

Running Head: ETHICS IN THE ARMY

Ethics in the Army

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Abstract

As long as humans have been living and working together in social groups there have been laws governing their conduct. These laws not only govern the conduct of the individual but the group as well to promote good order and discipline. Rules or laws of a group are normally based on the beliefs, values and social norms of that group. Ethics on the other hand is a philosophy based on a system of moral principles governing the appropriate conduct of an individual or group of individuals. In most societies rules are binding and carry consequences. On the other hand ethics and ethical behavior is not always legally binding and may or may not come with consequences. Unlike written laws or rules ethics is not always as clear or concise when attempting to define the philosophy or implementation of ethics. The reasons for this is due to the fact that ethics is based on morality and here is were the conflict of what is ethical and what is not begins.

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Ethical dilemmas plague us everyday. In this thought paper I feel that it is imperative to present you snippets of history, definitions, moral beliefs, examples, experiences and what I feel are the current ethical dilemmas which we face today. By doing this I will establish a foundation of my ideology on the subject and issues.

History Leading to the Philosophy of Ethics

The history of law written by man began sometime around 17th century B.C. when the king of Babylon created some of the earliest records of written law. These early laws were named in honor of the king and are known as Code of Hammurabi. In the 12th century B.C., Moses received a message from God now known as the 10 Commandments. These 10 rules explained how people of civilized nations should conduct themselves and is the basic law of Judaism. Judaism was one of the first religions to put the philosophy of ethics at the center of their beliefs. Then during the time of Jesus, Jesus preached that the Kingdom of God was coming. He preached and provided testimony for others to prepare for the arrival of Christ. His teachings taught them to be kind to their neighbors; look out and care for people who are less fortunate, sick or hungry; and to live honest lives reflecting a pure and holy living. Jesus expounded that good behavior and conduct was more important for those to enter the Kingdom of God than obeying the old Jewish religious laws. It was not until the 5th century B.C. that great philosophers began to theorize intensively about moral behavior, which led to the further development of philosophical ethics. These philosophers included Socrates, Confucius and Buddha which all believed in the same basic concepts and theories of morality and moral behavior. In their teachings they used words like kind, honest, polite, wise, obedient, respect, humble, generous, self-control and merciful to further expound on the philosophy of ethics. Today with the speed of the internet ethical writings have grown to cover many facets of our

society. These topics of ethical writings include but are not limited to: business, healthcare, research, science and technology, animal welfare, environmental, computer, professional, media, international, public sector and government ethics just to mention a few. With so much written about this topic one would imagine that there would be no issue with any ethical dilemma but in fact as a society we have complicated the basics of ethics to the point of confusion.

What is Ethics?

According to *Microsoft® Encarta® 2006* it is the study of morality's effect on conduct: the study of moral standards and how they affect conduct. So what does this mean to me? Simply put I feel that the impact of a person or person's moral conduct or behavior on another is what fuels the thought of ethics and what is ethical.

Moral Beliefs

Moral beliefs are the foundation to ethics. So what is moral? Some say religion establishes moral ideology and therefore ethics. Others claim that morals and ethical behavior is what you are taught as a child. Both of these are correct and wrong at the same time. It is true that religion creates a foundation to ethical behavior. It is also true that the traditional family values taught in the home establish ethical behavior as well. But if a person has neither a religious preference nor traditional family values does this mean that they are unethical - Of course not. Moral beliefs are established by the group in which you associate with. For example the seven Army Values were developed to establish a common set of moral beliefs among the great diversity of Soldiers whom serve in the United States Army. In turn these seven values established the ethical behavior in which Soldiers strive to live by. But do established ethics create issues that we fail to take responsibility for? Let us review examples of ethical values and some of the turmoil that is created by these conflicting values.

Examples of Ethical Values

Let us examine the first of the seven Army Values, Loyalty. Under Loyalty the Army has published the following: Bear true faith and allegiance to the U.S. Constitution, the Army, your unit and other Soldiers. Ethically Soldiers should be Loyal to the U.S. Constitution, the Army, their unit and other Soldiers. But, is it always possible to be absolutely loyal morally to all of these simultaneously. Let's not also forget the loyalty to their families and their God. In what order should all these loyalties occur? I have on a number of occasions witnessed that when Army Leaders are posed with this question that many of them reply with and demand loyalty to the unit. With ethical demands such as these on the American Soldier leaders shape ethical dilemmas that they have to take responsibility for. When a leader demands or implies that the order of loyalty begins with that of the unit then they must accept the responsibility in which comes with shaping the ethical thought processes and inadequate ethical behavior of those whom serve under them.

Let us briefly examine the inadequacy of values established by leaders and organizations as an absolute to ethics. For example criminals all have a value system of some sort. They are capable of reasoning and acting ethically but are they ethical. Furthermore, church leaders as well as military leaders promote good values but can this guarantee that all decisions are ethical. After briefly examining this thought process of values as a measurement it is evident that values by themselves are generally insufficient in establishing ethics. So how do you shape the ethical thought processes beyond presenting a list of values? This can be answered simply with one word – Morals. Now that we have come full circle back to morality it is important to review some experiences in which we can relate ethical thinking and processes to.

Ramifications of Ethical Decisions

As children we are taught that most of us are born with the five physical senses which are sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing. But it is not until later in life that many people understand that in fact they are also born with a sixth sense. While some people may not be born with the five physical senses I believe that all people all are born with a sixth sense. This sixth sense is that of morality and is sometimes referred to as feelings. Just because we cannot always measure it or chart it doesn't mean that it does not exist. Of course the intensity of this sixth sense differs from person to person just as some physical senses are stronger in some than in others. The sixth sense provides the foundation to morality which is the basis to many ethical decisions and being able to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong.

Ethical decisions have the ability to impact an individual or group far more than most written laws can in one event. The ramifications sometimes are unseen and immeasurable but yet sensed. This is due to the unwritten but very well sensed morality of ethics in all of us. Poor ethical decisions can be extremely damaging to a person, group or organization even though no laws may have been broken. Many times the damage of unethical decisions cannot be physically measured and may seem invisible. But, whether visible or invisible the fact remains that unethical decisions impact the moral emotions of humans which carry deep second and third order effects. These effects can include a drop in production, loss of trust, and the break down of relationships both personally and professionally. Some examples of poor ethical decisions that created moral turmoil in our society include those made by the CEO's of Enron, the military leadership at Abu grave, and even President Clinton. All of these poor ethical decisions negatively impacted the American people. Each one of these cases affected the trust in the senior leadership of America and brought into question what is morally correct.

On the other hand good ethical decisions foster and create positive effects. Even though some of the effects are transparent the results are exponentially positive as they result in improved group dynamics, communication and trust. Unfortunately many good ethical decisions are not published and for the most part go unnoticed. But in FM 6-22 on page 4-14 the story of Warrant Officer Thompson at My Lai, Vietnam provides an example what Soldiers do every day that are ethically correct decisions.

Extract from Army Field Manual 6-22, October 2006, page 4-14

On 16 March 1968, WO1 Hugh C. Thompson, Jr. and his two-man helicopter crew were on a reconnaissance mission over the village of My Lai, Republic of Vietnam. WO1 Thompson watched in horror as he saw an American Soldier shoot an injured Vietnamese child. Minutes later, he observed more Soldiers advancing on a number of civilians in a ditch. Suspecting possible reprisal shootings, WO1 Thompson landed his helicopter and questioned a young officer about what was happening. Told that the ground combat action was none of his business, WO1 Thompson took off and continued to circle the embattled area.

When it became apparent to Thompson that the American troops had now begun firing on more unarmed civilians, he landed his helicopter between the Soldiers and a group of ten villagers headed towards a homemade bomb shelter. Thompson ordered his gunner to train his weapon on the approaching Soldiers and to fire if necessary. Then he personally coaxed the civilians out of the shelter and airlifted them to safety.

WO1 Thompson's immediate radio reports about what was happening triggered a cease-fire order that ultimately saved the lives of many more villagers. Thompson's willingness to place himself in physical danger to do the ethically and morally right thing was a sterling example of personal and moral courage.

What I feel are some current ethical dilemmas which we face today

I have witnessed a number of ethical dilemmas during the past 23 years while serving in the United States Army. I have also had to make decisions that contained tough ethical thought processes. Before I expound on what I feel are current ethical dilemmas today in the Army I should provide a few moral beliefs which directly impact my ethical thoughts.

Religiously I believe there is a higher power. I also believe there are three sides to most situations. They are the absolute right, the absolute wrong and the grey area which I refer to as the unknown. I believe in the golden rule of treating others as I wish to be treated. I believe that most people are good and that circumstances of an event or events shape individuals ethically either left or right of the norm. I believe that two wrongs do not make a right. I believe that most people do not wake up in the morning meaning to make an error in judgment. I do not believe in zero defect, we are human and as humans we are bound to make mistakes. No is not an answer if what is being requested is not illegal, immoral, going to hurt someone or a disgrace.

Before I expound on what ethical dilemmas I feel that we face as an Army today it is also important to recognize our achievements. Since entering the United States Army in December 1984, there have been many ethical issues resolved to include but are not limited to sexual harassment, smoking in the work place as well as the excessive use and acceptance of alcohol. But there is still room for improvement.

I feel that ethically the Army has fallen short when it comes to Senior NCO Promotions, the Government Credit Card, and the GI Bill just to mention a few. In the next few paragraphs I will explain how I feel that the Army has fallen short in each of these areas.

When speaking of Senior NCO Promotions, Ethically I feel that the Army has let down the enlisted Soldiers of the United States Army in the pay grades of E-6, E-7 and E-8. I validated this statement by the fact that the published MOS career path charts are misleading and that most NCO's have little confidence in the DA selection process. Many NCO's today feel that the promotion system in place for the pay the grades of E-7, E-8 and E-9 are nothing more than the luck of the draw or a hook up by a senior NCO. In fact I have had senior NCO's in the Army state to me and validate that in fact there is not a true consistent standard from one year to the next. Which in turn reconfirms the misleading value of the MOS career path charts as well as what is truly expected of a NCO to achieve the most senior ranks in the Army. In fact to date board data is destroyed and no feed back is given to any NCO of what their strengths or weaknesses are. This adds fuel to the mystery of how they may improve themselves to achieve excellence and become the pentathlete that the Army continues to advertise for. I have always felt and have even proven that the point system similar to what is in currently in use for the pay grades of E-5 and E-6 would be the most ethical system. Unfortunately I feel that until a more ethical and open promotion system is established for the Senior NCO Ranks the lack of trust in the Army's Senior Leadership will continue to perpetuate throughout the NCO Corp.

When speaking of Government Credit Card (GOVCC) I can only ask the leadership of the Army, "What are you doing?" Ethically how can you force a Soldier to use a GOVCC and not have a system in place to ensure that Soldiers is paid correctly and timely so that they can pay GOVCC correctly and timely as well? Also why is there not a system in place that takes responsibility for not paying the Soldier correctly and timely? As a Senior NCO I have personally witnessed were Soldiers as well as myself were not paid correctly or timely and were threaten by the Officer Corp that if we did not pay our GOVCC we would face letters of

reprimand or even worse UCMJ action. The last time I checked, enlisted Soldiers don't have a lot of expendable income to cover the Army's Debt for a TDY that a Soldier is ordered to. It is ironic that when I was a young Soldier I never witnessed any of these issues. We went to the travel cash cage for a TDY advancement and upon our return filed for a settlement which was paid correctly and promptly. We never had a late payment, threat of UCMJ or the possibility of having my credit rating affected by this issue. Further complicating the issue many Soldiers now have to request a refund from the GOVCC on almost every TDY settlement due to the Army deciding that they need to automatically send a set amount to the GOVCC after an electronic settlement has been submitted through DTS. Bottom line here I feel is that the Army had good intentions to automate and improve the TDY payment system but the execution and implementation was and is still very poor thus adversely effecting the Soldier's confidence in DTS and their ability to focus when financial distractions are created on them and their families as I have described.

Lastly I am disturbed by the manipulation of the GI Bill (Educational Benefits) as a reenlistment incentive. Ethically I feel that this is wrong. Soldiers not only earn their educational benefits but also pay their hard earned income into it. After their initial enlistment the GI Bill belongs to the Soldier and should be used by the Soldier as they see fit . To tie a reenlistment incentive to it and by the way this is offered only to a select few is ethnically wrong. What about the Soldiers who have committed themselves by reenlisting indefinitely? What message is being sent? Retirees and their benefits may be targeted next in the future based on the ethics we teach our future leaders. Ethically I feel that the wrong message is being sent to our future leaders. What is to stop them from manipulating other benefits in the future possibly as soon as 2010 for the purpose to meet an end strength?

Conclusion

Over the past 23 years I have seen astonishing improvements in how the Army handles ethical issues and dilemmas. These improvements have made the United States Army the greatest Army in the world. But there are a number of issues that yet need to be resolved. As Soldiers become more educated so do their points of view. The decisions made today whether ethical or not will affect the future of the Army. Many times ethical decisions are controversial, unpopular and painful. This leads to the fact that the path to a correct ethical decision is sometimes the most difficult. Teaching morality to future leaders may be a painful process but leaders must not only teach but lead by example. The positive action of an ethical leader fosters future ethical decisions and creates positive effects. Even though some of the effects will be transparent as I have stated earlier, the results will benefit the Army exponentially and pay positive dividends to the organization and the Soldiers who are entrusted with the institution.