Dealing with Contemporary Moral Challenges by Re-discovering Historic Military Virtues: How can the Army indoctrinate the ethic of the Profession of Arms into personnel who come from an increasingly divergent moral system?

Chaplain (LTC) James Welch, USAR
DIMA, TRADOC Chaplain's Office
Fort Eustis, VA

ABSTRACT

For generations, military instructors have recognized that a new, military-oriented virtue is required to be indoctrinated into the life and conduct of those new to military service. Clearly, the central values and belief of the military virtue system has always been counter to many of the virtues held in popular society. Does this task become increasingly difficult as society's values continue to become more and more divergent from the values demanded by military service? When core military virtues are examined, we discover that they are relatively unchanged from the very beginning of warfare. While some highly debated issues, such as the role of women in combat and other results of societal evolution that relate to military service, have provided both new challenges and opportunities, the required virtues of the individual warrior in relationship to the success of the mission are very stable. Despite the changing societal influence in regards to virtues, values and ethics, military service still demands adherence to a completely divergent ethical system from the norm of society. In order to be effective, this military ethical system must be identified, codified and indoctrinated in the professional life of the American service member, and that challenge is not at all a new one.

Dealing with Contemporary Moral Challenges by Re-discovering Historic Military Virtues: How can the Army indoctrinate the ethic of the Profession of Arms into personnel who come from an increasingly divergent moral system?

Chaplain (LTC) James Welch, USAR

DIMA, TRADOC Chaplain's Office

Fort Eustis, VA

Visiting Assistant Professor of Management,

Eckerd College, St Petersburg, FL

BIOGRAPHY

James S. Welch, Jr. has served in non-profit management, military leadership and in higher

education over his career, currently serving as Visiting Assistant Professor of Management at

Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida. He has served in the US Army Reserve for 22 years,

currently holding the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He is presently assigned as an DIMA Chaplain

to the US Army Training and Doctrine Command at Fort Eustis, Virginia. Prior to this current

assignment he was most recently assigned as Instructor and Course Developer for the US Army

Chaplain Center and School, located at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, serving as Small Group

Leader for Officer Basic and Career courses. He teaches Principles of Management and

Leadership and Business Ethics at Eckerd College and Ethical Leadership/Decision Making with

the Lake Forest Graduate School of Management. He currently serves on the Board of Trustees

of the Presbyterian Foundation, an internationally focused $2 billion dollar charitable foundation.

He has served as a member of the Investment Committee and the Audit/Compliance Committee

of the Foundation with current service on the Asset Gathering Committee with responsibility for

establishment and monitoring of annual national fundraising targets. He holds memberships in

the Academy of Legal Studies of Business and the Academy of Management.

In his often quoted treatise, *On War*, Carl Von Clausewitz lays claim to the uniqueness of the warrior, and the importance of military virtue when he writes:

> War is a special business, and however general its relations may be, and even if all the male population of a country, capable of bearing arms, exercise this calling, still it always continues to be different and separate from the other pursuits which occupy the life of man.--To be imbued with a sense of the spirit and nature of this business, to make use of, to rouse, to assimilate into the system the powers which should be active in it, to penetrate completely into the nature of the business with the understanding, through exercise to gain confidence and expertness in it, to be completely given up to it, to pass out of the man into the part which it is assigned to us to play in War, that is the military virtue of an Army in the individual. (Clausewitz, On War)

While Clausewitz wrote his treatise at a time when only men went to war, the importance of a very unique and specialized military virtue system remains constant. For generations, military leaders and instructors have recognized that a military-oriented virtue must be indoctrinated into the life and conduct of those new to military service. Clearly, the central values and belief of the military virtue system has always been counter to many of the values and beliefs held in popular society. Does this task become increasingly difficult as society's moral standards continue to become more and more divergent from the values demanded by military service? Perhaps, it does become more challenging to introduce and indoctrinate a professional military ethic to new personnel raised under an entirely evolving moral code based on individual preferences and dominant self interest, however, the task remains essentially the same. Military personnel must be set apart for a very specialized service and, as such, they must be willing to learn a whole new way of thought and decision making. This new decision making process must be based on some common shared values of the military organization and will not work without that common core. This paper will address the importance, the challenges and the possibilities of teaching and integrating a common core set of virtues to personnel coming from a society which is often at odds with some of those key military virtues.

When these core military virtues are examined we discover that they are relatively unchanged from the very beginning of warfare. While some highly debated issues, such as the role of women in combat and other results of societal evolution that relate to military service, have provided both new challenges and opportunities, the required virtues of the individual warrior, in relationship to the success of the unit and the mission, are very stable. Despite the changing societal influence in regards to what is accepted moral behavior, military service still demands adherence to a completely divergent ethical system from the norm of society regardless of the particular era in which we live. In order to be effective, this military ethical system must be identified, codified and indoctrinated in the professional life of the American service member, and that challenge is not at all a new one.

A common perception regarding ethics in the modern military environment is that, since American society continues to evolve regarding ethics and morality, these societal changes make it difficult to provide consistency in ethical leadership training within the military culture. While these changes certainly place increasing pressure on the military to evolve as well and alter some traditional policies, such as women in combat roles, the overall importance of ethical decision making does not change. In fact, if you look at the some of the timeless values of wartime ethics, little has changed. We still study great military strategists such as Clausewitz, Sun Tzu, and Jomini, all of whom discussed the warrior ethos and the very unique nature of conflict that has its own rules of ethical decision making.

Perhaps at the core of this challenge is in the often synonymous use of the terms ethics and morals. Are ethics and morals the same? Is ethical leadership the same as moral leadership? Many scholars in the field of philosophy are quick to demonstrate the differences between ethics and morals. To the untrained eye, ethics and morals may seem to be the same thing, but in fact

they are quite distinctive. While both terms refer to the broad topic of ethics, it boils down to a difference between two variations, descriptive ethics versus normative ethics. When we speak of morals we are describing a certain form of ethics called descriptive ethics and when we speak of ethics (most especially applied ethics) we are describing normative ethics.

Descriptive ethics, or morals, refers to the study of human behavior as a consequence of beliefs about what a society determines to be right or wrong, "insofar as that behavior is useful or effective." (Lander) Therefore, the term moral, refers to the study of what is thought to be right and what is generally accepted by a group, society, or a culture. We can even describe this as "social mores." So essentially, when we discuss the change in morals we are describing what behavior or conduct is accepted in a society. This means that different societies will have different morals. They are the shared ideals of the group. A system of societal morals only attempt to determine what is "truth"? within a group or society. What do members of a society think is right? How does a society think one should conduct their lives? (Lander)

Morals, descriptive ethics, can change from group to group and can change over time. As we have seen in American society, "descriptive ethics" have evolved greatly over the years. Behavior that was not accepted fifty years ago is common place today. In fact, the term morality comes from a Latin word which can be translated as "proper behavior." Proper behavior today is quite a bit different than proper behavior of yesterday. That is not always a bad thing. While some lament the demise of societal standards, some societal standards have improved. Certainly, television watchers of the 1950's would be shocked, most in a negative way, to see adult subject matter content that is aired on television, even during prime time, in the new millennium. However, we have also moved on from duels and public hangings due to a change in accepted

behavior. Societal mores change, some for the worse and some for the better, but any such determination, whether the change is good or bad, is most often in the eye of the beholder.

When we move away from societal mores, or morality, and we begin to think of ethical decision making, we are referring to normative ethics. Normative ethics is "the study of issues which seek to discover how one *ought* to act (especially when dealing with one another), not how one thinks one should act." (Lander) Normative ethics describes conduct that is *actually* right or wrong, and conduct which may be independent of the values or mores held by any particular peoples or cultures. Normative ethics is the branch of philosophy which studies ethics in this very practical sense. (Lander) Normative ethics, can often, but not always, cut across societal and cultural lines.

Murder, by this I mean unjustifiable homicide, for example, while not only against the law around the world, is also frowned upon by most cultures as an unethical act. Only very radical groups, or fringe elements, see murder as an ethical decision. While people may disagree as to the ethics of war, self-defense, capital punishment, etc., there is little debate that unjustifiable murder is wrong. In sum, morals are those descriptive ethics that a society defines as appropriate behavior (what do members of a society think is right) while our traditional understanding of ethical decision making describes normative ethics (the way people ought to act in relationship to one another). As Isaac Asimov wrote, "Never let your sense of morals get in the way of doing what's right." (Asimov)

I currently teach business ethics for undergraduate and graduate business school students and when we tackle our business case studies we do not address issues like homosexuality, obscenity rules, or the role of women in the workplace, these are all descriptive ethics. As for those issues

we must go with what the society has determined acceptable through representative legislation. We have to rely on law, codified or case law, to set the parameters by which society views those debated social mores. However, in my business ethics class, instead of debating these social mores we examine case studies centered upon subjects like theft, fraud, lying, and other behaviors which can negatively affect business operations. When we discuss a case of corporate fraud, I find it very unlikely that any significant social group (other than perhaps a group of thieves) would suggest that fraud is an acceptable practice. My point is that while the Supreme Court may have removed the barriers to homosexual marriage reflecting that such behavior is now accepted practice within the society, I doubt very seriously that they will relax the rules on burglary, extortion, forgery, etc. Descriptive ethics can change quite rapidly over time and from society to society but the core truths of normative ethics, of how we are expected treat one another, do not change nearly as significantly.

When we discuss ethical decision making within the military environment, we should be more concerned with how leaders lead than with the descriptive ethics, or social mores, that society determines, such as homosexual marriage and the role of women in combat. Just as it is not the military's decision to go to war in the first place, military leaders do not dictate the social mores to the culture. So concerning the role of women in combat, doesn't it simply matter whether or not the soldier is up to the certain requirements of the task? If a male or female can perform the job does it really matter what gender the soldier is? The society, through legislation and/or the Supreme Court, decides if women can serve in combat roles, while military leaders simply determine if the soldier, male or female, is up to the certain task to which they are assigned.

Social mores may change indeed, but what about the core beliefs of the warrior ethos that guides, and has guided, military organizations for centuries? As Clausewitz suggested, military service "continues to be different and separate from the other pursuits." (Clausewitz) If military service is distinct from every other avenue of vocation, then it has always had its own particular ethos. In fact, the military ethos has never completely coincided with societal standards. The demands of virtues like selfless service have never really squared with what is expected in general society. While we enjoy stories of self sacrifice, they are always newsworthy because they are the exception in the civilian world. However, in the military, such a virtue cannot become the exception. Selfless service may be optional in general society, but it is a necessity in the military arena.

Simply put, it has always been recognized that military service requires an adherence to a higher standard than what is usually accepted in the public arena. In another example, while adultery is not exactly endorsed in general society, it is most often overlooked. Society understands that infidelity in marriage happens and as a result there is decreasing stigma placed upon those who engage in such behavior. While a Fortune 500 CEO may be embarrassed by such a revelation, they are not likely to lose their job, unless there were other extenuating circumstances such as sexual harassment.

In the military environment, however, it is a different situation. Military leaders are held to a higher standard due to the very sensitive nature of their position. In a position of authority in the military, dealing with personnel, national security, and potential life and death issues, adulterous behavior can threaten the mission and become a security risk. It is not for arbitrary reasons that adulterous behavior by military officers is met with harsh criticism and often with harsh punishment. Adulterous behavior does not fit in with the warrior ethos, even though it has

certainly occurred over history and still occurs within the leadership ranks. In 2011, a Lieutenant Colonel was charged with infidelity with his NCO's wife, an NCO that the Lieutenant Colonel tried to "oust from his position." (Gould) Sounds vaguely familiar to the David and Bathsheba incident in the Old Testament where King David sent Bathsheba's husband Uriah to the front, where he was killed in battle, so that he could have Bathsheba for himself. Certainly these incidents happen, but while society may gradually accept adulterous behavior among civilians, such conduct in the military will never square with the ethical requirements of military leadership.

The military ethic, the warrior ethos, represents a completely different set of values and provides a very unique method of ethical decision making. Over the years, the branches of the military have attempted to put this military ethic into a set system. Just recently, the Department of the Army published a new doctrinal publication on The Army Profession. In this publication, the Army Ethic is described as "the evolving set of laws, values and beliefs, deeply embedded within the core of the profession's culture and practiced by its members to motivate and guide the conduct of individual members bound together in common moral purpose." (ADRP 1, 1-9)

The Army, like the other military branches, regulates the behavior and effectiveness of Army professionals and units through this ethic. Much of this ethic is codified in the Uniform Code of Military Justice, through which regulations and policies set the minimum standard for behavior. However, the UCMJ, can certainly not address every possible ethical transgression. Simple compliance with laws and regulations rarely generate an understanding of why a prescribed behavior is right and good. Therefore, the UCMJ is just one facet of the military professional ethic. Ultimately, for Army personnel, the Army Ethic provides aspiration and inspiration for leaders to do the right thing. The Army Ethic provides this moral dimension, embedded in each

of the five essential characteristics of the Army Profession: Trust, Military Expertise, Honorable Service, Esprit De Corps, and Stewardship of the Profession. These five essential characteristics along with three Certification Criteria: Competence, Character and Commitment, provide the foundation for the Army Ethic. (ADRP 1, 1-9)

The Army Ethic is an integrated and coherent whole and, while it may be divided for instructional purposes, it applies to all that an Army professional is and does, everywhere, and at all times. As suggested previously, the Army Ethic is varied in its sources and its content. Parts of the Army Ethic originate from codified, legal documents carrying the force of law, such as the Constitution and the UCMJ. Institutionally, this codified part of our ethic establishes the purpose, mission, and duty of the Army (see ADP 1, *The Army*). Army professionals conduct their individual duties according to the legal part of Army ethic. The Army considers an individual's performance less than dutiful if it does not meet the minimum standard of the codified legal norms. The Uniform Code of Military Justice also lays out the penalties for Army professionals who neglect their duties.

However, the UCMJ is not the only source of ethics. The Army draws the other portion of its ethic from military traditions and the key virtues that become a necessity in building and maintaining a fighting force. The five essential characteristics of the Army Profession, described in ADRP 1, represent the latest effort to put important military virtues into a specific system. The selected military virtues do not really change, but we do tend to update our methods of describing and indoctrinating those virtues.   The Army weaves these moral foundations throughout its culture and subcultures within it. The Army believes these foundations have demonstrated effectiveness in previous conflicts and passes them on to succeeding generations through mentoring, customs, and traditions. Ultimately, even though the ever evolving change in

social mores creates challenges for managing military personnel in the modern situation, the requirements of ethical leadership in the military are constant.

So, in light of the difference between social mores and the Army Professional Ethic, the question remains: How can the Army indoctrinate the ethic of the Profession of Arms into personnel who come from an increasingly divergent moral system? There are four areas that must be addressed in order to make the indoctrination in the Army Professional Ethic more effective. To ensure the proper indoctrination of a military ethic in the US Army, we should make recruiting more selective, improve the diagnosis and treatment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, make certain that violators of UCMJ standards are punished in a timely manner, and require that the Army Professional Ethic standards are consistently communicated and enforced through the Army.

It is no secret that the Army had to relax entry standards to get the numbers required to engage in two simultaneous conflicts. Unfortunately, with this relaxation of entrance standards, the percentage of serious criminal incidents has risen as well. Consider the increase in violent sex crimes committed by soldiers over the 2006 to 2011 time period. Reported violent sex crimes increased by 90 percent over the five-year period from 2006 to 2011. This is on top of an increase in the 2001 to 2006 time period. (Slosson)

While the change in social mores should not really impact the key virtues of military service, such a change does impact the pool of future service members. Future service members have been exposed to a rapidly changing cultural environment. For example, young adults have been exposed to violent (and often times sexually violent) movies, television, video games, music, etc., over their impressionable existence. We should not be surprised that such exposure leads to an increase in sexual assault rates, in general society as well as in the military. As the Army

begins to draw down, the entry process should become more selective. If more money is invested in vetting future soldiers, those with violent or other undesirable proclivities can be weeded out of the selection process.

The second important consideration concerns the trauma of war and the impact that it has on otherwise good and effective soldiers. Today the Army is spending more time and money in developing programs to address PTSD and the reintegration into domestic life following deployment. However, Army front line service providers have to continue find new ways of seeking out those soldiers who need treatment. All too often, there are soldiers dealing with PTSD who simply fall through the cracks.

Consider the following story from The Gold Book, Generating Health and Disciplining the Force, 2012: "A 44-year-old SGT returned in March 2010 from his third combat deployment. Ten days later, he was arrested by civilian law enforcement after a physical altercation with his girlfriend. He was arrested a second time for physically abusing his girlfriend in November 2010. No disciplinary or administrative action was taken against the SGT for either incident. In December 2010, the SGT had difficulty coping with the death of his son who was killed in a gang-related incident, even denying to unit members that his son had died. In May 2011, he murdered his girlfriend, shooting her five times and then unsuccessfully attempted to kill himself by shooting himself in the head. He is now a paraplegic." (The Good Book, 2012) This situation was not without warning signs, three combat deployments and the loss of a son. A soldier needed help but fell through the cracks.

Thirdly, the Army should make certain that those who violate the Army Professional Ethic, and most assuredly those who have UCMJ issues, are efficiently disciplined and chaptered out of the service if the situation merits such action. Consider another story from The Gold Book: "A

23-year-old Soldier tested positive for illicit drugs on multiple occasions dating back to October 2005 when he tested positive for cocaine. On 29 March 2008 he tested positive for Ecstasy, self enrolled in the Army Substance Abuse Program (ASAP) and tested positive again for Ecstasy on 31 March 2008. He deployed in support of OIF from November 2008 to October 2009. In April 2010, he tested positive for Adderall. On 13 and 18 May 2010 he tested positive for amphetamines. On 28 June 2010, he again tested positive for Adderall. Although this Soldier was administered Field Grade Articles 15 for every incident with the exception of one (self-enrolled in ASAP), he continues to serve on active duty after a pattern of illicit drug use spanning five years. It is unknown whether or not administrative separation was initiated in accordance with AR 635-200." (The Gold Book, 2012) This type of situation weakens the Army's capability to indoctrinate a professional ethic within its ranks. Army leaders must tighten up on these separation procedures so that behavior that violates the Army Professional Ethic is not condoned.

Finally, the Army should ensure that Army Professional Ethic standards are consistently communicated and modeled throughout the Army. This means addressing even seemingly small issues that can be a threat to an ethical climate. When I served on the staff of Warrior Forge (or ROTC Advanced Camp, as it was then known) at Fort Lewis, in 1995, I was shocked to find pornographic material on sale at the camp satellite PX, a PX only accessible to cadets and cadre. This was the same summer that a sexual assault took place at the Fort Bragg ROTC Advanced Camp. While pornographic material is accepted in society, it does not have a place in terms of the Army professional ethic, especially in a new age where men and women serve alongside one another in combat situations. Certainly, as young adults have already had this exposure, and enter the military with a weak understanding of sexual boundaries, it makes no sense that the

Army would do anything to seemingly endorse such material. This is just one example of an often inconsistent approach to an indoctrination of the Army Professional Ethic.

In conclusion, for Army uniformed personnel "to be imbued with a sense of the spirit and nature of this business," as Clausewitz put it, requires the successful indoctrination of a new way of thinking and conduct. It is not easy, but it never has been. As we have discussed, military services requires adherence to an entirely different standard of conduct than what is accepted in general society. Any alteration in social mores does not alter the demand for Army leaders who make ethical decisions. The Army Professional Ethic stands apart from what a society accepts as normal and appropriate behavior. It requires more and its personnel must be held to that higher standard. To achieve this more effectively, I stand by those four steps mentioned earlier: we should make recruiting more selective, improve the diagnosis and treatment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, make certain that violators of UCMJ standards are chaptered out in a timely manner, and require that the Army Professional Ethic standards are consistently communicated and enforced through the Army. In this manner, the Army can be a positive example, over and above the norm, and create a distinctive ethical climate within the Profession of Arms.

References

ADP 6-22, Army Leadership. 10 September 2012

ADRP 1-0, The Army Profession. 31 August 2012

AR 165-1, Army Chaplain Corps Activities. 3 December 2009

Asimov, Isaac.   Retrieved from: http://quotes.liberty-tree.ca/quote/isaac_asimov_quote_16a5

Clausewitz, *On War*. Retrieved from:
http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/OnWar1873/TOC.htm

Lander University Center for Ethics. *Morals, Ethics, and Meta-ethics.* Retrieved from:
http://philosophy.lander.edu/ethics/types.html

Gould, Joe. *O-5 suspended while alleged affair investigated*. Retrieved from:
http://www.armytimes.com/article/20110710/NEWS/107100312/O-5-suspended-while-alleged-affair-investigated

Slosson, Mary. *Violent sex crimes by U.S. Army soldiers rise.* Thompson Reuters. Retrieved
from: http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/20/us-army-health-report-idUSTRE80J01C20120120

The Gold Book, Generating Health and Disciplining the Force, 2012. Retrieved from:
http://usarmy.vo.llnwd.net/e2/c/downloads/235822.pdf