A Moral Institution?
Examining the Methods, Consequences, and Motives of Modern Militaries

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Abstract

Is the military a moral institution? This question is central to both the project and my life as I approach my commissioning into the US Air Force as a Second Lieutenant. Having established freedom as the essential condition for human existence, I wanted to know if the military currently is or could ever be used to create a world that offers its inhabitants greater opportunities to define their lives. The military was described as an integral part of the government enacting diplomacy by other means, and the institution was subsequently subjected to a rigorous analysis of its methods, consequences, and motives, culminating with my conclusions on the moral state of the military.

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The Problem

Is the military a moral institution? Those who say "yes" typically praise the characteristics of a military organization, including discipline, honor, courage, and a sense of duty. They discuss the natural rights of people and the moral necessity of defense, to include their rights, their property, their families, and their lives, and argue that conflict has been a regular part of human history and that eradicating war in our lifetime is certain impossibility. Some (this being very few) even claim that war is necessary for human progress and is used to simultaneously cleanse society and motivate it out of stagnation; militaries are therefore necessary to conduct this effort. Opposite this view is the belief that an organization constructed around the purpose of dealing death and destruction can in no way be moral, because its reason for existence and methods used are inherently immoral. These individuals call into account the economic and human costs of war, and question not only whether war achieves its desired ends, but also bring in to question the underlying reasons governments would want to conduct war.

The fact that each side incorporates morality into its rhetoric is interesting. How can each claim moral superiority in their argument? By the logic that there is such a thing as a definitive moral truth, one side must be wrong. Yet there remains no consensus on the issue. Instead, the military is simultaneously admired and disdained, with each side convinced of the other's ignorance. Unfortunately, I feel those who accept an easy yes-no miss the complexity of the argument. Months away from commissioning as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Air Force, I cannot allow myself the luxury of simplicity. After witnessing the way in which the US military has been and is used, the civilian cost of war, the effect of war upon soldiers and their families, and how this conflicts with the values I hoped to defend, I am forced to question the morality of the military's methods, the consequences of its actions, and the motives that dictate its use.

This conflict would not exist were it not for my total conviction that humans are free, meaning they have an inherent right to choose the nature of their essence and to do so without coercion. Once an individual accepts the totality of their freedom, this means 1) that they also accept complete responsibility for their actions, and 2) recognize that freedom is essential to human existence, without which life is imperfect. The first point can be explained as follows: as free individuals, people have a moral duty to consider the consequences and character of their

actions and therefore act morally, because their actions both affect all of humanity and also define the moral character of humanity (i.e. contribute either positively or negatively to the concept of "human nature"). As it applies to my life, it means that everything I do, from what I study at school to the way I act toward others to the job I take to the food I eat, requires me to fully consider the moral implications of these actions; after all, it is ultimately my choice to act in one way over another, and I ought to be able to justify my decisions. By placing blame for my actions on others, on alcohol, on anger, or on fate, or by simply not fully examining my actions and instead taking the easy explanation, I am disregarding my moral responsibilities.

The second requires a more in-depth exploration: if I accept that freedom is an integral part of human existence, without which life is at best a poor imitation, then I create for myself and others two additional problems. I (along with the rest of humanity) ought to first take into account the natural right of others, and ensure that their freedom, or the condition in which they can create meaning, is not inhibited (this ties in with the first point). Secondly, if a person recognizes that their inherent right is being denied, or that others are being denied this right due to a condition not allowing for freedom, then that person has a moral duty to take action to restore this free condition.

Freedom is often interpreted as a positive, a "willful positing" of an individual's ideas and actions on the world. In this way, it is taken to mean a person's ability to act according to their will. But freedom is not something a person can assert or exercise. A person my say, "I exercise my freedom by choosing," but is this not simply exercising one's ability to choose? What does the act of choosing say about the choices available to a person? While choice is certainly an element of freedom and demonstrates a degree of freedom, I feel as though people generally fail to recognize what freedom really is. Instead of a positive, I would argue that freedom is a negative: it is the absence of everything, of influence, of social pressures, of laws (not a negative as in freedom is an evil).

In this absence, the human will is given the opportunity to emerge and in turn fill this absence. Humans act and exercise their will because they have desire, and freedom is the necessary condition for individuals to express this desire. It is imperative that humans are given this opportunity because, as Sartre states, existence precedes essence. Humans exist first, but must determine what to do with their existence by creating their essence. By simply existing (acting), individuals create their own essence (i.e. they create meaning, create being, and

determine what it means to be an individual). Essence does not have a deterministic quality involving biology, social circumstance, etc. Rather, essence is what is created in the condition of nothingness. Freedom, a nothingness, an absence of all, is therefore the essential condition from which to act, and the very foundation for being. Freedom, by nature, offers no direction or guidance, rather allowing humans the opportunity to create guidance for themselves.

Freedom in this sense is therefore not something that people possess (as in "I have freedom, we have won freedom," etc). Rather, freedom is a societal provision that allows for action to occur. It is the state that allows for limitless choices. A free person then is one who, by the choices they make and actions they take, has defined their own life and given it meaning, and has done so only because their society has granted them the opportunity to do so (in other words, the society has not restricted an individual's social mobility due to racism or sexism, the person has had access to equal education, etc). Freedom does not belong to an individual; freedom is a characteristic of the society that person lives in.

If freedom is taken as a positive, then the individual can only see the institutions and individuals that limit his or her own freedom. If freedom is taken as a negative, then the individual instead accepts that the rules and limitations are not always external in nature. It is not uncommon to hear someone say they were "overwhelmed" by too many choices or by their responsibilities. In the same way, people find the degree and kind of freedom I am discussing uncomfortable, and the typical reaction to this freedom is to fill the emptiness with meaning, either with a god, their own will and meaning, or viewing life as absurd and devoid of meaning. By accepting certain rules and conditions, the individual puts their own restrictions on their freedom, and must recognize that these limits are self-imposed and are a part of an individual's meaning and being.

In a practical sense, there are things that do not allow for a free condition: socio-economic conditions, education, physical and mental disability, availability of information, and other general influences and restrictions. These things limit freedom, and thus limit one's ability to have a genuine essence. Some (like physical and mental disability) are not in anyone's control. In these cases, one must work inside these constraints as best they can to still create being. Other limitations, however, are imposed by authority figures, the law, cultural norms, etc, and are adhered to out of fear of pain, death, punishment, isolation, reward for good behavior, etc. Freedom is the nothingness that allows individuals to ignore these factors and still act in a way

unique to themselves and their condition. By claiming that freedom is essential to human existence, I aim to create an environment that brings humanity closer to a freer existence where people can create their own meaning without coercion.

Perhaps I will be able to best illustrate this problem of freedom by explaining what drew me to the military in the first place. Individuals throughout the world are subject to extreme suffering, and while each instance is heart wrenching, it is the suffering caused by governments and other politically oriented organizations against other nations or their own citizens that most interest me. Witnessing this injustice moved me to want to act against the oppression I saw humanity endure on a daily basis and eliminate the source of this suffering. It was not enough to treat the symptoms; I wanted to find the cure. In other words, I saw government induced suffering as a limit to freedom, and wanted to help construct a world where its citizens had the same opportunities I had to define their existence.

I want to be careful not to say that governments are sadistic. Instead, those in power are focused on achieving certain goals and are often immune to the costs of these goals, which is why widespread suffering is often a byproduct. Or, the consequences are recognized and intended, and suffering is used as a tool to achieve these goals. The self-serving pursuit of power and resources typically benefits the ruling few, with little regard given to the many who are plunged into suffering. Suffering traditionally takes the following forms, each to varying degrees of severity:

- Social inequality (human rights infractions; restrictions on voting, owning property, education, unions, land possession)
- Economic inequality (sanctions, wealth distribution, taxation, opportunity)
- Humanitarian crisis (genocide, ethnic cleansing, war, terrorism)

The moral responsibilities of the ruling class are a separate topic involving the purpose of governments, how they should conduct themselves, etc. Because the military is a political tool, this topic will inevitably and only occasionally arise in this paper. However, I would like to stick to the morality of the military as much as possible without spending too much time analyzing the political system it is attached to. I hope to first prove the rightness or wrongness of the institution alone; if it is or can be moral, I can then begin to assess whether or not governments are using militaries the correct manner. If the military can never be moral, then it is not necessary to have that discussion.

From experience, it is not difficult to accept that suffering is a part of life. It can even be argued that suffering, when handled properly, can be a positive life-changing event that builds character, strengthens a person's will or religious foundation, and changes the way in which an individual interacts with other people. So why not let the problem go and accept this reality? The suffering I am discussing is the kind that is intentionally inflicted, of the resulting daily anguish and trauma. The physical, mental, and emotional torment associated with this kind of suffering should be avoided at all costs because (in most cases) this kind of suffering breaks far more people than it builds up. People do not have the opportunity to become stronger from this hardship, for they are often destroyed by it (think of those who have experienced torture, witnessed their village massacred, or endured crushing poverty). Moreover, there are ways in which individuals can build character, strengthen their wills and religious foundations, and change their interactions with others without experiencing this degree of suffering.

What makes this particular suffering (i.e. suffering caused by governments and other political organizations) different from the suffering caused by natural disaster, famine, disease, or natural death (excluding these "natural" events that can be blamed on global warming or other negligent actions on the part of humanity) is that this suffering is caused by other people. Since the cause of suffering is other people, it is therefore avoidable, unlike that caused by the natural world. I would also argue that the suffering caused by governments and political organizations are separate from the suffering caused by individuals, such as the case of a mugging, wife beating, or murder, simply due to the scale of the suffering. Although both types (individual and government-inflicted suffering) are induced by humans and therefore avoidable, and while the victim of a rapist may be traumatized, or the family of a murdered person emotionally distraught, when these events become sanctioned by governments as tools to achieve political goals and thousands of individuals and their families are affected, the number of those purposefully made to suffer is simply much greater than in individual cases.

I therefore saw government-induced suffering as a serious limiting factor on freedom, thus interfering with people's ability to create meaning. Oppression, land seizure, kidnappings, and discrimination all contribute to this. I wanted to assist others in realizing their freedom while at the same time acting in a moral manner that did not infringe on other's freedom or was a useless endeavor. What organization could I possibly join to fulfill these ideals? The answer seemed clear: the US as a whole embodied the principles of liberty, and its military was

committed to upholding and defending these same principles for its citizens and others. Moreover, since freedom was an integral part of human existence, was not freedom worth paying the ultimate price for? Was it not right to eliminate those who oppressed others using the swiftest means possible, i.e. through violence? After all, are not conflicts of this nature historically solved through warfare (think of beating the Nazis in WWII)? Thus, I found my answer: I would join the military.

The irony, of course, is that I am willing to die and kill for the things I feel are so necessary for life. As a member of the US Air Force, I therefore find myself in a difficult situation. If I am looking for a moral way to effectively give others freedom by ending the suffering caused by governments, am I in a good position to do so as a member of the military? Is the military a viable moral resource to respond to these issues? Can the military help solve the world's social, economic, and humanitarian problems? Is violence (or threat of violence) ever the necessary or justified response? Or is there another way? Given the military "at its best," I want to balance it against what the military is typically used for and determine whether or not I should affiliate myself with this organization. This will require me to determine if the military has ever or could ever be used in its ideal case, or if the military at its best cannot exist due to the current nature of our government and others.

The ideas in this section are based on the following:
Camus, A. (1983). *The myth of Sisyphus.* Alfred A. Knopf, United Kingdom
De Beauvoir, S. (1985). *The ethics of ambiguity.* Citadel Press/Kensington Publishing Corp.
Sartre, J.P. (1985). *Existentialism and human emotions.* Citadel Press/Kensington Publishing Corp.

What is the Military?

Generally speaking, a military (or armed forces) is a political tool organized by a nation as an integrated component of its national security policy. Even in a military dictatorship, the military is the government. However, here the military fulfills the traditional roles of the military, while other elements fulfill the administrative and leadership roles of government. The same structure exists in all government-military interactions, but because it is one organization without a distinction between civilian and military leadership, these differences are harder to delineate. This policy is designed for the protection of a nation's people from external threats and physical assault, as well as creating an environment that enhances a country's ability to achieve national interests. National interest is a broad term encompassing a nation's economic, political, military, cultural, or moral goals, the loss of which could threaten fundamental values and the vitality of the country. This philosophy of using the military as "not merely a political act, but also as a political instrument, a continuation of political relations, a carrying out of the same by other means" is relatively recent, originating with German military theorist Carl von Clausewitz in the early 19th century. With few exceptions, the idea that governments use militaries to impose their policies and will upon their opponents has been adopted by modern militaries worldwide. Prior to the era of modern war, war was often waged as an "end unto itself," not necessarily as a means to an end. While wars naturally had primary and secondary goals that served political means, the level of sophistication characteristic of modern war was mostly absent. However, great conquerors such as Alexander, the Romans, and the Mongols are often cited as precursors to modern war, as they used war specifically as a "means to an end" with an overall political aim.

But this military definition is terrifically ambiguous, doing little to explain the military-civilian-government relationship, identify military targets, or outline permissible military action. Adding to the ambiguity of the military's means and purpose is our own nation's conflicting duties of military professionals. While active duty and reserve military officers take the following Oath of Office:

> "I, *[name]*, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and

faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God."

National Guard officers swear a slightly different Oath:

> "I, *[name]*, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State (Commonwealth, District, Territory) of ___ against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the Governor of the State (Commonwealth, District, Territory) of ___, that I make this obligation freely, without any mental reservations or purpose of evasion, and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the Office of *[grade]* in the Army/Air National Guard of the State (Commonwealth, District, Territory) of ___ upon which I am about to enter, so help me God."

While enlisted personnel take the Oath of Enlistment:

> "I, *[name]*, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God."

The differences here should not be overlooked. Active duty and reserve officers swear an oath to defend the Constitution, the document that is the absolute law in the United States, which determines the role of the legislative, judicial, and executive branches, and protects citizens' most basic rights. An officer swears to defend that document and the ideals it embodies against all enemies, even those within ones own country or chain of command. A National Guard officer and enlisted military members, on the other hand, take an oath to additionally obey the orders of the President (and, in the case of the National Guard, the Governor). This presents an interesting scenario to these individuals: what if those who they have sworn to obey are actually acting in a way contrary to the document they also swore to defend?

While trying to understand the US military and its role as a part of the US government, I uncovered some rather disturbing questions: 1) what does the US stand for, and what are its objectives? 2) Who decides the actions of the government, especially in regards to foreign policy and the use of the military? 3) Why does the government decide to pursue these policies and 4) how does the government go about achieving its goals? These thoughts are disturbing because there are no textbook answers to any of them. The US as a nation has been engaged in an identity

crisis regarding its purpose in the world, amplified after the end of the Cold War; it does not know its role or purpose on the international stage, it does not yet understand how to balance its values and goals. As the world's only superpower, the US finds itself in a unique position with tremendous economic, political, and military power, and as a democratic republic, the governments and people of other nations have different expectations ranging from upholding certain values and conducting itself in accordance with these ideals, to economic, political, and/or military assistance. Naturally, the US claims to stand for its founding principles of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," as well as justice, freedom, and equality. But the actions of the government seem to contradict its guiding principles. Instead, the foreign policy of the government seems to be focused on short-term economic gains, where regional stability and the promise of free markets (for American businesses) trump genuine democracy.

The nation's ruling class naturally determines the actions of the government, although in the case of the US it is not an easy task to discern who truly makes the decisions. The ruling class is comprised of politicians, big business owners, the military elite, and lobbyists representing various interest groups, who can each only exercise as much power as the people (or the ruled) let them (the complacency of American citizens, however, is truly astounding, which allows the ruling class to exercise a considerable amount of power). Complicating the matter is that one group never truly has power over all the others; instead each takes part in a variable power dynamic and often can only accomplish its goals by finding common ground with the other groups. Policy is therefore dictated by whichever group(s) has (have) the most power at a given time, which is why the US appears to have an inconsistent foreign policy. This also explains why the government chooses to pursue these policies: the group with the most power at the time determine that it is in their best interest to do X. Likewise, this group will decide how best to realize these goals (i.e. will determine the method).

The ideas in this section are based on the following:
Clausewitz, C.V. *On war.*
Machiavelli, N. *The Prince.*
Title 5 of the United States Code, S 3331
United states air force national security affairs. Holm Center Curriculum Division, Maxwell AFB, Alabama

The Moral Examination

The US government certainly follows Clausewitz's teachings regarding the relationship of the military and the government. The discussion now begs the question of whether the military machine is, or ever can be moral, or if this political tool authorized to deal death in the name of the US government is inherently bad. By examining the military at its best, I hope to compare this to the way in which the military is typically used and explore ways in which the military can achieve this ideal degree of morality, if this is even possible.

Can the complexity of moral life truly be reduced to a few rules and methods? The answer here is obviously no. Morality is not a set of conclusions. Rather, a moral theory provides an individual with the tools needed to reason through a variety of moral problems. It does not produce a cut-and-dry solution to every problem. When approaching this problem, I will therefore need a moral theory that is at once diverse and flexible, able to examine my issue from multiple viewpoints as well as in the variety of situations my problem finds itself in. The following criteria for a moral theory have been outlined to meet these needs:

1) A moral theory must provide guidance on moral conduct. In other words, a moral theory must explain why "x" is right and offer direction on how to do right. Additionally, a moral theory must condition and strengthen a person's will to do right. It is not enough for an individual to know the rules; one needs to begin to be able to apply these rules. A kind person is not kind just because they know what kindness is. A kind person is kind because he or she has a disposition that is kind and demonstrates kindness to others.

2) A moral theory must analyze the nature of a person's action, the results of that action, and the person's intent in order to establish the moral rightness or wrongness of behavior as a whole. It is unrealistic to make a moral judgment without taking into account all three aspects.

3) A moral theory must establish a solid moral foundation within the individual while allowing the individual to adapt their moral reasoning to a variety of situations (i.e. to be flexible). This foundation combined with an open mind is important for two reasons. The first is that it will allow an individual to make a decision when confronted with conflicting moral obligations such as a wrong action that produces good results or a right action that could have negative consequences, or deciding whether violence or nonviolence is the moral course when both decisions result in suffering. The second is that an individual will be confronted with different problems that require different moral considerations depending on the individual's current moral sphere in regards to his or her interaction with other people (i.e. if the person's actions affect their immediate

family or several nations).

Clearly, moral problems will require different emphasis upon the nature of one's actions, the consequences of one's actions, and the character of the individual. The types of problems one faces will determine how to weigh the various elements of one's moral conduct. Especially when examining an institution as large and as complex as the military, I recognized a compound moral theory was necessary. In other words, the morality of the methods, the morality of the consequences, and the morality of the motives and individuals involved must be analyzed. By utilizing these criteria, I hope to reach a conclusion on the morality of the military.

Methods

The methods employed by an individual in executing a moral decision are relatively easy to assess, due to the fact that an action is objective by nature; an action, after all, is an observed process (this is, of course, if no consideration is given to the consequences of action or the intent to the agent, which is how method will be addressed in this section). If a person runs, there is little debate among witnesses as to what the person did (compare this to the subjective nature of motive: can anyone other than the individual running truly know why that person decided to run? The same applies to consequence: what will happen because the person is running, and what would happen if the person chose not to run? Can the observer ever know for certain what would have happened otherwise, or are they merely speculating?). This same line of thought applies to the debate on the morality of the military: without wrangling over perceived facts (i.e. if the subjective elements of consequence and intent are for the time being ignored), the methods available to the military to accomplish its mission can be observed, and a judgment can be made as to whether or not these acts are moral. These methods include humanitarian assistance, war, military support, and/or show of force.

Humanitarian aid occurs when the military uses its assets to distribute critical resources such as water, food, medicine, clothing, and shelter to those in need due to a catastrophic disaster, either from government oppression and conflict or from natural disaster. Additionally, the military supplies trained personnel in areas of search and rescue, medical treatment, and reconstruction. After examining these actions and asking, "Are these methods moral," I answer with a resounding "yes," to which the reader should immediately respond with one question: "why?"

Herein lies the difficulty of analyzing the moral nature of an action: what precisely are the criteria for a good action versus a bad action? After all, there is no way to truly justify one set of rules above another, because each can be shown to be arbitrary. For example, if moral law is grounded in God, this system can be shown to lack foundation or be inconsistent, simply by not believing in God. If moral law is grounded in one's culture, than how can someone reasonably say that one culture is morally superior to another? It is therefore an impossibility to rely on a pre-established set of rules to determine the rightness or wrongness of an action. Rather, I would prefer to appeal to Kant's concept of universal maxims, approaching each action with the following questions:

1) Would this action be the right action for any person in the same situation?
2) Does this action treat other people as an end unto themselves and not solely as a means to an end?
3) Would I want this action to become universal law in guiding others through comparable situations?

To rephrase these maxims in regard to my problem of freedom, I could ask whether or not my action creates an environment that allows others to better exercise their freedoms, or impedes their ability to do so. Applying this logic, I cannot find a convincing argument against providing for peoples' basic needs in times of hardship, making the act of humanitarian assistance a moral good. I would argue that a "survival of the fittest" argument that says the poor and underprivileged should suffer until they learn to help themselves is wrong because it does not treat people as an end unto themselves, as unique individuals with a right to life. It ignores the fact that, if one were in the same situation as those suffering, how one would want help to alleviate his or her suffering and get back on their feet. This argument also ignores these people's inherent right to create meaning, which was stated as an essential part of life. Lastly, would it make sense to have a universal law where those in need would not receive help?

I become alarmed, however, when I begin discussing the military's primary methods of war, military support, and show of force. The methods of war, devoid of motive and very much simplified, take the following form:

Country/party/organization Z would like country/party/organization X to do Y. X does not want to do Y. In response, Z intends to cause enough suffering to X to either force X into doing Y, or leave X with so little resistance Z can implement Y whether X wants it or not.

Notice that by conducting war, one organization (Z in this instance) *intentionally causes*

suffering through the use of extreme violence. Is this method moral in trying to convince X to do Y? Put this question in terms of the above maxims: does violence make for a freer human existence or not? This is not a freer existence for the people of one country over another; this is a freer existence for all of humanity, because everyone, not just one's countrymen, deserves the right to define himself or herself. Therefore, the answer is of course no; it was established in my statement of the problem that widespread intentional suffering (i.e. the goal of war) reduces freedom and is therefore immoral. This conclusion is difficult to accept, not because the answer was elusive, but because the answer is frightening. As a military professional, the answer puts me in an uncomfortable position. I do not want to confront the fact that my actions by nature are wrong. I want to say "but look at the results, look at the motives, can I not reconcile this action..." Telling a lie to save a life may be the moral thing to do, but it does not make the act of lying right. The same goes for violence.

Even actions like military support, which simply involves training, advising, or supplying other forces with the means to carry out the mission of war without directly involving oneself in the conflict, promote violence as a conflict-resolution tool; therefore, it can be concluded that the act of supporting violence is also immoral. Shows of force, on the other hand, are trickier (while I would like to avoid discussions of intent in this section, I feel I must describe the intent of "shows of force" here to make a point about the method). A show of force is when a nation positions its military forces in a way that threatens war, but with the intent to avoid actual conflict. The paradox, of course, lies in the fact that it is meant to avoid war by showing a nation's willingness to engage in war and demonstrate a nation's military might, providing the opposing side a visual reminder to the costs of engaging in war. However, I would like to highlight a critical component of show of force: while its purpose (which is not the concern of this section) is to avoid war, it is still done *with the intent and willingness to conduct war.* If a show of force were done without this intent, it would be a meaningless act, a bluff. The method then is to threaten violence while still displaying the willingness to use it, which has been established as a moral wrong. Moreover, it puts nations in a dangerous position of being on the brink of war, where a misunderstanding combined with jittery commanders could prematurely launch war.

In light of the suffering caused by war, militaries around the world have attempted to create rules in order to wage war morally. This should not be confused with "just war" or *jus ad*

bellum, which is the right of a nation to go to war (i.e. the moral motive for going to war). *Jus in bello*, on the other hand, discusses conduct during war. Through agreements and guidelines such as the Hague Conventions, Geneva Conventions, various United Nations charters, and the US's Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) and Rules of Engagement (ROEs), the international community has attempted to put limits on the destructive aspects of war in order to prevent unnecessary suffering, both to combatants and noncombatants, and facilitate the speedy end to conflict. Such rules include limiting military action to legitimate targets, such as opposing forces and a nation's assets that directly support the war effort, limiting the types of weapons that can be employed, and outlining rules for conduct in dealing with both civilians and military members.

The situation has changed. Again examining the categorical imperatives (and simultaneously accepting the unrealistic scenario that in a war, only those who directly support military action will be targeted, and that those who are serving in these militaries have volunteered, thoroughly assessed the morality of their choice, and understand the possibility of injury and death and inflicting harm on others), it appears as though those engaging in war have drawn the following conclusion: my violent actions are right for those in my position (i.e. other soldiers on both sides of the conflict), I respect my opponent and my comrades and will therefore obey certain restrictions upon my actions (they are ends unto themselves), and I would want my opponents to feel and act the same way toward me (the universal law). This reflection adds a sort of chivalry to war, whose rules and codes of conduct turn it almost into a sport, albeit one in which the stakes are very high. But does the presence of rules and the acceptance of these rules by soldiers make violence moral, if only those who accept that they could be killed or injured and are trying to do the same to me are involved? I would disagree. By invoking the maxims in regard to freedom, violence (even if it is mutual violence) still reduces the potential for a free world. However, as will be shown during the discussion of motives, there is virtue in a sincere effort to reduce the degree of suffering caused by war, even though this seems paradoxical.

Additionally, it is impossible to restrict a war to only those who directly support it, for these individuals will still have families and loved ones who will be affected by the individual's loss or injury. Even if the civilian population is shielded from the violence of war, they will still be impacted by the results of conflict. Furthermore, there lacks a legitimate body to hold nations accountable for breaking the laws of war, and the rules themselves are subject to debate: not all nations recognize the same rules, many are open to interpretation, and military and political

leaders intentionally manipulate the rules to make wartime decisions difficult. Targets are positioned in places or used in ways that force commanders to choose between the tactical and human cost of destroying or not destroying the target, such as a military base positioned next to a hospital or orphanage. Or equipment serves a dual purpose, such as roads that are used to transport both food supplies and military equipment, or communications towers used by both civilian and military channels. Lastly, when one side and not the other strictly follow the laws of war, the side respecting these rules is placed at a significant disadvantage and exposes their soldiers to greater risks than those of the opposing side.

Consequences

A person walks on a train, opens their jacket, and the horrified passengers see that the person has a bomb strapped to their body. As the bomber prepares to detonate, an off-duty police officer pulls out their sidearm and shoots the would-be bomber dead, stopping the detonation and saving the lives of all on the train.

I put myself in a difficult position by claiming that an act of violence, the primary mission of the military, is immoral. But the argument does not end because the act of violence is wrong. As outlined in the requirements of a moral theory, the consequences and intent of an action must also be examined, as method alone is not enough to condemn the entire organization. As shown by the above story, taking into account the consequences of an action complicates the issue. Instead of looking at the rightness or wrongness of the act, consequentialists ask if the ends justify the means. Examining the consequences of action is helpful when an individual finds himself in a position where he must make a choice, even if that choice is to do nothing, and thinking about the strict rightness or wrongness of the act itself cannot solve the issue. For example, say our off-duty police officer says to herself, "I cannot reach the bomber in time to wrestle the detonator from their hands, and while I could talk to them and ask them to reconsider, they seem pretty committed. But the act of violence is wrong, so I will not use my sidearm to stop them." With that, the bomb detonates, and the train passengers die. Are the deaths of the passengers worth upholding the maxim of violence is wrong? Or is there more good done by saving the lives of many by taking one, therefore making violence the moral choice even though the act is wrong (especially when that life would be taken through suicide anyway)? Can

consequentialism be used to supplement deontology, allowing people the ability to temporarily surpass the morality of the act itself to focus instead on the moral worth of the results? Can a person make a moral choice even when their options all appear to be immoral acts?

Consider another story: the year is 1943, and a person is harboring Jewish refugees in a French farmhouse in the countryside. The Nazis know there is a Jewish family being hidden in the area, and approach the farmhouse. They ask the owner a direct question: is this family in your house. The owner knows that lying is wrong; they should turn the family in. But the owner also knows that it is wrong to betray those who have put their trust in you and whom you are responsible for protecting; they should not turn the family in. In order to make a decision between which actions to take, the owner must examine the probable consequences of their action. If they tell the truth, the family will be taken away and likely endure a horrible death. If they lie, the family will live. The owner decides the moral act is to lie.

Likewise, can I envision an instance where violence is the moral option, even though the act of violence is wrong? A major criticism of consequentialism is that there are no criteria that the individual can use to establish which result is the more moral result, making my analysis of violence difficult. Oftentimes, "the greatest good for the greatest number" is invoked to quantify the morality of consequence, although this is almost as ambiguous as the purpose of the military discussed earlier. What is considered good for these people: is it pleasure, freedom, money? Which people's "good" is prioritized over others? Is it one's family, countrymen, or all of humanity? More importantly, what cost is willing to be paid for this good?

Consequentialism can claim that an action is moral if the ends justify the means, but does not provide a standard to determine which ends justify certain means. I can never then say, by using consequence as an argument, that violence is justified by a result. Considering the case of the bomber and the officer, consequentialism does little when I consider a situation where stray bullets kill other passengers, or if the bomber uses human shields, requiring the officer to kill other passengers in order to reach the bomber. How many other passengers could die before their deaths no longer justified stopping the bomber and saving others? This theory provides no answers, unless moral issues are addressed in an emotionally detached way. For example, a consequentialists could reduce individuals to numbers: if the bomber would kill 20 people total, and the officer killed 15, even 19 in the process, then the action is justified by the number of people saved.

However, there are two complications with taking a cold approach to moral issues. The first is that, by treating moral action as cause and effect, one must consider how the effects of their actions will affect future events, and the results of those events, etc, etc. Taking the case of the bomber and the officer again, what if the bomber hid behind a doctor who knew the cure to cancer and an activist who would later inspire thousands over generations to moral action? If the officer does not kill either to get to the bomber, then the world would be without either, whereas if the officer killed one, the world would at least have the other. But which one does the officer choose? Which individual would be best for the greater good? How far into the future can a person reasonably be expected to anticipate?

The second complication is that this unfeeling approach does not treat people as an end unto themselves, only as a means to an end. Earlier, respect for others and their right to create meaning was established as a necessary condition for freedom. If this prerequisite is abandoned in order to justify the analytical nature of consequentialism, then the basis of my argument is defeated. If the most moral "end" is a more free condition for humanity, and if people are treated as a means to achieve this end, then consequentialism says that this end (a freer world) will justify the means (using people). However, if it is immoral for people to be used as a means to an end, then the means in this case (using people) cannot justify the end (a freer world) because the means defeat the purpose of the end (by using people, a less-free condition is actually created). Thus, consequentialism fails by itself to provide a rationale for action.

Another criticism of consequentialism is the fact that humans can only guess as to what the results of their actions will be. Once the action occurs and the results fall in place, it is equally impossible to guess as to what would have happened if one chose differently. Moreover, humans can only speculate on the intended (the desired effect) and foreseen (potential side-effect) consequences of their actions, and cannot plan for unintended consequences. Take the story of the young revolutionary from Sartre's *The Wall*, who in a final act of spite to waste his guards' time and possibly escape death, provides the false location of a man they are looking for. They release the revolutionary, who finds out later that the man the guards were searching for changed his hiding place to the place he thought was false, where the guards captured him and brought him to be executed. Again, consider the bomber and the officer. What if the bomb was actually a dud, and never detonated? Or could the bomber lose heart at the last minute? Could the bomber be captured alive then, and his or her leaders taken into custody and future plots halted?

What if, in shooting the bomber, the officer actually detonates the bomb?

Finally, discerning the true results of action is difficult by itself. When more and more people and organizations are added to the mix, more variables are added to the equation and it becomes more and more difficult to pinpoint what action (or combination of actions) caused which result. Again, humans are left to speculate. As applied to the military, can one be sure that the action taken will bring about the intended result? Is it really possible to recognize and prepare for all the foreseen consequences, or will there inevitably be some tragic unintended consequences as in the case of the revolutionary?

Consequentialism has told me that violence, specifically in regards to war, should only be considered in a situation where there are no other "good" options, and the result of not using violence is worse than if violence were used. For example, if a dictator is brutalizing their people and is not responding to peaceful international pressure, what else is there to do? Governments can continue to watch the people be murdered and repressed, or consider military action to overthrow the dictator (of course, other means must be used in conjunction with military action to ensure lasting peace and stability). Does consequentialism provide an individual with the tools needed to make this decision? Not entirely. If the moral result is a freer condition, how can I be certain that violent action will actually bring about this desired state? How will I know whether war will instead limit freedom, thus defeating my desired end? If I elect to engage in war, how do I quantify the success of my end goal without treating people as a means to an end, and how can I be sure that it was violence and not something else that brought about this end? Subsequently, yet another analysis is required to determine the moral worth of the military.

Motives

I find myself in a situation that is so morally complex that simply examining the nature of the act and its potential consequences is not enough to make a moral decision. The methods of the military have been proven immoral, yet remains an option when other means have failed. However, the results of violent action and the morality of the results prove obscure, leading to greater confusion instead of more solutions. Can the military then be justified by its intent? Virtue ethics intends to solve this dilemma by placing an emphasis on the character of an individual rather than the nature of the act or its consequences. This leaves motive, the last aspect of moral behavior, to be scrutinized. Motive is perhaps the hardest aspect of the three to analyze,

because none but the individual committing the act truly knows their intent.

At this point, it should be no surprise that I would define "right motive" in terms of freedom. If an individual acts in a way that at once aims to grant others freedom while respecting the freedoms of others, I would consider this moral intent. I will again look at humanitarian aid, simply because it is the easiest aspect of the military to discuss morally. Humanitarian assistance to those who need was established as a morally right act. While aid may be given to garner favor from another government, put the other country in a state of debt (we helped you, so in the future we expect you to help us), or given out of sympathy, the primary intended result was to improve the conditions of those affected, while the secondary goals depended upon the success of the first. By acting in a way that intends to alleviate suffering and thus allow for more freedom, I would argue that the primary intent is moral.

Modern governments and militaries are increasingly recognizing that war as a conflict-resolution tool is not very profitable, as the loss of lives and equipment generally do not outweigh the benefits of the intended goals. Moreover, the rising complexity of modern war merges military and political objectives, with strict military action rarely achieving its desired effects. However, war is reciprocal; it can only happen when one side chooses to attack and another to resist in kind. Violence and war thus continue to be a very real problem. As such, violence is more complicated, as even my definition of moral intent becomes convoluted by previous conclusions. Consequentialism illustrated the impossibility of determining the result of an action before (and sometimes after) it is executed, making it an arbitrary motive to intend to bring about more freedom through an act of war. My analysis of method showed that violence does not respect others as a means unto themselves, but consequentialism demonstrated how violence to some could in fact be the necessary action if one is to respect the freedoms of many more. Can intent be moral and thus justify behavior if it is impossible to know the outcome of a wrong action, such as war? The following criteria, I feel, will allow a person to determine if their motive in the context of war is morally right:

- Just cause
- Right consequence
- Conduct in war
- Last resort
- Proportionality
- Probability of success

As evidenced below, moral intent demands a significant moral maturity on the part of the moral agent, requiring constant reflection and honest analysis of the options available. The person could not have tried to justify their intent to himself or herself (essentially lying to themselves to make them feel better), or conduct themselves in a way they knew was morally wrong due to convenience.

Just cause ensures the reason for going to war is right (*jus ad bellum*). Just cause attempts to create a scenario where some form of intervention is not only necessary (nonviolent or otherwise), but that if nonviolence fails, the cause is still important enough to kill and die for. Allow me to create yet another set of criteria to outline when intervention is necessary. If freedom is a necessary condition for an individual to define himself or herself and thus create meaning and validate their existence, then I believe that intervention is necessary if this condition of freedom is being forcibly restricted (note the difference: if individuals choose to live in a restricted state, that is their prerogative; they made the choice freely. It is when these restrictions are unwillingly imposed that there is an issue). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that, for a war to be just, "the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain." As I mentioned, life cannot be validated without freedom; if humans are in any way coerced, their lives are imperfect. There is no other condition as critical to existence as freedom; therefore, no cause is worth more. This is not freedom for some over others, either. This would be inconsistent with the claims of freedom and the moral issues addressed above. Intervention therefore is aimed at bringing all of humanity closer to freedom, and this freedom is a cause justifying violence.

Right consequence is the hope that one's actions bring about the intended consequences while anticipating and avoiding negative side effects. The consequence one is trying to bring about must be moral, i.e. the result of greater freedom for all (even the aggressor). This could be a lasting peace, equality, etc. Additionally, individuals can use history to make a guesstimate on what the consequences will be, which requires a mature and unbiased knowledge of history.

Related to right consequence is right conduct in war, or *jus in bello*, which examines the way in which military action is conducted and combines it with the consequences of these actions. Take two instances of aerial bombing. In the first case, the pilot bombs a munitions factory with the intent to deprive the enemy of weapons and end the war, but in the process civilians at the factory are killed. In the second case, the pilot bombs the civilian population in

order to end the war. In each instance, the intent is the same (to end the war) as well as the consequence (civilians die). However, one must examine closely in these instances the intended consequence and anticipated side effects. In the first case, the intended consequence was to end the war by depriving soldiers of weapons, but a side effect of the action was that civilians died. Here, the target was directly supporting the war. In the second case, the intended consequence was to end the war by killing civilians. These are not legitimate military targets; they do not support the war effort, and did not choose to be involved in a war (instead, war has been brought to them). If one is expected to conduct themselves in a way that respects the freedoms of others, even in war, then it must be resolved that the way in which a person conducts themselves in war ought to be moral.

One is also only justified in going to war if every nonviolent solution has been tried. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a last resort is considered when "all other means of putting an end to war must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective." Too often, nations engage in violent struggle when other means are still available. Remember, it was mentioned above that war is not one-sided; it requires both sides to participate (if only one side is inflicting violence, it is not a war, but still an immoral act limiting freedom). Both sides then should continue to hold out for a nonviolent resolution to the conflict. However, if the conflict descends into war, it is imperative that the diplomatic means used earlier be kept open and continued throughout the conflict in order to keep more options open for ending the conflict. War should be used only because these methods have tried and failed, and other nations cannot bear to witness the continued suffering. Thus, violence is applied in concert with nonviolent methods with the hope that the suffering may stop and a lasting resolution created.

This is particularly relevant to conflicts where there is some type of ethnic tension. While underlying motives naturally lead to this conflict (such as the social or economic power of one group over another, disputes over resources, etc), by framing the struggle as ethnic discord, one side is able to dehumanize the other, often leading to unimaginable atrocities. The oppressors therefore do not see their acts as immoral, because they are not committed against other human beings. This condition worsens when the oppressed represent a minority with little to no economic or moral power to exert over their subjugators. If the rest of the world responds and nonviolent means fail to reorient the oppressor's moral compass, there remain two options. The first is to continue applying the same nonviolent means, and hope that they 1) need time to work

effectively and 2) work in time before the tormented population suffers irreparable damage. The second option is to use militaries to immediately stop the violence, and use the pause in conflict to develop a peaceful resolution. This is only an intended consequence of military action, with the results of becoming involved largely unknown.

The last two criteria, proportionality and probability of success, are related to one another. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes proportionality that "the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated." This essentially means that the effects of war cannot be greater than the reason for going to war, i.e. we cannot create a worse condition by war than what previously existed. Probability of success likewise states that if one side has no chance of success, then there is no point of engaging in destructive conflict. If the intended result is in vain, then why cause even the enemy to suffer? This useless destruction creates a condition worse than when the war originally began, and to no lasting effect.

The ideas in this section are based on the following:
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Is the Military Moral?

Presented with the above evidence, I return to my original question: is the military a moral institution? My answer is that it can be. The military cannot be separated from the political organization it is attached to. The US military serves a function as a part of the US government, which itself is a part of this thing that calls itself a nation, the United States of America. The US military is unique because of its strict emphasis on civilian control. The organization's leadership and direction come from the executive branch, who in turn is elected by the people, and must answer to Congress, who is also elected by the people. As such, the military cannot be made perfect by itself. If change is to be made, then the entire system must change its goals, the way it thinks, and the way it acts.

"If we don't end war, war will end us." - *H.G. Wells* War is not sustainable, nor is it any nation's ideal resolution to conflict. This chilling quote illustrates the need to change our nation's attitude and willingness to engage in war. As our weapons become ever more separated from the actual conflict (through missiles, bombs, remotely piloted aircraft, etc), and as our leaders increasingly do not come from a military background, a disconnect develops between military values and the hardships of war, and the perceived benefits of a short-term solution, resulting in a greater willingness to use the military. If our leaders become detached from the human cost of war, I fear that war will be made more appealing.

The first step in making this change is for those in power in the US (not just politicians) to seriously reconsider how the US military is used. This dialogue can be initiated by those in the military, who can take a firm stance on when and what kind of military action is morally acceptable, and placing pressure on their civilian leaders to recognize this stance and adhere to it. Using this as a starting point, the nation can begin self-examination of its goals and motivations, and reassess how it goes about accomplishing them. Herein lies the problem: the government should be committed to upholding values, not imposing its economic will on others. While the economy is a part of national interest, using the military in this way is counterproductive to our long-term interests and morally wrong. The nation will be better off if other methods are found. Though not as profitable in the short-term, in the long-term ties will be strengthened and problems can be solved, not suppressed only to emerge in a worse form at a later time.

      As a young military officer, this leaves me with an interesting conclusion along with my new moral duties. In math and science, there are general rules everyone agrees upon. Mathematicians do not argue whether 2+2=4 or not: it is an accepted fact and arguments can be built upon these pre-established facts. This is not so in philosophy; it is much more subjective. Philosophers argue these basic facts and therefore philosophy can only propose methods. Because there are no established "facts" in philosophy, I cannot reasonably say, "X is right, Y is wrong." Ultimately, I am left with the ambiguity of my moral choice. The propositions and conclusions I have drawn create a state of permanent tension between my behavior and how it compares to the end goal of freedom. All a person of action can and must do is use these propositions to help determine under what circumstances their actions are valid. Therefore, the lessons to take away are that I have established a framework from whence I can act (exist) and through a continued assessment and reassessment of my action, their consequences, and my intent, I can continue my moral analysis and continue to define my meaning. Ultimately, I am responsible for the choices I make, and my moral conduct is limited only by the extent of my imagination.