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THE ILLUSION OF COMPETING ETHICS

Operationalizing the Army's Core Value System

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"To thine own self be true..."

      from _Hamlet_ by Wm. Shakespeare

    In today's greying world, trendy sociologists and psychologists would have us believe that right and wrong have been displaced by normative and anormative. A noncompetitive world could exist with such a notion; but, our world cannot. Man has phyllo-genetic precognitions of right and wrong. Cultural and professional ethics have sprung from this common base, creating complex psycho-social arenas within which we must exist. Problems arise when we perceive different ethics vying for our adherence. Nowhere can this perception be so keen as in the American military, especially for the citizen-soldier. The underlying core value system that is the genesis of each ethic is universal. The problem for the American military is not whether or not to have an ethic, or which ethic to have, but operationalizing the core value system that is the foundation for all ethics. The purpose of this article is to shed some light on the perceived dilemma of competing ethics.

    Let's start with a few definitions:

VALUE: Something an individual or organization considers fundamentally
       important.

CORE VALUE SYSTEM: Fundamental beliefs that, when melded, yield a set of
               morals.

MORAL: That which distinguishes right from wrong.

ETHIC: A system or code of morals.

ETHICS

Who has an ethic? Certainly you and I as individuals, but in a larger
sense, so does the civilian world (society less the military) and the
military. For the sake of argument, assume "yours" and "mine" are the same as
the group within which we operate. The civilian world has a multiplicity of
ethics, but consider a single representative civilian ethic. We reduce
complexity from four to two institutional dimensions....a military ethic and a
civilian ethic.

FM 22-100, Military Leadership, and FM 100-1, The Army, state the
Professional Army Ethic consists of:

- Loyalty to the nation's ideals.

- Loyalty to the Army.

- Loyalty to the unit.

- Personal responsibility.

- Selfless service.

Is this a professional Army ethic or simply a professional ethic? The
tenets are not unique to the Profession of Arms. Consider:

- Loyalty to the nation's ideals

- Loyalty to the corporation.

- Loyalty to the operating agency or profit center.

- Personal responsibility.

- Selfless service.

There is not much difference between the two, if any! A professional (military) ethic is simply a set of behavioral expectations commonly understood and accepted by members of the profession. The military ethic springs from the trust and confidence vested by the nation and nurtured by longstanding traditions. But, in form, the military ethic and a civilian ethic are not substantively different.
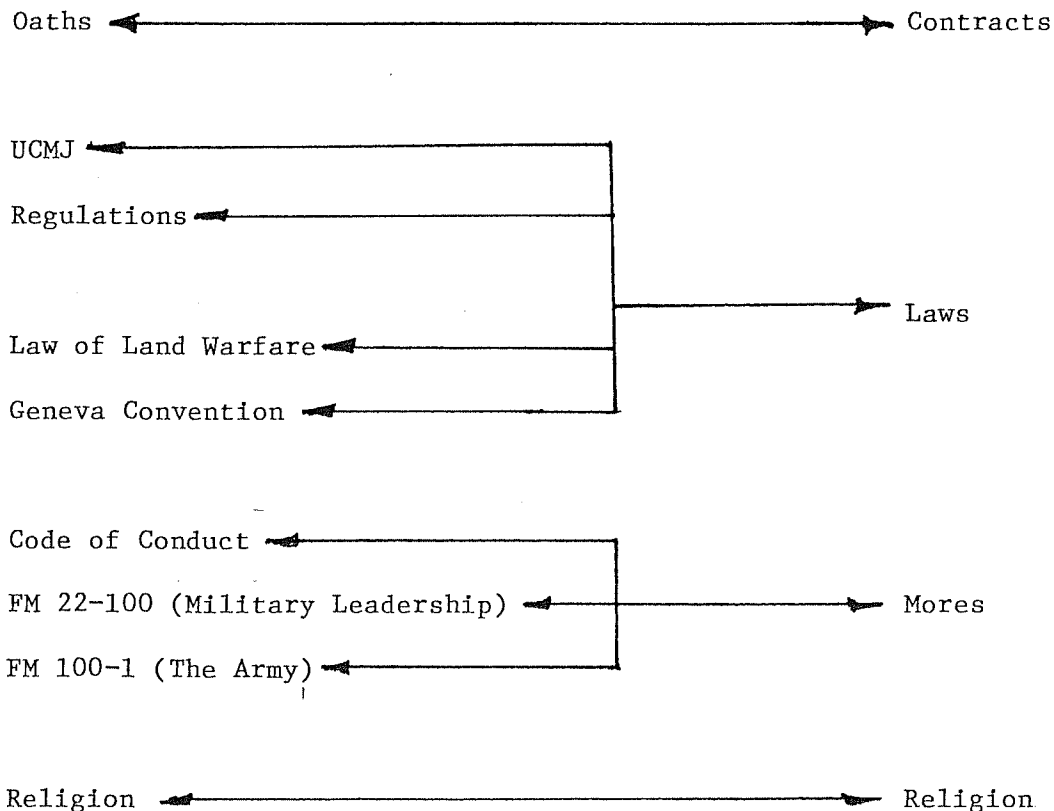
MORALS

For the non-pathological, morals are clear. The informal source of morals are myriad. The formal sources differ in name only.

FORMAL SOURCES OF MORALS

FOR THE MILITARY   FOR CIVILIANS

Oaths ◄————————————————————————————► Contracts

UCMJ ◄————————————————┐
Regulations ◄————————————————┤
                                                              ├————————► Laws
Law of Land Warfare ◄————————————————┤
Geneva Convention ◄————————————————┘

Code of Conduct ◄————————————————┐
FM 22-100 (Military Leadership) ◄————————————————┤————————► Mores
FM 100-1 (The Army) ◄————————————————┘

Religion ◄————————————————————————————► Religion

CORE VALUE SYSTEM

Americans generally hold a single core value system in esteem, which with minor modifications, is applicable across the socio-economic-political spectrum. The Core Value System forming the Professional Army Ethic is not unique to the military. Neither are "Solderly Qualities" or "Leadership Traits." *Historically,* Soldiers have proven the worth of these values, creating the illusion that such virtues are unique to the Profession of Arms.

SOLDIERLY QUALITIES	LEADERSHIP TRAITS
Courage	Courage
	Bearing
Candor	Decisiveness
	Dependability
Competence	Endurance
	Enthusiam
Commitment	Initiative
	Integrity
	Judgement
	Justice
	Knowledge
	Loyalty
	Selflessness
	Tact

Fundamental values, which are sources of our informal morals, are different

in application and intensity:

- Loyalty and obedience, be it to spouse, family, church, corporation, profession, working unit, friends, etc.

- Subordination of personal well-being for the greater good. Purists may argue today's validity of this tenet, but American's still make sacrifices for home, social group, church, community, state, and nation.

- Integrity. Truth, candor, sincerity, and the avoidence of deception, expediency, artificiality, and shallowness are held in esteem by the general populace even today.

Certainly these are non-negotiable requirements for ethical behavior, but they are not unique to the military. The difference between civilian and military core value systems is best characterized by:

- A shifting civilian morality that has yielded to trendy, liberal sociologists and psychologists. Right and wrong are still distinguishable, but what is right or wrong is changing.

- An abandoning of the absolute for the situational by both sectors.

- Civilianization of the military. We have an Army consisting of citizen-soldiers _and_ warriors. The citizen-soldier does not generally have the conservative realism about world affairs that the professional warrior has.

WHY?

The first question is _why_ the ethic should be made to work. The basis for the difference between the civilian and military worlds is the essence of military service. The motivation to adhere to, or operationalize, the ethic is different for each world. For the military, the ethic must be stringently applied. Why?

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(1) PUBLIC DEMAND: Society has an historically high expectation for ethical military behavior. The Profession of Arms has always been, or tried to be, a paragon of ethical behavior. Deviations, however slight, are big.

(2) PUBLIC SCRUTINY: The military is a public service; therefore, a free and easy target.

(3) PROFIT MOTIVE: The absence of a dollar motive may provide an illusion of purity. Military professionals have "profit" motives, but not in a monetary sense. There is no institutional competition for the military. The Profession of Arms is a monopoly. Institutional leaders can worry about ameliorating internal ethics without worrying about external threats to organizational survival. On the civilian side, profit centers compete and survival of the fittest rules. At the sub-institutional level, unit (service) vies with unit (service) in generally unhealthy, discooperative competition. Compromises, as in the civilian world, are made for the sake of success ("profit").

(4) INTERNAL SCRUTINY: The military has a closer, "more constant" system of checks for ethical behavior. Room for abuse exists, but the military has legal recourses for ethical compromises that personally affect individuals. Every soldier has a formal comprehensive, historical record of individual ethical (mis)behavior. Because compromises may have a devastating cost due to the military's fundamental mission -- combat --, careers can be rightfully terminated as a result of indiscretions. The civilian world does
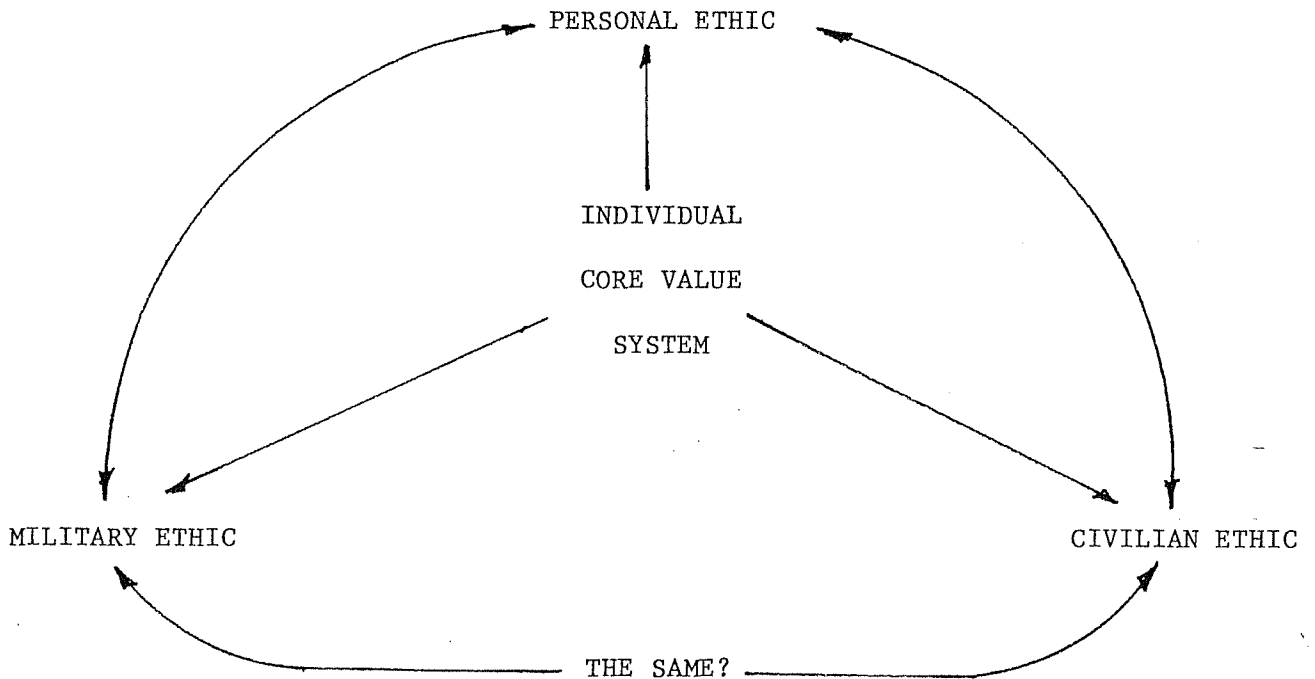
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not match this level of intensity; rather, corporations pay the costs, buffering (ir)responsible individuals.

(5) ULTIMATE LIABILITY: All the tenets have more meaning because soldiers swear service to the death. Sharing ultimate liability requires ultimate faith and trust in each other.

WHO?

The second question is who makes the ethic work.

Personal adherence to an ethic is dynamic. Although individual core value systems may be static, we situationally prostitute our personal ethic to adhere to the demands of our operational arena.

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                          PERSONAL ETHIC
                    ↗          ↑          ↖
                 ↙             │             ↘
              ↙             INDIVIDUAL            ↘
           ↙                CORE VALUE               ↘
        ↙                     SYSTEM                    ↘
     ↙          ↙                          ↘              ↘
  ↓        ↙                                    ↘            ↓
MILITARY ETHIC                                      CIVILIAN ETHIC
      ↖                                              ↗
         ⌐——————————————  THE  SAME?  ——————————————⌐
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The military requires each soldier perpetually adhere to the ethic in personal and professional life. The costs, in terms of human suffering, death, and mission accomplishment, are too great to play it fast and loose with ethics. Quibbling over a few meters of terrain can mean misplaced artillery. "Massaging" readiness reports can misrepresent unit capability. Shaving a few pounds off a weight control report can misrepresent personal qualification.

In the civilian world, costs and risks exist; but, corporate executives are not gambling lives and national goals. Strict individual adherence to the ethic is paramount in the Profession of Arms. Situational ethics can exist in the corporate world.

The real problem exists for people operating under an oscillating level of intensity. Some (citizen) soldiers subscribe to both worlds, or perceive that they do. These same soldiers may have difficulty coping with the demands of a strigent military ethic, especially if they value-processed and underwent adult socialization in the civilian world, operate in the civilian world more than the military world (Reserve Component), and/or believe they are in the military only when they wear the uniform.

WHAT?

For individuals and organizations, one ethic is better than two or three. A higher standard is better than a low one. Core value systems must be predicated on a single, high standard. A high ethic based on static, individual core value systems tend to obviate situational compromises.

By joining the Profession of Arms, especially the officer corps, every soldier makes a commitment to the operating norms of his professional community, regardless of component. The truth is the truth. This should be the fundamental tenet of a warrior's core value system. Each of us must always tell the truth even if no one wants to hear it.

- If a battalion has 15 non-operational vehicles, it has 15 non-operational vehicles. It does not have 10 deadlined and 5 that could be up if parts were cannibalized.

- If you are a reserve officer about to come on active duty and you exceed your screening weight, you exceed your screening weight. You do not weigh what you could weigh if you lose weight before you report.

HOW?

A professional ethic is not necessarily a code of conduct blown into a convenient list of maxims. It is alive! The achievement of a true appreciation and acceptance of a professional military ethic does not depend on a list of pious platitudes, but on the ability to operationalize the ethic. The Professional Army Ethic is probably as good a statement as any other. Some people may require a list of measurable standards; but, unless we are collectively commited to making our core value system work, there is no statement of ethics that will work. The what will be unimportant.

Instead of temporizing and apoligizing for the unethical, we should institutionally rise up in indignation and scorn, casting out those who are indiscrete, improprietous, and untruthful. We owe it to our nation, our

profession, our soldiers, and ourselves to meet and force others to meet the

highest ethical standard regardless of the arena in which we operate.

"Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example."

Mark Twain

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