

## ACCOUNTABILITY AND MORAL COURAGE

### Is it Possible for Anyone to be Responsible for the Ethics/Morality of a Command?

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#### OUTLINE

- PROBLEM:
- I. Who is responsible for the Ethics and Morality of a Command?
    - a. Naval Regulations indicate that the Commanding Officer, among many other duties bears this responsibility as well.
    - b. Often, because traditionally morality and religion are so closely connected, the responsibility is delegated to the Command Chaplain.
    - c. Nonetheless, since this secular age has effectively separated morality and religion, the Command Chaplain's involvement is limited to the "moral and wholesome activities" which are provided to the crew.
    - d. Commanding Officers' intervention into the field of Ethics and Morality of the Command are limited to incidents of misbehavior which inhibit the good order and discipline of the Command and negatively affect Mission accomplishment.
    - e. Thus, the development and growth of ethical and moral sensitivity within most Commands does not take place.
  - II. Pressures and trends within the Naval community and demands from the Civilian Sector appear to be pressing the Issue of "Who is responsible?"
    - a. Just as the business world has begun to re-think the need for education in ethical/moral sensitivity, so the Naval Community has also given a new emphasis to the moral element of "personal excellence."
    - b. The general public has grown impatient with the misconduct of some Military personnel which has been highlighted in recent months, and has demanded a "higher standard" from the Military.
    - c. Nonetheless, the pluralistic ethos of society, and the varied moral sensitivity

and backgrounds of military personnel leave most Commanding Officers who might be interested in developing the Ethical and Moral Sensitivity of their commands at a loss as to where a beginning might be made. How is it possible for the Command to take responsibility for this particular area?

DEVELOPMENT:

A re-reading of Aristotle's Ethics provides a "tool box" of ideas and direction for a Commanding Officer who wants to think about the appropriate Command atmosphere for the positive development of ethical and moral sensitivity. His approach to ethics and his choice of moral virtues worthy of development seem especially appropriate for military life today.

- a. Virtue is never an extreme form of behaviour, but a wonderful balance, harmony and integration of human life.
- b. The virtues which Aristotle considers (courage, temperance, liberality, proper pride, good temperedness, truthfulness, ready wittedness, friendliness, modesty, and righteous indignation) can be re-thought in a Command context as a model upon which to begin considering the balance, harmony and integration of human life among the Command's personnel.
- c. Aristotle's Ethics is able to speak to a Command in which morality and religion have been separated in the minds of personnel, and in the pluralistic and varied moral/ethical experience of the Command's members.
- d. The Command can again take responsibility for the moral/ethical ethos of the environment in which military personnel live and work with great benefit to the Navy as it assists in the balance, harmony and integration of the lives of those who serve.

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### WHOSE IN CHARGE?

To initiate a serious discussion among military members with respect to the question - "whose in Charge of the Command?" --could appear as mutinous at worst, or disloyal at best. The response to such a question is so painfully obvious that the topic is not normally considered worthy of serious debate. It is axiomatically accepted that the Commanding Officer is responsible for all aspects of the Command: its members, its mission and its authorized dependents. Normally this responsibility is carried out through the delegating process known as the Chain of Command. Thus, while the Commanding officer retains the responsibility, the concrete execution is left (with greater or lesser supervision) to others within the chain of authority. In certain areas of the Command's life--such as health, humanitarian welfare, and religion--the supervision is left to the professional expertise of the various Staff Corps. The Commanding Officer normally intervenes only when the program is not meeting members' obvious needs, or the Command's philosophy. Thus, Command retains responsibility in these areas, while assuming less direct supervision than would be customary in respect to the warfare specialties that affect the Command's mission accomplishment.

## THE COMMAND RELIGIOUS PROGRAM

While the Commanding Officer might feel inadequate to the task of supervising the Command's Dental Officer in the procedures of oral surgery, an intervention would be fully appropriate if a member of the Command suffered harm because surgery was not performed in a timely manner. After all, it is not the Dental officer's Dental Program, but the Commanding Officer's Dental Program. Naval instructions, from the very earliest times, have directed Commanding Officers to provide for the religious and moral needs of the Command's members.<sup>1</sup> Generally, the Commanding Officer fulfills this need by providing logistic and funding support for an assigned Chaplain to whom is delegated the immediate responsibility for the so-called "Command Religious Program." That program is expected to be comprehensive and inclusive in rendering support to all religious faith groups whose rights to the free exercise of religion are guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States. In this age of religious pluralism, the support of these needs requires as much a trained and schooled professional, as all other Staff Corps demand. For the most part, Commanding Officers rather like to "leave religion to the Chaplain," and intervene only if certain needs are not obviously being met. The Commanding Officer is often as remote an authority figure in the Chapel as in the Dental Clinic, although a participant in both!

1. OPNAVINST 1730.1B

## MORALITY AND RELIGION

The second portion of the Naval Regulations which direct Commanding Officers to provide for the religious needs of their Command's members also direct that they "...use all proper means to foster high morale and to develop and strengthen the moral and spiritual well-being of the personnel in the Command."2 While Command Religious Programs are religiously comprehensive, and inclusive, the contemporary separation of religion and morality are often evidenced in their content, form, and goals. For most Chaplains, facilitating "divine service" with all supporting requirements is the principle content of the Command's Religious Program. Religious studies--Bible study groups, schools of religious instruction, and the training of religious Lay Leaders--is also coordinated by the Chaplain in such ways that it meets the denominational necessities of the faith groups represented in the Command. The procurement of reading and instructional materials, special foods, and devotional items are essentially determined by the worshipful needs of each faith group. Together, these elements are generally agreed upon to be the Command Religious Program "package." If a religious program did not facilitate such essentially religious requirements, then clearly the Command's responsibility would not be fulfilled. At the same time by long standing tradition, Navy Chaplains have always been involved in those broader "humanitarian" responsibilities of the Command, such

2. OPNAVINST 1730.1B

as Navy Relief, Red Cross Message Traffic, recreation and welfare activities, and the counseling of Command members. But how does a Chaplain respond to the Commanding Officer's delegation of the Command's responsibility to "...develop and strengthen the moral well-being of the personnel in the Command."<sup>3</sup>

### THEOLOGICAL VERSES ETHICAL DISCOURSE

From several standpoints this delegation sometimes finds Chaplains who are both unprepared and unequipped for this particular task.<sup>4</sup> The theology of Justification is more highly developed in the discourse of the faith groups represented by many Chaplains than the theology of Sanctification. "Justification" is the concern with a radical conversion of life and acceptance of personal salvation. The focus of this theology is conversion. "Sanctification" is a theological concern for growth, development, and nourishment following upon the radical conversion moment. While these positions may seem to a body of philosopher-Line/Staff Corps Officers to be quaint "weltanschauungs" of a by-gone era, be assured that the practical consequences are enormously important. Chaplains whose faith bodies espouse a highly developed theology of justification are likely to perceive the great moral issue to

3. OPNAVINST 1730.1B

4. The topic is complex. Notice a contemporary grammar as found in Richard P. McBrien, Caesar's Coin: Religion and Politics in America (New York: McMillan Publishing Company, 1987), Appendix I: Definitions, Distinctions and Principles, pp. 203-207.

be "conversion." Hence, ethical discourse becomes a form of covert theological discourse with its practical and often unconscious religious goals. Even for those Chaplains whose faith bodies espouse a highly developed theology of Sanctification, it may well be the case that they lack a background in natural theology or philosophical theology from which springs the language of common ethical discourse. Thus, their ethics too becomes a type of moral theology. For all Chaplains, ethical discourse and moral imperatives are normatively determined by divine ordinances and sanctions in light of which ethical pluralism is judged to be moral chaos. While the Chaplain is charged with maintaining a Command Religious program which meets individual needs as required by each faith group represented, how is a Chaplain to provide an ethical/moral program for the Command in a cultural environment of ethical pluralism? The practical question for the Chaplain would become: "Whose morality?" To reformulate the issue: "Is the moral well-being of Command members served by ethical pluralism as it is by Religious Pluralism?" Thus, while the Commanding Officer can be relatively certain that the Chaplain will professionally fulfill the Command's responsibility to provide for the spiritual well-being of Command members, the moral well-being has become a separate question. This is not to conclude that Chaplains are incapable of such a task; the presumption can not always be made with the same certitude as it is that the Chaplain will fulfill spiritual leadership.

## OFF THE HOOK?

Pressures and trends both within the military community and the civilian sector, which need not be rehearsed in great detail, suggest that the "ethical issue" may well receive the same vigorous interest from higher authority which Equal Opportunity initially received nearly a decade ago. The serious compromising of military intelligence, and the alleged intervention of military members into various covert activities, which apparently included the possible violation of fundamental ethical norms, seriously damaged the public trust at a time when a new respect for military members was emerging. If the general public is intolerant of the unethical behaviour of the large cooperations, then given the connatural American suspicion of the Military, one can expect a renewed interest in the ethical sensitivities of military members. Higher authority in both the military community and the civilian sector will demand an accounting, inasmuch as a decline in the public trust inexorably means a decline in fiscal expenditures for the Military. An undesirable decrease in fiscal investment would necessarily mean a serious curtailment of the Military's professional ability in its proper warfare specialties. And that consequence, rooted in perceived unethical behaviour, is an unacceptable practical outcome to ethical/moral insensitivities. Thus, Commanding Officers can anticipate a likely reaffirmation of their personal and direct responsibility for the "moral well-being" of Command members.



## A BEGINNING WITH ARISTOTLE

It has been said that of all peoples, Americans have the poorest sense of history inasmuch as we act as though the world begins when we enter the human scene, and ends when we leave it! Any Commanding Officer who reviews even briefly the history of our common philosophical heritage, will discover with amazing speed, that the "ethical issues" have been considered by all the great thinkers, past and present. As an example of the assistance available to spark thought and to facilitate the emergence of a common ethical discourse about Command ethics/morality, Aristotle's Ethics 5 is as good a place to start as any! A re-reading of this traditional text might provide a Commanding officer some useful "tools" with which to initiate such a discussion from a broadly based perspective. While the scope of this paper prohibits a complete analysis of the text, several important assumptions and a possible procedural pattern for such an ethical discussion are appropriate.

### SOME ARISTOTELIAN ASSUMPTIONS

Aristotle does not assume that the pursuit of ethical discourse is the task of a fanatic or a crusader, for moral virtue is not a form of extremism. 6 On the contrary, he asserts

5. Richard McKeon (ed), The Basic Works of Aristotle (New York: Random House, 1941), Ethica Nicomachea, pp. 935ff.

6. Ethica, Book two, Chapter six, p. 959, and Book two, Chapter eight, p. 963.

that virtue is a "state of character" which is seriously compromised by the extremes of excess and defect. Virtue is the harmonious balance between competing human tendencies which exist within the human character as extremes at the opposite ends of the spectrum. Secondly, moral virtue is not natural but learned through a process of exercise and education.<sup>7</sup> For Aristotle, moral virtue is not merely an introduction of "discipline" into human life, for moral virtue embraces and transforms the human character so that when fully acquired, moral virtue brings with it a certain pleasure in its execution. The pain at the exercise of virtue is for Aristotle a sign that moral virtue has not yet fully become a "state of character." Thirdly, Aristotle exalts the moral virtue of "proper pride," or what may be called "self-respect." This virtue he assumes to be "...the crown of the virtues, for it makes them greater and it is not found without them."<sup>8</sup> He describes a person possessing this virtue in great detail:

...he will face great dangers, and when he is in danger he is unsparing of his life, knowing that there are conditions on which life is not worth having...he is the sort of man to confer benefits, but he is ashamed of receiving them...to ask for nothing or scarcely

7. Ethica, Book two, Chapter one, p. 952-3.

8. Ethica, Book four, Chapter three, p. 992.

anything, but to give help readily...to be a man of few deeds but of great and notable ones...unable to make his life revolve around another unless it be a friend..nor is he mindful of wrongs..nor is he a gossip..nor again is he given to praise ...he is not an evil speaker even about his enemies...9

Aristotle's descriptive of the person who has acquired the moral virtue of self-respect appears to be a synthesis of those characteristics of the perfectly balanced moral person. Rarely has self-respect been accorded such great importance. Lastly, Aristotle also appears to assume that the pursuit of moral virtue is always accomplished within the human community. This is implied in his praise of the moral virtue of justice as "complete virtues, but not absolutely, but in relation to our neighbor." 10 Aristotle writes:

...justice is often thought to be the greatest of virtues, and 'neither evening nor morning star' is so wonderful; and proverbially' in justice is every virtue comprehended.'...it is complete (virtue) because he who possesses it can exercise his virtue not only in himself but towards his neighbor also;

9. Ethica, Book four, Chapter three, p. 993-4.

10. Ethica, Book five, Chapter one, p. 1003.

for many men can exercise virtue in their own affairs, but not in their relations to their neighbor.<sup>11</sup>

For the same reason too, Aristotle places among the moral virtues several which in his view properly order the relationship of the individual and the community. Thus, Aristotle is found to praise that moral virtue which promotes truthfulness in the human community--the virtue of frankness--the moral virtues which promote pleasantness in human relationships--ready wittedness and comradery--and the moral virtue which promotes concern for the good fortune of others--righteous indignation.<sup>12</sup> Taken together, these Aristotelian assumptions might provide a Commanding Officer with a thumbnail sketch of the goals which might be reasonably pursued in any Command program concerned with the ethical/moral well-being of the Command's members. Such a program must be a) a reasonable task for an educative process, which b) aims at a transformation of the human character and awakens satisfaction in virtue's acquisition, and which c) nourishes self-respect, and d) promotes just and pleasant relationships between the individuals who compose the human community.

11. Ethica, Book five, Chapter one, p. 1003-4.

12. Aristotle makes a distinction between "liberality" and "magnificence" in terms of the size of the gift given. I have chosen to join the two virtues and name the composite "generosity." For Aristotle's idea see Ethica, Book two, Chapter seven, p. 960.

## PROCEDURAL PATTERNS

While a reading of Aristotle's Ethics suggests some attainable goals for the Commanding Officer who attempts to become personally accountable for the ethics/morality of the Command, the treatise also reveals possible procedural patterns. Logically, if Aristotle's assumption is accepted that virtue is not extremism, then the presence of extremes within a Command might provide the Commanding Officer with an initial assessment of the ethical/moral state of the Command. Figure (1) identifies eighteen possible extremes, whether by excess or deficit. The philosopher and the theologian would together recognize these vices as the common experience of the whole human family. Nevertheless, in the closed environment of a Military community, the Commanding Officer must ponder, after the initial assessment is made, to what extent the Command is functionally able to fulfill its mission, given the presence of the extremes revealed. While the moral well-being of the individual does not depend on the fulfillment of the Command's mission, the possibility of mission failure might reveal to Command the urgency of taking responsibility for the ethical/moral well-being of the Command's members.

But assessment is only the first moment of the Commanding Officer's taking responsibility for the moral well-being of the Command. The second step is pro-active development. The nine moral virtues need to be translated into the context of the Command, both in words that experientially place the virtues in a contemporary Military community, and in actions which reflect the

practical moral necessities of the Command. Figure (2) provides a listing of the moral virtues as presented in Aristotle's Ethics and attempts to create practical definitions. However, a further and much closer reading of the text than this paper can reasonably provide is necessary. But even more important, the pro-active concrete development of a real program which is as serious, directed, and as practical as the Command's Religious Program is required. If the Command's Religious Program was vague, unstructured, and undirected by any particular philosophy, it would not fulfill the Command's Religious responsibility. The care of the "moral well-being" of Command members cannot be approached with any less seriousness.

#### TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

No experienced Military member would suggest that anyone other than the Commanding Officer is responsible for the complete well-being of the Command. This paper has attempted to reassert that commonly accepted principle of military life by supporting the view that Command is as much able to take responsibility for the ethical/moral well-being of the Command as it has been successful in taking responsibility for the spiritual well-being of the Command. Certain cautions were discussed: first, morality and religion have become separate, both in the way our culture perceives them, and sometimes in the inability of professionally trained Chaplains to articulate a commonly understood ethical discourse or to execute a satisfactory ethical/moral Command

program in an ethically pluralistic environment. Secondly, recent developments within our society place the "ethical issues" in the forefront of civilian evaluations of Military performance. Decline in the public trust will translate into decline in fiscal investment with serious consequences for the professional functioning of the Military community. Thus, Commanding officers can anticipate a renewed interest in this aspect of their Command responsibility. Resources for taking a fresh look at the ethical/moral well-being of the Command are not lacking in the philosophical heritage which provides a basis for common ethical discourse and a structure for both assessment and pro-active development of a Command ethical/moral Program. While it cannot be anticipated that in the near future the Gideons will place Aristotle's Ethics free of charge in hotels, motels, and in Military Commands, the time may well have arrived when Command might want to bear whatever personal or financial burdens might be incurred in creating a program which seriously takes responsibility for the moral well-being of the Command's Members. The Chaplains who have experienced what such serious commitment means, might be the very first to support, encourage, and promote Command's efforts. Thus, it is not only possible, but highly desirable for the Commanding Officer to be responsible for the ethics/morality of the Command.

ARISTOTLE'S DESCRIPTIVE OF EXTREMES

FIGURE (1)

VIRTUE

<u>EXTREME</u> <u>BY</u> <u>EXCESS</u>		<u>EXTREME</u> <u>BY</u> <u>DEFICIT</u>
RECKLESSNESS	COURAGE	COWARDNESS
SELF-INDULGENCE	TEMPERANCE	INSENSIBILITY
PRODIGALITY	GENEROSITY (12)	NIGGARDLINESS
VANITY	SELF-RESPECT (13)	FALSE HUMILITY
CONTENTIOUSNESS (14)	EVEN-TEMPEREDNESS	PASSIVITY
BOASTFULNESS	FRANKNESS	UNDUE MODESTY
BUFFOONERY	READY-WITTEDNESS	BOORISHNESS
OBSEQUIOUSNESS	COMRADERY (15)	QUARRELSOMENESS
ENVY	RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION	SPITE

12. Aristotle makes a distinction between "liberality" and "magnificence" in terms of the size of the gift given. I have chosen to join the two virtues and name the composite "generosity." For Aristotle's idea see Ethica, Book two, Chapter seven, p. 960.

13. Aristotle names the virtue I have chosen to call "self-respect," "proper pride." I believe that my name is true to his sense. But for Aristotle's idea see Ethica, Book two, Chapter three, p. 993-4.

14. Aristotle calls the extremes of "even-temperedness," "irascibility" and "inirascibility." See Ethica, Book two, Chapter seven, p. 960.

15. Aristotle calls what I name as the virtue of "comradery," "friendliness." See Ethica, book four, Chapter six, p. 997.



FIGURE (2)

<u>VIRTUE</u>	<u>IF THIS VIRTUE IS UNDERSTOOD TO MEAN:</u>	<u>THEN AS COMMANDING OFFICER I DEVELOP THIS VIRTUE BY:</u>
COURAGE	TO STAND YOUR GROUND AGAINST AND FACE UP TO WHAT IS AWESOME, ESPECIALLY THE GREAT DANGERS OF PREPARING FOR OR CONFRONTING COMBAT DEATH.	
TEMPERANCE	TO BE UNCONCERNED BY THE CHILDISH CRAVINGS OF THE SENSUAL APPETITES, AND TO BE GOVERNED BY THE DISCIPLINE OF REASONABLE, PROPORTIONATE SELF-SATISFACTION.	
GENEROSITY	TO GIVE LIBERALLY WITH A NOBLE SENSE OF RIGHTNESS AND PUBLIC SPIRITED AMBITION.	
SELF-RESPECT	TO BELIEVE ONESELF CAPABLE OF THE HIGHEST AND NOBLEST DEEDS, AND TO AIM AT THE MOST HONORABLE GOALS WITHOUT REGARD TO POSSIBLE FAILURE OR PERSONAL COST.	
EVEN TEMPEREDNESS	TO ALLOW RIGHT REASON TO GUIDE APPROPRIATE ANGER IN AN APPROPRIATE MANNER WITH RESPECT TO SUBJECT, OBJECT, AND DURATION.	
FRANKNESS	TO BE TRUTHFUL IN EVALUATION OF SELF, OTHERS, AND SITUATIONS.	
READY WITTEDNESS	WITH RESPECT TO JESTING, TO SAY AND TO LISTEN IN A MANNER THAT IS PLEASANT AND TACTFUL.	
COMRADERY	TO PUT UP WITH AND RESENT THE RIGHT THINGS IN THE RIGHT WAY, WITH THE AFFECTION FOR COMPANIONS THAT MIGHT BE CALLED FRIENDSHIP.	

VIRTUE

IF THIS VIRTUE IS  
UNDERSTOOD TO  
MEAN:

THEN AS COMMANDING OFFICER  
I DEVELOP THIS VIRTUE BY:

RIGHTEOUS  
INDIGNATION  
(16)

TO BE PAINED AT ANOTHER'S  
UNMERITED GOOD FORTUNE.

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16. To review Aristotle's descriptive of each virtue, the following references are provided: Courage: Ethica, Book three, Chapter five, p. 974-5. Temperance: Ethica, Book three, Chapter twelve, p. 983-4. Generosity: Ethica, Book four, Chapter one, p. 984-5, and Chapter two, p. 988-90. Self-Respect: Ethica, Book four, Chapter three, p. 991-994. Even Temperedness: Ethica, Book four, Chapter five, p. 996. Frankness: Ethica, Book four, Chapter seven, p. 998. Ready-Wittedness, Ethica, Book four, Chapter eight, p. 1000. Comradery: Ethica, Book four, Chapter six, p. 997. Righteous Indignation: Ethica, Book two, Chapter seven, p.961.