Clashing Moral Civilizations: Why is Relativism a Threat to the Military?
Daniel M. Bell, Jr
General Hugh Shelton Chair in Ethics
C. G. S. C.

Over the course of many years discussing ethics and moral values with soldiers, a constant refrain of those conversations is, "What about relativism?" Taking many different forms, there is an abiding and deep concern expressed for the challenge that moral diversity generally and relativism in particular poses to any assertion of moral values and principles. Among many soldiers there exists a keen sensitivity to the fact that any moral commitment is subject to the acids of subjectivism and conventionalism: on what grounds can you assert that your moral commitments are more than individual preference or cultural construction?

Thus, in the midst of a presentation on just war, a soldier stops me to ask how we can adhere to the just war discipline when an adversary or ally does not? When working with officers who bear a particular responsibility for moral leadership, a frequently expressed worry is how to advocate moral values in the midst of a morally diverse culture. Even the work of articulating an ethics curriculum is marked by a struggle to identify a moral consensus that founds and sustains that curriculum.

In what follows, I consider the challenge of moral diversity to the moral warrior. In what ways does moral diversity and relativism pose a *particular* threat to soldiers? Then drawing on the work of the renowned philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, I suggest a way forward – a way forward that respects soldiers' vocation as soldiers and not as metaphysicians or philosophers (notwithstanding the ethics curriculum at CGSC). I conclude with suggestions for how MacIntyre's dialectic of tradition-dependent rationality addresses the several specific challenges that moral diversity puts to soldiering.

The Challenge of Relativism and Moral Diversity to Soldiering

Prior to taking up the challenges, two comments are in order. First, I have framed the question in terms of the challenge that moral diversity and relativism put to soldiering. However, it is important that we at least acknowledge one way in which relativism serves *not* as a challenge but as a *temptation* to soldiers. This is to say, at times the invocation of the specter of relativism comes across less as a sincere concern for doing the right thing in the midst of competing moral claims and more as a cynical excuse for dismissing moral constraints. Thus an officer invokes moral relativism to rationalize his abuse of enemy prisoners of war. Or a soldier argues that because not everyone acknowledges certain moral norms, his commitment to any given norm is qualified and conditional. It might even lurk behind the comment, "what happens down range stays down range," insofar as that comment suggests that one's moral standards are relative to one's location.

I call this the *cynical* invocation of relativism. It is relativism used as an excuse to avoid the high-price and hard work that accompanies moral commitment. While the following does not treat this cynical use, instead focusing on the sincere concern for moral conduct in the face of moral diversity, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge it as one possible dimension of the invocation of relativism.

Second, in popular discourse it is not uncommon for moral diversity and relativism to be used almost interchangeably. But they are not really interchangeable. The empirical reality of moral diversity is not synonymous with asserting the truth of relativism. Relativism is a philosophical position that purports to account for why there is moral diversity. One might say it is an interpretation of the reality of moral diversity. Thus, one can recognize that there is indeed moral diversity without affirming relativism. For instance, upon surveying the vast moral diversity around me, I might conclude that those whose moral vision diverges from mine are simply wrong.

Why does acknowledging the distinction matter? When I name the challenges, with one exception, it does not matter. But as we will see when we turn to possible solutions to the challenges, it matters very much.

What is the challenge of moral diversity and relativism to soldiering? Why is relativism a challenge to the moral warrior? In what follows I name ten challenges, divided into three clusters. The first cluster concerns the challenge that moral diversity and relativism pose to soldiers and soldiering at the intersection of civilian society with military culture. (The so-called "civilian - military divide.") There are four challenges here:

First, there is the challenge presented to forming soldiers out of civilians. U.S. culture celebrates freedom and liberty, a freedom and liberty that appears to be understood as a kind of license along the lines defined by the great utilitarian John Stuart Mill.[i] This is to say, we celebrate liberty, understood as the freedom to do pretty much whatever I want so long as that does not harm or interfere with the liberty of others. Such an understanding of liberty lends itself to a kind of moral relativism and so may foster a tension with the moral values and principles espoused by the military.[ii] Put bluntly, a relativistic culture presents a challenge to forming soldiers who do not merely comply with the military's moral vision but actually own it, internalize it, and are committed to it.

Second, and closely related to the first challenge, there is what I shall call the "professional challenge." In his well-known book on military ethics, Anthony Hartle argues that the military as a profession is "partially differentiated" from civilian culture.[iii] This differentiation is a source of some tension when it comes to moral standards insofar as the U.S. military is staunchly committed to civilian control. As a result of a deeply ingrained aversion to anything that smacks of the military seeing itself as being better than or collectively elevated above civilian society, some within the military find it difficult to claim and own moral standards that appear to be more rigorous than the civilian society it is committed to serving. The fear is that in so doing, the seeds of insurrection may be unwittingly sown. Said differently, the military's ingrained respect for and subservience to civilian society make it difficult for the military to differentiate itself from the moral laxity of a relativistic culture. (I will say more about the particular character of this challenge as a "professional" one shortly.)

Third, relativism and moral diversity challenge the military at the point of its interface with civilian society in terms of what I will call, borrowing the title of Andrew Bacevich's recent book, the "breach of trust."[iv] In that book, Bacevich argues that civilian society is breaking trust with the military to the extent that it fails to honor its commitment to the military and to soldiers. To the point of this essay, relativism challenges the military to the extent that the moral relativism of society aids and abets society in its breach of trust. In turn, this civilian breach of

trust cannot help but undermine military morale and stress the bonds of moral commitment.

Fourth, relativism presents a challenge to the military at its point of intersection with civilian society with regard to the military's ability to carry out its mission. Changing social mores can effect changes in the military itself that could hinder the military's ability to carry out its mission faithfully. For instance, as society's moral vision has changed with regard to issues such as race, sexuality (practice and orientation), gender, and recreational drug use, the military has been faced with the challenge of evaluating those changes and either accommodating or resisting them on the basis of how they impact the fundamental mission of the military.[v]

The second cluster of challenges that relativism presents to soldiering are internal to the military itself. Here I name three challenges.

The fifth challenge concerns what I shall call moral commitment. The noted just war thinker Michael Walzer calls war "the hardest place" and in such hard places, moral visions that are not owned, that do not go deeper than mere compliance, that are not internalized as part of one's identity, are not as likely to hold in the midst of the moral challenges and stresses of battle. What is at stake here is what we might call the strength of moral commitment. Relativism may undermine strong moral commitments; nurturing mere compliance precisely to the degree that relativism may foster the sense that moral commitments are voluntary and only hold so long as one chooses to recognize them. This is to say, relativism may work against the constancy needed in the hardest moral places by fostering the belief that moral commitments can be shed at any time, whenever the individual chooses. Thus, when the going gets tough, I may freely choose to abandon a moral commitment with the same ease with which I choose it in the first place.[vi]

The sixth challenge put to the military is rather simple and straightforward. Relativism within the ranks presents a significant challenge to the exercise of moral leadership within the military. As suggested in the introduction, soldiers struggle with how to exercise moral leadership and assert moral standards in a military that is drawn from and serves a relativistic culture. Recognizing the moral value of respect and the reality of diversity, including moral diversity, creates a dilemma: How can one recognize and respect moral diversity while at the same time asserting one particular moral standard? The default answer may be simply to follow orders but this answer is deficient insofar as it tends to encourage mere compliance, with the attendant problems mentioned in the previous point.

The seventh challenge concerns what I shall call, "justification for harm done." This is to say, given the tremendous hardships that war and combat impose upon others – both combatants and noncombatants, both friend and foe – soldiers may need a foundation that is more solid and substantial than relativism can provide in order to justify or make moral sense of the terrible disruptions, suffering and harm that war inevitably entails. Accidents of individual choice (e.g., subjectivism) or accidents of birth and place (e.g. cultural relativism) may not be able to provide the moral foundations sufficient to justify the unlimited liability of soldiers and the collateral damage suffered by civilians. Again, put more bluntly, the terrible harm of war may require more than relativism can provide if such harm is to make moral sense. We cannot be at war simply because we were born in different places and justice cannot simply be a matter of who is stronger and craftier. War craft may require a more robust moral foundation if it is not to destroy warrior and society alike.

The third and final cluster of challenges concern the difficulties relativism presents to engaging or working with outsiders. Again, I name three specific challenges.

The eighth challenge concerns working with allies. Relativism and moral diversity create a number of problems in the course of engaging others. When working with allies or coalition partners, how are we to deal with the fact that they do not share our moral commitments? Perhaps they have very different and more permissive standards with regard to the treatment of suspects and prisoners? Or, as the soldier put to me in the midst of a discussion of just war, perhaps they do not share our commitment to just war constraints? Respect and the cultural mantra of tolerance do not provide much operational guidance. And may, as I suggested earlier, function as a temptation to waver in one's moral commitments.

The ninth challenge concerns working with and in the midst of foreign populations. Deployed soldiers often find themselves operating in cultural environments that uphold very different moral standards than the West or the U.S. military. Whether it is a matter of drinking a beer, witnessing an honor killing or recognizing a couple of young boys at a checkpoint who are being delivered to be raped by a powerful elder, relativism again does not provide much helpful operational guidance and indeed can work against moral constancy.

The tenth challenge concerns confronting enemies. Relativism or moral diversity challenge moral commitments in the face of an adversary who does not does share one's commitments. Particularly when faced with constraints on action imposed by the just war tradition, it is not uncommon to hear the argument that we should not be bound by moral strictures to which the enemy does not adhere. The logic seems to be that when it comes to waging war, only restraints that are recognized by all parties are binding. No doubt this argument is sometimes advanced as a cynical ploy; but no doubt it is often raised as a genuine question – which standard should we follow? – in the face of conflicting standards in a situation where the stakes are so high.

Dealing with Relativism

Faced with these challenges, how do we begin to ponder a resolution? Let us consider first the matter of moral relativism – the interpretation of the empirical reality of moral diversity that asserts that such moral diversity is unavoidable and finally irresolvable.

The first possibility for dealing with moral relativism is simply to embrace it. Recognize that there is no solution, that relativism is true, and so conflict is endemic to life. In this situation, moral disagreement may devolve into a kind of social Darwinism and "survival of the fittest" or "might makes right."

Such a response might well resolve most of the aforementioned challenges. When faced with moral diversity, the one who is able to project the most political and/or military force prevails – at least so long as they are able to sustain that force. The one challenge such an approach may not be able to meet is the seventh, the challenge of justifying the harm, as previously articulated.

The second possibility for dealing with moral relativism is to argue in the hopes of showing it to be false by arriving at a moral consensus. This may take the form of rational debate. Indeed, Western modernity has been characterized by a strong belief in the power of reason to resolve moral differences. We might include here as well the appeal to natural law – the conviction that

there is an innate moral sense in humanity, usually discernable by means of the rational faculty of the mind.

This response suffers from at least two defects, with regard to soldiering. First, it has not proven particularly effective. Indeed, as we enter a postmodern and more globally connected era, the universal potential of Western reason is diminishing. Consider how the universal declaration of human rights is challenged by non-Western voices as something less than universal and how Western reason is increasingly exposed as a ruse of gendered, racial, and economic power.

But perhaps more immediately relevant is the fact that soldiers are first and foremost soldiers, not philosophers. When soldiers are deployed, they are not deployed to argue and debate. When facing an imminent honor killing, reciting Kant, Mill or Aristotle is not going to resolve the situation. Arguing philosophy and morals is the task of others. Soldiers are usually (and at best) sent into action when and where argument / diplomacy has failed.

Is there an alternative between arguing and fighting? In what follows I want to suggest that the contemporary philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre offers a path beyond this impasse by means of what we can call the dialectic of tradition-dependent practical rationality.[vii] Each of the terms in that label is important.

Modernity's argument with relativism is erected on the conviction that there are principles or truths that are obvious and undeniable by any right-thinking person and so independent of all social and cultural particularities. In short, modern reason assumes that individuals can escape or transcend their cultural particularity (indeed they must do so) and grasp universal truths of pure reason.

MacIntyre argues that truth is not the possession of individuals who escape their particularity via the ascent of pure reason. Rather, truth is socially embedded in moral communities and traditions. In other words, truth is discovered not by individuals but by communities and it is discovered not by escaping particularity but within particularity.

Furthermore, truth emerges as moral communities / traditions interact and show (or fail to show) by their way of life how they are better able to meet the challenges of living well. This is the dialectical and practical component of MacIntyre's vision: the truth is discovered in the practical work of human flourishing and it is discovered as communities interact and wrestle with those problems in different ways.[viii]

Thus, relativism is refuted not by individual appeals to abstract truths of pure reason (or power masked as reason) but by communities embodying the truth in the practical work of living in a compelling manner. In this regard, I am reminded of the story of German soldiers during WW II being instructed by relatives, "Be brave, join the infantry, and surrender to the first American you see."[ix] In a succinct form, this is an example of the way MacIntyre suggests relativism is defeated, not by a philosophical argument about pure reason but by the truth witnessed or practically embodied in lives in a manner that proves convincing to others.

Addressing the Challenges of Moral Diversity

At first glance, MacIntyre's vision may not appear to have moved us very far in dealing with relativism and moral diversity. It does not banish the challenge of relativism and it does not do away with moral conflict. And it is not self-evident that this vision offers a particular advantage to soldiers over the traditional model of rational argument.

What it does is provide a way to live in the midst of moral conflict that neither resigns itself to relativism, resorts to force, nor expects soldiers to be philosophers and diplomats. Yet it is not simply a way of living *with* moral conflict and diversity but rather it genuinely anticipates the emergence of truth in the very midst of the confluence of traditions and the interaction of moral communities. Indeed, it is a model that *requires* the interaction of diverse communities and traditions, for it is precisely in dialectic interaction that truth is sifted and distilled.

In this regard, I want to suggest that MacIntyre's vision bears a certain affinity to "social contract" theories of political community and morality. Recall that "social contract" theories, typically associated with the like of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, assert that human beings come together and form political communities on the basis of a contract or agreement that constitute rules for living together when and where individuals may not share a common conception of the good, of the end and purpose of life. Social contract theories hold that political communities are formed *not* on the basis of a shared understanding of the true and the good but on the basis of minimal rules that ensure we can get along in the *absence* of agreement on such first principles and fundamental truths.

How is this relevant to the challenge of moral diversity and the threat of relativism to soldiering? How does this illuminate the usefulness of MacIntyre's vision to addressing the challenges previously delineated?

Put simply, MacIntyre provides a model for working with others even when we do not agree, in the midst of moral diversity. Instead of approaching moral diversity as a problem that must be resolved by pure reason *before* we can work with or engage others, MacIntyre suggests that it is precisely by means of engaging with others in the practical tasks of living that the truth of a way of life is manifest. We might say that this is a vision that does not move *from* but *toward* first principles. MacIntyre describes this kind of dialectic movement toward first principles thus:

> If we cannot begin in a nonquestion-begging way from what we already believe, how can we begin at all? The Socratic answer is: by starting out from anyone's thesis, our own or anyone else's indifferently, provided that it is rich enough in content and formulated in such a way as to invite serious attempts at refutation. Every attempt at refutation from any point of view should be carried through as far as and as systematically as the participants in the enquiry are able. That thesis which most successfully withstands all attempts to refute it – characteristically, of course, such a thesis will have had to be modified and reformulated in the course of its encounters with a variety of objections – is that which claims our rational allegiance.[x]

Of course, none of us are moral blank slates; we all bring a moral vision and a conception of what is true and right to every interaction with others. MacIntyre's vision recognizes this. Whereas modern reason rejects tradition and expects that the individual will bracket out all traces of particularity in favor of a pure reason, MacIntyre recognizes tradition and particularity. More than this, he affirms or endorses that the truth is always already socially embedded. Which

means we need not leave behind our convictions when engaging others who do not share our understanding of what is true and right. Rather, we bring our convictions with us and in the course of interacting with others in the practical tasks of living, those convictions are tested and sifted and in the process we grow deeper in our understanding of the truth, which may affirm, nuance or change our previous convictions.

Practically speaking, what might this dialectic of tradition-dependent practical rationality look like? Let us consider the challenges previously identified.

Regarding the challenge of forming soldiers out of civilians drawn from a relativistic culture (#1). That civilian culture tends toward relativism does not mean that the military is or need accommodate such relativism. Indeed, on MacIntyre's terms, the military is not a collection of individuals but is itself a moral community, with particular moral standards and commitments. These are embodied in various creeds, oaths, values, the UCMJ, LOAC, just war and so forth and interpreted in various doctrinal manuals. Therefore when persons join the military, they are becoming members of a moral tradition and consenting to the moral vision that animates that community.

Granted, in a manner not unlike a social contract theory, joining the military does not require one affirm a particular *origin* or metaphysical source of that moral vision (be it religion, reason, or relativism) but one is required to embrace that moral vision. In a sense, the military is a moral community that recognizes one can arrive at the particular moral commitments it embodies from a variety of paths. Some soldiers come to it from a religious background, some from a familial background, some from independent reflection, and so forth.

Recognizing the military as a moral community also addresses the challenges of moral commitment (#5), moral leadership (#6), and the justification of harm done (#7). Moral leadership in the military starts from the moral foundations articulated in the creeds, codes and so forth. The challenge of such leadership is, of course, to assist soldiers in moving from mere compliance – following the moral rules out of fear or merely for the sake of career advancement – to commitment, to the internalization and ownership of that moral vision such that it becomes part of their identity. Here MacIntyre's vision is particularly helpful as it reminds us that moral leadership is practical. It is not primarily a matter of classrooms and lectures that argue for the moral vision; rather, the persuasive power of a moral vision resides in its social embodiment; that is, in how it is lived out. In contemporary parlance, moral suasion is a matter not of authority but authenticity. Moral leadership is not merely a matter of teaching but of living, of exemplifying, of embodiment, of identity, of who one is.

With regard to the need for a foundation that can justify the harm done in war, MacIntyre's vision suggests that the absence of universal recognition of the truth does not diminish the moral force of the truth. Moreover, moral diversity is not a threat to truth but precisely the necessary opportunity for the truth to be sifted and sharpened. Thus moral warriors and a just war people are willing to risk much and suffer much, even when the truth is disputed, precisely as testimony to the truth of the good and right that they pursue.

The professional challenge presented by relativism takes the form of reluctance by some within the military to make strong moral claims for fear of separating and in particular elevating soldiers above civilian society. MacIntyre's account of moral traditions and communities[xi]

involves recognizing that some are set apart, not as morally better, but for particular tasks that require a higher degree of skill in the exercise of certain virtues and likewise stricter accountability for abiding by the moral standards of the community. The military and its martial virtues are one such example. But the military, with its particular virtues, is not the only community so set a part. In this regard, when soldiers reflect on their partial differentiation from society, they would do well not to compare the best of soldering to the worst of civilian culture but compare the virtues of soldiering to the virtues embodied in other communities and professions within civilian society. Not only will they find that the moral warrior is not morally better than her civilian counterparts, but she will find as well that others are likewise required to exercise a high degree of virtue and are held accountable for that.

Having argued that there is nothing in principle problematic with the military espousing rigorous moral standards even in the midst of a less rigorous civilian culture, I want to acknowledge that this does not entirely relieve the tension that soldiers may feel with regard to their differentiation from the general public.

In a democracy, moral values are always open to negotiation and (re)interpretation regarding what those values are and what they mean. As MacIntyre argues, to be a moral agent is to be part of a moral community and every moral community is unstable in the sense of continually open to the sifting and sharpening of its understanding of truth in the midst of interaction with others.

Which means that soldiers, like every profession committed to serving the public, must constantly evaluate how the moral commitments of the profession interface with the moral vision (or lack thereof) of the public that authorizes the profession.

To explain this a bit further, I will borrow a concept from various religious traditions. Many religious traditions draw a distinction between what might be called "core" and "secondary" convictions. Core convictions are those that define a moral community and establish its identity and as such involve universal consent. Secondary convictions are those that admit of some flexibility, that do not require universal consent.

With regard to both the first and second challenge that relativism puts to the military – dealing with formation and professional differentiation– many if not most soldiers at least implicitly operate with a similar distinction. When you join and as you serve, you evaluate how your moral vision intersects with the moral vision of the military. While you may not agree morally with everything about the military, so long as the core values overlap you can serve. You constantly evaluate and negotiate changes, determining if the points of friction are ones that you can tolerate (i.e, they are secondary) or if they touch on the core of your moral identity and so you cannot live with them. Likewise, even as civilian society may not embody all the moral values that the military exalts, so long as the divergence does not touch core moral commitments, there is no crisis.

Problems arise when differentiation becomes division, when what distinguishes the military and civilian society is not a matter of professional specialization but reaches the status of a genuine difference, a difference that threatens the commitments civilian society makes to its soldiers (challenge #4, breach of trust) or that hinders the faithful fulfillment of the military mission (challenge #5).

Incidentally but not inconsequentially, this negotiation or evaluation goes both ways. Thus when it appears to civilian society that the military has strayed from certain moral commitments and is not capable of correcting itself, then civilian society may step in and curtail the autonomy that professions are generally accorded (e.g. the current concern over the military's ability to address sexual assault).

And all of this corresponds with MacIntyre's vision to the extent that crucial to the discovery and spread of the truth is the ongoing dialectical investigation of the truth in the practical interaction of moral traditions and communities. We may wish for a world in which the truth was clear and self-evident to all right-thinking individuals, but such is not the world in which we live. In this world, truth is discerned and disclosed in the grist of life as different moral traditions rub up against one another.

Having made our way this far, it should not be too difficult to see how this dialectic of tradition-dependent practical rationality addresses the challenges occasioned by interacting with outsiders, be they allies, foreign populations or enemies (challenges # 8-10).

One need not wait on a moral agreement or consensus to embody moral commitments. It is precisely in the face of moral diversity and disagreement that the truth has the opportunity to emerge. Indeed, it is by embodying our moral commitments that we are in a sense making the practical argument for our moral vision. Few soldiers will be a position to even attempt to argue others out of their moral position. But every soldier is in a position to make the practical argument for their moral vision that is their lived practice. This is one of the reasons that moral warriors will abide by the just war tradition even when the enemy does not. Because moral warriors are not just tools for war-fighting; they are representatives of a moral vision. Therefore the way they fight must embody that moral vision. As MacIntyre suggests, it is precisely in the practical embodiment that the moral arguments gain force.

Of course, as the military interacts with allies and foreign populations, as a moral community, it will have to continue to assess that interaction in terms of what it deems are its core and secondary commitments. Thus will the military have to decide when and where it can defer to or accommodate the differing moral standards of allies and host populations and when and where it cannot. The military will have to identify its core moral commitments (like, perhaps the Army values) that admit of no exceptions and secondary moral commitments (like, perhaps, modesty, abstinence, and so forth) where it can be more accommodating. (We should not rule out that sometimes accommodating may entail yielding to a higher moral standard.) Likewise, even as such determinations may be made institutionally, individual soldiers will continuously make similar judgments regarding how their personal moral vision meshes with the vision of the profession and practice of arms.[xii]

Conclusion

Relativism and moral diversity frequently are understood by soldiers to represent a significant challenge to moral commitment, moral leadership and service. Facing the challenge requires recognizing that the military is itself a moral community whose parameters are established in its foundational documents, creeds, oaths etc.

The challenges of relativism and moral diversity are further reduced to manageable size when,

following the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, one relinquishes the modern dream of self-evident moral truths available to individuals equipped with pure reason and instead understands moral truth as something that emerges in the dialectical clash of moral communities.

So understood, moral diversity and the clash of moral communities become neither a problem nor grounds for resigning to relativism but an opportunity to embody the truth, to prove and hone it in the midst of the practical demands of life while interacting with others.

---

[i] John Stuart Mill, in his essay "On Liberty," offers the quintessential modern definition of freedom when he writes: "The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it." See John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism, On Liberty Considerations on Representative Government* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1972), 81.

[ii] Andrew Bacevich offers a provocative discussion of this understanding of freedom in term of self-indulgence and "profligacy." See Andrew Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (NY: Henry Holt and Co., 2008).

[iii] Anthony Hartle, *Moral Issues in Military Decision Making*. 2d (Lawrence, Ks: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 148ff.

[iv] Andrew Bacevich, *Breach of Trust: How Americans Failed Their Soldiers and Their Country* (NY: Metropolitan Books, 2013).

[v] I am implying no particular opinion with regard to the specific issues.

[vi] Note that this critique carries the most weight against subjectivism, because subjectivism is voluntarist, anchoring morality most clearly in the fickleness of the human will. Cultural relativism, however, is not immune from the critique to the extent that it too is voluntarist. Some, such as the philosopher Louis Pojman, insist cultural relativism is voluntarist and so must collapse into subjectivism. While I am not convinced that cultural relativism is necessarily voluntarist, it is certainly susceptible to being such.

[vii] See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, In: Notre Dame University Press, 1988). Especially chapter 18. See also Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1990).

[viii] Two clarifications bear noting. First, there is no guarantee that in the clash of moral traditions, the emergence of the truth will be immediately clear and evident to all or that the defeated tradition will acknowledge defeat (MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*365-6). Second, MacIntryre differentiates his vision from Hegel's by rejecting any notion that the mind under its own power could achieve Absolute Knowledge. According to MacIntyre, growth in knowledge can never be ruled out. See *Whose Justice,* 360-1.

[ix] David Grossman, *On Killing* (NY: Back Bay Books, 1995), 205.

[x] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 71. Descartes, who in his *Discourse on Method* attempted to begin philosophy from a set of principles that cannot be doubted, is the paradigmatic modern thinker of first principles. Note that in arguing this, MacIntrye is not denying that traditions may treat certain truths as first principles. He is arguing only that such truths are not self-sufficient and self-justifying; rather, they must be proven and honed in the process of dialectical questioning. See p. 360.

[xi] For a full account of this, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* 2d. (Notre Dame, In: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984)

[xii] I put this in terms of "vision and practice" because soldiers not only weigh and compare the ideal but also the actual practice. It may be worth noting that for individual soldiers, when the dissonance between their personal moral vision and the vision and/or practice of the profession reaches a breaking point, they will face the decision to remove themselves from the situation, risk moral injury, or engage in dissent and work for reform.