Moral Reasoning in the U.S. Army: An Ethical Dilemma

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The purpose of this paper is to identify the need for moral reasoning skills for ethical development within the U.S. Army. Ethical development is a process involving moral and cognitive reasoning skills. If one of these skills is neglected it may have an effect on the other. In other words, both moral and cognitive development needs to be fostered in order to produce a wholly developed Soldier.

The issue of military ethics is once again in the minds of many, as events such as the Abu Gharib prison scandal, incidents of questionable killings, allegations of unethical acts towards the Islamic faith, and the use of torture are sensationalized in the daily news. Since the U.S. Army does not teach unethical actions, then where does the blame lie? How can the U.S. Army solve the problem of unethical or immoral actions conducted by Soldiers? One of the answers may lie in the training of moral reasoning to Soldiers, especially new recruits, to equip them with the skills necessary to resolve ethical dilemmas and to build a stronger moral base.

Many feel that adolescents or young adults in America are not receiving adequate training in moral reasoning by parents, teachers, or role models. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, concerned with the lack of moral outrage displayed by some American high school students, created a program to teach students "fundamental values and universal moral precepts." First Lady Laura Bush was involved with the facilitation of the program, which is known as the "Dialogue of Freedom," in an attempt to provide a moral foundation for today's youth (CNN.com). Morals consist of internal beliefs or principles of right and wrong, which help control our actions and behavior. Morals are an essential part of our ability to reason and rationalize on an ethical level. Man does not act without reasoning at some level, and this reasoning process is what governs our actions and behavior—good or bad. Our morals are learned through teaching and experience, and help answer the "why" of our actions and behavior.

This teaching usually comes from family, close friends, role models, teachers, and in the case

of the U.S. Army, Noncommissioned Officers. As dual income families, and single parent

households increase, the time spent between parent(s) and child usually dwindles. The New

York based research group Public Agenda, concluded in a research study that, "parents feel

they're failing to teach values" (Morality in the Media). The survey consisted of 1,607 parents

of children ranging in ages five through seventeen, and found that only 34% believe they were

successful in teaching their children self-control; 50% felt they were able to teach the value of

school; 55% were able to teach honesty successfully; and 62% believed they were able to convey

the importance of courtesy. The same survey further illustrated parent's belief that they "are

swimming upstream against a strong current of harmful messages to children." In another

survey taken by the U.S. Census Bureau, two-parent households were identified as being on the

decline. In 1960, approximately 86.5% of children lived within a two-parent household, whereas

in the year 2000 only 69.1% had both parents within the household. This leaves youth with the

responsibility of learning moral values and ethical behavior from friends, who are learning about

this themselves, role models, or from teachers. In the case of young Soldiers, who make up a

large portion of the U.S. Army population, military leaders are these teachers and role models.

In the Army, little time is given to training Soldiers on moral reasoning or ethical behavior,

leaving Soldiers to depend upon their individual level of moral reasoning when confronted with

the significant ethical dilemmas found in situations such as in Iraq. Many of the missions in Iraq

are conducted at the squad level, led by young Soldiers who are being called upon to lead, train,

and mentor others within life and death situations. Frequent occurrences which may require

ethical reasoning are; shoot—don't shoot situations, the handling of prisoners who recently

injured or killed a fellow soldier, killing another person without a well defined reason (other than

self-preservation), and the handling of individuals who may have important information. Could training in moral reasoning better prepare Soldiers in making these types of decisions?

Part of the problem with training such a topic in the military is in defining the value of such teaching. To illustrate how important society might consider the teaching of moral and ethical values, in 1994 "Public Agenda found that 95% of the general public thought that it was appropriate or highly appropriate for the nation's public schools to teach honesty, the importance of telling the truth, and respect for others, regardless of students' racial or ethical background" (Schaffer 15). Additionally, the ICR Survey Research Group surveyed 1,422 adults in reference to concerns within public schools, which indicated 50% had a major concern with undisciplined and disruptive students within the school system. These statistics are of concern to the U.S. Army, as many of the Soldiers recruited are still in, or newly graduated from high school. Since moral values are not often fostered at home or in public schools, it will be upon an organization (the Army) to determine what ethical and moral values their employees (Soldiers) should demonstrate if these processes are important to the organization. Moral values are considered "evaluations of actions generally believed by the members of a given society to be either 'right' or 'wrong'" (L. Berkowitz 44). The Army emphasizes the importance of the decision making process through training at various levels of leadership, but little effort is given to ethical reasoning, though it is identified as important to the Army values. It is neither the physical nor mental ability of a Soldier that influences every level of the Army values—loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, personal courage—but rather the Soldier's individual moral and ethical foundation, which plays a role in a Soldier's moral courage. "Moral courage is sometimes overlooked, both in discussions of personal courage and in the everyday rush of business...[a] DA civilian pointed out that consistent moral courage is every bit as important as

momentary physical courage. Situations requiring physical courage are rare; situations requiring moral courage can occur frequently. Moral courage is essential to living the Army values of integrity and honor every day" (FM 22-100 pg 2-9). Many believe that moral values give order to life by aiding in the decision making process, allowing one to consider not only themselves, but others affected by their actions. In stage II of Kohlberg's "Stages of Moral Reasoning," individual actions take into account one's sense of duty to do right for the sake of social order (Slavin 55). This belief would fall in line with a Soldier's sense of duty for the sake of the mission or for his or her comrades. To find value in teaching moral reasoning as part of ethical development one must first answer the question, do moral values affect behavior and development of higher learning skills, both of which are paramount to the military mission?

The concept of moral values is to provide internal guidelines, as defined by a group, community, or society, for one's actions or behavior. A void in this value system leaves one searching and defining their own set of internal values to justify their actions. Military leaders should facilitate cognitive reasoning as well as moral guidance for their Soldiers. Military leaders are involved in the setting of external controls for a Soldier's behavior through the use of punishments and rewards, often in the form of discipline. As an internal mechanism for behavior, moral values would benefit the Soldier by establishing internal controls, which would affect the Soldier's behavior through ethical reasoning before the action, taking into consideration how the action would effect more than one's self. This form of reasoning is abstract in nature, and therefore facilitates higher level thinking as well. The psychologist Jerome Kagan provides an example of the type of dilemma an individual may confront when analyzing abstract inconsistencies:

1. God loves man.

2. The world contains many unhappy people.

3. If God loved man, He would not make so many people unhappy.

The adolescent is troubled by the incompatibility that he immediately senses when he examines these statements together. He notes the contradiction and has at least four choices. He can deny the second premise that man is ever unhappy; this is unlikely, for its factual basis is overwhelming. He can deny that God loves man; but love of man is one of the qualities of God by definition. The adolescent can assume that the unhappiness serves an ulterior purpose God has for man; this possibility is sometimes chosen. Finally, he can deny the hypothesis of God. The last alternative, which has become a popular form of resolution for many people in Western society, has profound consequences. In denying a belief that has been regarded as true for many years, the child is tempted to conclude that if there is no God, then all other equally strong beliefs held at the moment are also in jeopardy (Kagan 180).

Though the above illustration deals with adolescents, many of them are not taught and do not develop the ability to abstractly think these types of questions to a conclusion. How many of these young people has the military recruited, and continue to recruit? The above illustration provides a foundation for the importance of moral and cognitive reasoning skills, both of which are important for a well-rounded Soldier.

Another issue to consider in the importance of teaching moral values as part of ethical decision-making is whether it has an impact on cognitive reasoning. If ethical and cognitive reasoning are interrelated, the importance of teaching moral values in the Army must be taken more seriously. Further, if moral development has an effect on higher level (cognitive) thinking skills, then leaders can develop strategies and lesson plans to incorporate moral development.

It is important to understand what is meant by higher level thinking skills in order to determine if the same type of process is used in moral reasoning. Jean Piaget, a world-renowned child psychologist, conducted numerous studies concerning learning development, and concluded that all individuals learn through interaction with objects and situations (Slavin 31). This interaction followed a set pattern of assimilation, accommodation, and adaptation. In this learning process, an individual is confronted with something unfamiliar and tries to identify, define, and utilize the unfamiliar by attempting to have it conform to what is known; thus, beginning the process of assimilation. This phase of the process may identify several similarities to other known objects or situations as confirmed by our natural senses. An object may appear, smell, taste, or sound similar to others, and then individuals to draw reference to these other objects in an attempt to identify the unknown. When the unfamiliar cannot be placed into a known category comfortably, then a new category of understanding must be developed— accommodation. A person may have learned that throwing a ball against a wall created a certain sound and action (familiar); however, when trying to apply this learned concept to a similarly sized and shaped beanbag (unfamiliar), they are confronted with different results. Individuals resolve these differences through what Piaget terms "adaptation," or adjusting our knowledge in response to the environment or occurrence to provide understanding. To Piaget, learning takes place through the resolution of experiences and interactions, which produces "equilibrium" out of "disequilibrium" (Slavin 31-32). Richard Swanson explained disequilibrium as issues that cannot be interpreted by the current level of understanding, which relates to the one's moral world as well as physical world. The individual must then restructure their thinking in order to understand the dilemma, thus bringing about equilibrium. The individual "notes reality and then struggles, much as a scientist would, to understand this reality. He experiments and tests his

thinking until he finds that it works (Swanson 296). One of the major issues of today's young

Soldier is that they are being faced with dilemmas above their cognitive and moral reasoning

ability, force to learn through "trial and error." Many times this disequilibrium is not resolved,

and similar situation are subsequently handled in the same manner and forgotten without any

learning taking place. Though Piaget believed that all learning followed his theoretic process, he

further theorized the complexity of what was learned was determined by a series of four distinct

stages of cognitive development, the fourth stage being the one relevant to adults:

Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development

STAGE	APPROXIMATE AGES	MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS
Formal Operational	11 years to adulthood	Abstract and purely symbolic thinking possible. Problems can be solved through the use of systematic experimentation.

(Slavin 32). Within her book, "Intellectual Development During Adolescence," Edith D.

Neimark, as cited in Watson and Lindgren (1979), provides further definition to Piaget's fourth

stage by identifying eight separate concepts, which can develop in the formal operational stage:

1. Combinational. This concept involves general systematic procedures that can be used

to generate such concepts as all possible pairs or other combinations of attributes, such as

colors, permutations, and variations in the ordering or grouping of qualities or objects.

2. Proportions. Ability to deal with the equality of two ratios, as in conducting a balance

experiment, or solving an equation.

3. Coordination of two systems of reference.

4. Mechanical equilibrium. The principle of equality of action and reaction, a concept

closely related to proportion.

5. Probability.

6. Correlation.

7. Multiplicative compensations. A complex type of conservation, involving three dimensions.

8. Advanced forms of conservation. Such abstractions as inertia, momentum, and energy—concepts that go beyond immediate observational experience (Watson and Lindgren 515).

Neimark provides clarification as to how several concepts may fall within Piaget's formal operational stage of cognitive development, yet maintain different levels of cognitive ability; furthermore, she affords how one may think at a higher level through the progressive acquisition of each concepts. Each of these separate concepts could play major roles in both cognitive higher-level thinking and moral reasoning.

The psychologist, Erik Erikson, developed his eight "major stages of psychosocial development" based in part upon Sigmund Freud's research. Similar to Piaget's theory, Erikson believed each of the eight stages, beginning at infancy and going through old age, was dependent upon internal conflict and resolution for progression to the next stage. Further, within these eight stages, man progressively builds upon his morals first, then his ideologies, and finally his ethical makeup. He points out it is important to understand that each is influenced by the resolution or lack of resolution of the previous one(s). The fifth stage deals with the conflict of identity vs. role confusion, which ultimately concludes in fidelity if all other crises are resolved. This also falls within the stage of building ideologies. "The individual's rapidly changing physiology, coupled with pressures to make decisions about future education and career, creates the need to question and redefine the psychosocial identity established during the earlier stages…it is a reassembly or 'an alignment of the individual's basic drives (ego) with his or her endowment

(resolutions of the previous crises) and his or her opportunities (needs, skills, goals, and demands of approaching adulthood'" (Slavin 50). Within this search for identity, an individual struggles not only with the past, but also with what the present and future holds in store for them. If an individual believes himself as worthless, either morally or cognitively, then they may not be able to resolve this conflict to go on to the next stage of development dealing with young adulthood. New recruits could fall within this category. Additionally, an individual's unsuccessful drive to resolve a conflict stage may cause them to choose alternative negative manners of resolution. In Erikson's dialogue with Richard I. Evans (1967), Erikson states, "…without the development of a capacity for fidelity the individual will either have what we call a weak ego or look for a deviant group to be faithful to" (Evans 30). This example has been noted within the military, where individuals with low self-esteem seek acceptance in deviant groups, such as rouge squads or gangs within the military. It is evident that the combination of moral/ethical and cognitive development is necessary to progress into further personal developmental stages. This is not to say an individual who acquires a higher level of learning skills will be a moral person, but it does present the probability that a person who is able to process moral dilemmas is also able to think at a higher level when dealing with problem solving.

Another determining factor as to if teaching moral reasoning is beneficial is whether it would lead to ethical behavior. Moral development is not the same for everyone, nor does it form at the same rate. Within his study of moral development, Larry Nucci explains that some concepts of morality are universal, whereas, many others are culturally or socially norm based. Nucci illustrates how morality involves interpersonal behavior towards others, and that these behaviors are influenced by the sense of justice and welfare. These inner mechanisms, such as knowing it is wrong to hurt someone, are also influenced by an external mechanism of justice, which

develops rules of moral (acceptable) behavior. Nucci refers to these external mechanisms as social conventions, and relates how they are imbedded at every level of living, from family, to social groups, to the formal city-county-state level. This would further encompass the military community. Much of the debate surrounding moral development is how it actually occurs, and whether moral development actually influences ethical behavior. As Nucci has shown, there is evidence that moral behavior is influenced by both the internal and external mechanisms. One may choose not to harm another, even with the absence of any formal law, because of universal morality; on the other hand, one may feel morally obligated to get a person to a hospital quickly, but stops at a red light because it is the law (created for the well being/safety of others). Nucci suggests that the difference between morality and conventions needs to be understood, and both given their proper respect, instead of trying to combine the two issues into one theory. Nucci further points out that, "earlier analyses of moral development, such as Kohlberg's stage theory, interpreted attention to convention as characteristic of the reasoning of persons at lower stages of moral development," and therefore, plays a separate, but significant role, in further moral developmental stages (Nucci 127-157). External mechanisms, such as laws, are generally influenced by universally held morality, but not always. External mechanisms are sometimes forced upon a society, though internal mechanisms scream against it. In the 1800's, slavery was upheld legally (convention), though many who had slaves fought against their own oppression from others (moral). Soldiers face similar issue when dealing with a different society's external mechanisms. The beheading of an individual goes against the U.S. moral fabric, and Soldiers not able to reason morally may fall into the trap of assumed "justifiable" retaliation.

Herbert and Daniel (1996) suggest that "empathy is the bedrock of human morality," because forms of this emotion is present in most moral behavior. The article suggests psychologists who

study empathy believe this emotion is hardwired into our basic biology, just as the bond of trust (child to mother) are internally present. In other words, people are born with a basic sense of trust and caring, but through our upbringing, external influences, and (in)ability to rationalize through moral dilemmas, these emotions are altered and our morality is structured. Herbert and Daniel also point to self-discipline as another crucial element of morality. They suggest self-discipline is created through interaction between the child and adults, usually parents, through one of, or a combination of, three general styles: "acceptance and warmth (vs. rejection), firmness (vs. leniency), and respect for autonomy (vs. control)." The utilization of these traits during interaction with children and later with adolescents helps to mold character traits such as, "self-esteem, self-control, social competence and responsibility." The inconsistent uses or non-use of these styles will also have an effect. Herbert and Daniel relate the use of these styles significantly influences the internalization of character traits, which will influence the individual's ability to not only confront dilemmas morally, but also act upon those moral decisions. In a study of self-esteem conducted by Steven Smith and Richard Petty, the following conclusion was reached:

> Put low self-esteem people in a negative mood and they will retrieve mostly negative memories from their past and from newspaper headlines. Put high self-esteem people in a negative mood, and they will often restore their mood by retrieving positive memories. Likewise, if put in a negative mood, low self-esteem people will usually imagine a mood-consistent negative story in response to an ambiguous picture. If put in the same negative mood, high self-esteem people will usually spin a mood-enhancing positive story (Myers 40).

At this point it appears one could easily postulate that moral internalization, academic achievement, and behavior are interrelated based upon the above mentioned character traits. Within the U.S. Army, leaders encourage academic achievement and proper behavior (discipline), as well as conducting exercises to build self-esteem, but do little to enhance moral reasoning or internalization. If in fact these elements are interrelated, then each influences the other and relies upon one another as well.

Lawrence Kohlberg studied how individual behavior was governed by their moral reasoning. In one of his most famous studies, he posed situations to individuals in order to create a moral dilemma. He concentrated on how an individual reached their answers to the dilemma more than on the answer itself, and found that individuals utilized six different stages of moral reasoning, which fall into three separate levels. Kohlberg believed an individual moved through these stages in consecutive order, one at a time, and did so through interaction with those who are one or two levels higher within the moral reasoning stages listed below:

Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Reasoning

Level I. Preconventional Morality

Stage 1. Obedience and Punishment Orientation

Stage 2. Individualism and Exchange

Level II. Conventional Morality

Stage 3. Good Interpersonal Relationships

Stage 4. Maintaining the Social Order

Level III. Postconventional Morality

Stage 5. Social Contract and Individual Rights

Stage 6. Universal Principles

(Slavin 55). Watson and Lindgrin further suggest that most adolescents fall within stages three and four (Level II), with only a few attaining Level III during their later teenage years. In stage three individuals begin to reason for themselves, and in stage four, for the sake of others. Again, the U.S. Army must be concerned with these developmental issues, as many of the recruits fall within this category. If Kohlberg's model is true, in order for a Soldier to proceed into the next level, they must have contact with leaders at the developmental stages of five and six (Level III). This illustrates the importance of continued training in moral reasoning for leaders as well. Within one of Kohlberg's developed dilemmas, a man (Heinz) is caught stealing medication for a dying wife, because the druggist was charging more for the medication than the man could afford. Individuals within stage three begin to look at motives versus mere actions. They may feel "Heinz…was right to steal the drug because 'He was a good man for wanting to save her (his wife),' and 'His intentions were good, that of saving the life of someone he loves'" (Crain, 1985). Conversely, they may also feel the druggist is wrong for charging such a high price. Within stage four, individuals have progressed into the concept of moral decision making for the good of society as a whole. Using the same example concerning Heinz, individuals within stage four may relate, "they understand that Heinz's motives were good, but they cannot condone the theft. What would happen if we all started breaking the laws whenever we felt we had a good reason? The result would be chaos; society couldn't function" (Crain, 1985). This dilemma could easily be altered to challenge Soldier's reasoning within real life scenarios previously mentioned, such as "shoot—don't shoot, justifiable killings, or honoring another's faith." Are leaders confident Soldiers would perform properly under such conditions? While at the Sergeants Major Academy, stories are being told of actions that would morally shock the U.S. public. Were these actions appropriate, or simply accepted? "The prevailing assumption, which

underlies most teaching, counseling…has been that our private beliefs and feelings determine our public behavior. So, if we want to alter the way people act, we need to change their hearts and minds" (Myers 41). This has great implications for military leaders, as they would be able to help develop a Soldier's moral reasoning through the use of situational exercises and discussions. Dr. Marvin Berkowitz offers the following as a possible solution to incorporating moral education into formal curriculum:

> First, it can systematically incorporate lessons about morality; e.g., through the historical study of notable moral events and decisions, through the literary study of moral heroes or villains or great moral dilemmas, through the theatrical depiction of great moral narratives or conflicts, etc. Second, lessons may be created which examine moral concepts and the classical thinking about them. Third, peer interaction around challenging moral issues can be woven into many classes. Fourth, courses specifically concerned with morality can be added to the curriculum. Fifth, service learning and other forms of institutionalized moral action can be made an explicit curricular requirement (M. Berkowitz 14).

As already discussed, the development of moral reasoning must be done by military leaders, as parents and schools sometimes fail in this area. This training should be implemented at the beginning level—Basic Training—and continually built upon throughout the professional development cycle as the Soldier through experiences.

Finally, in drawing a correlation between cognitive and moral reasoning, this paper looks at an illustration by Watson and Lindgren, concerning a study conducted by D. Kuhn and others about the relationship between cognitive and moral reasoning skills. In the study, individuals ranging from ages ten to fifty were presented with three questions developed by Piaget to

identify the individuals who had attained the formal operation stage of cognitive development. These same individuals were also given questions developed by Kohlberg to classify their moral developmental stage. The analysis of the answers indicated, "reasoning ability, as indicated by the attainment of formal operations, is fundamental to and parallels the development of highly principled moral judgment" (p. 530). It appears that either moral and cognitive reasoning go hand-in-hand, or one tends to justify the need or desire for the other. When moral issues are experienced and cannot be resolved through cognitive reasoning, and moral reasoning skills are weak, then the dilemma may continue unresolved, leaving the person unable to resolve future issues. An opinion poll conducted by Purdue University further illustrates how the relationships between cognitive ability and moral judgment are apparent:

> When replies were classified according to the academic performance of the respondents, those who had low grades were more likely to agree with the statement that police should use whatever means would be necessary to capture and punish criminals, but also that people have the right to take the law into their own hands if they feel they have been unfairly treated. Students with high grades were more likely to disagree with those statements...They were also more likely to be concerned about values—wondering how to tell right from wrong, expressing confusion on moral issues, worrying about not living up to ideals, and the like (Watson and Lindgren, 1979).

The above listed research confirms there is a link between one's moral and cognitive reasoning levels, and that both follow similar paths of progression. With this in mind, one can theorize that each compliments the other; on the other hand, if one is neglected or stagnant it can render the other the same. Even though differing studies would show that one is more important or dominant over the other, the studies also show remarkable similarities and interdependence.

Equipped with this information, military leaders are able to understand the importance of facilitating the development of moral reasoning along with cognitive skills to provide a balance between ethical and cognitive reasoning.

This paper highlights only a few of the individuals who have significantly contributed to the study of the relation between cognitive and moral reasoning as part of ethical development. Additional knowledge can be gained through the studies of M.L. Hoffman, Albert Bandura, Betty Bardige, Elliot Turiel, and Carol Gilligan just to name a few. This paper has illustrated how both cognitive and moral reasoning play a role in ethical development. The U.S. Army continually emphasizes ethics and values, but does little to teach or train in these areas. Modern asymmetric warfare is forcing younger and less experienced Soldiers to make harder ethical decisions, while the U.S. Army provides more responsibility and firepower to these same Soldiers. With the information presented in this paper, hopefully U.S. Army leaders (noncommissioned officers) can see the importance of moral reasoning, and how it fits in the "whole Soldier" concept. Further, leaders should consider the importance of how moral reasoning relates to both cognitive reasoning and ethical development. The need and importance of moral reasoning has been identified within this paper, but the concluding ethical question now at hand is "will the Army teach moral values?"

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