

*FUNCTIONALISM AND
MILITARY ETHICS*¹

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Introduction

Where do moral rules come from and how is this relevant for military ethics? It is hard to imagine a more difficult or more important question for this forum to ask.

Ten years ago, this question was not nearly as urgent as it is today. Whether or not we could answer it, we could generally assume that those persons whom we lead, follow, and teach would somehow view ethics as relevant, meaningful, and culturally useful. But that was then, and this is another era. Today, we are repeatedly reminded that ours is a post-modern, post-industrial, and post-literate culture bereft of purpose, conscience, and the capacity to reason. The symptoms are everywhere: gang violence, serial killing, adolescent suicide, scientific and technological failures, celebrity misconduct, worsening economic conditions, political graft and inaction, insider trading scandals, and so on *ad infinitum*.

Perhaps most symptomatic is our apparent inability to make progress toward resolving the key moral issues of the day. Gay rights, abortion, sex education, active euthanasia, assisted suicide, and the entitlements to education, health care, and employment are typical: they are issues stretched between intractable, sometimes violent parties whose perspectives are incommensurable. These disputes are so profound that we have no reason to believe that we will be any closer to a solution at the end of the next millennium than we are at the end of this one.

Those of us who propose to teach Ethics to officer candidates increasingly encounter students whose attitudes astonish and bewilder us. Ten years ago, the troublemakers in the classroom were the egoists, the subjectivists, and the cultural relativists. They could always be counted upon to challenge the view that ethical rules and systems have an objective basis or a

truly universal efficacy. Today, the egoists, relativists, and subjectivists are the *optimists* in the classroom; for, they can at least begin to articulate a meaning and purpose for Ethics, and they thus stand in bleak contrast to the dominant view, which is that Ethics is an investigation of the Void or *das Nichts*. For these unabashed or flaming nihilists, Ethics holds no more relevance or meaning than Upper Paleolithic fertility rites. It is of little comfort to learn that they harbor no special grudge against Ethics³ it's just that they consider culture and things cultural as pointless and stupid. We may be forgiven, therefore, if we occasionally conclude that the 'new Dark Ages' are upon us. And it is equally understandable if, under these circumstances, our central question assumes a poignancy and urgency it has never had before.

Where do moral rules come from and how is this relevant for military ethics? This paper will answer both halves of the question by fleshing out a position that I shall call "Functionalism." It is not an entirely new view, but is in fact one that occasionally surfaces in the literature as a last ditch justification for this or that virtue or moral rule. It is a position that is susceptible to misinterpretation, and thus we should take some care in its exegesis. Curiously enough, the best place to begin is with a fifties science fiction novel.

A Canticle For Leibowitz

Compared to other works in the genre, Walter Miller's *A Canticle For Leibowitz*² is an upbeat account of the post-WWIII world. Some of the survivors somehow manage to form communities with established, ritualized social practices and narrative histories, within which they preserve their values and their identity. What is most fascinating about Miller's novel, however, is the *Weltanschauung* that evolves after 1200 years of post-holocaust survival. The descendants of the survivors are no less logical than any other human beings: they strictly avoid self-contradiction and inconsistency in their accounts of the world. And these principles guide their careful reconstruction of the charred fragments they have managed to pull from incinerated libraries. They have retrieved and cobbled together parts of the Bible, personal memos, physics textbooks, auto repair manuals, and anything else they can find of a printed

nature. The result is a weird and wonderful concatenation filled with absurd creatures and half-truths.

The point Miller makes is this: it is entirely possible to have an account of the world that thoroughly obeys all of the laws of logic and integrates all of the "facts" known to mankind, but which has no legitimacy or practical force. The survivors of the nuclear holocaust *know that* they have a problem with their world view, and they *know why* they have a problem, but they can't be sure how far off the mark they really are. There is nothing for them to do but sift through the remnants of the ante-bellum culture and continue to expand/refine their world view.

Leibowitz is significant because it is taken by some late 20th century philosophers to be an allegory for our time³. According to these philosophers, we too have suffered a cataclysm that tore apart and incinerated a world view that had been around for some 18 centuries. We too have been left to sift through the fragments of this ancient world view, piecing together the tattered pieces of a conceptual system that has been utterly vilified and thrown over. We too have a sense that we have somehow "lost it," and that our present circumstance^¾the new Dark Ages^¾is the direct, if belated outcome of this cataclysm. We too follow the laws of logic and the internal consistency imperative, yet we produce, attempt to juggle, and seek to reconcile moral perspectives that claim to be mutually exclusive and which give every appearance of being incommensurable.

The Enlightenment is frequently praised as a major stepping stone in the history of humankind, but there can be no doubt that it did great violence to the ancient world view that held all human beings to be social creatures who find fulfillment in and through the agency of other people. Suddenly, the concept of a human being was divorced from the concept of a constitutive social context. People were defined as free-floating, radically individual atoms in a social void, having an unrestricted license to specify their own definitions, purposes, and directions. As such, the services of the Supreme Being were no longer required; and the Designer, along with the Grand Design, were summarily dismissed as myths of no further value or consequence. Nature, which at one time was viewed as the embodiment and organic

expression of the Supreme Being, came to be seen as nothing more than a blue-steel clockwork devoid of intention or conscious impulse.

If we momentarily set aside the theological dispute engendered by the Enlightenment, we can focus on the grievous damage done to Ethics by this revolution in thought. Essential to the ancient notion of a Grand Design was the idea that all natural and artificial objects have a reason for being^{3/4}a purpose, niche, mission, end, or *telos*. And what the concept of the *telos* allowed pre-Enlightenment thinkers to do was to evaluate objects on the basis of an objective, publicly accessible, and universal standard. For example, if you know the purpose of their species within the Grand Design, then you also thereby *know* that a two-legged horse, a hydrophobic alligator, and a vegetarian tiger are all defective, just as you *know* that a timepiece that is seven feet tall and weighs more than 1,000 pounds is a defective wristwatch. In short, if you know the type, definition, or form of which a thing is an instance, then you know the metric, standard, or norm to which it must conform.

When the Enlightenment banished the notion of a naturally occurring norm, it created the nearly insurmountable belief that all norms must be artificial, capricious, or the product of discredited superstition. That impression has become the curse of Ethics, and is the root cause of our devolution toward the new Dark Ages. Like fungal growths in an abandoned coffee cup, subjectivism and egoism thrive where there are no objective, public, and universal norms.

Interestingly enough, those who draw the analogy between our world and the world of *Leibowitz* also believe that we may escape the new Dark Ages in much the same way that civilization escaped the old. Characteristic of both periods, it is argued, is the existence of small enclaves of dedicated, even heroic, individuals whose job it is to vouchsafe intellectual culture. In the old Dark Ages, for example, the legendary monks of Ireland formed a watertight seal against the encroaching waves of barbarism and nihilism. In the new Dark Ages, it is suggested, the professions play this all-important role. Today's professions are the closed, tightly knit, self-regulating communities believed necessary for the preservation of fundamental moral truth. Hence, it has become somewhat popular to insist that the military

profession is the last bastion of truth and decency; and we even occasionally hear not-so-subtle suggestions that the profession will weather this period of darkness to restore truth to mankind.

But there is a problem. Just because a group of people form themselves into a narrative community, it does not follow that they are thereby blessed with some magical means of solving moral problems or of returning the race to an ethical world. If we were to discover a group of pre-Enlightenment physicists living high in Pyrenees, we would pity them as the hopeless and benighted throwbacks they truly are. No serious person would advocate a return to a cosmology based on personal inspiration or love, even if it has survived unscathed these many centuries. Likewise with Ethics. If the secret is to be found in the professions, then we must demonstrate that fact. But that has not happened. Those who see the analogy with *Leibowitz* suspect the professions hold the key, but they don't cash out that insight. They tantalize us with what might be, but they seem unsure of why they believe the professions to be important. The professions are narrative communities that have retained something like the original concept of the human *telos*, but there seems to be a lingering doubt about whether those communities can ever be the basis for a moral theory other than cultural relativism⁴.

Yet, it is arguably the case that we can make progress in this area just by considering what the honorific professions (medicine, law, clergy) are all about. In and of themselves, they do not warrant being treated as grand and lofty organizations standing apart from mere mortals, but they are important because they highlight for us a very important set of facts, viz. that human beings can and do have purposes, and those purposes conform to standards that are not subjectively capricious. To accomplish their single-minded aims, professionals discover there are only so many paths to success and some of them are preferable to others. This is not just a matter of opinion, but is in fact dictated by the task to be performed. For example, suppose that General Schwarzkopf had a prejudice against the tried and true principles of concentration of mass, maneuver, and logistics; and further suppose that the strategies and operational plans for DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM were organized and executed around these prejudices. The end result may have been the same, but no one can doubt that the price in blood and materiel would have been much higher.

The perhaps too simple point is this: conditions in the world dictate how we are to reach our goals. We may choose to not pursue a goal, but if we do so choose, then the *way* in which that goal is reached is in part determined by conditions *out there*. We may choose to ignore the lessons of past experience, but we do so at our own peril; for, those lessons are the collected wisdom about the performance standards implicit in worldly challenges. For example, the conditions of successful war fighting are standards implicit in the very nature of war itself, and those standards cannot be changed until war changes. Any leader foolish enough to say, "I don't do logistics," or who couldn't care less about maneuver warfare will pay the price of arrogance. This is true whether the war is fought in Pennsylvania, the Sahara, or the Hindu Kush. It is true whether it is fought by Mongolians, Swedes, or Peruvians. It is true whether it is fought with sticks, nuclear weapons, or plasma rifles.

And if there are objectively grounded principles of war, might there not also be objectively grounded principles that tell us what qualifications people should possess and how people should relate to one another if they are to successfully cooperate in the achievement of a commonly recognized goal? It may be irrelevant to the outcome of a war that the officers eat coarse food and like the occasional practical joke, but is it equally irrelevant that they lie to each other and always put themselves ahead of their troops? Who would you rather fight: an Army of self-centered careerists or an Army of selfless patriots? We all know the answer to that question because the answer is obvious; and the answer is obvious, arguably, because there are fixed, objective norms governing cooperative human endeavor. Put quite simply, successful endeavor is a function of respecting and following those norms.

Objective norms tell us what we must do if we are to successfully work with others in an effort to transform the world for our own purposes. These norms are just as objective as the principles of war; and our formulation of them is not an act of creation³⁴ it is an act of discovery. We may choose to ignore them, but we cannot do so without a concomitant desire to fail. Arguably, a subset of these norms is equivalent to the traditionally recognized precepts of morality.

Functionalism

Functionalism is not a moral theory. (Indeed, its formulation is in part driven by the belief that moral theories are dead ends: they are at best a further manifestation of the catastrophic impact of supposedly enlightened thinking.) Neither is Functionalism a theory about moral theories. It does not seek to generate criteria against which moral theories can be measured, rank-ordered, and finally judged. (Indeed, it takes such an activity to have value only in so far as it is a stepping stone toward a complete grasp of the post-Enlightenment problem⁵.)

Rather, Functionalism is a theory about the *nisus* or impetus to moral thinking and behavior as such; it seeks to explain the true purpose of moral rules, the place of moral hypotheses within the general domain of human thought, and how we should go about discovering moral facts. Functionalism argues that moral precepts, like all practical precepts, must have a purpose within the general context of human flourishing; and if no such purpose can be found, then morality is a vacuous and bizarre human ritual having no reason for being. Functionalism, in other words, recognizes a simple and brutal fact: Moral precepts need an objective basis, not because we are afraid of losing our bearings or because we are afraid of destroying the fabric of society, but because a purely subjective morality is a colossal waste of time.

Functionalism argues that, as a matter of fact, we *can* find a way back to an objective ethics by noting the performance standards implicit in cooperative human endeavor. These standards are not capriciously defined, nor are they governed by human opinion. Rather, these standards bubble to the surface of the wake created as human beings struggle to explain and subdue the world. 'If it works, it's good,' may be the motto of pragmatism; but functionalism argues 'if it's good, it works.'⁶ And to discover what is good, we need only pay heed to the inviolable requirements of successful cooperation among human beings working toward a common goal.

Functionalism rejects the notion that we must answer questions about the ultimate nature of reality before we can answer moral questions or find an objective ethics. Whether the performance standards were created by God, came to the world from Panspermia, or are the accidental product of evolution, we cannot deny that they *are* the performance standards. The theist and atheist may vehemently disagree over the ultimate provenance of the moral precepts; but functionalism gives the theist and the atheist a common framework within which to recognize, understand, and accept an objective moral system.

Because Functionalism is still in its formative stages, and because it is so susceptible to misinterpretation, it is imperative that we be as precise as possible in explaining it (or, at least, those portions of the theory that are relevant to our central question). To make this a bit more digestible, I will reduce the relevant portions of Functionalism to a pair of assumptions and a sequence of twelve straightforward claims. The two key assumptions are drawn from the history of philosophy itself:

Assumption #1: *The traditional distinction between the causa essendi of a thing and its causa cognoscendi is legitimate until demonstrated to be otherwise.*

This distinction has been a philosophical axiom since at least the Middle Ages, and what it tells us is that there is a significant difference between 'that which causes a thing to exist or to be what it is' (*causa essendi*) and 'that which allows us to know about a thing' (*causa cognoscendi*). For example, the *causa essendi* of a black hole is the total collapse and compression of a titanic star, which causes the formation of an almost infinitely dense point called a 'singularity'. But the way we come to know about the black hole is by way of a theory in particle physics that is subsequently confirmed by the observation of phenomena or outcomes predicted by the theory. Clearly, the *causa essendi* is distinct and easily distinguishable from the *causa cognoscendi* of the black hole.

To take a somewhat more down-to-earth example, consider the AIDS virus. Its *causa essendi* is not clear³ it may have had its origin in some harmless virus that underwent a radical transformation in the Green Monkey population in central Africa and was subsequently

transmitted to human beings. However, there is no similar mystery surrounding its *causa cognoscendi*: A team of French medical researchers operating within a highly advanced technological enterprise made it possible for the virus to be detected and identified.

Unfortunately, while the distinction's validity for science is taken for granted, its validity is regularly and forcefully denied in the context of Ethics. Suppose that a culture discovers that 'Thou shalt not kill' is a valuable and valid moral precept (the culture is the *causa cognoscendi*). Yet, there are those who would automatically infer that the culture is also the *causa essendi* of this precept as well. They are inclined to say, "Sure, 'Thou shalt not kill' is *true for* that culture, but that does not mean that it exists or has validity outside the requirements of that culture. Now, it may be the case that the *causa essendi* of such a precept is also its *causa cognoscendi*^{3/4} but we should be no more inclined to make this inference in the case of a moral rule than we are to make this inference in the case of a medical discovery. If we are willing to grant an objective grounding to the AIDS virus beyond the scope of French medical research, then we should not deny such status to moral precepts *unless we have an intervening argument that justifies such a conclusion*. If it is *ab initio* problematic (if not absurd) to suggest that the AIDS virus only exists for French medical researchers, then it should be no less problematic to suggest that 'Thou shalt not kill' is only true for the culture that recognizes it as a precept. (We can say that any such unjustified inference is an instance of the 'two causes fallacy'.')

Assumption #2: Contingent knowledge about ethical principles is no less acceptable than contingent knowledge in any other discipline.

In other words, we can learn about ethical rules and principles by making observations about the world of human activity, and those observations are as valid as physical principles discovered by observation and deductive inference about the world of natural activity. An ethical 'best guess' is not to be avoided^{3/4} indeed, it may be all that we can do. Arguably, the fear of contingent ethical knowledge is just another version of the two causes fallacy: if our *causa cognoscendi* yields contingent knowledge, then there are those who immediately infer

that that about which we have the knowledge exists only by right of social convention or is purely imaginary.

The long and the short of it is this: Functionalism argues that we can learn from experience (and the history of experience); it is fully prepared to be satisfied with half of an empirical loaf when the totality of the absolute loaf is missing⁷.

Accordingly, with these major assumptions in mind, it is possible to articulate some of the key tenets of the Functionalist perspective. Obviously, a complete account is here impossible, but what follows should be sufficient to give an adequate idea of what the perspective entails. To simplify matters, the description will be articulated through a sequence of claims.

Claim #1: Either there is some discernible purpose served by the practice of formulating and following moral precepts or there is not; if there is no such discernible purpose, then we should give up the practice as absurd (or we should stop taking it to be a decisive element in our lives.)

This claim is self-evident and incontestable. Given that sanctions usually accompany these precepts, it would be strange, to say the least, to impose sanctions without reason or to allow sanctions to be imposed upon oneself without reason.

Claim #2: If the practice of formulating and following moral precepts does have a discernible purpose, then that purpose is either exclusively religious or it is exclusively secular or it is both religious and secular.

Again, this is self-evident and incontestable. The categories 'religious' and 'secular' would seem to exhaust the domain of human purpose, especially if the term 'secular' is taken to refer to a purpose other than a religious one. More to the point, 'religious' and 'secular' are the two dominant categories in the history of ethics, and they play a key role in the dispute over the provenance of moral precepts.

Claim #3: *If the practice of formulating and following moral precepts has an exclusively religious purpose, then we should relinquish the study of the practice to those who are stewards of things divine and give up attempts to make sense of the secular role of the practice.*

This claim makes the rather inescapable point that if moral precepts have an exclusively religious purpose, e.g., to instill a behavior leading to redemption, then philosophers should give way to theologians. Under such circumstances, moral precepts assume an almost supernatural or miraculous quality having nothing to do with mundane affairs.

Claim #4: *If the practice of formulating and following moral precepts does not have an exclusively religious purpose, then we should be able to discern that purpose in human history; and given that moral precepts primarily regulate our relationships to each other, then we should be able to find that purpose in the history of collective human enterprise.*

It is important to note that this claim *does not* deny a religious purpose to moral precepts. It merely states that if moral precepts have a purpose that is not exclusively religious (i.e., either a secular purpose in addition to a religious one or an exclusively secular purpose), then that (additional) secular purpose should become evident in human affairs. And since moral precepts primarily pertain to the conduct of interpersonal relationships, it follows that we are most likely to discover the secular purpose of the moral precepts by observing the history of human beings engaged in interpersonal (collective or collaborative) activity. The secular purpose of moral precepts, in other words, is as discoverable as any other empirical phenomenon.

Claim #5: *If we examine the conditions under which collective actions occur, then we discover that they may be plotted along a spectrum of human control, which is articulated between an extreme of 'total human control' and an extreme of 'no human control'.*

There are few *collective* actions at the extreme of 'no human control' because to be able to collaborate or cooperate we must have some control of the conditions under which we

act, however minuscule that control may be. The escape from Pompeii and the evacuation of the *Titanic* lie in the direction of the 'no human control' extreme, but they do not precisely sit at the extreme itself. Likewise, there are few actions that lie precisely at the extreme of 'total human control' because there are always environmental factors, e.g., gravity and entropy, with which we must contend. However, in the direction of total control are actions like the celebration of Passover, reading a favorite novel, and entering a calypso contest. Arguably, if we were to plot the totality of human action along this spectrum, we would find a skew in the direction of control (although the occurrence of such a skew is not critical to my argument).

Claim #6: *Collective actions would seem to involve the interplay of five general factors:*

(1) agents, (2) actions, (3) instrumentalities, (4) organizational schemata or plans, and (5) purposes.

This claim is nearly analytic, but it makes the important point that every enterprise is definable along five axes: (1) Who are the persons involved in the enterprise and what is their quality? (2) How do those persons behave toward each other and of what sorts of action are they capable? (3) What tools and methodologies do they have at their disposal? (4) How are they organized and under what concept will they orchestrate their actions? (5) What do they hope to achieve?

Claim #7: *The accountable success or failure of a collective action is directly proportional to our capacity to use the five factors to respond to those conditions that lie between (and not at) the extremes of the control spectrum.*

This claim makes two important points. The first is that we are concerned only with *accountable* success or failure. We may have the best people, plans, tools, and purposes, and we may nevertheless fail because of bad luck. In such a case, we could not be held liable for the outcome. The second point is that accountability is a function of the spectrum lying between the extremes of control. That is, if we have no control of the circumstances under which we act, then we can hardly claim credit for what has happened; and if we have total

control, then our achievement is diminished to the vanishing point (and is hardly worth claiming as an accomplishment).

The question then arises: What then determines success or failure in collective human endeavor? And the answer is quite straightforward: to succeed or fail is to respond or not respond (to master or not master) conditions over which human beings exercise some, but not total, control. If the persons involved in our activity are not adequately disciplined, or are improperly trained, or are not sufficiently motivated, etc., then it is likely our enterprise will fail. Likewise, if we have the wrong tools or our tools are inadequate to the task, it is likely that we will fail. Or if our goals are unrealistic or poorly understood or contrary to what we actually hope to achieve, then it is likely that we will fail. The point is this: no matter which of the five factors we select, we do not dictate the conditions of success or failure; rather, we either answer to the conditions that are not within our complete control or we must refuse to act. The conditions have a life of their own; and while we may be able to master some of them for a short time, we cannot succeed unless we acknowledge and react to their independent existence.

Claim #8: *The conditions over which we do not exercise complete control, in other words, dictate objective normative standards for collective human endeavor.*

This claim merely summarizes what has already been said. If a 'normative standard' tells us how to grade or evaluate a thing, then the independent conditions to which we must respond specify the performance standards that must be met by each of the five collective enterprise factors. We grade every enterprise in each of these areas, and we use those grades to determine which enterprise is best, worst, or average. Moreover, if by 'objective' we mean 'something outside of ourselves that we do not completely control and to which we all have access', then those conditions are clearly objective. Building the Brooklyn bridge, running a successful company, or finding a vaccine for polio: these are all activities whose success or failure is only partially under our control. We respond to conditions in the world, but those

conditions define the task and establish the independent parameters^¾the normative standards^¾ within which that task is carried out.

Claim #9: *Given assumption #1 and claims 4-8, then some of the objective normative standards pertaining to agents, actions, and goals should be of particular interest because*

(a) contained within the standards pertaining to agents one would expect to find a subset of norms that afford a complete account/description of moral character;

(b) contained within the standards pertaining to actions one would expect to find a subset of norms that afford a complete account/description of moral conduct;

(c) contained within the standards pertaining to goals one would expect to find a complete account/description of intrinsic and extrinsic values -- an axiology⁸.

Clearly, there is insufficient room here to deal with this claim, but its significance should not be a source of mystery. What it says is that our observation and analysis of the agents, actions, and goals involved in cooperative human endeavor should yield conclusions that are neatly classifiable under one of the three prime heads of classical ethical theory.

For example, if we analyze the norms pertaining to agents, we will find in short order that we are sifting through the basic insights pertaining to character. "What kind of person should be involved in collective endeavor?" is certainly not a trivial question. A full answer would lead us to consider the person's emotional, intellectual, physical, and moral characteristics. Moreover, by attempting to answer this question, we would also discover a curious fact, viz. that while the standards pertaining to a person's emotional, intellectual, and physical characteristics may vary widely from collective enterprise to collective enterprise, the norms pertaining to a person's moral character remain fairly steady state. For example, consider two groups, one of which is engaged in building levees to contain a swollen river, and the other is a group trying to reprogram a spacecraft that has flown off course. Clearly, there is a wide divergence in the emotional, physical, and intellectual standards pertaining to these two enterprises; but both groups esteem the same basic character traits. Honesty, perseverance, self-discipline, loyalty, and integrity are as important to the folks building the

levees as they are to the scientists attempting to bring the space probe back onto course. It is this constancy of moral character across divergent enterprises that allows us to unashamedly discuss 'honor among thieves'. And it is this same constancy that allows us to recognize the value of Aristotle's virtue theory after 2500 years.⁹

Of course, this is but a third of the story; objective normative standards also pertain to the actions performed by the agents involved in collective endeavor. It would seem to be incontestable that all actions performed under the umbrella of collective activity either promote that activity, undermine that activity, or do neither of those things. Those in the last category are irrelevant; but those that promote the activity are called "right" actions and those that undermine it are called "wrong." And just as there are right and wrong technical procedures or right and wrong manual operations, so too are there right and wrong ways of treating or behaving toward those with whom one collaborates. Moreover, while the technical procedures or manual operations may vary widely from enterprise to enterprise, there is very little, if any, variation in the norms pertaining to our treatment of others. And the reason for this seems clear: the one constant across all cooperative enterprises is human nature itself. That is, human nature itself seems to dictate and shape our tolerance and intolerance of the ways we are treated by others. And this does seem to be universal. All things being equal, where are there persons who are comfortable being treated unfairly? Where are there to be found people who consciously and systematically deny their own worth? Indeed, this universal quality of human nature is so taken for granted that we brand as ill those who deny it, e.g., persons who are 'co-dependent' or have 'low self-esteem'.

The point is that human nature is a far more likely source of the normative standards pertaining to actions than any raw outcome may be. "If it works, it's good," may be the rule of thumb we should employ to identify the one best technical procedure or manual operation for a cooperative enterprise, but it does not work for standards of moral conduct. As J.S. Mill¹⁰ is quick to point out, there are certain intrinsically valuable things that cannot be easily, if ever, overridden^¾ and those values must delimit and temper the goal of the collective enterprise.

That is, there are also normative standards that pertain to the goals of the enterprise. There are good goals, bad goals, and goals that are morally neutral. It is impossible here to enumerate all of the good and the bad, but we can make some worthwhile general observations. First, the goals of collective enterprise must respect human nature and its dictates, and must do so for obvious reasons. Arguably, it is this insight that Kant seeks to capture with the first two formulations of the categorical imperative. Second, whatever the goals we set for ourselves, they must be consistent with the perpetuation of collective activity itself. Arguably, it is this insight that Kant captures with his conception of "the Kingdom of Ends."¹¹

The long of the short of it is this: the normative standards pertaining to agents, actions, and goals are interdependent and integrate the insights of virtue theory, consequentialism, and deontology to form a complex and dynamic perspective. Granted, the perspective is an empirical one, but it is also a product of observation and it is testable. What the world of experience teaches is that agents must not be considered independently of actions and goals; goals presuppose agents and actions; and agents, actions, and goals are only intelligible in the context of a collective enterprise or as a series of collective enterprises, i.e., a way of life.

Claim #10: *The single best causa cognoscendi of the normative standards for actions and agents is a closed or nearly closed narrative community having persistence across time.*

That is, the best way to come to know about these normative standards is by observing a community in microcosm over a period of years. A small enough community is easy to observe and, under the right circumstances, it is even possible to conduct experiments in which one tests the validity of various putative normative standards. One could, for example, attempt some cooperative undertaking in which everyone is instructed to lie to and cheat each other. (Arguably, the absurdity of such an experiment would be so apparent that it would either not be undertaken or it would not be undertaken for long.)

A closed narrative community, in other words, is a test bed. Observation alone is insufficient because the members of the community may get it wrong, i.e., they may

implement rules that retard or destroy collective endeavor in the long term because those rules fail to respect fundamental human nature. A closed narrative community would allow the erection of experiments to confirm/infirm the value of these rules in fairly short order.

Claim #11: *Few such communities exist, but the profession of arms is one of them, and this is the sole basis and outer limit of any special moral status it may possess, i.e., its members are not 'more moral' than those outside the community, but they do have the advantage of working and living inside a **causa cognoscendi** community.*

There are other such communities, e.g., the guilds of the Middle Ages, the Greek polis, the Shaker communities of the 19th century, and some of today's religious orders. Arguably, the members of these groups are not moral *in se*, but they may appear to be morally superior because they reside within a *causa cognoscendi* community. Those in religious orders, for example, enjoy a double advantage over their extra-communal counterparts: first, they receive a focused dose of ethical instruction via religious teaching, and, second, they have that instruction confirmed to them by engaging in cooperative endeavor with their brothers or sisters.

Arguably, this claim was recently confirmed for American military professionals by way of the so-called "Total Quality Management" (TQM) initiative. TQM is nothing other than a theory of obligation masquerading as a management theory, and it exhorts us to constantly examine and improve the quality of the five factors of cooperative human endeavor. For those already aware of functional imperatives, TQM is a redundancy; but for many persons in uniform, it is an exceptional opportunity to reflect upon and implement the normative standards governing cooperative endeavor.

Claim #12: *While it may be possible to capture these precepts under a single, all-encompassing algorithm, the search for such an algorithm or principle is secondary to the realization that the precepts articulate a dynamic way of life; and it is doubtful that such an*

algorithm could ever be a substitute for a genuine comprehension of and appreciation for that way of life.

Cooperative, i.e., social, life may not be susceptible to encapsulation and summarization by way of a single pithy moral algorithm, and we should not squander our time in pursuit of such. (We may only succeed in finding a marvelous inscription for the tombstone of our civilization.) Rather, our goal should be to achieve comprehension of the purpose of the moral precepts and an appreciation of their value in the broader context of human endeavor.

Our Questions

"Where do moral rules come from?" is the first of our questions, and if I have been at all successful, then it should be apparent by now that there are two ways to interpret this question. On the one hand, we may be asking, "What is the *causa essendi* of the moral rules?" and my answer, which is in no way meant to be flippant, is another question: *Who cares?* We do not need to know the *causa essendi* of the moral rules in order to know that there are objective normative standards for persons engaged in cooperative human endeavor. Perhaps God wove these standards into the fabric of reality or perhaps they are a purely accidental product of the interaction of our species with conditions in the world, but the point is this: we need not resolve this question before we can detect the normative standards, articulate their purpose, or commit to following them. It may well be that the moral precepts have a religious purpose above and beyond (or in addition to) their secular purpose, but we need not accept the actuality of the former before grasping the actuality of the latter. The normative standards are *out there*; we know we must obey them to be successful in long term, cooperative endeavors, and we cannot change that fact by changing our religious orientation.

On the other hand, if we are asking, "What is the *causa cognoscendi* of the moral rules?" then my answer is far more straightforward. We discover the moral rules by observing

human beings engaged in collective enterprises. Whenever human beings are engaged in cooperative activity for the purpose of solving some problem in the world, the normative standards present themselves or, at the very least, suggest themselves. And by employing a *causa cognoscendi* community we may test those suggestions.

How is this relevant for military ethics? It is relevant in at least four ways. First, it allows us to anchor our professional ethics to something other than opinion, viz., the performance standards implicit in the task we are trying to perform. Arguably, we have not done a perfect job of this in the past. For example, we do not merely seek to manage violence, but to manage violence in very specific ways to achieve very specific ends of value. If we can analyze these ends fully, we can then determine the complete set of performance standards inherent in the problem. Functionalism, in other words, promises to properly orient professionals to the true task at hand, and it thus guides them to a full recognition of all of the standards they must satisfy.

Second, Functionalism fully cashes out the widespread intuition that the profession of arms has a central role to play in late 20th century ethics. As the profession that demands the greatest degree of cooperative activity among its members, it is the single best *causa cognoscendi* of the moral conduct and character norms needed for successful resolution of common problems. There are no uniquely military values or virtues as such: there is only a highly organized community with a single-minded purpose whose activities allow us to discover certain regular features of successful cooperative endeavor. Yes, the profession of arms is special, but only because of the service it provides to the moral community as a whole.

Third, this is relevant for military ethics because it offers us a means for sorting out good from bad moral theories. Functionalism immediately discredits conventionalism, relativism, subjectivism, and egoism. Conventionalists, relativists, and subjectivists are just plain wrong: the performance standards implicit in the problem-to-be-solved are not subject to manipulation by persons, cultures, or conventional agreements. One may choose to ignore those standards, but the price paid is failure. Likewise, while the egoist may be right in saying that ethical rules must promote human welfare, he or she is wrong to infer that this means the

rules must promote the welfare of any given person, family, or group. The center of the universe of moral interest is not the individual human but humanity itself, and there is no reason to believe that the rules of successful cooperation must pander to individual interests.

Finally, it is relevant because it helps to assuage Dr. Fotion's concern about ethical theories. Functionalism gives us a fresh start. It compels us to disengage from the fundamentally false assumptions and paradigms that becloud the Enlightenment project. What we have heretofore called ethical theories are not really theories at all, for they are neither tied to any particular set of observations nor were they driven by methodological imperatives to confirm/infirm their conclusions. In fact, Functionalism promises to provide the framework within which genuine moral theories may evolve for the first time in the history of the discipline.

¹The opinions expressed in this paper are the private opinions of the author and do not in any way represent the official views of the United States Air Force, Department of Defense, or the Government of the United States.

²Walter M. Miller, Jr., *A Canticle For Leibowitz* (New York: Bantam Books, 1961).

³Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1981) is the best expression of the views of this movement. MacIntyre seems especially convinced of the value of Miller's *A Canticle For Leibowitz*, and he has done the most to argue for the apocalyptic interpretation of the Enlightenment.

⁴I am by no means suggesting that MacIntyre, et al. have done nothing to solve the problem. However, I do believe they have not been entirely successful because of the near-universal suspicion of empiricism in philosophical circles.

⁵I am here referring to a draft of Dr. Nick Fotion's paper, "It Really Doesn't Matter That Much," which he is to deliver at JSCOPE XVI. I agree with much of what Nick has to say in his paper, but he does not go far enough. When one discovers the hollow nature of the project to formulate moral theory, one's response should not be a pessimistic fatalism; rather, the proper response is to surrender the project as bankrupt and move on to something like Functionalism.

⁶One of the conditions *out there* is human nature itself, especially the apparently universal sensibility that human beings deserve respect and expect to be treated in ways that are consistent with what they deserve.

⁷It is a source of mystery to me that so many persons are afraid of an empirically-based ethics, as though such an empirical basis diminishes the value or force of the precepts discovered. Clearly, this is in part motivated by religious concerns, but shouldn't religious persons find comfort in the empirical discovery of moral truths that are already articulated in Scripture?

⁸Perhaps the best contemporary expression of an axiological ethics is J.N. Findlay's *Values and Intentions*, which is grounded in phenomenological introspection or intuition. Arguably, Functionalism will validate Findlay's conclusions, but it will also lift from them the veil of subjectivism under which they are now blanketed.

⁹Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1985).

¹⁰John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* is the consummate expression of the need to ultimately subordinate cost-benefit calculation to fixed, eternal intrinsic values, e.g., liberty, autonomy, justice, etc.

¹¹Immanuel Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Values*, Trans. Thomas K. Abbott (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1949), pp. 38-54.