

GALLANT ATAVISM

The Military Ethic in an Age of Nihilism

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ALTHOUGH THAT title is pompous, it tells you exactly what I plan to tell you. An ethic is a body of moral principles or values governing or distinctive of a group. Almost any group—a collection of ministers or mechanics, a mafia—can, and often does, have an ethic. Here I do not write about ministers or mechanics or mafia but about the military.¹ Ferdinand Foch (1851–1929), the French general, once asked this question of war: “*De quoi s’agit-il?*” What is it all about? What is its end, its purpose? In a similar vein, the English writer C. S. Lewis



(1898–1963) once contended that “the first qualification for judging any [thing] . . . from a corkscrew to a cathedral is to know what it is—what it was intended to do and how it was meant to be used.” What values or morals govern or are distinctive of a professional military group?

I think we could trace through rather a large number of such values—a sense of honor and duty, a spirit of patriotism and self-sacrifice, an awareness of tradition, and a feeling of loyalty to seniors and subordinates who similarly share one’s treasury of values. But surely that is not enough. Those very same values might be found—one hopes they would be found—in, say, the diplomatic corps or even in our country’s executives, legislators, and judges. Something must set the military professional apart—something truly unique and therefore clearly distinguishing.

Tired though we are with the statistics of nihilism swirling about us, the terrible truth is that so many of our countrymen essentially believe—in nothing.

I venture to say, with Gen Sir John Hackett, that what finally segregates you from so many others with whom, in many other ways, you might share high values is precisely this: you guard our country and our way of life, and you are prepared to die in our defense. But more—in guarding our country and our way of life, you are also prepared, either directly or indirectly, to kill in our defense. Yours is a contract conceivably involving death—either yours or our country’s enemies’. Your contract thus contains, as Hackett puts it, the “clause of unlimited liability.”² That, simply put, is your ethic, the military ethic, the profession of arms.

Nihilism, from the Latin “nihil” (“nothing”), means belief—in nothing. It refers to the entire rejection of established beliefs—as in religion, morals, government, and laws. I will spare you a

lengthy list of sorrowful contemplations about the moral state of our society today. But the point must, nonetheless, be made, as it has been recently by William Bennett:

[From 1960 to 1990] there has been more than a 500 percent increase in violent crime; more than a 400 percent increase in illegitimate births; a tripling in the teenage suicide rate; a doubling in the divorce rate; and a drop of almost 75 points in SAT scores. Modern-day social pathologies have gotten worse. . . . [O]ur society now places less value than before on what we owe others as a matter of moral obligation; less value on sacrifice as a moral good; less value on social conformity, respectability, and observing the rules; and less value on correctness and restraint in matters of physical pleasure and sexuality. Higher value is now placed on things like self-expression, individualism, self-realization, and personal choice.³

We have all been endlessly subjected to doom-and-gloom preachers, prophets, and pundits who cite mournful statistics about drugs, drink, and divorce; about homicide or rape; about illiteracy or abortion. We tire of such tirades and jeremiads, for we know that such complaints about our country are so often intended solely to serve narrow personal, political, or sectarian ends. Tired though we are with the statistics of nihilism swirling about us, the terrible truth is that so many of our countrymen essentially believe—in nothing. In evidence of that claim, I submit the lyrics of so many popular songs, the messages of so many contemporary TV shows and movies, the failure of so many American educational enterprises from grade school to graduate school. The list, I am afraid, could easily be lengthened.

You who wear the uniform practice your profession among many millions who do not know and do not care, and the “way of life” in defense of which you are now ready to kill and die is under assault as never before in the history of our country. The people doing the assaulting are not Germans or North Koreans or North Vietnamese or even Iraqis—but Americans themselves. The military ethic in an age of nihilism: the knights in shining armor still exist, but few can hear them over the sounds of the orgy.

Gallant suggests something noble, valiant, brave, and heroic. Your profession insists upon gallantry, not sometimes, not just in combat, but always—in or out of uniform—over the skies of Iraq and in the corridors of hotels. You are distinctive too, in that your *oath*—a curiously medieval term with a powerful modern impact—obliges you to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic. Such gallantry and such promises suggest the biological term *atavism*—the reappearance in a plant or animal of characteristics of some remote ancestor that have been absent in intervening generations.

The remote ancestors that I talk about are our forebears from the time, generally, of the Civil War (1861–65) through, perhaps, World War II (ending in 1945). I would argue that a post–World War II emphasis on materialism, from which none of us has wholly escaped, gave rise to, or at least has surely coexisted with, a decline in those same moral, ethical, or spiritual values that so often marked the daily conversations of ordinary Americans whom we know as our great-grandfathers. We could certainly argue about the extent to which America lapsed into a spiritual decline in the late 1940s and through the 1950s, but I suspect that few of us—whether from the left or right of the political spectrum—would debate long whether America went into a moral decline in the 1960s and 1970s. I would assert that the latter trend has continued through the 1980s and into this decade.

In 1955 Walter Lippmann wrote a superb book entitled *Essays in the Public Philosophy*. In it, he deplores a declining sense of civic virtue. Lippmann eloquently discusses the sense of tradition and the sense of common purpose that link—or ought to link—all of us to our country. Lippmann quotes Edmund Burke (1729–97), who once described the bindings that secure a man to his country as “ties which though light as air are as strong as links of iron.” “That,” Lippmann says, “is why young men die in battle for their country’s sake and why old men plant trees they will never sit under.”⁴

In the military, Article 133 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice still exists, but one must wonder how long it will endure

Forty years after Lippmann comes Zbigniew Brzezinski, long-time professor at Columbia and President Jimmy Carter’s national security adviser, to tell us that the spirit of public service, ill by 1955, has now practically flat-lined. In his 1993 book *Out of Control*, Brzezinski terms American society a “permissive cornucopia, [which] involves essentially a society in which the progressive decline in the centrality of moral criteria is matched by heightened preoccupation with material and sensual self-gratification. . . . The combination of the erosion of moral criteria in defining personal conduct with the emphasis on material goods results both in permissiveness on the level of action and in material greed on the level of motivation.”⁵

Brzezinski points out that the notion of freedom used to be understood in the context of citizenship—our rights were seen in a context of citizenship in which duties preserved rights and rights fostered a sense of duty. Today, Brzezinski tells us, “*civic freedom is divorced from . . . civic responsibility*” (emphasis in original).⁶

I agree with Brzezinski, but I do not choose to quote statistics here to support his thesis. Rather, I ask you to listen to the words, to the sentiment, of a Rhode Islander—a man I suspect that many of you have come, in a manner of speaking, to know. His gallantry, profession, and sacrifice are exactly what you are about. His qualities tell you why your subordinates salute you and respect you as “sir” or “ma’am.” On 14 July 1861—a week before the battle of Bull Run—Sullivan Ballou, a major in the Second Rhode Island volunteers, then in Washington, D.C., wrote home to his wife in Smithfield:

My very dear Sarah:

The indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days—perhaps tomorrow. Lest I should not be able to write again, I feel impelled to write a few lines that may fall under your eye when I shall be no more. . . .

I have no misgivings about, or lack of confidence in the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how strongly American Civilization now leans on the triumph of the Government, and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and sufferings of the Revolution. And I am willing—perfectly willing—to lay down all my joys in this life to help maintain this Government, and to pay that debt. . . .

Sarah, my love for you is deathless, [and] it seems to bind me with mighty cables that nothing but Omnipotence could break; and yet my love of Country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me irresistibly on with all these chains to the battle field.

The memories of the blissful moments I have spent with you come creeping over me, and I feel most gratified to God and you that I have enjoyed them for so long. And hard it is for me to give them up and burn to ashes the hopes of future years, when, God willing, we might still have lived and loved together, and seen our sons grown up to honorable manhood around us. . . . If I do not [return], my dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you, and when my last breath escapes me on the battle field, it will whisper your name. Forgive my many faults, and the many pains I have caused you. How thoughtless and foolish I have often times been! How gladly would I wash out with my tears every little spot upon your happiness. . . .

But, O Sarah! If the dead can come back to this earth and flit unseen around those they loved, I shall always be near you; in the gladdest days and in the darkest nights . . . always, always, and if there be a soft breeze upon your cheek, it shall be my breath, as the cool air fans your throbbing temple, it shall be my spirit passing by. Sarah, do not mourn me dead; think I am gone and wait for [me], for we shall meet again.⁷

Major Ballou was killed at the first battle of Bull Run.

Here, then, is my thesis: The military ethic can and must serve as a source of moral refreshment⁸ in an age which so often finds that military ethic and even Major Ballou to be objects of ridicule, for the gallantry of your profession and of Sullivan Ballou are not understandable in crack houses, among the impoverished, or among the lifestyles of the rich and famous. Today, I often despair of some clergymen and of some cults, and I regard universities with increasing disdain. If I am at all correct and moral squalor began in the late 1940s to keep pace with economic affluence, then I think the profession of arms is one of the very few institutions that can remind us of those values which impart noble purpose to life. Thus, the military ethic is a gallant atavism in a nihilistic and materialistic age.⁹

The belief in our time that there is no common good, no universal reason, is what Alasdair MacIntyre of Notre Dame calls “the privatization of the good.”¹⁰ If politics is merely the will of the strongest or the victory of the most popular, then increasingly we have not good law but the triumphant legislation of some pressure group’s special advantage. Public recognition today seems to depend much less on reason and much more upon shock value, foul language, and repeated assaults on the standards of decency most of our grandparents accepted as “civilized behavior.” Why, after all, can’t I say what I please? Why can’t I make love in public if I choose? I do not lie or cheat; I “get over.” I do not steal; I rip off. There is no common good—only my good. I do and say whatever I please—unless I am caught. Some people, even those learning your ethic, are caught doing what many of our forebears would have called shameful.

As Josiah Bunting, former Army officer and author of the Vietnam novel *The Lionheads*, recently wrote,

Those who cheat at Annapolis cheat because our culture and society reward academic achievement and competition—reward and exalt it—and are not able to educate young people not to cheat. . . . The ultimate measurements of intellectual fitness for the naval profession, of a vocation to serve, and of the necessary character to lead sailors and marines in harm’s way are never the kinds that can be counterfeited.

Bunting contends that the education which produces ensigns and second lieutenants should ingrain the “rich and deep culture of patriotism, love of service, self-denial, military discipline and pride in excellence of performance that go to the making of a sustaining and lifelong devotion to the Navy.”¹¹

Compare that sentiment with this story. One college teacher of ethics, Prof Christina Hoff Sommers of Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, points out in a recent article that, as important as public morality is (issues such as abortion, capital punishment, DNA research, and the like), private morality (lying, cheating, and stealing) is also critically important. One of Sommers’s colleagues criticized her for the piece, arguing that moral people will not be common until there are moral institutions. Thus, the critic planned to continue teaching about oppression of women, big business, multinational corporate transgressions in the developing world, and so on. At the end of the semester, the critic, who was upset, came in to see Professor Sommers. “They cheated on their social justice take-home finals. They plagiarized,” she lamented. In order to help improve private morality, Sommers suggests implementing a three-part program in the schools. It involves establishing behavior codes that emphasize “civility, kindness, and honesty”; expecting teachers to emphasize “civility, decency, honesty and fairness”; and exposing children to “reading, studying and discussing the moral classics.”¹²

An old Chinese proverb says, “You do not use good iron to make a nail or a good man to make a soldier.” In fact, that notion is wholly mistaken. The great anguish of military ethics lies in this: Human beings control the power to kill and maim. If those humans are evil or if they are morally unfit, we thereby unleash a torrent of sinister power. Soldiers and airmen—no less than doctors, teachers, ministers, and lawyers—must be decent and discreet people. But, in anguish, we know that our professions fail us as regularly as our schools in inculcating private morality. Thus do students plagiarize on an ethics test! As Sir William Francis Butler once observed, “The nation that will insist on drawing a broad line of demarcation between the fighting

man and the thinking man is liable to find its fighting done by fools and its thinking done by cowards.” We might add the corollary that the nation that will insist on drawing a broad line of demarcation between moral instruction and public schooling—or between character formation and military training—is liable to find its educational orders given by the corrupt and its ethical standards set by the illiterate.

It is sometimes said of mercenary men that they know the price of everything and the value of nothing. All ethics is a debate about comparative value. Unless students and soldiers learn to value wisely and well, they imperil their peers, their mission, their service, and their country. Saint Augustine, in book 4, section 4, of *The City of God*, asks, “Justice being taken away, then, what are kingdoms but great robberies?” Students of military ethics must ask, “Morality being taken away, then, what are armies but great mobs?” After four years at Harvard, a recent undergraduate said in his graduation speech, “Among my classmates, however, I believe that there is one idea, one sentiment, which we have all acquired at some point in our Harvard careers; and that, ladies and gentlemen, is, in a word, confusion.” He went on to say, “They tell us that it is heresy to suggest the superiority of some value, fantasy to believe in moral argument, slavery to submit to a judgment sounder than your own. The freedom of our day is the freedom to devote ourselves to any values we please, on the mere condition that we do not believe them to be true.”¹³

It used to be true on many college campuses that professors could be dismissed for “moral turpitude.” Not only is that notion apparently obsolete, it would be regarded as comical on most campuses. In the military, Article 133 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice still exists, but one must wonder how long it will endure: “Any commissioned officer, cadet, or midshipman who is convicted of conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman shall be punished as a court martial may direct.” That might well include such offenses as drunken or reckless driving (Article 111), wrongful use of controlled substances (Article 112a), rape and carnal knowledge (Article 120), larceny and wrongful appropriation

(Article 121), writing a bad check (Article 123a), sodomy (Article 125), and perjury (Article 131). But some of these appear to be old-fashioned. Is it time for “conduct unbecoming” to go the way of “moral turpitude”?

“Good people aren’t always good soldiers, but good soldiers are always good people.”

Prof Steven Cahn was once asked to give a lecture on the subject of “Ethics in the Academic World.” When he mentioned the topic to a faculty colleague, Cahn was told, “It’ll be a short talk.” Cahn tells of reading a book about modern higher education in which the author, a history professor at a state university in the West, put it bluntly: “I have met few professors whom I would hire to run a peanut stand, let alone be the guardian of wisdom and Western civilization.”¹⁴ According to a spate of recent books, the American university not only is not educating its students, it is inflicting intellectual and moral harm upon them.

Professor Sommers suggests that some “uncontroversial ethical truths” exist. She says, “It is wrong to mistreat a child, to humiliate someone, to torment animals. To think only of yourself, to steal, to lie, to break promises. And on the positive side: It is right to be considerate and respectful of others, to be charitable and generous.”¹⁵ These are universal ethical obligations.¹⁶ In these days of value relativism, we must understand that these obligations, these values, must be cherished. Absolutes, I think, exist (such as our need to follow right reason), but they are necessarily vague.

Education will not return to its proper place as champion of high value until it can again discover virtue.¹⁷ If all that matters, after all, is what one’s group believes at any one time, then all that matters in ethics instruction is cultural relativism. Every group thus determines its own standards of right and wrong. But we are then ethically powerless to assess Adolf Hitler’s

Germany or a street gang’s thuggery. If no universal standards exist for right or wrong, might does make right; there is no profane, for there is no sacred; there are no villains, for there are no heroes; and as there is nothing worth dying for, neither is there anything worth living for.

But how are universal ethical obligations to be inculcated? Such values are taught and caught. They are taught by reading good literature (a good place for kids to begin is with William Bennett’s *Book of Virtues*)¹⁸ and by having good education. (Consider the wonderful contribution of Adm James B. Stockdale and Prof Joseph Brennan in their superb course on the Foundations of Moral Obligation, so long taught at the Naval War College.)¹⁹ And such values are caught by our being exposed to men and women who are, in the best sense of the word, *gallant*. Good education, as Aristotle taught, results in the habitual inclination to do as we ought. Without good education, there will be character—all bad.

These are some of the lyrics of a moving song made famous by Roy Clark: “Yesterday when I was young, the taste of life was sweet as rain upon my tongue. . . . [S]o many happy songs were waiting to be sung, so many wild pleasures lay in store for me, and so much pain my dazzled eyes refused to see. I ran so fast that time and youth at last ran out. I never stopped to think what life was all about. And every conversation I can now recall concerned itself with me and with nothing else at all.” A generation ago, a remarkable popular movie asked the question, “What’s it all about, Alfie?” and a deeply moving book by Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*,²⁰ suggested that power, sexual urge, and greed do not sustain us in our darkest moments, but that purpose, faith, and conviction are what “it’s all about.”

How striking it is to me that two men of whom I heard so much a generation ago, when I was in college, died almost simultaneously a few years ago. Abbie Hoffman, a perpetual protestor of yesteryear, and Col James N. Rowe, USA, for five years a prisoner of war in Vietnam and the author of the deeply moving *Five Years to Freedom*,²¹ both died seven years ago. (Hoffman killed himself with alcohol and a drug overdose on 12 April 1989; Rowe was ambushed and mur-

dered in the Philippines on 21 April.) For much of their lives, one suspects—I guess one can say, “one hopes”—they were animated by the search for truth, which took them onto remarkably different paths. No doubt, Hoffman and Rowe suffered from the belief that too few of their countrymen cared enough about those causes in which they, although almost complete opposites, found meaning and purpose.

In a nihilistic world in which so few contemporary students and so few contemporary faculty would attempt a response to the assertion that “Nothing is worth dying for!” I would suggest that therein lies the very definition of cowardice. People who can find no purpose in noble death can find no purpose in noble life. They are left rudderless on the seas of daily living. As Roy Clark put it in the lyrics I quoted, these people never stop to think what life is all about.

It used to be that education was concerned with wisdom and virtue. I submit that the military ethic, properly understood, is concerned exactly with wisdom and virtue. One requires wisdom and virtue to know that when orders are legal, as the vast majority certainly are, they must be carried out crisply and confidently; and one requires wisdom and virtue to know that when orders are illegal and unethical, their subsequent obedience is wrong.

When I was an infantry officer candidate, I learned the Army leadership principle that I must be “technically and tactically competent.” One of my fellow Officer Candidate School graduates, Lt William L. Calley, Jr., I am sure, learned the same principle—and applied it at My Lai. But Calley was an ethical cretin who never should have been commissioned. I don’t doubt that Calley was trying to serve his country and that he was doing his duty in a twisted, macabre way. It may very well be that Calley some how thought himself an honorable man and a good soldier. The lesson is that one must be technically, tactically, and *ethically* competent.

But I come now to the very heart of the military’s organizational ethics. To say, as West Point has for so many years—Duty, Honor, Country—is, I think, not clear enough. Change it to Honor, which means Principle; then Duty, which means Purpose; then Country, which

means People. Always keep the order prominently in mind. If you get it out of order, chaos reigns. Genuine leaders always take good care of their people. Because you may have to kill and die, you must be willing to put your people in harm’s way—but never lightly. Your reason for being is mission accomplishment and duty—call it your purpose. If purpose or duty or mission accomplishment is all there is, suspend the rules, abolish the laws, and do what you must to win at any cost. But we know better than that. We know that Principle—that is, honor itself—obliges us to devise rules of engagement based upon the laws of war, which in turn are based upon the moral deposit of the ages. Principle, then Purpose, then People. Or—if you prefer—Honor, then Duty, then Countrymen.

Acting with virtue thus guarantees the greatest integrity, for it unites the best of the past with the test of the present and with the quest for the future.

The people who fought the Civil War were born largely in the 1840s. About 100 years later, much of that community of values began to erode—for a cluster of reasons. The military profession, at its best, is concerned with service to the national interest. (Many soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines of World War II simply said, after the war, that they had been “in the service.”) Without that ethic of service, armed services become armed mobs. Perhaps one Latin phrase catches the point well: *corruptio optimi pessima*—the corruption of the best is the worst. As William Shakespeare once put it, “Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.” Thus, Adm Hyman Rickover wrote that “morals are the quarrel we have with behavior. Yet, any system of education which does not inculcate moral values simply furnishes the intellectual equipment whereby men and women can better satisfy their pride, greed, and lust.”²²

Thus, I contend that military training and education (from basic training and boot camp for E-1s through “charm school” for newly minted O-7s) must deal with issues of wisdom and virtue, for only that way lies the cultivation of character. Understand that the military services are among the only institutions in our tortured country today where character education is seriously discussed; where racial justice is invariably the rule; where gender equality, whenever practicable, is increasingly realized; where “conduct unbecoming” really is “conduct unbecoming”; where protocol and etiquette—simple civility and what used to be called common courtesy and good manners—are expected and practiced; where progress purges some tradition and where tradition purifies some progress; and where officers are expected to be ladies and gentlemen.

But does that not return us, once more, to a term of yesteryear: *ladies and gentlemen*? As John Henry Cardinal Newman once wrote, “Liberal education makes not the Christian, not the Catholic, but the gentleman. It is well to be a gentleman. It is well to have a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind, a noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life.”²³ In my recent book *True Faith and Allegiance*, I argue that “good people aren’t always good soldiers, but good soldiers are always good people.”²⁴ As Col Anthony Hartle of West Point writes, “Persons of strong character are the ultimate resource for any military organization.”²⁵

There, then, you have it. The gallant atavism is—you. Because of the military ethic you preserve, Maj Sullivan Ballou is not dead. Because of the military ethic you promulgate, Col James Rowe is not dead. Because of the military ethic you perpetuate, you will be spared the pain of saying at the time of your death, “Every conversation that I can now recall concerned itself with me and with nothing else at all.” The military ethic will teach you principle and purpose and people. It will tell you that you are in *the service* and that by guarding our country and our way of life—by setting the right example—you can help restore a sense of meaning and purpose to the country you protect. In a remarkable talk given at the United States Air Force Acad-

emy nearly a quarter-century ago, Gen Sir John Hackett offered the following explanation of how the military can serve the state:

A man can be selfish, cowardly, disloyal, false, fleeting, perjured, and morally corrupt in a wide variety of other ways and still be outstandingly good in pursuits in which other imperatives bear than those upon the fighting man. He can be a superb creative artist, for example, or a scientist in the very top flight, and still be a very bad man. What the bad man cannot be is a good sailor, or soldier, or airman. Military institutions thus form a repository of moral resource that should always be a source of strength within the state.²⁶

In an age of nihilism, in which too many of our countrymen believe in nothing, you can remind them of values that are eternal. In serving that way, you are truly professional. What you profess in deed and in word is the military ethic, which, at its heart, is chivalry. But isn’t that old-fashioned, out-of-date, even somewhat medieval? No. In your case, honor and duty and self-sacrificing concern for the national interest are most certainly not obsolete; they are professional requirements and functional imperatives—the coin of your realm. When you think in the future of the military ethic, think of the word *integrity*, which, at its root, refers not simply to uprightness and honesty but to wholeness. (An integer, for example, is a whole number—not a fraction.) Acting with integrity squares your conduct with the bearing of those who nobly preceded you; acting with honor puts you at one with the heroes of the past; acting with justice ensures the solidarity of your profession—and thus serves as inspired example for all of us in the Republic to which we pledge our allegiance.

Acting with virtue thus guarantees the greatest integrity, for it unites the best of the past with the test of the present and with the quest for the future. In his first inaugural address, Abraham Lincoln referred to the mystic chords of memory that bind us solemnly together. That is what your professional actions do when they are in keeping with the spirit of the military ethic: they bind you to your brothers-in-arms long since dead, and they bind you to your brothers- and sisters-in-arms for ages to come.

Notes

1. Portions of this article are derived from my recent book *True Faith and Allegiance: The Burden of Military Ethics* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995).
2. See Sir John Winthrop Hackett, *The Profession of Arms* (New York: Macmillan, 1983), 23.
3. William J. Bennett, *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators: Facts and Figures on the State of American Society* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 8–9.
4. Walter Lippmann, *Essays in the Public Philosophy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1955), 36.
5. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Out of Control: Global Turmoil on the Eve of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Scribner's, 1993), 65.
6. *Ibid.*, 69.
7. Geoffrey C. Ward, Ric Burns, and Ken Burns, *The Civil War: An Illustrated History* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 82–83.
8. This is not to argue, however, that soldiers have the duty or right of moral preachment to the society from which they come (and to which they will return) or to the civilian authorities whose will they do. We hope, for example, that people of the cloth will provide for us sources and models of moral excellence, but few among us favor the establishment of a theocracy. Similarly, the mere fact that one views truly good soldiers as modeling moral excellence hardly means that one supports a “military-industrial complex,” let alone a coup d'état.
9. In Bennett's *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators*, one reads that in prime TV time, the three largest networks broadcast a total of more than 65,000 sexual references each year. The average child watches up to 8,000 made-for-TV murders by the end of grade school. Although 60 percent of Americans “never doubt the existence of God” and 42 percent attend church once a week, only 5 percent of TV characters practice religion in any form (pages 104–5).
10. See Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2d ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). This book is extremely important, but beginning ethics students are unlikely to understand it unless they first read a general ethics textbook such as Louis P. Pojman, *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1995). See chap. 8 of the latter for a discussion of virtue-based ethics.
11. Josiah Bunting, “Code of Dishonor,” *New York Times*, 19 February 1994, 19.
12. Christina Hoff Sommers, “Teaching the Virtues,” *Imprimis* 20 (November 1991).
13. Robert N. Bellah et al., *The Good Society* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 43–44.
14. Steven M. Cahn, *Saints and Scamps: Ethics in Academia* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1986), preface, 1.
15. C. H. Sommers, “Teaching the Virtues,” *The Public Interest*, no. 111 (Spring 1993): 6–7.
16. To pursue this notion of ethical truths, see W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930). In chap. 2, Ross discusses his theory of “prima facie” or “conditional” duties, which represent claims on our moral responsibility but are not absolute.
17. As important as virtue is, I assign priority of place to verities. Proper principle must precede virtue, or we wind up with the possibility of, say, a courageous killer. I argue, therefore, for verities, then virtues, then values.
18. William J. Bennett, ed., *The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993). See also William Kilpatrick, *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong: Moral Illiteracy and the Case for Character Education* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992); and James Q. Wilson, *The Moral Sense* (New York: Free Press, 1993).
19. See Joseph G. Brennan, *Foundations of Moral Obligation: The Stockdale Course* (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College, 1992).
20. Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).
21. James N. Rowe, *Five Years to Freedom* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971).
22. H. G. Rickover, “Thoughts on Man's Purpose in Life and Other Matters,” US Naval Institute *Proceedings* 100 (December 1974): 72.
23. John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1947), 107.
24. Toner, 129.
25. Anthony E. Hartle, *Moral Issues in Military Decision Making* (Lawrence, Kans.: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 84.
26. Sir John Winthrop Hackett, “The Military in the Service of the State,” in *War, Morality, and the Military Profession*, ed. Malham M. Wakin, 2d ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1986), 119.

The real way to get value out of the study of military history is to take particular situations, and as far as possible get inside the skin of the man who made a decision, realize the conditions in which the decision was made, and then see in what way you could have improved on it.

—Sir A. P. Wavell, 1930

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