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## CULTIVATING SAILOR ETHICAL FITNESS

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*Michael Hallett*

**T**he Navy's rollout of its Leader Development Strategy provides an opportunity to think about new approaches to sailor training and education on ethical behavior.<sup>1</sup> The current approaches are not entirely satisfactory, as they focus predominantly on sanctions for ethical failures, such as misallocation of funds and extramarital affairs. As former President of the Naval War College and then-rear admiral Walter E. Carter Jr. explained in his *Ethics in the U.S. Navy* in March 2014, "the current culture for Navy ethics is one based on obeying the rules in order to avoid punishment."<sup>2</sup> Admiral Carter called for a new approach to Navy ethics training and education, making six recommendations; the third was to

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"[b]uild a culture for Navy ethics beyond compliance."<sup>3</sup> This article weaves multiple philosophical threads together into an ethical fitness concept as a contribution to practical implementation of this recommendation. It is designed for sailors engaged in combat, both at sea and on land.

This sketch of an ethical fitness concept aims to contribute to a strategic-level Navy ethics program that both avoids a legalistic focus on rule breaking and moves beyond exhortations to "act with integrity" to develop practical, actionable, ethical decision-making skills. The goal is a concept of ethical competence that is both operationally effective in time-constrained, dynamic environments, including combat, and useful for sailors performing their daily tasks. Part 1 argues that

adding specific ethics training for warriors is required; relying solely on standard, academic, off-the-shelf ethics training will not meet program requirements. Part 2 introduces the concept of “ethical fitness” as a guiding metaphor, using the Marine Corps’s creation of the Combat Fitness Test as a model for development of a sailor ethical fitness concept. Part 3 describes the advantages of the concept of ethical fitness as a way to move beyond compliance. Part 4 explores implementing the ethical fitness concept in part by employing senior leaders as coaches.

## PART 1: WARRIORS REQUIRE A WARRIOR-FOCUSED ETHICS TRAINING AND EDUCATION REGIMEN

Before attempting to offer a concept for sailor-as-warrior ethical competency development, we must draw a preliminary distinction between sailors as bureaucrats and as professionals. As Rear Admiral P. Gardner Howe, President of the Naval War College, points out, “Our Navy has a dual character. On one hand, it is a military department organized as a bureaucracy. The bureaucratic dimension of our organization is unavoidable for any organization of our size and complexity. But on the other, it is an organization dedicated to supporting a military profession. It is this dual nature as both a bureaucracy and a profession that shapes our key challenge as Navy leaders.”<sup>4</sup>

Current Navy ethics training emerged from a legal compliance paradigm and often has focused on sailors as they operate within the bureaucratic dimension of the Navy. While necessary, such training lacks the content necessary to inspire sailors operating in complex, violent, uncertain environments. The Navy Code of Ethics provides a list of dos and don’ts and includes the following:

- Place loyalty to the Constitution, the laws, and ethical principles above private gain.
- Act impartially to all groups, persons, and organizations.
- Give an honest effort in the performance of your duties.
- Protect and conserve Federal property.
- Disclose fraud, waste, and abuse, and corruption to appropriate authorities.
- Fulfill in good faith your obligations as citizens, and pay your Federal, State, and local taxes.
- Comply with all laws providing equal opportunity to all persons, regardless of their race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, or handicap.<sup>5</sup>

Regular civilian ethical decision making, such as that captured in the Navy Code of Ethics, is governed by the rules of what Nassim Taleb in his book *The Black Swan* describes as “Mediocristan.” The supreme law of Mediocristan is “When your sample is large, no single instance will significantly change the aggregate or the total.”<sup>6</sup> In this world, traditional ethical guidance, such as Kant’s categorical imperative or utilitarian precepts, is often valid. The exceptional

situation generating suboptimal outcomes (e.g., an ax-wielding madman kills an innocent person) is so rare as not to require special attention.

Yet the ethical behavior rules in normal society poorly prepare warriors for combat. As Karl Marlantes in his book *What It Is Like to Go to War* argues, “Our young warriors are raised in possibly the only culture on the planet that thinks death is [merely] an option. Given this, it is no surprise that not only they but many of their ostensible religious guides . . . enter the temple of Mars unprepared. Not only is such comfort too often delusional; it tends to numb one to spiritual reality and growth. Far worse, it has serious psychological and behavioral consequences.”<sup>7</sup>

Today a full range of tools is available to prevent or reduce the moral injuries to which sailors become subject while performing the ethical tasks associated with combat risks. If we do not use these tools to supplement the existing ethics training and education (which emphasize compliance), we fail to prepare our sailors effectively for what they will face.<sup>8</sup> This is important, because warriors reside in what Taleb refers to as “Extremistan,” where the consequences of action are amplified beyond the normal range. Individual actions, taken or not taken, can generate consequences at levels ranging from the individual through the tactical to the grand strategic, and do so regularly as part of normal professional activity.<sup>9</sup>

The normal ethics training is not entirely adequate for comprehensively meeting the ethical training and education needs of the military professional dimension of the Navy, which includes the sailor as warrior. Sailors require an approach to ethics training and education tailored for naval professionals, who are, as Admiral Howe points out, professional warriors who also, but not exclusively, act in bureaucratic ways as part of performing their professional functions.

The foundation of warrior ethics is the awareness with which warriors take sides and accept the risks associated with that decision. They are cognizant of the risk-transference impacts of their actions, internalize the tensions in their decision making, and do not push the negative externalities onto others. As Marlantes puts it,

Choosing sides is the fundamental first choice that a warrior must make. . . . The second fundamental choice of the warrior is to be willing to use violence to protect someone against even intended or implied violence. This second fundamental choice engenders an additional choice, which is accepting the risk of death and maiming that usually results from the decision to use violence against violence. To become a warrior requires making these two fundamental choices and accepting the risks entailed. Doing the above eliminates any need to use the adjective “ethical” in front of the noun “warrior.” A warrior, by my definition, acts ethically.<sup>10</sup>

This tripartite decision bundle places warriors in a position that requires meta-ethical principles to guide their application of ethical principles. Ethical

principles, while congruent parts of an overarching ethical system, are not always identical in formulation and application when applied to combat conditions versus ordinary life. Informed examination of the principles and how they operate in the various domains is necessary. In other words, combat demands a supplemental ethical operating system. Think of it as a turbocharger, which adds to an engine an additional physical capability for extreme situations. The supplemental ethical operating system enables effective ethical decision making across the full range of life experiences. Building this “turbocharger” requires additional efforts to facilitate the development of sailors’ ethical competence.

Therefore, the bulk of traditional academic, off-the-shelf ethical training—based on the Golden Rule and fundamental prohibitions such as “do not kill”—is not entirely adequate for the sailor-as-warrior. This training starts from the assumption that the subjects of the training are rational actors operating in accordance with what Nobel Prize-winning thinker Herbert Simon described in *Reason in Human Affairs* as the Single Expected Utility model of rationality, which is characterized by well-ordered conditions and a set of tame, if perhaps complicated, problems.<sup>11</sup> Gary Klein, an expert on recognition-primed decision making, in his *Streetlights and Shadows*, refers to such conditions as “streetlight” situations.<sup>12</sup>

However, warriors must conduct ethical decision making not only under streetlights but in poorly illuminated ethical environments, characterized by chaotic situations in which individuals must deal with other impassioned individuals through the filters of their own passions. They must engage in activities considered unethical under normal circumstances. Therefore practical ethical decision making requires an understanding of what Benedict de Spinoza in his book *Ethics* designated “human bondage,” within which people are ruled by passions, not the clear exercise of reason.<sup>13</sup> Warriors’ efforts to manage wicked, complex problems in dynamic, agonistic environments therefore demand decision-making techniques different from those provided by traditional, rational actor model-based ethics training.<sup>14</sup>

What qualifies as “common sense” under the streetlight does not apply comprehensively to the shadow situations of combat. Carl von Clausewitz, in the beginning of his book *On War*, states that a different ethical framework must be used when thinking about war. He writes, “Kind hearted people might of course think that there was some ingenious way to disarm or defeat an enemy without too much bloodshed, and might imagine this is the true goal of the art of war. Pleasant as it sounds, it is a fallacy that must be exposed: war is such a dangerous business that mistakes which come from kindness are the worst.”<sup>15</sup> Within the traditional ethical perspectives, such as the Kantian, virtue ethics, or utilitarian, the idea that such things as “mistakes from kindness” exist is at first glance amoral and unethical.

However, as Socrates pointed out, the commonsense answer to a dilemma is often wrong. In book 1 of *The Republic*, Socrates, the combat veteran, points out that the simple ethical commands to give people what they are owed and never tell a lie are not automatically just. He says, “Everyone would surely agree that if a sane man lends weapons to a friend and then asks for them back when he is out of his mind, the friend shouldn’t return them, and wouldn’t be acting justly if he did. Nor should anyone be willing to tell the whole truth to someone who is out of his mind.”<sup>16</sup> In his search for a definition of justice, Socrates goes on to reject the idea that whatever is done to members of the out-group (enemies) is automatically just. The ethical category applying to another person can shift in an instant (for example, from enemy combatant to injured prisoner), changing the appropriate set of ethical behaviors that apply to that person. Socrates thus articulates the complexity of the warrior’s ethical understanding, which includes awareness of the risks associated with both action and inaction, for self and others, and the central role that time and context play in the ethical treatment of people. This is not to say that ethics are relative, only that ethical behavior in Extremistan must attend to what Heraclitus referred to as the *concealed logos*, which in this context of ethical decision making can be understood as constituting the meta-level ethical principles governing when to apply specific ethical principles.<sup>17</sup> Discerning, while in the shadows, the ethically appropriate action requires robust competency development.

This is not to say that the traditional approaches are invalid, only that they are not entirely sufficient for military professionals. As Klein explains in discussing the need for appropriate action in both the streetlights and the shadows, “The way we see in bright light differs from the way we see in shadows. Neither is the ‘right’ way. We need both. This dual viewpoint of light and shadow affects how we make decisions and how we make sense of situations. It affects how we plan and how we manage risks and uncertainty. It guides how we develop expertise and how we use our intuition.”<sup>18</sup> Bureaucrats operate under the streetlights; warriors often, but not always, in the shadows.

The warrior’s ethical decision making is different from the normal ethic of society. This is so not only because killing, for example, is permissible but because the warrior internalizes the full risk-management constellation. The warrior understands the risk of action and inaction, and takes more risk on him- or herself so as to reduce it for others. In other words, the warrior confronts the ax-wielding madman if necessary, instead of simply allowing that risk to pass him or her by; an example of the latter would be to follow the categorical imperative to tell the truth (“Which way did that kid go?!” “That way.”) as a means to avoid making an appropriate decision (“Put down the ax.”).

Thus, warriors require a specific ethics training and education program, in addition to but distinct from the conventional programs available. The “ethical fitness” concept constitutes a framework for this ethical competency development program.

## PART 2: THE MARINE CORPS COMBAT FITNESS APPROACH AS A MODEL FOR CULTIVATING SAILOR ETHICAL FITNESS

The Marine Corps approach to physical fitness offers a model for an approach to cultivating warrior ethical fitness. It demonstrates the necessity to add training, education, and assessment metrics in order to develop and assess specific combat-required capabilities. In 2008 the Marines added a Combat Fitness Test (CFT) to their existing Physical Fitness Test. As MCO 6100.13 explained, “As professional warrior-athletes, every Marine must be physically fit, regardless of age, grade, or duty assignment. . . . The Physical Fitness Test (PFT), Combat Fitness Test and Remedial Conditioning Program (RCP) are components of an effective organizational Combat Conditioning Program.”<sup>19</sup> Why did the Marines add another *fitness*, not wellness, test to the existing PFT? Greg Glassman’s definition of fitness in his article “What Is Fitness?” provides an answer. Fitness is the positive pole of the health continuum demarcated by sickness, wellness, and fitness.<sup>20</sup> Thus, fitness represents a higher degree of health than wellness, and professional warrior-athletes must operate at the higher end of the fitness zone of the health continuum if they are to execute their missions effectively. Therefore, the Marines deemed a combat-specific test necessary because combat requires a bundle of physical competencies not cultivated by traditional athletic activity. It is possible to be an effective athlete—say, a runner or football player—and yet not possess the physical capabilities required for combat. As a result, normal physical fitness tests fail to evaluate these competencies adequately, not because the tests are flawed, but because they focus on noncombat-related measures of performance and effectiveness. Therefore, the Marines deemed necessary an additional set of competencies, training to cultivate those competencies, and an assessment mechanism to check both the effectiveness of the training and the individual possession of the competency.

Just as the Marines have two approaches to developing and testing physical fitness, the traditional PFT and the CFT, specific ethical competency development would benefit from a structured approach consisting of both the traditional and warrior-specific applications of traditional ethical systems. While conventional ethical training can and does meet many of the warrior ethical competency requirements, providing both principles and guidance for the application of those principles, it is insufficient. The addition of training and education on combat-focused application of principles, in accordance with the concept of ethical

fitness for warriors, constitutes a necessary expansion to meet the ethical needs of twenty-first-century warriors.

### *Definition of Ethical Fitness*

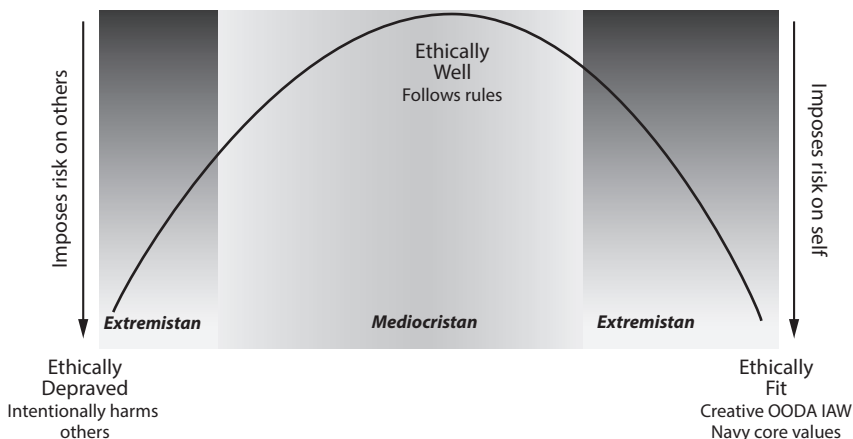
Borrowing the concept of “fitness” from the physical domain provides a model for thinking about enhancing sailor-warriors’ ethical competencies to inform their daily decision making in both combat and noncombat conditions. Ethical fitness consists of effective orientation, observation, decision, and action; with full cognizance of the risks; in accordance with Navy core values; applied in a violent, uncertain, extreme world.

Mapping ethics onto an ethical health bell curve, with depravity constituting the deficient condition, wellness the normal condition, and fitness the highest level of ethical competence, clarifies the distinction between the ethically well and the ethically fit. As shown in the figure, most people abide in the “ethically well” section, following rules and getting along under the normal conditions of everyday life. A few are depraved: intentionally harming others; constantly attempting to shift risk from themselves; and lying, cheating, and stealing as a normal part of their life practices. At the other pole are the ethically fit. The few people at this pole take risks on themselves to reduce the risk to others, while operating in extreme conditions such as combat.

### *Applying Ethical Fitness*

John Boyd’s presentation “The Essence of Winning and Losing” lays out the observation and orientation steps of his observe—orient—decide—act (OODA) loop. An individual warrior is ethically fit when he or she can apply these cognitive skills while operating in the dynamic conditions of Extremistan. Ethical fitness metaprinciples enable warriors to orient themselves appropriately in the

**FIGURE 1  
ETHICAL HEALTH BELL CURVE**





context of engagement space, understand their own observations, and use them to inform their decisions and actions. Boyd explains that “[o]rientation is the *Schwerpunkt* [focus point]. It shapes the way we interact with the environment—hence orientation shapes the way we *observe*, the way we *decide*, the way we *act*. . . . Orientation shapes the character of present observation—orientation—decision—action loops—while these *present* loops shape the character of *future* orientation.”<sup>21</sup> Ethical principles structure this orientation, and the meta-ethical principles informing warrior orientation provide an additional layer of insight into their application that helps to make sense of observations and inform decisions and actions across all possible environments.

### PART 3: ADVANTAGES OF THE ETHICAL FITNESS CONCEPT

The ethical fitness concept has three major advantages over current ethics training and education.

First, the ethical fitness concept provides an overarching training, education, and practice paradigm, thereby helping to implement Rear Admiral Carter’s recommendation to move “beyond compliance” in ethics training and education.<sup>22</sup> Framing ethics training and education as the cultivation of ethical fitness constitutes a positive approach to the sort of life-and-death decision making that is the specific task of warriors. It does so in a way that enables the flow of passion and enthusiasm to “do the right thing” that is the default setting for sailors. In contrast, the current Navy ethics guidance is a list of dos and don’ts for bureaucrats, not warriors. By avoiding a focus on the negative “don’ts” and “ought nots” from philosophers who have never faced combat, the ethical fitness concept provides a way for warriors to take the ethical initiative when they find themselves in a conflict. This enables sailors to perceive the ethical components of military decision making not as restraints (can’t do) but as fertile constraints (must do) that enable long-term mission success.

Second, the ethical fitness concept provides a framework for the development of ethical decision-making habits. Ethical fitness, like physical fitness, arises from habitual exercise of the capability, appropriately guided through training and deliberative practice. As Aristotle said, “Thus the virtues arise in us neither by nature nor against nature, but we are by nature able to acquire them, and reach our complete perfections through habit.”<sup>23</sup> Habitual (regular, repeated) application of the desired behavior is necessary for humans actually to possess a competency. Aristotle compared the process of acquiring ethical competency to the sort of hands-on training that builders receive. Aristotle explained, “Virtues, by contrast, we acquire, just as we acquire crafts, by having previously activated them. For we learn a craft by producing the same product that we must produce when we have learned it, become builders, e.g., by building and harpists by playing the harp: so

also, then, we become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions.”<sup>24</sup> Athletic habituation ingrains appropriate movement patterns, just as experience, including imaginative experience generated through training and education, ingrains ethically fit behavior.

Third, the ethical fitness concept provides a framework for ethical behavior in multiple contexts. Warriors engage in activities not obviously justifiable using the conventional ethical metrics of Mediocristan. As General James Mattis said in his 2004 William C. Stuntz Ethics Lecture at the U.S. Naval Academy, entitled “Ethical Challenges in Contemporary Conflict: The Afghanistan and Iraq Cases,” “Your job, my fine young men and women, is to find the enemy that wants to end this experiment and kill every one of them until they’re so sick of the killing that they leave us and our freedoms intact.”<sup>25</sup>

However, a warrior is not engaged in killing all the time or in all places, or even indiscriminately in any one place or at any given time. Therefore, to act appropriately in multiple contexts, warriors must build, on the foundational ethical habits, what the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche referred to as “brief habits.” Nietzsche wrote, “I love brief habits and consider them an invaluable means for getting to know many things and states down to the bottom of their sweetnesses and bitternesses; my nature is designed entirely for brief habits, even in the needs of its physical health and generally as far as I can see at all, from the lowest to the highest.”<sup>26</sup> By extending the range of human experience, and of expertise within that experience, brief ethical habits inform individual warrior decisions and actions and thus foster the advanced level of ethical development necessary for warriors and leaders. A life in which the same ethical habits are applied in all contingencies will fail to correspond appropriately to the demands of an Extremistan ethical situation, just as performing the same set of exercises (even with good technique) without variation can lead to decreases in physical capability. Training and practice consisting of varied stimuli and responses are necessary for ethical growth, and challenges stimulate development.<sup>27</sup> The warrior requires multiple brief habits for ethical decision making to facilitate decision making across the full range of life activities.

The employment of the various ethical habit sets can be thought of as corresponding to weapons readiness levels.<sup>28</sup> Weapons status readiness levels describe the appropriate posture for weapons employment; similarly, the ethical habit set articulates the balance of risk (between self and other) and the appropriate level of violence available to respond to adversary action. The ethical habit set for combat is different from that for an exercise, just as weapons readiness levels change with the situation. Hence, “mere” ethical wellness is insufficient for warriors; they require education, training, and practice to become ethically fit to enable them to shift rapidly among appropriate ethical habits.

**FIGURE 2**

Weapon Conditions	Weapon Status	Likelihood Weapon Use Required
Condition 1	Magazine inserted, round in chamber, slide forward, and decocking/safety lever on	High
Condition 2	Not applicable	Medium
Condition 3	Magazine inserted, chamber empty, slide forward, and decocking/safety lever on	Medium
Condition 4	Magazine removed, chamber empty, slide forward, and decocking/safety lever on	Low

The concept of brief habits has the advantage of opening space for forgiveness, respect for the enemy, treatment of the dead, etc. He who is an enemy in one moment can become a prisoner or a fellow human being whose life has ended in the next. In dynamic combat conditions, such a shift can occur faster than it can be articulated explicitly. The training task is therefore to infuse warriors'

intuition (their tacit understanding), and thus their decisions and actions, with the appropriate ethical operating system. Brief habits, as part of ethical fitness, provide a way to think through how to deal with these varying circumstances. The ethically fit individual will have ingrained the correct "movement patterns" and thus possess the "muscle memory" necessary to decide and act appropriately in every situation.

#### **PART 4: CONCEPT IMPLEMENTATION—COACHING THE ETHICAL FITNESS WORKOUT**

Implementation of the ethical fitness concept requires appropriate training and education—in other words, the development of an effective ethical habituation process. Indeed, the Navy as an institution has a responsibility to provide robust and effective ethics training. As General Mattis has said, "A tragedy is when one of your beloved young sailors or Marines, who will literally die to carry out your orders, does something, and now you have to court-martial him. That is the last thing you ever want to do, because you failed to talk your people through it, to illustrate for them what it's going to be like."<sup>29</sup> Ethics training for bureaucrats based on ethical habits developed for everyday life in Mediocristan will not avert the tragedies to which General Mattis refers.

Yet simply saying that we need more and better ethics training is an inappropriate response. Effective ethics training must overcome two challenges: the scarcity of attention resources and the rules-based compliance model. Ethical fitness provides a framework for developing an ethical training regime that meets both these challenges.

##### ***Scarcity of Attention***

As Herbert Simon has pointed out, in a time of nearly unlimited information, the critical limiting factor is attention.<sup>30</sup> Even as the increasing complexity of Navy

tasks demands additional training, attention resources available to focus on training decrease. As a result, the reliance on more training to solve organizational problems creates its own ethical challenges. As Leonard Wong and Stephen J. Gerras point out in their *Lying to Ourselves: Dishonesty in the Army Profession*, the well-intentioned effort to provide more training to deal with problems can have “detrimental effects on training management due to the suffocating amount of mandatory requirements imposed upon units and commanders.”<sup>31</sup>

Similar tensions exist in the Navy. Therefore the training dedicated to ethics must be sensitive to this attention-constrained environment instead of simply adding more training as the answer to every challenge. Effective training will provide the minimum effective dose of ethics training in a way warriors find useful. A list of dos and don'ts is unlikely to meet this need. While compliance with rules is essential, it is not sufficient. Thus, warrior ethics training must go beyond a compliance-based set of rules on what to do and not do. It must provide principles that not only explicitly guide action but intuitively inform the moral operating system that animates the orientation of decision making. This enables warriors to make value-based judgments that are always in accordance with the highest ethical standards.

### *The How-To*

So how do we capture the warrior's attention and provide the minimum effective ethics training and education dose in time-constrained, complex environments?

Effectively capturing the warrior's attention requires that training and education be delivered not by an outsider but by a leader who is on the field of Mars with the warrior. Just as a team coach provides expert advice on techniques and training for the sport, so the military has coaches: senior leaders with expertise in navigating ethical situations. These coaches, serving as role models, provide positive tools to enhance the warrior's competency to move through the OODA loop ethically.

Coaches facilitate warrior ethical competencies by developing their ethical decision-making mental models through the pathways of life experience and education, similar to the development of physical competency through drills in the weight room and on the sports field. As Klein writes, “Mental models are developed through experience—individual experience, organizational experience, and cultural experience.”<sup>32</sup> By guiding reflection on experience and discussing imaginative experience gained through training and educational activities, coaches facilitate development of the ethical competencies that together constitute ethical fitness, just as a physical coach guides a workout. Coaches do not simply point out mistakes; they are sensitive to tacit knowledge derived from understanding the context of an action, and help to sensitize those they coach to the weak signals emerging from the shadows.

Coaching takes many forms, including “workouts” that cultivate ethical competency. Admiral Carter articulates possible coach-provided ethical training and education content:

*[S]potlight examples of good ethical choices and behavior; as well as examples that favorably represent the naval profession. . . . [I]nstitutionally reward good decisions and actions that reinforce Navy Core Values and the Navy Ethos. Tend to the moral development of our Sailors—i.e., helping them develop habits for making the right ethical choices and utilizing proper discretionary judgment. . . . [P]rovide opportunities for facilitated dialogues, peer discussions, and open roundtables around topics of motivation, reasoning, and processing of moral choices. Capitalize on existing training and education that present opportunities to instill ethics discussions and learning.<sup>33</sup>*  
[italics in original]

Ethical fitness workouts can vary significantly in length and intensity. Examples include plan of the day (POD) notes requiring a minute to read;<sup>34</sup> complex, multiactor scenarios as capstone events in schools; asides in lectures; boxed texts in doctrinal manuals; and commentaries on recommended texts. Such material exists: Steven Pressfield’s *The Warrior Ethos*, Karl Marlantes’s already-mentioned *What It Is like to Go to War*, Nicholas Monsarrat’s *The Cruel Sea*, E. D. Swinton’s *Defense of Duffer’s Drift*, and many others; it need only be placed in the appropriate package for sailor use. The lessons literature need not focus on mistakes; especially for those beginning their ethical fitness workouts, providing positive role models for making ethically fit decisions in complex, chaotic situations provides outstanding value. For example, Steven Pressfield’s book *The Lion’s Gate* offers multiple positive examples, such as the way Ran Ronen dealt with his mistake in combat during the Six-Day War: by taking more risk on himself and his squad by flying his plane under the other Mirage formations (so low, in fact, that he created a wake on the Mediterranean Sea below) so as to avoid transferring that risk onto others through failure to hit his targets at the assigned time.<sup>35</sup>

Ethical fitness can be achieved only by engagement—by wrestling with ethical issues in a wide variety of environments. Its relationship to rules (rules are necessary but not sufficient and not always available) makes ethical fitness difficult, both for practitioners and for those working to train and educate warriors aspiring to ethical fitness. The ethically fit must decide and act both in compliance with explicit rules and dynamically in accordance with core values.

This article offers the ethical fitness concept as a contribution to implementing previous calls to enhance the Navy’s approach to ethics training and education. The addition of an active growth and exercise component to ethics training and education, based on an analogy to the physical demands of combat (sprinting, climbing through warped hatches, lifting ammunition, etc.), provides a readily

comprehensible, accessible, and actionable methodology for engaging in ethical decision making both in the extremes of combat and in everyday life. Ethical fitness therefore provides a way to think about ethics training and practice that goes beyond exhortations to “be good.” The goal is to provide sailors with practical, actionable ethical decision-making skills. Importantly, the ethical fitness concept adds to the rich set of images, such as “moral compass,” “golden rule,” and “straight and narrow,” that already shape ethics education and practice.<sup>36</sup>

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#### NOTES

1. U.S. Navy Dept., *The Navy Leader Development Strategy* (Washington, DC: 2013).
2. Walter E. Carter Jr. [Rear Adm., USN], *Ethics in the U.S. Navy* (Newport, RI: Naval War College, 2014), p. 11, available at [www.usnwc.edu/](http://www.usnwc.edu/).
3. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
4. P. Gardner Howe III [Rear Adm., USN], “Rear Adm. Howe: Professionalism, Leader Development Key to Future,” *U.S. Naval War College*, 19 May 2015, [www.usnwc.edu/](http://www.usnwc.edu/).
5. Secretary of the Navy, “Navy Code of Ethics,” 2005, available at [www.secnv.navy.mil/](http://www.secnv.navy.mil/). The Navy Ethos is more suited to the sailor as bureaucrat.
6. Nassim Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 2010), p. 32.
7. Karl Marlantes, *What It Is Like to Go to War* (New York: Grove, 2011), p. 8.
8. Shira Maguen and Brett Litz, “Moral Injury in Veterans of War,” *PTSD Research Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (2012), pp. 1–3. The bibliographic essay accompanying this work discusses major articles within the growing body of literature on moral injury.
9. Taleb, *The Black Swan*, p. 33.
10. Marlantes, *What It Is Like to Go to War*, p. 222.
11. See Herbert A. Simon, *Reason in Human Affairs* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1983), for a discussion of the rational actor model and its limitations.
12. Gary Klein, *Streetlights and Shadows: Searching for the Keys to Adaptive Decision Making* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), p. 7.
13. See Spinoza’s discussion of human bondage in section 4 of the *Ethics*. He writes, “Man’s lack of power to moderate and restrain the affects [passions] I call bondage.” Benedict ed. Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994).
14. The challenges that combat generates for the development of ethics competency are not new. For example, W. Somerset Maugham’s *The Razor’s Edge*, published in 1944, is about a veteran who is on a quest for an ethical system appropriate for a returned warrior. Maugham contextualizes the World War I veteran’s struggle by having the character compare his struggles to those of Civil War veterans.
 

“We all know how after the war between the states there were men who never did a stroke after they came back from it. They were a burden to their families and useless to the community.” Also, “The war did something to Larry. He didn’t come back the same person that he went. . . . Something happened that changed his personality.”

“What sort of thing?” I asked.

“I wouldn’t know. He’s very reticent about his war experiences.” Dr. Nelson turned to Mrs. Bradley, “Has he ever talked to you about them, Louisa?”

“She shook her head.

“No. When he first came back we tried to get him to tell us some of his adventures, but he only laughed in that way of his and said there was nothing to tell” (W. Somerset Maugham, *The Razor’s Edge* [Philadelphia: Triangle Books, 1946], pp. 26–27).

- The tensions inherent in the ethical implications of combat are recurring issues that require continuous engagement.
15. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), p. 75.
  16. John M. Cooper, ed., *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), book 1, p. 331c.
  17. On “concealed logos,” Dr. Thomas Robinson explains, “And truth about the real can be known; for while it is no doubt the case that ‘<the world’s(?)> real constitution has a tendency to hide itself’ (fragment 123), it is none the less, with effort, ascertainable (fragments 1, 22), and this bears implications for conduct.” Heraclitus, *Heraclitus: Fragments; A Text and Translation with a Commentary*, trans. T. M. Robinson (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1987), p. 154.
  18. Klein, *Streetlights and Shadows*, p. 6.
  19. U.S. Navy Dept., *Marine Corps Physical Fitness Program*, MCO 6100.13 (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, 2008).
  20. Greg Glassman, “What Is Fitness?” *CrossFit Journal* (October 2002), p. 3.
  21. “The second O, orientation—as the repository of our genetic heritage, cultural tradition, and previous experiences—is the *most important part* of the O-O-D-A loop since it shapes the way we observe, the way we decide, the way we act.” John R. Boyd, “Organic Design for Command and Control,” *Defense and the National Interest*, 2005, slides 16, 26, [www.dnipogo.org/](http://www.dnipogo.org/).
  22. Carter, *Ethics in the U.S. Navy*, p. 13.
  23. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1985), book 2, sect. 1103a, lines 20–25.
  24. *Ibid.*, lines 25–30.
  25. Lieut. Gen. James N. Mattis, *Ethical Challenges in Contemporary Conflict: The Afghanistan and Iraq Cases* (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Academy, 2001), p. 9.
  26. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), p. 167.
  27. The idea of brief habits can also provide insight into post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD may be understood, in some cases, as a healthy, appropriate adaptation (or brief habit of living) to combat conditions, but an adaptation that later continues to inform observation, orientation, decision, and action even when translated into an environment in which other habits would be more appropriate. Thinking of the life of a warrior as requiring the development of many different brief habits, and the subsequent discarding of some of those habits in favor of others, can help conceptualize the transitions from training to predeployment preparations, to combat, and to the return home, followed by another cycle. Warriors can think of the skills they acquire (and that they need to survive in complex, violent environments) as brief habits, to be set aside upon return, then taken up again when necessary.
  28. U.S. Marine Corps, *Pistol Marksmanship*, MCRP 3-01b (Washington, DC: 2003), available at [www.marines.mil/](http://www.marines.mil/).
  29. Mattis, *Ethical Challenges in Contemporary Conflict*, p. 17.
  30. See Herbert A. Simon, *The Sciences of the Artificial*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), p. 144.
  31. Leonard Wong and Stephen J. Gerras, *Lying to Ourselves: Dishonesty in the Army Profession* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2015), p. 5.
  32. Klein, *Streetlights and Shadows*, p. 104.
  33. Carter, *Ethics in the U.S. Navy*, p. 13.
  34. An example of such a POD note while under way: “During tonight’s showing of the movie *Gettysburg*, pay special attention to Chamberlain’s speech prior to the battle. What are the ethical foundations of the ideas he articulates?”
  35. See Steven Pressfield, *The Lion’s Gate: On the Front Lines of the Six Day War* (New York: Penguin, 2014), pp. 144–49.
  36. For example, see Adm. Jonathan Greenert’s *Proceedings* article “The Moral Component of Leadership” for its use of “moral compass.” The admiral also writes, “We keep ourselves ethically fit through contact with one another.” Adm. Jonathan Greenert, “The Moral Component of Leadership,” *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 141/9/1,351 (September 2015).