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Business Ethics and Military Ethics:

A Study in Comparative Applied Ethics

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Abstract

In the past three decades, philosophers have delved into applied ethics, pursuing a surprisingly wide range of practically oriented normative questions, and a number of fields of applied ethical research and teaching are flourishing. There have, however, been few comparative studies of different fields in applied ethics, but such studies can, I believe, teach us something. Accordingly, this essay compares and contrasts business ethics and military ethics as distinct disciplinary or sub-disciplinary areas. The two subjects might appear to be worlds apart. Yet there are not only differences, but also intriguing similarities between them. Specifically, I discuss the skepticism that often greets the idea of both business ethics and military ethics, compare the emergence of the two as academic fields, and examine some pedagogical issues they face. I then try to put some central questions in both fields in fresh light by comparing and contrasting the goals and responsibilities of corporations and their managers, on one hand, and of the military and its officers, on the other.

Keywords: military ethics, business ethics, managerial responsibility, military officers, teaching

In the past three decades, philosophers have delved into applied ethics, pursuing a surprisingly wide range of practically oriented normative questions, and a number of fields of applied ethical research and teaching are flourishing. There have, however, been few comparative studies of different fields in applied ethics,[1] but such studies can, I believe, teach us something. Accordingly, this essay compares and contrasts business ethics and military ethics as distinct disciplinary or sub-disciplinary areas.[2] The two subjects might appear to be worlds apart. Yet there are not only differences, but also intriguing similarities between them. Specifically, I discuss the skepticism that often greets the idea of both business ethics and military ethics, compare the emergence of the two as academic fields, and examine some pedagogical issues they face. I then try to put some central questions in both fields in fresh light by comparing and contrasting the goals and responsibilities of corporations and their managers, on one hand, and of the military and its officers, on the other.

1 On managerial versus engineering ethics, see Charles E. Harris, Jr., Michael S. Pritchard, and Michael J. Rabins, *Engineering Ethics: Cases and Concepts*, 4th ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2009), pp. 172-175, and the works they cite.

2 The reflections that follow were stimulated by an academic year that I, a long-time teacher of business ethics, recently spent at the U. S. Naval Academy. I thank the Academy's Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale Center for Ethical Leadership for its financial support and my colleagues at the Center for many valuable and stimulating conversations.

Is Ethics Even Possible In These Areas?

As anyone who teaches or writes on either business ethics or military ethics knows, laypeople tend to view these subjects with skepticism or disbelief. They joke that the concept (business ethics/military ethics) is oxymoronic or that business (the military) certainly needs more ethics. Naturally, those who work in these

fields regard these comments as ill-informed and, in a social context, simply shrug off them off with a smile. But because analogous comments are rarely made to someone who teaches medical ethics, say, or environmental ethics, it may be worth beginning with the layperson's underlying question, Is ethics even possible in these areas?

But let's turn this question around: Why might one think that it was not possible? To begin with business, there is a widespread perception, at least regarding large enterprises, that business is a totally self-seeking, amoral activity, driven only by a concern for profit and lacking any intrinsic regard for employees, customers, suppliers, or society at large. Popular American novels and films frequently depict business leaders and the corporations they direct as villains—ruthless, greedy, and untroubled by ordinary moral scruples—while the daily news seems filled with stories of corrupt business conduct. It must be granted that such people and such companies exist, but the question is whether they represent the true, inescapable nature of business.

The problem with thinking that they do, with thinking that business is at its core a totally amoral activity, is that this view ignores the extent to which business activity presupposes adherence to certain elementary moral standards. Without widespread, if perhaps unconscious, compliance with certain norms, without some degree of trust, business could barely function.[3] It would certainly fail to be very efficient or effective at providing society with the goods and services it needs or wants. Indeed, without some sense of ethics, business would descend into gangsterism. Those businesspersons who act unscrupulously attempt to take advantage of the ethical restraint and rule adherence of others, just as liars try to exploit the fact that communications are generally assumed to be truthful. These points may be simple, but they suffice to show that one cannot plausibly maintain that ethics and business have nothing to do with each other. This conclusion tallies with commonsense morality, which does not hesitate to identify and criticize some business conduct as wrongful—for example, when a company avoids paying vendors the money it owes them, misleads its stockholders about its financial condition, fails to provide customers with the goods or services they were led to believe they would receive, or loots the pension fund of its employees.

If skepticism about business ethics arises from business appearing to be a completely self-serving and egoistical enterprise, skepticism about military ethics arises because of the violence inherent in combat and the deadly, destructive, and inhumane nature of war itself. How can there be anything ethical about it? As with ethics in business, though, further reflection suggests that morality can and does apply to war.

First, almost every culture has thought that under some circumstances waging war would be, not merely imprudent, but wrong or irreligious. And the commonsense morality of most people today condemns some wars, such as those of national aggrandizement, as wicked and immoral while deeming others, such as wars of national defense, to be morally permissible or at least necessary evils. Second, throughout history the warriors of many, perhaps most, cultures have recognized certain restrictions on their conduct: Certain weapons, certain tactics, or certain ways of fighting have been considered dishonorable or even taboo.[4] This, too, tallies with commonsense morality, which unambiguously repudiates certain ways of fighting, for example, the systematic use of rape as a terroristic military tactic. However, if these two points are correct, then one can quite sensibly ask, as military ethics does, (1) when if ever is it morally permissible to wage war and (2) if and when wars do break out, how is one permitted to fight them?

So ethical analysis and argument seem perfectly applicable to both business and war. But this fact by itself does not explain why business ethics and military ethics have become recognized and, indeed, flourishing fields of academic endeavor. Teaching and university life raise interesting ethical issues, and some people have written insightfully about these important matters,[5] but academic ethics is not, or not yet anyway, a recognized academic field with courses in the subject, textbooks, journals, and a community of researchers. Let's look, then, at the origins of business ethics and military ethics as academic subjects, their institutional contexts, and the nature and purpose of ethics education in schools of business, on the one hand, and military service academies, on the other.

3 Amartya Sen, "Does Business Ethics Make Economic Sense?," *Business Ethics Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 1 (January 1993): 45-54.

Business Ethics and Military Ethics as Academic Subjects

Although the occasional course on ethics in business was offered before 1960, the number of undergraduate courses on business ethics exploded in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[6] These days such courses are commonplace,

4 For two examples, see Victor David Hanson, *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), and David Wetham, *Just Wars and Moral Victories: Surprise, Deception, and the Normative Framework of European War in the Later Middle Ages* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009).

5 For example, Steven M. Cahn, *Saints and Scamps: Ethics in Academia*, rev. ed. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011).

6 Richard T. De George, "The Status of Business Ethics:

and most state and large private universities not only offer them, but also see such courses as an important and necessary component of the university curriculum. Furthermore, any self-respecting business school must be seen to provide its students with some sort of ethical instruction, and undergraduate business majors are frequently required to take a separate course on business ethics, often taught by instructors from the philosophy department.

Once universities began offering business ethics courses, then textbooks soon appeared, along with academic conferences, professional societies, and specialized journals. This reversed the more common academic pattern. Usually, a new area of scholarly study is first explored in professional articles and books and at conferences of specialists and is then further institutionalized as journals devoted to the field begin to appear, before the subject begins trickling into the undergraduate curriculum. In the case of business ethics, however, the demand for it as a subject of instruction came first. As this demand grew, and as more and more people found themselves teaching courses on business ethics, many of them became intellectually engaged by this new subject and began writing on the issues they were teaching, organizing scholarly conferences, or founding journals for publishing work in business ethics.

So business ethics as a specialized academic subject was a spin-off of the teaching of business ethics. But whence came the demand for university instruction in business ethics in the first place? In the United States, that demand emerged during a period of political turmoil and business scandal—think of Watergate or the revelations of overseas bribery by American firms—and of widespread disillusionment with the nation's political and business elite. The image of big business, in particular, was tarnished, and its moral legitimacy called into question. As a result, in the universities and in some business quarters, the need was felt to counteract immoral or harmful business behavior by inculcating a greater sense of ethical responsibility among America's future business leaders, and the teaching of business ethics to undergraduates was seen as one very important way to do this. Today it is taken for granted that the business curriculum must include ethics education.[7]

Military ethics offers some interesting contrasts and comparisons. For philosophers and political theorists, Michael Walzer's 1977 book, *Just and Unjust Wars*,[8] opened up an important realm of moral reflection that professional, analytically trained philosophers had largely ignored. This came at a time when Anglo-American moral philosophy had just shaken off its almost total preoccupation with metaethics. Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*[9] had recently put beyond doubt the importance and viability of substantive normative theorizing, and a younger generation of analytically oriented philosophers was keen to examine socially salient moral and political issues, such as abortion, civil disobedience, and affirmative action. In this environment it was natural that a number of them, stimulated by Walzer, would take up some of the many moral questions raised by war. For a long time this was a relatively small current, but political events of the past dozen or so years have increased dramatically the number of publications on ethical issues related to war.

The best of this work is quite good, indeed, and of fairly broad intellectual appeal because it connects to basic questions in moral and political philosophy.[10] Indeed, it is likely to have an impact on those broader fields that goes well beyond questions of war. By contrast, the leading work in business ethics, for example, on the topic of corporate social responsibility, say, or on whistle-blowing or manipulative advertising has—rightly or wrongly—not yet been seen by other philosophers as connecting in important or stimulating ways to central issues in moral or political philosophy more generally. This work, despite its importance within business ethics, seems to have had little impact on those broader fields and is largely restricted to business ethics journals. For example, if one scans the prestigious journal *Ethics* over the past two or three decades, one can find much that could qualify as military ethics but little that could be labeled business ethics.

Because work on ethical issues in war has had more outlets, there has been less demand for specialized journals to provide a platform for it than has been the case with business ethics. The demand has also been less because far fewer people teach military ethics and because most of those who do teach the subject do so at military academies, where the imperative to publish has, until relatively recently, been less strong. Still, as the service academies have been hiring civilian philosophers or training military officers to teach ethics and, in particular, military ethics, a small but vigorous philosophical community has emerged, complete with its own professional organizations[11] and conferences and its own journal, the *Journal of Military Ethics*, now ten years old. This, in turn, has increased the production of research on more specialized or applied topics in military ethics, for example, on the use of drones, on aspects of command responsibility, or on the subordination of the military to civilian leadership—research that is often carried out at a lower-level of abstraction than one finds in mainstream philosophy journals.

Although comparatively modest in size, the military ethics community is, proportionally speaking, more international in character than is the business ethics community because of the links between faculty teaching ethics at American military academies and their counterparts in other western countries. Unsurprisingly, both the military ethics and the business ethics communities have links with practitioners in their fields, that is, with business people and military personnel. That this should be so is obvious for those teaching in military academies. By contrast, in my experience, philosophers who teach business ethics or even write on topics in business ethics seldom have much business experience or much contact with business leaders. However, many non-philosophers working in business schools also teach business ethics or at least take an interest in it, and they do tend to have links with people in business, including business leaders who care about social responsibility and ethics in business.

But to return to the emergence of military ethics as an academic subject, why did America's service academies begin teaching ethics to their cadets and midshipmen? This development is linked to the profound changes in curriculum that those institutions have undergone over the past forty years as they have transformed themselves from being, in essence, schools of engineering, navigation, or aeronautics into institutions that in a surprising number of ways look very much like their civilian counterparts, complete with departments of history, English, and philosophy. In short, the military academies have come to have an expanded, liberal-arts view of officer education, that is, of the sort of intellectual preparation and training that is necessary for the future leaders of a modern military organization in an advanced democracy—a point that is underscored by the number of senior American military leaders with PhDs. Thus, as the service academics have evolved and as their teaching faculty have come to resemble the American professoriate in general in terms of their values and attitudes, it is not so surprising that they should accept the centrality of ethics to their mission.

Because being a military officer has always been seen to involve a sturdy sense of duty and honor, to some extent the ground was already prepared for this development. To be sure, in the past the service academies simply assumed that everyone knew what duty required and what was honorable and what was not—and if they didn't, the academies would tell them.[12] Nevertheless, this institutional emphasis on duty and on living up to certain standards was fertile ground for those who came along later to argue that future military officers needed to be taught to think more directly and explicitly about the ethical choices they would later be called on to make and to emphasize that an important part of being a leader involves the ability to engage in informed and intelligent ethical reflection. Given this prior institutional commitment to ethics, it was natural, furthermore, for people inside them to argue that the service academies should foster original research on the ethical dimensions of war just as they do research on other aspects of war.

This is not to say there is unanimity on this point at the service academies. Despite the firm and unambiguous commitment of their senior leadership to the importance of ethics and to strengthening the moral development and capacity for moral reasoning of cadets and midshipmen, there are, no doubt, those at the academies who would be taken aback by the technicality, abstractness, and—to their way of thinking—abstruseness or irrelevance of some of the ethical topics that their colleagues take up. Still, the situation may be similar when it comes to business ethics for there are, undoubtedly, many business professors who think that it is enough to exhort their students to act rightly and see little point in exposing them to Kant, to different formulations of utilitarianism, or to other ethical technicalities. Likewise, in both cases, there will be those who because of their own disciplinary orientation will think that advanced academic work in either business ethics or military ethics is not very important.

As in the case of business ethics, larger social attitudes, no doubt, help to explain the importance that the service academies have come to assign to teaching and, to a lesser extent, to doing research on issues of military ethics. The military, as an institution, is sensitive and responsive to the social and political currents that shape the society in which it operates. And it is certainly true that the service academies' enhanced concern with ethics followed in the wake of the Vietnam war and events such as the massacre at My Lai, which challenged the blithe assumption of many Americans that their country's wars were always morally justified and its military personnel always upright

Past and Future," *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 6, no. 3 (April 1987): 201, and Richard T. De George, "A History of Business Ethics" (2005), available on-line at the website of Santa Clara University's Markkula Center for Applied Ethics (www.scu.edu/ethics). See also Michael Davis, *Ethics and the University* (London: Routledge, 1999), chapter one.

7 See, for example, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business's 2004 report, "Ethics Education in Business Schools," available at www.aacsb.edu.

8 Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

9 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971).

10 For example, Jeff McMahan, *Killing in War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

11 In particular, the International Society for Military Ethics.

12 It is true, too, as an anonymous reviewer has pointed out, that military personnel can sometimes act immorally or even criminally without, apparently, disturbing their sense of duty and honor (consider German military officers during World War II).

in their conduct. Nevertheless, I tend to think that in contrast to business ethics the emergence of military ethics as a discipline, as a subfield of teaching and philosophical research, reflected developments that were to a significant extent organic or internal to changing ideas of military education and less a response to, or a reflection of, a perceived social need on the part of the public for more moral behavior by members of the armed forces. Although the Vietnam war tarnished the U. S. military, today it is a highly respected institution[13] (a state of affairs that contrasts with popular attitudes toward big business and its leaders, which mix distrust and cynicism with admiration for worldly success). Even those Americans who have been critical of the wars their country has recently chosen to fight have not blamed them on the military or reproached it for fighting the wars it has been directed to fight.

Some Pedagogical Issues in the Two Fields

Business ethics presupposes something like the moral legitimacy or potential legitimacy of capitalism whereas military ethics assumes something like the moral legitimacy or potential legitimacy of some wars. Obviously, these presuppositions can be contested: Socialists would reject the former, and pacifists the latter. Both fields, however, take such objections seriously. Any philosophically oriented course on business ethics will spend some time examining the pros and cons of capitalism. Likewise, any respectable course on military ethics will consider the criteria that must be met for a war to be morally justified and whether those criteria are in fact ever met. In both cases, a student might be left with something less than a full positive justification of either activity. Perhaps business or war can be justified only to extent that the alternatives to them are worse, or perhaps they are simply inevitable activities that we should strive to humanize as much as possible. This situation contrasts with other areas of applied philosophy, such as medical ethics, where almost no one thinks the underlying activity is morally suspect.

Teachers of ethics often struggle to get undergraduates to overcome their sophomoric relativism and appreciate that not all ethical stances are equally defensible. We want our students to take ethics seriously, that is, to appreciate the ethical dimension of their lives and the need for critical self-reflection on the choices they make now as well as the choices they will be called upon to make later in their careers. In my experience, business students and students at the military academies are neither more nor less reflective than are their peers elsewhere. They are, perhaps, rather more likely to have imbibed the view that their future professions (business and fighting) are ethics-free zones—where the only consideration is triumphing over one's opponents, and ruthless, dog-eat-dog conduct is the path to glory. But, on balance, their ethical ideas are probably no more naïve than those of eighteen- to twenty-year-olds elsewhere.

What should we be teaching these young people? To the practically minded, it may seem a waste of time to discuss with them possible moral justifications of either business or war. These are broad questions, well outside the potential decision-making province of students of either subject. Exposure to them, one might think, will not make them better businesspeople or better soldiers. As mentioned above, the same sort of point is often made with respect to ethical theory. Neither business students nor cadets and midshipmen, it is sometimes contended, need to be exposed to the intricacies of ethical theory. If they are to receive ethical instruction at all, it needs to be practical and relevant. And this point is strengthened by the fact that almost all those who teach courses in applied ethics or contemporary moral problems complain about the difficulty of connecting traditional ethical theories to specific normative problems. After all, it is not easy to determine what utilitarianism implies about abortion or what Kant would say about affirmative action. A lot more can be said about these matters,[14] but I will restrict myself to a few relatively uncontroversial points.

First, exposure to normative theory as well as to basic ethical questions about war or capitalism can help students to grasp certain concepts and principles that can improve their ethical thinking about specific problems. Second, between highly abstract ethical theories and broad questions about war or capitalism, on the one hand, and specific, practical moral problems, on the other, there is an important space for "mid-level" conceptual and normative theorizing—for example, about such topics as (in business ethics) whistle-blowing, insider trading, or conflicts of interest or (in military ethics) assassination, collateral damage, or the use of drones. Work at this level is obviously pertinent to thinking about certain real-world decisions, even if it, too, sometimes tends to be more abstract or academic than many students

13 Today the public has higher confidence in the military than in Congress, the press, the clergy, or colleges and universities, and young people are more likely to trust it to do the right thing than they are the Supreme Court, the president, Congress, the United Nations, the federal government, or the media. See the 2008 presentation "Attitudes and Formation of Attitudes toward the U.S. Military," prepared by David C. King and John Della Volpe of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government (available on-line).

14 For a debate over the usefulness of moral theory for practical ethics, see the articles by C. E. Harris and Michael Davis in *Teaching Ethics*, vol. 10, no. 1 (Fall 2009) and by Bernard Gert, C. E. Harris, and Michael Davis in *Teaching Ethics*, vol. 12, no. 1 (Fall 2011).

are used to. Finally, because professional philosophers often fiercely contest all these matters—broad questions about war or capitalism, abstract ethical issues, and mid-level theories—exposure to them can strengthen students' critical thinking skills and get them to question their own principles and values and those of the society around them. Ideally, it can encourage them to rely less on their gut feelings and more on their intellect. For these reasons, then, people in both business and the military may do better in those roles if they have spent some time thinking about certain theoretical matters and somewhat abstract or general questions.[15] Finally, there is the Socratic point that thinking about these things is worthwhile for its own sake, but this is obviously a value judgment, not an empirical claim.

Even if, as I believe, various theoretical issues and broad questions about war or capitalism all have a role to play in the teaching of business or military ethics, the important thing, pedagogically speaking, is to find the right balance between theoretical and more practical or applied issues; after all, in both fields we want students to be able to deal effectively with the concrete and context specific problems they will end up encountering in their professional lives. No doubt, some courses in both areas do not do enough to prepare their students for the messy real world of moral decision making. There is in particular a tendency for instructors to focus on big, sexy issues at the expense of seemingly more humdrum nuts and bolts issues, for example, concerning the fair treatment of subordinates by their superiors. Related to this is the tendency for textbooks and other pedagogical materials to focus on ethical questions that can arise for managers, on the one hand, or officers, on the other, as opposed to the ethical choices that ordinary workers or enlisted personnel are likely to encounter. That's natural, of course, because one is presumably addressing the country's future business managers or military leaders and because those issues may seem more complex or more foundational than those that lower-level personnel are likely to run into. Still, both business and military ethics can and should encompass more than the moral quandaries that managers and officers can encounter. And even if that remains the focus, it is important for both future managers and future officers to have thought about some of the moral challenges that their subordinates can face and to rid themselves of the implicit assumption that it is their job to think and the job of their subordinates merely to obey.

When it comes to teaching applied ethics, in general, or military or business ethics, in particular, there are a variety of legitimate approaches and a range of possible topics to take up. In the case of business ethics, the market for teaching materials is so large that there is a wide assortment of pedagogical options for instructors. In addition to single-author texts and textbook anthologies, pitched at different levels, aimed at different kinds of students, and representing different approaches to the subject, there are various sources of case studies for classroom use as well as a diverse range of pedagogically helpful materials available on-line. By contrast, there are far fewer published teaching materials for use in courses on military ethics—a market that barely exists outside the military academies, though courses in ethics or political philosophy often take up issues of war for part of the semester. In fact, there are hardly any traditional looking textbooks devoted to military ethics[16] although, to be sure, there are a number of good books on the morality of war, which although written for a wider audience could be used effectively in the classroom.[17] There are also some large, historically oriented anthologies on the ethics of war. [18] A valuable resource for professors, they are, however, probably not well suited to most undergraduate courses. To target their particular students, in fact, the service academies often develop or assemble their own teaching materials on ethics and war.

As mentioned before, as the military ethics community has grown and become increasingly active, much more work is being produced on applied topics or mid-level theoretical issues as opposed to the relatively abstract and highly theoretical work on issues of war that journals like *Ethics* or *Philosophy and Public Affairs* tend to publish. In business ethics, of course, there is already a great deal of published work on specific issues and mid-level concepts and theories. Much of this new work in military ethics will probably find its way into the classroom, if only by influencing the thinking of instructors. For one thing, it will make it easier for instructors to build a course around debates that cadets and midshipmen are likely to find both interesting and pertinent.

When one visits a U.S. military academy from another university, one is likely to be surprised by the seriousness with which ethics is taken and the importance assigned to ethical training and the development of moral character

15 Obviously, we do not know that they will do better (nor do we know for certain that anything else we do in an ethics classroom will have beneficial long-term results.)

16 One such text is Paul Christopher, *The Ethics of War and Peace: An Introduction to Legal and Moral Issues*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 2003).

17 For example, Brian Orend, *The Morality of War* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 2006).

18 Gregory M. Reichberg, Henrik Syse, and Endre Beby, eds., *The Ethics of War: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), and Larry May, Eric Rovie, and Steve Viner, eds., *The Morality of War: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 2005).

across the board. This institutional commitment to, and concern with, ethics is evident in a variety of way. Here is one example: Although a team of professional philosophers at the U. S. Naval Academy teaches its required ethics course, weekly discussion sections are led by officers or former officers who volunteer to teach them. The fact that people they respect, who have often seen combat and whose careers they aspire to emulate, take ethics seriously sends a clear message to young midshipmen about its relevance and importance. This contrasts strikingly with many secular universities, especially the large state universities. Although they all have statements about values, ethics, or social responsibility in their student learning objectives or institutional goals, those goals and objectives often appear to be largely window dressing, added on to satisfy external evaluators, but underwritten by little substantive institutional commitment to ethics education. Indeed, it is difficult to find a secular institution that requires all students to take an ethics course, taught by philosophers.[19] And even when particular groups of students, for example business majors, are compelled to take ethics, this can be seen by them as just another seemingly arbitrary requirement, just another hurdle that has to be cleared on the way to their degree, not as something that lies at the core of their future profession.

I do not, however, want to paint too rosy a picture of ethics instruction at the military academies. It involves many of the same problems and challenges that teachers of philosophy encounter elsewhere. Furthermore, some report that in practice Socratic dialogue and open, classroom discussion of challenging ethical issues tend to give way to the search for pre-approved answers.[20] But even if this is or has been a problem,[21] the situation will certainly continue to improve as the military academies employ more and more civilian philosophers and other academics (often, these days, in leadership positions). Still, it is probably true that some in the military approach ethics education as a training issue, attempting to turn philosophical problems into technical ones to be solved by developing the right protocols.[22] There can, of course, be a somewhat analogous tension in business ethics education, with some instructors (usually from the philosophy department) tending to adopt a more open-ended, Socratic style and other instructors (often from the school of business) favoring a more practical, step-by-step approach to resolving moral questions. This, of course, relates to the unsettled pedagogical question, discussed earlier, of finding the right balance between theoretical issues and practical matters when teaching either business or military ethics.

In the military academies, there is also a tension between the extremely rule-bound institutional regime to which cadets and midshipmen must submit, which has the goal of inculcating in them an ethic of automatic adherence to orders, and the philosopher's goal of encouraging students to question and to think for themselves. This is not to say that this tension is insurmountable. Ideally, graduates of the academies will appreciate that there are situations in which they must think for themselves about ethical matters (and to learn to identify those situations) while at the same time seeing the importance of their having been trained to follow orders. Still, there is a tension there which has no real counterpart in the education of business students although, to be sure, university students are often presented with institutional rules that seem to them arbitrary and for which they are rarely given any explanation, at least not one that connects the rules to underlying ethical principles.[23] And there is a tendency in both institutional contexts for the authorities to take a legalistic view of the rules, one that emphasizes self-interested reasons for compliance.

I turn now from pedagogical matters to (1) the nature and purpose of business and the military and (2) the moral responsibilities of managers, on the one hand, and officers, on the other. These topics involve issues that are central to business ethics and to military ethics. Analyzing them in comparative perspective should throw some fresh light on both fields.

Business, the Military, and Service to Society

Although people sometimes say that the job of the military is "to kill people and break things," this vulgarizes military service and obscures a larger truth about it. It vulgarizes it at the micro level because much of what people do in the military has little or nothing to do with killing and breaking, and it vulgarizes it at the macro level because the military can be, and often is, called upon to perform nonviolent tasks. The phrase "called upon" brings us to the larger truth obscured by the above slogan, namely, that the military's raison d'être is to serve the state and the country it is presumed to represent. That and not violence, and certainly not killing and breaking for their own sake, is its ultimate purpose or goal. The military hopes, of course, as do all reflective people, that it is never called upon to do what is unjust—and hard moral decisions arise for the organization and for the individuals in it if it is—but the military is always animated by an ideal that is larger than itself, namely service to the country.

Like other organizations, the military, of course, has an interest in maintaining itself as an organization and in increasing its influence and stature, but these are not the rationale for its existence. Rather, in a modern democracy, the military is an instrument of the civilian authorities. The latter determine the size, structure, and capacities of the military as well as its specific mission in any given context, such as, defeating a guerilla force in another country, propping up a failed state, or supplying humanitarian aid after a natural disaster. Given civilian control of the military, the military cannot act autonomously, or fully autonomously, in pursuing those objectives. These general points apply obviously to sub-units of the military as well, for example, to divisions and brigades. In a business organization, too, sub-units must follow instructions and carry out policies and directives from above. But business organizations as a whole are not subordinate to some higher authority; they are autonomous and free (subject to certain moral and legal constraints) to advance their own interests as they see fit.

To be sure, business provides the goods and services that society needs, and in this way it serves the country. However, on the most prevalent view these days, which harks back to Adam Smith, the provision of those goods and services is a side-effect of the pursuit of profit. The point of business activity is simply to make money. Outside of business ethics classrooms, this is the message that students frequently receive, implicitly or explicitly, from their business courses: Maximization of profit (or, alternatively, of shareholder wealth) is a business's only goal. Providing socially useful goods and services is only a means to that end (although, strictly speaking, neither necessary nor sufficient for it). Conservative and liberal economists may disagree about the extent to which business activity should be constrained by rules and regulations and what those rules and regulations should be, but they tend to agree that, once we have the right sort of legal framework—once we have set up the rules of the game—then companies should be left to go about their business, that is, to pursue profit as best they can, within that framework. Only in this way will we get the economic results that we want.

The rules of the game are not limited to laws and regulations. As mentioned before, business activity presupposes adherence to certain ethical norms, a point emphasized by Milton Friedman himself,[24] because a market system cannot flourish without widespread acceptance of certain elementary norms or moral rules, such as honesty and good faith. Does business have social or moral responsibilities above and beyond the pursuit of profit within the rules of the game, thus understood? The answer to this question is hotly contested, and debate over it is likely to loom large in any class on business ethics. As I have intimated, economists are likely to believe that the answer is no, that the trick is to get the right laws and regulations and then to turn business loose. Some business theorists and probably most of those who teach business ethics believe, to the contrary, that businesses do have such responsibilities—responsibilities to employees, to suppliers and other business partners, to consumers, to the environment, and to the larger society—beyond what the law and the elementary norms of business practice require. The practical implications of the two views often coincide. That's because those who believe that business has broad social or moral responsibilities also argue that companies who embrace those responsibilities tend to be more profitable than companies that do not whereas those who deny that companies have those responsibilities in the first place acknowledge that it may be in their interest to act as if they believe that they do.

The thesis that businesses have responsibilities beyond attempting to maximize profit within the existing framework of law, regulation, and accepted business practice can be understood in two ways. The first is that these putative responsibilities are additional side-constraints on business activity, that is, additional restrictions on the pursuit of profit beyond those already laid down by law and customary business morality. The second is that business has, or should acknowledge itself as having, other goals besides the pursuit of profit, for example, providing certain goods or services or satisfying the interests of its customers. On the former view, then, business has a single goal (profit) although pursuit of it is subject to constraints beyond those implicit in the rules of the game. By analogy, one's only goal in playing tennis may be to win, even though one acknowledges various constraints, beyond those specified in the rule book, about what one may do to win. On the second view, business lacks a single maximand. Rather, it must pursue several different and independently valuable ends, balancing them as best it can. By analogy, in playing tennis one might be pursuing several goals at once—striving not just to win but also to exercise or have fun with friends—with none of these goals lexically prior to the others. If something like this held true of business, that is, if business were best understood as having multiple goals, then—depending, of course, on exactly what those goals were understood to be—its role would no longer be defined by self-interest; it would

19 Princeton University appears to be one. And at many universities, ethics courses, even if not required, often satisfy university-wide general education requirements.

20 J. Joseph Miller, "Squaring the Circle: Teaching Philosophical Ethics in the Military," *Journal of Military Ethics*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2004): 206-208.

21 I should state, for what it is worth, that it does not correspond to my experience at the U. S. Naval Academy.

22 Miller, "Squaring the Circle": 214.

23 Derek Bok, "Can Higher Education Foster Higher Morals?," *Business and Society Review*, no. 66 (Summer 1988): 8.

24 Milton Friedman, "The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits," *New York Times Magazine*, September 13, 1970.

have a service component to it.

There is a view of business activity that is more radical than this. Like the view with which I began, it sees business as having only one goal. However, this goal is not profit, but the provision of some good or service. For example, John Mackey, founder and CEO of Whole Foods, claims that customer happiness, not making a profit, is his company's true end.[25] In response to Milton Friedman's insistence that Whole Foods is simply maximizing its profits through providing consumers with a service they value, Mackey insists that his company does not treat customer satisfaction as a means to an end. Rather, it is the whole point of his business, the reason for it existence. Profitability is a side effect of pursuing that goal well. At the same time, profitability is a necessary means of continuing to pursue it effectively because a company that fails to make money will not be able to go on providing the goods and services that are its rationale for existing in the first place.

To summarize the discussion schematically, if A = producing some socially useful good or service, and B = making a profit, then there are three positions:

(1) Business has only one goal: A is merely a means to B.
(2) Business has at least two independent goals, A and B.
(3) Business has only one goal: B is merely a means to A.

One might object that this scheme is too simplistic and ignores the possibility of more sophisticated variants of these positions. I can ignore this objection here, however, because I am not trying to settle the debate over the proper role and responsibilities of business, but rather to draw some broad comparisons between business and the military, and my schema suffices for that. As I argued above, the military has one defining organizational goal (service to the country), and its ability to employ force is merely a means to that end. Certainly if one embraces view 3 and probably also if one embraces view 2, then a business enterprise is akin to the military in being a kind of service organization—an activity the ultimate point of which is not self-interest but the social good.

The Contrasting Responsibilities of Managers and Officers

On views 2 and 3, managers obviously have broad responsibilities; by definition, in running a company they must have goals other than or in addition to maximizing profit. View 1, in contrast, seems to entail that profit is a manager's only concern. But this is incorrect. Even if the sole purpose, point, or economic role of a corporation is to make money for its owners, it does not follow that maximizing a company's returns is the only responsibility that managers have. View 1 grants that there are legal restrictions and moral side-constraints on what corporations can do in the pursuit of profit. Economists differ about what those legal restrictions should be, and moral philosophers disagree about whether those side-constraints go beyond merely obeying the law and adhering to elementary market morality. But internal to any version of view 1 is the idea that what managers should do is not determined simply by the goal of maximizing profit, even if that is the only goal of a corporation. They must manage within the rules of the game and possibly also within other social or moral constraints as well.

Suppose that a very minimal version of view 1 is the most tenable and that the rules of the game impose few restrictions on the pursuit of profit. This would not rule out managers' having responsibilities that are other than, or more extensive than, those imposed on a company as a collective entity. To argue that the obligations of the whole determine the obligations of the part is to commit the fallacy of division. To be sure, managers are hired to help the company make money, and they do indeed have a fiduciary duty to advance its interests and, in particular, not to enrich themselves at its expense. But it does not follow that pursuit of profit, even within the rules of the game, is their only moral responsibility or that their fiduciary duty always takes priority over other moral concerns. Managers are autonomous agents, and what they should or should not do is not something that we can derive directly from the goals, even as constrained by law and by elementary market morality, of the company of which they are part.

Military officers have even stronger duties to the organization and to cooperate actively and constructively in achieving its legitimate ends. The analogy with the fiduciary responsibilities of managers is obvious although (1) the stakes can be considerably higher here than in business and (2) the organization that officers serve is itself premised on service and not, as view 1 would have it, on self-interest. Like managers, officers are autonomous moral agents. Just as the rules of the game or their own sense of responsibility constrains the pursuit of profit by managers, so the rules of war, that is, the moral and legal restrictions on the conduct of war that philosophers call *jus in bello*, constrain what military personnel can do it pursuit of the objectives they are given. Some of these restrictions are fairly detailed and legally codified, for example, those that govern the treatment of prisoners of war. Others are broader and their application to, or implications for, certain specific situations are often contestable, for example, the duty to

25 John Mackey, Milton Friedman, and T. J. Rodgers, "Rethinking the Social Responsibility of Business," *Reason*, October 2005.

respect civilian immunity or refrain from force that is out of proportion to its military objective. Still, the norms are real and widely accepted even if hard cases abound.

The laws and norms that govern business behavior are generally justified by their social utility. Thus, economists and other business theorists debate whether having businesses operate within this or that framework will produce better results—although, as I have suggested, even the best set of laws and rules may fail to provide adequate guidance to the moral manager. Similarly, the rules of war do not provide clear answers to every moral problem an officer might encounter, and even where they do provide answers, it is possible that morality might require more or, conceivably, less, than the rules of war do. The rules themselves, on one plausible view, are analogous to those that govern business in being norms or conventions that states have found it in their collective interest to adopt. Or to put it in a more explicitly utilitarian way: Given that wars will be fought, whatever philosophers say, then the task is to identify those rules that, given the world as it is and governments and people as they are, will bring about the most good, taking into account, among other things, the likelihood of states being brought to accept and comply with those rules.[26]

This is not the only possible way of thinking about the rules of war, of course, but whatever view we take of them, the rules will sometimes require one or other side of a conflict to refrain from acting in ways that could benefit it; that is, the rules may make victory more costly or more difficult than it would otherwise have been because they prohibit certain sorts of conduct. Similarly, even on the least restrictive version of view 1, a business will sometimes be required to forbear from making a profit in a certain way. On the other hand, of course, it will often be in the long-term interest of a business, just as it can be of a state or military organization, to forgo any short-term advantage that would come from breaking the rules of the game.

Human beings, however, are only human, and they sometimes allow short-term interests to trump long-term interests. Moreover, some business or military situations may be so asymmetrical that the dominant party has little reason to concern itself with reciprocity. So if the rules are to be adhered to, thus benefitting everyone in the long run, then individuals will have to have internalized a commitment to them. In business, that internalization must be able to overcome financial temptation and the diffuseness of responsibility in large organizations. In the military, that internalization needs to be robust enough to withstand the heat of battle when emotion runs high, when decisions must be made quickly, and when the facts are shrouded in fog. It must also withstand the psychological proclivity to dehumanize one's opponent and to disregard the safety and well-being of enemy civilians.

Still, two things make the task of inculcating a commitment to the rules of war firm enough to stand up under these conditions less daunting than it might otherwise seem. First, men and women in the military can be trained ahead of time to respond correctly, that is, to act in accord with the rules of war, under battlefield conditions just as they are drilled to act without hesitation in other desirable ways. The military itself insists that its personnel obey the laws of war; it teaches them that unlawful orders are to be refused, and it tries to assist officers in thinking through ahead of time the hard dilemmas that they can face in the field. In contrast, although businesses always try to ensure that their employees behave in ways the company wants, it is doubtful that many of them endeavor to strengthen their employees' ability to make sound, independent moral decisions under duress or that the message that young managers end up getting has changed much from what Badaracco and Webb identified it to be back in the 1990s: "don't break the law" but "don't overinvest in ethical behavior," either.[27] True, some large corporations have ethics training programs, but—judged by the sorts of programs that filter down to the university—one suspects that these are legalistic and compliance oriented.

Second, as part of their profession, soldiers, sailors, marines, and air force personnel explicitly assume certain demanding moral responsibilities. The concepts of duty and honor loom large in their traditions, and they are well aware of the possibility of being called upon to sacrifice themselves for their country or for their comrades. For them to risk their lives, say, to safeguard noncombatants trapped in a battle zone requires selflessness, but selflessness is something that their profession already demands. The virtues associated with being a warrior have varied across time and cultures, but in the western tradition the warrior ideal is not that of a bloodthirsty killer who seeks to preserve his own life at all costs. Whatever else a soldier is, he is not the rational, self-interested, maximizing agent hypothesized by economists and implicitly taken for granted by some business theorists.

The military ideal of sacrifice finds no obvious counterpart in the world of business, nor do at least three other aspects of the responsibilities of officers. First, officers are responsible not only for the conduct of their subordinates but also for their moral development. They must try to protect the young people in their command

26 Henry Sidgwick, *The Elements of Politics*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1908), p. 238.

27 Joseph L. Badaracco, Jr., and Allen P. Webb, "Business Ethics: A View from the Trenches," *California Management Review*, vol. 37, no. 2 (Winter 1995): 10.

from the moral coarsening that so often accompanies war; that is, they have a duty to help them retain their moral compass and preserve their identity as moral agents. There is nothing analogous to this in the world of business. All companies and all managers are concerned with how their employees act, but only very rarely with what kind of people they become, or risk becoming, as a result of working for the company.

Second, although the military ethos embraces sacrifice, it also stresses the importance of loyalty to one's comrades. This can sometimes lead to military personnel being too concerned with "force protection," that is with preserving one's unit or those under one's command from excessive risk of harm. Admirable in itself and a healthy antidote to the indifference with which some past military leaders often squandered the lives of their own men, a concern with force protection can sometimes translate into a disinclination to take the risks that are necessary, say, to avoid placing civilians in harm's way—or even the risks necessary for accomplishing the mission. One might see this as somewhat analogous to a manager's allowing the interests of the people who work for him to blind him to other responsibilities, but this does not do justice to the strength of the obligation that officers have to look after the well-being of those in their command or the moral importance of loyalty. In some business situations, to be sure, one must balance responsibilities to co-workers or subordinates against other leadership responsibilities, but usually the stakes are lower and the ties of loyalty weaker than in the military.[28]

Finally, everyone acknowledges that officers have serious *in bello* responsibilities. But what an officer is to do if he or she suspects, believes, or knows that his or her country is fighting in an unjust cause is less often discussed, especially in the military itself. Officers themselves gravitate toward the view that their only responsibilities are *in bello*, that is, to fight within the rules of war, and that *ad bellum* issues are not their concern. Memorably expressed in Shakespeare's *Henry V* (Act 4, Scene 1), this stance has a long pedigree, and is accepted by many moral theorists. It is, however, not beyond challenge and remains an ongoing subject of debate among philosophers.[29] There is no real analogue to this in business ethics. (One might, I suppose, maintain that managers are not to be held responsible for whether the corporate project in which they participate is immoral [for example, providing software to be used for a vicious end by a despicable regime]—an *ad bellum*-like question—but are nevertheless responsible for carrying out that project in a way that breaks no moral rules [e.g., no one is cheated, misled, or bribed]—an *in bello*-like responsibility. But I know no one who actually holds this position.)

Conclusion

For the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, to study ethics was to study metaethics.[30] That has changed for the better. Work on normative theory and on concrete or applied ethical problems now flourishes as it never has before. Indeed, a number of areas of applied ethics can be considered distinct, semi-autonomous academic fields, complete with professional societies, journals, conferences, undergraduate courses, and graduate students writing on cutting edge topics. But there have been few comparative studies of different fields in applied ethics. In the belief that such studies can teach us something, this essay has compared and contrasted business ethics and military ethics along several different dimensions. After responding to skepticism about whether ethics is even possible in these areas, I examined their origin and development as academic fields, some pedagogical issues that arise in these areas, and the contrasting goals and responsibilities of the military and its officers, on the one hand, and of corporations and their managers, on the other.

The emergence of business ethics as a specialized academic subject was largely a spin-off of the fact that so many universities began offering business ethics courses in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Now seen as an important aspect of their curriculum and of the mission of their schools of business, business ethics offerings expanded so rapidly, I believe, because of a perceived social need to instill a greater sense of ethical responsibility among America's future business leaders. In the case of the military academies, the emergence of academic instruction in ethics probably reflected more internal developments as these institutions evolved into genuine undergraduate universities with an expanded liberal-arts view of officer education. With more military and civilian professors involved in teaching ethics, the community of those interested in issues in military ethics grew. Although a number of professional philosophers have been writing about the ethics of war since the 1970s, the growth of this community has stimulated more research and writing in the field, especially on applied or specialized topics.

Both fields face similar pedagogical questions in finding the appropriate classroom balance between

28 This is not to imply that all questions of loyalty in the military involve dramatic or high-stakes situations. For example, should a soldier help cover up a buddy's minor malfeasance?

29 For rival perspectives, see Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* and Jeff McMahan, *Killing in War*.

30 Roughly speaking, from Moore's *Principia Ethica* (1903) to Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1971).

theoretical and practical or applied issues. Because it is much larger, the field of business ethics offers instructors a much wider range of possible pedagogical materials. The military academies, on the other hand, are more likely to have to put together their own materials. More significantly, ethics instruction in the two fields takes place in quite different institutional environments. The service academies take very seriously the ethical dimension of military leadership and place a high priority on developing the character and ethical reasoning ability of those in their charge. The seriousness and broad, institutional nature of this commitment are not something that secular universities have been able to match. On the other hand, Socratic reflection and independent thinking about ethical matters fit more easily and naturally into a traditional university context.

Several intriguing contrasts between the two fields stem from the fact that whereas service to country is at the heart of the military's identity, the purpose or proper social role of business is a contested matter, with conflicting views about the responsibilities of corporations and their managers. As we have seen, there is no consensus whether or to what extent business is required to do anything other than strive to make money within the rules of the game. To be sure, business managers have duties to the organization just as military officers do, and on any view of the social role or function of the corporation, managers have responsibilities that restrict what they may do on behalf of the organization. Nevertheless, although all those who teach business students wish them to act morally, morality is not usually thought to be at the core of what it is to be a good manager. By contrast, military ethics takes it for granted that the military is a service calling, which has a goal or purpose that is noble and transcends self-interest, and those who teach it emphasize that morality—upright conduct, the acceptance of moral responsibility, and the exercise of moral judgment—lies at the very heart of what it is to be an officer.[31]

31 An earlier version of this essay was presented at the Sixth International Conference on Applied Ethics, held on October 28-30, 2011, at the Center for Applied Ethics and Philosophy, at Hokkaido University (Sapporo, Japan). I thank conference participants for their helpful comments.