On Sheepdogs (or, the Warrior’s Honor)

We sleep soundly in our beds at night because rough men stand ready to do violence on our behalf.

—Winston Churchill (attributed)

In his book On Combat: The Psychology and Physiology of Deadly Conflict in War and in Peace, retired U.S. Army ranger Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman recounts a conversation he once had with an old soldier. The soldier, a retired colonel and Vietnam veteran, shared with Grossman his view that society is divided into three basic categories. Most people, he contended, are sheep. “They are kind, gentle, productive creatures who can only hurt one another by accident.” These ordinary, average people face a threat, however, from those who occupy the next societal class: the wolves. “The wolves feed on the sheep without mercy,” continued Grossman’s companion. But they, in turn, are confronted by the third group—the sheepdogs. It was in this last category that the old warrior counted himself as a member. “I’m a sheepdog. I live to protect the flock and confront the wolf.”

Grossman’s recounting and exegesis of this veteran’s wisdom has struck a resounding chord with many who serve in the military, police, and other security services. The old warrior’s parable seems to them to simply, yet profoundly, capture the essence of their purpose. For those who serve in the armed forces, the parable stands as a reminder to them that, although violence is the underpinning of their professions, the way of the warrior is an honorable path.

There are, of course, those who disagree, those who hold instead to the view that violence is never justifiable. While this is a minority view, and not one that will be addressed in this article, the basic
intuition on which it stands is nonetheless one that must be taken seriously by all. For there can be no question that violence, and particularly the killing of fellow human beings, is evil. Were we to find ourselves in some ideal world in which violence and killing were entirely absent, we should think it particularly deviant should someone view that absence as a loss.

Pacifists aside, however, it is generally accepted that under certain circumstances violence and killing are justifiable. Furthermore, there is a widespread belief that those who protect and serve society using, where necessary, controlled and sometimes deadly force, do not suffer dishonor for doing so. To the contrary, there is a strong and widely shared intuition that these warriors, as we shall call them here, are in some way worthy of greater honor than the average “sheep.”

Just what is it that accounts for this intuition? What, in other words, is the basis for the warrior’s honor? This perennial question must be answered repeatedly for the sake of both society and the warriors. As military ethicist Martin Cook points out, “Morally conscientious military personnel need to understand and frame their actions in moral terms so as to maintain moral integrity in the midst of the actions and stress of combat. They do so in order to explain to themselves and others how the killing of human beings they do is distinguishable from the criminal act of murder.”

In this article, I outline the central reasons that account for the esteem in which the warrior is properly held. For the purposes of this article I will take the term warrior to refer to what we might take as the paradigm cases—the soldiers, marines, airmen, and sailors who serve their country in the face of determined and violent enemies. I do not, however, intend to suggest that there are not others who deserve the title of warrior. To the contrary, it seems fairly obvious that, for example, many police officers could rightly be called warriors, at least in the sense in which the idea of a warrior is interchangeable with the sheepdog in the parable mentioned above. And it would be hard to deny that the ordinary citizens aboard United Airlines Flight 93 displayed the courage and self-sacrifice characteristic of the warrior when they took on their hijackers on September 11, 2001. However, because the goal of this article is to assess whether there is a place for armed contractors in today’s armed conflicts, and the obvious point of comparison is with the
member of a national military force, I restrict the term warrior here to the narrow sense applicable to that comparative exercise.

**The Warrior Virtues**

As military ethicist Shannon French points out, “When they are trained for war, warriors are given a mandate by their society to take lives. But they must learn to take only certain lives in certain ways, at certain times, and for certain reasons. Otherwise, they become indistinguishable from murderers and will find themselves condemned by the very societies they were created to serve.” Part of the reason that the warrior is due honor and not condemnation is because of the role he or she plays in defending the citizens of the state to which he or she belongs. This is an issue I address later in this article. However, before turning to what we might think of as external factors such as this (external, that is, to the warrior's character), it makes sense to begin by considering what the virtues of the individual soldier, marine, airman, or sailor are that make him or her worthy of our respect. To return for a moment to the sheepdog analogy, what are the characteristics that the “true” warrior shows that are equivalent to the courage, patience, endurance, and loyalty that make the sheepdog such an admirable creature?

What follows is a sketch of an answer to this important question. I have deliberately tried to describe the virtuous warrior in a manner with which most ethicists and military personnel would (I hope) agree, and I have steered away from the contentious philosophical debates at the fringes of this description. I have also used the term virtue somewhat loosely, meaning to reflect its everyday usage rather than a strict philosophical definition. Some of what I describe probably would be more properly called characteristics rather than virtues, but they are morally positive characteristics, and I hope my misuse of the term virtue conveys this and does not distract from the description. I also hope it is obvious that what is sketched below is an ideal that real people strive to achieve, rather than a description of a group of moral superbeings. This sketch does, nonetheless, reflect the inescapable fact that the unique challenges that arise in the circumstances of armed conflict call for men and women of high ethical caliber to engage with them. As General Sir John Hackett once said, “A man can be selfish, cowardly, disloyal, false, fleeting,
perjured, and morally corrupt in a wide variety of other ways and
still be outstandingly good in pursuits in which other imperatives
bear than those upon the fighting man. He can be a superb creative
artist, for example, or a scientist in the very top flight, and still be
a very bad man. What the bad man cannot be is a good sailor, or
soldier, or airman.\textsuperscript{4}

\section*{Courage}

On June 28, 2005, Lieutenant Michael P. Murphy and the three
other members of his U.S. Navy SEAL reconnaissance team were
in the rugged mountains of Konar Province, on the Afghan side of
the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Their mission: to locate one of
the key leaders of the insurgency being conducted against the Af­
ghan government and coalition forces in Afghanistan. Despite the
considerable skills of Lt. Murphy and his team, a local goat herder
stumbled upon their surveillance position. Murphy was faced with
a quandary: should he give the order to kill the goat herder, thereby
giving his team the time necessary to relocate to a safer hiding spot,
or should he allow the herder to live and risk discovery by Taliban
insurgents located in the vicinity? Together with his teammates,
Murphy decided on the latter course of action.

Shortly thereafter, an estimated thirty to forty insurgents besieged
their position. A brutal firefight ensued in which numerous enemy
fighters were killed or wounded. All four members of the heavily
outnumbered SEAL team were also wounded, and despite numerous
attempts the SEALs were unable to reach their headquarters on the
radio to call for support. When the team’s radio operator fell mor­
tally wounded, Murphy continued trying to get through, eventually
concluding that the extreme terrain in which their fighting position
was located made radio contact impossible. Without hesitation,
Murphy left his teammates and fought his way to open terrain,
where he was finally able to call for help. His exposed position left
him vulnerable to enemy fire. Nonetheless, he continued to engage
the enemy until (as he must surely have expected) he was mortally
wounded. For his selfless leadership and extraordinary courage, Lt.
Murphy was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor, the high­
est military decoration awarded by the government of the United
States. The sole surviving member of the four-man team and Mur­
phyr’s best friend, Marcus Luttrell, described him as an “iron-souled
warrior of colossal, almost unbelievable courage.”\textsuperscript{5}
There can be little question that courage, as so remarkably demon­
strated by Lt. Murphy, is the queen of the military virtues. Though
courage on its own does not make a warrior, the idea of a true war­
rior who lacks courage is inconceivable. This multifaceted virtue is
one to which I give due consideration.

Although Aristotle’s ideas on courage (primarily in his Nicoma­
chean Ethics) have been described as “a pit of quicksand” and
in some ways “frustratingly implausible,” it is nonetheless his
thoughts that are usually taken as the starting point for discussions
of this virtue. Peter Olsthoorn reflects an uncontentious reading
of Aristotle’s view of courage when he describes it as “the middle
position between rashness and cowardice” and “having the right
attitude concerning feelings of confidence and fear in the pursuance
of a morally just cause.” Unlike Plato who, in his Laches, sought to
apply the idea of courage very broadly, Aristotle saw it as a virtue
with particular application to the military profession, and he viewed
the paradigm case of the brave man as “someone who does not fear
a noble death in war.”

Like many virtues, courage is not comfortably reducible to ele­
ments that can be subjected to scientific analysis. Most scientific
studies that do attempt to study this phenomenon limit their defini­
tion of courage to something like acting positively while experienc­
ing fear. But while there are some advantages to viewing courage
in this way, what is left out is the critical aspect of motivation. The
distinction between physical courage and moral courage is impor­
tant here. As Olsthoorn puts it, “Whereas the word ‘physical’ in the
term physical courage refers to what is at stake, life and limbs, the
word ‘moral’ in the term moral courage refers to the higher end that
this form of courage aims at.” Aristotle seems to view courage as
a combination of both, requiring the willingness to risk (where nec­
essary) physical harm in the service of the noble end. Lt. Murphy’s
actions provide a remarkable example of this combination—he
displayed a firm and sacrificial commitment to the “noble end” in
his refusal to kill the goat herder, which led to the circumstances
in which he exhibited extraordinary physical courage in seeking to
protect his comrades.

Though it seems likely that those with moral courage are also
likely to be physically courageous when the need arises, it is useful
to see both facets of this virtue, because while it is physical courage
that is most recognized in the military (through, for example, the
awarding of medals), it is in fact moral courage that is more regu-
larly demanded of warriors, particularly when it takes the form of integrity. James Toner writes that “integrity—knowing what to be—is the hallmark of the skilled officer, for character and competence . . . are complementary.”13 The willingness to do what one holds to be right, even in the face of disapproval and opposition from among one’s peers, is critical for ensuring the virtue of as tribal a group as the military. Though it sometimes sits in tension with another key warrior virtue, that of duty, this is a necessary tension even when it creates problems for military organizations (as in the case of selective conscientious objectors, those who have volunteered for military service but who refuse to participate in particular wars on ethical grounds).14 Individual integrity acts as a vital brake to the potential excesses that can arise from the overapplication of the military norm of obedience to authority (Semper Fidelis). The latter norm, if unchecked, can lead to excesses or even atrocities on the battlefield and, less dramatically but also importantly, abusive behavior within military units. But integrity must be kept in its proper place. Paul Robinson writes that integrity “should be viewed as an Aristotelian mean flanked by excesses such as arrogance and deficiencies such as weakness of will.”15

Moral courage is, therefore, critical. At the same time, however, it is the physical dimension of courage that makes this distinctly a warrior virtue. All kinds of people—lawyers, accountants, teachers, and so on—are required on occasion to show moral courage, but few other professions demand the physical courage that is so intrinsic to the traditional understanding of warriorhood.

I say “traditional understanding” here because several important contemporary commentators have argued that, in the Western world at least, the traditional virtues that have defined the warrior caste have eroded and have been replaced by an occupational or economic view of the military profession.16 In this “postheroic” age, argue eminent scholars such as Christopher Coker,17 war has become “disenchanted,”18 and the value of virtues such as courage have been displaced by a focus on technical expertise, as Western nations become increasingly squeamish about taking casualties on the battlefield and go to extraordinary lengths to ensure “force protection.” As the concern for community has over time become replaced by the individual in Western societies,19 so the argument goes, so traditional motivations to serve in the military (indeed, even the notion of military “service” itself) have declined and been replaced by individualist motivations such as career advancement,
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salary, and thrill seeking. I turn to this theme several times in the course of this article. For now, it is enough to note the existence of such claims before moving on.

Comradeship

While courage is the key individual virtue that defines the warrior, the true warrior is not a lone wolf. While he may sometimes, even often, have to act on his own, the warrior is usually part of a team, and the bond of comradeship he forms with the other members of that team is a critical part of his identity. It is commonplace that military service, and particularly the crucible of combat, forms bonds between warriors that are arguably unmatched in the civilian world. These bonds can be a significant factor when it comes to combat motivation, as attested to in this moving passage penned by William Manchester regarding his World War II military experience:

I understand, at last, why I jumped hospital that Sunday thirty-five years ago and, in violation of orders, returned to the front and almost certain death. It was an act of love. Those men on the line were my family, my home. They were closer to me than I can say, closer than any friends had been or ever would be. They had never let me down, and I couldn’t do it to them. I had to be with them, rather than let them die and me live with the knowledge that I might have saved them. Men, I now knew, do not fight for flag or country, for the Marine Corps or glory or any other abstraction. They fight for one another. Any man in combat who lacks comrades who will die for him, or for whom he is willing to die, is not a man at all. He is truly damned.²⁰

The motivational potential of comradeship—or, to use the more morally neutral term, cohesion—is well recognized by military forces, and considerable effort is made to use training, unit structures, and cultures to reinforce its power. It is no surprise, for example, that the U.S. Marine Corps’ advertising slogan (“The Few. The Proud”) so closely mirrors the words that Shakespeare put into the mouth of King Henry V in the famous Saint Crispin’s Day oratory:

This story shall the good man teach his son;
And Crispin Crispian shall ne’er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remembered—
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne’er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition;
And gentlemen in England now-a-bed
Shall think themselves accurs’d they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin’s day.\(^{21}\)

Who could fail to be stirred by these words? They strike a chord deep within, somewhere in the very nature of our humanity. If we do find ourselves jaded in the light of such talk, it must surely be more a reaction to Hollywood’s exploitation of our emotions in this regard rather than any lack of genuine resonance. There is, however, a negative dimension of cohesion or comradeship that must be recognized. Sometimes it is fear and not courage that comradeship encourages, fear of being ostracized or shunned from the all-important group. Physical courage can be motivated by the fear of shame, which for some can be an even greater fear than the fear of death. Olsthoorn’s reminder is therefore important: “If an act of courage does not meet the Aristotelian requirement of noble intention . . . but is motivated by the wish to gain esteem or save face instead, it is not very likely to be motivated by moral courage.”\(^{22}\)

While military institutions are heavily invested in the idea that it is the personal bonds between members of units that serve as a key motivator in combat (the idea that “each man fights for the man next to him”), it is interesting to note that there is a growing body of research that suggests that interpersonal bonds are not as important as is generally believed in securing optimum performance. There seems, in fact, to be good reason to believe that task cohesion (a shared commitment to the same goals), rather than unit cohesion per se, has a stronger correlation with mission success.\(^{23}\) This is perhaps not all that surprising, given the feelings of comradeship that many military personnel have toward other warriors who they’ve never met but who have served in the same or similar operational environments.

Closely related to cohesion is discipline. Discipline is, obviously, a virtue that applies to individuals, but it has its greatest application in the context of a group, and arguably the military context sees the pinnacle of its relevance. Field Marshal William Slim once made this point well when he wrote, “The more modern war becomes, the more essential appear the basic qualities that from the beginning of history have distinguished armies from mobs. The first of these is discipline.”\(^{24}\) While discipline is in part a product of drill and training—that “muscle memory” that kicks in when or-
ders are shouted or contact is made with the enemy—it is certainly also more than that. Again, Field Marshal Slim is helpful here, in his eloquent account of the connection between comradeship and discipline: "The real discipline that a man holds to . . . is a refusal to betray his comrades. The discipline that makes a sentry, whose whole body is tortured for sleep, rest his chin on the point of his bayonet because he knows, if he nods, he risks the lives of the men sleeping behind him."25

**Sense of Honor**

If it be a sin to covet honor, I am the most offending soul alive.

—Henry V, Act 4, Scene 3

Honor is a notion that seems distinctly old-fashioned to most moderns, yet it has long been considered a critical aspect of the self-identity of military personnel. According to a widely quoted definition, "Honor is the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his claim to pride, but it is also the acknowledgement of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, his right to pride."26 Though sometimes treated as one, honor is not itself a virtue. Instead, as Aristotle pointed out, honor is the reward for virtue, and it is the sense or love of honor (philotimia) that is the virtue itself.27

Though archaic sounding to modern ears, valuing honor has a long and distinguished history. The Roman philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero defended honor against its Stoic and Epicurean detractors, and in so doing developed a highly sophisticated and compelling account thereof. As late as the seventeenth century, Francis Bacon wrote that "there is an Honor . . . , which may be ranked among the Greatest, which happens rarely: That is, of such as Sacrifice themselves, to Death or Dangers, for the Good of their Countrey."28

But this positive view of honor was significantly eroded by the onset of the Enlightenment. Philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, Jeremy Bentham, and John Locke were midwives to a radical societal change in which human beings were viewed primarily as creatures of self-interest. The concept of honor fell afool of this radical new outlook. As Quentin Skinner eloquently put it: "With his bristling code of honor and his continual thirst for glory, the typical hero of the Renaissance began to appear slightly comical in his willful disregard for the natural instinct of self-preservation."29 More than this,
the Enlightenment’s firm rejection of pride made the quest for honor something to be despised. Even almost three centuries, it is impossible not to hear the sneer in the Enlightenment thinker Bernard Mandeville’s voice when he wrote that “pride has nowhere been more encouraged than in the army” and “never anything has been invented before, that was half so effective to create artificial courage among military men.”

We now have enough distance from the Enlightenment thinkers to see that the purely economic view of humanity they were so strongly committed to gives, in some respects, a distorted view of human nature. In their quest for realism they ironically rejected the quintessentially pragmatic and realist views of thinkers such as Cicero. As Peter Olsthoorn explains:

In Cicero’s view, soldiers, although far from selfish, cannot be expected to perform their duties from a sense of duty alone. Both inside and outside the sphere of war, only the perfectly wise act virtuously for virtue’s sake. However, those perfectly wise are rare—Cicero himself claimed that he had never met such a person. . . . For the not so wise, that is, most of us, a little help from the outside, consisting of the judgments of our peers and our concern for our reputation, can be of help. The censure from our peers is a punishment we cannot escape and, more importantly, no one is insensible enough to put up with the blame of others—that is a burden too heavy to bear. Virtuous persons are, in general, far from indifferent to praise, and this should not be held against them. Those who on the other hand claim to be insensitive to fame and glory are not to be believed.

The economic view of humanity ushered in by the Enlightenment seems at first blush to fit comfortably enough with the contemporary trend away from citizen armies to military forces made up entirely of volunteers—the All Volunteer Force (AVF) in U.S. military parlance. Renowned military sociologist Charles Moskos has argued that the move to the AVF signaled a shift in emphasis in the U.S. military from being a “calling,” with the focus being on service and sacrifice, to being an occupation or career, in which self-interest began to take on a more central role. But while there is truth in this analysis, its implications can be exaggerated. For while it is certainly true that the introduction of the AVF has seen an increase in the professionalism of the U.S. military (and other military forces that have followed this route), this has not had the feared effect that “bland careerism” has robbed members of the military of the higher commitments that have traditionally characterized their historical counterparts. The pecuni-
ary and careerist focus that is, undeniably, part of the AVF, does not adequately account for the commendable behavior of the majority of those men and women who have served in recent times in places such as Bosnia, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. A sense of honor remains a critical motivating force for today’s warriors. The desire for honor seems to tap into something deep in the human psyche. Indeed, “The concern for external validation may even be hardwired into human biology.”

As Christopher Coker puts it, “What we desire, above all else, is respect, and it is through the warrior’s conduct in battle that respect is won.”

In her book *The Code of the Warrior: Exploring Warrior Values Past and Present*, Shannon French points out that the desire for honor is one that can be identified in a wide range of cultures and military traditions throughout history, and that this usually results in the development of some form of warrior code. Beyond this, she argues, “most warriors also feel themselves a part of an even longer line, a line of men and women from diverse cultures throughout history who are deserving of the label ‘warrior.’ This is a legacy that spans not just centuries but millennia.”

Honor is not reducible to glory. While we certainly do respect the abilities and physical courage of those who display exceptional prowess in battle, that on its own is not sufficient to earn honor. We can, for example, respect the fighting capabilities of some of the die-hard Nazis of World War II without conferring upon them the status of “honorable warrior.” As Michael Ignatieff has pointed out, the warrior’s honor is also an ethic of responsibility: “Wherever the art of war was practiced, warriors distinguished between combatants and non-combatants, legitimate and illegitimate targets, moral and immoral weaponry, civilized and barbarous usage in the treatment of prisoners and of the wounded. Such codes may have been honored as often in the breach as in the observance, but without them war is not war—it is no more than slaughter.”

The warrior’s honor, then, is not simply a spur to standing firm in battle or displaying heroic courage, it is also the basis of restraint under the chaotic and taxing conditions imposed by armed conflict (and as such is a close companion of the moral courage discussed earlier). Here we might follow Paul Robinson’s distinction between external and internal honor. External honor—the esteem in which a warrior is held by peers, family, friends and society—tends to be a strong motive for acts of courage. Internal honor—the esteem in which a warrior holds himself—is more often a motive for restraint
in warfare, and it is "associated with virtues such as self-control and mercifulness."  

Two examples help illustrate the point. During the war in Vietnam one young enlisted marine was pushed by the stress of combat to the verge of committing an atrocity. An officer discovered the young man with his rifle held to the head of a Vietnamese woman. Instead of threatening the marine with a court martial or something of that sort, the officer simply said, "Marines don't do that." "Jarred out of his berserk state and recalled to his place in a longstanding warrior tradition, the Marine stepped back and lowered his weapon." More recently, on April 3, 2005, a patrol of American soldiers was making their way through Najaf in Iraq when an angry crowd of several hundred shouting and fist-waving Iraqis emerged from the buildings on either side of the street and converged on the small group of soldiers. Conditions looked ripe for a violent confrontation, perhaps even a massacre:

At that moment, an American officer stepped through the crowd holding his rifle high over his head with the barrel pointed to the ground. Against the backdrop of the seething crowd, it was a striking gesture . . . "Take a knee," the officer said. . . . The soldiers looked at him as if he were crazy. Then, one after another, swaying in their bulky body armor and gear, they knelt before the boiling crowd and pointed their guns at the ground. The Iraqis fell silent, and their anger subsided. The officer ordered his men to withdraw [and continue on their patrol].

The balance between the desire for external honor and internal honor is critical. The motivation toward courage that is provided by the desire for external honor is vital in the military profession, but there is a danger that those who put prime store in external honor will tend toward extremes. There is a fine line between courage and recklessness, and without the balancing provided by the restraints imposed by internal honor that line can all too easily be crossed, often at the cost of the lives of comrades. This is not to say that sacrifice will not sometimes be necessary, and it is to this that we now turn.

Sacrifice

The willingness to sacrifice life and limb when circumstances demand is perhaps the defining characteristic of the virtue of the warrior. General Sir John Hackett is often credited with being the first to explain this relationship in terms of a "contract of unlimited liabil-
ity.” The notion that the relationship between volunteer members of a nation’s military and the society they serve is a form of contract (both legal and moral) is a very helpful one. As military ethicist Martin Cook puts it in the context of U.S. military officers’ service:

The terms of the contract are that the military officer agrees to serve the government and people of the United States. He or she accepts the reality that military service may, under some circumstances, entail risk or loss of life in that service. This contract is justified in the mind of the officer because of the moral commitment to the welfare of the United States and its citizens.\(^{40}\)

Christopher Coker makes the valuable point that sacrifice is not only a defining characteristic of the virtuous warrior; it is in fact a defining characteristic of war itself. Coker argues that it is sacrifice that transforms the violence of war from mere killing into something with a metaphysical meaning. “It is sacrifice which makes war qualitatively different from every other act of violence. We rarely celebrate killing but we do celebrate dying when it has meaning, not only for the dead, but for those they leave behind.”\(^{41}\)

The power of that metaphysical transformation cannot be underestimated. Here sacrifice is often tied to patriotism. Examples abound; I offer just one. Consider this statement by decorated war hero and former Republican Party presidential candidate, Senator John McCain:

I believe that young men and women join the armed forces to serve a cause greater than self-interest. They must make the most of their patriotism. They must foster virtues of courage, obedience, loyalty, and conscientiousness. To have a military that functions as well as it can, it must be fully committed to endorsing these virtues and behaviors in military professionals. It requires a sense of honor that demands as the price of self-respect the sacrifice of self-interest. What a poor life it is that has no greater object than itself.

Those who claim their liberty but not their duty to the civilization that ensures it live a half-life. Success, wealth, and celebrity gained and kept for private interest is a small thing. It makes us comfortable, eases the material hardships our children will bear, and purchases a fleeting regard for our lives, yet not the self-respect that in the end will matter to us most. But have the character to sacrifice for a cause greater than self-interest and invest in life with the eminence of that cause, and self-respect is assured.\(^{42}\)
Professionalism

While warriors have not always been professionals, there is little question that professionalism is an essential aspect of the character of today’s virtuous warrior. There is a vast literature on the nature of professions in general, and the military profession in particular, and I can do little more here than give a rough outline of the main issues. I will address this issue in more detail later in this article.

Historically it was only members of the officer class who were considered to belong to the military profession. This is because, since Revolutionary France revolutionized warfare through the introduction of the levée en masse in the late eighteenth century, most armies were made up primarily of conscripts, led and organized by a small core of career officers. This perception is, however, changing with the (relatively recent) advent of the AVF, and military personnel of all ranks are increasingly being considered to be military professionals.

By far the most widely recognized definition of the military profession is that put forward by Samuel Huntington. Huntington’s classic definition sees the professional soldier as being defined by three main characteristics: “a politically neutral sense of duty to the state, military expertise and a professional identity.”

The first of these characteristics is generally considered to be the most important of the three. In Western societies at least, the idea that the soldier is to serve the state qua state, and in so doing eschew party political agendas, is almost axiomatic. For the professional soldier, duty to the state is the virtue summum bonum. The move to the AVF gave rise to concerns among some scholars that the “occupational view” of the military would undermine this core value, but this seems not to have happened.

The military professional is also defined by his or her unique expertise in the art of war fighting and its subservient elements. As Cook puts it, “It is the essence of a profession that members possess unique knowledge and the skill to apply that knowledge to a given range or sphere of service.” The ever increasing complexity of conventional maneuver warfare and its less glamorous relatives—counterinsurgency, peacekeeping, and “operations other than war”—have led to the emergence of an extensive range of military education and training opportunities for the modern professional soldier.

Against this, however, Krahmann contends that the growing use of civilian technologies by the military, and the increasing emphasis on technological know-how, have in fact narrowed the distinctive
set of skills of the modern warrior to those learned in basic combat training.\textsuperscript{46} It might be added to this that the emergence of counterinsurgency as the dominant form of warfare (for now, at least) further decreases the distinctiveness of the military professional's area of competence, as in counterinsurgency kinetic war fighting skills are (or should be) kept to a minimum, while nontraditional skills such as training police, building local economies, and administering humanitarian aid come to the fore.

But this viewpoint ignores the centrality of what military professionals call "operational art" to all that they do. Effective military operations can only be undertaken by those who grasp this art, and it is by no means reducible to a set of technical skills. The true military professional is, therefore, not a military technician, but rather what Cook calls a "soldier-scholar," someone who "preserves both aspects of truly professional officership: excellence in performance of military skills as currently understood by the profession and the contribution as a scholar to the continuing evolution of the body of professional knowledge that advances the profession through time."\textsuperscript{47}

The third feature of the military professional, as identified by Huntington, is identity. This identity is, in part, defined by the unique body of knowledge that the military professional shares with his or her counterparts. But it is also far more than that. As Cook points out, when one enters a profession, one also

- learns the identity of a pantheon of archetypal members of the profession and stories of their contributions to the profession. One becomes familiar with a set of institutions, awards, honors, and so forth, that members of the profession know and value (and that generally members outside the profession do not). One picks up, almost unconsciously, the small signals in dress, attitude, speech, and so forth that members use to signal to one another that they are members of the same professional group.\textsuperscript{48}

The identity of the military profession is also defined externally; that is, by how the profession is viewed by society. Recognition as a profession is conveyed by society based on it being perceived as morally praiseworthy, worthy of confidence and respect, and (perhaps as a result) being vested with prestige.

**Conclusion**

We are now in a position to draw together a description of the virtuous warrior. The warrior is a person of courage, both the physical courage to face the dangers of combat as well as the moral cour-
age to stand firm in the face of illegal orders or peer pressure, and exercise restraint and discernment on the battlefield. He is strongly tied by the cords of comradeship to those he serves alongside (including those with whom he shares no direct personal relationship), and he has the discipline to play his part in ensuring the cohesion of his unit. He is, furthermore, characterized by a sense of honor. That is to say, he desires and seeks to be worthy of the esteem of the society he serves, while also seeking to stay true to his internal moral compass. The former motivates him to acts of courage on the battlefield, while the latter ensures that he exercise the restraint of a moral combatant. He is, above all, willing to sacrifice his life or physical well-being to serve his country. This does not, however, make him a fanatic. Instead, he is the quintessential professional. His commitment to the state he serves is politically neutral. He possesses and continues to expand the core expertise of the military profession. And he both identifies with, and is identified by, society as a member of the military profession.

All this has been by way of precursor to our true subject, the contracted combatant. Is the contracted combatant truly a warrior at all? Or is he a despicable mercenary, to be derided as a “whore of war”? It is to these questions we now turn.

Editor's note: This article is an excerpt from the author’s recently published book; additional information can be found on page 76.

Notes


11. Ibid., 274.
12. Interestingly, Lt. Murphy’s official Medal of Honor citation makes no mention of his morally courageous choice not to kill the goat herder, instead focusing on his physically courageous act of exposing himself to enemy fire in order to secure help for his comrades.
14. As Paul Robinson wryly puts it, “Autonomous thinking, it seems, is only a virtue until it leads to conclusions which the military doesn’t like.” Paul Robinson, “Magnanimity and Integrity as Military Virtues,” *Journal of Military Ethics* 6, no. 4 (2007): 263.
15. Ibid.
19. Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) is perhaps the most famous work to expound this view.
25. Quoted in ibid., 121.
27. See Paul Robinson’s helpful discussion of magnanimity in Robinson, “Magnanimity and Integrity as Military Virtues.”
30. An Enquiry into the Origin of Honour, and the Usefulness of Christianity in War, quoted in Olsthoorn, “Honor as a Motive for Making Sacrifices,” 188.


44. See the discussion in ibid., 252ff.


48. Ibid., 67.

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