CHAPTER 15

TRAINING FOR MILITARY ETHICS
15. TRAINING FOR MILITARY ETHICS

Teaching Military Ethics Is An Exercise In Consciousness - Raising

- James H. Toner

15.1 During the course of analysis on the research topic various facets of the ethical environment in the Indian Army have been analysed in detail. Extensive interaction of the researcher with middle/junior level officers, JCO and OR was carried out wherein he often inquired from them the definition and implications of military ethics. The response pattern varied from ignorance to a limited view of the subject. As far as the JCO and OR were concerned the knowledge was far from satisfactory. For them following of orders of their superior was the ultimate purpose of their existence. Some informed junior officers would say, “can you teach such thing to the military?” Teaching philosophy to undergraduates was fine, but real soldiers who knew the real world would find “military ethics” a contradiction in terms. The researcher was appalled at the paucity of knowledge of military ethics with the vast majority of soldiers and junior officers. The researcher pondered whether military ethics was just a nice, warm, fuzzy subject meant for casual and occasional discussions but not relevant for the real world?

15.2 But then the researcher convinced himself. He thought that if military ethics was an irrelevant exercise, then why for war crimes in World War II officers and men were punished? In most of the armies there is a code of conduct for members of the Armed Forces, the legal code for its members - about unbecoming conduct. Why are Geneva conventions so explicit and morally binding on all? Why are lying, cheating, and stealing so strictly prohibited in the Army? Why do we still talk about “officers and gentlemen”? It therefore goes without saying that the study of military ethics needs to be initiated at the inception stage of a soldier itself. The young minds need to be exposed to the intricacies of military ethics. This thereafter has to be sustained in a graduated manner throughout the service of an army man.

Ethics Education

15.3 The main objective of education of ethics is to make moral behaviour a way of life with the soldiers. Aristotle said, "the object of training is - not merely to make us feel
rightly, desire rightly, and act rightly under particular occasion, training must aim at inculcating the habit of feeling, designing and acting, with the consequences that it becomes as natural to us to feel, desire and add rightly on all occasions as it to breathe and to sleep”. As stated earlier education of ethics must commence when a soldier enters the profession and should end only when he finally retires.

Training in Morals and Ethics

15.4 Another objective of ethics and moral education is to make the subject audience aware of the responsibility of the officer cadre specifically with respect to morals and ethics, imbibe in them strong sense of ethical values and inculcate a deep sense of spirituality to aid and assess the process of ethical behaviour even under severe stress. The aim is to focus on those specific moral and ethical issues which are pertinent to the present or impending appointments tenable by them.

Training of Cadets

15.5 The training and development of cadets in the ethical field must commence at the training academies/institutions itself. It is most unfortunate to notice that the vital issue of development of character is not being given its due importance. As it is known that the training of cadets/recruits is carried out in high-pressure environment where without strong ethical basis many cadets lower their guard and tend to get attracted by the ways and means of less scrupulous seniors and peers. To survive in adverse situations, such seniors and peers advise the “smart” way out. Unfortunately, lying, cheating, stealing and impersonation are increasingly becoming rules of the game. To a younger and fertile mind these do set in fast and deep. What is most unfortunate is a lackadaisical attitude on part of the some of the young instructors to overlook such small indiscretions. It is these young cadets who tomorrow would become YO and as instructors get posted to such academies where the overlooking aspect would continue.

The ultimate task of education in ethics is to help the soldier or student at least to think through his or her ethical codes and standards and to know what matters.

- James H Toner

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Inculcating Core Values during Training

15.6 The main objective of any training institution in the Indian Army is to educate, train and inspire the cadets or recruits to scrupulously follow the core values to enable them to graduate in a wholesome soldier of character. The core values as imbibed by the young soldier ensure him professional growth throughout his career in the Indian Army and a lifetime of service to the Nation. The Professional Military Ethic can be defined as the military profession's standards of personal and corporate character, competence and conduct required in the defence of the nation. Through a series of honour classes, the young minds during their training should be able to describe the core values and analyse its practical utility and relevance in military life. It must be ensured that the subject of military ethics should be so structured that cadets/recruits identify it with their chosen profession. A leader of character is defined as someone who seeks to discover truth, seeks to gain an understanding of what is right and then demonstrates the courage and commitment to act accordingly. Character is manifest in conduct, reflecting intellect, will, compassion and the warrior spirit. The leadership at the academies should recognise that the processes which affect character development are numerous and varied, not all of which can be controlled or even accounted for. The academies should therefore be careful to avoid centralising character development without any particular setup. Rather, the academies or the training institutions should so design the entire curriculum to contribute to moral and ethical development in cadets based on the core values as discussed earlier.

Theoretical Nature

15.7 It is often seen that reaction to the proposal to teach military ethics or improve existing education of ethics is met with scepticism. Ethics education is perceived as theoretical and boring. It is often seen as a world of uncertain depth and infinity. The common opinion in the Army is that the theoretical education needs to be put aside and only practicalities need to be dealt into. The researcher strongly feels that the theoretical issues need to be dealt first and always. It is difficult to teach ethics. In fact as Plato had asked, “can virtue be taught”?

We argue about ethics because it is so fundamental, and because how we ought to live our lives - - -

- Daniel Callaghan
15.8 Teaching of military ethics involves resistance. Most of this resistance is concerned with questions about what ethics itself is. It must be understood that instructors at various levels cannot do a good job with the practical issues unless one is aware of some inherent difficulties of the subject itself.

15.9 The teaching of military ethics has traditionally faced indifference, hostility to the subject matter itself. Ways and means are sought to find ways of why not to teach ethics. Some common beliefs are:

15.9.1 Subject is inherently soft and hazy.
15.9.2 Ethics is nothing but a matter of taste and preferences of leaders who matter.
15.9.3 Ethics cannot be taught in a rational way.
15.9.4 Subject is disturbing and should be avoided.
15.9.5 “Who has the time for it?”, as said by so many in the Army.

15.10 Teaching of ethics can be disturbing. Interestingly if done well it is in direct conflict with military’s basic professional goals. It forces all military personnel to introspect deeply. And when introspection is carried out an individual gets disturbing answers which he wants to avoid.

15.11 Ethics questions all action. Military ethics if followed at all levels, in all spheres and tends to filters all matters personal or professional. It is often accused that subject of ethics causes confusion and indecision in thinking and therefore impedes growth of professionalism.

15.12 It is important for all instructors to first be aware of the resistance to teaching of ethics in Army and its reasons. There is a great deal of scepticism, antagonism and lackadaisical attitude towards this subject per se. The subject therefore has to be carefully structured and delicately handled. To begin with the aims and objectives must be clear and small. This needs to be brought to the notice of the target audience.

A great part of teaching of military ethics is simply to help people to clarify the thinking.

- Daniel Callaghan

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36 Daniel Callaghan: The Ethics Instruction.
15.13 Military ethics is definitely a subject which when dealt with seriously puts off an individual especially a senior officer. It is to such individuals who need to be trained that ethics of a profession always follows the aims and objectives of their profession. It must be made clear to Cdr at various levels in the Army that ethics is very fundamental to their existence and that there should be no difference between practice and precepts. Dubious leaders have great antagonism towards ethics as it forces them to introspect and asks them to justify ways and means adopted to achieve organisational goals. Teaching of ethics should be aimed particularly at such officers and men.

15.14 Unethical leaders in the Army often object to ethical education on the grounds that it severely intrudes in their professional domain and reduces their competence. Ethical education is aimed to remove this misnomer. Pure ethical ethos and culture just aims at self-analysis and examination and makes one alert of the fact that it is an intrinsic part of personal and purely professional decisions alike.

*Ethics is inherently a practical and applied discipline meant to stimulate people to behave as well as they can.*

- Daniel Callaghan

15.15 **Teaching in Peace.** Military ethics cannot be taught in the midst of battle or operational scenario. There is no time for that. It is at such crucial moments a leaders’ actions are a reflection of the quality of ethical training undergone in peace time. Aim of ethical training is to prepare leaders in Army to think before an actual situation is faced by them. It is to prepare them for tough decisions in future situations.

*The problem in assuming that ethics and competence are working against each other is the failure to recognise that one cannot be a competent professional unless one is a moral and responsible professional.*

- Daniel Callaghan

15.16 Teaching of military ethics must aim to make the rank and file of Army to understand that unethical behaviour may pay dividends in short run but in the long run is very destructive. Professional competence and military competence in fact are a fundamental part of the same cherished military ethos of the Indian Army.

15.17 It is often said that military ethics is not in sync with the actual ground level
situations. This is where teaching of ethics comes in handy which presupposes the fact that actual situations can be altered with patience and training. It again would reflect on the values that the soldier holds and what sort of ethical training he has received. It needs to be grilled in all decision-making ranks of Army that all decisions technical or purely professional must pass the test of ethical scrutiny.

15.18 **Advantages of Teaching Military Ethics.**

15.18.1 It helps soldiers identify ethical dilemmas.

15.18.2 It helps soldiers deal with ethical dilemmas as per the traditions and norms of service.

15.18.3 Makes soldiers analyse the causes of ethical problems. Ethical problems are a result of existence of institutionalised accepted form of unethical behaviour and practices.

*Ethical dilemmas are a result of the institutional arrangements.*

*Daniel Callaghan*

15.19 The most difficult aspect which concerns training for military ethics is an often asked question by many in the Army and that is “why me”? “See the world around you and you want me to be singled out and burn my fingers”? “And who sets the moral tone and standards”? “Whom do I follow”? “For God's sake leave me alone!” These questions are archaic and an easy excuse for many to indulge in plenty of small and big indiscretions. There are no set piece methods to handle such issues. Therefore the aim of this Chapter is to propose a holistic approach to this issue. Formal ethical training is a must and unavoidable aspect of the soldier's life. The policymakers however senior they be must involve short and long-term approach to train rank and file of Indian Army in ethics.

15.20 The teaching methods for military ethics must be made uniform in all training institutions. No one should be excluded from the ambit of ethics education. Training institutions, at times, on one pretext or another keep reducing the emphasis on ethics education as having lower priority than tactical and technical training. Unfortunately the focus on the *centrality of morality in professional life is constantly diminishing in the Army.*
15.21 It needs to be removed from the minds of rank and file of Indian Army that the application of military ethics is faulty and contradictory at times. The real problem lies in convincing the target audience who do not have a basic background of such philosophical realities of life. Many are ignorant and believe that in the real world ethical considerations have no place in the soldier’s psyche.

15.22 And the critical issue that needs mention here is the notion in the Army that awards, decorations and years of military service are enough to qualify a man as an ethicist. The rank and seniority are not a measure of absence of indiscretion in various measures. And any immoral act small or big renders a person, howsoever senior, incapable of teaching military ethics to rank and file. Therefore the need for qualified persons in training institutions who have an unblemished record. These persons must have the ability to connect abstract ethical theory with the practical exigencies of military life.

*Ethical training should facilitate a new soldier to experience a climate that exalts and inculcates ethical propriety.....* -James H Toner

15.23 There is a difficulty to teach a course of ethics to trainees. In actual service we expect officers and soldiers to refuse illegal orders. But the moot point here is that are all capable of defining illegal orders especially in live combat situations? Is the soldier being trained to decide morality of issues? Training for ethics during the induction training needs to be so structured so as to make military ethics look simple and morally mandatory for all to follow in service.

15.24 Unfortunately an easy excuse to overlook ethical imperatives is to cite real and hard battle situations wherein moral consideration supposedly have to take a back seat in the interests of the mission and men. If such situations are the only examples thrown upon the young trainees to debate, demoralisation is bound to set in. Ethical training would have died before being born.

15.25 Most ethical dilemmas are not the purview of combat situations. If one analyses the service of an officer or soldier, a major part of this is not spent in combat like situations where ethical considerations are made to be at cross purposes with mission objectives. Therefore what is being done to ethical dilemmas being faced by soldiers and officers in major part of their career? We tend to overlook small and big indiscretions as a matter of
norm. From misleading a senior to the culture of appeasing seniors by gifts there are a whole range of issues which when analysed will not stand the test of ethical scrutiny.

15.26 Religious teachers in units must be utilised not only for conduct of religious festivals but education of ethics with live examples from scriptures. *From the moment of entry in Army life, the new soldier should experience a climate that exalts and inculcates ethical propriety.*

*Ethics classes are places to learn that honourable men and woman do not lie, steel and cheat; rather they keep promises, do their reasonable best to carry out their responsibilities, attempt to set right mistakes and omissions.*

- James H. Toner

15.27 And the issue is of honour codes and mottos of training academies and training institutions. Firstly how many cadets, soldiers and officers understand honour codes and mottos in actual ethical dimensions? Can honour codes ensure on their own that cadets/recruits will not lie or steal? Or tolerate those who do? The honour code at West point is “Duty, Honour, and Country”. Duty by itself means nothing. Also repeating the word honour to soldier would ring hollow if not associated with ethical dimensions. The soldier may consider loyalty to his ‘corrupt’ superior as his honour. Each one may see these honour codes and mottos in their own perspectives. It is also agreed that taking courses on ethics is also not a ticket to moral and just environment. *Knowledge of good is not enough*. Exposure to ethics and training for it increases the possibility of enhancing one’s moral plane. Purifying drinking water by best possible means may not totally eradicate the chances of waterborne diseases but it does diminish them considerably.

15.28 Military ethics is about obligation, duty and responsibility. All CO and Cdr at various levels have the onerous responsibility of first sustaining ethical attributes in themselves and then developing in those whom they command. The recruits/cadets need to be exposed to the environment that they are about to enter.

15.29 It has often been said in this research that the soldier is duty bound to refuse illegal orders. But how does he do that? For that he should be exposed to the values of leaders who have an unimpeachable record and who give precedence to values and character.

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Training to obey legal orders must be done in peacetime during courses for teaching of ethics. There is no time for reflection in actual combat situations.

15.30 A soldier's existence is 'for the State'. And this he has to achieve by honourable conduct and honourable means. The end of the mission must not override means. If an officer, JCO or soldier places his well-being above the call of duty then he is guilty of perpetuating an unhealthy environment. Ethical training needs to tackle this issue with examples. The researcher remembers an incident when a basketball team of a unit was to have played a match with neighbouring unit. Orders were that state and national level players will not play. One unit cheated on this issue, which went unnoticed and the unit ultimately won the match and championship. Unfortunately for this unit motive overrode matters of values and ethics.

15.31 It must be understood by all that in the Army, principal precedes purpose and purpose precedes people. Agreed that 'in war there is no substitute for victory'\(^{59}\), but it is also true that in military profession there is no substitute for integrity.

15.32 And the confusion that needs to be addressed to in teaching ethics are the terms morals and ethics. Morals refer to conformity with the generally accepted standards of goodness or rightness in conduct or character. Ethical implies conformity with an elaborated, ideal code. Morals prescribe what is commonly done, ethical prescribes what ought to be done. Hence the emphasis on ethical training.

15.33 **A Combat Situation.** A patrol of ten soldiers led by an officer are patrolling a street in a militant infested town. Suddenly a shot was fired from the direction of shops and one soldier is seriously injured. The officer orders his troops to fire back in self defence to prevent further casualties. In the process, scores of civilians are either dead or wounded. On the face value of it this action or reaction appears correct as it is commonly accepted and perhaps done in such situations-he fired in self defence. But is it ethically correct? What about the ethos and values of the Army? Is this morality which is unrepresentative of the true character of the Indian Army? Did this officer receive correct education in ethics in his earlier career which also emphasises the importance of restraint in ethical dilemmas?

15.34 But then there are other dilemmas too. S. S. men of Adolf Hitler ruthlessly searched for Jews everywhere. There are stories of families having lied to the S. S. brass about the

\(^{59}\)Gen Mc Arthur.
presence of Jews in their homes. They did save lives by telling lies. Here motive overrode aspects of principle that is to speak the truth.

15.35 Ethics in education similarly demands that we emphasise not just morality - or practices of the group but we look beyond the group to larger questions and greater concerns.

15.36 Studies on ethics do not insulate a soldier from all evil. It helps them to ask questions about virtuous conduct. Also ethical education does not undermine authority. Rather ethical education helps achieve a strong support for authority that is morally upright. Persons of strong character are the ultimate resources for any military organisation, and they are by definition persons of integrity -- individuals whose actions are consistent with their belief. 60

Present Problems of Ethical Training in the Army

15.37 Ethical training in the Army today is of a standard which has a long way to go. The present situation on issues connected with training for ethics in the Army are given below:

15.37.1 The Indian soldier is from a rural background who has no exposure to philosophical discourse. This is largely true of the officer and JCO cadres also. Instructors on the subject of military ethics find it difficult in conveying their ideas.

15.37.2 There are very few civilians scholars in India who are interested in, or are knowledgeable about the subject of military ethics. And the same is true in the Army also. Unfortunately in the Army it is presumed that awards, decorations and years of military service qualify soldiers as ethicists. There are very few, in fact a handful of real soldier-scholars who are eminently qualified to teach and to write about military ethics.

15.37.3 The problem with instructors of ethics in the Army today is that they are unable to pour abstract ethical wine into practical military bottles.

15.37.4 Very few military scholars in the Army today are able to connect abstract ethical theory with practical exigencies of military life in wartime or peacetime.

15.37.5 The other difficulty experienced in the Army is trying to teach a genuine course of ethics to trainees. The inability of the organisation to make military ethics accessible to soldiers is all too obvious.

15.37.6 The other problem in the Army is the intractable problem of determining how ethics could be taught to thousands of trainees.

15.37.7 It is a known fact that lip service is being paid to the subject of ethics in the training curriculum of training institutions. An odd period or two is devoted to on this subject which would lack substance or relevance and which would be delivered by instructors not qualified to do so.

15.37.8 Most of the instructors of the subject of ethics do not realise that a very small percentage of soldiers spend even a small part of the careers of service time in or near combat but do deal with ethical dilemmas and difficulties daily. The instructors need to realise that part of the military education of the soldier has do deal with more pedestrian problems of ethical dilemmas in daily life.

15.37.9 Most of the ethics classes in the Army today do not cater for high levels of interface between student and the instructor.

15.37.10 The instructors of military ethics are unable to convey to the soldiers that military bearing means far more in ethical terms than standing straight and rendering crisp salutes to the superior.

15.37.11 The meaning of each and every word of the honour codes need to be first understood in totality by the instructors and then communicated to the audience.

15.37.12 Not much emphasis is given to the critical aspect of ethical-legal aspects of the subject of military ethics.

15.37.13 Education of ethics needs not only to emphasise on just morality or the practices of the group but should attempt to look beyond the group to larger questions and to greater concerns.

15.37.14 The subject of military ethics is not being kept simple and simulative. Issues need to be discussed that the audience will relate to.
15.37.15 There is an all encompassing need to introduce in a big way discussion on real case studies in courses of instruction on military ethics.

15.37.16 The instructors first need to create sensitivity towards the subject of military ethics amongst their students.

15.37.17 The other approach which is lacking in the Army today is the inability on part of the instructors to stimulate an environment which would facilitate a soldier in identification of ethical issues.

15.37.18 Analysis of ethical dilemmas in classrooms needs to be done in a scientific manner.

15.37.19 The art of generating interest so as to create maximum involvement of the students in this subject is woefully lacking amongst the instructors.

15.37.20 The instructors will not sound convincing about this subject until and unless they teach students to develop a certain level of tolerance towards the existence of a certain level of ambiguity in ethical decision-making. Simultaneously the instructors need to possess the art of convincing the students that in spite of the ambiguity progress can still be made.

**Essence of Military Training**

15.38 It must be understood by the instructors of military ethics and the rank-and-file of the Army that *ethical studies per se do not inoculate the person against all evil*. It helps generate a debate, stimulate thought processes, fire imagination and encourage the environment to ask questions regarding the whys and hows of issues concerning their lives. It also needs to be understood by the leadership that ethical education does not undermine authority; rather it helps achieve a strong support for authority that is legal, moral and ethical. *Good leaders and sound teachers put principal first, purpose second, people third and own careers last.*

15.39 **Courses of Action.** The Chapter Priorities for Action contains in detail the methodology for teaching ethics in the Indian Army.

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62 Douglas Southall: *in a lecture to Naval War College in 1949.*