Virtuous soldiers: A role for the liberal arts?

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Virtuous Soldiers: A Role for the Liberal Arts?

“You cannot make men good by law”
C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

Introduction

Ethical discussions of war tend to centre around two distinct, but related, areas. The first area involves discussions about what can and cannot - as a matter of principle - be done in the lead up to, execution of and resolution of war. These set of ideas are commonly called just war theory (JWT)\(^1\) the discussion of when and how military force might be used in a way that comports with broader ideas of justice. The second, less popular area discusses the moral lives and character of those participating in war, and examines the various ways in which a person’s character can affect the way that they conduct themselves at war, and vice versa.\(^2\) The former category will be referred to as the deontological aspect of JWT; the latter as the aretaic aspect.\(^3\)

Although deontological and aretaic aspects of JWT are conceptually related, their relation within the academic literature has often been similar to that of estranged brothers: there is a formal relationship between the two, but the occasions on which the two actually come together are extremely rare; and when they do, there is a good chance that things will get messy. Integrating the deontological and aretaic aspects of JWT is a project few have embarked on, and even fewer have done so well.

It is somewhat surprising that this is the case, because a review of the history of JWT reveals that the original architects of the theory (at least as it is understood in the modern day) viewed an important role for questions of virtue, character, moral psychology and intention within JWT, not just as a thematically related moral question, but as a central aspect of the theory itself. For the fathers of JWT, one could not distinguish the deontological from the aretaic: both were intrinsic and necessary elements of a complete and coherent morality of war.

Over time, however, attempts to develop JWT into a set of codified principles (which would form the basis of international law) led to a growing interest in the deeds which were permissible and impermissible and a diminishing concern regarding the moral character of the agents performing the deeds; that is, a growing focus on the deontological at the expense of the aretaic. For instance, Hugo Grotius, perhaps the most substantial contributor to this codification project, distinguished between that which the law of nations permitted, viz. that which one could not be punished for doing, and that which it was morally right or virtuous to do.

When I first set out to explain this part of the law of nations I bore witness that many things are said to be ‘lawful’ or ‘permissible’ for the reason that they are done with impunity […] things which, nevertheless, either deviate from the rule of right […] or at any rate may be omitted on higher grounds and with greater praise among good men (Grotius 2006: Bk. III, X.I).

Grotius demonstrates his point with reference to Seneca’s Trojan Women, where Phyrrus claims that no law protects captives from any form of injury, to which Agamemnon responds ‘[w]hat law permits, this sense of shame forbids’ (Grotius 2006: Bk. III, X.I). This ‘sense of shame’ is a recognition
of what Grotius calls ‘internal justice’: the moral laws that govern warfare, and forbid what the law of nations may permit (Grotius 2006: Bk. III, XI.II). Thus, although commentators who have suggested that Grotius ‘straddles the gap between morality and the law,’ (Orend 2007: 17) the emphasis is, in many ways, on the gap between the two rather than any continuity between them. The law is preferred because of the readiness with which it can be taught, enforced, and punished. In the words of Endre Bebgy, Gregory Reichberg & Henrik Syse (2012: 320), Grotius (and Vitoria and Suarez before him) preferred the deontological aspects of JWT for their ‘juridical connotations.’ Unethical behaviour, by contrast, is often difficult to prove in legal contexts, which explains why right intention, which ‘looks to the inner moral quality of an agent’s action […] is hardly invoked by Vitoria or Suarez’ (Begby, Reichberg, & Syse 2012: 320). When it is invoked by Grotius, it is limited to a question of private morality rather than part of the universally applicable laws of war. Over time, as international law became more influential, this focus shift in the thinking of just-war-theorists-cum-international-lawyers like Grotius became entrenched in legal, academic, and military thinking, leading to JWT being ‘displaced from the centre of normative reflection on international affairs’ (Begby, Reichberg, & Syse 2012: 323). As Jeff McMahan (2009: 106) explains,

As the legal regulation of war became more effective, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the practical significance of just war theory was gradually eclipsed by that of the evolving law of war.

In no place was this more true than with regard to aretaic aspects of JWT; after all, at first sight the private character of soldiers and political leaders, the private intentions of actors, and the instantiation of habits appear to have far less juridical relevance than do questions of (for example) rights violations, sovereignty, and legitimate authority. Consequently, many of today’s accounts of JWT focus almost exclusively on prescribing what a soldier, officer, general, politician or even civilian should do in any particular situation. This usually takes a deontological form, describing various duties or principles that must be upheld (the most obvious examples are the jus in bello principles of proportionality and discrimination). Typically, the lens through which these duties and principles are usually developed and reconciled is human rights. The idea being that a war which the nation has a right to wage, and in which all agents perform only actions they have a right to perform (that is, a war in which nobody is wronged), will be an entirely just war.

The more recent iterations of JWT tend, therefore, to focus on the moral character of certain actions (just, unjust, illegal, rights-violating, etc.) as opposed to the character of the agents performing those actions. The general project has been to describe just wars in terms of the actions that will (or will not) constitute them. However, close examination of older thinking within the just war tradition reveals some shortcomings in this approach: shortcomings that derive from the absence of aretaic thinking in contemporary JWT. First, they fail to recognise how even prima facie just actions can have deleterious effects on the character of an individual, and therefore are of grave moral significance. Secondly, deontologically-focused instantiations of JWT fail to appropriately consider the continuity between act and actor: the instantiation of good deeds is greatly expedited by, if not entirely dependent on, the moral virtue of the person performing the deed.

In what follows I will first demonstrate how and why virtue was seen to be an integral part of some of the original just war theories, and how these theories conceived of the virtuous soldier. This approach will be contrasted with the conception of the virtuous soldier that seems to emerge from deontologically-focused just war theories. Following this, I will argue that it is the more dated,
classical conception of JWT and of the virtuous soldier that best comports with recent trends within military ethics education (MEE) which are beginning to emphasise the development of the moral character and virtue of their soldiers (especially officers). Finally, whilst supporting these recent trends, I will suggest some ways in which the classic model of liberal arts education might supplement and support this virtue-based approach to MEE.

1: The Flight from Virtue in JWT

The first part of this section will describe classical JWT, viewed through the works of two of its fathers: St. Augustine of Hippo and St. Thomas Aquinas. These thinkers have been chosen because of they reside relatively early in the history of JWT, and also demonstrate particular interest in aretaiac matters. Despite the presence of other significant contributors to classical JWT, I choose these two because they are unquestionably two of the most influential figures of the early development of JWT. Furthermore, because (as I have already noted) post-Aquinas, JWT begins to move in the modern direction thanks to the contributions of Francisco Vitoria and Hugo Grotius, aretaiac discussions are best preserved in these two thinkers. It is in Augustine and Aquinas that we see the origins of virtue-based JWT in its most pure form, serving as an excellent comparison to modern-day, deontological theories (described in the second section).

1.1: Classical JWT

St. Augustine, often credited as being the father of JWT (Kinsella & Carr 2007; 55, Orend 2007: 12, Steinhoff 2007: 9, Holmes 1989: 115-116), believed that the soul was the seat of virtue, and therefore what was most significant in moral evaluations were the internal states of agents, including those involved in waging war.

What is the evil in war? Is it the death of some who will soon die in any case, that others may live in peaceful subjection? This is mere cowardly dislike, not any religious feeling. The real evils in war are love of violence, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable enmity, wild resistance, and the lust of power, and such like (Augustine 1887: 22.77).

Augustine further emphasizes the importance of internal states by arguing that justice in war requires that human beings must fight with a spirit of reluctance and sobriety, not hatred or enmity:

[...] for it is the injustice of the opposing side that lays on the wise man the duty of waging wars; and this injustice is assuredly to be deplored by human beings [...] And yet a man who experiences such evils, or even thinks about them, without heartfelt grief, is assuredly in a far more pitiable condition, if he thinks himself happy simply because he has lost all human feeling (Augustine [1467] (1972): 19.7).

In the thirteenth century another theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas, revived St. Augustine’s just war thinking. When Aquinas examined war, he situated the discussion within a broader discussion of the virtues, arguing it to be a vice against charity. It is a vice insofar as it acts against peace, which is one of three ‘effects’ of charity. However, where war aims to restore a peace that is already broken, it
may be just; on the other hand, where war acts against peace, it is unjust (Aquinas 1948: II-II q. 40 a. 1). Ultimately though, all JWs are regulated by the virtue of charity.5

Charity, for Aquinas, is the virtue of love between persons which is based on a love for God (Aquinas 1948: II-II q. 23 a. 1). However, charity is not just one of many virtues, but is what Thomas calls a ‘special virtue’ (II-II q. 23 a. 4), meaning that it is a virtue that relates directly to a particular ‘species’ of love (Divine love), and therefore no true virtue is possible without charity (II-II q. 23 a. 7). This leads Aquinas to call charity ‘the form of the virtues’ because it directs man to his ultimate end, God (II-II q. 23 a. 8). Peace is one of the ‘special attitudes’ of charity; Aquinas calls it one of the effects of charity (II-II q. 29 a. 3). For Aquinas, peace entails two separate things: first, concord: the wills of various hearts agreeing together in consenting to the same thing; and second, what might be called inner peace: a harmony amongst one’s own feelings, desires, and moral judgements.

It is at this point that Aquinas defends certain wars as just insofar as their striving toward or defending peace is consistent with the virtue of charity. The argument is fairly intuitive: if peace is an aspect of the good life, one can be justified in defending that peace under certain conditions. The conditions listed by Aquinas have been enshrined in JWT as the jus ad bellum conditions of just cause, right intention, and legitimate authority. However, for many, Aquinas’ significance as a just war theorist ends with these contributions. Some go a step further, exploring Aquinas’ notions of intentionality and the doctrine of double-effect, but very few take the time to consider Aquinas’ treatment of aretaic questions later in his Summa Theologica. His treatment is most specifically directed to in bello concerns, at which stage Aquinas considers in detail the virtues that bear most directly on those who fight in wars. Here Aquinas subjects in bello moral requirements to aretaic considerations, seeing the internal character of military personnel as being just as important as the moral character of the acts they perform.

The inclusion of virtues amongst Aquinas’ writing on war is significant not only because it reflects a conception of JWT in which the virtues of individual agents are considered prevalent, but also because of the connection between the virtues and happiness in Aquinas’ writing. For Aquinas, ‘happiness […] consists in an operation of virtue,’ (I-II q. 4 a. 7) meaning that activities that serve to instantiate the virtues in people can be morally laudable paths by which individuals can achieve flourishing. The military life, with the virtues that it requires and fosters is one such path to flourishing. It therefore serves to understand precisely how military command and soldiering serve to develop the virtues. Further, Aquinas construes the virtues as being habits that direct an individual toward his or her ultimate end – happiness (I-II q. 1 a. 8).

Importantly, Aquinas notes that ‘no man can serve two masters,’ and that ‘[i]t is impossible for one man’s will to be directed at the same time to diverse things, as last ends’ (I-II q. 1 a. 5). What this suggests is that man’s ultimate end, happiness, is the only thing to which humans ultimately aim, and is common amongst all men. For Aquinas, and Augustine too, this end is happiness which ultimately consists in God (I-II q. 2 a. 8). This is significant for the reason that the conception of the virtues that Aquinas presents is one in which all virtuous behaviour is all directed toward one end. Thus, if virtuous conduct is to warrant the name, it must be conduct that directs a person toward happiness.7 This point is one that will be picked up again later in the paper.

1.1.1: Aquinas on Prudence and Courage
Aquinas’ treatment of war at various points in the *Summa* reflects that, as Gregory Reichberg (2010: 263) notes, ‘his aim was to [...] situate lethal force in relation to the virtues that render it an acceptable practice in human life, and inversely, to indicate what vices are especially to be avoided.’ By bringing the practice of war under the realm of the virtues, Aquinas subjects those who fight in wars not only to juridical norms, but to matters of internal morality; that is, questions of virtue and vice. Whilst virtuous commanders and soldiers will require a complete set of the virtues working co-operatively, Aquinas sees these practices as being specially disposed to *particular* virtues, those being, as was said above, prudence and courage, which Reichberg (2010: 264) describes as ‘two dispositions assuring right conduct *in bello*.’

Prudence, for Aquinas, is the special virtue of the cognitive faculty which allows man to decide between various paths of action (II-II q. 47 a. 1). Aquinas goes on to suggest that prudence does not apply only to the individual, but has political relevance too (II-II q. 47 a. 10). This includes a specific type of prudence directed to military judgements, which differs from political prudence in that each is directed to a different range of acts: those concerned with the right ordering of the state on the one hand, and those concerned with effective resistance against external attacks on the other.

This is important because the introduction of prudence into moral reasoning about war is new to JWT. Aquinas notes that prudential reasoning is not only inherent in the practice of warfare, but that participating in warfare can be—as a response to virtue—a constitutive aspect of the moral life generally; not just insofar as one fights for justice, but also insofar as one is good at fighting. Aquinas does not, however, suggest that prudence is the virtue which governs all military conduct; ordinary soldiers do not need military prudence to function well in their role. Aquinas explains the distinction between the soldier and the commander as one of virtue: issuing a command and bringing that command to fruition are very different things. ‘The execution of military service belongs to fortitude, but the direction, especially in so far as it concerns the commander-in-chief, belongs to prudence’ (II-II q. 50 a. 4).

So, although the prudent man is best equipped for military command, it is the courageous man who is best suited for soldiering. Fortitude (or courage) is the virtue which allows man to pursue what he knows to be good despite the difficulties involved (Aquinas 1948, II-II q. 123 a. 1). In the context of the military life, fortitude usually comes in the form of doing what is right despite the prospect of dying in the process and, because death is perhaps the greatest physical evil one can suffer, courage in the face of death ranks as one of the purest instantiations of the virtue.

Fortitude of soul must be that which binds the will firmly to the good of reason in face of the greatest evils: because he that stands firm against great things, will in consequence stand firm against less things, but not conversely. Moreover it belongs to the notion of virtue that it should regard something extreme: and the most fearful of all bodily evils is death, since it does away all bodily goods (II-II q. 123 a. 4)

The warrior faces, almost uniquely, the opportunity to practice fortitude in his endeavours, because although ‘the dangers of death arising out of sickness, storms at sea, attacks from robbers, and the
like, do not seem to come on a man through his pursuing some good [...] the dangers of death which occur in battle come to man directly on account of some good, because, to wit, he is defending the common good by a just fight’ (II-II q. 123 a. 5).

Again, Aquinas demonstrates how the act of soldiering can be a constitutive element of the good life. The soldier can fight justly and laudably. However, to do so he must take some interest in matters of jus ad bellum. Fortitude, as we have seem, is the moderation of fear of death in order to achieve goods which require risk. Fortitude requires a conception of the good aimed for; a cognitive assent that the end desired justifies the risk undertaken. This seems to imply that the courageous soldier will have considered, and become confident in, the justice of the cause for which he fights. Aquinas notes that ‘it belongs to the virtue of fortitude to remove any obstacle that withdraws the will from following the reason’ (II-II q. 123 a. 3) it follows then that if reason is not employed, the subsequent act cannot be fortitudo. This arguably places a ‘burden of contemplation’ on the soldier without which his act may not be unjust, but cannot be virtuous. It falls to the virtuous soldier to contemplate the justice of his cause before being willing to risk his life in its pursuit.

So in light of this, how would Augustine and Aquinas describe the virtuous soldier? First and foremost, the virtuous soldier will be a virtuous person. He or she will be a person who habitually and wilfully chooses actions that promote the good in a particular situation. For both, the virtuous soldier will be one who fears doing evil more than he fears dying and will courageously pursue the good even in the face of severe physical risk. More than this, however, he will by the type of person who willingly chooses to do what is right without any external motivation to do so: he will be the type of person who chooses to do what is virtuous for its own sake. This is advantageous from a moral perspective because individuals who feel personally disposed toward acting well will more easily comply with in bello moral and legal restrictions. Furthermore, as I discussed above, the virtues are habits to act rightfully which direct a person toward happiness. Thus, the virtuous soldier or commander will be one whose soldiering or commanding directs him toward happiness. Thus, for virtuous military personnel, involvement in military life becomes an active contributor to their moral and psychological wellbeing. Here emerge two separate arguments in favour of incorporating aretaic thinking into JWT: first, because personal virtue amongst military personnel is likely to lead to improved conformance with moral and legal regulation on in bello conduct; and secondly, because virtue, properly conceived, allows military personnel to reconcile their involvement in war with their living a morally praiseworthy and personally satisfying life.

1.1.2: Virtue and Fragmentation

The latter point regarding the interaction of virtue and living a happy life is especially important and speaks to a growing problem for military personnel today by which the competing roles identities inhabited by military personnel – broadly, their civilian and military identities – conflict with one another in ways that inhibit the personal flourishing of individuals. This problem is described by Paul Berghaus and Nathan Cartagena (2013: 287) as ‘fragmentation.’

As social creatures, human beings possess a number of identities [...] Many people struggle to see themselves as a unified person, because they believe that each identity requires them to be a distinctly different person. Throughout a given day, they transition from being one person to another as they move to each new social context.
Fragmentation can be deleterious to the happiness or flourishing of military personnel when the different identities they inhabit seem to conflict with one another. Whilst fragmentation is not a problem that is limited to military personnel, they do seem especially vulnerable to it for at least two reasons. First, because the difference between the military and civilian life is particularly sharp by comparison to, for instance, the difference between a teacher’s professional and private life, thus making the transition particularly difficult, as Nancy Sherman (2010: 115) notes in discussing the case of William Quinn, an interrogator:

“Border passing” – that is, moving between civilian roles and the roles required in uniform and in war – is neither morally nor psychologically simple. The passage can subject both psychologically strong and morally good persons to feelings of shame and remorse, as well as to traumatic symptoms. In Quinn’s case, deception and betrayal, manipulation and exploitation, tools morally questionable in ordinary transactions, had become standard tools of his specialized trade. And this did not sit perfectly well.

Second, military personnel are especially vulnerable to fragmentation because ‘it is often the case that they identify predominantly with their professional moral self’ (Berghaus & Cartagena 2013, 289). Thus, instead of seeing him or herself as, for example, both a parent and a soldier, the soldiering identity may be seen to take priority over one’s civilian identities. At worst, this threatens to rupture the individual from his or her identity as a parent; at best, the two identities pull in different directions. Recalling that Aquinas saw happiness as a univocal end of human behaviour toward which all virtuous activity is ultimately directed, we see how fragmentation – which pulls a person in different directions by dividing them into separate, and sometimes contradictory identities – undermines the project of seeking the achievement of a single ultimate end for one’s activities.

The virtuous soldier will therefore be one who understands that his or her deeds help form one’s identity, and therefore he or she needs to integrate the military identity with various others in a harmonious manner. Soldiering is a way of life that can either assist in the achievement of human flourishing or be detrimental to it, but it is not separate from the rest of life; the way I soldier will affect the way I act when I am at home. One area in which this is particularly telling is in the experience of ‘moral injury’ amongst returned soldiers. By moral injury, I refer to what Johnathan Shay (2012: 58) describes as ‘the soul wound inflicted by doing something that violates one’s own ethics, ideals, or attachments.’ Berghaus & Cartagena (2013) tell the story of Corporal Sanchez, a man who discovered that he had accidentally killed a fourteen year old boy in the line of duty. His ruminations are telling: ‘[t]he Army says I did the right thing, so why do I feel so guilty? How can I say I am a good soldier and a good man when I killed an innocent boy?’

Were Sanchez a parent, he might also wonder how he could be a good parent whilst simultaneously being a soldier who had killed a child. Here, civilian and military identities threaten to schism a character unless the two identities can be harmonised under a broader framework. The virtues, understood holistically as character traits by which a person willingly acts virtuously for the sake of being virtuous, and in a way that advances a person’s path to happiness. Further, he could consider whether the process which had lead to his killing the children had been undertaken prudently, courageously, and from a genuine desire to do good. If it had, Sanchez might in time be able to recognise that although the outcomes of his action were bad, that he had conducted himself with virtue. Thus, his actions would not reflect badly on his moral identity; indeed, his soldiering –
even despite killing a child – might still be reconcilable with living a happy life. As Berghaus and Cartagena (2013: 297) argue:

Sanchez can think about his emotions in terms of his virtue-relevant goals. He can broaden the scope of his goal to be a just person such that it incorporates the other identities he possesses [...] From a more realistic vantage point [...] Sanchez will be able to begin to process anew his actions in Baghdad, their consequences, his feelings about them, and their ramifications for his development as a person.

However, this response appears to be available only if one employs a certain conception of the virtues and their interaction with happiness. Absent a coherent approach to aretaic ethics such as that provided by Augustine and more substantially by Aquinas, JWT will be unlikely to offer such a coherent and satisfying response, as we will see in the following section.

1.2: Modern JWT

When JWT enjoyed a strong revival in the 20th century, its greatest spokesperson was Michael Walzer. In his seminal book Just and Unjust Wars, Walzer (1977: xxiii-xxiv) explicitly founds his just war theory on the concept of human rights.

There is a particular arrangement, a particular view of the moral world, that seems to me the best one. I want to suggest that the arguments we make about war are most fully understood (though other understandings are possible) as efforts to recognize and respect the rights of individuals and associated men and women. The morality I shall expound is in its philosophical form a doctrine of human rights.

Walzer was not alone in this regard; the trend began earlier in response to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: ‘now theorists saw that the new moral basis for the age was destined to be human rights, and so they got to work interpreting traditional just war theory in light of human rights’ (Orend 2007: 23).

Indeed, the language of rights has permeated modern JWT. Jeff McMahan, another prominent just war theorist whose theory sits at odds with that of Walzer’s also formulates his theory in the language of human rights. McMahan (2009: 16) objects to the moral equality of combatants on the basis that just combatants and unjust combatants enjoy different moral status; whilst just combatants have done nothing to forfeit their right not to be killed, unjust combatants have. McMahan (2009: 106-107) similarly explains the shift away from virtue and natural law approaches and toward human-rights based approaches in terms of an interest in developing a ‘Law of Armed Conflict’ (LOAC) rather than a simple morality of war.

There are also historical reasons why people tend to conflate the morality and law of war. The moral theory of the just war antedated any serious legal regulation of war. When juridical thinkers began to develop accounts of the “law of nations,” the framework within which they formulated their theories and proposals was inevitably provided by the prevailing understanding of natural
law found in classical versions of just war theory. Legal principles were thus couched in just war idioms. […]

As the legal regulation of war became more effective, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the practical significance of just war theory was gradually eclipsed by that of the evolving law of war […] Late twentieth-century just war doctrine was thus modeled quite closely on the international law of war in the form that the latter took at that time.

However, that none of these rights-based approaches is entirely adequate can be seen from the way in which virtue and character-based concepts infiltrate their thinking in ways that do not map clearly on to a rights-based JWT. For instance, when Walzer (2004: 170 argues that ‘when it is our action that puts innocent people at risk, even if the action is justified, we are bound to do what we can to reduce those risks, even if this involves risks to our own soldiers,’ he makes the argument partly on the basis of civilian rights to immunity, but also partly with reference to Albert Camus’ argument that one cannot kill unless one is willing to die. Camus’ argument could hardly be formulated as saying ‘only when one is willing to die does one earn the right to kill another’; rather, what Camus (and, via citation, Walzer) is saying is that there are particular attributes of moral character and a particular psychological state requisite for an agent’s killing to be just. These are necessary, but not sufficient conditions for morally acceptable intentional killing. Implicit in Walzer’s stance is an interest in character and moral psychology that a purely rights-based approach cannot justify.

Consider another example, this time from Orend (2007: 111) in his discussion of torture in The Morality of War.

[At Abu Ghraib] the world saw some shocking photos of American troop conduct […] Some of it - like deliberate, prolonged sleep deprivation, and using dogs to attack or threaten already prone and naked people - clearly violated the Geneva Conventions. Others might have been visually disturbing but do not obviously count as human rights violations, such as forcing the prisoners to wear dog collars, or having American women ridicule their private parts, or putting female panties on their faces temporarily.

Orend (2007: 111) disapproves both types of actions as ‘a violation of both the letter and the spirit of the principle of benevolent quarantine,’ but is not willing to completely condemn the latter: ‘I suppose we might condone efforts at psychological pressure […] when the goal is getting information which might save innocent lives.’ It seems like Orend (2007: 112) wants to condemn the undignifying behaviour of US troops, but lacks the theoretical framework to do so; he notes that ‘[t]orture hardens the heart and corrupts the character of the torturer.’ This is problematic for two reasons: first, because Orend is unwilling to forbid absolutely behaviour that corrupts the character of an otherwise good individual – and is likely to undermine the individual’s ability to live a happy or fulfilling life; and secondly, because moral corruption may not be exclusive to the torturer; the antagonistic interrogator, willing to mock, insult, lie and threaten surely cannot expect to leave with a pristine character. Thus, even licit activities threaten to form a professional identity based, at least in part, on moral vices. Again, Nancy Sherman (2010: 117) is informative:

The nearly exclusive focus on torture has silenced a more general debate about the moral shadowland in which the interrogator dwells, even when he does not practice torture […] [T]he
space the interrogator inhabits has its own special moral demands. And with it comes a distinct set of moral and psychological vulnerabilities.

What Sherman is aware of – and which Orend is arguably less sensitive to – is the fact that even ‘interrogation-short-of-torture’ (Sherman uses the term ‘exploitation’) brings accompanying moral difficulties for the interrogator. The subject’s vulnerability, loyalty and trust is exploited by the interrogator for specific ends; and the skills requisite to do so are not compatible with the overall flourishing of a life. In cases such as this, although the soldier has not breached the Law of Armed Conflict, in no way does the case is closed, morally speaking.

Here the fragmentation problem re-emerges. Orend’s unwillingness to fully prohibit torture on the sole basis of its capacity for corruption reflects a sense amongst a number of contemporary just war theorists that the deeds soldiers perform are at best a ‘necessary evil.’ However, a necessary evil is still an evil, and it may not be possible to reconcile one’s identity as evil-doer with the endeavour to live a morally excellent life with some chance of happiness. Here we return to the case of Corporal Sanchez: Sanchez was told by the Army that he had acted rightly but yet Sanchez himself believed his actions to be morally unjustifiable. Berghaus and Cartagena (2013: 291) explain that ‘[a] subsequent routine investigation of the incident found that [...] Corporal Sanchez acted appropriately within the line of duty and rules of engagement.’ The investigation did not, it seems, take the further step mentioned in the previous section of assuring Sanchez that he had acted courageously or virtuously, and thus allowing him to reconcile his conduct with his moral self more generally conceived. What the investigation had determined was that Sanchez had not intentionally violated any of his professional duties.

This reflects the modern conception of virtue that permeates both JWT and the military establishment generally. The virtuous soldier, under this approach, is more limited in the sense that his virtues are restricted to his role as a soldier. He has character traits that mean that he habitually adheres to the laws of armed combat and his character is compatible with the requirements of soldiering to uphold human rights. However, the virtues are defined by what the military profession defines as excellent conduct, rather than being defined by those activities which best lead to happiness. Thus, the military profession, were to adopt the language of virtue without adopting the full aretaic spirit present in Aquinas and Augustine, risks the development of military personnel whose professions pull them away from living a flourishing life. Paul Robinson (2006: 3) notes that the virtues seen as complicit with military excellence tend to be created by societies, but may also lead soldiers away from right conduct.

The four virtues of prowess, courage, loyalty, and truthfulness form the unchanging core of military honour [...] Many societies create formal codes of behaviour which prescribe how to display the approved virtues. Unfortunately, in yet another complication, this means that honour can derive from rigid obedience of the code even when it is unhelpful or even clearly wrong.

There are two significant observations from Robinson. The first is that there is no mention of prudence, autonomy or conscience amongst the important character traits of the honourable soldier, meaning that the soldier’s role as a free-thinking, autonomous agent (as he is in his life outside the military) is undermined. Under such an approach, the virtuous soldier is paradoxically required to separate himself from fundamental human characteristics. The flaw in this approach is noted by Susan Martinelli-Fernandez (2006: 57), who argues that a Kantian approach to moral education might
be beneficial in the military: ‘[t]he goal of moral education [...] is not merely to get the agent to follow rules. It is the cultivation of moral agency, an agency that involves one’s becoming an independent, right thinking and right acting person.’

The second is that formulations of good conduct which associate rule-adherence and loyalty with virtue are entirely dependent on the rules themselves being morally good ones that can be easily applied across all situations and boundaries. If this is not the case – and given the contingencies of war it is likely not to be – then defining morally good conduct only in association with obeying particular rules or fulfilling particular duties is setting soldiers up for moral failure. Thus, it seems that equipping the soldier with skills or character traits that will allow him or her to adapt morally to the demands of particular situations requires a more comprehensive understanding of ethics than a strictly deontological formulation is able to provide. Here we again see an area in which aretaic modes of thinking will be welcome. However, incorporating the virtues into military training may not be sufficient to overcome the difficulties that appear to arise in the face of deontological ethics. Some have taken a step toward aretaic thinking by aiming to instil professional virtues is problematic for the same reason: professional virtues, if they are divorced from a more holistic account of the good life (such as that present in Aquinas’ writing), threaten to require a professional to perform actions that he or she cannot reconcile with his or her identity, conceived more broadly. As Berghaus & Cartagena (2013: 293) note, ‘[b]y limiting moral aspiration to a context-specific good, professionalism, [professional virtue approaches] actually further the problem of fragmentation.’

2: Virtue and Military Ethics Education

If there was any uncertainty as to whether the division between old and new concepts of virtue inJWT had carried over to MEE, Paul Robinson’s (2008; 1) observation in the introduction to the collected volume Ethics Education in the Military ends it:

... for some ethics is synonymous with ‘morality’. The aim of ethics education, therefore, is seen as being what many refer to as ‘character development’, in other words the creation of morally upright persons through the instillation of certain key qualities or dispositions of character (commonly known as virtues). Others, however, disagree, and consider ethics to be somewhat distinct from general morality. Instead, ethics are more properly seen as being related to a given profession and its requirements. The focus of ethics education therefore shifts from character development to creating an understanding of the purpose and methods of the profession and the values which underpin it.

These two contrasting approaches suggest different approaches to military ethics: the latter limiting it to a set of clearly defined and codified rules, where adherence to the rules counts as ethical conduct; whilst the former takes a more holistic approach, apparently believing that moral conduct in the military is synonymous with ‘what the virtuous soldier would do,’ where it is assumed that a virtuous person will also be a virtuous soldier. Although both these approaches are commonly seen in ethics education, it is clear that one is waxing and the other waning. As Robinson notes, ‘the predominant principle which most military ethics education programmes have adopted is that of virtue ethics.’ (2008: 5) This may not, in fact, be true: although many military programs have adopted the language of virtue ethics, it is not clear that they have adopted it in its full spirit, including
providing avenues for military personnel to actually develop the virtues that are so central to their practice and, as Berghaus & Cartagena (2013: 295) note (echoing Martinelli-Fernandez’s thoughts above), ‘a central concept of virtue theory is that human beings must reflect upon who they are and what they ought to be.’ Such reflection can only, I argue, take place in the context of a holistic model of virtue ethics. It cannot be successful if limited to a model of professional virtues. This is problematic because, as Berghaus and Cartagena (2013: 293) critically observe is the case in the US Army, ‘the scope of moral development within the Army Profession campaign is limited to a soldier’s professional moral development.’ As long as professional virtue is the lens through which military ethics educators view moral development, the extent to which MEE truly reflects and can make use of virtue ethics will be stunted.

Further problems emerge when the concept of ‘professionalism’ is embraced without being contextualised by reference to the moral life conceived more broadly. Don Carrick (2008: 197) expresses scepticism toward the practical viability of a virtue ethics approach to military ethics serving as an appropriate normative guide for soldiers.

If the educators want to bring virtue ethics, care ethics and so on in to the pedagogic equation, then they run a serious risk of taking the soldier outside his role and into situations where he does no longer have a reliable moral compass to guide him; he can find himself having to deal with people ‘simply’ on the basis of common humanity, fellow-feeling and a universal morality.

Carrick’s fear is that relying on universal, ‘everyday morality’ to govern warfare will generate a kind of ‘moral schizophrenia’ because soldiering involves deeds that defy everyday morality, such as intentional killing (Carrick 2008, 195-196). As such, it is preferable to educate soldiers so that they see the practice of soldiering as a separate moral realm from that of everyday life. As such, Carrick (2008: 196) advocates ‘ring-fencing soldiering within the notion of professional role morality.’

Carrick expresses a genuine concern regarding profession-centric approaches to virtue: that, as Berghaus and Cartagena (2013: 293) note, focussing only ‘on the development of character traits within the professional domain of soldiers’ lives […] fails to help soldiers develop in a holistic manner,’ and may, in fact, ‘further the problem of fragmentation.’ The moral seriousness of soldiering, which involves committing ‘the ultimate wrong’ (Carrick 2008: 195) – killing, demands substantial psychological protection for soldiers who are asked to kill. To avoid the kind of slippage, one must insulate what a soldier does from the rest of his moral life by referencing his professional role; that is, embracing a kind of role morality. This is an unusual conclusion to reach if one considers arguments, such as that of Sherman (2010: 115), that moral schizophrenia is unavoidable for the modern soldier in large part due to the huge gulf between ‘peacetime’ and ‘wartime’ morality.

“Border passing” – that is, moving between civilian roles and the roles required in uniform and in war – is neither morally nor psychologically simple. The passage can subject both psychologically strong and morally good persons to feelings of shame and remorse, as well as to traumatic symptoms. In Quinn’s [an interrogator Sherman is interviewing] case, deception and betrayal, manipulation and exploitation, tools morally questionable in ordinary transactions, had become standard tools of his specialized trade. And this did not sit perfectly well.

Carrick’s suggestion is that if soldiers are only informed by ‘everyday morality,’ and have to ‘deal with people “simply” on the basis of common humanity, fellow-feeling and a universal morality,’
they will be less able to make decisions vital to the successful fulfilment of their role as soldiers. Sherman, realising that what a person does actually affects the type of person he is, highlights the reverse: if soldiers are encouraged to think of soldiering as entirely separate from other walks of life, there will be inevitable seepage where aspects of their soldiering are habituated, or haunt them in the form of guilt in so small part because of the stark difference between the now-separate moral realms of civilian and soldier life.

It is worth asking on what basis Carrick justifies his claim that if soldiers were to make decisions solely on the basis of a common morality that they would be unable to perform their roles as soldiers well. The argument is as follows:

My concerns can [be] encapsulated in a simple imperative; one fundamental objective of any ethics education programme must be to protect the soldier against the sort of moral schizophrenia that can affect anyone who is brought up on a diet of unqualified moral rules (do not lie, Do not break other people’s things, Do not harm, Do not kill) but who is then told that he is entirely justified in going out and doing the exact opposite, namely undertaking as much breaking, harming and killing as possible (Carrick 2008: 197).

Besides taking issue with the straw-man claim that soldiers are told to break, harm and kill “as much as possible”, we should question why it is the case that developing two distinct sets of rules for two distinct contexts is the ideal way to protect against moral schizophrenia – particularly when Sherman’s empirical research, as well as the more recent work of Berghaus & Catagena, suggests otherwise. Might it not be more fruitful to explain to soldiers that, as the classical just war theorists believed, what is morally important is to act virtuously in war – with charity, courage, prudence, loyalty, etc... and thus to foster virtues that are equally welcome in home life and war time? This is why Aquinas chooses to situate his discussion of war within a discussion of the virtues rather than within discussions of justice (Reichberg 2011), because he believes that ethical conduct in war requires the same character traits and does ethical conduct in other walks of life, and that the virtues of soldiering must be directed toward happiness in the same way as other virtues. The model proposed by Berghaus and Cartagena (2013; 297), which helps soldiers to ‘develop character traits in the professional and personal domains of their moral selves. It also encourages soldiers to acquire goods that are external to the Army profession but are relevant for members of that profession’ appears much better suited to protecting against moral schizophrenia (viz. fragmentation) than does a role morality approach.

That military ethics should be considered a branch of professional ethics (but not necessarily a role morality) has also been argued in a very different way by Martin Cook and Henrik Syse (2010: 119), who argue that ‘[f]irstly and most importantly, military ethics is a species of the genus ‘professional ethics’. That is to say, it exists to be of service to professionals who are not themselves specialists in ethics but who have to carry out the tasks entrusted to the profession as honorably and correctly as possible.’ However, Syse and Cook’s standard of professional ethics is different from Carrick’s: ‘The test is fairly simple here: is what’s going on [...] the sort of thing that might be helpful in providing real-world guidance for policy-makers, military commanders and leaders, or operational decision-making?’ (2010: 120).

In fact, Cook and Syse at no point suggest that military ethics is reducible to a set of laws, that right conduct in warfare consists only in rule adherence or that soldiers’ morality is different from that of the everyday. What they note is simply that military ethics is first and foremost about training
ethical practitioners of warfare; any academic endeavour that is not directed to this end ‘are more marginal, ancillary, or perhaps essentially irrelevant’ (Cook & Syse 2010: 120). In fact, they speak somewhat disparagingly of military lawyers rehearsing the LOAC to fulfil their annual training requirements, suggesting that ethical training involves much more than rote-learning the rules (Cook & Syse 2010: 119). What it requires, I want to suggest, is (a) the development of virtuous habits within those who will find themselves a part of the theatre of war, and (b) that the normative theory by which we evaluate actions conducted in war, JWT, hold a special, central place for virtue so that soldiers, politicians, officers and educators alike recognise that questions of virtue, character and moral psychology are not peripheral issues to military ethics, but sit at the heart of the field.

Ethics educators have increasingly seen the importance of fostering virtuous soldiers as a means to ensuring that wars are fought ethically. Here ethics is not necessarily understood simply as rule-adherence, as Alexander Mosely (2008: 184-185) notes: ‘to raise the individual soldier up from an uncritical level to the philosophical realm [...] can lead to a rejection, at any time, of the armed forces demands, commands, and even contract.’ Ethics teachers have become aware that the project of ensuring that a soldier does what is right in a situation is greatly assisted by ensuring that soldier is, at his heart, a good person. This allows us to recognise the end of MEE, but what remains to be seen is what form it should take in order to achieve this goal.

3: Liberal Arts and Military Education

I believe the traditional liberal arts approach to education can support MEE in achieving the ends established above. The understanding of liberal arts I will be applying here is that which originated in the Catholic University tradition, explained by Jeffry Davis (2007: 65) as ‘interdisciplinary thinking guided by the great questions of the human condition: “Who am I?” and “How should I live?”’. Warren A. Nord (2007: 31) lends this understanding more depth, describing the liberal arts as follows:

It assumes that moral truths and the ideals of civic virtue are to be found in classical literature, and it is largely a literary education. It founds character, and is meant to be the ideal education for public leaders [...] A liberal arts education binds students to the past, to tradition.

In short, the liberal arts education aims not just to teach students how to excel at whatever vocation they may have chosen, but how to excel as citizens and as moral persons whilst simultaneously (and indeed as part of that moral development) connecting them to the cultural, historical, and philosophical traditions that individuals are born into. This section will focus on four aspects of liberal arts education, so understood – interdisciplinarity, tradition, the development of intellectual curiosity, and the focus on morality as being concerned with the overall goodness of a life - and examine how they might contribute to the goals of MEE defined by Carrick: protecting against the psychological scars of battle.

The appeal of the liberal arts as an interdisciplinary approach to education, whereby students become familiar with a host of different areas of study (history, philosophy, psychology, science, sociology, politics, etc.) is that it provides students with applicable knowledge in a variety of different situations. Because of this, it is impossible to list all the possible benefits of interdisciplinarity to someone in a military context. However, I will suggest one here: most important, I believe, is some formal training in psychology. I have repeatedly cited instances where current trends in JWT
underemphasise the psychological trials of soldiers at war, and the hardships they face. One way in which the military establishment could assist soldiers is by talking in advance about emotions they are likely to experience: guilt, regret, shame, anger, hate, vengeance, and giving them an opportunity to understand them as moral and psychological phenomena. In her classic work, *The Fragility of Goodness*, Martha Nussbaum (2001: xviii) assesses in depth the substantial role that luck and the emotions play in the Ancient Greek moral tradition. When talking about the work’s modern-day relevance, she suggests that:

Thinking well about what emotions are can help us defend better the general thesis of *Fragility* about their cognitive role. In the process, it reveals both some risks we run by trusting to their guidance and some previously unacknowledged prospects for personal and social progress.

This is the role that psychological training in the military could play: awareness of the significant role of emotions in the moral lives of soldiers, and also a way of cautioning soldiers against valuing the emotions too strongly. Here I emphasise how the transferral of knowledge – an *intellectual* virtue – has moral repercussions, and may indeed make the practice of moral virtue easier. For instance, educating soldiers about the psychology of combat, can lead to soldiers to a more sophisticated understanding of the moral virtue of courage. Clark C. Barrett (2011: 100) explains how in combat situations, the amygdala takes control of the brain and ‘complex motor skills diminish. Tunnel vision, loss of depth perception, and restricted hearing follow. Loss of bowel and bladder control is inevitable.’ Going further, Barrett observes how ‘In pop culture, there is a connection between cowardice and losing bowel or bladder control; but of course, there is no such real connection in combat.’ Thus, soldiers who are educated in the psychology of combat can challenge pop culture assumptions about what it means to be courageous or cowardly, which in turn influences soldiers’ attitudes toward both their own conduct as well as the conduct of their comrades.

Another benefit of the interdisciplinary approach of the liberal arts is that its classical interest provides a wealth of rich, sophisticated examples of moral and immoral conduct within warfare to assess. This provides not only a subject for philosophical analysis and inquiry, but also inspiration on an emotional level, as Cook and Syse (2010: 121) suggest (with caution) that:

[T]here is some role for the hortatory in professional military ethics. Perhaps especially in a profession which requires courage and spirit (what the Greeks called thumos), non-rational appeals that motivate have a role in encouraging those very attitudes and behaviors. Tales and examples of exemplary individuals and actions can provide us with role-models and motivation at a level deeper than rational analysis. But they also need to be used with caution - they can easily misfire and produce cynicism. And of course selecting the appropriate examples and heroes presupposes an antecedent grasp of excellence in military conduct and virtue.

The success of non-rational appeals as a means of compelling soldiers to act well is well-documented. By taking particular behaviours or character traits and making them synonymous with the identity of particular practice or profession (such as soldiering), professionals come to define themselves by those values. Shannon E. French (2003: 14) argues that the warrior code, which is internally developed and regulated by other warriors, is a key influence in eliciting good conduct from soldiers. In this vein, the liberal arts educations insistence on tradition makes it an excellent candidate for helping to develop a healthy, effective warrior code for soldiers to defer to. French (2003: 14) refers to the
tradition of the ‘Long Gray Line’ at West Point Military Academy, suggesting that ‘the reverence modern warriors feel for their illustrious predecessors almost resembles the ancestor worship that is found in so many of the world’s older religions. Warriors are proud to receive the legacies of the past and wish to remain worthy of them.’ The appeal of the liberal arts insistence on tradition is consistent with MEE’s interest in virtue ethics models of education: as Nafsika Athanassoulis (2014) explains, ‘Moral development, at least in its early stages, relies on the availability of good role models. The virtuous agent acts as a role model and the student of virtue emulates his or her example.’ The liberal arts provide students with a host of role models on which to model their own virtuous conduct.

However, students ought to be able to discerningly consider whether all figures from within the military tradition should be esteemed as role models. Achilles is an archetypal warrior, but should he be considered a virtuous warrior? Answering questions such as these demonstrates the third benefit of the liberal arts: the development of a spirit of questioning and critical thinking. Recalling first McMahon’s (2009: Ch. III) view of a soldier’s personal responsibility for the immorality of the cause he fights for, a soldier’s ability to think critically about ethics and justice is vital to their ability to perform their role ethically. Again, Cook & Syse (2010: 120) note that ‘critical assessment of LOAC is a fundamental component of military ethics, understood as professional ethics’ and as Mosely noted above, the free and fully functioning soldier should be able to disobey a command at any time, but to be able to do so requires that soldiers possess the ability to think critically and analyse concepts well. Secondly, thinking critically and reasoning about how one ought to live one’s life falls under the domain of the virtue prudence, which Aquinas emphasised as the central virtue of the military commander. Insofar as the liberal arts are able to instill critical analysis skills in its graduates, it will be preparing them to excel in their role as military commanders under the classical model of JWT.

Finally, and to my mind most importantly, the liberal arts encourage students to think about morality as a system that evaluates the overall goodness of a life, and each act as contributing to or detracting from that goodness. In this sense, it is profoundly Aristotelian. However, it also serves to support a view of soldiering as connected to the other aspects of one’s moral life; what I do as a soldier is not separate from the rest of my identity. In the British Military, David Rodin advised educators to encourage their students to achieve a Rawlsian ‘reflective equilibrium’ (Mileham 2008: 51) that is, to “test” various parts of our system of beliefs against the other beliefs we hold, looking for ways in which some of these beliefs support others, seeking coherence among the widest set of beliefs, and revising and refining them at all levels when challenges to some arise from others’ (Daniels 2011). Such an approach encourages students to think about the obligations the military holds them to and evaluate their consistency with other moral values the students hold. This, rather than the development of a ‘role morality’ appears to me to be the ideal way to genuinely protect students from moral schizophrenia.

Of course, the typical graduate coming out of liberal arts colleges today is probably not going to be equipped with the knowledge or character traits necessary to perform well in a military context. I do not mean by the above that a standard liberal arts education is sufficient as military training, even on the level of developing virtues or critical thinking skills. These things must be tailored to be specifically relevant to a military context. This tailoring provokes an important question that I have not had time to address here: that being where an education process such as this should be housed? This important question is one that warrants further discussion. I do not have an answer here, but I would hazard that whatever the answer is, it would likely involve increasing the amount of time it takes to train soldiers and officers before they are ready for deployment.
Conclusion

This paper has tried (perhaps over-ambitiously) to do several things. First it has aimed to show the historical differences between the classical founders JWT and the theory as it appears in the modern day. The difference largely concerns the role of virtue within the theory. I have argued against the modern conception of JWT as predominantly rights-centric on the basis that (a) it ignores the reality that soldiers need to be able to reconcile their deeds as soldiers with their moral lives generally, and (b) virtue-talk infiltrates these rights-based theories in ways which they seem unaware of. Furthermore, I have argued that the image of the virtuous soldier presented by the classical approach is the more convincing, not least because it comports better with new developments in MEE, which are beginning to consider the role of military ethics to extend beyond simple rule adherence.

Finally, I have suggested some ways in which a modified liberal arts approach might support the goals of this new attitude to MEE and noted why the inconsistency between JWT and MEE should be disturbing to anyone interested in ensuring that war is practiced within the requirements of justice, and in ways that best furthers the flourishing of all involved, citing three reasons: environmental discrepancies, the devaluation of ethics generally, and the risk of moral schizophrenia. By way of closing I want to note (obviously) that I find these new trends in MEE to be particularly encouraging, and hold high hopes that some of the revived interest in virtue might gradually find its way into new discussions of JWT.

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Notes


2 Examples of this approach include the works of Sherman (2005 & 2010); Robinson (2006); Rodin & Shue (2010); Davis (1992); French (2003); Gray (1970).

3 The terms derive from the Greek terms deon, meaning duty, and arete, meaning virtue.

4 So much was said in the opening line of the introduction to a special issue of the Journal of Military Ethics focussing on Virtue Ethics. See: Moelker & Olsthoorn (2007: 257): “It has frequently been argued in recent years that the best way to teach military ethics is by way of virtue ethics.”

5 There is ongoing debate regarding whether the inclusion of war in discussions of charity indicates a "presumption against war" whereby the use of force is looked down on more strongly than some readers of Aquinas have suggested. For the affirmative case in this debate, see: McCarthy (2011).
the counter-argument, see: Gorman (2010). I find Gorman’s argument, which sides with James T. Johnson’s, the more compelling and consistent with Thomas’ writings. Manning’s argument for the presumption against war makes claims which are unsustainable, for example, citing Todd Whitmore, Manning argues that Johnson’s rejection of the presumption against war leads to permitting first-use of nuclear weapons, and argument which over-reaches almost to the point of non sequitur.

6 The Doctrine of Double-Effect has been so widely discussed throughout moral philosophy and just war theory that I take it as clear that all understand what it entails; I do not here have time to outline it. In short, Aquinas argues in a discussion on whether all killing is murder, that one can, in attempting to prevent being killed by an aggressor, defend oneself - even lethally - from harm so long as one’s intention is self-preservation, and any harm caused is a side-effect. See: Aquinas (II-II, Q.64, Art. 7)

7 It does not matter for my purposes here whether or not happiness is connected to a God or not, only that it be seen as being, in some way, univocal.

8 Although Brian Orend (2007: 24) suggests that “[i]t is in Walzer’s book […] that the cementing of human rights theory within the core propositions of just war theory occurs.”

9 The accompanying conditions would be those that rights-theorists have done well to point out: that the person being killed has somehow forfeited their right not to be killed by performing such-and-such an action.

10 Another obvious candidate for a military-oriented liberal arts education is history; specifically, military history. I omit it from discussion here because it already forms an important part of officer training.

References


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