

The Virtuous (Human) Soldier

A MacIntyrian Approach to Moral Education in the US Army Thesis Summary

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Following nearly two decades of continuous conflict, the complexities of modern warfare have placed immense pressure on the US Army to recognize its deficiencies, construct creative solutions, and adapt in a rapidly evolving environment.¹ Among the most significant changes has been the explicit branding of the army as a profession with an official ethic meant to ground the development of soldiers into competent and committed leaders of character.² The army profession views this developmental process as crucial to maintaining a foundation of trust with its client—the American people. By morally educating every soldier to be a leader of character, the army better prepares them to face the multitude of ethical challenges accompanying modern warfare in the presence of multinational conditions, the geopolitical situation, and advancements in media and technology.³ Additionally, the army's character development process plays a large part in shaping the soldier qua human, guiding an individual's decisions and actions in the other various roles they occupy within society both now and throughout the rest of their life. Therefore, the army should instill an ethical framework that not only serves soldiers on the battlefield, but also in their homes and throughout their post-military careers. In this thesis I argue that the unique nature of the army profession requires an expansion from a general moral education process aimed at developing virtuous soldiers to a more holistic moral development of humans seeking a flourishing life

1. The views expressed throughout this thesis are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the US Army, the Department of Defense, or the US government.

2. US Dept. of the Army. *Army White Paper: The Army's Framework for Character Development*. Center for the Army Profession and Ethic, 2017, 2. The Army defines character as "one's true nature including identity, sense of purpose, values, virtues, morals, and conscience." Further, it is "the moral and ethical qualities that help us determine what is right and provide motivation to act accordingly."

3. US Dept. of the Army. ADP 6-22 Army Leadership and the Profession. Government Printing Office, 2019, 8-4.

while fulfilling the various roles of a soldier. I approach this task utilizing a framework initially laid out by Alasdair MacIntyre in his book, *After Virtue*. Specifically, I critique the US Army character development process utilizing two of the three logical stages in MacIntyre's development of the concept of a virtue—"practice" and "narrative."⁴ As I move through the first two stages of MacIntyre's concept of a virtue, I argue that while the army's moral education process attempts something very similar to MacIntyre's framework, there are crucial gaps that prevent the proper moral development of soldiers from taking place.⁵

In the first section, I introduce the roles MacIntyre's practice and narrative order of a single human life play in the development of a virtue. More specifically, MacIntyre's account of virtues first proceeds through a stage which concerns virtues as qualities necessary to achieve the goods internal to practices, followed by a second stage which considers them as qualities contributing to the good of a whole life.⁶ In considering the first stage, I argue that the army is not a singular practice, but a collection of practices, each requiring a unique set of virtues. Practices encompass a great many things including arts, sciences, games, and the making and sustaining of family life.⁷ In entering a practice an individual accepts the authority of certain standards of excellence and obedience to rules that place judgement upon the inadequacy of their own performance. To enter into a practice is to accept the current state of standards realized so far in the progression of the practice itself, and to live out the good of a certain kind of life.⁸ The army attempts to instill virtues it believes are necessary for professional soldiers, yet they fail to capture the uniqueness and diversity of the various soldiering roles. Currently, these soldier virtues are codified in the official Army Values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage.⁹

4. While I believe the Army could benefit from elements within the tradition stage of MacIntyre's framework, the complexity of addressing the stage was too unwieldy given the purpose of this thesis.

5. I believe that values, like the Army Values, are what we aim for and virtues, in a MacIntyrian sense, are those values which we have successfully attained. I use both terms interchangeably here, but the difference in the context of this paper is the difference of the starting point and ending point of a successful moral education process.

6. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 273.

7. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 188.

8. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 190.

9. US Dept. of the Army, *ADP 6-22 Army Leadership and the Profession*, Government Printing Office, 2019, 1–2. The Army is explicit in its Army Value of "personal courage" pertaining to both physical courage as well as moral courage.

To demonstrate that the army is no longer a singular practice of soldiering, I focus on three distinct army branches in the Infantry, Signal Corps, and Civil Affairs. By highlighting the uniqueness of each branch, I argue that the army is in fact a community built around a collection of practices, much like a scientific society built around multiple scientific practices, or an orchestra built around a collection of instrumental practices.¹⁰ Importantly, each of these practices requires a unique collection of virtues necessary to flourishing within that particular role.

In considering MacIntyre's second stage, I argue that the holistic narrative of individual soldiers and the various roles they occupy outside of the military—which are vital to proper moral deliberation—are essentially nonfactors in the moral education process of the US Army. The concept of a virtue must continue its development through the second stage of the framework, in which an individual considers their various practices and virtues within the unity of an individual life—MacIntyre's narrative. It is through narrative that an individual establishes their selfhood and recognizes that they are the subject of a history that they must own. In doing so, an individual becomes accountable for their actions and experiences. While the army acknowledges that each soldier possesses an individual narrative with unique personal values, they fail to consider their importance to the proper moral development of a soldier as a human. A soldier's personal roles, whether as a spouse, parent, citizen, or friend, are vitally important in establishing a unified individual life capable of moral reasoning. By disregarding such a crucial component in the educational process, the army attempts to set the priorities of a soldier's narrative believing that it might eliminate potential conflicts. However, conflict between personal and professional values remains inevitable and to ignore such conflict in the education process leaves soldiers ill-prepared to face ethical tension well as moral agents. While highlighting this inevitable tension, I explore three scenarios in which the Army Values can conflict with the other practices and virtues of an individual soldier.¹¹ Instead of attempting to eliminate ethical tension, proper moral development consists of educating soldiers on the possibility of error and of the errors to which each of them may

10. Kenneth A. Strike, "Trust, Traditions and Pluralism: Human Flourishing and Liberal Polity," in *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education*, ed. David Carr and Jan Steutel (Routledge, 1999), 239.

11. Eva Van Baarle et al, "Moral Dilemmas in a Military Context. A Case Study of a Train the Trainer Course on Military Ethics," *Journal of Moral Education* 44, no. 4 (2015): 465.

be inclined. This requires guiding soldiers in the acknowledgment of and reflection upon who they are as individuals and the various roles they may hold as spouses, parents, citizens, or friends.¹² The moral education of soldiers in the virtues of a practice requires the ability to demonstrate not only how they will serve in the good soldier life, but also how they may contribute to life as a whole.

Ultimately, I argue that the unique nature of the army profession requires an expansion from a general moral education process aimed at developing virtuous soldiers to one which aims to morally develop soldiers holistically as humans seeking a flourishing life in their role as a soldier. In recognizing my argument as a significant departure from the current US Army character development process, I consider two possible objections. First, an objection that asks whether it is an army's responsibility to morally develop its force beyond their roles as soldiers. Second, an objection that asks whether the US Army could feasibly embrace a MacIntyrean approach. To both, I argue yes, as the US Army's responsibility to defend the nation and the moral development of its soldiers are intertwined now more than ever. The immense moral responsibility that young and increasingly autonomous volunteer soldiers face today requires the US Army to accept the responsibility, and I offer some practical steps for addressing practice and narrative in the soldier moral education process.

Works Cited

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12. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 191.