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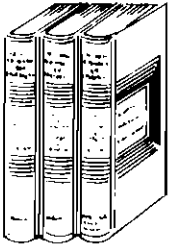
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"A Moral Military," and "Waging War: A Philosophical Introduction,"
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Authors

James H. McGrath, Sidney Axinn, Ian Clark, Anthony E. Hartle, Lloyd J. Matthews, and Dale E. Brown

PROFESSIONAL READING



A book reviewer occupies a position of special responsibility and trust. He is to summarize, set in context, describe strengths, and point out weaknesses. As a surrogate for us all, he assumes a heavy obligation which it is his duty to discharge with reason and consistency.

Admiral H.G. Rickover

Moral Issues in War

James H. McGrath

Axinn, Sidney. *A Moral Military*. Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1989. 230pp. \$29.95

Clark, Ian. *Waging War: A Philosophical Introduction*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988. 154pp. \$35

Hartle, Anthony E. *Moral Issues in Military Decision Making*. Lawrence, Kan.: Univ. of Kansas Press, 1989. 180pp. \$25

Matthews, Lloyd J. and Brown, Dale E., eds. *The Parameters of Military Ethics*. McLean, Va.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1989. 178pp. \$32

“**E**thics may well be America’s secret weapon” suggests Harry Summers in his introduction to *The Parameters of Military Ethics*. Proficient fighters are physically and morally courageous, honest, resolute, and self-reliant. In effective units, mutual trust and respect flourish amid candor and principled dissent. *Warfighting* (FMFM-1), the 1989 revision of the Marine Corps’ philosophy and doctrine, emphasizes that moral forces exert a greater influence than physical forces on the outcome of war. That small book is also reviewed in this issue of the *Naval War College Review*.

However, military effectiveness and moral demands are not always so harmonious. A letter from a distinguished combat veteran voices the tension

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between warfighting and restraint: "Our mission is to train, to fight, and to win. When I saw churches and pagodas being used for salvage depots and gun emplacements located on dikes, was I obliged to observe the laws of war? Not on my watch. Not when one trooper's life was in my hands. Unless it is mutual, restraint does nothing but arm our enemies." Often military morality or ethics seems more akin to an encumbrance than to a weapon or force.

These four books on military professional ethics address such issues as the warfighting importance of moral forces and moral restraints. What, if anything, do these books offer the American fighting man who is concerned with the ethical aspects of his profession? What do they contribute to our understanding of warfighting's moral dimensions?

Anthony Hartle's *Moral Issues* stands out as a warrior-philosopher's exposition of the American professional military ethic. Colonel Hartle, the director of the West Point Philosophy program, returned from two years of combat in Southeast Asia and set out to "sift through the philosophical wisdom of our culture." *Moral Issues* is an elaboration of his 1982 University of Texas doctoral dissertation and belongs on every professional's bookshelf.

Its initial achievement is to provide our first systematic presentation of the ethical code of the American military professional: the rules, standards, and values which actually guide his conduct. The author offers his interpretation of the commissioning oath and warrant, the constitution, the codified laws of war, the Uniform Code of Military Justice, the Code of Conduct, and relevant official publications. He then presents informal traditional military values and the enduring American values taught by socialization. Hartle claims a consensus among professionals for the bulk of this code; junior personnel will profit from his presentation. His treatment of the code's disputed areas will challenge senior officers to test their own interpretations.

A fighting man might well ask "Why should I abide by such a code?" One way Hartle replies is as follows: Regard the military as a profession and yourself as occupying a professional role. The function of your profession is to provide a social need, the systematic application of force. Ultimately your professional obligations and the restrictions on your permissible actions are justified in terms of your independent moral judgments about the enduring values of the American society you have sworn to support and defend. Military ethics may in some sense be grounded in universal moral truth. However, as an analytic technique, your question is more manageable when answered in terms of your role as an American fighting man.

The strategy of Hartle's reply is a methodological coup (for which the reader must forbear some jargon). It bypasses quagmires of fundamental issues and confronts empirically accessible actual American values, rules, and standards. The hands-on payoff occurs in a chapter that challenges the reader to include ethical considerations in his decisions about tough cases.

Moral Issues also makes a sustained attempt to establish two contentious claims: The structure of the American professional military code is consistent, coherent, and free from contradiction (just what such terms mean is not clear). And the ethical code must have such a structure to be battlefield-effective against "paralyzing moral dilemmas." Hartle's claims seem to express a version of a view of moral structure held by Aquinas: the code itself precludes moral dilemmas.

If the first claim means that the structure of the fighting man's professional ethics somehow precludes situations where he has two professional obligations and cannot do both, then it is demonstrably false. The Code of Conduct alone has put men in such a position. (POWs who were legally ordered to accept parole or not to escape *could not possibly* do what the Code of Conduct explicitly required.) As for the second claim, it seems more plausible to allow that such a complex code sometimes creates real dilemmas that a fighting man must deal with, then live with. My misgivings about Hartle's claims find support in Aristotle. This consistency-dilemma dispute is as important as it is controversial and will profitably embroil the thoughtful reader.

The Parameters of Military Ethics consists of 17 essays from the 1974-1988 volumes of *Parameters*, the U.S. Army War College Quarterly. The format resembles three earlier familiar *Parameters* anthologies: *The Parameters of War*, *Assessing the Vietnam War*, and *The Challenge of Military Leadership*. The essays are well-chosen, thematically grouped and of high quality. Summers' introduction provides a useful summary of each essay, with the exception of one.

Conspicuously absent is mention of General Maxwell D. Taylor's provocative "A Do-It-Yourself Professional Code for the Military." General Taylor argued that the worth of an officer is properly measured by mission success with minimal loss of resources, including men. *Moral Issues* explicitly confronts and rejects General Taylor's position. Facetiously, Hartle asks "Don't we expect our Marines to win no matter what it takes? The answer, of course, is no."

Waging War, the offering of Ian Clark, a Teaching Fellow in Defense studies at the University of Cambridge, is, as its subtitle announces, a philosophical book. Its central thesis is that to understand any specific warfare practice or restraint one must have a theoretical grasp of the nature of the war being fought. (Consider the theoretical baggage behind the practice of waving a white flag.) Conversely, from what one conceives a particular war to be, one can deduce distinctive principles for its prosecution. In turn, restricted conduct makes sense only in the context of those principles.

Such analysis is as old as Plato and as current as The Marine Corps Manual. In the *Republic* and *Laws*, Plato observed that Greek citizens conceived of strife between Greek factions as a different sort of activity than war with foreign

enemies. Because of their conceptions, he continued, his countrymen adopted different views of how to practice each activity.

Individual chapters of *Waging War* analyze both the just-war tradition handed down by Roman law and the Christian Church, and a political limited war tradition that the author traces from Machiavelli and Hobbes through Clausewitz. Here the most substantial thesis is that the two traditions share similar restraints but have divergent motives. The most provocative claim is that these two traditional concepts of war as an activity between states-at-war erect an intellectual barricade for our understanding of the varieties of contemporary armed conflict short of war between states.

Throughout *Waging War*, Clark argues convincingly that in any goal-directed war some military actions must be impermissible or prohibited; a war must have some restraints if it is goal-directed. Thus, my friend's and General Taylor's emphasis on mission success and winning with minimal loss cannot be the whole story. *Moral Issues* provides a particular example of Clark's general argument about restraints by contending that an American fighting man's action is impermissible whenever it subverts the enduring values of the society he serves. *Warfighting* and its sequel, *Campaigning* (FMFM 1-1), provide another example. They develop the idea that a military action is prohibitive whenever it is contrary to national policy aims. So we now have two particular views about restraints, two distinct ways to decide what is impermissible or prohibitive.

But we might also have problems. (Clark takes a philosopher's delight in suggesting that *Waging War* is more likely to start an argument than end one.) Hartle's enduring American values might or might not coincide with a particular national policy aim. *Moral Issues* and current Marine Corps doctrine may permit and prohibit different military actions.

In fact, things might even be fundamentally worse. *Warfighting* anticipates a dispersed, chaotic battlefield where front and rear and enemy and friendly areas are blurred. Its doctrine of rapid, flexible maneuver thrives by ruthlessly, relentlessly, and aggressively exploiting critical enemy vulnerabilities. Can such a doctrine be put into practice without violating *Moral Issues'* professional code? (Hartle confronts the related challenge of terrorism in *The Parameters of Military Ethics*.) If not, then what?

When questions get this close to rock bottom, *Waging War's* enterprise of relating concepts of war and concepts of restraints becomes an insightful, well-argued resource. Any officer wishing to probe the foundations of his profession should welcome it.

A Moral Military, written by Sidney Axinn, Professor of Philosophy at Temple, aspires to join the dialogue. Mostly it exasperates with platitudes, factual mistakes and muddled arguments. However, two chapters stand out. One presses hard questions about military honor and deception; another

reviews the problem known as the dirty hands of command. Overall, *Moral Issues* covers the same ground and is by far superior.

Each of these volumes, except *Moral Issues*, deals with nuclear morality, a topic I have bypassed in discussing individual military responsibility. None raises either distinctively naval professional questions or issues particular to the enlisted fighting man. Perhaps the next crop will explore an officer's special trust and confidence from the perspective of a seaman.

Weisner, Louis A. *Victims and Survivors: Displaced Persons and Other War Victims in Vietnam, 1954-1975*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988. 448pp. \$55

Modern governments profess that civilians and noncombatants should not suffer unnecessarily at the hands of military forces. The track record since Hiroshima and Dresden however, plainly shows the difference between theory and practice in tragic terms. On one hand, the prospect of indiscriminate death from weapons of mass destruction or terrorism can paralyze policymakers in a pool of pessimism. Yet the fate of innocent bystanders in any conflict, be it nuclear or "low-intensity," injects a sense of urgency into the debate about the role of civilians in war.

Excellent work on the subject has emerged since 1947, much of it from historians. Now we have a contribution from a first-time author with credentials that should appeal to veterans as well as to scholars. Louis Wiesner went to Vietnam in 1968 as a member of the United States Refugee Division. Since then, his life

has revolved around the plight of refugees worldwide.

Wiesner knows the civilian side of combat. His book focuses on refugees, but also discusses civil action, "pacification programs," and problems which European experts refer to as "civil-military cooperation." Both professional warriors and laymen with little knowledge of war can benefit from his perspective.

The first third of the book covers events and conditions in Vietnam between 1954 and 1968. Wiesner describes the 1954 exodus from the North, the strategic hamlet program in the South, and the various Montagnard resettlement efforts. Each chapter concludes with an evaluation of the program.

The refugee problem grew in the sixties. Wiesner's description of the Tet offensive, which he witnessed, is affected by his own experiences. Indeed, by the end of the book the reader has witnessed three different writing styles, each appropriate to Wiesner's role in the war.

Wiesner conveys his distaste for the Vietminh and the Vietcong, but the reader still senses that the Government of Vietnam (GVN) did