The Warrior, Military Ethics and Contemporary Warfare: Achilles Goes Asymmetrical, by Pauline M. Kaurin

Thomas E. Creely

Follow this and additional works at: https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol70/iss3/22
mission in a particular theater at a given time, while at the same time allowing a useful extension into the broader topic of naval diplomacy throughout the Americas as a backdrop. The work begins with a survey of the extant scholarship on *showing the flag*—a term that the author explains is really too broad to be useful—before moving chronologically through the decades of the last century. By and large the chapters flow logically into one another, although the comparative chapter on U.S. postwar defense plans (chapter 6) seems something of an outlier, particularly in view of the title. The research is excellent and uses a wide variety of contemporary official sources and established scholarly works. The author is an academic researcher and does not appear to have had any naval experience, although he has done his homework in gathering the appropriate naval opinions. The work forms a concise and usable package. (However, from a publishing point of view, the physical ink used in the printing leaves a lot to be desired. In the reviewer’s copy, even the action of fingering a page lifted the print right off the paper!)

The book’s overall message is that, while the Royal Navy was suffering through a stretch of undeniable decline throughout the period, even in its heyday the service never really enjoyed a position of complete, influential dominance on the South American continent. Furthermore, by being proactive and focusing its efforts on areas where success was more likely, it managed to maintain a surprising level of influence for far longer than one might have imagined in what was, after all, very much a secondary theater for the United Kingdom. To this end, the book showcases the importance of the attaché in linking naval and diplomatic efforts, as well as the enormous value of offering educational experiences and exchanges to foreign officers, thereby sowing the seed corn for future cooperation.

Interestingly, it also demonstrates that even in the absence of such schemes, the Royal Navy leadership could and did lead the impetus for change, with surprising success—as evidenced by the impact of the 1970s “Group Operating” concept, which enhanced the prestige value of the navy’s visits ashore while at the same time sustaining its skills and capabilities at sea. The navy benefited in that its “blue-water” skills were preserved far longer than would have been possible otherwise, and defense sales benefited from the showcasing of those skills. It truly was a “win-win” development. In conclusion, this is a worthwhile read for anyone interested in the broad topic of naval diplomacy overseas or defense sales in particular.

ANGUS ROSS


Pauline Kaurin is associate professor of philosophy at Pacific Lutheran University, specializing in the just war tradition and military ethics. For this volume, Kaurin developed her research during time at the U.S. Naval Academy and U.S. Military Academy and in dialogue with academic colleagues in the International Society for Military Ethics. This volume examines the ethical
complexities facing the modern warrior engaged in asymmetrical warfare (AW).

In the introduction, Kaurin begins with a thorough discussion of the term warrior, giving it a meaning distinct from soldier, sailor, airman, or any other military operator. To give meaning to the warrior concept, Kaurin reaches back to ancient Greek mythology: she finds Achilles, of Homer’s Iliad, to be the “touchstone” for the ethical warrior. Kaurin does not see Achilles as the perfect example of a warrior; instead, Achilles exemplifies the military professional’s existential essence in war and personifies warrior virtues, resilience, and prowess.

Even though Achilles fought his wars in antiquity, Kaurin sees Achilles as relevant to the AW of the current era. Examined through the lens of jus in bello, how do we fight like Achilles and how do we fight against Achilles? The volume addresses the moral education of the warrior to engage and interpret better the unconventional conflicts that present ethical challenges, as well as ethical impediments that are contrary to jus in bello. How do we equip the warrior to engage ethically complex weapons technology and changing asymmetrical conflict?

Kaurin argues for a systematic examination of the ethical challenges posed by autonomous weapons and AW. What are the ethics of the strategies and tactics of each of the two sides in AW? One side may use torture against captives, whether combatants or noncombatants, while the other side chooses not to reciprocate owing to countervailing moral norms, contrary public opinion, and lack of political will. How does the warrior question, think, and respond to such moral dichotomies faced in AW? Kaurin’s premise is that moral education must address AW within the scope of jus in bello.

The focus on AW stems from two points. The first is a mind-set fixed on a conventional-war theory that understands asymmetrical conflict as part of conventional warfare. A second point is that AW requires new challenges to ethical thinking that are counter to that associated with conventional war. When will serious ethical thought be given to the changing nature of war, which confronts the norms of traditional war between nations?

Kaurin’s thoughts and observations go beyond AW. She identifies the deeper nuances of moral asymmetry, as defined by Michael Gross and Rob Thornton. The adversary’s failure to practice reciprocity undermines the moral norms, strategy, and tactics of the generally stronger opponent. With disproportional impact, the effect represents a symbolic and ideological stance against the stronger opponent.

Of the ethical questions Kaurin poses throughout the book, some are being contemplated already, while others are harder to engage because the moral scope involved cannot be brought into focus yet. She contends that understanding the full scope of the ethical issues requires getting into the hearts and minds of the adversary; yet often it is the adversary who artfully gets into the hearts and minds, and the social fabric, of the opponent.

Kaurin contends that if warriors are to engage in asymmetrical moral conflict, they must have courage. Yet the technological development of weapons means that the physical distance between
opponents is growing, so it takes less courage to go to war. Achilles had the courage to fight face-to-face, taking risks and facing danger directly. For many, distancing oneself from danger—even the risk of danger—by using technology imposes a fundamental weakness on the modern warrior amid the challenges he faces. Kaurin presents a detailed analysis of courage in an asymmetrical context, with a prescription for developing courageous warriors.

Another moral attribute that Kaurin sees as essential to the warrior ethos is loyalty. This loyalty is built on leadership and trust and is a foundation of the profession of arms. Referencing the Illiad, she compares the loyalty of Achilles, the traditional warrior, with that of Hector, the contemporary, professional warrior. A strategy for training warriors for loyalty is laid out. In addition to excellent military ethics literature references, Kaurin uses film to illustrate key ethical points.

The combatant/noncombatant distinction must be made clear for the soldier considering jus in bello. Kaurin proposes a five-level gradation of power and threat, from highest to lowest:

- uniformly combat personnel
- unconventional belligerents
- those provisionally hostile
- neutral or nonhostile noncombatants
- vulnerable noncombatants

Discerning the appropriate category of combatant/noncombatant would determine the appropriate level of force. Such a moral model of ascertaining the threat level would equip the soldier better in the ethics of jus in bello.

Kaurin’s thoughts are a contribution to the literature on the higher level of moral thinking for military leaders. She does not shy away from the conundrums the warrior faces. To maintain an ethical edge in asymmetrical warfare, military ethics must be embedded into the culture of the profession of arms.

THOMAS E. CREELY


The relief of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur by President Harry S. Truman remains one of the most controversial and debated wartime command decisions made in the military history of the United States. By April 1951, Douglas MacArthur was at the peak of his game as a military leader. His public pressing to widen the war in Korea, in direct contradiction to the intent of his president, and his public statements to that end that led to his dismissal still fuel debate today.

H. W. Brands gives depth to the tale of MacArthur versus Truman by including the complexities that existed in the Korean conflict and its Cold War context, when a U.S.-led “free world” was engaged in a global struggle against Soviet-led Communism (and especially Soviet interest in Central Europe). As the fighting in Korea continued, official Washington, and the Pentagon in particular, worried that the war effort was tying down more and more U.S. military resources—worries that fueled further concerns that Moscow might see the United States stretched militarily and unable to defend Central Europe adequately.