



Military Ethics: Values or Virtues? Regional or Universal?

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Introduction

There seems to be a core set of 'values' that western armies use in their published *Military Values and Standards* like 'loyalty', 'integrity', and 'courage', but do these values mean the same thing for each country? Are they substantially equivalent in some way? Are they synonymous, merely similar, or unrelated in meaning? While western armies might understand loyalty in the same way, would North Korean soldiers understand loyalty in the same way as British soldiers? Would ISIS fighters understand loyalty in the same way as US soldiers? Did Kamikaze suicide bombers understand loyalty and courage the same way as a US soldier jumping on a grenade to save the lives of her squad?

According to Virtue Ethicists and Neo-Aristotelians, words like 'loyalty', 'integrity', and 'courage', are moral virtues. They argue that the moral virtues contribute toward moral excellence. Are western armies striving for moral excellence? If so, why do western armies call them values and not virtues? The Australian, British, Canadian, Norwegian, Swiss and US Armed Forces all refer to their ethical codes as values and not virtues. Is virtue a universalized value? Value is a descriptive term. It is used to describe something a person or organization finds valuable. This could be good or bad.

Even Kim Jung Un, Bashar al-Assad, and Vladimir Putin 'value' the notions of 'loyalty' and 'courage' in their militaries. Additionally, ISIS, the Taliban, and al-Qaeda, are adhering to a set of values (including 'loyalty' and 'courage') based on Sharia Islamic law. Maybe it is the case that western armies only 'value' the ideas of 'loyalty', 'integrity', and 'courage'. If so, they may not be too much different from totalitarian regimes like China, Iran, Syria, and North Korea, and terroristic state and non-state actors like the Taliban and ISIS.

Overall, this paper highlights the similarities and differences in the military values of armies around the world, whether they are values or virtues, and if they are regional or universal. I address these issues in the following sections of this paper.

More specifically, in section two I discuss and describe a variety of Western armies and their core values and standards, most of which, are published in pamphlets, brochures, posters, and websites. In section three, I lay out the case that what these Western armies are calling 'values' are actually 'virtues' in the Neo-Aristotelian sense and should call them such. In section four of the paper I argue that some totalitarian regimes and non-state actors are correct in adopting 'values' even though the language used would cause most people to call them virtues. Finally, in the conclusion, I argue that despite the regional feel to armies using values/virtues as a guiding force in their profession or not using them, virtuous soldiers and armies are universal.

Western armies' core 'values'

Many western armies have adopted a set of values and/or virtues they want their soldiers to inculcate, embrace, and emulate. Countries like Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Norway, Switzerland and the United States, have similar, albeit different codes to live by. The Australian Armed Forces have the *Australian Military Values*. Canada has the *Canadian Armed Forces Code of Values and Ethics*. The British Army calls them the *Values and Standards of the British Army*. The Norwegian Armed Forces have the *Military Values and Standards*. The Swiss Military have the *Military Core Values*. Finally, the US Army calls their code the *Seven Army Values*. Figure 1 shows a comparison of the different values laid out by the various armed forces of Western nations. One thing to point out is that there are some 'values' that most Western armies share like 'respect', 'loyalty' and 'courage' and there are some that only appear in one or two of the various Western national armies like 'excellence' and 'stewardship'.

US Army 7 Army Values	British Army Values & Standards	Canadian Armed Forces Code of Values & Ethics	Australia Army Values	Norwegian Armed Forces Values & Standards	Swiss Military Core Values
Loyalty	Loyalty	Loyalty			Loyalty
Duty		Duty			
Respect	Respect for Others	*Respect dignity of all persons	Respect	Respect	
Selfless Service	Selfless Commitment	*Serve Canada before self			
Honor		Honour			
Integrity	Integrity	Integrity			Honesty
Personal Courage	Courage	Courage	Courage	Courage	
	Discipline	Discipline			Discipline
		Responsibility		Responsibility	Responsibility
		Excellence			Act in exemplary way
		Teamwork	Teamwork		
		Stewardship			
			Initiative		
					Self-Reliance
					Consistency
		* indicates Ethical Principles			Accuracy
		Non * indicates Values			

1. (See Notes)

Figure 1

Canada's published approach to ethics is interesting. While they do have a *Code of Values and Ethics*, they also have published the *Ethical Principles of the Department of National Defence and Canadian Forces* that complement their *Code of Values*. In the Canadian Armed Forces column of Figure 1, in addition to their values, are the Canadian Armed Forces Ethical Principles. These two ethical principles are distinct and separate from their *Code of Values and Ethics* but bolster and reinforce the *Code of Values and Ethics*. The two ethical principles are 'respect the dignity of all persons' and 'serve Canada before self'. In Figure 1, the two ethical principles are notated with a red asterisk.

There are other Neo-Aristotelian words and ideas that the Western armies embrace. For instance, the United States has the *Warrior Ethos* and the Canadian Armed Forces has the *Canadian Military Ethos*.

While *ethos* is the root of our word ethics, it is more accurately translated as 'character'. Interestingly, in addition to having a set of military values to live by, Canada and the US stress the importance of being an officer and soldier of character which further supports a Neo-Aristotelian underpinning in the way these militaries approach ethics.

One consistent 'value' across the six Western armies, is courage. The only nation that does not state the 'value' of courage in their code of values is the Swiss Army. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 3, Aristotle states the importance of Courage as a moral virtue. Courage is important as it is the just right amount of a character trait between rashness and cowardice (Aristotle, 1980). It is easy to see why this virtue would be consistent across Western armies. Militaries do not want their officers and non-commissioned officers rashly going into battle without conscientiously and earnestly thinking through the situation before taking their soldiers into harm's way. Similarly, a military does not want a leader who is cowardly, refusing to go into battle, but sends his or her troops into harm's way in the absence of leadership.

The case for virtues over values

Value is a descriptive term and not the normative or proscriptive term that the western armed forces are seemingly using it as. It is used to describe something a person or organization finds valuable. This could be good or bad. As a person or organization, I could value treating people with human dignity or I could value ethnic cleansing as a way to purify my 'people'. In each example, I find value and pleasure in either being kind to or killing people that do not share my ethnic makeup, but it only seems like one of these actions is virtuous.

Virtue, according to Aristotle is moral excellence. It is something quite different than vice and by its very nature, cannot be bad. As mentioned with the virtue of courage, Aristotle defines moral virtue as a disposition to behave in the right manner and as a mean between extremes of deficiency and excess, which are vices. This is what Neo-Aristotelians call the *Doctrine of the Mean* (Annas, 2011; Hursthouse, 1999; MacIntyre, 1981).

We learn moral virtue primarily through habit and practice rather than through reasoning and instruction (Annas, 2011; Hursthouse, 1999; MacIntyre, 1981; Olsthoorn, 2011). Aristotle points out that virtues are acquired and developed through performing virtuous acts (Annas, 2011; Hursthouse, 1999; MacIntyre, 1981; Olsthoorn, 2011). You could see how loyalty, integrity, and courage would contribute to moral excellence. Can these 'virtues' be in fact values that are used toward bad? The answer is no. Aristotle insists that a virtue cannot serve an unethical end. The virtue must be motivated by and in pursuit of an honorable goal. This becomes an interesting point when thinking about things like loyalty, duty, and courage.

While I do believe that the leaders of Western armies want their soldiers and officers to fulfill their duty to the oath of their constitution (not a human), be loyal to the ideals of their state (like freedom and equality), and be both physically and morally courageous, I do not believe that is the same loyalty, duty, and courage for totalitarian regimes. You must be loyal to the supreme leader, fulfill your duty to serve the desires of the supreme leader, and physical courage is a must, but moral courage is discouraged.

Totalitarian leaders would insist their soldiers do what they are told and following those desires and commands would be 'right' courage.

We do have examples of soldiers showing emotion in battle, even anger. Does this mean the soldiers are not being virtuous, but in fact being vicious? As I mentioned above, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines moral virtue as a disposition to behave in the right manner and as a mean between extremes of deficiency and excess, which are vices. For Aristotle, having these feelings at the right time, on the right occasion, towards the right people, with the right aim and in the right way, is in fact the mean (Annas, 2011; Aristotle, 2010; Hursthouse, 1999; MacIntyre, 1981). Since the virtue is the mean, it could be that the right way to feel on occasion might be anger or indignation. If the anger is toward an individual's or nation's inhuman treatment of other nations, or even of its own citizens, it is the mean between tolerance/mild annoyance and blind anger/hatred. Righteous indignation, or anger, would be displaying the appropriate amount (the mean) of anger (Annas 1993).

In the British, Canadian, Swiss, and US armies, you swear an oath to the constitution and the ideals for which the constitution stands. That is where your loyalty comes in. This virtue of loyalty is to the constitution and ideals of freedom, elemental equality, human rights, and human dignity. I also believe that many western soldiers believe they should be loyal to their brothers and sisters in arms. I would argue that this sense of loyalty is virtuous. We could not be loyal to the ideals of freedom, elemental equality, human rights, and human dignity and not be loyal to those fighting alongside us in pursuit of these virtuous and honorable goals. Human Dignity is something consistently reinforced throughout Western armies. That is the main component of the German Bundeswehr's (German Army) key doctrine of 'Innere Führung' or 'leadership development and civic education' (Breuer). Canada's publication of Duty with Honour, a publication explaining the Canadian Armed Forces Code of Values and Ethics insists that Canadian soldiers must perform duty with humanity, specifically stating respect the dignity of all persons. In developing responsible leaders at the Swiss Military Academy, one of the four elements the Swiss Army focuses on with their future officers is respecting the fundamental values of human dignity (Stouffer and Fischer, 2010). Even General Petraeus, Commander Multi-National Forces-Iraq(MNFI), mentioned the importance of human dignity in his letter to the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines fighting in Iraq in May 2007 (Petraeus, 2007; Wood, 2007). In his letter he wrote:

Our *values* and the laws governing warfare teach us to *respect human dignity*, maintain our *integrity*, and *do what is right*. *Adherence to our values* distinguishes us from our enemy. This fight depends on securing the population, which must understand that we – not our enemies – *occupy the moral high ground*. This strategy has shown results in recent months [emphasis added] (Petraeus, 2007; Wood, 2007).

When 'virtues' are values

It might be the case that totalitarian regimes and non-state actors are correct in adopting 'values' even though the language they use are what most Neo-Aristotelians call virtues. We know they must value things like courage in battle, loyalty to the state (or supreme leader), and selfless service to the state or leader.

Not all armies embrace military values or virtues, but should they? Totalitarian regimes like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabi, The Islamic Republic of Iran, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the People’s Republic of China and the Syrian Arab Republic do not publish a set of core values or virtues². But why is that? They seem to be operating under the idea of protecting what they value, primarily their way of life and preservation of their state.

Even terroristic military organizations and non-state actors such as the Islamic State (also known as ISIS, ISIL, or Daesh), the Taliban, and al-Qaeda, at least ostensibly, are adhering to a set of values based on Sharia Islamic law but are these values just that, values and not virtues?

Armies should adopt virtues and not values. Even Kim Jong-un, Bashar al-Assad, and Vladimir Putin “value” certain things in their military. The question is, are the things they value virtuous behavior? Are they moral exemplars?

There seem to be a core set of virtues that the western armies use in their military values and standards like loyalty, integrity, and courage, but do these virtues mean the same thing for each country? Are they substantially equivalent in some way? While the western armies might understand loyalty in the same way, would North Korean soldiers understand loyalty in the same way as the British soldiers? Would ISIS fighters understand loyalty in the same way as US soldiers?

As I mentioned in the previous section of the paper, human dignity is something consistently reinforced throughout Western armies. Clearly dictators like Kim Jong-un, Vladimir Putin, and Bashar al-Assad have all violated the human dignity of their own people.

Take the Bashar al-Assad regime of Syria. Assad ordered his soldiers to use chemical weapons on numerous occasions against his own people. According to the UN organization for the prohibition of chemical weapons (OPCW), the Assad regime used sarin gas on numerous occasions. The most deadly and indiscriminate account of the Assad regime using the deadly nerve agent was in a rocket attack in April 2017 which killed more than 70 civilians in the small town of Khan Sheikhun (BBC, 2017; Guardian, 2017a; Guardian, 2017b). To make matters worse, Russia has used its veto power on the UN security council 12 times to block actions against its ally Syria. Russian President Putin is a supporter of keeping the Assad regime in power in Syria. As such, Russia has blocked a dozen UN proposals related to the Assad regime and the chemical attacks in Syria. It’s gone from vetoing to stop investigations into the sarin attacks (Guardian, 2017a), to vetoing a UN resolution proposed by the US, UK and France that would have imposed sanctions on Syria after a chemical weapons attack on the town of Khan Shaykhun in June 2017 (BBC, 2017). Additionally, on 10 April of this year, Russia used their veto power to block a resolution to identify who was responsible for a chemical weapons attack in the Syrian city of Douma, just Northeast of Damascus (BBC). Whatever reason Putin has for keeping the Assad regime in power, by doing so, he is allowing Assad to harm and kill his own citizens that are against him. Putin is preventing the virtue of justice.

While the intended target might have been the rebels fighting against his regime, Assad also intended to target, and attack unarmed Syrian civilians in order to terrorize them into submission. Soldiers following Assad’s orders to use internationally banned weapons could be seen as loyal to Assad, but by committing attacks that are means mala in se, because the end or goal is unethical, it is not possible for

their act of being loyal to Assad's order to be virtuous. In fact, it would seem this act of 'loyalty' would be a vicious one. An act that Assad would value. Further, the soldiers committing these acts of misplaced loyalty would also be deficient in moral courage. Two vices that the Assad regime would value.

Could the difference in courage between Western armies and totalitarian regimes be the difference between physical courage and moral courage? Western armies, like those listed on figure 1, do hope that the 'values' they promote become learned and part of their character. The Western armies do want their soldiers and officers to have the moral courage to question, and even stop senior military leaders from vicious and immoral acts. Just as they would want their soldiers and officers to develop physical courage in battle. Dictators and leaders of totalitarian regimes would not tolerate the insubordination of moral courage of their soldiers. You must be loyal (blindly so) to the supreme leader. You must never question their actions.

Conclusion: Values or virtues? Regional or universal?

Because a world leader, nation-state, or non-state actor is vicious, does not mean that virtues are not universal. Nor does this support the notion of ethical or cultural relativism. While the countries compared in this paper seem to be regional, it's not that countries from the West embrace a set of virtues and others do not, it is more likely that it is the type of government, that is the difference. It appears to be democratically elected countries whose armies embrace a list of virtues. Take for instance the Singapore Armed Forces. Singapore is a parliamentary republic and their army has a Code of Conduct that lists Loyalty, Duty, Respect, and Honor (Lew, 201). It is also interesting to point out that Singapore also refers to these virtues as values.

While totalitarian leaders and regimes like Kim Jong-un, Vladimir Putin, and Bashar al-Assad 'value' the notions of 'loyalty' and 'courage' in their militaries, they do so because they find these traits valuable. However, because these characteristics are not motivated by and in pursuit of an honorable goal, they are not virtues. They are merely values because a virtue cannot serve an unethical end. This is distinguished between most Western armies who do embrace these virtues through habit and practice. Further, because some nations' militaries choose to value characteristics that promote unethical ends and other nations' militaries choose to embrace virtues does not mean that virtues are regional. Virtues are universal even if a nation's army does not adopt or embrace them.

Notes

1. I interviewed, individually, French Army Second Lieutenant Clément Lefèvre, Germany Army Sergeant Major Stephan Engel, and Germany Army Lieutenant Colonel Michael Breuer about French and German published military values or virtues. Lieutenant Lefèvre stated that the French Army does not have a published set of 'values' as do other Western armies as seen in figure 1. In fact, the French Army focuses on the values of the French Republic. The notion of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* (liberty, equality, fraternity) is not only the national motto adopted by

the Third French Republic but was also written into the French Constitution in 1958. Lieutenant Lefèvre pointed out that the French Army values hierarchical command, honour, humility and heroism. The French Army believes that exemplary leadership will inspire in soldiers the very values they defend. While the French Army clearly values liberty, equality, and fraternity, I believe it is possible to see providing freedom, equality, and treating people like 'family' is virtuous behaviour.

While the German Army does not have a published list of values that they adhere to, they do have a key doctrine that focuses on human dignity and interaction with civilians which does seem to incorporate virtuous behavior as it relates to honour, kindness, and respect. Sergeant Major Engel and Lieutenant Colonel Michael Breuer stated that the German Bundeswehr's (German Army) key doctrine is called 'Innere Führung' or 'leadership development and civic education', which provides the guidelines for their core values and virtues as soldiers and leaders. The underlying philosophy of Innere Führung is the importance of civil-military relations theory and the importance of values as it relates to the Bundeswehr's distinguishing feature of the 'citizen in uniform'. The Innere Führung stresses the importance of protecting and honouring human dignity and human dignity can never be dishonored. Innere Führung is imbued in all areas of military life, especially in the soldiers' interaction with civilians.

The Dutch Military does not have a published set of values or virtues, but they do have a published code of conduct that does speak to virtues and virtuous behavior. Some of the virtues that the Dutch Military Code of Conduct includes are comradery, responsibility, integrity, and respect.

2. I do not know for a fact that the listed totalitarian regimes do not embrace a core set of values. In my research I could not find a published account of virtues or standards for any of the above states or their current regimes, while the Western armies publish their values and virtues across a variety of platforms and are easily located in a variety of places. Further, totalitarian regimes are not known to for their virtuous behavior.

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