"THE ROCK OF TRANSFER": A SYNTHESIS OF ETHICS IN HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH THE LENS OF THE UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMIES

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With unconventional modern-day warfare and the pervasiveness of social media comes an unprecedented operational environment of highly publicized ethical dilemmas for young military officers. The United States service academies are in the unique position of educating their undergraduate students in the traditional four-year academic construct as well as in ethical decision-making within strict rules-based cultures. Further complicating this charge is the posturing of students as both scholars and contracted employees of the Department of Defense, liable to the American taxpayer. Using the construct of ethical education at the United States military academies, this paper makes the case for the shifting emphasis from rules-based to values- and principles-based ethical instruction in higher education, and will explore a variety of models by which they may be taught, to include pre-scripting (Gentile, 2010), ethical triangulation (Baker, 2012), and Theme Centered Interaction (Wortel & Bosch, 2011).

Although Marines, Soldiers, Airmen, and Sailors are trained in tactics, techniques, and procedures for the battlefield, opportunities also exist for these men and women to simultaneously receive an undergraduate education. In addition to active–duty, Reservist, and National Guard service members who are both working full-time and enrolled in courses, retired and separated veterans are attending civilian schools in droves under the benefit of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Blum (2010) acknowledges the importance of diverse viewpoints or perspectives in the ethical classroom, and men and women with military experience can help to enrich and diversify the outlook of their civilian peers. Similarly, Spelman (2010) writes of transformational

interconnectedness and the "web of moral life" (p.116). Returning home with so many experiences wherein they made ethical decisions and built their moral competence translates well when these men and women continue their ethical education within the context of their undergraduate careers. The relationships they have built with their peers and the morals, values, and beliefs, they have fostered and maintain during their military involvement become transformative for their home communities, as well.

Although it is widely agreed that the experience active duty and veteran military students bring to the classroom is valuable for their classmates, for the learning environment and for ongoing dialogues about ethics, formalized ethical education for undergraduate service members is also impacted when it is specifically constructed to prepare young men and women to hold commissions in a military in which they have not yet fully immersed themselves. The military service academies are a unique subset of higher education in America in that their enrollees are simultaneously students and employees of the Department of Defense; their mission is both academic and vocational.[1] These students are considered active duty, but have not yet joined the operating forces. They are entirely subsidized by tax dollars, and the stakes for successful completion are high—the safety of their subordinates and the success of their missions depends on their decision-making. Learning transfer is absolutely critical and there is no option for any of these academies to, as philosopher Van Gelder (2010) writes, founder on the "rock of transfer." Van Gelder (2010) uses "founder" as a thematic reference to a ship crashing and sinking, while "rock of transfer" refers to learning transfer, or the student's ability to apply learned material to their everyday life or work role. Learning transfer is tied directly to learning objectives. Without the ability to apply learned information, retention of that information drastically decreases, therefore, opportunities for learning transfer are essential.

In an operating environment where ethical dilemmas abound and evidence of poor decisions made in combat by a 21-year-old second lieutenant freshly graduated from West Point may be tweeted or plastered on Facebook, learning transfer in ethical education is especially paramount. The current professional military education literature privileges the teaching of ethics to this student population, but specific examples of ethical dilemmas or how to address them are

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[1] There are five total United States service academies: the United States Military Academy (USMA), the United States Naval Academy (USNA), the United States Coast Guard Academy, the United States Merchant Marine Academy, and the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA). For the purposes of this paper, only USMA, USNA, and USAFA will be discussed.

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sparse. Using the construct of ethical education at the United States military academies, this paper makes the case for mandatory ethics education at the military academies and explores a variety of models by which ethics may be taught.

Ethical Education at the United States Military Academies: The Need for Ethics

The hybrid of military training and undergraduate education found at the military academies is the perfect reflection of Aristotle's recommendation for effective ethical education: "reciprocity of habit, character, and action" (Kiss & Euben, 2010, p.5). The daily life of a cadet at these academies is nothing if not habitual, geared toward assuming the character traits of an effective leader and training for action. The ethics curriculum persists outside the classroom, but it is certainly not "hidden"—academy administrators and admissions counselors are quite clear that every waking moment of these students' four years as undergraduates will be spent in reverence of and in adherence to academy and service branch values (Kiss & Euben, 2010, p.12). The challenge for military academies has been and will continue to be providing ethical education while avoiding the potential hazards of indoctrination and partisanship (Fish, 2010).

Although indoctrination likely does occur at the military academies, it may not be hazardous. Undergraduate students at the military academies are enrolling not just in four years of academics, but also in at least nine years of a lifestyle, as they are contractually obligated to maintain their commission for at least five years after they graduate.[2] This form of higher education could also be considered an apprenticeship, thereby making students' inculcation and indoctrination into this habitual mindset appropriate and necessary. As a result, their ethical education becomes both academic and professional in nature. They differ from non-commissioned officers who have received a standardized professional, but not an academic, ethical education via their service branches. Therefore, factors in the ethical education debate within higher education—factors such as the classification of a values-neutral institution—do not necessarily apply to the military academies.

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[2] This service obligation is determined by 10 U.S.C. §§ 4348, 6959, 9348 (2012): "Cadets obtaining appointments as officers upon graduation from the U.S. Military Academy, Naval Academy or Air Force Academy will have an ADSO [active duty service obligation] of no less than 5 years."

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Values Neutrality

In our modern culture of political correctness, values neutrality may be mistakenly associated with values tolerance. At supposedly values-neutral universities, it is not necessarily true that because no values are prescribed, all values are accepted. An institution's prerogative to not prescribe values is not synonymous with complete values tolerance. Wolff (2011) recognizes this incongruence when he notes that neutrality is not uncontroversial or even completely values-free. Simon (2011) goes a step further and argues that neutrality is impossible, and that self-proclaimed neutral institutions suffer from naïveté by failing to recognize that the adoption of a neutral mindset is in and of itself anything but neutral because "the failure to do something is as much an act as the doing of it" (p. 124). The military academies are not values-neutral in their curriculum nor administration; they occupy a unique space in the neutrality debate that both Simon (2011) and Wolff (2011) fail to distinguish.

This unique space is largely shaped by the students themselves. The academies are charged with admitting a high caliber of freshman recruit. Aside from physical fitness and academic proficiency, applicants must be individually endorsed and sponsored by members of Congress, who attest to their moral character and ability to represent their home states with dignity and honor. These values are expected even before admission. In order to be admitted, applicants must stand out as individuals in all aspects of their application, but, paradoxically, they must stand out as individuals who are malleable. They will leverage their individual strengths within a complex adaptive system of one fighting force—as is evidenced by the slogan, "An Army of One" ("Steps to Admission," n.d.).

Education for students at the academies is standardized, "Officers need to hold objective, non-relative values," and these values have been pre-determined for them by their respective branches and the United States government (Miller, 2007, p. 201). Undergraduate students are expected to maintain the values that earned them admission in the first place—discipline, dedication, ambition, etc.—and will call upon these values in their future careers as officers and decision-makers. But even more important than these individual values are those the Army, the Navy, or the Air Force will instill in these men and women during their time at the academies. These are manifested in codes of ethics, creeds, and, in the case of the Army, the "Warrior's Ethos":

I will always place the mission first.

I will never accept defeat.

I will never quit.

I will never leave a fallen comrade. (Williams, 2010, p.44)

This ethos is a subset of The Soldiers' Creed, which, along with the seven Army core values (loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage), forms the Army's moral code and is detailed in *Field Manual 6-22: Army Leadership*. The Navy's and Marine Corps' values are simply "Honor, Courage, and Commitment." Codes such as these are concrete and objective, and may be applied to any variety of mission sets an academy graduate may face. They are the ethical guideposts for military education.

Balancing Values-Based and Rules-Based Ethics

Even though these values are deeply ingrained in all Marines, Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen, Williams (2010) argues that the military is still not values- or principles-based, but rather rules-based. The academies' organizational structures are examples of the military's rules-based culture. The rank system of the military is reflected in the classification of undergraduates as cadets or midshipmen of various levels instead of the traditional classification of freshmen, sophomores, and so on. At the academies, rules dictate hourly schedules, modes of address, activities on and off campus, and even the amount of chair space occupation allowed when one must "sit at attention" at the Naval Academy (three inches or less). As employees of the Department of Defense, students are also under the immediate purview of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, which is made up of rules for ethical and legal conduct. Adherence to these rules is a key component of each undergraduate's training.

Miller (2007) describes the military's current system of ethical education at the academies as moral training, and "when that training mentality carries over into moral education, it results in a setting in which 'knee jerk' moral certainty is more common than the settled certainty and nuanced understanding that results from Socratic inquiry" (p.206). Prior to 2003, West Point's ethical education program took the form of Values Education Training, or VET classes, wherein students learned an "approved ethical reasoning process" that originated from *Field Manual 6-22: Army Leadership*. The process is as follows:

1. Define the problem.
2. Know the relevant rules.

3. Develop and evaluate possible courses of action.

4. Choose the course of action that best suits Army Values (Miller, 2007, p.207).

After the VET classes were eliminated, the Army wrote this four-step ethical reasoning process into the curriculum of all West Point classes in the form of instructional guides for faculty.[3] In this way, professors from all disciplines are expected to successfully implement cross-curriculum moral and ethical education, regardless of their academic or professional credentials. The other service academies follow a similar approach, including seminars on character development and leadership (Miller, 2007).

The process- and rules-based ethical education (or training) paradigm is problematic in that it seems to offer students the guarantee: follow these steps and you will be ethical, no matter the dilemma or circumstance. Miller (2007) terms this the "technician model" (p.208). He best explains the difference between this and a philosophical inquiry-based model as,

Rather than asking philosophical questions like "Why be moral?" or "Why is it wrong to kill noncombatants?" a technician's approach to ethics would ask "How do I become a good officer?" and "How do I decide at whom to aim?" When a moral question becomes a technical question, students will often assume that the issues can be resolved by (a) finding all of the variables involved, (b) choosing the equation that incorporates those variables, and (c) plugging in the variables and churning out a solution… [There is] an "approved solution" to every moral problem. (Miller, 2007, p.208)

If there is an approved solution to every moral problem, as Miller suggests some students assume via curriculum structured in the technician approach, then the way to reach that solution can be taught and students can systematically troubleshoot their way to a resolution, just as they might troubleshoot a malfunctioning computer program or weapons system. But the technician model may not be the most apt approach to teaching ethics at the academies. The section that follows discusses alternatives to the technician model.

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[3] Likewise, *Field Manual 6-22: Army Leadership* is written in an easily digestible graphic organizer format. Ten leadership competencies (leads others, builds trust, extends influence, leads by example, communicates, creates a positive environment/esprit de corps, prepares self, develops others, stewards the profession, and gets results) are each explored in depth. The components of the four step ethical reasoning process expounded upon by Miller (2007) are aligned with the competency "leads by example," under the subheading "understands and models conceptual skills."

Decision-Making and *Phronesis*

Williams (2010) asserts the technician model negatively affects individual moral and character development, as well as mission accomplishment, in fourth generation warfare.[4] Alternatively, a values- and principles-based culture may allow for increased moral and character development and the eventual organizational agility and resilience needed to adapt to the new four-block war of humanitarian support, peacekeeping, combat action, and media/information operations (Mattis & Hoffman, 2005). Officers must be able to "think outside the box" in situations of extreme pressure and consequence insofar as these situations are constantly in flux, and the parameters and resources of the technician model may not apply to all circumstances. A more flexible model that is values- and principles-based reflects Pritchard's (2006) understanding of professional integrity; in a values- and principles-based culture, an individual soldier would not just remain "true to oneself," but also to the "fundamental role and character of one's profession," even when rules are not explicit (p.68). As mentioned previously, although the military is largely rules-based, it is also values–centric in its perpetuation of codes and expectations of virtue for the entire community of service members.

A values- and principles-based dynamic also aligns with Gentile's (2010) pre-scripting line of thought, transforming the "should" or "should not" of a rules-based culture to the "how" and "if" script of a values- and principles-based culture. Pre-scripting responses to ethical dilemmas, or dedicating time for individual reflection on potential dilemmas, allows for more adroit responses when students encounter those (or similar) circumstances as leaders in the operating environment. The military has used this approach since its inception, by way of moral exemplars. Undergraduates at the military academies have not experienced the types of ethical dilemmas they may face after graduation (e.g., dealing with insubordination, engaging civilians in counterinsurgency operations, speaking with the press). As a result, they rely on the experience of their more seasoned faculty or mentors as, what Hoekema (2010) would call, "moral guides" (p.257). Military personnel call these shared experiences "sea stories" or "war stories," and their value is indubitable Hearing their superiors' or mentors' stories often leads students to ask of themselves, "What would I do, if I was in that situation?" thereby creating a

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[4] Fourth generation warfare is marked by complexity and decentralization, often including non-state actors, psychological warfare, and ambiguous rules of engagement (Lind, Nightengale, Schmitt, Sutton, & Wilson, 1989).

pre-script. In literature surrounding the efficacy of storytelling as a pedagogical tool, pre-scripting is called situation modeling or mental modeling (Zwaan, Magliano, & Graesser, 1995, p.386). Content aside, the very structure of narratives allows for more accurate and meaningful memory recall (Zwaan, Langston, & Graesser, 1995). Therefore, pre-scripting is a practice that should be continued, and is more suitable within a values- and principles-based ethical education paradigm than in one that is rules-based. In a rules-based culture, the pre-script is institution-wide and takes the form of set standards and procedures, instead of adaptable self-knowledge.

Just as with war stories, the end goal of pre-scripting is competent decision-making, and ethical education at the military service academies can share this focus on *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, within virtue ethics (Baker, 2012, p.214). *Phronesis* informs Baker's (2012) pedagogical method of ethical triangulation. In this model, ethical education revolves around a three-pronged approach, wherein duties and principles (rules-based), character traits and emotions (values-based), and consequences (principles-based) are all equally considered. When these three inputs are considered, ideally, a practical outcome or ideal decision is produced.

In Baker's (2012) model, the emotional intelligence (especially self-awareness) of a leader or decision-maker is weighed at least as heavily as their duties, aligned with Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee's (2002) theory of emotional intelligence and assertion that effective leadership depends on self-management of emotions. Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011) call this equanimity, and it is one of five measures of spirituality included in their longitudinal College Students Beliefs and Values Survey. They correlate spirituality not with organized religion nor a belief in a higher being, but instead "as an animating, creative, energizing, and meaning-making force—a 'dynamic expression' of who we are" (Astin et. al, 2011, p.28). This force is explored throughout higher education, and "the peace and calm typically associated with equanimity allow the person to channel anger or frustration into positive action" (Astin et. al, 2011, p.52). Positive action is the application of practical wisdom—or *phronesis*—in this sense.

Baker (2012) argues that his ethical triangulation model should inform the framework of case-based scenarios, "woven together into a metanarrative, in place of the traditional historical case study" (p.208). Such a structure also passes Cook and Syse's (2010) two-criterion test of effectively transferred ethical education: realistic and focused on decision-making. Baker's (2012) model also replicates Gentile's (2010) pre-scripting methodology. Although the scenarios that Baker (2012) proposes may be based on real–life events, they are more "ethical simulations"

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than historical case studies, thereby eliminating the potential for hindsight bias (p.217). Students are unfamiliar with the outcome of the scenarios because they are not rooted in historical accounts, although the sequence of events may be similar. These types of ethical simulations also allow for expertise ethics or regulation of professional virtue (May, 1988; Pritchard, 2006). In this sense, too much power in the hands of the experts—or attributed to the main actors for historical case studies—causes complete powerlessness of those who are ignorant of the power (Pritchard, 2006). Making the case a more dynamic simulation paradoxically dehumanizes it and regulates this professional virtue on the part of the protagonist.

It is important to remember that because these types of instructional metanarratives are simulations only, emerging events within the stories that are continued session to session can be tailored to reflect contemporary events that are actually occurring in the operating environment. This keeps the ethical education relevant and enhances learning transfer for these undergraduates. For example, an ongoing metanarrative regarding predictive analysis of terrorism in Europe might be greatly impacted by the events of the November 2015 Paris attacks; students will be familiar with those events, and are not only piqued emotionally because of that familiarity, but also better informed of the real-life implications of their decisions. By focusing on building each student's moral confidence via practical decision-making, rather than examining the right or wrong decisions of former military officers, this form of ethical education avoids the "hermeneutics of suspicion," the likes of which can lead to moral and cultural relativism (Kiss & Euben, 2010, p.10). Finally, following one character's travails throughout the scenario is akin to Astin et al.'s (2011) measure of the spiritual quest, a process-oriented search for meaning and purpose that is positively related to overall student engagement. By tracking one character from the beginning of their story through the presentation and potential resolution of an ethical dilemma, students can track their own developmental progress.

Moral Competence and Self-Awareness

Moral competence, much like decision-making and *phronesis*, has actionable connotations. If young officers are morally competent and have the opportunity to gain this competence within their higher education experiences, then they are more likely to act ethically and morally when faced with a dilemma. Wortel and Bosch (2011) called this "living learning," and Cohn's (1975) model of Theme-Centered Interaction (TCI) is one manifestation of this

concept. Here, themes emerge after students examine their personal reactions to tasks and problems. The notation of "we" symbolizes the learning environment or community of practice, and others' reactions are weighed at least as heavily as any one individual student's emotions and beliefs in an inclusive culture of tolerance. This includes the instructor—they are not to be the sole authority in the classroom, and their degree of control in facilitation is to remain limited and largely student-centered. TCI draws heavily upon the tenet of self-awareness within emotional intelligence. This system is values-oriented and the balance of power within ethical discussions and ethical decision-making is meant to be equitable and fair.

Wortel and Bosch (2011) analyzed TCI as a possible construct for military ethics training and assert that it has the potential to be included at the military academies. Currently West Point uses the Thayer Model in its classes, which is essentially an adapted version of nineteenth century flipped learning. Under the Thayer Model, cadets take responsibility for their own learning and study material prior to class, wherein activities and exercises are then facilitated by the instructor in the place of lectures (Shell, 2002). Together with TCI, this pedagogy becomes both inclusive and self-driven, although it may be a challenge to balance the necessary low degree of instructor or facilitator control with the valued contribution of more experienced officers' and veterans' war stories. This could be rectified with having set times for discussions with these moral exemplars in addition to the regular class meetings. By asking students to complete a significant amount of self-study before attending ethical education classes, learning transfer may be enhanced as students come to class more prepared to discuss realistic applications and consequences of the covered material.

Conclusion

As Van Gelder (2010) suggested, the first priority of ethical education for military academy students should be learning transfer—the "rock of transfer" should be the foundation for ethics curriculum at the military service academies. A construct that allows for *phronesis* and emphasizes values- and principles-based modeling may be most successful as academy graduates enter the operating environment and assume high-risk leadership of subordinates. The highly kinetic and unconventional nature of modern day warfare compounds the need for military leaders to be trained in more than the technician model of ethical decision-making, wherein procedures are dictated for every circumstance and followed in a one-size-fits-all mentality. The

military environment overall is already innately values- and principles-driven, as discussed earlier; modeling ethical education on this same structure is a natural pedagogical progression. Procedures and rules will always be necessary in the military, but they can be balanced with values- and principles-based models such as Baker's (2012) ethical triangulation model and Cohn's (1975) TCI approach in order to be more applicable in rapidly changing environments and in these student's lives beyond their military careers. Both these constructs allow for the incorporation of analysis of context, themes, and lessons learned through war stories by moral exemplars to develop students' ethical decision-making skills.

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