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## FROM MERCENARY TO PROFESSIONAL

Soldiers typically join the Army more out of enthusiasm for weaponry, fraternity, violence, adventure, or salary than to promote objective justice. Unsurprisingly, when asked why they fight, they overwhelmingly reply that they fight for fraternity and self-preservation. These are the motives of the mercenary. They apply equally well to the barbarian as to the professional. Fortunately, our soldiers are mistaken about their motivational psychology. If self-preservation were really their primary reason for fighting, they would do better to refuse deployment. If protection of buddies was a dominant concern, they would do better to discourage re-enlistment. Even when it is not well-developed, our soldiers already harbor an implicit sense of the moral basis for their service. They sense there is something noble in serving the state rather than their own self-interest. Unfortunately, they are unable to articulate the virtue of their service. To become truly professional, they need a better understanding of their professional identity. We owe it to our soldiers to endow them with a more thorough understanding of their professional role and the moral basis for the violence they commit. Internalizing this understanding marks the transition from mercenary to professional.

Revision note: Dispense with discussion of profession. Or greatly curtail it. The important point is about the requirements of professional service and why the mercenary cannot meet them. Say a bit more about fostering the transition from mercenary to professional.

## SOLDIER PSYCHE

### Reasons for **enlisting**:

- ✧ Opportunity
- ✧ Adventure
- ✧ Fraternity
- ✧ Respect
- ✧ Self-improvement
- ✧ Public service

## Soldier Psyche

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### Reasons for **fighting**:

- Fraternity
- Self-preservation
- ~~Obedience?~~
- ~~Defense of rights?~~

The reasons for which soldiers join can probably be broadly categorized as:

1. Opportunity
  - Economic compensation – pay & compensation, enlistment & retention bonuses
  - Healthcare and family services
2. Adventure
3. Fraternity
4. Respect
  - i.e., To improve their status
5. Self-improvement
  - Development of character, discipline, fortitude, etc. (recruiting slogans: “Be all that you can be,” “Army of one,” “Army strong”)
  - Skill training
6. Public service
  - Patriotism
  - Desire to help others in the world

Among combat arms soldiers, enthusiasm for weaponry, violence, fraternity, and adventure run particularly high.

Despite the high accolades paid to soldiers for their service, except after unique events like 9/11, patriotism doesn’t typically rank high on soldiers’ reasons for joining.

When asked why they fight, soldiers overwhelmingly respond that they fight to support (or in order to avoid disappointing) their comrades.

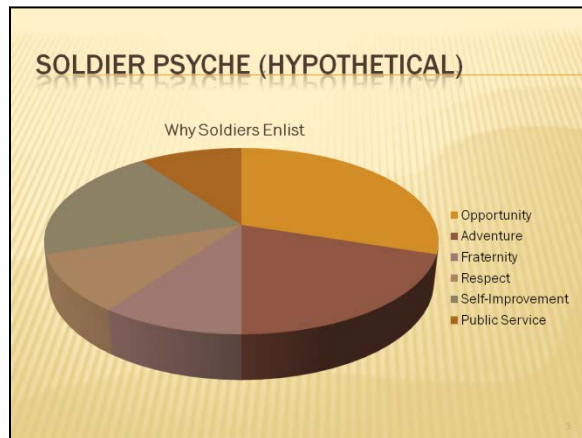
They don’t regularly cite “self-preservation” as they have come to value their support to comrades over their own lives. But I imagine self-preservation remains influential in their reasons. It just isn’t their dominant reason.

### [CLICK SLIDE TO ADVANCE NEXT TEXT]

Interestingly, soldiers don’t seem to cite “obedience” as one of their reasons for fighting. They are caught up in an institution that places a premium on obedience, yet they still don’t feel that it is mere obedience that explains their participation in combat.

Also interesting is the fact that soldiers don’t seem to cite variations on the “defense of rights” theme very regularly. Again, they might cite this to explain their deployment overall. But when asked to explain what motivates them, this theme doesn’t register significantly.

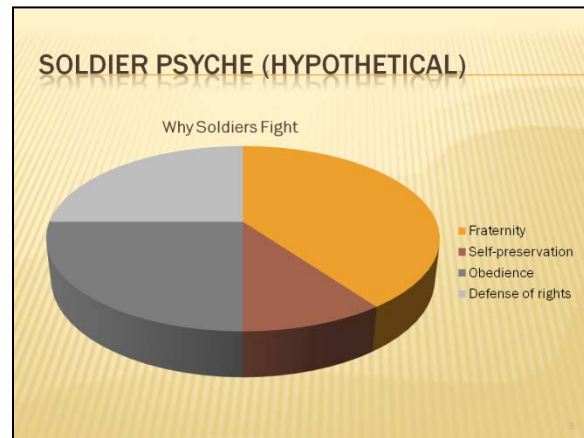
Move this later in discussion – after talking about problem of mercenaries  
Just how big a role does the public good have to play in one's motivational psychology?



*Dr. Snider argued yesterday that no human behavior stems from a singular motive.*

Rather than viewing survey results as being the various individual reasons for which soldiers fight, it is surely the case that any one soldier's motivational psychology reflects an array of reasons of various strengths.

It is also likely that soldier's actual motivational psychology is different from that which they report. Numerous psychology studies demonstrate how regularly we act for reasons other than those by which we suppose we are acting.



When soldiers are pressed to explain why they fight, I suspect that they fall victim to false (yet honest) explanations more readily than when explaining why they joined the military. I suspect that obedience and concern for the rights of others remain a significant part of their psychology. But I don't know how far this goes. And if it does exist, the fact that it is largely unrecognized is highly problematic.

*It means that the soldier's principal reasons for fighting remain self-interest.*

"Fraternity," unless we are referring to all people affected by one's actions, is merely self-interest on the collective level.

## MORAL INSUFFICIENCY OF COLLECTIVE SELF-INTEREST

- ✖ “I am not bound to win, but I am bound to be true. I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to live by the light that I have. I must stand with anybody that stands right, and stand with him while he is right, and part with him when he goes wrong.” (Abraham Lincoln)
- ✖ Collective self-interest is a simple recipe for continued sectarian conflict.
- ✖ Self-interest, whether on the individual or collective level, relegates the soldier to the moral status of mere mercenary.

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- Self-interest, whether on the individual or collective level, relegates the soldier to the moral status of mere mercenary.
  - For the soldier to be professional requires loftier motives
  - Only professional relationship (not small unit cohesion) can provide real context to the work soldiers do

## SOLDIER AS MERCENARY

Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions defines a mercenary as one who:

- ✖ is especially recruited locally or abroad in order to fight in an armed conflict;
- ✖ does, in fact, take a direct part in the hostilities;
- ✖ **is motivated to take part in the hostilities essentially by the desire for private gain** and, in fact, is promised, by or on behalf of a Party to the conflict, material compensation substantially in excess of that promised or paid to combatants of similar ranks and functions in the armed forces of that Party;
- ✖ is neither a national of a Party to the conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a Party to the conflict;
- ✖ is not a member of the armed forces of a Party to the conflict; and
- ✖ has not been sent by a State which is not a Party to the conflict on official duty as a member of its armed forces.

Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions defines a mercenary as one who “is motivated . . . essentially by the desire for private gain.” The other elements of the definition above are incidental to the fact that the mercenary fights for private gain.

Does it matter if our soldiers are predominantly mercenary? Isn't it preferable to having zealots and fanatics?

### THE PROBLEM OF MERCENARIES

1. Killing is not the kind of thing that ought to be done for market-based reasons.
2. The morally indifferent are morally reckless. They are a threat to all.
3. The soldier who does not appreciate the moral value of his service is unprepared to exercise the moral judgment which just conduct requires.

1. Killing ought not to be done on the basis of market incentives.
2. Those who are morally indifferent are morally reckless. They don't deserve to wield power.
3. The soldier who does not appreciate the moral value of his service is unprepared to perform the moral assessments which just conduct on the battlefield requires.



### LIMITS OF MARKET-BASED EXCHANGE

To kill without concern for justice is prostitution.

Equating the mercenary to a prostitute is not merely casual derision. The wrongness of prostitution lies in that it involves an exchange of incommensurable goods.

**MAN** (to woman seated next to him at an elegant dinner party): Madam, would you sleep with me for ten million dollars?

**WOMAN** (giggles and responds): For ten million? Yeah, I guess I would.

**MAN**: Would you sleep with me for fifty dollars?

**WOMAN** (indignant): What do you think I am, a common prostitute?

**MAN**: That fact has already been established. Now we're just haggling over the price.

### **[CLICK TO ADVANCE SLIDE ANIMATION]**

Increasing the pay does not redeem prostitution any more than giving high salary, or even government sanction, redeems morally indifferent killings.

The point of this joke is that some goods are incommensurable in a way that defies establishing an appropriate exchange rate. The problem of prostitution lies in its willingness to sell for money something which has no market value, not simply that the price is typically set too low. In exchanging for mere money something that should be a rich emotional experience, both prostitute and client forfeit a portion of their humanity. They become less human and more animal. Similarly, soldiers who indifferently exchange for mere money their willingness to kill others surrender part of their own humanity.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See also Dave Grossman's "On Killing" for further discussion of the parallels between the psychological experiences of sex and killing.



## THE PROBLEM OF MERCENARIES

### LIMITS OF MARKET-BASED EXCHANGE

1. It is wrong to harm others unless a greater good is brought about thereby.
2. It is wrong to undertake to harm others unless one personally believes a greater good will be brought about thereby.
3. The greater the harm one presumes to bring about, the greater the necessity that he be personally persuaded it should be done.

## The Problem of Mercenaries

### Limits of Market-Based Exchange

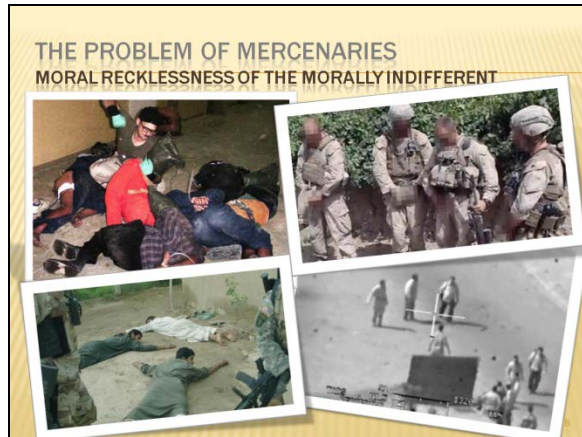
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**[CLICK TO ADVANCE SLIDE ANIMATION]**

*To ignore this truth is to surrender an element of one's own humanity. To ignore this truth is to surrender one's integrity.*



### **MORAL RECKLESSNESS OF THE MORALLY INDIFFERENT**

The soldier's actions have greater social consequence than does that of any other professional.

The past decade of war has repeatedly revealed the danger of having soldiers who are motivated by something other than justice.

- SPC Charles Graner: "The Christian in me knows it's wrong, but the corrections officer in me can't help but love to make a grown man piss himself."
- Marines urinating on corpses
- Killing of detainees during Operation Iron Triangle (See *The New Yorker*, "The Kill Company")
- Helicopter firing on journalists
- ~~SSG Calvin Gibbs~~
- ~~SSG Robert Bates~~

War crimes and other moral atrocities over the past 11 years of war have left many commentators quick to label these events as anomalies. The rest of the force, they suppose, is exercising great moral discipline. Unfortunately, various Military Health Advisory Team studies over the past few years paint a different picture. They suggest that moral confusion dominates the force. The atrocities which garner national attention are merely the tip of the iceberg. Soldiers widely report having witnessed or perpetuated unreported abuse. They likewise report that they would not turn in a comrade for violating the law of war.



**THE PROBLEM OF MERCENARIES**  
**MORAL CONCERN AS PREREQUISITE TO MORAL JUDGMENT**

Fundamental principles of *jus in bello*:

- ✗ Necessity
- ✗ Discrimination
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- ✗ **Discrimination** – target only those who participate materially in the conflict
- ✗ **Proportionality** – the military value of the target must exceed the moral value of the collateral damage

*Moral concern is also essential for professions and professionals.*

### **MORAL CONCERN AS PREREQUISITE TO MORAL JUDGMENT**

Fundamental principles of *jus in bello*:

- **Necessity** – the act to be performed must be essential to the accomplishment of legitimate military objectives
  - The mercenary has already indicated he doesn't care about necessity; he cares only about compensation.
- **Discrimination** – target only those who participate materially in the conflict
  - This now becomes a legal question only, not a moral question. The mercenary isn't interested in the moral; he simply wants legal protection.
- **Proportionality** – the military value of the target must exceed the moral value of the collateral damage
  - this requires assessing the value of the collateral damage; the mercenary is disinterested in value assessments

**[CLICK TO ADVANCE SLIDE ANIMATION]**

*While we have reason to be morally concerned about mercenaries, I want to draw particular attention to the professional problem of relying on mercenaries. The motives of the mercenary are inimical to those of the professional.*

## UNDERSTANDING PROFESSIONS

1. Professions possess great power.
2. Society must restrict the employment of powers that don't adequately control themselves.
3. Unrestricted power offers more benefit to society than restricted power.
4. Society will extend trust and autonomy to those communities of practice which self-regulate to ensure their power is used exclusively for the public good.
5. Professions secure public trust and autonomy by committing themselves to the public good over their own good. **They publicly "profess" their commitment to moral standards.**

### **Professions possess great expertise, hence power.**

- Professions possess advanced theoretical and technical knowledge.
- Knowledge is power.

### **Society must restrict the employment of powers that don't adequately control themselves.**

- Power is potentially dangerous.
- For the good of society, dangers must be controlled.

### **Society benefits more from unrestricted power.**

- Power is potentially beneficial.
- Unrestricted power can achieve more than restricted power.

### **Communities of practice which demonstrate their commitment to employing their power exclusively for the public good will be welcomed by the public.**

- Self-regulating power offers much benefit and little risk to society.
- Communities of practice can self-regulate to ensure their power is used exclusively for good.

### **Professions secure public trust and autonomy by committing themselves to the public good over their own good. They publicly "profess" their commitment to moral standards.**

Still, this is obligation on the collective level. Does collective performance really require the individual to share the same moral commitments as the community? Is it possible for the community of practice to so organize itself so that the impure motives of the individual don't undermine the pure motives of the community? *(Think of how the government is organized to balance one branch's ambition against another, resulting in a construct that is less dangerous than the ambitions of individual branches.)*

## PROFESSIONAL OBLIGATION

- ✦ Prepare to provide, and then provide, expert service.
- ✦ Serve the public good over oneself and over one's professional community.
- ✦ Hold fellow practitioners accountable for doing the same.

i.e., the obligation of professionals

PREPARE TO PROVIDE, AND THEN PROVIDE, EXPERT SERVICE.

**Mercenaries might be capable of satisfying the first requirement.**

- Their technical expertise often exceeds that of the professional soldier.
- But their theoretical expertise probably does not. The unifying expertise of the profession of arms is not merely the management of violence. If violence isn't being applied towards a particular end, then "management" doesn't even mean anything. The unique theoretical expertise of the profession of arms is the application of violence to achieve political objectives. I am suspicious that the motives of the mercenary leave him ill-qualified for the kind of moral sensitivity that pursuing political objectives requires.

*What elevates the professional over the "highly skilled barbarian" is the theoretical knowledge of when and where to apply his technical knowledge (or even his theoretical knowledge of how)*

SERVE THE PUBLIC GOOD OVER ONESELF AND OVER ONE'S PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY.

**Mercenaries cannot satisfy the second requirement.**

HOLD FELLOW PRACTITIONERS ACCOUNTABLE FOR DOING THE SAME.

**Mercenaries are likewise unable to satisfy the third requirement.**

### IS A PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EVEN POSSIBLE?

#### Principal-Agent Problem

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*"...if one holds his state on the basis of mercenary arms, he will never be firm or secure; because they are disunited, ambitious, without discipline, unfaithful; gallant among friends, vile among enemies; no fear of God, no faith with men; and one defers ruin insofar as one defers the attack; and in peace you are despoiled by them, in war by the enemy." (Machiavelli)*

Studies of combat psychology seemingly imply that it is unrealistic to expect the soldier to fight for professional ideals. Instead, he seems most motivated by concern for his comrades. Is it possible to overcome this? Does this inherently disqualify the soldier for consideration as a professional? Or does it indicate that professional conduct can only be found at higher ranks and positions?

**Principal-agent problem** – the challenge of establishing incentives to ensure the goals of the agent remain aligned with those of the principal

- *Incongruity between principal and agent objectives gives rise to moral hazards.*
- Until the soldier's motivation matches his moral role, he remains a mercenary. This is an irresponsible, morally dangerous predicament.

### [CLICK TO ADVANCE SLIDE ANIMATION]

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What is to be done about the fact that our soldiers join the Army with motives that are more mercenary than professional? How big a problem is this really? Given that the Army serves collectively, in a fashion much more task-organized than other professions, is wrong motives really as big a problem as it would be in other professional communities?

### THE GOOD NEWS

- ✗ Soldiers are wrong about their reasons for serving.
- ✗ They can be transformed from mercenaries to professionals.

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- ✗ Soldiers are wrong about their reasons for serving.
- ✗ They can be transformed from mercenaries to professionals.
  - + The transition from individual self-interest to collective self-interest demonstrates their susceptibility to transformation.

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Widespread moral confusion is not a sign of our having recruited bad soldiers. It is instead evidence of the inadequacy of the moral development we provide our soldiers. It is a symptom of the cynicism of soldiers who joined the Army with an implicit sense of its moral legitimacy but then don't receive sufficient instruction to truly understand their moral function.

We underestimate our soldiers and sell them short when we treat them as if they are incapable of serving for professional reasons.

#### **Soldiers are wrong about their reasons for serving.**

- Motivation is a complex psychological phenomenon. Contrary to common belief, we are not necessarily the best authority on why we do what we do.
  - Numerous psychology studies demonstrate how regularly we act for reasons other than those for which we suppose we are acting.
- If soldiers' concern was really for their buddies, they would all have done better to collectively refuse deployment. They would attempt to dissuade each other from re-enlisting (at least in a time of war). They would impose deployment-inhibiting injuries upon each other. They would avoid confrontation with insurgents on the battlefield (especially if the thought of getting home unharmed is among their primary motives). They would sabotage equipment to ensure they were not battle-ready. Etc.

I suspect that even though soldiers aren't prepared to articulate it, a belief that their service in the military will serve justice (honorable) really does motivate them. If their motivation were really what they presume it to be, I believe their behavior would be different.
- If self-preservation were really their primary concern . . .

#### **They can be transformed from mercenaries to professionals.**

- Over thirty years ago, the author of a professional ethics text used at the Air Force Academy wrote:

There is something deficient about someone who enters the armed forces exclusively for his or her own benefit. Such persons are usually not blameworthy or guilty; they are usually not aware of the moral implications of their actions and overlook such implications because of the generally accepted and unquestioning social approval of service in the armed forces. To

enter into an organization whose primary purpose is to be prepared for and to fight wars – with the attendant killing, wounding, and destroying inherent in that occupation – and to do so exclusively for self gain amounts to participating in activity which is normally considered immoral behavior without realizing that higher moral commitments alone justify one's behavior.

Of course this commitment to basic values is rarely what prompts one to join the armed services. Most join out of economic motivation, the pressure of the draft, the opportunity for education and the like. And yet most such persons, at least subconsciously, realize that they wouldn't consider it right to "enlist" in a criminal syndicate for similar reasons. They somehow recognize that the one is wrong and the other is right. And, I believe, if they are encouraged and helped in figuring out why they accept the one and not the other, they will come to recognize their basic value commitments which permit involvement in activity which would be normally wrong. Indeed, they will come to realize that these commitments are quite strong, strong enough to override the normal prohibition against activity involving homicide and destruction. To repeat, most persons are not aware of their basic value commitments when they enter the armed service; however, upon reflection, they will usually find very strong commitments. These commitments can serve as the ground, the starting point, of a viable "professional military ethics.

(Wenker, Kenneth. "Professional Military Ethics: An Attempt at Definition." USAFA - Journal of Professional Military Ethics 1 (April 1980): 25-26.)

## **[CLICK TO ADVANCE SLIDE ANIMATION]**

**The transition from individual self-interest to collective self-interest demonstrates their susceptibility to transformation.**

- Transition from individual interest to group interest is significant (even though insufficient); it also happens quite rapidly and naturally because of Army/unit culture
- This provides grounds for hope that we can indoctrinate them into the culture of selfless service.
  - Compare to jihadi motivation
  - Compare to kamikaze pilots
- Email dialogue with 1LT Formica – "They might enter as mercenaries, but I think over the course of numerous training exercises and combat deployments in which they watch their buddies give their blood, limbs, and lives, Soldiers eventually do come to view their service as something more than a source of income and they do make that service about the comrades they share it with. This is what I think I observe in my guys over here, anyway."

**What needs to take place is a kind of professional alchemy, transforming the soldier from his initial base motivational set to something loftier.**



### THOUGHTS ON ACHIEVING THE TRANSITION

1. This transition is a moral and professional imperative.
2. Emphasize professional identity.
  - ✧ Servant of the Nation
  - ✧ Just Warrior
  - ✧ Leader of Character
  - ✧ Member of a Profession
3. Burden probably falls most heavily on mid-career officers.

#### 1. This transition is a moral and professional imperative.

- a. Conduct of the soldier
  - Our nation is ill-served by mercenaries. We need professionals. Turning our soldiers from mercenary to professional is our obligation to our soldiers, our profession, and our nation.
- b. Psychological health of the soldier
  - Understanding his moral role provides psychological protection to the soldier. We need to provide our soldiers with moral protection comparable to the combat protection we afford them.

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#### 2. Emphasize professional identity.

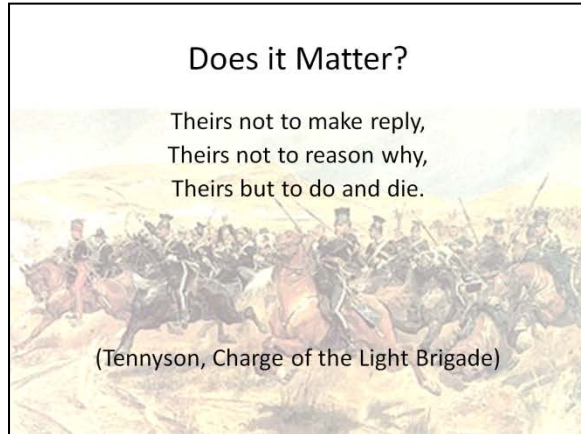
- Our soldiers enter the profession with undeveloped moral identity
- Develop the soldier's sense of professional identity.  
As MacArthur observed, "The soldier, be he friend or foe, is charged with the protection of the weak and unarmed. It is the very essence and reason for his being."
- Soldiers who understand their role are inspired by it. They don't commit atrocities and don't permit others to do so either.

**[CLICK TO ADVANCE SLIDE ANIMATION]**

#### 3. Burden falls most heavily on mid-career officers.

- Junior officers lack the perspective. Senior officers are too far removed from troops.
- As a practical matter, it is the junior officers and NCOs who need to implement this transition. But that is unlikely to happen. They are not yet sufficiently developed to see the problem. Once the solution takes effect, they will be key to maintaining it.
- Mid-career officers need to educate junior officers.

## Hidden Slide

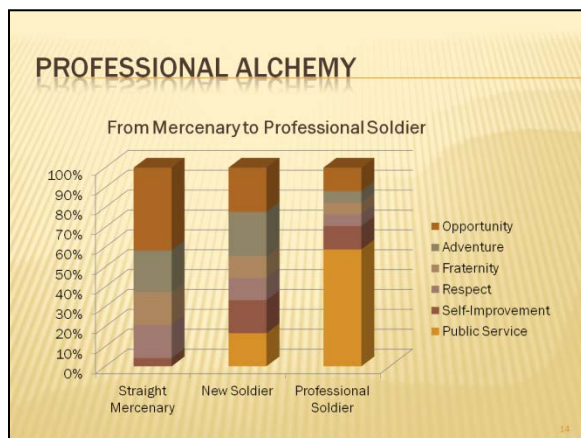


Does it even matter *why* the soldier serves or does it only matter *that/how* he serves?

- Tennyson suggest that we don't expect the soldier to concern himself with the why of his combat: "Theirs not to make reply, Theirs not to reason why, Theirs but to do and die." Having soldiers care about the justification for their work could undermine the diligent obedience we so value in the military. While this argument sounds alluring at the collective level, its absurdity becomes more apparent at the level of the individual soldier.

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**Rather than a major overhaul of the soldier's motivational psychology, we need to bring some of their latent ideology to the foreground.**

- We need to help soldiers understand the moral foundations of their service.

Consider: This doesn't require that one is continually inspired, in each and every moment, by lofty ideals. It simply requires that those motives continue to give him sufficient reason to continue serving.

- Compare to running → the committed runner isn't necessarily enjoying the run throughout; he feels the strain of the run just like anyone else; but he recognizes that the benefit is worth the effort.
- It isn't necessarily love of the activity so much as it is recognition of the value of it

**Service is inherently meaningful.**

## Unused Notes

The difference it makes whether our soldiers are persuaded

- Soldier conduct – persuaded soldiers obey the rules of war
- Soldier performance – persuaded soldiers fight resolutely
- Soldier trauma – soldiers are later haunted by concern for unjustified killings
- Soldier fulfillment – soldiers who are pursuing moral goods can feel good about their work

*“There came with the true patriots a host of false friends and plunderers. And this was true of both sides in this terrible struggle. The outlaw Whig and the outlaw Tory, or rather the outlaws who were pretended Whigs and Tories as the occasion served, were laying waste the country almost as much as those who were fighting for the one side or the other.”*

McCrary 1969, 139.

McCrary, Edward. 1969. *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1780–1783*. New York: Paladin

We asked previously whether it matters why the soldier serves or if it only matters how he serves. This is a misleading question. Why someone serves has everything to do with how they serve.

“Every doctor will allow a colleague to decimate a whole countryside sooner than violate the bond of professional etiquette by giving him away.” (G. B. Shaw, *The Doctor’s Dilemma*, 1946)

The military professional “is not a mercenary who transfers his services wherever they are best rewarded, nor is he the temporary citizen-soldier inspired by intense momentary patriotism and duty but with no steady and permanent desire to perfect himself in the management of violence.” Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 15.