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The Military Leader's Role in Mitigating Moral Injury

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War is a breeding ground for moral injury. Even in a justified war that is fought justly, combat soldiers are likely to intentionally kill enemy soldiers, unintentionally harm civilians, and witness levels of violence and senseless suffering that challenge their assumptions about their own moral goodness and the goodness of the world. When soldiers commit, fail to prevent, or witness acts in war that violate their own moral codes, they become susceptible to suffering long-term shame, anger, alienation, loss of religious belief, and other effects known as moral injury.

In this article, I argue that moral injury in combat veterans can be mitigated by effective small-unit leadership. There are actions that leaders can take before, during, and after their units' combat deployments that reduce the likelihood and magnitude of morally injurious experiences. Ethical leaders can train and lead their soldiers in ways that reduce the likelihood that their soldiers will commit immoral acts in war. Pro-active leaders can also educate their soldiers to make sense of their justified and excusable actions in war—to see themselves as good people who did their best to act honorably in the tragic, morally complex circumstances of war.

My argument has developed over years of research and relationships. As an active-duty Army officer, I had the privilege to interview almost 400 Army leaders in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2003 to 2011 over the course of five research deployments. Almost all were junior officers—lieutenants and captains—serving in battalions that were conducting combat operations. Almost all interviews were private, in-depth conversations lasting 1-2 hours. Although the interviews focused on the leaders' experiences of combat leadership and lessons learned, issues related to moral injury often emerged. Typically I embedded with a company or battalion for days or weeks at a time, so I had the opportunity to observe and talk informally with many more soldiers of all ranks. Additionally, from 2000 to 2016 I served as a facilitator in two popular online forums of Army junior officers as well as taught on the faculty at West Point. My participation in these military communities led to countless conversations with combat veterans about the intersections of leadership, lethality, and morality.

1. Pre-Deployment.

"The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him." --G.K. Chesterton

The fight against moral injury should begin at home stations prior to a deployment. As leaders prepare their units to deploy to war, they can establish conditions—through education, training, and personal example—that will protect their soldiers' consciences in the moral crucibles that lie ahead.

1.1. Educate soldiers on moral frameworks for war.

Moral injury occurs when soldiers are unable to reconcile their wartime experiences with their existing (i.e., peacetime) moral frameworks. Too often in war, there is a gap between what soldiers experience and what they are intellectually prepared to experience. To close this gap between future “wartime acts” and current “moral frameworks,” leaders can educate their soldiers on the morality of war, expanding their soldiers’ moral-conceptual frameworks to include the context of war.

Based on my interviews, I believe that soldiers are less likely to suffer moral injury if they can answer three questions:

1. How can war be morally justified?
2. How can killing in war be morally justified?
3. Why is there so much unfair, unnecessary suffering in the world?

Few soldiers are able to answer these questions. The military’s institutional training and education systems neither raise these questions nor offer answers, constituting an enormous blind spot in the profession of arms’ stewardship of its people. A profession that recruits, equips, trains, and orders its members to kill should also explain to them why it can be morally (not merely legally) right to participate and kill in war.

Soldiers—especially combat veterans—are intensely interested in the morality of war. For over a decade, I have given presentations and facilitated conversations on these big moral questions. I have addressed audiences as diverse as West Point cadets in their classrooms, Georgia National Guard chaplains on their annual training, Army paratroopers in Iraq, Marine field-grade officers at their Command and Staff School, and a brigade of 101st Airborne Division soldiers preparing to deploy to Afghanistan. In every case, I have been struck by soldiers’ recognition of the moral gravity of war as well as their frustration at feeling unable to make informed moral judgments about war.

Military leaders have a moral responsibility to educate themselves and their soldiers on moral justifications of war and of killing in war. There exists, I recognize, a significant concern that by openly acknowledging these moral questions, leaders might provoke their soldiers to doubt the morality of their actions and hesitate in combat, in turn putting at risk both soldiers’ lives and mission accomplishment. What I have learned, though, is that many deployed soldiers are already asking themselves these questions. Lacking answers, they experience doubt. (Hesitation in combat is less widespread, a credit to their loyalty and training.) The moral gravity of combat cannot simply be wished away, so it should not be ignored. Many soldiers’ consciences will raise troubling questions. They and their units will fight more confidently and cohesively if they are equipped with satisfying answers.

Commanders and platoon leaders, supported by first sergeants and platoon sergeants, should teach and model to their soldiers how to think morally about war. The challenge, of course, is to train those trainers (or more accurately, educate those educators). I have developed instructional packages on the moral justification of war and on the moral justification of killing in war that I have used and continually refined for years. The presentations and subsequent unit conversations have empowered thousands of soldiers with a conceptual framework that empowers them to think critically about morality and war.

1.2. *Integrate moral reasoning into tactical training.*

Military leaders' foremost responsibility is to train their soldiers to perform, succeed, and survive in combat. The ways they train them, though, are focused almost entirely on developing tactical skills. The After-Action Reviews (AARs) that are integrated into training illuminate and evaluate *tactical* decision-making—e.g., why a machinegun was emplaced at a certain location, or why a squad maneuvered over a wall rather than around it—but overlook *moral* decision-making—e.g., why it was morally right to kill an enemy combatant or morally wrong to call for artillery fires that would have disproportionately killed civilians. The prevailing approach to training is not immoral; however, it is a-moral. To their credit, U.S. military leaders train their soldiers to adhere to the laws of armed conflict, which explains the commendable moral record of U.S. soldiers in recent wars. Yet, those same leaders typically explain soldiers' lethal permissions and limitations in terms of legal and professional norms, not as moral principles. Those explanations are sufficient for soldiers in training, when they are firing their weapons at inanimate training aids. When soldiers deploy to war, however, they engage and kill real human beings. The amoral explanations (e.g., "it's legal"; "it's what soldiers do") that sufficed in training are inadequate for such morally significant actions, leaving soldiers susceptible to moral injury.

To protect against moral injury, then, leaders should integrate moral reasoning into their tactical training. In AARs, soldiers should be challenged (and empowered) to evaluate their moral decision-making—using moral language—as they already do their tactical decision-making using doctrinal and legal language. For example, after a training exercise in which a soldier engaged a civilian on the battlefield who had picked up a weapon and pointed it toward friendly forces, the leader should ask the soldier not only, "Why did you engage him?" ("Because he threatened the assault element.") and, "Why was that legally permissible?" ("Because the ROE states that any non-uniformed person who is armed and making a threatening action is positively identified as enemy."), but also, "Why was it morally right to kill him?" ("He chose to fight for an armed organization that threatens the lives and fundamental rights of the people we are protecting, so he forfeited his right not to be killed. It wasn't morally wrong to kill him, and it was morally right to protect those I serve with and those we are serving.")

A major difference between *training for combat* and *engaging in combat* is the moral component of actual combat. Soldiers perform the same actions on the training range and downrange, but their actions downrange have immeasurably greater moral consequences. Soldiers who are unprepared to deal with those consequences are more liable to suffer moral injury. Leaders, therefore, should incorporate moral reasoning into tactical training, preparing their soldiers to succeed tactically, morally, and psychologically.

1.3. *Inoculate soldiers to injustice in war*

Citizens raised in a just society and trained in a respectful military organization are psychologically underprepared for the injustices that they will face in war. War isn't merely difficult and terrifying—it's also unjust and frustrating. From what I've observed, the stress that soldiers experience from facing difficulties and death is different than the stress they experience from perceiving that the odds are unfairly stacked against them. When soldiers confront fair challenges, they rely on their values and work even harder. However, when soldiers perceive that their struggles are caused by an unfair playing field (e.g., enemy combatants posing as civilians), they are tempted to lash out and become discouraged, which can dispose them to commit actions that harm the innocent, tarnish their honor, and result in moral injury.

Leaders should begin to inoculate their soldiers to injustice-based distress in their pre-deployment training. For instance, leaders could conduct a 12-mile forced footmarch in which, at the finish line, the standards are suddenly changed without any explanation and the soldiers are required to continue marching, perhaps for an additional three miles. At the AAR, leaders could guide a reflection on what happened and how they reacted to it emotionally and psychologically, and then lead a conversation about the ways in which they should expect to experience even greater injustices on the deployment. If leaders repeatedly inject unfairness into combat training while continuing to demand high standards of professional conduct, soldiers will learn to regulate their emotions and act professionally even when they feel personally wronged.

1.4. Be a leader of character.

Leaders should never underestimate the importance of their own moral character to their soldiers' well-being. In all circumstances—home station and deployed—a unit's ethical climate is a reflection of its leader's moral character. On a combat deployment, the impact of a leader's moral character is magnified enormously. Leaders, after all, are the authority under which their soldiers kill other human beings. Leaders develop plans and issue orders; soldiers execute those plans and follow those orders. By their oath of enlistment, soldiers are bound to obey their leaders. Because they typically do not have access to as much information as their leaders do, soldiers are forced to trust their leaders' moral decision-making. Combat soldiers' consciences, therefore, can be affected greatly by their confidence in their leader's moral character.

Leaders gain or lose "moral capital" by their moral decision-making in their everyday behaviors—at home station and deployed. Leaders who consistently demonstrate good moral judgment and moral courage earn the trust of their soldiers, and soldiers' trust in their leaders' moral decision-making influences the way that soldiers interpret their own actions in war. I've asked many soldiers whether they thought a debatable act of violence they performed in war was morally justified. Soldiers who have confidence in their leader's moral character respond with answers like, "I don't know exactly why it was justified, but I'm pretty sure it was. Our unit always does the right thing." In contrast, soldiers who lack confidence in their leader's character respond with statements along the lines of, "I don't know. The killing probably wasn't justified. War is f**ked up and we all do f**ked up things when we're in war."

In everyday non-war life, our consciences are impacted primarily by our own actions and decisions. In war, soldiers' consciences are impacted by their own actions in carrying out their leaders' decisions, which soldiers often lack the means to morally evaluate. Frequently, lethal actions in war are "judgment calls" made by the leader. When soldiers have learned that they can trust the moral decision-making of their leader, they are less likely to judge themselves harshly after a questionable killing during a combat action led by that leader. They are more likely to focus on the positive—rather than negative—aspects of a morally complex situation. It follows, then, that leaders can mitigate moral injury in their soldiers by demonstrating trustworthy moral judgment in all circumstances—before, during, and even after a combat deployment.

2. During Deployment

"He who fights monsters should look into it that he himself does not become a monster. When you gaze long into the Abyss, the Abyss also gazes into you." –Friedrich Nietzsche

The wounds that later manifest as combat-related moral injury often result from acts of violence that soldiers judge to be morally wrong. As discussed above, pre-deployment education and training can prepare soldiers to make sense of violence in war by closing the gap between soldiers' moral frameworks and what they have to do in combat. Moreover, soldiers' confidence in their leader's moral character sets conditions for them to interpret morally complex acts in a positive way. Nothing, however, can—or even should—protect soldiers who deliberately commit unjust acts in war from suffering a moral injury. Therefore, leaders on a combat deployment can prevent some moral injury among their soldiers by setting and enforcing standards that make unjust acts less likely to occur, by leading with integrity, and by continuously helping their soldiers make sense of their wartime experiences.

2.1. Inspire and require respect for all

A simple way that leaders can reduce the likelihood of moral injury is by demanding that their soldiers treat enemy combatants and local-national civilians with respect. A war zone constitutes the ultimate “us versus them” environment, so it's easy for soldiers to lack empathy for anyone who is not “on their side.” This attitude can easily lead to a dehumanization of “the other” which is often reflected in and exacerbated by soldiers' language. Soldiers' usage of pejoratives to describe their enemy has, unfortunately, a long history—e.g., “heinies”, “nips,” “krauts,” “chinks,” “gooks,” “ragheads,” “sammies,” and “hadjis.”

Some leaders support the use of dehumanizing terms for enemy combatants, believing that it helps their soldiers overcome their natural aversion to killing and thus enhances their mission effectiveness and safety. If dehumanization does make killing easier, it's only because leaders have not explained to their soldiers why it is morally right for them to engage in that war and to kill enemy combatants. Soldiers who understand the moral justifications for their actions have no need to resort to dehumanizing pejoratives to avoid cognitive dissonance.

In fact, I believe that leaders should do all they can to help their soldiers acknowledge the humanity of their enemy counterparts. After all, dehumanization typically holds up only for so long; at some point, soldiers are likely to realize that the targets they engaged were indeed human beings. When that realization happens, soldiers feel deceived, and if they have already left military service, they may lack ready access to resources that can help them deal with this realization. So, rather than perpetuate a wartime lie, leaders should lay out the truth. With support from intelligence staffs, leaders should discuss with their soldiers the demographics and motivations of the enemy, who in many cases share much in common with their own soldiers. In truth, the enemy are fathers, sons, and brothers; they too are young, idealistic, and willing to die for a cause they believe in. Leaders should explain that we believe the enemy fighters' cause to be objectively unjust, which is why they must be defeated, but the fighters themselves often do not realize the error of their ways. Leaders should describe enemy combatants as fellow human beings who—whether misguided, malicious, or both—are fighting for an evil cause that must be defeated. Having acknowledged to their own soldiers the humanity of the enemy, leaders would find it easier to develop soldiers who kill efficiently yet respectfully, who defend the innocent without hating the aggressors, and who ultimately appreciate both the necessity of fighting and the tragedy of war. By not denying the humanity of their enemy, soldiers would retain their own full humanity. Treated as the responsible moral agents they are, soldiers would not feel the need to divorce their “soldier selves” from their “moral selves” while deployed. They would fight with full awareness of the moral situation and thus be better enabled to come to terms with their violent actions.

In the Iraq War, I never heard the term “hadji” used during the 2003 invasion. That pejorative came into use later that summer to refer to insurgents, and then expanded (in many units) to refer as well to unsupportive Iraqi civilians and (in some units) to all Iraqis and even all Muslims. Language shapes attitudes, and attitudes result in behaviors. Leaders who set a good example and demand that their soldiers use respectful language (e.g., enemy; civilian) emplace a healthy obstacle that blocks the moral slippery slope of attitudes and behaviors that can lead to unjust acts that result in moral injury.

2.2. Do not lie to fellow Americans or to trusted allies

Leaders who take pride in never lying in their everyday lives often discover that they ought to lie at times on combat deployments. After all, it’s admirable to deceive the enemy, and it’s right to shade the truth when talking to untrustworthy local-national civilians or “partnered” security forces. That said, leaders should not lie to those on their own team, up and down their chain of command.

It’s common knowledge that lying destroys trust in organizations and undermines mission accomplishment. What’s less recognized is the effect that leaders’ lying has on their soldiers’ belief in the moral justification of their own wartime actions. No one wants to die for a lie; no one wants to kill for a lie. Soldiers desperately want to believe that the “bad” things they are doing and witnessing in war are supporting a morally good war. Lying by their leaders, however, undermines that belief. An Army captain, disillusioned by witnessing an accidental killing of civilians become reported by higher headquarters as a justified killing of combatants, put it this way: “The good guys shouldn’t have to lie. And I thought we were the good guys.”

2.3. Maintain standards of conduct

An inherent responsibility of leaders is to establish, embody, and enforce high standards. However, the conditions that characterize soldiers’ experiences of combat deployments—fatigue, frustration, fear, grief, and anger (to name only a few)—impose a steady downward pressure on standards. For example, soldiers frustrated by civilians who don’t provide information about insurgents may feel justified in smashing or stealing items during a search of their home. Soldiers afraid for their lives may be tempted to shoot first, confirm PID later. Soldiers grief-stricken at the death of a buddy may feel entitled to acquire and abuse alcohol or drugs, or even to rough-up a detainee or two. Behaviors such as these are wrong in themselves, likely to result in moral injury. They are also indicators of leaders who failed their soldiers. I’ve never seen or studied a unit that maintained moral standards on relatively minor issues (e.g., respectful language, no substance abuse) suffer a major moral breakdown (e.g., beatings, murder). Rather, the typical pattern is for a unit to become “morally worn down” over time by the extraordinary pressures of war, its leaders unintentionally and unreflectively accepting lower and lower standards of behavior until a final step down the slippery slope lands them all in the abyss.

Leaders have a duty to maintain moral standards in their units throughout the course of their deployments, regardless of their own feelings or competing priorities. They should routinely accompany their soldiers on missions, engage with them personally between missions, and conduct inspections to reinforce standards and to identify any aberrant behaviors in their ranks before they take root and grow. Perhaps most importantly, leaders should anticipate and intervene in morally high-risk situations, taking actions to identify and mitigate the risk of soldier misconduct. For example, in the emotional days after a

unit has suffered casualties, leaders should ensure that moral standards are reiterated in all mission briefs and should increase their supervision of higher-risk situations (e.g., detainee operations).

A U.S. Army infantry company commander in Iraq expressed well his commitment to preventing moral injury through his enforcement of strict rules of engagement:

“I keep my soldiers on a tight leash when it comes to the rules of engagement, and they hate me for it. When they’re frustrated and angry, especially after we’ve taken casualties, they want to unleash hell on somebody, anybody, to get some payback. At times like those, any Iraqi who appears at all sketchy looks like an enemy. I don’t allow them to engage targets that are at all questionable. This is my third deployment, and I’ve seen what happens to the guys who kill recklessly. When we go home, they drink too much, beat their wives, get divorced, and kill themselves. I won’t let that happen again. My soldiers are angry with me now—thinking I put too many restrictions on them—but once this deployment is over, they’ll be thanking me for the rest of their lives.”

2.4. Discuss candidly the morality of actions in war.

The practice of including moral decision-making in AARs (section 1.2) should continue during the deployment. The stakes are higher when real lives are involved, which makes the AAR-sensemaking process even more important. When soldiers kill in war, it is always done in support of a collective mission. Their coming to terms with killing, likewise, should also be treated as a collective mission. Soldiers who killed justly should be reassured that they killed justly. Soldiers who killed questionably should be given the benefit of the doubt and then coached to discover what can be learned from the experience. Soldiers who killed unjustly should be told unequivocally that they acted immorally. That said, I believe that not all wrongful actions in war should be treated as war crimes. Context matters, and the context of war is so demanding that it calls for discretion. Nevertheless, for the long-term welfare of all soldiers involved in the situation—the perpetrator and witnesses—any wrongful act should at least be named as such and criticized, and any soldier who intentionally commits an unjust act should be punished appropriately. Soldiers cannot be expected to recover from wounds they haven’t even been permitted to acknowledge. The violence of war is a collective act; soldiers should not be left alone to “figure out” their own roles in that violence.

2.5. Reinforce the purpose of the war

The only ends that justify the violence that soldiers perform in war are protection of the innocent and pursuit of a just peace. A challenge for leaders is that their soldiers personally witness the violence they inflict, but they do not always see the people they protect (except for their fellow soldiers) nor their part in the war’s progress. Soldiers who lose sight of their role in the war’s overall scheme also lose sight of the meaning of their actions. Among the most dangerous phrases to hear on a combat deployment is, “It just doesn’t matter.” Meaning and morality are inherently connected, so soldiers who don’t understand why their actions matter are also unlikely to understand how they could be morally justified. Therefore, leaders ought to remind their soldiers regularly of the big picture—which includes the people they are protecting from unjust violence and their role in contributing to a just peace—that justifies whom they aim at in their sight picture.

3. Post-Deployment:

It's not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters. –often attributed to Epictetus

The conclusion of a combat deployment marks the beginning of life as a combat veteran. Those who have shared “the best worst experience of their lives” have become forever bonded, connected by shared experiences that only each other can fully understand. Because a deployment never completely ends—soldiers will always be making sense of some aspects of it—neither does a leader’s role ever completely end. There are things that leaders can do—in the days, weeks, and even years after a deployment—that may mitigate and heal moral injury and even promote post-traumatic moral growth in their soldiers.

3.1. Take responsibility for all that your soldiers did or failed to do.

After each combat action and at the conclusion of a deployment, leaders should personally acknowledge their soldiers for performing their duty—for protecting their teammates and contributing to the mission—and then express their own responsibility for putting their soldiers in that situation. Soldiers do not start or conclude wars; nor do they plan patrols. Leaders in their chain of command—from top to bottom—are the ones who make decisions that bring about soldiers’ morally tragic situations. Therefore, it is fitting that a member of that chain of command who personally knows what the soldiers experienced should take responsibility for the requirement that they engaged in violent acts against fellow human beings. The dual nametapes on military uniforms convey a deep moral truth—that soldiers act as individuals (last name) on behalf of the collective (e.g., U.S. Army). Soldiers in war should be commended often by their leaders for their individual acts, and they should also be reminded that they acted as one small element of a national collective body that bears the ultimate responsibility for each mission, each deployment, and the war itself. Leaders in the chain of command, which creates the situations that breed moral injury, should take full responsibility for those situations. The burden of command in war—already laden by casualties, second-guessing of fateful decisions, etc.—will become even heavier as leaders willingly take on additional risk of moral injury in order to reduce their soldiers’ risk of suffering it. Yet, that is the right thing to do, and well-prepared leaders will be able to handle the load.

3.2. Make post-deployment reflection and conversation a unit priority

Leaders are trainers, and they are able to influence (if not control) their own units’ training schedules. After a deployment, leaders should fence off time and space for their redeployed soldiers to talk deeply with each other about their experiences.

In an email to me, Army chaplain (Lt. Col.) Peter Dissmore described an approach that he saw succeed.

“The soldiers returned from Iraq and Afghanistan. It seemed like they’d had a bad dream of being in war, but they could not remember all of the dream. Things had happened with their friends and families in the States that they could not remember either.

“Then they decided to get together once a month as a squad and share their experiences. This helped them to begin to make sense of their experiences. During each session, they focused on only one of the following questions, taking turns sharing their answers:

1. What deployment experience surprised you the most?
2. What deployment experience troubled you the most?
3. What was your best day during the deployment?

4. What was your worst day during the deployment?
5. What did you learn about yourself during the deployment?
6. What has been the most difficult part of coming back from deployment?

“It helped the soldiers to hear that others’ experiences were similar. Six months of these conversations helped them begin to make sense of life back in the States. They finally felt like they were coming home.”

Soldiers benefit greatly from reflecting on and talking about their deployment experiences, especially with others who shared those experiences, as well as from hearing others’ perspectives on those shared experiences. In the preceding example, the members of a squad decided on their own to meet and talk. There are too many squads that didn’t or couldn’t do the same. Leaders can ensure that such conversations happen in their units by putting them on the training schedule; they can emphasize their importance by personally participating in them. In sum, just as units conduct post-deployment recovery on their trucks in their motor pools, they should do the same for their souls in their dayrooms.

3.3. Maintain connections.

Combat is a life-altering experience, for better and for worse, and leaders are an essential component of that experience before, during, and after a deployment. In a peacetime environment, leaders shouldn’t have emotionally-intimate relationships with their soldiers, and leaders who have been reassigned to other duty positions should not “interfere” in their former formations. A combat deployment changes those rules. Leaders who have shepherded soldiers into and through life-defining experiences have bonded with them in a profound way and should maintain non-duty relationships with them even after one or both have moved to different jobs or posts. At a minimum, leaders should maintain lines of communication that enable them (leveraging subordinate leaders) to check in periodically on their former soldiers, to acknowledge and commiserate with them on significant dates, to remember their fallen comrades, and overall to continue to help them make sense of the wartime experiences they both shared. Wars tends to make more sense when we’re in them than when we’ve returned from them—especially when a unit’s tactical-level successes and sacrifices appear not to have accomplished any worthwhile strategic gains. As a result, a leader’s sense-making role may become even more important in the months and years after returning from a deployment. Setting up a persistent shared space, such as Facebook closed group, can facilitate the process. It’s important that no soldier slip through the cracks and be left behind, alone and forgotten. Soldiers’ post-deployment mission statement might be, “We had each other’s backs and kept each other alive as best we could for a year of combat; let’s continue that mission now that we’re home.”

3.4. Provide a vision for post-moral-injury growth

Many combat veterans who suffer post-traumatic stress disorder eventually enjoy post-traumatic growth. I believe that the same can be true of moral injury. Leaders can facilitate healing processes by fostering a unit narrative that acknowledges the moral tragedies of war yet frames their soldiers’ experiences as opportunities for increased moral self-awareness and moral growth. After all, a sociopath would not—in fact, could not—experience the grief, shame, anger, moral disillusionment, etc. that are indicative of moral injury. The possibility of moral injury presupposes a morally good person—someone who holds and values deep moral commitments. Leaders should remind their soldiers of this fact, encourage them to reflect on their injurious experiences in order to gain greater self-awareness of their moral values, and challenge them to live those values more intentionally in their everyday lives. In this way, the same deeply

held moral commitments that created psychological distress can become springboards to happier, more purposeful lives.

Conclusion

Some years ago, an experienced combat leader posed a question to me. “Do you think of your subordinates primarily as soldiers who happen to have personal lives on the side, or as people just like you who happen currently to be soldiers?” I had to admit to myself that I unconsciously held the former attitude. I thought of my soldiers as resources to be developed, trained, and led to accomplish missions. I did genuinely care about their welfare, but I related to them *as soldiers, not as people* who had grown up as civilians and would (God willing) live many more decades as civilians after they’d finished their military service. I don’t think that I was unique in my approach, which may explain the military profession’s relative inattention to its members’ moral concerns.

Military leaders have always been entrusted with the wellbeing of their soldiers, and that responsibility should extend to them as people, not merely as soldiers. Leaders already prepare their soldiers for war in many ways—tactically, technically, culturally, mentally, physically, legally, administratively, etc. This essay has argued that leaders should also prepare their soldiers morally. After all, even in justified wars, military leaders compel their good people to do normally bad things to accomplish the war’s morally praiseworthy goals. Given that soldiers’ experiences in war will likely remain with them for the rest of their lives—for better and worse—leaders should do what they can before, during, and after a deployment to empower their soldiers to act morally while at war and to make peace with their participation in war for the rest of their lives.