1st Lt. Patrick Higgins (*foreground*) of 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment surveys a village as Spc. Aaron Trapley and Sgt. Gary Fordyce provide sniper overwatch and Sgt. Nicholas Gauthier provides security during a foot patrol 23 February 2009 near Forward Operating Base Mizan, Afghanistan. To deal with the extreme stress and moral ambiguity of such situations, the authors assert that high standards and methods for ethical decision making need to be inculcated in troops and their leaders through intensive education. (Photo by Sgt. Christopher S. Barnhart, U.S. Army)

# The Military Moral Education Program
## Checking Our Ethical Azimuth

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Horrific war crimes, the sort portrayed in the film *The Kill Team* and the book *Black Hearts: One Platoon's Descent into Madness in Iraq's Triangle of Death*, and major transgressions by senior leaders that make for embarrassing headlines typically dominate the Army's discourse on moral education.[1] While no one argues that those responsible were somehow unaware of their actions being wrong, such events commonly elicit immediate demands for further instruction and improvements in the ethical reasoning of all soldiers. In its haste to respond, the Army repeatedly deploys its intellectual capacity toward solving the wrong problem.

Failure to identify the root of a complex problem can sabotage even the best intentions. Imagine for a moment a purpose-driven soldier motivated to improve his fitness level. Each morning, he inspires his fellow soldiers by giving 100 percent during physical training. Yet, he shows little improvement. Only after an honest counseling session with his squad leader does the soldier confess that he rewards himself with eight hundred calories worth of coffees, free donuts, and breakfast assortments after each session on the way to conduct hygiene. Immediately, the squad leader recognizes the problem: the soldier is attending to a multi-faceted end (general health) along only one relevant line of effort. Similarly, the Army is unaware of its own blind spot in character development.

Recent military initiatives—such as the addition of an ethics block for professional military education and the Army's Ready and Resilient Campaign—have led to a more comprehensive curriculum in ethical theory that seeks to improve soldiers' moral reasoning skills. However, the Army must simultaneously improve its soldiers' moral will—that is, their moral motivations. The proper ends of the Army ethics program include moral action rather than *merely* moral knowledge.[2] These are two deliberate, but not necessarily discrete, ends. One might gain moral knowledge without interest in pursuing moral action. In contrast, one cannot act morally without the prerequisite knowledge (ethical reasoning) that allows him or her to discern right action. The Army must characterize its ethical training as moral education and implement systematic methods of reinforcement so that the profession interprets its ethic as a standard that each member aspires to *be* rather than simply *do*.

The contemporary environment is complicated and growing ever more complex. While the Cold War-era military prioritized efficiency and effectiveness, the modern military emphasizes flexibility and adaptability. Training attends to the former; training prepares soldiers and leaders to succeed in the next *known* mission. Education attends to the latter; education prepares soldiers and leaders to succeed in the next *unknown* mission. While training prioritizes highly specialized, repeatable expertise (battle drills, for example), education prioritizes "big-picture" thought that understands the interoperability of efforts—their necessary causes and likely effects on mission accomplishment.

Moral knowledge requires education initiatives rather than further training initiatives.

Similarly, the Army might seek to train soldiers toward the second end suggested above: moral motivations. Training may habituate good activities by virtue of an organized system of rewards and reprimands. That model might achieve more immediate compliance, but it is unlikely to gain enduring commitment. Formerly, in a more centralized formation, that course of action would prove acceptable, feasible, and suitable. However, contemporary low-intensity environments impose upon the military a need for far greater autonomy throughout the force—from the combatant commander to the fire-team leader. Junior leaders find themselves responsible for large swaths of battle space, armed with incredible assets, and able to make major strategic impacts. Rewards and reprimands often require immediacy and deliberate oversight to be effective; operational conditions are not conducive for such a method of reinforcement. This is to say that a punitive system does not work as well in the fight our Army faces today.[3]

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## Foundations: Moral Education Matters

Michael Walzer, in his seminal work *Just and Unjust Wars,* best captures the essence of what it means to be a good soldier when he suggests that "soldiers must be 'men of spirit,' like Plato's guardians. … It is almost certainly true that they fight best when they are most disciplined, when they are most in control of themselves and committed to the restraints appropriate to their trade."[4] According to Walzer, well-disciplined soldiers do not just act morally or fight justly.[5] They *are* moral people who consistently align their actions with objective moral truths—those that the Army explicitly codifies in its professional ethic (normative rules, regulations, values, and creeds). Foremost in this professional ethic is the claim that its people are stewards of the profession who have an "ethical workspace," or nonphysical realm, that they maintain at all times to foster trust.[6] That is, the Army's professional ethic maintains the ideal that Army professionals are ethical beings with stable moral dispositions. Further, they do not set aside ethical obligations and duties during off hours—weekends, leaves, or when they retire.

In requiring that military professionals *be* stewards, the Army accepts the moral principles of virtue ethics in some important ways. We turn to Aristotle, the most well-known virtue ethicist, to provide a theoretical framework that can guide a clearer approach to moral education. For him, the state of *being* moral is more important than acting justly and morally; that is to say that a person's habitually moral actions derive from his or her character.[7] Similar to Aristotle's perspective, we look at ethics as an integral part of how a person should be throughout an entire lifetime. We want soldiers whose actions originate from a stable character that conforms to the Army's professional ethic. When people's interests, values, and passions match with their organizational beliefs, it is more likely that they will be committed to the profession.

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* explains how people could lead good lives and act rightly from deeply rooted motivations. Aristotle's thesis centers on the question of what is a good life—the Greek term for good life, or human flourishing, is *eudaimonia*. To morally self-actualize, Aristotle proposes a "functionalist" theory of the human good; he claims that just as the goodness of a flute player or sculptor resides in his proper function/purpose (*ergon*), so "the good of man" resides in "whatever is his proper function."[8] Moreover, he stipulates that "the proper function of man … consists in an activity of the soul in conformity with a rational principle … [and that] the good of man is an activity of the soul in conformity with excellence or virtue."[9] Here, Aristotle means that human beings distinguish themselves from other living organisms, because we have a rational capacity that allows us to be people who can achieve excellence, or flourish, not by simply acting but by *being* virtuous. For instance, for soldiers to be excellent, they ought to be people whose actions are consistent over time, and their actions ought to originate from right motivations.

Their virtues should conform to the Principle of the Golden Mean, which says that good actions are between two extreme vices (e.g., the virtue of courage is the mean between cowardice and recklessness). By being a virtuous person, who acts between the mean of two vices, one fosters stability in his or her organization and provides coherence for that person's identity and actions. Thus, to have a good life (to be *eudaimon*) is to live a life in which one engages in excellent activities that utilize abilities unique to human beings. A good life is a life of excellent activity. A morally virtuous person has values that are so firmly instilled in that individual that they are truly part of that person; these values, in essence, are inseparable from the person and guide his or her actions in life.[10]

In regards to practically applying Aristotle's position, we begin by discussing the military's unique group dynamics and highlighting potential benefits in regards to character development. We have made the following two assumptions: first, a better measure of character is one along a spectrum that traverses from vicious to virtuous (in accordance with the Aristotelian Principle of the *Golden Mean*) rather than assuming its uncompromising presence or absence; and second, formal and informal mentorship better motivates ascent along that spectrum than less personal methods commonly employed by more conventional training (to include those that exist within the Army's Ready and Resilient Campaign). Informed by an Aristotelian model, these two assumptions will help us respond to four bad arguments or practices that we often see in the military when it attempts to yield a successful moral education program.

**First Bad Argument: "You are a moral person until you prove otherwise."** In order to explicate our

concept of measuring character along a spectrum, we first depict that method within a more quantifiable domain, physical fitness. The military has clearly outlined physical fitness standards of excellence and failure. There is no confusion over how the profession designates, scores, and records those standards. However, the Army anticipates that its largest population of service members will score somewhere well between what they consider an excellent or failing score. For instance, it would be absurd to designate a

> The interpretation that everyone's character is exceptional and without any room for improvement is, again, absurd ...

failing score just below one that represents excellence. However, that same absurdity persists in our understanding of character development; the institution assumes every service member has exceptional character, until he or she does not. For years, the officer evaluation report allowed only for a single check to describe a leader's embodiment of the Army values: commitment to duty, respect, selfless-service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. Marking "yes" indicated the officer was fit for service, while "no" condemned him or her as absent decent character; with few exceptions, the latter rarely occurred.

While different in its form, the revised officer evaluation report instituted in 2014 maintains a similar dichotomy: either one is a moral exemplar or a deviant. Raters now draft descriptive prose in the block devoted to character. However, their comments identify most subordinates as "operating with impeccable integrity and ethic" (or something comparably laudatory). Any comment other than one that speaks to a rated officer's pristine character would greatly damage his or her career. The interpretation that everyone's character is exceptional and without any room for improvement is, again, absurd; not only does it make no intuitive sense, leaders clearly do not employ such a stark distinction in any other category on the evaluation. We must admit that most members of our profession operate in that aforementioned third category that is not necessarily void of high moral character, but could certainly stand

to further mature as they might in any other capacity within which they are rated.

**Second Bad Argument: "Punishment makes good soldiers out of common men."** There is value in returning to the physical fitness domain again. As previously assumed, the majority of military members remain well within the spectrum between exemplar and failure. Admitting the benefits of the conventional "carrot and the stick approach" for those soldiers on the cusp of either designation, one must concede that most

do not fear "the stick" of failure, nor are they inspired by the "carrot" to excel, as they likely see it as impossible for them. For the majority, those incentives offer very little to motivate improvement. For them, their relative performance in respect to their performing peer group offers better motivation. In that regard, the military offers a powerful advantage discernible in its unique group dynamics and subculture.

The military has carefully addressed instances of hazing; it must continue to root out inappropriate behaviors of that sort. However, it stands to continue benefitting from appropriately employed peer pressure. Its potential motivation is the predictable result of a phenomenon referred to as Social Identity Theory. Proposed by Henri Tajfel, a former professor at the University of Oxford and a founding member of the European Association of Experimental Social Psychology, the theory suggests that people base their sense of who they are largely on their group memberships.[11] His hypothesis is that group membership indoctrinates its members in a way that emphasizes the negative aspects of an out group in order to enhance their own self-image. In pursuing his theory further, some argue they have exposed the psychological nature of prejudice by better understanding Tajfel's principles of basic cognition involved in the group-formation process.[12]

First, one categorizes people into a group according to certain common attributes that he or she admires. Second, one assimilates or socially identifies him- or herself with that group by adopting its identity as his

or her own by establishing an emotional bond with group members. Third, one coheres, or socially compares, him- or herself and his or her group with others through a lens that is predisposed to recognize one's own advantages and an outsider's disadvantages.[13] That is all to say that soldiers likely similarly self-actualize out of desire for inclusion in a peer group they value.

We can apply this discussion of the in-group versus the out-group dynamic to physical fitness. The average soldier is motivated to improve him- or herself in order to remain in the fold. Absent clearly identifiable goals, such as those available to the soldiers on the margins of excellence or failure, those around a soldier motivate and compel that soldier to improve. Sadly, no similar peer pressure exists in the domain of character development. A soldier admires the moral exemplar, and avoids association with the pariah; however, most are generally content and uninspired to grow (as identified above, they may not even understand growth as an option as they interpret themselves as already endowed with "impeccable" status). The Army must impose valuable pressure within the ranks that encourages the already present benefits of group dynamics to perform how it does elsewhere. Educational mentorship, rather than more training, will provide that valuable pressure.

one is valued as a mentor. Why is that? While mentorship requires sincere commitment by both parties, it also requires certain attributes, skills, and characteristics such as humility, sympathy, competence, and relevant experience.[15] If it is so valuable and it requires so much to be successful, why pretend everyone can do it?

It is here that we propose a major shift in the professional military education model: a deliberate emphasis on one-on-one mentorship. When a rater comments on a subordinate's potential for future assignments, one of the most coveted comments should be in a newly created *professional military education mentor* category. While the specifics of such a role would require far more discussion than is within the scope of this article, identifying a subordinate with the promising attributes of a mentor would suggest to the board superior merit in those attributes the Army values most—clearly identifying him or her as a steward of the profession. Further, such identification would impose an obligation to uphold and spread that moral value among the ranks. This identification creates a more accurate understanding of the spectrum of character in the force. Those leaders would serve as moral exemplars. The majority would now populate some newly created middle ground that more accurately reflects reality. With the landscape re-

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**Third Bad Argument: "Everyone is a moral exemplar and, thus, everyone can be a mentor."** Thomas Ricks, a sincere critic of military leadership, earmarks a fascinating dynamic for further discussion in his controversial book, *The Generals*. He calls attention to the inconsistency present in military leadership's unwillingness to fire senior leaders.[14] While professing that generalship is incredibly difficult and requires a unique set of skills and characteristics, the military's reluctance to fire general officers tacitly endorses the notion that everyone promoted to that rank has those rare skills and characteristics. Ricks' suggestion bears import here as well. By virtue of remaining in the military long enough,

drawn, we might consider now the advantages afforded to the military by this new population of mentors in regards to moral education and motivation.

In its recent emphasis on moral education, the Army has taken a necessary (but we argue insufficient) step by requiring moral education as an element of soldiers' annual training, resiliency programs, and professional military education.[16] Following its flawed premise that everyone can be a mentor, however, the Army places the moral education and training of its soldiers in the hands of retired or seasoned Army officers, chaplains, and military lawyers. In the Army's eyes, those moral experts set the course for the profession.

The Army needs to recheck the azimuth on this course, because it does not provide enough resources to the preparation of those who are responsible for the moral education of our soldiers. Some have little education in ethics as an academic discipline and some have no experience as educators. The Army, as a learning institution, must invest in its intellectual development and bring the right educators into the classroom in order to facilitate proper mentorship and learning. Specifically, it should open its faculty to civilian moral philosophers and ethicists (real academics) in order to enrich the classroom, stop privileging tactical experience over ethical understanding, and stop relegating moral discourse only to the realm of religious experts. We do a harm to our soldiers when we fail to recognize that there can be a distinction between the morality of the profession and the morality of a religious discipline. The best person to talk about morality may not be the chaplain in the formation.

**Fourth Bad Argument: "Soldiers and junior officers are the only proper audience."** Influential political theorist John Rawls offers insight into the dynamic process of moral development in his seminal work, *A Theory of Justice*. Properly interpreted, moral psychological development is a persistent process that occurs throughout one's life among three interdependent stages.[17] With disregard for rank, all service members reside in one of the three stages he articulates; it is our contention that proper moral education will motivate more members toward the third, and most desirable, stage. We suggest that each member of the profession ought to pay consistent attention to his or her moral development. The Army ought to inform its efforts with that premise.

The first stage of moral psychological development strives to implant an objective standard in concordance with a proper authority. Its resultant effort may manifest itself in, "prized virtues [of] obedience, humility, and fidelity to authoritative persons."[18] Without proper moral development at this stage, the second state of evolution, "morality of association," becomes potentially as dangerous as it does beneficial. The second stage allows moral momentum to build by associations that one develops among peers; the second stage, simply understood, amounts to rightly oriented peer pressure. The third stage of moral development, "morality of principles," pursues fuller maturation; the fully matured person acts out of an internal sense of pride that emanates from membership in a decent, principled society. As Rawls articulates, "by acting upon [these principles] men express their nature as free and equal rational beings. Since doing this belongs to their good, the sense of justice aims at their well-being even more directly."[19]

This process is dynamic; at any time, a member participant may experience a set of circumstances that forces them to devolve. This may result from a loss of respect for authority due to perceived impropriety, betrayal by associates, or from the perception that the existent principles that one reveres are no longer serving his or her better interests. The structure must be constantly reinforced and strengthened. A second reference to the structure as dynamic is the way in which its fulfillment of each stage intrinsically provides the necessary foundation and motivation to enter into the next; it is a self-perpetuating process.[20]

## Recommendation: Checking the Ethical Azimuth

In gathering the science regarding learning, Drs. Henry Roediger and Mark McDaniel collaborate with Peter Brown to describe a number of successful learning techniques in *Make It Stick*. The authors suggest a number of potentially beneficial teaching techniques that are naturally present in our proposed form of mentorship. The technique we will focus on in our closing remarks is one they refer to as *generative learning*, "the process of trying to solve a problem without the benefit of having been taught how."[21]

What most consider merely "interference" in the process of learning actually offers a critical opportunity for greater retention and greater internalization. One may understand the operative premise in our argument by considering the following example: "when letters are omitted from words in a text, requiring the reader to supply them, reading is slowed, and retention improves."[22] By this exercise, the instructor forces the reader to work harder in order to graft the text onto meanings and heuristics already in his or her memory. That process activates deeper recognition of the relevance of the new information to information already stored and internalized. We suggest that this same sort of thing might occur in a personal one-on-one interaction between mentors and their mentored. The anecdotes proposed will require the learner to construct

courses of action and assess their likelihood of success, and will provide the learner with an opportunity to receive timely feedback from his or her mentor without lasting consequence. That iterative process of back and forth "filling in the blanks" will certainly result in mutual benefit for both parties.

soldiers, giving positive feedback on performance, and using disappointment as a motivational technique."[24] Given this data, it is here that we directly apply pressure along the dimension of moral motivations. Mentors not only instruct the facts and rules of ethics, but they also hold the subordinates accountable to

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Effective sessions would result in learning long after the session concludes by way of encouraged reflection. Reflection includes several cognitive activities: "retrieval (recalling recently learned knowledge to mind), elaboration (for example, connecting new knowledge to what one already knows), and generation (for example, rephrasing key ideas in one's own words or visualizing and mentally rehearsing what one might do differently the next time)."[23] We propose that the sort of model we are suggesting makes moral education a persistent process that survives among, not in competition with, the many training requirements with which units already contend.

Currently, ethics training occurs discretely. Predominantly, the Army instructs ethics within professional military education programs and requires small-unit leaders to iterate the major points annually. At both times, the Army is guilty of placing ethics instruction among a list of competing demands and poorly emphasizing its priority. The proposed mentor program demands an open dialogue that occurs as, or when, necessary. While anticipating the necessity that units outline some standards in order to ensure some commonly shared experience, those standards must remain limited to meet the intended spirit of the initiative.

The soldier is more likely to value the topic of ethics and moral instruction if it is taught by an exemplar than if it is modularized and mass-produced in the way it is currently. According to Chaplain Kenneth Williams, in his study of Initial Entry Training, "Based on the qualitative data, leaders played the key role in influencing soldiers' moral and character development. Effective motivation by leaders included encouragement and inspiration, spending extra time with

them as a moral agent. That personal dimension serves as an intermediate step toward inculcating the notion that the profession (not merely an individual professional) holds one to account; initially represented by an individual, ultimately he or she is representative of an ideal worthy of one's conformity.

Dialectic is the only way to instruct the topics covered in ethics and moral education. Mentors must inspire subordinates to dig far deeper and reconcile their individual world views with their professional ethic—all while solving real-world problems. This sort of pursuit remains only superficial when conducted in mass; it allows far too many to remain on the sidelines of those critical discussions necessary to develop and mature one's character. This one-on-one proposal demands that sort of valuable interaction.

Being virtuous and establishing caring relationships of mentorship matter in moral education, because the types of people we are and the relationships we form are fundamental to our happiness. Most people want to align their personal and professional values; they seek to maintain their personhood in the military so they can recognize themselves in a mirror before, during, and after service. Similarly, people want to know that the organization (namely, the people within it and their leaders) care about them. This concept of care is significant, because soldiers want to be a part of a trusting profession. As Army Doctrine Publication 1, *The Army*, stipulates, "Trust is the core intangible needed by the Army inside and outside the profession … [because] the Nation depends upon trust."[25] By emphasizing the importance of moral mentorship, we can better ensure that the byproduct of the organization is trust.

Members feel as if they are part of a trusting organization that cares for and enables them to maintain their values, ways of life, and outlooks for the future.

When the gunfire and explosions go silent and the soldiers are no longer in their battle fatigues, they should feel like they are complete persons who have done a great service to the Nation. The military profession and the Nation should want their soldiers to recognize who they are as people when they return home to their families. They should see that their physical and mental sacrifices are appreciated because they have taken a road less traveled—one that is unique in its dangers and sacrifices but made possible by an equally unique ethos. The profession and the Nation cannot forget them. We should help them find their roads back home; we can do this by respecting and educating them as people. ■

*The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors, and do not reflect the official policy or position of the United States Military Academy, Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.*

## Notes

1. *The Kill Team*, directed by Dan Krauss (New York: Oscilloscope, 2014), DVD; Jim Frederick, *Black Hearts: One Platoon's Descent into Madness in Iraq's Triangle of Death* (New York: Broadway Books, 2010).

2. Take the case of the Army's Ready and Resilient Campaign as an example. The campaign does address the issues of moral challenges, to include moral injury, but morality does not have its own category—spirituality does. There is a difference between spirituality and morality. The Army would serve itself well by recognizing the differences between these two concepts.

3. The changes we recommend will require attention to the overarching education of the soldier as a moral agent. Moral education must educate soldiers so that they might discern right actions, and then choose to conduct those actions out of respect for the profession and its ethic. To develop a disposition of moral responsibility, we need to take a new approach to learning; we must encourage full-scale debates about moral issues (a dialectical method) that allows soldiers to question and deepen their personal convictions until they adopt the profession's morals as their own. These changes to the military moral education program will benefit the military in two ways: collectively decreasing the occurrence of moral failures, and individually fostering greater resiliency against moral tragedy by appropriating soldiers' morals within the greater Army ethic.

4. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations,* 4th ed. (New York: Basics Books, 1977), 308.

5. In this paper, we do not recognize a distinction between ethics and morals. There is much disagreement and conflation of the terms and it is beyond the scope of this article to separate them.

6. Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 1, *The Army* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 17 September 2012), 2-9. This doctrinal publication further describes that trust is between soldiers; between soldiers and their leaders; among soldiers, their families, and the Army; and between the Army and the Nation.

7. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 15.

8. Ibid., 17.

9. Ibid.

10. Eva Wortel and Jolanda Bosch, "Strengthening Moral Competence: A 'Train the Trainer' Course on Military Ethics," *Journal of Military Ethics* 10, no. 1 (2011): 20.

11. Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. Steven Worchel (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1985).

12. Michael Billig, "Henri Tajfel's 'Cognitive Aspects of Prejudice' and the Psychology of Bigotry," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 41, no. 2 (June 2002): 172, accessed 17 February 2017, http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1348/014466602760060165/abstract (subscription required).

13. Tajfel and Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," 35–36.

14. Thomas Ricks, *The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), xx.

15. One of the basic assumptions we make about mentorship is that the mentor *cares* about whom he or she is mentoring. A caring relationship is dynamic but has stable characteristics that are involved with both parties. Humility is a requisite characteristic, like sympathy or empathy, because in a caring relationship, it enables people to account for and consider the feelings of others and act upon them to gain trust. Humility allows individuals to grow, learning from one's mistakes and successes. Absent humility, relationships rely only on unsustainable success to maintain themselves.

16. Army Regulation 350-1, *Army Training and Leader Development* (Washington, DC: GPO, 19 August 2014). Topics such as ethics, moral leadership, and ethical reasoning practices are mandated throughout the regulation.

17. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard, 1999), 420.

18. Ibid., 408.

19. Ibid., 417.

20. Ibid., 420.

21. Peter C. Brown, Henry L. Roediger III, and Mark A. McDaniel, *Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard, 2014), 94.

22. Ibid., 87.

23. Ibid., 89.

24. Kenneth R. Williams, "An Assessment of Moral Character Education in Initial Entry Training (IET)," *Journal of Military Ethics* 9, no. 1 (2010): 49.

25. ADP 1, *The Army*, 2-2.