

Tower

page 62#16

A CREEDAL-CODE OF ETHICS FOR THE MILITARY PROFESSION

1. The military profession requires neither a pure code of ethics nor an ethical creed; rather, it requires a document which at once states the ethical goals of the military profession while also giving those prescriptions best suited to the attainment of those goals. In short, it requires a 'creedal-code'.

2. "A Code of Ethics for the Military Profession" is an extremely inviting topic; it tempts one to plunge immediately into the task of laying-out those prescriptions which either demarcate the lowermost limits of acceptable behavior in the military profession or which exhort us to excellence in the profession-of-arms. But one must avoid this siren song of our topic. Before laying out the moral rules and goals essential to the military professional one must first explore and delineate that ethical perspective -- the General Normative Ethical Theory -- which is the basis and driving force of the profession. Unless this is done, one runs the great risk of arguing for rules which are either worthless, mutually inconsistent, or even inimical to the interests of the profession. To borrow a line from Kant: a theoretical foundation without prescriptions is empty, but prescriptions without a theoretical basis are blind.

3. Hence, we are confronted with the question: What is the GNET upon which the military profession is based? The answer is: a GNET recently hinted at by Alasdair MacIntyre, and which I shall call "praxiology". Although this GNET has yet to be fully defined, we can say that it makes the following claims:

3.1. Human beings have a telos or functional definition. That is, we can understand the claim "X is a bad person" because we have at least an intuitive grasp of what it means to live the good life in excellence.

3.2. This functional definition is based on the fact of a universal set of values common to all human beings.

3.3. These values are cashed out by various forms of "social practice" whose specific purpose is to realize those values.

3.4. These forms of social practice vary from culture to culture, but this variation is accidental or incidental to the values they realize.

3.5. Moreover, the forms of social practice are preserved and perpetuated in each culture by way of an historical narrative.

3.6. Hence, each culture can be graded on at least three scales: first, there is the number of universal values it recognizes and pursues; second, there is the extent to which its recognized forms of practice cash-out these values; and, third, the ability of its narrative to perpetuate the successful forms of practice and to adjust itself to admit new, equally successful forms of practice.

3.7. Finally, the functional definition of a human being may be said to consist of an enumeration of those characteristics which a human being must possess if he/she is to take part in the successful forms of practice. In short, these characteristics are dispositions without which the practice cannot be successfully prosecuted. The good man/woman is that person who possesses these critical virtues and acts through them.

4. MacIntyre claims that this GNET was prevalent before the Eighteenth Century, but was forgotten during the Enlightenment when the concept of a functional human definition was rejected in favor of the belief that human beings are unformed, radical 'monads' which enter into contractual arrangements for purposes of safety and mutual reward. Calling this event a "catastrophe", MacIntyre attributes to it the present incommensurability of moral discourse, the "Me" generation, the tendency to embrace emotivism, and contractarian theories.

5. In fact, the catastrophe of the Enlightenment was so pervasive that it caused the total loss of praxiology.

6. I shall argue, however, that this GNET was not completely lost. Indeed, it has been preserved in various cultures and subcultures which are not wholly susceptible to the suasions of popular thinking. Certain religious orders, for example, have preserved this GNET. More importantly, it has also been preserved by the military profession.

7. The military profession is a true profession because it is based on this GNET. It is a genuine community dedicated to the realization of universal values through highly defined forms of social practice. Indeed, the definition of the military professional contains an enumeration of those dispositions or virtues which are essential to the task of cashing-out those universal values. In a sense, we can say that the military profession is a dedicated, master social practice.

8. If we are to have a code of ethics for the military profession, it must lay-out and emphasize that profession as a master social practice and the functional definition of its members. The best means for accomplishing this is to combine a creed -- a statement of purpose -- with a code -- a list of prescriptions. The 'creedal' element will emphasize the profession as a master social practice, while the code will prescribe/prohibit those behaviors which promote or are inimical to the practice.