

Ethics Thought Paper
Ethical Dilemmas and Violations

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16 November 2005

Ethics are principles that are followed that lead one to do the right thing. Doing the right thing is not always easy, but to fulfill your duty, maintain your integrity, and serve honorably, you must be able to apply ethical reasoning. To really get a feel of the meaning of ethics I referred to Webster's Dictionary for the definition. Webster's definition states: ethics is the study of the general nature of morals and specific moral choices an individual makes in relating to others.

Ethics concerns itself with the rights and wrongs of human behavior. At time you may think of ethics as a series of simple, clear-cut rules such as "do not tell lies" or "do not kill." Ethics is concerned with more than the rules themselves. Ethics help us decide how to act when two or more different courses of action seem equally right.

The word "ethics" comes from the Greek word *ethikos*, which mean custom or character. The Greek philosopher Aristotle first used the word to describe the careful examination of human behavior in the light of moral principles. It was another Greek thinker, Socrates, who earlier separated ethical considerations from the philosophical issues. Socrates saw ethics as a means of judging what was, and was not, moral. He believed that if he could understand what makes some types of conduct right and others wrong, he could help people learn to lead better lives. In the military individuals develop his or her own ethical standards, usually by combining ideas from various ethical systems. These standards are the codes people turn to first when they face a moral or ethical dilemma. These are **personal ethics**. These dilemmas occur in daily life.

Suppose you see a fellow SGM cheating on a test or you know that one has plagiarized papers in the academy. How you react will depend on the ethical standards you decide to apply. In

your personal code of ethics, loyalty to a fellow Sergeant Major may rate so high that you will keep silent. The Academy's honor code on the other hand, may require that you report any cheating. If you choose to be guided by either, you applied your personal ethics to the situation. Some may use the teachings from their religion as a guide no matter. No matter how you resolve your dilemma and no matter what standards you use to do so, you have made an **ethical judgment.**

Everyday our ethics are put through a test or we are faced with personal ethics or ethical judgments. Some may be severe that they may cause us to rationalize a bit more. Here are a few questions that may be asked to check on your personal ethics. Why do people have radar detectors in their cars? You may say, it's legal, in most states, so why not? "Everyone speed," or you may say, "I can't afford another ticket," "I'm just defending myself against sneaky cops with radars." Let's look at radar detectors for what they are. A radar detector is simply to help people get away with breaking the law, by driving at speeds deemed unsafe by the state. Another simple question that can be asked that may deal with your ethics is, do you go to the check out counter that is for 10 items or less knowing that you have more? Do you board a plane a plane before your row number is called? These corner-cutting strategies are all ethical violations nonetheless. The message that it sends is "it's not wrong if you don't get caught," In my military career I have been faced with numerous **ethical dilemmas.** The one that I will elaborate on is the one that I am more passionate about. If the very same incident occurred again, I would not change a thing.

I once had a hard charging Sergeant working in my orderly while I was a First Sergeant. This hard charging Sergeant stayed as late as I needed him to stay without any questions asked. His interactions with superiors were very professional for his rank which made dealing with higher

headquarters a breeze. This NCO eventually became my right hand man, my ace, and my main man. I knew I could count on this NCO for anything; he would never let me down. I eventually put this hard charger in a Team Chief position although the battalion CSM did not agree, due to the position being an E-6 position. After convincing the CSM that he was the man for the job I deployed him to Djibouti along with his other team members.

While my hard charger was deployed doing his airborne mission, he called me informing me that his wife had left him emptying his bank account and taking everything from the house. He asked if I would go by his house to check on it, so I did. I confirmed that she was gone and so was everything inside. I informed him that I was pulling him off of the deployment and redeploying him as soon as I could to allow him to take care of legal issues. The response I received from him was that he wanted to complete the mission, that there wasn't anything that he could do about it. He said that if he came home now he would come home to an empty house as well as if he comes home later. I allowed him to complete the mission and redeploy his team back.

Once returning from deployment I told him that he didn't need to stay at his house being that it was empty, I suggested that he stay at my place. He refused my offer and said that we would be okay, he wanted some time alone. I understood his wishes and left him alone. After him and his team completed their recovery he went on leave and from there everything went down hill.

I received a phone call late one night from authorities in Pennsylvania informing me they had a soldier of mine in their custody. He was charged with initiating a threat to his wife, he was quoted as saying that he was going to chop her up and hide her body. The authorities claimed that a knife was found in his vehicle but it turned out to be a common tool that can be found on any signal soldier. I called my commander and informed him of the incident. Here's where my

ethical dilemma begins. Being that he was on leave we decided not to inform the battalion Commander or the Command Sergeant Major hoping that he would be released before his leave was over. However, he was being charged with a more serious crime than we thought, he was being charged with initiating a terrorist threat and was going to be in custody for a while. Eventually we had to extend his leave to cover him from being AWOL and still not informing the higher command. I talked to the Chaplain about the incident and let him know that my commander and I did not inform the command and I wanted to go to Pennsylvania to get him out of jail. The Chaplain understood and even agreed to drive with me to get my hard charging NCO out of jail and we did. I ended up signing him out of jail putting my career on the line. I was informed by the district attorney that if he failed to show up for his court appearance that I would be held accountable. Now, getting to the meat and potatoes of this ethics paper I will demonstrate the ethical dilemma that I faced and why I chose the actions I took.

Once back to work my hard chargers performance slipped drastically. He started to come to formations late and he also began to miss formations all together. His appearance took a drastic change for the worst and he walked around as if he no longer cared about anything. When he showed up to work with the smell of alcohol on his entire body I called him into my office. I questioned his judgment and expressed how disappointed I was with his performance. I reminded him how I put my career on the line on his behalf. He appeared to not care which I could not understand, this did not even a little bit sound like the hard charger who worked for me. I took him home and told him to sleep on it and return to work the next day with a better attitude.

As time went on he did not seem that he was straightening up at all but still, I would not give up on him. This was my pet rock, my ace, my main man who in the past I could count on for

anything. I tried everything to get him back on track but nothing seemed to work. I began to wonder if he was worth it because he was drawing attention from the other soldiers and NCOs in the company. I knew if this continued that the higher command would have to deal with this and everything that transpired would come out. With a lot of one on one with this NCO it seemed that I eventually got through to him. I shared a story with him about myself. I let him know that the very same thing happened to me and I recovered. I felt just as bad as he did but I chose to deal with it in a different manner. He shared with me that if I would have never shared that with him, he would not have known that I been through the same thing that he have.

If I had not experienced the same thing that this NCO experienced would I have dealt with him differently? I really don't know, maybe I would and maybe I would not have. If the same performance happened with another NCO in my unit would I have dealt with that individual the same way? Again, I do not know.

In summary, I have discussed personal ethics, ethical judgment, and ethical dilemmas and how I chose to deal with it and how I put my career on the line because of my strong convictions.

In conclusion, the right action in a situation that you may face may not be found in regulations or field manuals. Even the most exhaustive regulations cannot predict every situation; they are designed for the routine, not the exceptional. The most difficult tasks faced, as an Army leader is, determining when a rule or regulation simply does not apply. Sometime the situation you're facing falls outside the set of conditions envisioned by those who wrote the regulation.