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American military officers, as a class, traditionally disdain involvement in any activity that can be even remotely described as political. In this paper, I want to argue that such disdain is at best morally inconsistent, and at worst morally wrong. I will argue for the moral inconsistency of political non-involvement by showing that the traditional justification for the existence of a military force in a democracy requires such involvement. Next, I will show the inefficacy of a common objection to the political involvement of military officers. Finally, I hope to make a case for the moral impermissibility of political non-involvement by officers because of their professional obligations to their soldiers. Before I can begin, however, I must address the immediate and serious objection that my entire project is in contravention of Army Regulation 600-20, Army Command Policy and Procedures.

Army Regulation 600-20 represents the formalization of the American conception of the separation of military power and governmental authority. It seeks to prohibit any action which "...violates the traditional concept that military personnel must not engage in partisan political activity..."(26). The key term throughout the regulation is "partisan." It is the intention of the regulation to prohibit the use of military office in support of any particular candidate or cause, or the outright use of

military force to affect the outcome of duly authorized democratic processes. It is not the intention of the regulation to deny military personnel their basic political rights as citizens of a democracy. Participation in the political life of the community can take on many forms other than mere partisan support for political candidates or the pursuit of public office. The regulation states: "Army members are expected and urged to carry out their obligations as private citizens" (26). Consequently, the regulation also lists the types of political activity that are permitted. Briefly, these include the following actions:

- a. Register, vote or express a personal opinion on political candidates and issues, as a private citizen, but not as a representative of the Army.
- b. Promote and encourage other military personnel to take part in political activity as in (a) above...[caveat].
- f. Sign a petition for specific legislative action or to place a candidate's name on an official election ballot...[caveat].
- g. Write a letter to the editor of a newspaper expressing his or her personal views on public issues if those views do not attempt to promote a partisan political cause. (26)

Sections above ending with [caveat] all conclude with a prohibition against partisan political activities. In this paper, "political activities" will refer only to those nonpartisan political activities permitted by Army Regulation 600-20.

The fundamental reason why military officers should take a more active role in political affairs centers on coherence with the justification of the profession itself. The purpose of the military is often defined as the defense of the community. Although military forces have, and probably will, be used for other less noble (aggressive) purposes, these are not normally the grounds on which the existence of a military force is morally justified. The moral justification for the existence of military forces is routinely based on some conception of self-defense. But what is it that is being defended? References to boundaries, borders, what Michael Walzer calls "territorial integrity," often seem legalistic and arbitrary at best. Most notions of justifiable self-defense eventually resort to interpreting the defense of territory as the defense of a location for some type of shared human existence. What is defended is a community composed of shared experiences and values. The Army and its officer corps exist in order to defend the American way of life and its values. This view is expressed well by MG (Ret) Clay Buckingham in an article in Parameters, entitled, "Ethics and the Senior Officer: Institutional Tensions".

The moral justification of our profession is embedded in the Constitution- "to provide for the Common Defense." We are that segment of American society which is set apart to provide for the defense of the remainder of

that society. The word defense is key. *We are to defend our territory, because that is where our people live, but in an expanded sense, we are defending our value systems, our way of life, our standard of life, our essential institutions,...*(24) (my emphasis)

Critics might argue that this expanded view of the military project overlooks the many social problems our nation has had and continues to have. Does the military defend an economic system that tolerates seven percent national unemployment? Does the military defend slumlords in New York City? One response would be to argue that the Army defends only an ideal, the America of the Constitution, that can never be fully realized. But to argue this way raises serious problems for the justification of military forces. An acceptable interpretation of the Constitution that military officers are sworn to defend must find a middle ground between the currently instantiated set of values and the values reflected in the ideal.

The Constitution itself is merely a document unless the ideas and concepts it contains are somehow manifested in what may be called a "form of life." In other words, the Constitution derives its meaning from the form of life which results from its current interpretation. The Constitution has often been described as a "living document" and its life stems from the fact that the community, whose political life is based on this Constitution, has shown itself capable of change. It is a reflection of the powerful notion that

America is not a finished product, but an unfinished project. Any current set of American values is in no sense final, but represents a stage in the movement towards a more ideal instantiation of the Constitution. Historically, this is not so difficult to comprehend. Defending the Constitution, for American military officers, once meant defending a set of values that condoned the owning of slaves, the denial of full citizenship to women, and systematic discrimination based on race, sex, and ethnic origin. So the Constitution that the American military officer is sworn to defend finds its meaning in its reflection in the community, not merely in the status quo, but in its aspirations and goals, as well. In a recent address at West Point, Associate Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor was concerned with pointing out that the Constitution is not interpreted solely by the three formal branches of government. All citizens, to a varying degree, are involved in its interpretation as they live their lives. The task of the military is to defend a "form of life", a set of values that has evolved through the interactions of individuals, groups, classes, through shared experiences, through a community's common history.

If the justification of the military rests on the defense of American values and the current set of American values is a stage in an ongoing project, the question of how the instantiation of these values changes becomes important.

The political life of a pluralistic democracy like America can be characterized as the conflict and resolution of innumerable individual demands. Philosophical proponents of this characteristically American view include William James and John Dewey. The conflict of demands represents the conflict of values. The values which "win out," in a Darwinian sense, make up the form of life which the military is tasked to defend. This notion of community is not static, but dynamic. Tradition, a kind of social inertia, comes into play and slows and inhibits any attempt to change instantiations of values too rapidly. Nevertheless, the community is constantly in a state of transition; it is a set of values constantly under revision by increments. Instantiations of values which hold sway do so because of the quality of their expression, the reasonableness of their demands on community resources in contrast to other competing demands, their coherence with prior beliefs about values and their coherence with historical documents and doctrine. Such a system invites abuse. Potentially, special interest groups, especially those with an inordinate amount of money, influence and access could commandeer the political processes of such a vulnerable community. The only feasible counterweight to such abuse is an educated and interested citizenry, willing to express itself through any available channels. John Stuart Mill, in On Liberty, describes such activity as follows:

[Man] is capable of rectifying his

mistakes by discussion and experience. Not by experience alone. There must be discussion to show how experience is to be interpreted. Wrong opinions and practices gradually yield to fact and argument; but facts and arguments, to produce any effect on the mind, must be brought before it. (19)

Military officers, by virtue of their education, training, and profession, are among those especially suited to these activities.

The educational requirements to become (and remain) an officer are among the most exacting of any profession except medicine and law. The ability to identify, analyze and decide between alternative courses of action is one hallmark of the capable military officer. It is currently safe to assert that military officers generally have more formal education than the vast majority of their fellow citizens. The military profession is one of a very few whose practice is vitally interconnected with the political course of the community. By its very nature and by the potential consequences for the members of the profession, its members can be said to have an interest in the values embodied in the life of the community. What is lacking is the willingness of military officers to make themselves heard, not as soldiers, but as citizens. The systematic non-involvement of military officers in the political affairs of the community represents a failure to defend the American form of life from special interest groups and the systematic



deprivation of highly capable voices from the public debate. This non-involvement is thus inconsistent with the justification for the existence of the military given by most officers.

An important objection must be raised at this point. This objection centers on the potential for a conflict of interest on the part of the military professional. If military officers were to become more politically aware and involved, might this not lead to an erosion of civilian control of the American military? In other words, can the increased political awareness of the military officer lead to a reluctance (or a refusal) to carry out orders which support a political course of action he opposes? It would seem so initially, but a closer look at one of the activities peculiar to the military profession shows that a conflict of interest need not be paralyzing. Most military decisions are value-laden. It is traditional, at least in the American military, that discussion and dissension on tactical matters is allowed, even encouraged, until the final decision is made. Once the final decision is made by the senior commander all subordinates are routinely expected to carry out orders to the extent of their abilities. Because the examination of many courses of action is considered to enhance the quality of the final decision, this seemingly anarchic process is considered a strength peculiar to the military forces of a democracy. Considering

the quality of military officers, it would not seem troublesome or even unusual to extend this process to the political sphere.

The argument for the moral impermissibility of political non-involvement is based on two assumptions, neither of which seems unacceptable. The first assumption involves agreeing with Michael Walzer's analysis of the responsibility of citizens of a democracy for the wars fought in their name. Walzer, in Chapter 18 of Just and Unjust Wars, argues that citizens are responsible for *jus ad bellum* (the justness of a war) to the extent that they are capable of influencing the political course of their community. Walzer invokes Gray's Principle: "the more one can do, the more one has to do" (301). Since military officers systematically divorce themselves from political activity, they make no effort to influence the political course of their community. Walzer insists that voluntary non-participation in political affairs does not alleviate responsibility. Thus, military officers, as highly capable citizens in virtue of their education and ability, may be at least partially responsible for the initiation of an unjust war.

The second assumption is that one becomes and remains an officer based on superior abilities to command, organize and sustain military forces. From this assumption, we derive the concomitant responsibility to "take care of our

troops." A commonly cited component of this responsibility is to ensure that the lives of soldiers entrusted to one's care not be wasted. One of the most serious instances of wasted human life occurs in the waging of an unjust war. Military officers therefore may, through a systematic policy of political non-involvement, be responsible for needlessly endangering the lives of their soldiers. This is an action that is morally impermissible in the military profession.

By systematically excluding themselves from participation in the political lives of their communities, officers fail to do all they can to insure that the values they defend are worthy of the cost of that defense. Failure to insure that the set of values they defend comprise the best possible set is potentially an abnegation of the responsibility to never waste the lives of their soldiers. Such actions are not in keeping with the traditions of the military profession.