy that is as powerful as any human leader. Pettit believes that as people come together in

purpose, norms develop which eventually turn into a code. This code becomes enforceable, and individually enforcing/espousing those burgeoning tenets can often become a requisite for group membership, according to Pettit. However, there is a tendency among many collectives to believe that these social norms are rooted in some inherent virtue or morality in and of themselves—in the ethereal as it were. Questioning this ethic, challenging beliefs, trying to make the organization more efficient all equate to what many group members will actually consider immoral.

Notice the move that just occurred, the developed social norms of a group can, in a short span of time become assumed moral truths. But, what if these social norms will fall outside of the larger moral conversation? This is a problem for an ethic which seeks normative weight. Authority is given to the group as if its internal code is infallible. In other words, progress stops, status quo principles become the greatest moral end, and failure to adhere to group morality is grounds for eviction. This happens in businesses, religious organizations, politics, governments, and yes, even the Army.

This is truly the problem of assumed universalizability stemming directly from implicit limitations to social developments. ADRP 1 does not address this concept nor does it attempt to quell its effects. In fact, it seems that ADRP 1 is not even meant for such a conversation; the Army Ethic does not seem to enter the normative realm but rather remains descriptive throughout. This, to say the least, is significant. In order to be used normatively, the doctrine would require an ascription to some sort of authority more than just its own developed norms. Instead, it reads like a history of social development based only in the group itself—a circular appeal to authority. One challenge as to why a certain action is moral (including maintaining trust) would unravel its entire purpose. ADRP 1 requires more than social evolution, but a

meaningful analysis and application of real ethical critique. For example, what framework does the Army wish to use to transition its moral history in the realm of the normative? What part of the greater moral conversation and philosophical context does the Army Ethic fall into? There appears to be little ground from which to base any normativity from the doctrine even though it serves as a moral history—and performs this task proficiently.

Problem 2

How Problems in Social Development Lead to the Secondary Problem of Assumed Universalizability

Due to the progress of collectivization described above, the Army specifically has become an autonomous being with enforceable norms—norms which must be applied to all people at all times. These can range from blousing boots, to having a good haircut, to obedience to orders, to ROE, to fraud waste and abuse—the explanation to these actions captured in the ethical concept of professionalism. Each of these points exists in relative importance to the others. For example, following proper ROE often has life and death implications while boots blousing does not. In the interest of accomplishing missions, winning wars, and trying to be the proverbial “good guys,” the Army has, again, become a group with a mind of its own. And its members are bound to its ideals which, because so many come to consider its ethical principles with near-religious awe, are slow to change. As we will see in a future section about cognitive development, reversibility is a key to a developed moral code. And the Army Ethic does not enable this sort of robust critique.

I believe the problem, then, is actually education. Using shallow universal tenets of an ethic to enforce behavior and perpetuate the group norms, in fact, is simply a cheap counterfeit for real moral education. More than governing a status quo, an Ethic must inform members of a

group with the confines of the greater moral conversation. Shallow ethics are easy to control, easy to judge, easy to understand, and the result so often is unchallenged universalized normativity. So often one leader can say to another, “you ought to x,” or “you have a responsibility to y.” What these phrases usually mean is that “the rules say a certain thing,” or “this worked for me so it should work for you.” It means that in honor hearings at West Point when a cadet is accused of breaking the basic honor tenets, his or her chances for moral defense are limited to a jury’s ability to think outside of the prescribed moral box. The rules exist to express identity of group members, not inhibit moral education. But often their inability to be further developed because of their near-religious status limits meaningful progress. The status quo of an ascribed ethic inhibits moral development of the collective and individuals alike. The responsibility of a professional ethic, then, should be to educate its members holistically that they may make wise decisions in morally ambiguous situations based upon their own developed sense of morality. In its pursuit of professionalization, it is possible that the army has led itself into at least the first two traps surrounding ethical codification. Universalizability requires a right answer. Education enables leaders to make tough decisions in the morally ambiguous based on an informed ethos. I fear that the Army Ethic only achieves the former.

But, to be fair, what of epistemic humility, limitations, and relativism? Torbjorn Tannsjo in his book *Understanding Ethics* writes, “We find that, no matter how much we try to establish a consensus, we constantly seem to fail. Does not this indicate, we may ask, that a kind of epistemic relativism is true? Does it not indicate that people who hold conflicting moral views may be equally (and even fully) justified in their views?” (7) Developing a moral code which depends on “All soldiers should do x in y,” may have ethical implications of its own, as this could hinder the very education of the people who need it the most. If there exists a normative

assertion in this conversation it is that members of the armed forces ought to be morally educated, not according to a standard but in the name of reducing epistemic limitations. That which attempts to limit this personal investigation via absolutism, therefore, is culpable to scrutiny. In a business whose very fabric is morally ambiguous (war), having morally educated individuals means much more than free thinking.

One possible counter-argument to this position warrants brief consideration. This counter is specific to the military, though it can be extrapolated to many organizations as well. That is: can the average Soldier actually be expected to develop his or her own personal ethos capable of withstanding the ambiguity faced in situations like combat? My response to this is yes, but only if the organization makes real moral education as key a task as it currently does about right answers and doctrine. Such a solution is laughable to anyone who has spent more than ten minutes in the military system. The main reason for its laughability is the lack of time to incur such an education. Why is there a lack of time, though? More often than not, it is due to fulfilling the various obligations which the members of the group themselves have created, good or bad, and whose completion has developed near religious status. Not doing these various bureaucratic tasks, again well-intended as they may be, reduces heavily the time for things like relationship building and moral education, a fabric of so many successful organizations. Speaking for the Army, we sort of do it to ourselves.

In their book *The Starfish and the Spider*, Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom recount how many investors failed to get in on the ground floor to so many young internet startups during the dawn of the information age. In fact, they scoffed at any organization based on a system that did not have a leader, centralized leadership, or vision statement. The internet was not overt, clear, and felt unsafe. Brafman and Beckstrom note a sentiment from those days, "It has to be

centralized, there has to be a king, or there has to be an emperor, or there has to be—something” (Beckstrom and Brafman 33). The internet depends on quite the opposite. It depends on individuals and relationships acting autonomously and deliberately. So too is there a current tension among moral education of our armed forces. “There has to be a right answer” is the dominating trend of current education. Perhaps, it is simply considering the individual soldier worthy of his or her own education that would turn this problematic numbness into true passion among our ranks. A professional ethic’s main function should be to morally educate its members, not delineate versions of epistemic truth. This to say, more than prescribing a list of behaviors for every given situation, an ethic should seek to educate an individual along the greater moral conversation that is centuries old. This opens up a world of personal development, enlightenment, and education which would quell moral issues better than an ambiguous list. This reality is only heightened by understanding that much of what an organization calls morality, is actually a developing set of concepts which help progress the organization into more efficiency, well-being, and effectiveness. When these descriptive tenets of behavior become immovable, however, progress stops, education stymies, and members of the group will settle for counterfeit moral solutions in the name of the status quo. Why develop a personal ethos when the organization has a tidy narrative of what is “right” already produced? (Especially if this narrative is being enforced without an ability to be changed or improved.) Therefore, universalizability might be more akin to a marker of moral compromise than an actual beneficial tool.

And this surmises the pitfall of universalizability. I believe that an adherence to shallow universal principles over personal, moral development for the members of a group will ultimately hold an organization in confusion and frozen in tragedy with no way out. And, this occurs due to an adherence to socially developed principles as inherently virtuous ideas which

cannot be modified. I see no way in which ADRP 1 avoids this pitfall. In fact, it makes very few normative assertions, yet the ones it does assume universalizability—think the need to maintain trust mentioned above. Because of this predicament, any leader can take a simplified principle, and manipulate any situation in order to present a narrative in favor of the Ethic. This presents a temptation to simply manipulate a universalized goal to present the public only with that which is trustworthy while hiding that which is not. All of the sudden, because ADRP 1 does not address the problems associated with universalizability, morality can quickly degrade to a public relations game in which doing what is right has little to do with the tested virtues associated with the Army (if there are any), but instead protecting an image even if that image is not true to the state of the organization in reality. And, here we reach another paradox: this behavior feels like lying—is this a moral end which the Army cares to achieve? Therefore, because ADRP 1 does not handle the problems associated with universalizability, it falls short of carrying real normative force which would occur by enabling its members to refine their own ethos. Again, however, ADRP 1 is a powerful tool of descriptive work which can serve as a bedrock in the future for developing a normativity fit for soldiers.

Problem 3

The Often Missed Imperative of Psychological Development and Identity

An interesting final commentary to the conversation of the development of an ethic is its ability to be reproduced, understood, and mass communicated. How translatable is a set of beliefs into an individual's personal ethos? Much of the meta-study of morality in recent history has been based on a theory in which moral development is only as powerful as the psychological development accompanying a culture or individual. This to say, the individuals inside of a group can only develop morally as far as their cognitive ability will allow. This theory has been

codified by Lawrence Kohlberg in his theory of moral development (Thomas 464-465).

Kohlberg believes that there are six stages of moral development, and that an individual cannot ascend the scale without passing through each phase. Paraphrased, his stages are as follows:

Stage I revolves around punishment and obedience—nearly entirely stimulus oriented.

Stage II moves to the ability to manipulate moral situations for one's own desired ends often via given and take.

Stage III involves the ability to empathize outside of one own interests

Stage IV involves a developed loyalty to one's socialized context (think Pettit's theory of group development, at this stage one believes in and adheres to his or her group norms as moral ends in and of themselves.)

Stage V centers on a yielding to developed social and political laws which govern people and maximize utility for a greater good.

Stage VI is the arrival to some sort of universal ethical series of principles—not that there exists one moral truth, but rather that an individual can attain a worldview robust enough to be unilaterally applied to a host of situations, most likely based on self-sacrifice or the betterment of others. Someone in this stage will do what is “right” simply because they believe it is right. They will do so even if it means bucking social norms (Thomas 465-466).

It is easy to intuit that the military exists very much inside of this type of system largely remaining somewhere around Stage III. Coupling this reality with Pettit's theory of group development presents a possible world which the Army and its ethic revolves around espousing its own developed norms as moral law so that it can remain separated and professional. And, these developments are largely oriented about natural socialization rather than deep meaningful moral concepts part of the larger conversation about ethics. This is not necessarily a problem until one realizes that this requires the reduction of morality into self-serving social principles. Is reducing the Army Ethic to a stage II or III type of content-focused, organization-serving moral code beneficial for its members? I argue no, that in fact this means that when faced with real moral dilemmas to which there is only bad and worse, a soldier will be left wildly unprepared for making informed decisions because of the organizational apathy for the soldiers' personal moral education. A soldier's job is managing death and chaos. Does he or she not deserve a more

personally developed code of ethos? Simply requiring that people trust the US Army does not seem like the job of an ethic which is, I believe, normatively informing a soldier developing his or her own personal ethic. I am not entirely convinced that current formations are equipped to handle moral dilemmas and moral injury as aptly as they could if they were expected and trained to develop their own personal ethos in the face of the morally challenging.

Thus, on the imperative of psychological development—both corporately and in enabling individuals—I believe that the Army Ethic also falls short. ADRP 1 does not mitigate the problems associated with the need for individual psychological development. Due to its assumption of universalizability and social development mentioned above, it also fails to overcome problems surrounding cognitive development. Because the Army Ethic does not view individual soldiers as matured or capable beings able to reach higher stages of psychological development, the doctrine does not enter the realm of the normative, but yet again remains a descriptive tool for the current state of the Army. Once again, the ethic proves to hold powerful descriptive force about where the Army has come and where it currently rests along the moral plain; however, it seriously lacks any normativity. One cannot follow the precepts laid forth because they lead to nowhere in specific. Rather, the doctrine is comprised of principled beliefs from people in the organization. The ethic cannot develop its people, rather, it only describe the organization's moral history to its members. This is extremely helpful and necessary, but cannot be used as the educator that the soldiers require. Again, because of its inability to even address the need for moral education, the Army Ethic lacks the ability to speak normatively in a relevant way to its soldiers.

Section V

An Ethic with Limitations—So what?

At this point, a brief pause for thought is vital. Here, I will ask the question “so what?” Why does the Army care so much to create the concept of professionalism and codify it ethically? Why does the Army open up this conversation knowing the difficulty and ambiguity it will entail? Does this all matter in the larger scheme of the Army’s mission? The answer to this series of questions, as I will explain, is both yes and no.

The Army Ethic was developed in a society in which the pressures for socialization are even more than natural evolution. I believe that for many within the society, group norms have developed their immovable moral status because a link has been developed between them, and keeping people alive. Because it is already natural for a group to socialize itself by making the original social norms as hard-and-fast moral law of unchallengeable status, connecting these same developments to keeping people alive is a natural jump in cognitive growth (Pettit). What I am not saying is that basic adherence to important standards is not valuable or does not help promote vital discipline in a formation. Rather, what I am pointing to here is that the development of these norms often comes from a place of important distinction from the rest of the population; it is a representation of the profession, and socialized behaviors which develop in the camaraderie of the military. Understanding these sorts of things—like mandatory trainings, strange uniform standards, drill and ceremony, and proper bureaucratic procedures—as part of the narrative which creates the profession, would prevent so much organizational stagnation currently experienced. Rather, these sorts of things seem to become entrenched in a stoic, immovable status and exhibit the institution’s struggle to provide room for moral development of its members into a more cognitively matured state. These behaviors also, in practice, tend to

encroach on the territory of what would be considered “moral.” Connecting group “standards” to morality is a powerful way to maintain a status quo among a majority of members and inhibit real moral development, even if this is not the organization’s intent.

I believe that every large group struggles with this paradox. Simply put, it is how to maintain a cohesive identity and distinction from the rest of the population (i.e. “what makes us different for the better?”), while maintaining room for constant improvement and collective rationality. In the completion of this paper I have come to believe that one of the quickest portions of a corporation to die in the struggle for identity is what Pettit calls collective rationality—its ability to be governed by the evolving relationships and represented beliefs of the people inside the group. Many soldiers can describe the feeling of doing something that no one in the group believes is a good idea, often dismissing it with justification of some sort. This is truly a real live version of Pettit’s idea of a group with a mind of its own. The members become constrained to beliefs and ideas to which none of them desire or think necessary. Not to say that many times a day in an organization like the Army its members must do things which are uncomfortable or that no person desires. This is markedly different, however, from the inability to maintain collective rationality to which I am currently speaking. And this is largely the paradox which has arisen in attempting (for very important and necessary reasons) to codify the Army as a corporation of professional soldiers. Understanding this narrative is a final portion of the foundation which will be necessary to understand a meaningful critique of the Army Ethic.

Section VI

Analysis

This final section will remain brief. I desire to bring together my main intention of the work by connecting the three moral traps studied above and the distinction between a descriptive and normative document. I will attempt to prove that the Army Ethic is descriptive and metaethical while remaining unable to carry normativity in its rhetoric.

An ethic is largely intended to provide moral guidance, a normative guide to tell one how to live their life according to principles assumed righteous, good, and virtuous (Solomon 5). This is largely considered normative ethics and the category into which I believe that the Army Ethic desires to rest—to inform its soldiers what is good and bad and right and wrong according to the larger moral conversation (Solomon 5). Above this study, however, also exists metaethics which involves the study, scrutiny, and investigation of ethical norms and customs in a given situation (Solomon 5). I believe that the Army Ethic is almost entirely a well written, investigated, and proved metaethical study of the Army to this point in history. It exhumes some of the norms, customs, narratives, and trends of the Army (a nearly impossible task which the Ethic artfully and masterfully produced) but does not cross the line into normativity in which it provides a reason, basis, or appeal to levy behavior or education in any way. Outside of the implicit call to maintain trust between the Army and the nation, the doctrine lacks any true moral imperative rooted in its story. The Army's own moral story is not enough to produce a robust framework worthy of the difficult moral terrain of modern combat. Not that the work is not hugely important, beneficial, necessary, and overtly significant in the process of moving the Army into a more morally developed situation. The Ethic's inability to move beyond the traps of assumed universalizability, its social development constraints, and its lack of individual psychological

growth speaks to its true success: capturing the metaethical conversation of the Army, not providing the robust framework for answering questions of morality. Because so much of the moral story of the Army contains assumptions about morality which inhibit what would be needed to move into the normative domain, the Army Ethic if anything simply exhumes the reality that the internal moral state of the Army is broken. A lifetime of adherence to its own socially developed norms has left the Army filled with what I would call a “folk-tale” morality rather than one rooted or situated in the larger moral conversation. Therefore, the Ethic lacks normative weight while retaining a powerful role as a descriptive illuminator to the internal moral status of the Army.

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