

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Response to the review of “Pursuing the Honorable: Reawakening Honor in the Modern Military”

*Military Review*, November 2019 online book review

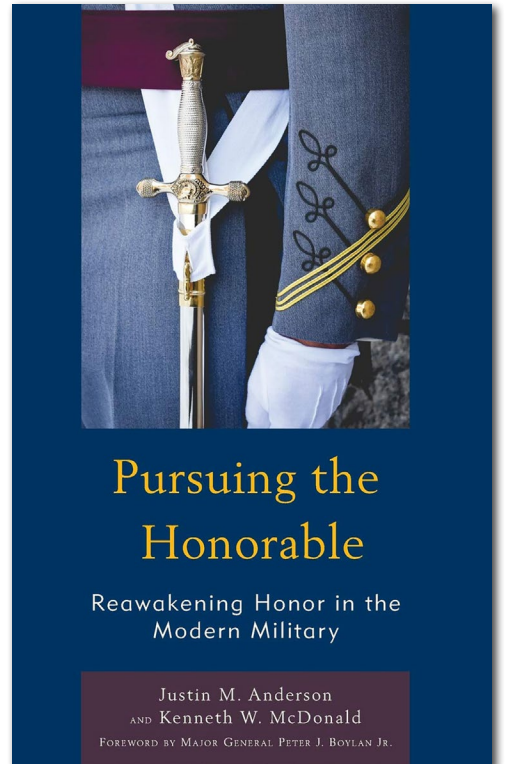
### Dear Editors,

It was with disappointment that we read 1st Sgt. (ret.) Bryant Macfarlane’s review of our book *Pursuing the Honorable: Reawakening Honor in the Modern Military* in *Military Review*’s November 2019 issue. While Macfarlane’s review contained multiple problems, its single most grievous transgression was that it was not a review of our published work. Macfarlane’s review is almost an exact copy of a blind review we received prior to publishing our book. (Submitting both to computer analysis reveals a 100 percent match.) At that time, we took Macfarlane’s misunderstandings and, prior to publication, revised our manuscript to address explicitly such misconceptions. His current review simply re-presents those misunderstandings

claiming our book fails by its silence to address those issues. Therefore, we struggle with Macfarlane’s review, not because it is critical, but because it is not based on our actual published work. We wish, then, ever briefly, to set the record straight. What follows are some responses to Macfarlane’s assertions, each of which we already explicitly addressed in the book.

First, Macfarlane wonders then accuses us of treating the U.S. Military Academy and honor in the military in general in a “classist” manner. This charge he bases on our purported silence on the issue. However, on pages 8–10, we dedicate four full paragraphs to discussing this misconception and the nature and purpose of our examples.

After citing a sentence that only appeared in our pre-published manuscript, Macfarlane comments, “The



authors would do well to support their claims with similar citations.” Page 4 of our published book contains a revised sentence and refers the reader to the entirety of chapter 3, which serves to substantiate that claim.

Our argument is, according to the review, “circular,” and therefore “self-effacing,” since “the authors never provide a structuralist framework for either reintroducing or retaining honor within the modern military, never mind Western society.” Here is the most mystifying comment, for in nearly every chapter of the book we state that providing that framework is the work of chapter 4.

He continues by stating that we offer “Aristotelian transference logic” for our argument. On page 5, we explicitly address how our account of honor “is necessarily analogical: it can be applied to various practices, everywhere differing in some respects, though never losing its inner unity.” We then continue in the next paragraph to address a potential charge of “circularity.”

Macfarlane argues we have failed to address the connected issue of loyalty. On page 10, our published work explicitly addresses how our account can aid in linking honor to “many other virtues or value terms, such as loyalty, obedience, respect, dignity, etc.”

Paragraph 11 of Macfarlane’s review is replete with factual mistakes. The U.S. Military Academy’s cadet honor committee has not be disbanded; the Simon Center, whose membership read our book with approval, is not on the same level as an academic department; and West Point does not have a press for internal publications.

Macfarlane indicates that a mere footnote is insufficient to reject an amoral notion of honor. We found this curious since the thrust of our book is to define honor in

relation to the classical four cardinal virtues, but to make this clear, our published work included a paragraph rejecting this amoral conception of honor on page 8.

We do not invoke Aristotle and Cicero to revitalize their philosophies but to adapt and use chosen aspects of their insights on the nature of honor. (p. 37–38)

Unsurprisingly, and for the benefit of the readership, Macfarlane has missed the main point of our argument when he characterizes it as “that honor’s salvation in the West is vested in the military.” Indeed, on page 9, we again expressly rejected this: “Nor do we address the military services because we think Western notions of honor will be saved through the military. This would, in fact, go against our account of honor.”

That a blind reviewer wrote a public review is not our grievance. Our complaint is that his piece in *Military Review* is not a review of our published work. Indeed, his piece is hardly a book review at all, in that it never substantially divulges the book’s argument, but merely criticizes what he takes to be its various faults. Each of these “faults” we explicitly addressed, mostly in the book’s introduction. In the final analysis, by not reviewing our published work, Macfarlane’s review fails to take seriously either *Military Review* or its readership. It falls then to the reader him-/herself to be the ultimate judge of the coherency and success of our argument.

We are grateful to *Military Review* for the opportunity to set the record straight.

**Sincerely,**  
**Justin M. Anderson and Kenneth W. McDonald**

## Response from author of “Pursuing the Honorable” book review

**Dear Editors, Dr. Anderson, and Dr. McDonald,**

I wish to thank you all for the forum and the open discussion regarding my review of *Pursuing the Honorable: Reawakening Honor in the Modern Military*. I want to address some items that Dr. Anderson and Dr. McDonald have raised in this discussion. First, to clarify, I was a blind reviewer for *Pursuing the Honorable* and feel very honored that my input was used, in part, to produce the final manuscript. I have read both the definitive printed monograph as well as the prepublication copy and note that alterations have been applied

from the prepublication to the published manuscript. The majority of the changes applied to the monograph, however, are in the introduction, leaving the bulk of the work to which the heart of my comments were directed untouched. As honed as the alterations may have been, my original comments remain salient.

The intent of *Pursuing the Honorable* was to raise awareness of the perception of flagging honor in a liberal democratic world. I stand by my review of the monograph in its published form. Irrespective of our differences, subject matter experts within the fields of

philosophy, theology, and ethics found the monograph to be useful in the effort to create greater inclusion of value ethics within the service academies.

I would offer that the structure of the argument, as presented, is aimed at the incorrect audience. *Pursuing the Honorable* is more or less a hagiography of value ethics with academic significance. However, it lends itself less well to the task of teaching or creating discussion about the nature of value ethics in the core curriculum at the U.S. Military Academy, or any other service academy. In short, the promise that the monograph will not only aid the decision-maker who

ultimately could change the curriculum but would extend beyond to “many forms of human life” falls short of its intended target (Back-Cover Synopsis).

I am grateful to *Military Review* for allowing me the opportunity to be a continued part of this conversation. In the final analysis, it is always up to the reader to determine whether an argument is coherent and useful, and I encourage open-minded readers, and possibly, more importantly, decision-makers in the curriculum development process, to read it and decide for themselves.

**Sincerely,**  
**1st Sgt. Bryant Macfarlane, U.S. Army, Retired**