

REFRAMING THE ARMY'S CONCEPTION OF CHARACTER:
THE NECESSITY OF VIRTUES FOR
LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
with a Major in Applied Philosophy and Ethics
August 2021

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DEDICATION

For my parents, Dr. William W. Grimes and Mrs. Ruth Grimes, who instilled in me the critical importance of godly-character, and for my children, Liam, Noah, Eliana-Grace, and Benjamin, to whom I prayerfully hope I can offer the same, in both word and deed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without a doubt this past year has been both full and fulfilling, with my wife deserving the majority of the praise for a variety of reasons: we welcomed our fourth child amidst COVID-19 and all of the lovely restrictions that affected patient care; we transitioned from one Army assignment to a student status to complete the MAAPE degree in less than twelve months and are now preparing for a move to our follow-on assignment; and I continued to progress in my doctoral research for my Ed.D. These three things alone made for many a long day or night working on philosophy coursework, a thesis, and my dissertation. Mary Catherine, my love, I must acknowledge you first and foremost, for without your loving support this year wouldn't have been nearly as rewarding. You deserve greater acknowledgements than these and so it is only appropriate that you receive them once my doctorate is complete. "Yours, always."

My children are still too young to understand the nature of this past year, but nonetheless also deserve my thanks for their support, for the simple "how is writing doing today, dad?" to the "have a good day at work on the computer!" To all my extended family, but especially my parents on both sides—Dr. William and Ruth Grimes, and Lieutenant Colonel (USAF, Ret.) James and Donna Kotowski—your love, continual encouragement, and provision of both solace *and* places to get this work done have been more valuable than you know.

Dr. Fischer, thank you for being a fantastic writing coach, forthright with constructive criticism, and helping me grow in *how to think* philosophically as I struggled

through the process of *how to write* philosophically. From start to finish you played a critical role at every juncture, helping me come on board the MAAPE program, agreeing to serve as my thesis chair, and guiding me throughout the process. I could *not* have done this without you, and I will be forever thankful to God for placing you in my life—you not only helped me complete my thesis on time, but more importantly, you helped me rekindle a forgotten passion for writing.

Dr. Gallegos, I continue to greatly appreciate all the feedback you have provided along the way. Your courses in emotion, moral personhood and dehumanization not only served an important background role in the crafting of this thesis, but by God’s grace were incredibly timely as he used them to challenge and further inform my relationship to my neighbor and what it means to “love my neighbor as myself”: from my wife and family, to the oppressed and marginalized. You also played a superbly important role in helping me grow as a philosophical writer, and I hope to take the insights I have gained from you—both in content and methodology—into my future writing endeavors within the chaplaincy and beyond.

Dr. Olson, thank you again for being willing to serve on my committee. Though we only spent a brief period together discussing just war theory, the military profession and ethics, and how to navigate these matters with integrity, I greatly appreciated the thoughtful candor you brought to each of our conversations as well as you sharing your experience as a career Navy officer. I sincerely hope we remain in touch in the coming years.

To the commissioned and non-commissioned officers with whom I have served who have exhibited exemplary character and sought to instill it in their subordinates, and especially to some of my commanders who have modeled excellence (if you are reading this, the few of you know who you are): I am indebted to you not only because you have influenced this work by proving through success and failure that virtue and growing in virtue is possible in military leadership, but because in doing so you continue to do what excellent leadership demands—providing the kind of earthly hope followers need to avoid cynicism and aspire to something more in a vocation whose nature and mission both engages and often brings out the worst in humanity.

Finally, I must give thanks to my Father in heaven who continues to provide for my every need and whose Spirit patiently guides me, and Christ Jesus who continues to lend a loving ear to every question that arises in my heart and mind. To borrow from Plato, he is the true “philosopher-king” I ultimately need, for he is wisdom incarnate, full of grace and compassion, bidding me to seek and find myself—my character, and thus a flourishing life—in him.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. CASE STUDY OF A MORALLY COUNTERPRODUCTIVE LEADER.....	6
III. CASE STUDY CHARACTER ANALYSIS: PART 1.....	16
IV. CASE STUDY CHARACTER ANALYSIS: PART 2	33
V. OBJECTIONS TO THE VALUES-CHARACTER ANALYSIS	50
VI. (NO) FRAMEWORK FOR (MORAL) EXCELLENCE	63
VII. A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR CHARACTER EXCELLENCE	77
VIII. A VIRTUOUS CHALLENGE: NEXT STEPS FOR ARMY LEADER CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT	103
REFERENCES	117

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. The Army Leader Requirements Model (ALRM)	2
2. Revised ALRM Centered in the Army Leader Virtues (ALV).....	101

I. INTRODUCTION

It is a simple matter to identify morally disastrous military leaders—those whose actions leave destruction in their wake, such as the supervisor who uses his position and power to sexually assault a subordinate or the command-directed murder of hundreds of unarmed civilian men, women, and children in the Vietnam May Lai Massacre.

However, to identify morally mediocre leaders becomes a more complicated affair when more often than not their behaviors are tolerated and the consequences of their actions not immediately apparent, yet arguably harm the moral well-being of both individual followers and the organization. Their deficits—in contrast to historical examples of extreme moral failure—rarely result in individually atrocious actions committed by themselves or the subordinates they negatively influence. Theirs is not a failure to follow the rules—legal or ethical—nor hold others accountable to do the same. Rather, theirs is a failure to demonstrate a quality of character required to lead in a morally holistic and effective manner. The negative effects of such leadership not only result in lower morale, but more critically have the subtle effect of degrading the moral culture, in which subordinate leaders and their soldiers become increasingly cynical, self-protective, and prone to a performance-driven mindset that sears the conscience of moral clarity. In the pursuit of becoming “all that they can be,”—and pardon the use of the old Army slogan—many of these leaders’ ethical moorings lack the necessary depth to properly orient their ambitions unto moral excellence.

Over the past few decades, the U.S. Army has undertaken a comprehensive revision of its doctrine and efforts to improve its culture with respect to its nature as a *profession of arms*. The result of this intensive work has been the codification of a

professional ethic and seven *Army Values*, as well as subsequent revisions to its leadership doctrine (Department of the Army [DA], 2012b, 2012a, 2019; Licameli, 2018). As its leadership philosophy has evolved in accordance with academic and professional studies revealing the critical importance of the leader-follower relationship, the Army has intentionally attempted to address toxic or counterproductive leadership behaviors that run contrary to both the Army ethic and mission effectiveness. An important component of its emphasis on effective versus counterproductive leadership has been the Army’s most recent edition of Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22, “Leadership and the Profession,” which includes a revised section on leader *character*, the first of six leader attributes and competencies of an Army leader (see Figure 1).

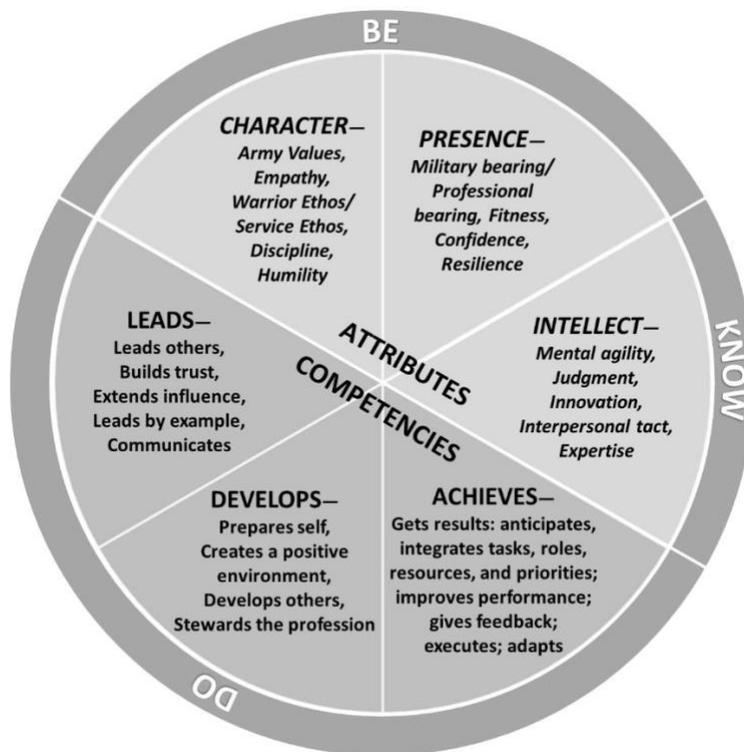


Figure 1. The Army Leader Requirements Model (ALRM). Reprinted from *Army Leadership and the Profession (ADP 6-22, C1, para. 1-15)* by Department of the Army, 2019.

According to Army doctrine, a leader's character "consists of their true nature guided by their conscience, which affects their moral attitudes and actions... [it consists] of the moral and ethical qualities of an individual revealed through their decisions and actions" (DA, 2019, para 2-1, 3). Specific to the Army context, a leader's character comprises five attributes: (embodying) the *Army Values*, the *Warrior Ethos*, *discipline*, *empathy*, and *humility*.

However, a lingering challenge is that many leaders who are predominantly regarded as effective—committed to the mission and competent to lead—still lack the quality of character needed for *morally perceptive* leadership—a lack often overshadowed by their strength of personality, expertise, and proclivity to produce desired outcomes. In an organizational culture that understandably emphasizes performance, morally mediocre and counterproductive leaders whose personal and professional ethics are primarily framed in terms of compliance with rules and regulations are in many instances able to model some or all of the *Army Values* through a purview of moral obligation, and perhaps demonstrate one or more of the doctrinally identified character attributes through a similar lens, yet lack an excellence of character necessary for effective moral leadership—the kind that is able to not only know “right from wrong,” but whose behaviors reflect a kind of moral expertise that allows them to consistently navigate morally complex situations, regardless of external factors that might sabotage a leader who is merely morally continent or whose moral concerns are easily influenced by personal consequence.

Perhaps this is why military ethicists such as Martin Cook (2015) critique the military's longstanding focus on instilling honorable character in service members,

arguing that its “Aristotelian” approach to character development—a kind that predominantly focuses on habit formation and behaviorally instilling various virtues or values that are thought to correspond with desired outcomes—is superficial at best since it lacks a full-orbed Aristotelian understanding of character that requires practical wisdom for holistic cultivation. Without this, the consistency and reliability of supposed character traits as a means to prevent ethical failures remains flawed and cannot adequately account for situational factors (e.g., the stressors of combat), cultural influences, or bureaucratic constraints that may affect soldiers’ ethical decisions and behaviors. I contend that while the Army in particular rightly emphasizes the importance of leader character, it has failed to present a holistic account of character necessary for *morally* effective leadership.

In this paper I will argue that the Army’s doctrinal conception of character is inadequate for the cultivation of *excellent character*, which is fundamentally requisite for *exemplary Army leadership*. I will attempt to support this argument through a succession of discussions that examine and critique the current conceptual framework of character and then respond with a proposal for a revised framework that supports the development of exemplary leadership. In chapter two, I will begin by first discussing a case study of a highly competent and committed Army senior leader whose counterproductive behaviors caused moral harm to his subordinates, yet whose particular sense of moral duty led to a demonstration of the five character attributes that, though arguably problematic, helps to shed light on important conceptual insufficiencies. In chapters three through five I will provide an analysis of the case study, throughout which I will assess specific issues inherent to a leader’s embodiment of the *Army Values* and remaining character attributes,

in order to demonstrate how these important components of character are individually and collectively unable to produce moral excellence. Having laid the conceptual groundwork, in chapter six I will demonstrate how Army doctrine's "character problem" relates to what I will argue as a lack of a coherent framework for exemplary leadership. In chapters seven and eight I propose a revised framework for character excellence based on what I refer to as "Army leader virtues" and then conclude with a cursory review of some organizational and pedagogical considerations for implementing a virtues-based character development program.

II. CASE STUDY OF A MORALLY COUNTERPRODUCTIVE LEADER

The following case study is of a brigade commander whose counterproductive behaviors were prevalent enough to have a progressively negative effect on the morale and moral well-being of his subordinate leaders, yet serve as examples of what is often tolerated within Army culture. With respect to the ethical issue at hand, this commander is representative of a problem all too common amongst successful Army leaders: they meet if not exceed nearly every performance metric the Army uses to measure effective leadership; however, they often lack the kind of holistic moral competence recognized in *exemplary* or morally excellent leaders. They are rewarded for their military expertise, stewardship, and ability to produce results. Their character flaws are often overlooked as long as they do not exhibit immoral conduct, unreserved toxicity, or gross negligence toward issues that affect unit readiness. Problematic temperamental or dispositional issues may be dismissed as inconsequential, or at minimum, tolerated until serious complaints arise that often entail formal investigations. Such was the case with who we will refer to as Colonel John Smith.

2.1 Case Study

Col. Smith had been a successful Army senior leader in the most characteristic sense. After decades of proven competence and commitment to the Army and its mission, multiple deployments in combat, and successful commands at the company and battalion levels, he was of the less than 50 percent of lieutenant colonels promoted to colonel and even fewer still selected to lead one of Army's premier brigade combat teams. His capability as a proven leader was not only evidenced by his professional record, but in his tactical and operational competence, his keen intellect, and his ability to

get results. Like most Army leaders who succeed in attaining such a senior position, his ability to both read and command a room, his out-of-the-box approach to military problem solving, and his type-A personality that in particular drove him to make his organization above all others the very best in the Army, made him what might culturally be considered the ideal candidate to effectively lead an organization designed to help fight and win the nation's wars.

Col. Smith was a dedicated learner, soldier, and officer. He both extolled and modeled discipline, both in his daily study habits and work ethic, and had no problem giving of himself tirelessly for the success of the organization and its mission, demonstrating *loyalty* to the organization and his soldiers, *duty* with respect to his role and responsibilities, and *selfless-service* in his sacrificing both time and energy. In the most traditional sense, no one would likely question his embodiment of the *Army Values*, especially with respect to what the Army culture esteems and demands of its people to succeed in accomplishing the mission.

However, any respect for Col. Smith coexisted with the unease of a command climate governed more by the need to meet expectations and uncertainty of reprisal for failure. What was it about Col. Smith that made him respected for his capabilities, but less less admirable as a leader and often feared for the power he wielded? The following scenarios detail several interactions had by members of his staff and subordinate command teams and help illustrate the morally counterproductive aspects of Col. Smith's leadership.

2.1.1 Scenario 1: A Disagreement of Diagnosis. Every brigade commander has a section of personal or special staff members that serve as subject matter experts and

advisors on key issues pertinent to the commander's mission, such as legal matters (the judge advocate general, or JAG officer), religion, morale, and spiritual resiliency (the brigade chaplain), and the psychological health of the unit (the behavioral health officer, or BHO, usually a psychologist or clinical social worker). These staff relationships exist for multiple reasons, but ultimately each special staff officer is in a unique position to assist the commander by ensuring he or she is best informed so as to make important decisions that affect the lives of soldiers, such as when caring for one who has been or remains suicidal.

On one such occasion, after providing treatment to a soldier who had expressed suicidal ideations, the BHO individually briefed Col. Smith that he had assessed said soldier as “no longer a threat to himself or others,” thus clearing him for regular duties. Other personnel directly involved in the care for the soldier—including the soldier's commander, first-line supervisor, and unit chaplain—all concurred with the BHO's assessment. While Col Smith voiced concern and hesitation at this diagnosis, he nonetheless acknowledged the BHO and dismissed him from his office. However, the very next day, at the monthly brigade-wide health promotion council meeting,¹ both the soldier's command team and the BHO received a drastically different response. When it came time to review the case of this specific high-risk soldier, after a mild disagreement between Col. Smith and the BHO, Col. Smith proceeded to berate his BHO and the respective command team, questioning their judgment on clearing a soldier who

¹ A brigade health promotion council meeting consists of the commander, brigade staff, the subordinate command team leadership, the behavioral health team (including the BHO), the chaplain, and other representatives, and exists to address mental health, resiliency, and safety issues across the formation, as well as an opportunity for subordinate commanders to brief the brigade commander on their actions to care for individual, high-risk soldiers (e.g. those who have been suicidal, engaged in risky behaviors, are pending disciplinary action, etc.)

was “clearly” not fit to return to duty, and threatened to dismiss them from the room. He then expounded on what it meant to properly and holistically care for soldiers and what action he believed would be in the best interest of this particular soldier—such as receiving in-patient care—so that they could ensure his mental fitness.

This rattled many in the room—not only the BHO and command team—leaving many to wonder if they might be next in the “receiving line” of rebukes for perceived error or disagreement on decisions made. One staff officer remarked,

I get it that he was frustrated about what he thought was improper care for a suicidal soldier and that this kid’s life was his responsibility, but to blow up on the BHO like that in front of everyone else? It’s like he wanted to make an example of him. Whether it’s simply “don’t disagree with me” or “take care of soldiers” or something else. I don’t know, but it seemed unnecessary to me, no matter if his opinion was the right one.

2.1.2 Scenario 2: Good Cop/Bad Cop. Field training exercises are the meat and potatoes of brigade combat team readiness, not only serving to provide the subordinate command teams the opportunity to prepare their soldiers for real-world missions, but also giving the brigade staff the opportunity to design, test, and assess their own systems and procedures for managing all of the components that are needed to effectively run the operation. By the time most officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) are working at the brigade level, by and large they have had several years of technical experience and are expected to perform at the highest level, including with respect to administrative and logistical standards necessary for the brigade’s operational headquarters to run like a well-oiled machine.

One evening during such an exercise, Col. Smith decided to pay an unscheduled visit to both his command post (CP)—which is where operations staff oversee the mission—and his administrative and logistics operations center (ALOC) tent, which housed his support staff—the human resources personnel, logisticians, medical, legal, and chaplain sections. For the brigade commander to conduct staff circulation is not unheard of nor unwarranted—in fact it should be commonplace. But this was not common for Col. Smith. When he did arrive, he proceeded to silently inspect every inch of both tents, then went section-by-section, criticizing deficiencies in a rather condescending manner. When he left both tents, he called them “utter failures” and “the worst” CP and ALOC he’d ever seen, demanding that they be fixed before his next visit. Approximately 24 hours later, Col. Smith returned, again unannounced, in what was an obviously improved mood, smiling and commenting on how everything looked great and that he loved the outcomes.

One support staff officer commented that what bothered him most about this interchange wasn’t so much that Col. Smith was wrong or even harsh—for example, the ALOC did benefit from his corrections—but that:

He didn’t even use it as an opportunity to train or coach us. He just saw deficiencies and chewed us all out. And then he comes back the next day as if nothing happened and we’re ‘all-good’ now. One moment the boss was “bad cop,” and the next he was the “good cop.” He obviously knew what he was talking about, but the way he handled himself made folks either feel stupid, anxious, or just pissed and frustrated—it’s like things were never quite good enough for him, and you don’t ever want to be around when he lets you know.

2.1.3 Scenario 3: Holding Leaders Responsible. The Army and its leadership can at times appear stiff, rigid, and uptight. However, given the scale and scope of the Army’s mission and the seriousness of failure in both training and combat, it is absolutely necessary for leaders of leaders to hold them to might appear to be exceedingly high standard of responsibility, even with respect to what might seem like minor issues.

During another field training exercise, Col. Smith had come across some information that struck at the heart of his priority for soldier safety in concert with maintaining training standards: his headquarters company had a soldier that needed to return to the garrison for a separate duty he had to perform the following day. The operations officer—a major by rank—instructed the headquarters company commander to task some personnel to take this one soldier back in one of their tactical vehicles. However, they decided to return at night and were required to use the vehicle’s “white lights” (normal headlights) rather than tactical “black-out lights,” (special lights used in conjunction with night-vision goggles) which were malfunctioning.

Col. Smith saw this as both a safety failure (i.e., it was poor planning to have to drive a soldier back during the night, rather than during daylight hours) and a training failure (the vehicle should not have been in the field with inoperable black-out lights, as driving with “white-lights” during night operations was not authorized during the training exercise). He was also upset that the soldier’s responsibilities hadn’t been better prioritized in the first place so as to keep him in the field for the direction of the exercise, rather than having to return to complete a separate duty. Col. Smith proceeded to chew out both the operations officer and the headquarter commander in front of the other leaders and soldiers in the CP for failing to properly plan, coordinate and control their

soldiers, and support the training exercise.

2.1.4 Scenario 4: “Always On.” The first three scenarios were representative of what became instances where one of the brigade senior staff officers commented that he felt that he was constantly doing “damage control” with the majors on the staff and in subordinate units. Aside from managing his own back-and-forth relationship with Col. Smith—one moment on edge, the next receiving kudos—he mentioned that it seemed like a large part of his job was simply going around to check the “pulse” of his fellow staff officers to see how they were handling the command climate. On one occasion he paid a visit to Col. Smith in a continued effort to build a working relationship with him, as well as attempt to engage him regarding his leadership behaviors:

During an office visit, we talked about his presence with the rest of the staff. I mentioned that most of them felt like they didn’t really know him—even on a professional level. At one point I also told him that the impression he gave most of the majors was that he wanted to make sure everyone knew that *he* was the brigade commander—that *he* knew what was best for the organization and taking care of soldiers—and that we worked for *him*. His response was basically, “those majors have a job to do, and I expect them to do it well. I’m fine if they seem afraid of getting fired—let that drive them to perform better and make sure soldiers are taken care of—that’s what matters most: taking care of soldiers and excelling as an organization. I’m not here to make everyone happy—I’m here to lead a brigade so that it will succeed in combat. They need to deal with that.”

When it came to discussing any ethical grey areas—like those where he might have been dealing with a situation involving a soldier who had gotten into trouble

and was under disciplinary action, but where this soldier might have personally benefited from a little mercy; or in situations where he cut some corners to get something accomplished for the organization, but in the process put some of his staff in an ethical bind—he would say things like, “Here is how I see it: I’m a fairly religious guy and I go to chapel whenever I can, but when it comes to making decisions as a commander, my bible is the UCMJ” (Uniform Code of Military Justice). He definitely gave me the impression that as long as he wasn’t breaking the law, he could justify doing whatever it took to accomplish the mission. I think another big part of his personality and leadership was his intensity about everything—he was always “on”: in the office, in the field, driven to accomplish...even at unit social events he was intense, wanting to make sure nobody was left out, that everyone was involved and participating to the level he saw fit. And yet he maintained a kind of emotional distance from everyone, including me. This seemed to affect everything he was and did as a leader.”

2.1.5 Impressions. The previous scenarios and others like them—both similar and more subtle in scale—left a general impression that while perhaps somewhat toxic, he was by no means morally deviant. They didn’t feel that he was preferential or prejudiced in his treatment of others—to the contrary, he was quite equitable based on one’s merit of performance. However, the behaviors that *were* problematic were so commonplace that they had a *cumulatively* negative effect on the morale of his leadership team and those leaders who served in the echelons under his command. While Col. Smith verbally repeated his commitment to the centrality of caring for soldiers, the importance of maintaining high standards, and critical nature of what he viewed as

dedicated and competent leadership at every echelon, his interpersonal behaviors with his closest staff officers and the leaders in his battalions left much to be desired.

However, while we might find his behaviors personally insulting or ill-suited for maximizing human performance, realistically, many find this par for the course in the Army's performance-driven culture, acknowledge these kinds of leaders produce results, and accept them as long as they do not clearly and consistently cross lines of abuse. After all, it is a highly subjective matter when it comes to evaluating leaders' personalities, especially when it is easy to contrast likeable and admirable leaders with those whose demeanor is personally objectionable. Col. Smith might be chastised for a lack of emotional intelligence or by pointing to his narcissistic tendencies—common amongst many type-A, successful leaders. But perhaps Col. Smith (and many others) would himself argue that ultimately, his job wasn't to "be nice" or to "protect others' feelings," but rather to ensure that his units and their soldiers were trained and equipped to accomplish the mission and come home safe and sound, no matter how their leaders personally felt about his particular leadership style.

Understandably, others might provide a contrary moral argument: that Col. Smith's behaviors revealed his neglect to truly "live" one or more of the *Army Values*, given their role as the leader's practical application of the Army Ethic...e.g. that he neglected to model the *Values* of *respect* or *selfless service* as they pertained caring for the individual welfare of his subordinate leaders. Perhaps a complimentary accusation could be that Col. Smith not only failed to live the *Army Values*, but that he also failed to demonstrate the leader character attributes of *empathy* and *humility*.

However, what if such an assessment, while perhaps true from a certain

perspective, ultimately misses the mark with respect to more vital matters of a robust and nuanced understanding of leader character—for Col. Smith, others like him, and those without such demonstrable problems but who no less exhibit mediocre character that allows them to get by as morally “good enough” leaders? It is with this question in mind that we will now turn to our analysis of Col. Smith specifically, and what it entails for the Army’s fundamental problem with respect to its description of character more broadly.

III. CASE STUDY CHARACTER ANALYSIS: PART 1

If we are to properly understand and critique Col. Smith's behaviors, and not merely with respect opinions about his moral duty or the consequences of his actions, we should begin by examining *who* the Army expects its leaders to *be*. The next three chapters provide an analysis of the Smith case by examining it through the lens of the Army's description of character and specifically the five desired character attributes—the *Army Values*, the *Warrior Ethos*, *discipline*, *empathy*, and *humility* (DA, 2019, pp. 1 – 15,16).

This chapter will focus on the latter four attributes, beginning with a brief contextual overview of the role and nature of character for leadership as communicated in doctrine. My reason to delay addressing the *Army Values* is intentional: the *Values* are essentially the Army leader's principal character attribute, given they are the practical application of the Army ethic and serve as the moral foundation for leader character. While an apparent strength of this moral framework is the relationship between the *Values* and remaining attributes, there is also an important weakness that consists in what I believe to be a doctrinal assumption and expectation regarding their moral association, development, and outward expression: that the latter four attributes—if given proper attention—will develop *in tandem with* a leader's genuine and intentional "living the *Army Values*." However, that this matters for the Smith case in particular and for the larger problem regarding the Army's assessment and development of character deserves a distinct discussion to be addressed in the next chapter.

Finally, I acknowledge that part of a holistic assessment of (poor) character should take into consideration issues pertaining to moral psychology and pathology, such

as those regarding moral upbringing, trauma, or other experiences that bear on one's personality, temperament, and emotional dispositions. While I admit that having such information is important to fully understand an individual's situation, since it was not directly applicable to the Army's doctrinal issue I am challenging and thus not within the scope of this paper, I will forgo it in the following analysis and discussion.

3.1 The Role and Nature of Army (Leader) Character

When we think of individuals who demonstrate *good* character, we describe them in specific moral terms or point to specific examples of behavior, temperament or personality: *he is a good man...she is an understanding person...he is a man of courage...she is a model of sincerity...he lives and breathes his moral convictions...she is a very principled leader, unwavering in her devotion to what is right...he carries himself well in nearly any situation...she is the most steady and trustworthy person I know.* By contrast, we often describe *poor* character by pointing to consistently defective behaviors: *he is narcissistic...he has no respect for others...he cares more about efficiency and success than peoples' well-being....his desire that others recognize his authority and competence is blindingly obvious...he doesn't seem to pay attention or care about the moral or emotional impact his actions have on others.* Despite our relatively stable tendency to intuitively differentiate between good and bad character qualities, we are often less willing to judge the entire character of an individual unless they are generally perceived as either exemplary or vicious on the spectrum of moral behavior.

Recognizing the importance of character and its relationship to moral duty and ethical decision-making, Army doctrine attempts to formally address what Army professionals intuitively recognize: while soldiers may pay more conscious attention to

the effects of their leaders' competency and commitment to them and the mission, and while the culture is indeed functionally oriented around one's duty—moral or otherwise—and the consequences of ethical decisions, both the morale and moral climate of the unit are greatly dependent on leaders' character, which is in turn subsequently vital to mission success. Informally defined² as consisting of “the moral and ethical qualities of an individual revealed through their decisions and actions” (DA, 2019, p. 2 – 1), character is described as *affecting how one leads*, and:

...consists of their true nature guided by their conscience, which affects their moral attitudes and actions. A leader's reputation is what others view as character...An Army leader's role in developing others' character would be simple if it merely required checking and aligning personal values with the Army Values. Reality is much different. Becoming and remaining a leader of character is a process involving day-to-day experiences and internal fortitude. While education, self-development, counseling, coaching, and mentoring can refine the outward signs of character, *modifying deeply held values* is the only way to change character. Leaders are responsible for their own character and for encouraging, supporting, and assessing their subordinates' efforts to embody character...Leaders must consistently demonstrate good character and inspire others to do the same (p. 2 – 1; emphasis added)

A cursory review of Army doctrine reveals that it makes a noble effort to concisely describe character and its nature—at least as it pertains to its importance for Army leadership. It provides an approachable description, identifying such elements as one's

² It is worth noting that the most recent publication of the Army's leadership doctrine (DA, 2019) explicitly states that it no longer contains a formal definition for *character*.

attitudes, actions, and reputation, beliefs and values, and an acknowledgement that its formation is progressive, rooted in the modification of deeply held values. Secondly, it places the burden of its development on individual leaders and requires that leaders be directly involved in their subordinates' cultivation of character. Third, it orients leaders to specific attributes so that they might assess and develop character in themselves and their subordinates.

While these points are important to keep in mind as we examine each part of the Army's conceptual framework for character, the problem with the Army's conception of character does not primarily lie in what doctrine *does* speak to, but rather in where it is silent and thus insufficient regarding two fundamental concerns. The first is the nature and scope of *developing* character *excellence*, for while the modification of values is an important part of character, doctrine fails to address *how* this is done in an *excellent* manner. The second concern is what such excellence *entails*—i.e., its *telos*—with respect to leader and soldier well-being. Therefore, by way of analyzing the Smith case, the primary aim of this and the following two chapters is to address the first concern by demonstrating that while the framework of character attributes provides appropriate and necessary *evidences* of *good* Army leader character, as construed in Army doctrine it a) does not fully account for the elements necessary for developing *excellent* character, and as such b) does not effectively result in the kind of character required of and for *excellent leadership*.

3.2 Leader Character Attributes: The Warrior Ethos and Discipline

The *Warrior Ethos* and *discipline* constitute what might be considered more traditional attributes of Army leader character, speaking to the beliefs and behaviors

typical when one considers the nature and mission of the military profession. Army doctrine describes the *Warrior Ethos* as an essential leader character attribute that embodies the spirit of the Army profession:

[The Warrior Ethos]...represents the professional attitudes and beliefs that characterize the American Soldier...a Soldier's selfless commitment to the Nation, mission, unit, and fellow Soldiers...Leaders develop and sustain the Warrior Ethos through discipline, commitment to the Army Values, and pride in the Army's heritage...[it] requires unrelenting resolve to do what is right regardless of the mission...[it] creates a collective commitment to succeed with honor...the Army must continually affirm, develop, and sustain its Warrior Ethos...Growth in character, confidence, composure, mental agility, and resilience are *outcomes* of internalizing the Warrior Ethos" (DA, 2019, pp. 2 – 8,9, emphasis added).

Furthermore, the practical exposition of the *Warrior Ethos* is contained in the *Soldier's Creed*:

I am an American Soldier.

I am a warrior and a member of a team.

I serve the people of the United States, and live the Army Values.

I will always place the mission first.

I will never accept defeat.

I will never quit.

I will never leave a fallen comrade.

I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my

warrior tasks and drills.

I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself.

I am an expert and a professional. I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy the enemies of the United States of America in close combat.

I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life.

I am an American Soldier (DA, 2019, p. 2 – 9).

Discipline, which includes the notion of self-discipline, is demonstrated by decisions and actions that are consistent with the *Army Values*, and is regarded by Army doctrine as:

...the ability to control one's own behavior—to do the harder right over the easier wrong. Doing tasks to the established Army standard without deviation reflects discipline...leaders maintain discipline by enforcing standards impartially and consistently...When enforcing standards, Soldiers expect their leaders to do so in an impartial, transparent, just, and consistent manner (DA, 2019, pp. 2 – 10).

As essential character attributes, whereas the *Warrior Ethos* represents the leader's dispositions that demonstrate his or her loyalty to the greater cause of the Army profession and effectively cultivate the esprit de corps considered critical for mission success, *discipline* summarizes the leader's complementary dispositions to consistently demonstrate self-control, impartial behavior and just treatment towards members of the unit.

Was Col. Smith's character demonstrative of the *Warrior Ethos* and *discipline*?

In light of how Army doctrine articulates these attributes and depending on the perspective of the one assessing his behaviors, the answer could be "yes" or "no," but most likely an unsatisfactory "it depends." With respect to the *Warrior Ethos*, while his

actions may have arguably diminished some of his subordinate leaders' individual sense of esprit de corps, this is difficult to judge given how their sense of comradery for one another and the cause of the profession may or may not have been adversely affected by their boss's unpredictable toxic behavior. Perhaps he could be criticized for undermining his subordinate leaders' sense of personal resolve, which could be construed as some sort of dereliction of his duty to have a selfless commitment to his fellow soldiers, and thus an obvious character flaw. But as we shall see when we assess him in light of the *Army Values*, this conclusion is not so straightforward.

In his defense, he could argue that he embodied every line of *Soldier's Creed* and exuded the confidence, composure, mental agility, and resilience that identify one's internalizing the *Warrior Ethos*. This highlights an important interpretation of the *Warrior Ethos*, albeit a cultural one: as a character attribute, it essentially embodies dispositions associated with the mentality and behaviors expected of loyal, dedicated, and stalwart military service members—dispositions regarded as necessary to sustain them in war and safeguard honorable service to the nation. While many modern critics will want to understandably interpret this attribute through the lens of how, say, *emotionally intelligent* leaders might exemplify it in their interpersonal relationships, the attribute by itself does not emphasize this requirement. This is not to say that the attribute can be assessed independently of the others—such as *empathy*—but that as one of several supposedly complementary attributes, it emphasizes those more intense if not aggressive dispositions that, when rightly tempered, are requisite for effective soldiering. As such the *Warrior Ethos* is a social or communal attribute, a set of dispositions that aid soldiers in protecting their own and defending the nation in the ethical conduct of war.

At the risk of oversimplifying a case like Col. Smith's, one might be justified in asking:

When it comes to war, to ensuring soldiers are prepared to engage in it honorably and then return home to their families, who do you ultimately want leading you—someone you love to work for, or someone who is the best at what they do and will ethically get the job done, and done well?

While it may sound cliché, it is in this very sense that Col. Smith was a “warrior” embodying the *Warrior Ethos*, for he deeply cared about the nation, the mission and its impact on the soldiers, even if that meant subordinate leaders' egos were deeply bruised along the way. In light of these considerations, to judge Col. Smith as having lacked or embodied the *Warrior Ethos* depends on how one understands its relationship to the remaining attributes and how such a relationship tempers its proper embodiment—a theme we will see throughout our examination of the remaining attributes.

Similarly, with respect to *discipline*, it is difficult to judge Col. Smith a failure on most accounts. In his defense, his personal discipline with respect to military bearing and professional competency was without question, and with respect to the discipline of his subordinates and their units, he demonstrated relatively impartial treatment based solely on a leader's performance, despite *how* he might engage them interpersonally. Perhaps it could be stated that he demanded an exceedingly high standard of discipline—that he expected too much. But it is difficult to impugn a leader for this unless it is accompanied by his or her own abject hypocrisy, which cannot be clearly said of Col. Smith. Without a doubt he was considered mean-spirited, demeaning in his language to the subordinates he viewed as inept, and that he had an erratic temper, which might lead us to conclude

that he in some sense he did not embody a form of self-discipline with respect to his own impulses and thoughtful communication. Here doctrine might affirm this conclusion, but only implicitly and again through a lens of emotional intelligence, as culturally this is not uncommon and often overlooked as long as it doesn't verifiably result in a counterproductive climate—something not always addressed until the end of a leader's tenure in command.

In what some believe might be a cutting of procedural ethical corners to get his soldiers ready for deployment, he could be said to not have exercised discipline in choosing the “harder right over the easier wrong.” Was this a violation of the *Army Values*, such as *integrity* or his *duty* to follow proper procedures? Perhaps, but as we will see in the next chapter, values often come into conflict with one another, and “choosing the harder right” may not always be agreed upon, especially when leaders perceive their higher duty to the *Values* and the mission is constrained by bureaucratic requirements. What leaders need are affective attributes to help them make these hard calls in a humane manner, and Army doctrine proposes two more to help close this gap.

3.3 Leader Character Attributes: Empathy and Humility

While *empathy* has been included in recent revisions of leadership doctrine published over the past decade, *humility* is a relatively new addition to the Army's leadership model (DA, 2019). While they both might appear to be obviously necessary to a modern reader, prior to the past decade neither concept was explicitly addressed in doctrine with respect to describing the effective leader, as until the 2010's the Army's focus had been on revising its professional ethic situated in defined moral values (Licameli, 2018). Perhaps implied in some cases, more likely the challenge of

incorporating *empathy* and *humility* has understandably been a longstanding military culture that has valued seemingly conflicting traits more in alignment with the *Warrior Ethos* and *discipline*—those that correspond with a sense of pride, personal and unit honor, and a collectivist mentality. Yet due to leadership studies of recent decades, the changing socio-political climate of war that has increasingly emphasized the need for more humane soldiering, and the testimonies regarding the effectiveness of emotionally healthy leaders have influenced the inclusion of these *affective* attributes in the Army’s conception of leader character.

Army doctrine describes *empathy* as a leader’s ability to experience another’s point of view and identity with another’s feelings and emotions, which leads to a deeper understanding and desire to care for Soldiers and others. Leaders are to demonstrate *empathy* in both their roles as leaders *and* followers. It is interesting to note that the doctrinal description of *empathy* takes a predominantly pragmatic, aspirational tone—how it helps leaders perform better:

Empathy does not mean sympathy for another...[it] allows a leader to anticipate what others are experiencing and feeling and gives insight to how decisions or actions affect them...Leaders with a strong tendency for empathy can apply it to understand people at a deeper level [e.g. civilians, soldiers and their families, local populations, victims of disasters, and enemy combatants]...Empathy enhances cultural understanding and enables an Army leader to better interact with others (DA, 2019, p. 2 – 8).

On the same token, doctrine does recognize the relational importance of empathetic leaders:

[They are] better communicators, help others understand what is occurring, and inspire others to meet mission objectives. During operations, Army leaders gain empathy when they share hardships to gauge Soldier morale and combat readiness...[they] recognize that empathy includes nurturing a close relationship between the Army and Army families...[it] includes providing recovery time from difficult missions, protecting leave periods, and supporting events that allow information exchange and family team building (DA, 2019, p. 2 – 8).

With respect to *humility*, Army doctrine summarizes it as a leader's inherent motive to support the mission above self-interest, accurate self-awareness, and receptivity to others' input and feedback. It addresses humility by way of describing its influence and relationship to other moral qualities, placing it on a continuum of excessive humility versus arrogance, and briefly emphasizing the subjective nature of properly judging a leader's humility:

...A person of high integrity, honesty, and character embodies the qualities of humility. For humility to apply, a leader must first have competence and confidence...Leaders are seen as humble when they are aware of their limitations and abilities and apply that understanding to their leadership...Either extreme [of excess humility or hubris] signals a lack of self-awareness that undermines followers' trust and confidence in the leader's ability to make good decisions...[Humility is] a subjective perception of the leader...Individuals need to guard against their biases and assess character on the whole set of Army Values and attributes (DA, 2019, p. 2 – 11).

These doctrinal descriptions appear to leave little ground to defend Col. Smith as having

embodied either attribute—at least with respect to his interactions with his subordinate leaders. He did not appear to genuinely relate to his subordinate leaders’ feelings, had a propensity for severe communication, expected others to understand him rather than making the effort to understand them, demanded rather than inspired others to meet mission objectives, maintained an overly strenuous work-tempo, and was perceived by many as self-focused, unreceptive to feedback, and overconfident. But again, this may be examining his behavior with too strict of an eye for *empathy* and *humility* in light of developed emotional intelligence. It also does little to account for the nature of a military culture that until recently has not explicitly required these attributes of its leaders and continues to place a higher functional value on the competency and commitment of officers like Col. Smith.

The Army has without a doubt taken an important step by including these attributes in leadership assessment and development, but exactly how they are embraced, embodied, and expressed—even authentically—will likely always vary by a leader’s age, gender, and especially their cultural background. While perhaps we cannot ultimately excuse his lack of empathy and humility, we must acknowledge that given his time in service relative to doctrinal revisions, it may be too much to judge him for failing to embody these relatively new attributes, especially given how they are a result of intentional emotional maturity. This brings up some important considerations when evaluating attributes such as these. First, a more seasoned leader’s genuine appreciation and demonstration of either attribute may not be nearly *as* expressive or expressed in the manner similar to that of a younger leader who has experienced both in a generational context that likely understands them better than the other, more traditional character

attributes. Not only that, but what may be considered ineffective or emotionally unacceptable in the civilian sector cannot always (and perhaps should not always) be directly transposed onto the military culture, regardless of general observations garnered from empirical research. While cultural variations do not excuse unethical behavior, they do help us nuance behaviors more effectively, especially given the unique culture of the Army *and* when emotional maturity plays an important role throughout the career of a leader. What may be morally excellent of military leadership may in some ways differ from the character expected of excellent civilian leaders.

Perhaps given these contextual variables, in Col. Smith's defense we might acknowledge that he appeared to empathize with the lower-ranking soldiers under his command, often justifying his harsh behavior towards other leaders in defense of soldier well-being. Perhaps in a way he even empathized with his leaders—he likely understood their discomfort, perhaps having experienced it himself as a junior officer—but perhaps used that awareness to achieve what he valued as most important for the unit and believed that they would perform better under what he reasoned was an acceptable level of stress. It was also understood that while he rarely solicited input or feedback his staff, he had enough self-awareness to keep confidence with select peers whose counsel he trusted. Consequently, while far from a token example of empathetic or humble leadership, Col. Smith is likely to have good company with a majority of Army leaders whose professional competencies seem to compensate for what they lack emotionally.

3.4 The Lingering Challenge for Character Assessment

Thus far we have examined Col. Smith's character and found it subpar on several accounts, but we might also argue that such an assessment is ultimately unsatisfactory

when we rely on doctrine to be the predominant guide to our interpretation. Regardless of how strongly we might feel about his leadership style, it fails to fully account for inconsistent interpretations of some of the attributes, the degrees in which they are learned and embodied—especially the affective attributes only recently emphasized in Army leadership—within the scope of a leader’s time in service and relative effort to embrace them, and how cultural standards affect such interpretations. Perhaps most important, such assessments greatly depend on the specific moral lens through which one might judge each of the attributes, which is often an amalgamation of one’s moral principles, interpretation of the *Army Values*, sense of moral duty and the moral consequences of leader’s actions. Regardless of what normative lens may be most in play, when we judge Col. Smith as a leader of poor character, we do so not on account of some purely objective standard for each of the attributes, for neither doctrine nor individual experience provides one. What entails when the Army must “line up” several of these “mediocre-to-bad leaders” are often politically-driven, somewhat arbitrary assessments of poor character as part of an investigatory conclusion resulting in varying degrees of disciplinary action, yet all without addressing the root issues of character failure and the likely truth that while the Army does not demand excellence from every leader and often tolerates a lack therefore, aspirationally it is desired by subordinate leaders and soldiers alike.

Notwithstanding the objective moral grounds on which we may stand, we primarily judge instances like Col. Smith based on a certain *way* in which we *want* him to embody the *Warrior Ethos*, *discipline*, *empathy*, and *humility*. Our intuitions about moral character are just as strong an influence in our assessment as the external moral

guidelines provided by doctrine. Whether or not we can articulate it clearly, we have an expected manner in which we desire leaders to demonstrate character, which reveals that we—consciously or unconsciously—have our own disposition, per say, towards these and other attributes or qualities and the manner in which we believe they should operate as evidences of character. While our intuitions are not always trustworthy, in many ways we know excellence when we see it. This leads us to an important consideration.

The final line in the section on *humility*—which is also the final line in the chapter on *character*—states that individuals must “guard against their biases and assess character based on the whole set of Army Values and attributes” (p. 2 – 11). An important concluding remark, this statement also recapitulates what doctrine addresses in prior sections: that all of the desired character attributes not only complement one another, but that to be embodied appropriately, they require that each leader internalize the *Army Values*—what I will refer to as the Army’s “moral-ethical guidance mechanism.” As we shall discuss in the next chapter, the *Values* serve as the primary lens through which to (properly) assess the other four character attributes and thus character as a whole.

Let us consider the following synthesis of the attributes and what that may entail for the larger problem of character we are trying to address. First, at the risk of oversimplification, *the Warrior Ethos* and *discipline* could be understood to represent dispositions of character that are critical for leaders to foster comradery, a sense of purpose, mission-centeredness, and dedication to the profession, whereas *empathy* and *humility* uniquely contribute to the emotional health of character that is critical for building trust and promoting moral health. Embodied as a whole, these four attributes

would make an important contribution to the moral excellence of an Army leader, one whose temperament constitutes a unique composure combining stalwart military bearing and professional discipline with the emotional wisdom necessary to best interact with and inspire the trust and dedication of one's followers. Second, doctrine appears to assume that a) good leaders will *value each attribute accordingly* as worthy of embodying and b) that the desired manner of doing so will naturally flow from *living the Army Values*. In other words, leaders of character are those who internalize the *Army Values* unto the embodiment the remaining four character attributes. To what conclusion might this lead us?

Failures of character, whether they be failures of embodying the *Warrior Ethos*, *discipline*, *empathy*, or *humility*, must ultimately be the result of some failure to fully *live the Army Values*, and perhaps implied is that the intuited leader excellence the Army may desire of its leaders is centered in the embodiment of the *Values*. It is therefore imprecise to simply charge leaders like Col. Smith as having failed to develop and demonstrate behaviors in keeping with those attributes, without addressing his failure to *live the Army Values*. Furthermore, with respect to proactive character assessment in the larger effort of effective leader character development, the moral cultivation of the latter four attributes ultimately rests on helping leaders properly modify their deeply held values in accordance with internalizing, and thus living, the *Army Values*.

At this point it is unlikely that those loyal to the Army's emphasis on the ethical nature and purpose of the *Values* would disagree with this conclusion. The *Values* are indeed the fundamental mechanism for Army leader character and various moral leadership training efforts exist to the end of helping service members learn how to

modify deeply held values with the goal that they might be equipped and encouraged to *live the Army Values*. But is this enough to help leaders cultivate the remaining attributes and thus develop the kind of character the Army desires of its leaders, and more importantly, the kind of character needed for excellent leadership? Do the *Values* suffice as *the* fundamental moral-ethical guidance mechanism for (excellent) character? My answer is *no*, as there remains a lingering, unaddressed insufficiency in this framework. However, to fully explain this answer requires that we first conclude our assessment of Col. Smith in light of the *Army Values*.

IV. CASE STUDY CHARACTER ANALYSIS: PART 2

In this chapter I will conclude my analysis of the Smith case by providing an assessment of his leadership character in accordance with the seven *Army Values*. I will first provide a cursory overview of the doctrinal history of the *Values* as well as highlight some contextual considerations, after which I will discuss Smith and the *Values* particularly germane to his situation.

4.1 The Army's Ethical Core: The Army Values

While the current list of *Values* was codified in 1999 (DA), its conceptual history began post-Vietnam when the Army was facing a dire need to change its moral culture in the aftermath of various war crimes, poor organizational discipline and morale, and an obvious need to produce ethical leadership. In what might be summarized as multi-decade, progressively complex revision of Army doctrine with respect to having values-centered leadership, ethos, and profession, the *Values* evolved over several iterations of development, with the current list incorporated into various character development initiatives and extolled as the basis or core of character (Licameli, 2016, 2018).³

³ A contextual note: In 2016, after the Army had completed an in-depth assessment that concluded it was unable to identify character attributes, nor develop and assess efforts of character development, it began the "Character Development Project" (Center for the Army Profession and Ethic [CAPE]). This project, which is still officially ongoing, consisted of various working groups responsible for reviewing and redesigning how the Army would incorporate character development into every domain of the organization, with one of the primary resultant products being the "Army Framework for Character Development" (AFCD; CAPE, 2017b). While this may well be the Army's most comprehensive endeavor in character development, the Army Values remain the emphasis of character, and virtues are only mentioned within descriptions of character, within brief reviews of historic models of character formation (e.g. Socratic and Aristotelian) and are treated as either derivatives of informal and formal education and experiences, or as one of many components of multi-faceted theoretical approaches to character development (CAPE, 2016a, 2017b, 2017a).

As of March 2019, the AFCD was placed within a larger strategic directive for FY19, with certain working group battle rhythms suspended until further notice (Center for the Army Profession and Leadership, 2020). If this status continues into the foreseeable future, it is my assumption that much of the effort thus far will be delegated to lower echelons in such a way as to inadvertently undermine the potential of the project, simply due to lack of prioritization amongst competing training requirements and the lack of directive procedural and pedagogical methods of implementation. At this point, it is essentially the responsibility of

The *Army Values* consist of *loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage*, and doctrine states that they:

...embody the practical application of the Army Ethic. They encompass the enduring moral principles, beliefs, and laws that guide Army professionals in accomplishing the mission as well as their conduct in all aspects of life....All members aspire to achieve the Army Values professionally and personally. The Army Values are a compass needle, always pointing toward what the Nation demands of its Army....During conflict, the Army employs lethal violence in accordance with the law of armed conflict and rules of engagement under the most demanding conditions. This is an enormous responsibility and the people of the United States require the Army to adhere to its values and represent its interests across the range of military operations and the competition continuum....Personal values develop over the years from childhood to adulthood. People are free to choose and hold their own values, but upon taking the oath of service, Soldiers and DA Civilians agree to live and act by the Army Values...[the Values] set expectations for conduct and are fundamental to making the right decision in any situation. Living...Army Values is an important leader responsibility...The Army recognizes seven values that all Soldiers and DA Civilians must internalize. Embracing the Army Values is the hallmark of being an Army professional. (DA, 2019, para. 1-70,72; 2-4,5; emphasis added).

Army leaders of all ranks to discern ways to utilize the resources generated thus far in their training efforts, which in my experience is a tall order given the challenges of command in environments that have typically high operational tempos.

Aside from the obvious context of armed conflict in which adherence to the *Values* is critical, it is worth noting again what doctrine emphasizes with respect to what the *Values* are *to do* for character and thus leader behavior, and in turn what *leaders* are *to do* with the *Values* such that they might embody the Army Ethic in all areas of life. Doctrine states and thus assumes that the *Values* represent not only the principles and beliefs of the nation's heritage, but also those of the individual leaders and their soldiers, each who come from and represent diverse upbringings. As such, the *Values* are the moral foundation of leader ethical decision-making.

In addition to understanding the fundamental importance of the *Values*, leaders are directed to *internalize, embrace, achieve, adhere, live* and *act by* the *Army Values*, and exhort their subordinates to do the same. They provide a functional baseline of “what right looks like,” clear enough for the most junior soldier to understand and apply, yet broad enough to not confine a soldier to a rubric of strict moral or behavioral expectations. Doctrine not only frames the *Values* in a normative and aspirational sense, but also in an evaluative sense—the means by which leaders navigate morally relevant and salient matters; the mechanism they rely upon to rightly understand and appraise matters of moral consequence. But are they fully sufficient to fulfill these requirements, or do they require something more? This is the question we need to examine as we assess both the Smith case and the larger character challenge facing Army doctrine and leader culture.

If Col. Smith can be judged to have not lived up to one or more of the character attributes of the *Warrior Ethos, discipline, empathy, or humility*, does this by association mean he failed to *live* one or more of *the Army Values*? Before we can attempt a

response, let us first review the doctrinal definitions of each (DA, 2019):⁴

- *Loyalty*: To bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of the United States, the Army, your unit and other Soldiers (para 2-6)
- *Duty*: Fulfil your obligations—always do your best (para 2-7)
- *Respect*: Treat people as they should be treated (para 2-8)
- *Selfless Service*: Put the welfare of the nation, the Army, and your subordinates before your own (para 2-9)
- *Honor*: Live up to Army Values (para 2-10)
- *Integrity*: Do what is right, legally and morally (para 2-11)
- *Personal Courage*: Face fear, danger, or adversity (physical and moral) (para 2-12,13)

Let us now return to our tentative conclusion at the end of the previous chapter: that failures to rightly embody the *Warrior Ethos*, *discipline*, *empathy*, or *humility* must ultimately come from some failure to fully *live the Army Values*. Now, in light of the normative and aspirational role of the *Values*, we might also conclude that the *Values* are not merely a list of individually distinct principles, but rather exist as an interdependent set and thus represent a comprehensive practical application of the Army Ethic, which then could entail that to some degree not explicitly stated in doctrine, *failure in one* may

⁴ Doctrine provides brief definitions of each of the Values as well as illustrative descriptions and historical vignettes. The reader should note that the definitions and descriptions are not purposed to provide comprehensive instruction for each of the Values' fullest possible connotations and moral entailments, but are rather clear and concise presentations in order to meet the specific needs of the Army with respect to its professional context and ethical norms. Where these definitions are narrow in contextual substance, they are relatively successful in providing leaders an accessible scaffold of shared, interdependent principles and beliefs by which to morally orient themselves and their subordinates. Therefore, while there may be something to critique in each value with respect to definition or description, such will not be the focus of this discussion.

amount to a *failure of the whole*. However, caution must be exercised in examining either the *Values* or character in this way, for though the *Values* are normative and aspirational, they are not a standard for perfection. Even leaders who are generally deemed to have good character would likely demonstrate varying degrees of values-adherence and expression. So, while we may agree that an integrated perspective of the *Values* is inherent to embodying the Army Ethic and thus evidence of good leader character, such a standard must accommodate an acceptable range of both (adherence and expression) that is morally demanding without being rigidly absolutist.

Moreover, as we discussed in the previous chapter, such a conclusion depends not only a correct doctrinal understanding of what each of the *Values* means and entails for the other character attributes, but also on one's *personal* application of the *Value(s)* in question, as well as how individual biases, preferences and expectations influence what one accepts in a leader. For example, a failure to demonstrate any or all of the *Values* may be judged more harshly by subordinates who do have a personal ethic governed by moral absolutes or (unconsciously) believe in categorical imperatives. For those subordinates who pride themselves in their adherence to, say, *loyalty* or *duty*, or perhaps exhibit complementary attributes such the *Warrior Ethos* or *discipline*, a leader's failure to live either of those values may be much more visible and damning compared to other character flaws. Consequently, in their personal zeal for *duty* and *loyalty*, they might be less critical (or more importantly, less aware) of a leader's failure of *personal (moral) courage*, for such a value requires leaders of all ranks to confront unethical behavior in those who might otherwise be deemed as *disciplined*, *dutiful*, and *loyal*.

While these and similar examples are demonstrative of human behavior in general

and not restricted to Army leaders, they serve to illustrate the subjective nature of assessing moral character in terms of the values (personal or Army), not to mention how it is likely that nearly every Army leader, when examined from a given perspective, might be found to embody some of the *Values* while neglecting others. They also serve to illustrate how our values can be fixed in how they influence our judgment of *others'* behavior, and yet at times be contextually adaptable when judging *our own* behavior. Therefore, as I assess Col. Smith's demonstration of the *Values*, I will do so not only considering how doctrine defines them, but also with regards to how Army culture and personal values—both espoused and underlying—play into their embodiment and application in the life of a leader, so as to explain the extent of their purposed moral efficacy within the larger framework of Army leader character.

4.2 Smith and the Army Values

To simplify the *Values*-assessment, I will organize it by way of first addressing those *Values* which appear to be the most debatable with regards to Col. Smith's behaviors and may ultimately withstand criticism when understood in light of the Army's traditional, military culture: *loyalty* and *duty*. I will then address the values for which Col. Smith may still be in a position to defend himself yet for which he received far greater criticism in varying degrees: *respect*, *selfless service*, and *integrity*.

With respect to the remaining values of *honor* and *personal courage*, I will not be giving them their own treatment for the sake of brevity and the following rationale. First, *honor*, despite its seemingly redundant meaning within the whole of the *Values*, is described as a leader's setting an example by way of living the *Army Values*, thereby contributing to a positive climate and morale. Since its focus is on overall leader conduct by way of *living*

all of the *Values*, we might only assess its demonstration by Smith after the fact.⁵

Second, *personal courage* was only addressed by his subordinates by way of indirect implication. They did not have any opportunity to witness him demonstrate it *physically*, given that doctrinally that aspect primarily pertains to the physical danger experienced in combat. *Moral courage* includes the:

...willingness to stand firm on values, principles, and convictions. It enables all leaders to stand up for what *they* believe is right, regardless of the consequences...it also expresses itself as candor...carefully considered professional judgment offered to subordinates, peers, and superiors is an expression of personal courage (DA, 2019, paras 2-12,13, emphasis added).

It is debatable whether or not Col. Smith “carefully considered” the judgment he so willingly gave to his subordinates. If he demonstrated moral courage before his superiors is an unknown matter. He certainly did not lack candor and consistently acted on his own convictions and on what he believed was right. Therefore, while there may be more to Col. Smith regarding *personal courage*, it seems appropriate to focus the remainder of our assessment on those values that provide more illustrative material for discussion.

4.2.1 Loyalty and Duty. Consider the following descriptions for these two values:

- *Loyalty*: One cannot remain loyal to the Constitution by being loyal to those

⁵ *Honor* will be briefly taken up again in Chapter 7. As a means of moral assessment it can be somewhat of a troublesome issue, especially if the military culture in which it is extolled still views its embodiment or acquirement within the context of a relatively small or tightly guarded “honor-group,” where as an ideal it is only held by those who represent that group well (large or small, e.g. in the Army versus a civilian, or in this particular unit within the Army that views itself as superior to other units). When connected with a narrow scope of *loyalty* to the honor group (rather than, say, loyalty to moral principles that transcend the group), we often have service members who “adhere to/live” a value or virtue of honor (or loyalty), but who are morally reprehensible (see Olsthoorn, 2011; Robinson, 2007).

who violate it...One way that individuals demonstrate loyalty is by upholding all of the Army values. With those values as a foundation, loyalty is a two-way exchange: leaders earn loyalty and subordinates expect loyalty in return. Leaders earn subordinates' loyalty by training them well, treating them fairly, and living the Army Values...Loyalty and trust enable the successful day-to-day operations of all organizations (DA, 2019, para 2-6)

- *Duty*: Army professionals exercise initiative when they fulfill the purpose, not merely the letter, of received orders. Leaders take responsibility for their actions and those of their subordinates; it is inherent in their duty to the larger organization, the Army, and the Nation. Conscientious leaders and subordinates possess a sense of responsibility to apply their best efforts to accomplish the mission. This guides Soldiers and DA Civilians to do what is right to the best of their ability (DA, 2019, para 2-7)

Loyalty is the *Value* that ethically orients the leader to the institution and its members, and doctrine comments on its interdependency with the remaining *Values* in how it affects the moral well-being of soldiers and organizations. While perhaps not evident at face-value, *loyalty* is a rather thick concept considering its multifaceted applicability to both organizational ideals and persons—individually and corporately—as well as with respect to its relationship to the other *Values* (an issue that will implicitly crop up throughout this section). This makes it difficult to simply give Col. Smith a “pass or fail” with respect to *loyalty*.

For example, there was no doubt amongst his staff that he was “loyal” to the unit and its success, as well as to the larger institution. He certainly seemed to demonstrate

loyalty to the soldiers who were ultimately his responsibility. When we consider *loyalty* in light of a leader's dedication to his subordinates to train them well and treat them fairly, Col. Smith could argue that he did so according to *his* professional understanding and experience—training proficiency was one of his top priorities and equitable treatment—even if that meant severe reprimands for not meeting the standard—was meted out based on subordinate performance. How might his subordinates counter this assessment?

First, they might claim he was indeed loyal to the Army and to the unit, but that most of all he was *loyal* to his own agenda. Second, while we have yet to fully arrive at this conclusion, if he failed to uphold all of the *Army Values*, then this would be a *doctrinal* interpretation of neglecting *loyalty*. Finally, while he was loyal to the soldiers, his belligerent behavior toward his subordinate leaders certainly did not *earn* their loyalty nor led them to feel that they had his—as even his equitable treatment seemed based on a standard that many found impossible to achieve.

With respect to *duty*, in his own mind Col. Smith certainly strove to do *his* best, and the very best was demanded from his subordinates. A traditional view of *duty*, if not in a Kantian sense, was the touchstone of Col. Smith's approach to military service, the proper work-ethic, and at the core of organizational success. Initiative and responsibility might as well have been written on the walls of the headquarters, as his subordinate leaders knew he expected nothing less from them as well. Discussions with some of his closest staff officers revealed that he almost agonized over the unit's (and his own) ability to prove themselves as *the* best combat brigade in the Army. To strive for and demand anything less was conceived as *not* doing what was right with respect to making that

success a reality. Personally, he worked tirelessly, never failed to be the first to arrive and the last to leave, maintained his physical fitness, and was dedicated to continual self-development (e.g. he was known for being a voracious reader, consuming no less than two to three books per week).

Even subordinates who felt disempowered by Col. Smith had little to say regarding this particular *Value*, except that perhaps it was tainted by his authoritarian personality. *Duty*—though not verbally expressed as such—seemed so important to Col. Smith, that he considered any failure to follow his command guidance to the letter as a failure to do one’s own duty. It might be argued that for Col. Smith, *duty* was the *prioritizing Value* under which the remainder of the *Values* were ranked and applied. But his subordinate officers consistently complained that his actions were more a reflection of his own agenda than principled adherence born of *duty* or *loyalty* to the moral principles described in the Army Ethic—a theme that we will see more strongly with regards to his adherence to the remaining *Values*.

4.2.2 Respect, Selfless Service, and Integrity. Let us continue by reviewing the doctrinal descriptions of those *Values* to which Col. Smith’s adherence is perhaps more questionable:

- *Respect:* The Army Values reinforce that all people have dignity and worth and must be treated with respect...In the Army, each is judged by the content of their character. Army leaders should consistently foster a climate that treats everyone with dignity and respect, regardless of ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, creed, or religious belief. Fostering a positive climate begins with a leader’s personal example. Leaders treat others,

including adversaries, with respect. (DA, 2019, para 2-8)

- *Selfless Service*: While the needs of the Army and the Nation should come first, selfless service does not imply leaders should neglect their families or themselves. Unselfish, humble leaders set themselves apart as teammates who are approachable, trustworthy, and open to follower input and advice. Selfless leaders aspire to attain goals for the greater good, beyond their own interests and benefits (DA, 2019, para 2-9)
- *Integrity*: Leaders of integrity consistently follow honorable principles. The Army relies on leaders who are honest in word and deed. Leaders of integrity do the right thing because their character permits nothing less. To instill the Army Values in others, leaders must demonstrate them. As an Army leader and a person of integrity, personal values should reinforce the Army Values (DA, 2019, para 2-11)

At first glance it would seem to be much easier to judge Smith a failure with respect to these latter three *Values*, considering both how doctrine describes each one and how they more closely reflect the principles highly regarded by modern Western culture, such as the autonomy and dignity of individual persons. When we look at the application of these *Values* through an individualistic lens—a lens that is becoming more common in the modern Army—it is difficult to let Smith “off the hook.” *Respect*—or the lack thereof—seemed to be the biggest complaint from his subordinate leaders, based on his demeaning rants and condescending behavior towards those leaders who disagreed with him or whom he believed failed to meet his standards.

On the other hand, he appeared to *respect* the soldiers, believing that whatever

benefit they received from his harsh correction of their leaders justified his actions. At the risk of oversimplification, Smith's demonstration of *respect* was selective, given only to those whose who he believed deserved it. Most would probably argue that this amounts to Smith not holding to this *Value* as doctrine describes it, and while they may be correct, we must again consider how cultural context muddies the waters of values construal and application.

For example, while a soldier does not lose her right to be treated *with respect*, she does in a sense "lose" her "right" to be treated with respect in the same sense she might have expected in the civilian sector. The social etiquette of respect manifests itself differently in different cultures, and the rules for *how* to show respect and being a recipient of respect are also created by cultures. While it may be offensive to someone in the civilian sector, in the military context no one is (necessarily) treating another disrespectfully by using harsh language or being overly critical, or by requiring long hours from subordinates while also communicating that when it comes to mission accomplishment, their feelings (and those of their family members) take a backseat. So, while *respect* as a moral value is not relative, it *is* contextually *valued* in different ways. Smith likely *failed* to demonstrate *respect*, but only because the Army culture, especially in light of increasing social and political influence, has increasingly evolved to view these latter *Values* through a lens that recognizes individual dignity as part of organizational success. While this does not excuse Smith's bullying behaviors, it serves as a reminder that cultural and generational differences affect not only the expected values-expressions of leaders, but also of those with whom they interact, suggesting that even fundamental values need something more to be properly represented.

The same challenge holds true for Smith's embodiment of *selfless service* and *integrity*. He unreservedly gave of himself for the success of the organization, sometimes even at the cost of his own family time. While this may seem to conflict with the second phrase in the description of *selfless service*, many seasoned soldiers would likely regard that second phrase as more aspirational than normative. Even for those subordinates who attempted a fair assessment of Smith's *selfless service* or *integrity*, they believed these *Values* were filtered and applied through his ego and an unhealthy drive to prove himself and the organization. For them, this put both of these *Values* in question, for while he unabashedly held to his principles, it seemed to come at the cost of others. Unwilling to receive input from his subordinates, he often redirected feedback to those offering it, using it to question their own competence instead of as a means to mentor or coach, making him unapproachable and personally—if not professionally—untrustworthy.

As one of his officers put it, Smith was somewhat of an enigma—toxic in that he bullied people, but not in the overtly malevolent, vindictive, blatantly immoral sense. To one extent he practiced what he preached yet did so while keeping everyone at arms-length—both in his berating behavior and in how he personally and professional distanced himself from his staff. One day he would seem like your ally and the next he would be questioning your ability as a leader. Perhaps he was a “soldier’s commander,” but not so much a “leader’s commander.”

4.3 Bad Leaders, Insufficient Values, or Something More?

When we consider the sum of his behaviors in light of the *Values*, we easily arrive at a negative judgment if we are either cultural outsiders or those within the culture who hold a modern conception of what these *Values* mean for good leadership. Perhaps this

conception correctly reflects what doctrine intends. However, if that is so, it is not simply because we have the “correct” or superior understanding of the *Values*, but because something in us disposes us to view them in such a manner—which means that something in Smith disposed him to employ them in a different manner, in emotionally ineffective ways, resulting in diminishing, rather than contributing to, the moral well-being of his people and himself. What does this mean for our *Values*-assessment and their functional role in leader character?

First, we are presented with a challenge regarding how to best judge a leader’s character in light of the *Values*, based on tensions between individual experience and temperament, doctrinal meaning, and the cultural standards of what constitutes actions that accord with one or more of the *Values*, individually and in relation to one another. For the sake of illustration, let us briefly return to those of *loyalty* and *duty*—the two that seemed most prominent in Col. Smith. There appears to be a spectrum for *loyalty* and *duty*, in which there can be not only cases of obvious disloyalty or irresponsibility, but in which any perceived latitude is greatly affected by subordinates’ expectations. This should not be construed to say that doctrine allows for a relativistic interpretation of the *Values*, in which it is ultimately left to each leader and follower to determine their own personal understanding and application. Rather, despite Smith’s serious character flaws, it reveals that the *Values* themselves almost always pragmatically applied, individually and collectively, as it is difficult to make the requirements of any one *Value* more precise or by using the resources of the others to dictate what one should always look like in any given situation.

As we advance through the remaining *Values*, we see that such a (necessary)

practical spectrum exists for each, providing for a wide range of ways the *Values* might be both adhered to and expressed such that, in a given circumstance, context, or unit subculture, they have the potential to concurrently support *and* undermine leaders' character and their embodiment of the Army Ethic. While this does not pose an existential dilemma for the normative purpose of the *Values* as a “practical application” of the Army Ethic, it does begin to point to why they are insufficient *in themselves* as the guiding moral mechanism for leader character and moral decision-making. The *Values* are not black and white, but neither are they plug-in-play—they require something more fundamental for their proper embodiment, so that service members are not left with a moral framework in which there are many “legitimate” ways for them to adhere to and express the *Values*, thus leaving open the possibility for not only bad leaders, but more importantly those who are mediocre, to defend a kind of character that never rises nor truly aspires to moral excellence, but only that of cultural, social, or political acceptability.

Second, we should not easily dismiss that individual leaders will (and probably should) prioritize or rank both their values and the *Army Values*—this is far from abnormal, and is arguably necessary, at least insofar as when it comes to making moral decisions. The ranking of values provides people a principled way of concluding what ought to be done in any given moral circumstance—without such ranking, there would only be confusion or constant conflict, especially when more than one individual is involved. For example, with leaders who exhibit comparably more emotional intelligence or the attribute of *empathy*, their *principal* or *prioritized Value* might often be *integrity* or *respect*, which helps them make moral sense of the remaining *Values* in their

priority to relate effectively to others. Perhaps for Smith, based on his temperament and experience, he ranked *duty* as his *principal Value* and used it to prioritize the others when making important decisions. His personal issues aside, this may be a culturally acceptable manner in which to rank the *Values*, for the Army often rewards the prioritization of *duty* and the “senior brass” often require such a strong expression of it from their subordinate commanders. Therefore, the ranking of values is both understandable and functionally necessary for moral behavior.

This leaves us at a somewhat uncomfortable conclusion: that on the one hand, Smith “failed” to *live the Army Values* because, by and large, he failed to meet the expectations of the modern military culture that tolerated his leadership until his negative behaviors eventually crossed a line. On the other hand, he did not clearly “fail” to live the *Values* on all accounts, due to how a reasonable interpretation of the *Values* still allows for a range of rankings, adherence and expressions which are often (sub)culturally influenced and admired. Therefore, in assessing leader character, it would appear that *living the Values* is not an effective barometer. If this is the case, then it would also entail that the *Values’* normative role in the remainder of the attributes—*Warrior Ethos*, *discipline*, *empathy*, and *humility*—is in question, at least with respect to how they are to serve as a leader’s moral guiding mechanism. Is there a way to resolve this, such that a leader’s *living the Values*—their construal, ranking, and application—might be less clouded by the various tensions we have addressed?

Put conversely, how might leaders’ character be developed—not merely expected—to reliably construe, rank, and employ the *Values* in a morally wise manner that aligns with the principles of the Army Ethic and commendably displays the

remaining attributes so as to demonstrate the kind of character the modern Army (increasingly) desires—one that *effectively* integrates what morality *reasonably* and *affectively* demands for individuals and the good of the larger organization? While this question does not indicate a problem with the *Values*, per say, it again points to a more fundamental problem the *Values* are insufficient to solve on their own. However, before I offer a response to this problem, we must first give some deserved attention to some potential objections to my assessment of these attributes, especially with respect to the insufficiency of the *Values*' role in Army leader character.

V. OBJECTIONS TO THE VALUES-CHARACTER ANALYSIS

It is likely that many will challenge my analysis and not merely for reasons of tacit allegiance to the Army's conception of character or more specifically the *Army Values*. They may argue that my critique of the role of the *Values* is too strong, leading to objections that essentially emphasize the culpability of poor leaders over and against any conceptual problems in doctrine. In this chapter I will attempt to address what I believe to be two of the more obvious objections to my assessment: first, that *leaders* are the problem, *not* the *Values*' functional role in leader character; and second, despite cultural and generational differences within the Army, the *Values* remain sufficiently objective in their functional role in leader character. In my response to both I will attempt to address what I believe to be the fundamental problem with the *Values* as character guidance mechanisms: that despite their fundamental importance for moral leadership and the objective standards they maintain even while allowing for cultural flexibility, they are insufficient to help leaders *be the kind* of moral leaders the Army desires.

5.1 Objections: The Sufficiency of the Values Despite Leader and Cultural Problems

My assessment of Smith revealed that he may be able to reasonably defend his adherence to at least some of the *Values*, even if by and large he is unable to withstand scrutiny regarding his particular expression of them. Perhaps a more nuanced interpretation would be that his prioritization of some of the *Values* (e.g. *duty* and *loyalty*), according to his reasoned understanding, served to govern the nature of his adherence to and expression of the remaining *Values*. In addition to the challenges posed by values-prioritization and varying degrees of adherence and expression, I also

examined how such concerns are affected by differences in (sub)cultural and generational norms and expectations held by both leaders and those with whom they interact. If these observations are warranted, then while Smith may be ultimately judged as a counter-productive leader due to his bullying behaviors, we cannot necessarily account for such a judgment based on an utter lack of moral adherence to or expression of one or more of the *Values*, which leads to the conclusion that the *Values* are insufficient to fundamentally orient and guide leaders into the ethical behaviors the Army requires. The two objections that might follow this conclusion are somewhat related, therefore I will first present each one and then address both collectively.

5.1.1 Objection 1: A Leadership Failure. An objector might first simply double-down on the professional need for and doctrinal intent of the *Army Values*, with a claim that my assessment merely reveals that Smith—and therefore poor leaders in general—*fail* to truly internalize the *Values* as an integrated whole as they are presented in doctrine. Therefore, the Army’s conception of character remains adequate and the problems I have addressed have nothing to do with the insufficiency of the *Values* to be adequate moral guidance mechanisms. Rather, they are the failures *of leaders to fully embrace and live up* to the *Values* which would otherwise result in a healthy demonstration of the remaining character attributes. When leaders do not fully internalize the *Values* as *their personal* normative and aspirational standards *as doctrine* requires of them (see DA, 2019, paras. 2-4 and 2-5), their actions cannot accord with what the Army regards as the *right motives* nor sufficiently *right reasons*, irrespective of their individual perspectives. This is due to the *Values* normative function as the practical application of the Army ethic, which provides the basic moral standards—

standards sufficiently broad for all to appreciate and sufficiently narrow be specifically pertinent to the purview of the Army ethic—to guide leaders in their commitment to the good of individuals and the greatest good for the organization as a whole. Since the *Values* provide the practical baseline for assessing the ethical behavior of leaders, those like Col. Smith are judged as having poor moral character for not having internalized the *Values* in a way that recognizes their normative importance requisite to produce the desired results.

For example, as an expression of their professional commitment and submission to the Army ethic, leaders should *will* or *desire* to demonstrate *loyalty* or *respect* toward all fellow leaders and their soldiers in order to positively affect morale or the organizational climate, produce an effective fighting force, and morally shape tactical endeavors. The Army clearly communicates again and again its expectations regarding what effective leadership entails in the care of its people, the inexcusability of toxic or counterproductive leaders, and the moral grounding the *Army Values* play in improving the (leadership) culture. The failure to *live the Army Values* is like any other failure to “meet the standard” required of professional competence. Just as the Army expects its members to perform to established levels of technical proficiency, the Army requires that the ethical demands of the profession be met by way of displaying basic standards of moral-social competency in accordance with the *Values*.

Therefore, the objection stands that at minimum the *Values* remain *sufficient* to “point the way” normatively and aspirationally, and that if all leaders would internalize them as doctrine requires—and undoubtedly the Army has leaders capable of this—then they would be empowered to demonstrate the remaining attributes and thus promote the

kind of effective leader character the Army desires. If there *is* a flaw to be addressed, it is not with doctrine's description of what the *Values* are for, but with those leaders—those individual agents—who fail to either live in accordance with moral reason or fail to hold the correct moral perspective, mindset, attitude, or temperament. Why some leaders rather than others fail to do so appears to be an issue pertaining to moral psychology—perhaps due to personality, emotional, or psychological deficits—but not a failure of the normative or aspirational nature of the *Values* to which all leaders are required to commit themselves.

5.1.2 Objection 2: The Cultural Flexibility of Objective Values. A second objection may be articulated along the following lines: the claim that the *Values* can be misconstrued, misapplied, and thus adhered to and expressed in varying degrees due to differing cultural and generational expectations does not undermine their normative role in forming and guiding leader character and subsequent behavior, especially given how the Army's diverse membership has progressively learned to simultaneously retain a traditional sense of their communal importance and application while recognizing the significance of each individual and his or her contribution to what it means to *live the Army Values*. While this objection may require an acknowledgment that there exists a thin spectrum of acceptable *Values* adherence and expression as demonstrated by generally *good* leaders, the basic definitions and standard interpretations of the *Values* are articulated in relatively black and white terms. They *are* standards that are historically rooted and have stood the test of time, in which their moral content can be universally understood and applied regardless of one's age or cultural background.

Units that tolerate or even celebrate narrow and self-serving interpretations of the

Values reveal (sub)cultural and leadership problems, rather than a problem with the normative role and power of the *Values*. The presence of such errors is in no way an argument in support of individual leader moral subjectivity or expressions of (sub)cultural relativism, but rather explains how the *Values* are compatibilized with bad leader behaviors, especially when such construals are further influenced by moral-psychological deficits and the mediocre characters of others with whom he or she interacts. The response to either the issue of leader failures or to soldiers whose behaviors reveal a need to better-internalize the *Army Values* is one and the same: both require that leaders and soldiers be properly educated on and continually reminded of the importance and function of the *Army Values*, their commitment to the Army profession and ethic, and the moral expectations that must be met within an evolving Army culture. Therefore, leaders such as Smith are guilty regardless of perceived cultural flexibility, for the *Values* provide standards to which all leaders are accountable, despite any conflicting proclivities they might have.

5.1.3 Response. I will attempt to respond to both objections somewhat simultaneously, as the issues at stake regarding the *Values*' normative role and leader failures are related to the concerns regarding cultural flexibility. I fully acknowledge that to view the *Values* as sufficient normative and aspirational principles is warranted. In that respect I would essentially agree with both objections in their appeal to the *Values* as the moral expression of the Army Ethic and foundation for leader character, and that the *Values* should not only be reflected in leader character, but that their normative role *is sufficient* with respect to providing basic moral standards leaders should follow and by which they might be assessed and held accountable.

However, it is not that the objection is mistaken in stating that the *Values* play an important part in character nor that they have a central role as standards for assessing leaders' moral behaviors. Therefore, I agree that leaders such as Smith might be fairly judged in accordance with the *Values*. My aim is not to show whether or not Smith ultimately has or has not internalized the *Values* according to the Army's standards, but rather to challenge the idea that the *Values* are sufficient to help him be the kind of leader we want him to *be*. Therefore, the problem with the objection is that by defending the *Values* as *the* defacto moral constituents of character it misconstrues the very nature of character and its role in moral action, by relying on certain assumptions about the role of the *Values* in moral decision-making, moral intuitions, and ultimately character formation. I will refer to these as the *motivational assumption*, the *moral-guidance assumption*, and the *pedagogical assumption*.

The *motivational assumption* is a general belief that the *Values*, when internalized, serve leaders as sufficient intrinsic motivators for the right kind of moral actions they need in any given situation—general or specific. Because the Army identifies the *Values* as representative of a diverse Army culture and thus universally applicable, regardless of one's background, when integrated with a leader's own personal values, they should become the moral-ethical bedrock upon which she stands. While this is probably valid in a generic sense, two problems remain.

First, given leaders' diverse values-backgrounds (ethnically, culturally, religiously, etc.), intuitions, and social and emotional pre-dispositions, it is difficult to imagine that properly internalized *Values* will sufficiently or consistently motivate leaders to the same kinds of moral actions, for even *if* we maintained that they are

intrinsically sufficient motivators, each leader will *value* them in different ways based on myriad of factors: personality, experiences, goals, etc. Second and related is that this assumption does not fully attribute the influence of extrinsic motivators ubiquitous in the Army culture, such as personal honor, accolades, promotion, positional or personal influence, and so on. This is not to say that the many extrinsic motivators are immoral by comparison, but simply that they too influence a leader's dispositions toward and internalization of the *Values*.

These two challenges can be illustrated by briefly applying this assumption to *marriage or family values*. While undoubtedly important to have and internalize, anyone who has experienced marriage or family dynamics knows that while *Values* do motivate, they are not *sufficient* motivators, nor necessarily intrinsic, given the many factors each individual brings into the relationship or set of relationships that provides his or her composite set of motivations—even when a couple or family verbally espouse the *same* values. Such factors influence motivations of how the relationship(s) should work, what its goals should look or feel like, or how people should best relate to one another in a moral fashion. Therefore, this assumption is likely more aspirational than it is feasible: it is a positive view of what grounded, internalized values *can do* for a leader, when incorporated into a holistic, socially-embedded moral framework, but not necessarily what values *will do*. Finally, even if we assume that the normative role of the *Values* is culturally flexible, if the Army desires somewhat consistent motivational outcomes from its leaders while considering their diversity, then something more is required to help such a diverse internalization of the *Values* achieve such a unified effort.

The *moral-guidance assumption* is essentially the idea that *when coupled with a*

leader's moral intuitions, the Values—as doctrinally defined and prescribed—are adequate to promote the right moral actions representative of good character. This assumption has three components: a) that while the *Values* may leave room for appropriate individual expression, they are still articulated in a sufficiently detailed manner to be rightly understood and thus leave little room for misinterpretation regarding their fundamental meaning and import; b) that the *Values* are morally sufficient to help inform, guide, and effectively influence leaders' intuitions; and c) that when the *Values* are properly understood, developed, and practiced in good will, leaders will be able to—by and large—appropriately rank the *Values* in both general and specific moral contexts.

This assumption is somewhat more complex than the former, but still largely weak for two reasons. First—with respect to components *a* and *b*—as practical guides representative of the Army ethic, each of the *Values* can in no way ever be detailed *enough* to provide moral guidance for every possible situation. The *Values* may indeed be understood in a generally principled manner, unlikely to be misinterpreted by leaders when they think through generic or characteristic moral scenarios. However, a basic problem with moral rules and principles in general, and thus one for even the best of moral values, is that they are never sufficient to fully guide moral decision-making, especially when situations present factors in which values conflict.

As moral guides, the *Values* do provide leaders the proper beliefs *about* desired modes of conduct, as well as communicate the general *goals* of such conduct, but they do not provide the moral *mechanisms* needed to bridge the gap between beliefs and goals, nor do they provide the wisdom required for a leader to target a precise moral goal when the situation demands more than a general moral good. It is also doubtful to assume that

the *Values* as communicated and presumed to be universally applicable will naturally accord with and thus positively inform a given leader's intuitions—which are often emotionally-laden—especially in circumstances where the leader's pre-existing dispositions may be a hinderance to the appropriate moral action. Therefore, while the *Values* are sufficient to provide both a moral baseline and a leader's scope of moral consideration, without morally appropriate dispositions they do not holistically inform the leader's intuitions needed to discern the nuances of moral complexity—an issue only further complicated by an evolving and diverse Army culture.

The second reason for this assumption's general implausibility is one that most leaders would acknowledge with a degree of irony: Army doctrine does not provide a rule of *Value*-prioritization, so it is left up to the individual leader to discern how they should be ranked and applied. Some leaders will jest that the *Values*' doctrinal acronym "LDRSHIP" (i.e., "leadership") may be the Army's way of prioritizing the *Values* for its leaders. However, this is unlikely, given that this notion explicit is nowhere explicit in doctrine. The rather casual mention of such a prioritization may be more a reflection of a traditional honor-culture and a demanding organization that has historically valued *loyalty* and *duty* in the ways we have already examined, and the use of the acronym LDRSHIP more a pragmatic attempt at establishing an effective mnemonic device. Regardless, neither doctrine nor the Army's leadership culture view the *Values* as inherently or intuitively self-prioritizing, which entails that for those leaders who do apparently rank the *Values* in appropriate ways do so for reasons other than what the *Values* provide on their own accord.

The *pedagogical assumption claims* entails that the sufficiency of the *Values* as

adequate moral motivators and moral-guidance mechanisms *is functionally independent from the manner or means in which they are to be internalized and expressed by individual agents that accords with proper character formation.* In other words, with respect to expecting the proper behavioral “follow-through,” when the Army exhorts its leaders to “live the Army Values,” it is enough that leaders be provided regular reminders of their importance, the need for their internalization, and continual training measures that help them connect the *Values* to their leadership responsibilities and context. As rational agents, the *pedagogical assumption* is that as long as leaders are provided the proper *Values* and related ethics education, they are not only responsible, but inherently capable of internalizing the *Values* unto the embodiment of the remaining attributes—and thus the cultivation of good character as a whole—in line with the Army’s expectations.

While the subject of the Army’s pedagogical methodology for *Values* and moral leadership training deserves its own discussion, given how this assumption is inherently tied to the first two, my response will be to re-engage some of the same issues by briefly considering them through a lens of character development, though it will admittedly be cursory in nature. Over the course of the past two chapters I have essentially argued that while the *Values* can and do serve as or represent guiding moral principles, laws, and beliefs, they are incapable of telling the agent—the Army leader—*how* they should be ranked, prioritized, balanced, or even understood in relation to one another. *Values* do not inherently produce excellence—they do not tell the leader how to address questions of perception and self-awareness, nor are they sufficient to fully guide a leader’s *empathy* or *humility*, nor fully inform the leader regarding the relevant and salient features of everyday morally complex situations. Therefore, *how* the *Values* and moral leadership

are properly trained so as to contribute to this dynamic is essential, and admittedly the Army *is* concerned about continually improving its pedagogical methods to better train its leaders by way of more experiential and situated learning formats, rather than regularly depositing ethical content by otherwise predominantly didactic means of instruction. Whether or not these ongoing efforts will be effective is yet to be determined.

However, assuming that even improved *Values* instructional methods are helpful still misses an important factor regarding their role in character formation—the very *means* of effective internalization. By assuming that the internalization of *Values* by any leader, regardless of cultural influences, can be basically achieved or at least supported by pedagogical methods that implicitly neglect the requisite processes essential to such proper internalization is to inadvertently see the *Values* as functioning independently from the true constituents of character—the cultivation of leaders’ moral dispositions. Without the *Values* being properly incorporated into a leader’s dispositional learning, and without such attention to the role of dispositions in *Values* internalization, the Army is ultimately left with individualized internalization that results in a wide range of leadership characters, from poor to mediocre to excellent, but with the functional standard more often than not being “good enough”—for excellent dispositions are not in the purview of *Values* education. Therefore, the *Values* cannot remain as a leader’s primary moral guidance *mechanism* if exemplary character—rather than good and acceptable character—is to be the aspirational and functional norm for Army leadership.

Before I transition to discussing the fundamental problems with the Army character’s conceptual framework that prevent exemplary leadership, I want to briefly respond to the issues of moral psychology raised in the objections. The powerful effect

of moral upbringing and resultant personalities on leaders' internalization of the *Values* and their embodiment of the remaining attributes is without question. That leaders' moral failures can in part or whole be ascribed to pathological issues is not a topic of debate I am taking up in this discussion, for while such a conversation has implications for how to holistically evaluate moral behaviors, it is also dependent on the normative issues in question. Besides this, the Army has a relative abundance of professional resources to help leaders respond to such challenges

What *is* problematic and has been the focus of this discussion is precisely what the doctrinal conception of character and the role of the *Values* brings to this complex moral dynamic. The Army's claim that leaders' moral and ethical behavior can find a common, culturally oriented and supportive guide in their modifying their own deeply held values for the sake of character formation, in accordance with the principles inherent to the *Army Values*, requires at least two premises to be true: first, that leaders share a common moral understanding of the meaning of each of the concepts and their inherent or implicit principles, and second, that leaders share a common understanding of *how* each of the values should be morally embodied and prioritized. The discussion in this chapter has revealed that while there is some truth to these premises, they at best produce inconsistent outcomes and rely upon a view of the role and power of the *Values* that I will argue is conceptually insufficient for achieving moral excellence. Internalization of the *Values* cannot be achieved in the manner the Army desires without addressing leaders' moral dispositions, the constituents of leader character, and the Army's existing pedagogical methods nor its assumptions about *Values* and their relationship to leaders' moral agency explicitly address this concern.

The pressing issue is not simply that Smith has somehow failed to internalize one or more of the *Values* or other attributes, but that these core components of doctrinal character are themselves insufficient to inform leaders how to navigate these components appropriately and effectively in morally complex situations. Even if the *Values* were “perfect” and crafted in such a way to tell leaders exactly how to rank and employ them, they would still not be the most weighty moral considerations in a given situation. Furthermore, while Army doctrine clearly declares that good leadership *takes good character*, “bad leaders” are still capable of producing bad or ineffective results even as they demonstrate one or more character attributes.

What the Army desires is for leaders as competent as Smith but who display moral perception and expertise in their leadership of others; what amounts to a kind of art or skill at producing results *while* fostering a moral organizational culture: moral dispositions that ground their intuitions and the internalization of the character attributes so as to consistently incline them to behave in a morally skillful manner. That the Army infers such (moral) excellence but does not provide leaders the doctrinal tools to produce it will be the focus of the following chapter, as we examine the broader problem with the Army’s conceptual framework of leader character.

VI. (NO) FRAMEWORK FOR (MORAL) EXCELLENCE

In this chapter I will address how I believe Army leadership doctrine's conception of character to be insufficient in its description and promotion of *exemplary character*. I will examine doctrine's particular emphasis of excellence as it relates to its description of an "ideal leader," and argue how this emphasis implicitly necessitates exemplary character. I will then introduce how we might conceive of exemplary character for Army leaders. In the chapter that follows, I will then articulate a revised framework for *exemplary character* that would be sufficient for the promotion and cultivation of *exemplary leadership*.

6.1 The Locale of Excellence in Ideal Leadership

Thus far I have argued that the Army's doctrinal conception of the nature and functional role of the *Army Values* and remaining attributes is inadequate for the cultivation of exemplary character. While both are appropriate for the Army's concept of *good* character and provide leaders normative and aspirational standards, individually and collectively they are *insufficient* for addressing moral *excellence*—for providing leaders the moral perception needed to holistically navigate the moral demands of complex situations. In addition to doctrine's inadequate conceptual framework is yet another problem: how it situates character in relationship to what it *does* identify as leader excellence.

As I shall demonstrate shortly, doctrine explicitly recognizes the importance of excellence but fails to not only provide a conceptual framework for character that supports it, but also to explicitly establish the essential relationship between exemplary character and holistic professional excellence. Thus, while doctrine exhorts Army

leaders to demonstrate character, competency, and commitment, what is provided is not *strong enough* to support the excellence it does require of the “ideal leader.”

Doctrine’s description of the ideal leader is one who “serves as a *role model* through strong intellect, physical presence, professional competence, and *moral character*” (DA, 2019, p. vii, emphasis added). This ideal is established early in the *Introduction* to ADP 6-22 as part of a broader emphasis on what it means to be an effective leader. When it comes to striving for and attaining excellence with respect to matters of one’s intellect, presence before others, and the competencies required of a professional soldier, it is critical that the means necessary to achieve said excellence are properly identified so that efforts do not result in arriving at a standard or outcome of leadership intellect, presence, and competency that is merely “good enough.”

To avoid mediocrity in the required leader attributes and competencies, doctrine provides a rather detailed treatment of what constitutes each of the requirements of the ideal Army leader,⁶ with explicit exhortations that leaders strive for and model *excellence* (DA, 2019, emphasis added):⁷

- Individual stewardship is the responsibility to strive continuously for *excellence* in the performance of duty, to pursue lifelong learning, and to accomplish every mission (para. 1-37)
- Successfully accomplishing missions requires spirited and dedicated

⁶ Doctrine (DA, 2019) articulates these components in the “Army Leader Requirements Model,” which consists of the three leader attributes of *character*, *presence*, and *intellect*, and the leader competencies of *leads*, *develops*, and *achieves*, each of which has sets of sub-attributes and sub-competencies, respectively (e.g. as we have been examining, *character* consists of the (*sub*) *attributes* of the *Army Values*, *Warrior Ethos*, *discipline*, *empathy*, and *humility*).

⁷ As an aside, it is worth noting that the title of the Army Combined Arms Center’s lead organization that oversees the Army’s proponent for its leadership doctrine, the Center for the Army Profession and Leadership, is the Mission Command Center of *Excellence* (emphasis added).

Soldiers and Army civilians who strive for standards of *excellence* (para. 1-38)

- For Soldiers and Army civilians, esprit de corps is reflected in... Motivation, discipline, striving for *excellence*, and good morale (para. 1-41)
- ...the Army ethic encompasses moral foundations to include the Army Values and Just War Tradition. While the moral foundations of the Army ethic are not legally binding, they provide the inspiration to strive for *excellence* in contribution of honorable service to the Nation (para. 1-50)
- Army professionals accomplish the mission as a team of Soldiers and Army civilians contributing their best effort, doing what is ethical, effective, and efficient to the best of their ability, and always striving for *excellence*. Leaders set the example, live by and uphold the Army ethic... (para. 1-57)
- [as Army experts, as competent professionals]... We do our duty leading and following with discipline, striving for *excellence*, putting the needs of others above our own, and accomplishing the mission as a team (Figure 1-2).
- [as Stewards of the Army Profession—committed professionals]... They are accountable to the American people to make decisions and accomplish the mission in accordance with the Army ethic. They hold themselves and others accountable to achieve standards and strive for *excellence* (para. 1-67).

- [In the Army Leader Requirements Model competency of *Leads by Example*, an effective leader] demonstrates technical and tactical competence [by performing] duty with discipline and to standards, while striving for *excellence* (Table 5-4)

We might suppose that doctrine presumes a conceptual relationship between *these* instances of excellence and leader character (especially paras. 1-50, 57, 67), however, no *explicit* references to character *excellence* can be found. While the Army does recognize the importance of excellent performance in the aforementioned ways, this does not entail that such a focus on excellence would also result in *character excellence* by virtue of the inclusion of “character” under the broader conceptual relationship of the “ideal leader.” On the contrary, I would argue a different entailment: that *character excellence* is requisite for any kind of conceivable or achievable excellence in leader *intellect*, *presence*, or *competence*, and that a lack of character excellence hinders the realization of holistic excellence within the Army’s concept of an ideal leader. Therefore, for the sake of doctrinal consistency, character excellence must not only be conceptually framed, but it’s requisite relationship to holistic leadership excellence in the areas of intellect, presence, and competence must also be explicitly addressed.

6.1.1 Explicit Character Excellence for Achieving Ideal Leadership: An Objection and Response. Now perhaps at this juncture one who is more pragmatic with respect to doctrine’s articulation of excellence might challenge such an assertion. After all, it might be asked, isn’t this simply a matter of deciding what to emphasize with respect to excellence? Since the Army *is* ultimately concerned with *excellent* outcomes, isn’t it enough that doctrine expresses the need for excellence in the outcomes it *does*

address? If the above argument is true, and for the sake of focusing on what is important—ethical, competent outcomes—then is additional language specifically devoted to character *excellence* truly necessary? Doesn't it entail that when there is a relationship between competency and character, character is implied? Therefore, to not only desire to reframe a doctrinal conception of character, but to also claim that such a conception must be explicitly connected to the other aspects of ideal leadership, seems to be an unnecessary measure.

In response I would argue that such an explicit connection is not only necessary, but a natural entailment of a reframed conception of character excellence that cannot be divorced from the excellence of a leader's intellect, physical presence, and (especially) professional competency. We must remember that the very mission of the Army is framed in ethical terms, thus all the human particulars that pertain to its accomplishment—intellect, physical presence, professional competence—all entail moral considerations and consequences. In every doctrinal instance of “striving for excellence,” its performative associations with the notions of stewardship, duty, learning, standards, mission accomplishment, morale and esprit de corps, effectiveness, and the Army ethic are all *morally loaded* ideas. In fact, the idea of “excellent competency” is itself a moral notion, for it assumes a “right way” of doing things that exceeds “acceptable competency”—a way that excels, that requires more of a person, that communicates what is worthy versus unworthy, good versus poor, that contributes rather than diminishes the well-being of others, be it other soldiers or those for whom the Army is charged to serve. Leader excellence is not merely instrumental, but normative as well—it communicates both to what ends leaders must perform *and* who they *should be*.

Once again, a leader's holding to the *Army Values* and merely having "good character" are not enough to produce the excellence doctrine describes of the ideal leader. Excellence of any kind, but especially with respect to the Army leader's intellect, physical presence, and professional competency, requires excellence of character so that each might be understood and executed rightly, in light of morally relevant features that accompany nearly every situation in life. For example, if we consider and loosely apply an Aristotelian conception of moral character, we see that its domain of influence is not limited to what we might typically consider moral matters, such as those that pertain to religious or social beliefs and expectations, but is inclusive of the entirety of the leader's experience—individual and corporate, in work and play, in private and public life. Given such a wide moral purview, character excellence naturally extends to the proper fulfillment of a leader's professional competencies and commitments, to include those aspects of leadership typically associated with technical rather than moral proficiency. Understood in this way, it must logically precede *and* culturally accompany all other expressions of leader excellence, for character is about a leader's *being*, while performance is about a leader's *doing* or *behaving* that proceeds from a leader's *being*.

However, the challenge leaders face is that it is far more difficult to transform the former than the latter, and thus more practical to hold themselves and their subordinates to a standard of right or acceptable behavior. Since such is often the case, and because doctrine's conception of excellence outside of character misses the *dispositional* essence of *being* while targeting a leader's *behaving*, character as it stands is easily relegated to and therefore accommodated by the culture's performance-oriented, box-checking approach to (effective) leadership—it is functionally subordinated to a supporting role in

the development of ideal leadership. However, without an adequate framework for character that entails the cultivation of holistic excellence, we do not have an adequate account of an ideal leader and are thus unintentionally left with a framework that accounts for “good (enough) leadership.” Therefore, the need for an explicit emphasis on character excellence is not only important for doctrinal consistency and with respect to a more robust concept of character itself, but also for the promotion and achievement of what makes for a holistically excellent, ideal leader.

6.1.2 Doctrine’s Implicit References to Exemplary Leaders. Despite doctrine’s unintentional allowance for the “good enough” leader character, it is worth noting that in addition to conceiving of ideal leader qualities and recognizing the importance of excellence, it *also* implicitly points to the demonstrative importance of what we might consider “exemplary leaders.” In addition to the aforementioned citations that describe the importance of leaders being role models or leading *by example*, doctrine often provides illustrative language to paint a picture of an effective, ethical leader. It consistently emphasizes the importance of leadership *influence*—that leaders embody the Army Ethic in such a manner as to help motivate their soldiers to cultivate their own character, competency, and commitment—a clear, albeit indirect component of leader development by way pointing to model leaders or exemplars. Specific to the discussion of character, doctrine emphasizes this theme following each description of an *Army Value*, by providing a historical vignette of a soldier who embodied the value in word and deed. However, while it is important and helpful for doctrine to direct leaders to exemplars, without both a conceptual framework for character excellence and an explicit reference to character excellence’s requisite relationship to holistic leader excellence,

such *pointing* remains somewhat ambiguous and falls short of providing leaders what they need to not only aspire to excellence but also what is required to truly *cultivate* excellence so that they might progressively meet the moral demands inherent to Army leadership.

Let us briefly apply this line of reasoning to Col. Smith's case. In light of Army standards, an investigation of Col. Smith may indeed reveal a counter-productive or toxic leader who either needed to be reprimanded or removed from command. However, as I have argued in the previous chapters, his case was not *fundamentally* one that constituted crystal clear ethical violations nor was it *simply* an example of leadership that demonstratively failed the relative test of one or more of the *Army Values* or other character attributes. While those may all be contestable issues, for our discussion they are actually *secondary* to something more important: that his case—and many others like it in the swatch of perhaps less toxic but otherwise counter-productive and morally mediocre to good enough leaders—was *fundamentally* a failure to live up to the *exemplary nature that leadership demands as a representative of the Army profession*. His is a case of the failure to *be* and *act* as a leader that deep down every soldier desires—one who thinks, feels, and behaves in accordance with excellence.

Now, in contrast let us pause and consider an important implication in light of what we have examined thus far. When we review a) doctrine's conception of "good enough" character, b) its explicit but limiting references to excellence, yet lack of an explicitly defined effectual relationship between character excellence and holistic leader excellence, c) its implicit indication of the relative importance of exemplary leadership, and d) our knowledge of cases of mediocre or poor character both similar to and less

challenging than Smith's, we arrive at an understandable yet problematic consequence regarding doctrine's current demonstrative standards for leader character. While doctrine does *not* provide a framework for character excellence, it *is* successful at giving us a means to identify *a lack of character* or *a lack of effective leadership*. As we have seen, such a lack is evidenced by a leader's demonstrative failure to live the *Army Values*, *Warrior Ethos*, or one of the other attributes based on the aspirational notions the culture holds for its leaders, even if that "culture" habitually tolerates leaders who "pass" in a mediocre fashion. Though doctrine provides affirmative language with respect to values-based leadership, by way of other emphases it also inadvertently focuses on what a leader is *not to be*—moral do's and don'ts—while only rarely implying what *it is to be* a leader of moral excellence.

Let us look at this problem somewhat inversely. For any leader to be potentially motivated to avoid "wrongness" or the minimization of immoral and emotionally unhealthy behaviors from a perspective predominantly concerned with the consequences of their actions misses an even more important issue: because of who they are and what they represent as members of the Army profession, for leaders to simply "fail" to do *wrong*, to "succeed" at avoiding immoral or unethical behavior, to meet a cultural status quo of competency-based "good leadership," is in fact *not good enough*. Exemplary leadership, exemplary character, requires much more, and if doctrine is to be a part of properly addressing this problem, it must clearly articulate a positive characterization of exemplary character for the cultivation of exemplary leadership.

6.1.3 An Interjection: An Alternative Proposal for Character Excellence.

Now let us assume that now our doctrinal pragmatist agrees with the need for a

doctrinally revised emphasis on character excellence with respect to its requisite relationship to overall leadership excellence. In response, he claims that the Army should simply employ a more proactive, explicit, and sustained developmental training process to address character excellence, versus what has often been an implicit, indirect, and intermittent approach to ethical leadership development that predominantly relies on annual or semi-annual briefs or classes. In other words, he might argue that my point regarding the relationship between *character excellence* and overall leader excellence is a legitimate problem in the ways I have addressed, but he still does not believe it necessitates reframing doctrine's conception of character—rather, it simply requires a practical response.

He might argue that what *is needed* are programmatic means to help leaders strive for excellent character that effectively apply the current doctrinal attributes of character and thus help leaders strive for excellence in all other areas—in essence, the real need is to find ways to help leaders address character in a manner similar to their other performance-oriented requirements. The Army must simply become more consistent, specific, and regimented with respect to these kinds of training efforts to help leaders practically connect character with the other aspects of ideal leadership. Such efforts would include, for example, revising annually required *Army Values* training to include learning objectives that pertain to excellence, or requiring units to conduct regular leader professional development sessions on the topic of character excellence and its importance for creating and sustaining the ideal leader.

Furthermore, he might argue that the Army also needs to discern better ways to incorporate the discussion of character excellence in other training programs, such as in

the Army's Ready and Resilient campaign⁸ or within the various institutional leadership courses requisite for career progression. Addressed in this fashion, perhaps these and other programs could be a means to not only prevent moral-ethical failures, but also serve as part of a unified approach to help leaders better internalize the *Values*, build up emotional resiliency, and develop emotional intelligence under the "banner" of "character excellence" for the sake of promoting the kind of excellent behavior we desire in ideal leaders. Realistically, in the end we want our leaders to be excellent in all things; therefore, just like we approach our standards for intellect, physical presence, and professional competency, we must simply do a better job at developing and providing the needed training, holding leaders accountable to living the *Army Values* and other attributes, and ideally, develop better ways of incorporating doctrine's existing conception of character into leaders' career-long professional development.

My response to this proposed alternative is multifaceted. While revising and improving upon current models of training would indeed prove helpful if well executed, such an approach would remain inadequate to develop character excellence without considering the issues I am raising with respect to leader dispositions. To agree with the importance of excellence is not enough if the fundamentals in place are not inherently equipped to provide for it. Since the current conception of character is primarily oriented around the *Army Values*, let me again refer to them to help illustrate.

As I briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, values of any kind do not teach an individual *how* to achieve moral excellence, but rather serve as normative principles regarding what is important, general guidelines of what is and is not morally acceptable,

⁸ This includes unit and individual focused skill development in emotional, social, spiritual, physical, and family resiliency (see DA, 2014).

and thus what is morally desirable and worthy of pursuit. As such, values alone cannot tell a person how each should be ordered or prioritized, especially in situations where values may conflict with one another. Nor do values in themselves provide a leader the emotional competencies required to rightly apply them in different or morally complex circumstances. While the *Army Values* do provide the leader a moral means for self-identity, they do not provide the leader a formative-process *for* moral self-identity—something to which virtues are better suited (Wang & Hackett, 2020).

Character *excellence* requires more than informing a leader’s moral foundation, knowledge and beliefs, and decision-making abilities—it entails a process of moral development that includes the cultivation of wisdom as well as one’s rational and affective capacities—all of which are essential in the process of virtue cultivation. Furthermore, cultivating virtuous dispositions is not *only* about how to skillfully understand the values and other attributes in morally relevant and salient matters, but an ongoing process that enables the leader to identify, pursue, and achieve that which is morally worthy—what is excellent, rather than simply that which is “good enough.” Such a process is experiential, situated, and reflective in nature; thus, to only provide more rigorous training and standards of accountability under a banner of “excellence” will likely only benefit those who already demonstrate or are predisposed to virtue cultivation. Character excellence by way of virtue cultivation entails an approach to training and standards that is fundamentally different than that which is provided by the current pedagogy for *Values* training methods or other programmatic efforts, such as those previously mentioned.

Unfortunately, the Army’s approach to character does not help with respect to

these concerns regarding excellence, since it fails to recognize that the constituents of character must play a *functional* role, not merely an aspirational one. As such it misses what is fundamentally required for excellent character, the manner in which it is acquired, and its necessary function in acquiring excellence in any other area of leadership as addressed by Army doctrine. In summary, the current strategy doesn't result in the consequences of excellence we want it to have in Army leadership, requiring that the current conceptual framework for character be revised to support the development of a holistically ideal or excellent leader.

6.2 Proposing a Revised Framework for Character Excellence

In the previous chapters I have argued for the insufficiency of the Army's current conception of character, discussing it in terms of its attributes and giving specific attention to the *Army Values* as the fundamental attribute of leader character, given its normative and aspirational role as the supposed moral guidance mechanism of character. I have argued that critical to this insufficiency are the following issues: a) the *Values* themselves are insufficient to be the primary motivators and guides of moral perception needed for exemplary leadership; b) that exemplary character is requisite for excellent leadership on all accounts and specifically for the Army to have "ideal leaders"; and c) that in fact, the Army implicitly provides an aspirational tone that points to the need for exemplary leadership, yet its doctrinal concepts and pedagogical efforts do not provide for it.

Therefore, to support the development of exemplary Army leaders, the following conceptual work needs to be done. First, we must broaden *and* specify our understanding of character to address not only modest moral failures or account for generally "good"

leadership, but also to specifically address what is required to promote morally exemplary leadership, in order to overcome the current deficits found in how doctrine conceives of the nature of excellence, the means to identify and develop exemplary leaders, and most importantly, how it currently construes the constituents of character to the neglect of excellent leader dispositions necessary to *live the Army Values* and demonstrate the remaining character attributes.

My proposal is to leave the *Values* and other essential attributes intact and address what should be the fundamental constituents of character that give one *moral skill*. The *Army Values* should maintain their normative role in leader character and conduct and the attributes of the *Warrior Ethos*, *discipline*, *empathy*, and *humility* should remain key attributes—for there is no character change without values-change and the development of these attributes. However, the constituents and impetus of excellent leader character must be *virtues*: the moral dispositions or skills to help leaders navigate morally complex situations, to help them attend, notice, perceive and appropriately feel and rank moral considerations—especially one’s values—that come to bear on moral reasoning, decision-making, and behaviors, such as empathy and humility.

Given the disadvantages to the current doctrinal framework, I propose revising the Army’s current conceptual framework for character by orienting it around leader-virtues. I acknowledge that such a proposal will also entail extensive attention to the development of a leader-character training program, as no amount of doctrinal content will be sufficient to achieve the desired effect without a complementary, situated learning process. However, before such considerations can be addressed, it will be important to first elucidate a conceptual model of leader-virtues suitable for Army doctrine.

VII. A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR CHARACTER EXCELLENCE

In this chapter I will attempt to outline a revised framework for Army leadership character excellence, in which leader *virtues* serve as the functional constituents of character. I will begin by first providing a succinct conceptual overview of *character virtues* and then give attention to what they offer the leader with respect to exemplary character. I will then discuss what I believe should be considered key features of *Army leader* character excellence and how this helps establish the parameters for how Army doctrine might provide a positive characterization of exemplary character. Having laid the contextual groundwork, I will then elucidate a conceptual framework for virtues-centered Army leader character and then conclude with two illustrations of exemplary leaders.

As I attempt to provide an overview of *character virtues* as part of the effort to revise the Army's conceptual framework, I believe it is important to begin by reminding us that the fundamental problem with the current conception is *not* its conventional description of what character *is* and *does* in a leader, though that too would benefit from attention to excellence. Rather, I have argued that the Army's existing conception of character is insufficient to produce exemplary leadership, for while its attributes consist of normative moral principles (i.e. *Army Values*), cultural standards (i.e. *Warrior Ethos* and *discipline*), and affective components (i.e. *empathy* and *humility*) necessary for exemplary leadership, without the cultivation of *dispositions of excellence* to guide, internalize, and employ them appropriately, attempts to individually or collectively develop these elements will not entail the cultivation of exemplary character. Therefore, in order to establish some contextual parameters around our particular focus of

exemplary character—exemplary Army leadership rather than exemplary human character in general—it would be helpful to briefly expand on the Army’s description of character to address some elemental aspects that doctrine fails to highlight.

Aside from identifying the various influences of one’s character, doctrine sufficiently describes how a leader’s character affects various decisions and behaviors, is demonstrated by reputation, reflects moral attitudes and actions, and comprises one’s true nature and conscience. What is important to specifically include in our understanding of character and attention to the cultivation of excellence is not only how exemplary character is differentiated from that which is “good enough,” but also how such character reveals a leader’s deepest commitments and attitudes to everyday concerns and responsibilities. Therefore, an Army leader’s character must also be articulated in doctrine as her “state of being expressed in doing...that involves evolving or settled dispositions with both cognitive and affective elements that flow into appropriate action” (Athanasoulis, 2012, p.44).

A revised conceptual framework, while maintaining a basic agreement with doctrine’s current description of character, must emphasize how exemplary character is centered on this interdependent relationship between right thinking and right feelings that result in right actions. Such an emphasis finds the most rigorous support in the fundamental function of virtues as the constituents of exemplary character.

7.1 Virtues: Dispositions for Morally Exemplary Leadership

When I speak of virtues for leadership, I am using a term uncommon to daily life yet evident in our everyday language when we voice opinions and preferences about the character of Army leaders. We consider the degree to which they model ideal

temperaments and behaviors, such as generosity, self-control, self-awareness, selflessness, courage, sincerity, being emotionally attuned to others, reasonableness, or wisdom. One might immediately notice how some of our preferences highlight what we think it means for leaders to *live* the *Army Values*, such as *selfless-service* and *personal courage*. These *Values* and attributes such as *empathy* and *humility* inherently entail for us not only morally appropriate beliefs or goals, but also attitudes and behavioral responses. In light of this, it may be appropriate to construe a leader *living* any one of the *Values* or *embodying* the attributes of *empathy* and *humility* as language that conveys the cultivation of virtues.

In previous chapters I have mentioned that while the *Values* are important in their function as normative principles of the leader's moral foundation, they alone are insufficient to guide the leader as to how each should be ranked or prioritized in any given morally complex situation, nor do they alone provide the rational and affective ability to appropriately discern such situations' morally relevant and salient features—abilities dictated by one's relative moral maturity. The cultivation of virtues fills this gap by helping the leader become morally context-sensitive, or what Aristotle referred to as living in accordance with *orthos logos*, or “according to a correct appreciation of the situation” (Crombie, 1962, p. 539), which helps the leader properly judge and be motivated in light of context specifics. As the proper integration or infusion of reason *and* emotion unto the most appropriate moral response, virtue cultivation is perhaps the most fundamental component and expression of a leader's moral maturity, for character virtues are the dispositions to appropriately perceive, notice, attend, and rank the morally relevant and salient considerations of a situation, as they emerge.

Developed by proper habituation and experience, virtues can be described as persisting, reliable, and characteristic ways of being and acting that entail the right reasons, feelings, and attitudes about a given matter. Whereas the *Values* and their respective moral goals may not be consistently enacted across cultural or sub-cultural contexts within the Army (due to aforementioned factors such as when *Values* conflict with one another or a leader's personal values), by comparison *virtues* can be socially cultivated to be effective across contexts. Thus, it is the very nature of virtues as rational *and* affective dispositions that makes them essential for Army leaders to develop *excellent moral perception*, such that they can appropriately and effectively *live* the Army *Values*—to “incarnate them in an intrinsic way” (Kristjánsson, 2018, p. 31), rather than only out of a sense of moral obligations or to avoid guilt, shame, or moral culpability.

It is important to further distinguish the nature of habituation that is present in the cultivation of virtues versus those dispositions that pertain to standards and the meeting of one's basic moral duties. While the Army instills in its members various behavioral dispositions that pertain to duty, personal responsibility, and military bearing, virtues differ from personality traits or dispositions of mere habit (e.g., punctuality or orderliness), which are often extrinsically motivated or done for their instrumental value, rather than for their own intrinsic good or how they contribute to the well-being of others (Annas, 2011). Furthermore, since virtues are *not* temporary moods or attitudes, they are not episodic instances of moral good (i.e., independent but otherwise inconsistent actions that might otherwise appear virtuous). Finally, virtues also differ from moral *continence*, which is the state of character the Army in particular expects its members to attain, in which one has the ability or self-control to exercise right moral reason to overcome

inappropriate or immoral emotional impulses or responses (Curzer, 2018). By way of simple contrast, whereas virtue's aim is moral excellence, the aim of continence is merely individual moral duty or social compliance.

7.1.1 Character Virtues: The Moral Skills of Exemplary Army Leaders.

Given the Army leadership context—doctrinally and culturally—in which the ideal leader is a composite of strong intellect, physical presence, professional competence, and moral character, and in which the leader is assessed based on his continual development and demonstration of attributes and competencies, it seems suitable to conceive Army leader virtues as analogous to *moral skills*. Here Julia Annas (2011) provides terminology helpful for this discussion, which I will interpolate for the Army leader context.⁹

She promotes a 'practical skill' analogy of virtues considering how they are acquired by intentional habituation, of a kind does not merely involve routine, nor result in a mindless ability to perform certain behaviors in a rote fashion but is rather one in which the leader becomes more morally intelligent and responsive in creative ways. We may compare this to the skill of a jazz musician, whose expertise is reflected in both knowing all the "rules" of music *and* the ability to contextually adapt or improvise as best suits the occasion. Virtues as moral skills yet again help differentiate between "good enough" and exemplary character, for rather than immediately appealing to the dictates of moral principles or potential consequences of actions, they provide the leader the kind of moral insight and deftness that allow her to navigate complex moral situations in an

⁹ At this juncture it is worth mentioning that in advocating for leader *virtues*, I am not arguing for a perspective of "moral excellence" that nears a notion of moral perfection or such a standard that is so high that it would arguably be too demanding for Army leaders, but rather a position akin to Annas (2011) that views them in terms of both aspirational and achievable given the proper education, support and social context (see also Russell, 2018).

elegant manner. They help the leader adeptly discern when and when not to willingly sacrifice supposed mission effectiveness for the moral well-being of people, especially when extrinsic motivational factors such as mission efficiency and how one's performance will be judged typically have some degree of influence on one's moral judgments.

Critical to Annas' understanding of virtue as *skill* is that within the leader exists a unity of the 'need to learn' and 'drive to aspire,' motivations not uncommon to Army leaders. Therefore, virtues as moral skills are fitting not only with the dispositional language used thus far, but also for a developmental perspective of character, for their cultivation requires a situated learning context, models from whom to learn, self-direction, and a path to excellence along which there will always exist varying degrees of virtue acquisition, but where the morally skilled are increasingly able to give a reasoned account *of* their skill.

In light of the modern Army's cultural context, which is increasingly concerned about leaders' social or emotional intelligence, a particularly important aspect of moral skills development is that of cultivating *virtuous emotions*. As I previously stated, virtues are an infusion of both rational and affective capacities, which help leaders not only *think* appropriately, but also *feel* appropriately in a given situation. In an organization that is not only progressively emphasizing the importance of emotionally intelligent leadership, but also reorienting an organizational focus on the well-being of people, it is critical that leaders not only learn concepts and competencies to this end, but that they develop emotional dispositions that enable them to effectively do so while maintaining the necessary level of physical and mental toughness essential to a military professional.

Virtues provide the leader the ability to emotionally “balance” this well, for they help leaders cultivate virtuous emotions—emotions that are responsive to reason, morally valuable, educable, and constitutive of exemplary moral self-hood (Kristjánsson, 2018a).

What makes virtuous emotions *excellent* is not only that at face-value they be fitting to the context, but that they demonstrate sincerity, reasonableness of expression (rather than irrational), and be morally justified—i.e., that they developmentally, by-and-large, share in reason’s moral ends (Kristjánsson, 2018a). To put this in Aristotelian terms, virtuous emotions are those relevant emotions which are felt “at the right times, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end and in the right way” (1985, p.44 [1106b17-35]). Finally, virtuous emotions are not only the result of virtue-acquisition, but are also essential for the proper development of moral perception, for they help a leader rightly interpret the interrelated and interdependent moral demands, emotional features, and moral ends of a situation (Little, 1995). If the Army desires its leaders to aspire to and developmentally achieve excellence that is contextually effective for its evolving organizational culture, there is no substitute for the development of virtuous emotions that accompany the cultivation of virtues.

A final aspect of virtues as moral skills and the entailing development of virtuous emotions is what Aristotle and contemporary Aristotelian scholars consider critical for virtue cultivation: the development of *phronesis*, or “practical wisdom.” Described by Aristotle as an “intellectual virtue,” *phronesis* a disposition of moral “know-how” that involves both “affective and cognitive elements, which manifests itself in having the ability to see what virtue requires” (Athanasoulis, 2017, p. 419). If moral perception allows the exemplary leader to recognize what is required of her, “practical

wisdom...shows [her] *why* it is required [of her]" (Athanassoulis, 2012, p. 76).

What is interesting about *phronesis* and *phronetic reasoning* is that it is perceptual in nature, cultivated by experience as a kind of governing virtue, and thus necessary for one to rightly discern and apply all other virtues in a particular circumstance. It is also considered to be *the virtue* that most corresponds to the development of empathy (e.g. Svenaeus, 2014)—one of the desired character attributes for Army leaders—for the proper emotional attunement to oneself and others is essential for moral perception and knowledge. Without this particular moral skill, a leader can have values and even be cultivating individual virtues yet be unable to skillfully handle complex or delicate moral situations well. For example, *phronesis* helps the leader to reasonably and emotionally distinguish between the virtue of courage and those instances of courage motivated by personal gain. As the term practical *wisdom* implies, by virtue of experiencing, learning from failures, and reflectively engaging one's reasoning and emotional perception, *phronesis* serves to help the leader integrate and unite her virtues, such that her disposition of kindness or compassion is informed by her other dispositions, e.g. justice, self-control, gratitude, or loyalty, all of which contribute to her moral perception.

7.1.2 Benefits of Leader Virtues. Practically speaking, virtues as moral skills would benefit a leader in a variety of ways. When leaders employ the moral guiding mechanism of virtues, the *Values* and remaining attributes are evaluated by perceptual and emotional ranking systems so that they might be embodied in an appropriate manner that accords with what a given situation morally demands.

Let us first consider the *Value of personal courage—moral and physical*—when employed by or construed as the *virtue* of courage. It would be evident in the leader as

persistent, reliable, and characteristic, though *not* in a mechanical or rote manner, but in a rationally and affectively intelligent and flexible way. The leader who practices and cultivates the virtue of (personal) courage is enabled to take into account the morally relevant and salient features of a situation—regardless of what kind of threat is apparent—and thus able to best discern whether or not to rush into the face of danger or choose to assess further, as well as feel and display the appropriate emotions, such as a sense of confidence that is mingled with the anxiety that comes when, for example, telling the truth in a trying situation may jeopardize a leader’s social standing or even career prospects.

Let consider a virtue that would be recognized by the Army as important yet functionally challenging given the Army’s culture: *compassion*. In the case of a subordinate soldier in emotional distress, a leader attending to the virtue of compassion will be able to discern the morally relevant and salient features, enabling her to properly internalize and apply the *Value of respect* and be *empathetic*, even if such a response might entail disrupting other pressing operational issues or risk a perception of weakness before other leaders who have a divergent opinion on the matter. However, in a different scenario, attentive compassion *in the same manner* for an individual soldier in apparent distress may be inappropriate, such as when a leader discerns that strong *discipline* is also necessary after repeated instances of failure or inappropriate conduct (despite the soldier’s emotional distress). This is not to say that she does not employ the virtue of compassion in a way that enables her to still be *empathetic* and *humble* in her demeanor, but rather that these moral responses are also tempered with an appropriate employment of the virtues of justice, which influences a proper devotion to the *Values of duty* and

integrity and a consideration to how such behaviors might help the other members of the unit cultivate virtues so as to also properly orient themselves to the *Army Values*, *discipline*, the *Warrior Ethos*, and a balanced application of *empathy* and *humility*.

Virtues also help leaders interpret, prioritize, and apply the *Values* in a more sophisticated or multidimensional manner. Let us return to the virtue of compassion in the case of a unit that has suffered a severe loss, whose morale is low, yet whose mission requirements are ongoing. For a leader to put aside her own agenda to provide personal care, exercise self-awareness to be truly present, and instruct certain members of her unit to put aside their current priorities to provide the needed support—even at the potential cost of perceived mission effectiveness—may be a morally appropriate perceptual and emotional application of the *Value* of *duty* in conjunction with *empathy*. Whereas *duty* might be normally understood and applied in a one-dimensional manner with respect to mission accomplishment, interacting virtues such as compassion, courage, and *phronetic* emotional awareness (of self and others) help leaders perceive and internalize the *Values* as multidimensional, such that in the case above, *compassion-informed duty* to a fellow comrade is in fact a fulfillment of *duty*, not only a demonstration of, say, *loyalty*, or *selfless-service*. This also helps us discern the difference between “virtue-motivated” duty and simply a cognitive recognition that helping hurting soldiers is a good and effective thing to do. The leader who is exhibiting the aforementioned virtues will not only make the right calls but do so in an emotionally effective manner, for intrinsically good reasons.

Let us consider another multidimensional situation with respect to the virtue of compassion: the exercise of professional competency and the application of the *Values* of

personal courage and *respect*, in the context of the humane treatment of enemy combatants. While a competent leader may follow the rules of engagement, a leader developing exemplary character will not only follow the rules, but in light of a proper integration of the virtues of compassion and justice, will have the appropriate moral perception to discern and motivate her to make the right decisions *and* behave in a manner that allows her to better emotionally navigate situations what involve seemingly opposing priorities—caring for her own and the killing or proper detainment of the enemy. Similarly, we might take *Value of loyalty* as employed by the virtue of courage. In an instance involving a corrupt peer, the morally appropriate response may require a leader to bravely question or withhold unflinching *loyalty*, despite personal feelings of loyalty or how such an action might be perceived by other members of the unit who have a different disposition *toward* their understanding and embodiment of *loyalty* to fellow members of the unit. Cultivating virtues helps a leader not only develop the ability to respond in morally relevant and salient ways, but also to have a more holistic view of the features and implications of moral principles as experienced in context.

One last benefit to leaders worthy of mention is how virtue-acquisition, with respect to developing virtuous emotions, might further contribute to leaders' ability to overcome failure and develop both empathy and emotion regulation as a means to help address guilt and shame (Sherman, 2014; Stichter, 2020) commonly experienced in the Army profession. This also points to how virtues-based character might serve as an effective conceptual bridge between what are otherwise distinct educational foci in the Army—moral leadership, emotional resiliency, and behavioral health. While such a relationship requires further analysis, it seems plausible to argue that given the cognitive-

affective dimension of virtues and their function in excellence or individual flourishing or well-being, as a basis for leader character they might help the Army better integrate what is only natural: the moral and emotional well-being of its members.

In summary, virtues help leaders operationalize the *Values* and other attributes in a multi-dimensional, interdependent fashion. Their practice and cultivation help leaders convey and express what is valued (Sherman, 1997), promote reflexivity and quick access to important moral knowledge stored deep within one's psyche (Goldie, 2004), and can even help invigorate the *Values* and guard them from 'axiological entropy,' the gradual process in which our tacit awareness of their importance for our character diminishes over time (Starkey, 2015). Virtues *practiced* beget the ongoing internalization of the *Values* and cultivation of their related character attributes, which serves to further help the cultivation of virtues themselves—a process which, guided especially by the development of *phronesis*, serves to mature the leader's intuitive moral landscape, rationally and emotionally.

Having briefly provided a treatment of the nature of leader virtues as moral skills and demonstrated some ways in which they would contribute to exemplary leadership, I want to now turn to how we might understand leader virtues in the larger, yet specific context of what constitutes exemplary Army leader character. In the following section, my intent is to identify the key features of exemplary leadership centered in exemplary character, which will serve to help us establish a positive characterization of leader character that includes a "frame" on which to hang an appropriate conception of virtues as the constituents of character necessary for the employment of the leader attributes and competencies outlined in leadership doctrine.

7.2 Framing Army-Leader Character Excellence

In response to moral failures and adapting to an evolving culture that is increasingly concerned with how to holistically lead and care for its people, the 21st century Army has continued to “move the goal posts” in what it morally demands of its leaders. What was initially a strong emphasis on values-adherence and the avoidance of negative leadership has become an increasing emphasis on a people-centered leadership that is just as equipped to handle interpersonal issues that pertain to inclusion, sexual harassment and assault, racism, and developing a positive climate, as it is to lead soldiers on the battlefield. While the fundamentals remain the same, Army culture continues to require more of its leaders, such that an understanding of “character” must also be stretched to meet this demand—it must be richer, more perceptive, and more nuanced to achieve complex moral ends—to distinguish not only the mediocre from the good, but the good from the excellent.

Before we can proceed with a conceptual revision of character based on virtues, we must return to our earlier discussion regarding the Army profession and ethic, as it fundamentally orients the Army leader’s calling, purpose, and ethical obligations. In order for a conception of exemplary character to properly fit the Army context, it must demonstrate how it supports the cultivation of exemplary leadership in light of several interdependent concepts, each of which is ethically-laden: the characteristics of the Army profession, the *telos* of the Army ethic, the shared identity of Army professionals, and the ethically entailed expectation of Army professionals.

Army doctrine identifies five characteristics of the profession that are to be demonstrated by its members: *trust, honorable service, military expertise, stewardship,*

and *esprit de corps* (DA, 2019). These characteristics are shaped by the Army ethic, which is the “set of enduring moral principles, values, beliefs, and laws that guide the Army profession and create the culture of trust essential to Army professionals in the conduct of missions, performance of duty, and all aspects of life” (DA, 2019, para. 1-44). Together, the characteristics of the Army profession and Army ethic provide the leader purposive guidance and content regarding both who they are to *be* and the ends to which they are to strive, which includes the recurring emphases of excellence and trust.

The profession and ethic are also distilled into the *Army Values* and summarized in a shared identity as “trusted Army professionals,” which consists of complementary roles as honorable servants (“professionals of character”), Army experts (“competent professionals”), and responsible stewards of the profession (“committed and accountable to each other, the profession, and the American people”). Doctrine then specifically articulates that the ethical orientation of the Army profession entails that its professionals contribute:

...their best effort, doing what is ethical, effective, and efficient to the best of their ability, and always striving for excellence. Leaders set the example, live by and uphold the Army ethic, establish a professional organizational climate, and inspire their team.... The consistent demonstration of character, competence, and commitment, with shared understanding and intent, reinforces mutual trust (para. 1-57).

While neither the characteristics of the profession and its professionals, nor the content of the ethic, sufficiently address the nature and role of excellent moral perception in leader character, they do provide us the basic moral foundation and guidelines upon which

leaders might cultivate excellence. They also provide what amounts to the Army leader's comprehensive ethical *telos*: trusted Army professionals¹⁰ who consistently (or *excellently*) demonstrate the characteristics of the profession and live according to the ethic create or maintain a *culture of mutual understanding and trust*. It is from this doctrinal content, especially with respect to the recurrent emphases of excellence and trust, that we might orient our framing of exemplary leader character.

In accord with the larger argument I have made with respect to exemplary character being requisite for overall leadership excellence, I will add an entailing premise: that creating a culture of mutual understanding and trust is not achievable apart from a culture of moral excellence that is itself cultivated by leaders of exemplary character. Articulated in positive terms, individual exemplary leader character is essential for the ethical *telos* the Army desires, especially the cultivation of a culture of mutual understanding and trust—of creating excellent moral cultures. Therefore, a revised conceptual framework for exemplary character must be oriented such that it consists of virtues that supports this comprehensive moral end.

7.2.1 Features of Leader Excellence. Let us initially consider how this all might apply to our case study of Col. Smith, with equal consideration given to those mediocre, run-of-the-mill leaders who are neither moral monsters nor models of disregard for the *Values*, but who's consistently overlooked failures of moral excellence indirectly contribute to morally mediocre unit cultures. I have argued that while we may have reasons to negatively judge Smith on account of perceived failures to live one or more of the *Army Values* or demonstrate *empathy* or *humility*, the deeper concern with respect to

¹⁰ I.e., what we might also construe as “ideal leaders” (see previous chapter).

doctrine's conception of leader character is not ultimately to how it applies to moral duty or its ability to help assess moral consequences that are the result of toxic behaviors, for while these concerns are evident in cases like Smith, they are also in many ways resolvable without giving the necessary attention to exemplary character. Rather, the concern is that the Army culture recognizes the difference between "good enough" leadership and exemplary leadership but lacks the doctrinal and practical resources to formatively bridge that gap.

Applied to the case of Smith, the concern is to address the crucial difference between the Smith we have and the kind of Smith we want. On the one hand, aspirationally we want Smith to admirably demonstrate all the character attributes and leader competencies. On the other hand, our practical or functional desire is for leaders to have Smith's professional competency that achieves desired goals, but without the negative behaviors and their entailing problematic outcomes for moral climates.

This is where the notion of excellent character bridges the gap between the aspirational and functional demands of moral leadership. A morally excellent Smith is not only effective at achieving the same goals and avoiding negative behavioral outcomes but is averse to said behaviors and outcomes because they are inherently contrary to what is intrinsically excellent, nor do they cultivate the mutual understanding and trust requisite for well-being or effective climate and culture. It is a Smith virtuously disposed to demonstrating any one or more of the *Values*, *empathy*, or *humility* in a given interpersonal circumstance, whose relative cultivation of *phronesis* allows him to at minimum appreciate the affective moral features of a situation and respond accordingly, albeit imperfectly. A morally excellent Smith is disposed to taking the risk of being "less

effective or efficient” for the sake of virtue and instilling a virtuous culture in the unit, believing that the comprehensive moral ends of mutual understanding and trust are the principal ends of leadership.

Therefore, a positive characterization of exemplary leader character is one that *a) considers how excellent character aspirationally and functionally bridges the gap between the bad or mediocre and the truly ideal leader, and b) is concerned with the exemplary embodiment and demonstration of the Army profession and ethic unto the moral ends of a culture of shared mutual understanding and trust.* With this positive characterization in view, I will now attempt to elucidate a conceptual framework of exemplary character that illustrates the relationship between essential leader virtues, the attributes and competencies of Army leadership, and the entailing moral ends of *exemplary* trusted Army professionals.

7.3 A Framework for Virtues-Centered Army Leader Character

If an exemplary Army leader is one whose moral perception and responses contribute to individual and communal well-being that is contextually nuanced in terms of a culture of shared mutual understanding and trust, then the virtues of exemplary character should be those that interdependently cultivate this moral end. Table 1, the “Army Leader Virtues” (ALV), provides a list of dispositions essential for the development and demonstration of exemplary Army leadership, such that in any given situation a leader might have the appropriate moral perception to recognize and respond to the relevant and salient features requisite for appropriately demonstrating one or more of the five Army character attributes. These essential or “cardinal” leader virtues are connected to subordinate virtues by way of “generic connectivity” and the essential

virtues as a whole by way of “cross-generic connectivity,” such that the subordinate virtues function like *species* of their higher order or *genera*, and then taken collectively

Table 1

Essential Virtues of Exemplary Army Leader Character (“Army Leader Virtues”)

Essential Virtue	Description	Subordinate Virtues
(Personal) Courage	Directed at/concerned with the fortitude to confront fear, uncertainty, and intimidation in the midst of doing the right thing	Self-confidence, Perseverance, Magnanimity
Humanity	Directed at/concerned with the care for others and healthy relationships; regard for dignity of human life	Benevolence, Compassion, Generosity
Justice	Directed at/concerned with giving each their due; equity and the common good; entails respect for others	Humility, Gratitude
Temperance	Directed at/concerned with governing one’s desires (physical and emotional), to include self-gratification	Self-control, Patience, Modesty,
Truthfulness	Directed at/concerned with honesty to self and others; underlies “promise-keeping,” reliability, and being principled	Fidelity, Integrity
Phronesis (“Practical Wisdom”)	Deliberative disposition that unifies and contextually integrates the other virtues by identifying the morally relevant and salient features pertinent to individual virtues and dependent relationships between virtues; its affective component is akin to <i>empathy</i> and the competencies associated with social or emotional intelligence	

the sum of essential virtues function interdependently in what is leaders holistic moral

perception or virtuous reasoning (Russell, 2009).¹¹ All of the leader virtues are properly integrated, contextualized and exhibited by way of the leader's *phronesis*, which serves as the unifying essential virtue.

The items selected for the ALV were chosen based on both traditional and contemporary sources of virtues. For example, the inclusion of traditional virtues such as *justice, courage, temperance, truthfulness*, and *phronesis* find themselves in the work of not only Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and Aquinas, but also re-interpreted and framed in modern terms both in neo-Aristotelian scholarship and moral psychology, in which contemporary lists of virtues—whether generalized or enumerated—have often included such virtues as *humanity* or its related subordinates to better account for the well-being or flourishing of human beings (see Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Wang & Hackett, 2016, 2020). Therefore, the ALV attempts to preserve those traditional virtues that are particularly important for the military profession while integrating those complementary virtues needed for the kind of 21st century leadership equipped to be morally perceptive in combat, on the home front, in humanitarian crises, with soldiers, enemy combatants, and civilians alike.

7.3.1 Additional Virtues? The ALV is framed to provide an inclusive list of virtues that are aspirational and practical for every Army leader, regardless of their given personal beliefs. However, this list does include virtues that may be distinct to leaders'

¹¹ Some may object that one or more of these subordinate virtues should be considered primary or basic virtues, or that some may be subordinated to one of the other essential virtues (e.g., humility may just as well be considered an aspect of benevolence or practical wisdom). This point serves to highlight that just as there is interdependent reciprocity between the essential virtues, the same principle applies to the subordinate virtues. For the sake of enumeration, simplicity, and an attempt to unify the virtues in an interdependent fashion, they have been organized accordingly.

specific religious or theological beliefs, such as the *infused virtues* discussed by Aquinas (faith, hope, and *caritas* or “godly-love”) or more generic kinds such as forgiveness, spirituality, or piety. Nor does this list specifically include virtues that are arguable related or connected to the essential or subordinate virtues, such as friendliness, civility, or humor. Such exclusions do not imply that leaders cannot or should not consider cultivating additional virtues, but rather is purposed so that leaders might have an enumerated list of the primary and secondary virtues necessary for exemplary character. It also recognizes that in many cases there is not universal agreement with respect to the precise connotation of similar or related virtues, such as benevolence and kindness and their import for virtues such as friendship and civility. Therefore, this concept for the ALV is an imperfect attempt to highlight and prioritize those virtues that may be construed as primary and those of immediate secondary importance.

7.3.2 Army Character Attributes as Virtues? One will immediately notice what appears to be specific Army character attributes construed as virtues. The *Value of personal courage* is intentionally construed as a virtue given its dispositional description in doctrine, its nearly ubiquitous importance in traditional and contemporary lists of virtues, and its relevance for military leadership. The *Value of integrity* is construed as a virtue (subordinate to truthfulness) based on doctrine’s dispositional language that understands it in terms of an expression of honesty and adherence to honorable principles, as well as how it also connotes a leader’s awareness and attention to the integration and adherence to her own principles. Since a leader’s integrity can lead her not only into virtuous but also “vicious” actions, it is subordinated to the higher disposition of truthfulness (honesty with oneself and others) and must be balanced with a

leader's magnanimity, or the disposition of "greatness of soul" which is concerned with noble pursuits external to oneself and the honor thus received by others (Robinson, 2007).

Army doctrine also conveys the attributes of *empathy* and *humility* in dispositional language, as well as in terms of how they integrate with and affect the remaining attributes. The revised conceptual framework of character will preserve *empathy* and *humility* in the list of character attributes while more specifically addressing their dispositional content in the ALV, as their emphasis (along with the virtue of *humanity*) is important to maintain in order to counter-balance and inform more traditional expressions of virtues and values (e.g. courage, duty, and loyalty) that might restrict a leader's moral perception such that he is unwilling or unable exercise the proper affective reasoning.

Empathy, while not specifically listed as an essential or subordinate virtue, is an affective component of *phronesis*, and such serves to bolster the concept of a leader's development of the skill of practical wisdom as both a cognitive and affective endeavor. The intent is that if doctrine and character development processes emphasize the relationship between *phronesis* and *empathy* in dispositional language and its entailing behavioral outcomes described of *humility* as a character attribute, both the leader's conceptual understanding and cultivation of emotional and social intelligence will be properly grounded in virtue, rather than solely in terms of technical competency. Taking direction from Aquinas (1947), *humility* is included in the ALV as one of justice's subordinate virtues due to how it helps direct a leader to see herself rightly in relationship to others and what they are due. For example, *humility* informs the leader of herself with

respect to the authority she holds over others and those who hold authority over her, the strengths, weaknesses, and responsibilities she brings to her working relationships, and therefore what she owes to her subordinates, peers, and superiors.

The doctrinal language for *Warrior Ethos* is primarily descriptive with reference to beliefs and ideas that require the proper dispositional commitments to be properly demonstrated, and while the attribute of *discipline* also includes dispositional language akin to the virtue of temperance, its description is more generic and implies behaviors that would be entailments of temperance and its subordinate virtues. The same holds true for the *Values* of *duty* and *respect*—which are at minimum demonstrative commitments that flow from the expression of justice and humanity—and *selfless service*, whose descriptive language implies its expression being the evidence of the interacting virtues of justice (to include its subordinate, humility) and humanity (to include its subordinates).

While the *Value* of *loyalty* has on occasion been construed as a virtue, it is questionable as to whether or not it should serve as an essential or even subordinate virtue in a military context, given the tendency for it to veer into excess when oriented around misplaced personal values or prioritized above other virtues, evidenced when a leader's *loyalty* to his peers, subordinates, or the subcultural code of honor blinds him to the proper exercise of humanity, justice, or personal courage when one or more are morally demanded in a given situation (Olsthoorn, 2014). The ALV takes into account Ewin's (1992) suggestion that *loyalty* better serves the other virtues as a kind of moral 'raw-material,' in which (like a properly held value) it is appropriately expressed *through* the leader's virtues and in some instances may be a "necessary condition of the exhibition of the other virtues" (p. 417). The *Value* of honor is also more of a good or reward of

virtue that should be sought by the proper exhibition of virtues, but not a virtue or true good in itself, since it is dependent on the opinions of individuals and can be problematically non-virtuous when it is functionally understood within a restrictively defined honor group (such as the Army culture or subcultures within the Army), rather than in light of a broader one that includes trust with the American people as exhorted in the Army ethic (see Olsthoorn, 2011). Given the Army's description of *honor* as a demonstration of living in line with the *Values*, it is best understood as both a reward of and manner of conduct in keeping with the virtues.

This discussion on the functional relationships between the leader virtues, *Army Values*, and leader character attributes begins to illustrate the importance of virtues in their aspirational and functional role within a broader conceptual framework for exemplary character—how they interact with, prioritize, and integrate values and beliefs, as well as incorporate the appropriate emotional content required to appropriately apply or constrain the values, beliefs, and behavioral standards of Army leaders in a morally reasoned and responsive manner. Having provided a brief introduction to the ALV, I will now address its role within the broader reconceptualization of exemplary character and how this revised framework, when incorporated into the Army's overall leadership paradigm, serves as the fundamental basis for exemplary leadership.

7.3.3 A Revised Conceptual Relationship: Leader Virtues, the ALRM, and the Trusted Army Professional. By way of review, exemplary leadership that holistically accounts for excellence implied in Army doctrine and what is required for holistic excellence in a leader's character, competency, and commitment, entails that a leader's moral identity be character-based, that virtues of character be cultivated for

leaders to have the moral perception needed to appropriately and effectively embody and exhibit each of the leader character attributes, and so that leaders might advance the moral well-being of their units, demonstrated in organizational climates and an Army culture of shared mutual understanding and trust. The leader, by way of continual development and interdependent exercise of the essential and subordinate virtues as governed by an ongoing cultivation of *phronesis*, will have the moral skills needed to rightly identify the relevant and salient features of complex, emotionally-laden moral situations and respond in morally effective ways, whether it is in the heat of physical battle or the psychological terrain of interpersonal relationships that require a degree of emotional intelligence not provided by sheer reliance on moral principles, intuition, or good will.

A conceptual framework of exemplary leader character situates the ALV at the center of the Army Leader Requirements Model (ALRM), as the functional and aspirational basis for both an Army leader's attributes (to include character) and professional competencies. Leader virtues cognitively and affectively ground, guide, and properly orient the remaining character attributes in order to promote excellent moral perception. The ALRM has also been modified to reflect a holistic approach to leader excellence discussed in the previous chapter, situating the revised concept of exemplary character at the center of the entire model rather than one of several equally interdependent concepts. This also serves to emphasize the character-based moral identity of the Army leader, which properly grounds the Army leader's professional identity as a "trusted Army professional." To aid comparison between the old and revised conceptual components, see Figures 1 (cf. Chapter I.) and 2 (below).



Figure 2. Revised ALRM Centered in the Army Leader Virtues (ALV)

7.4 Lingering Challenges

With a conceptual model of the ALV proposed and assuming it's validity as central to a revised framework for Army leader character, the more pressing and challenging issue remains: how the Army as a whole might effectively employ a leader

virtues-based character development program. Such an endeavor entails both pedagogical and institutional concerns that are far beyond the scope of this paper. However, in the following chapter I will conclude by providing a cursory overview of what I believe to be some important considerations that must be addressed for such a venture to succeed.

VIII. A VIRTUOUS CHALLENGE:

NEXT STEPS FOR ARMY LEADER CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

How might we envision the ALVs at work in the lives of Army leaders, helping them to appropriately internalize and demonstrate the desired character attributes of ideal leaders, and what might this entail for Army leader professional development? To help illustrate possibilities of exemplary Army leadership, I will first revisit our examination of Col. Smith and then provide a brief case study of another brigade commander who was undoubtedly regarded as exemplary by subordinates and peers alike. I will then briefly discuss some of the organizational and pedagogical issues that will need to be addressed in a follow-on work regarding the implementation of an ALV character development program.

8.1 A More Excellent Way

Returning to Col. Smith, let us revise some of the case study scenarios in terms of exemplary behaviors. In the instance where he disagreed with his BHO regarding a soldier's diagnosis and treatment plan—in which the BHO recommended the soldier return to duty, and Smith wanted him referred to an in-patient program—exemplary character would have been demonstrated in a variety of ways. For example, assuming Smith personally cared for this soldier, his embodiment of the virtue of humanity would have been more holistically applied, not only with respect to the soldier but also with respect to the behavioral health team and the other officers in the meeting. Instead of berating the behavioral health team, he would have exercised *phronetic reasoning* to better discern the emotional state of the room in a way to show a benevolent attitude as well as a degree of interpersonal generosity—even if he still disagreed with the treatment

plan. More importantly, such reasoning in conjunction with practicing the virtue of temperance and its subordinate virtues, as well as a fuller appreciation and practice of justice would have put him in an emotionally-reasoned position to humbly receive contrary input as well as show gratitude to those staff officers who were entrusted with the direct care of the soldier—all of which would have displayed an effective internalization and demonstration of the *Value of respect* and attributes of *empathy* and *humility*. One could also argue that these virtues would have served to more holistically shape his virtue of personal courage, balancing his dispositions of self-confidence and magnanimity.

With respect to the perception that Smith was always “on”—always intense and driven, even at the cost of others’ emotional well-being—practicing each of the essential ALVs, but especially humanity, justice, and temperance, would have arguably helped him counter balance this aspect of his temperament with attitudes, emotions, and patterns of thinking that properly positioned him in relation to others, so as to see the value in exercising his intensity in morally relevant and salient ways as fitting for each situation—again helping him embody the attributes of *empathy* and *humility*, as well as more holistically understand and apply *discipline* on a personal level. Finally, and perhaps most fundamentally, his general approach to others in light of how he seemed to view and carry himself—as the expert in the room and the one with the authority—could have been positively influenced by the *phronetically*-injected virtues of truthfulness and justice, so that he could at least have been a leader who more often—if not perfectly—acknowledged his limitations, gave credit to others, and displayed compassion when it was needed, all of which would have served as a more nuanced application of the

Warrior Ethos in the effort to build his team.

It is difficult to re-imagine Col. Smith without simply retracing each of his behaviors and replacing the vicious with the virtuous. Perhaps this is why virtues-cultivation and character education as a whole does *not* provide the learner bad examples to avoid, but rather points the learner to exemplars—and in a modern context, especially imperfect ones—so as to provide the best of possible moral azimuths upon which to gauge, reflect, and put one’s own cultivation into practice. Thankfully, the Army is not without its exemplary senior leaders, such as with another former brigade commander who I will refer to as Col. Jim Doe.

Col. Doe was the commander of a brigade in one of the Army’s “combat support” branches, which consists of military intelligence, signal (communications), combat engineers, military police, and chemical warfare. By comparison to Col. Smith, Col. Doe was also extremely experienced and accomplished in his own right, in his 25th year of service and one of the very few brigade commanders in his specific military occupational specialty. While combat support brigades provide direct support to maneuver brigades like the one commanded by Col. Smith, they are generally smaller in size and their officers fewer in number, arguably making career progression more competitive.

Col. Doe also read and commanded a room well, but in a drastically different manner. He was generally a quite observer who asked lots of questions, solicited constructive feedback, occasionally joked with the subordinate commanders and staff officers who attended his meetings—to include jokes at his own expense—and had no problem empowering and delegating authority. His calm demeanor and welcoming smile, tempered with the expected seriousness of a senior leader, put most people at ease.

He balanced his ability to ask insightful questions and push responsibility on his subordinates with a keen mind that enabled him to make quick and effective decisions as their commander. He was known for individually checking on his leaders to inquire of their professional and personal well-being. And perhaps most important though easily overlooked by those leaders who admired him, he had learned from the mistakes he made as a younger officer, not only those with respect to technical expertise, but also with respect to his emotional state of mind and how it had negatively affected his leadership and his family—evidence of the practice and development of *phronesis*.

A couple scenarios help illustrate these and other exemplary leader behaviors. On one occasion during a deployment, two of his staff officers were increasingly having difficulty working together—a situation that had been brewing for months. The more senior of the staff officers had reached her own emotional limits and in a fit of frustration issued both Col. Doe and her staff supervisor what was essentially an ultimatum with regards to the other staff officer—“get rid of him or I’m done.” While this situation may seem minor, how Col. Doe navigated it set a tone for the rest of the staff that reverberated for the remainder of his time in command. His moral perception developed through the virtues of *phronesis*, justice, temperance, and humanity helped him exercise command discipline of this officer in such a way that she cultivated a clearer perception of her own, inspiring her to restore the difficult relationship and become a caring mentor to the staff officer she had previously disparaged.

Col. Doe was also known for being a patient leader. However, during the same deployment, after several rather long days and some politically charged situations had developed, he snapped at some of his leaders during a small staff meeting. In the meeting

that shortly followed, which included additional participants not privy to the outburst, he began by apologizing to those in the room, acknowledging his behavior was unacceptable, unhelpful and did not set a good example. This display of humility—even in the midst of failure—was a touchstone of Col. Doe’s leadership. In fact, on occasion his dispositions of empathy, humility, and humanity frustrated some of his more driven senior subordinates, who in a few instances privately remarked that they thought he was at times too willing to give leaders second chances they believed were undeserved. What was interesting is that these same subordinates never doubted Col. Doe’s competence, commitment, or character, they simply wondered if in those moments he was as effective as *they* thought he could or should be—a testament to the occasional cost of exemplary leadership. At nearly every staff officer’s farewell dinner, Col. Doe was praised as being one of—if not the—best leader under whom they had ever served. He was effective and proficient in his area of expertise, led by delegation, acknowledged his weaknesses, and consistently displayed the care for the well-being of his leaders, their soldiers, and their families, reliably demonstrating and instilling the moral skills needed to cultivate an organization of mutual understanding and trust.

While it may be simple to conceive of exemplary behaviors or point to exemplary leaders past or present, it is far more challenging to develop them—individually, and especially organizationally. Assuming the conceptual framework I have discussed is both sound and valid for character formation,¹² what remains to be addressed is a challenge for

¹² A possible objection of a particularly pragmatic nature that could effectively halt such a program is the disagreement regarding the probability of individuals’ ability to cultivate consistent and cross-contextually or situationally reliable dispositions, whether they be virtuous or not, raised in what is often called the “situationist critique.” Given the inconclusive nature of this debate, and how in many cases philosophers and some moral psychologists argue in favor of virtues, I will assume their validity while recognizing this may be an initial hurdle that must be overcome in the initial assessment stages of a revised character development program (see Bates & Kleingeld, 2018; Fowers et al., 2020; Olsthoorn, 2017; Slingerland,

the Army far more complex than doctrinal revision: the development of a leadership character development program or process that can be employed and managed throughout the course of a leader's career. In the final sections of this paper, I will attempt to provide a rather cursory review of what I believe to be some of the important organizational and pedagogical issues that need to be considered for the Army to effectively design and implement such an endeavor.

8.2 Organizational Considerations

The structure of the Army's existing professional military education process will have a profound effect on the feasibility of a given ALV character development program, as well as how such a program might be effectively integrated throughout a leader's career. Therefore, considerations for a comprehensive program will include how virtues education and cultivation will be implemented across the Army's three complementary domains of learning to develop leaders: institutional, operational, and self-development (DA, 2019).

The institutional domain consists of the Army's various formal educational training environments that provide leaders functional and professional military education (PME). The ALV character development program would be incorporated into every formal PME course required for career progression—beginning in the Army's basic courses and at a minimum culminating in the Sergeants Major Course for noncommissioned officers and the U.S. Army War College for officers—and include not only specific leadership character-ethics classes, but in which relevant concepts would be

2011; Sreenivasan, 2013; West, 2018). Another assumption is that despite one's bad upbringing, some degree of virtue acquisition is indeed possible in adult learners, even if their relative demonstration of excellence is not as "virtuous" as another's (Kristjánsson, 2015).

integrated throughout each course's core curriculum. Whereas junior officers and enlisted would receive the fundamentals of virtues-based character by way of classroom instruction, small group interaction, and personal reflection exercises, with each having learning objectives for both the individual leader and their follow-on operational contexts, as leaders of all ranks progress throughout their careers they would experience similar training suitable for their particular level of responsibility so as to continually build on prior learning.

Knowledge and experience gained in the institutional domain is to then be developed further in the operational domain—the leader's workplace, the unit in which she engages in day-to-day situated learning and thus increases her professional expertise primarily through experience. The ALV character development program would need to be diversified in its scope, so as to be more effective than what constitutes much of the current ethics and *Army Values* training conducted at the unit level—didactically “taught” rather than “caught.” Not only would occasional dialogically-based concept refresher training be necessary, but, e.g., the ALV would also need to be integrated into mission training priorities, small groups designed to provide leaders and soldiers opportunities to concretely connect exemplary character to unit issues, and related unit events that complement its mission (e.g. resiliency training, chaplain-led moral leadership workshops, marriage and family training events, sexual harassment and assault response and prevention training, etc.).

Finally, the self-development domain addresses what individual leaders do with respect to personal and professional development goals. Here the ALV character development program would be integrated into leaders' individual development plans,

annual evaluations, and include the important component of reflective application so as to aid them in their growth of *phronesis*. This could include a leader conducting monthly reviews of her engagement with one or more moral situations that required her to reflectively practice the essential or subordinate virtues and then constructively process her experience(s) with her peers or a mentor.

Revising training doctrine and methods will only be the first step in a transition process that will also require specialized preparation of institutional educators; devising the necessary scaffolding to support development and assessment goals across each of the learning domains, so that leaders at every level are by-and-large equipped and empowered to facilitate important dialogue with their subordinates; and attention to establishing formal and informal avenues for exemplary character-building relationships. Such issues present not only organizational but also pedagogical challenges, the complexity of which is beyond the scope of this paper. However, given the “taught and caught” nature of virtue-acquisition, there are some initial pedagogical concerns that developers of Army training and doctrine must consider.

8.3 Pedagogy for Virtue-Acquisition

For the sake of brevity, I will divide these initial concerns into matters of *content* and *form*. With respect to the content of leader-virtues education, doctrine will need to devote considerable effort to determining the language of the ALVs, such as definitions and contextual descriptions of both the essential and subordinate leader virtues, how *phronesis* pertains to the remaining virtues,¹³ how the virtues are interdependent, and

¹³ I readily admit that the topic of *phronesis* deserves a much fuller treatment than provided in this paper. Given its somewhat elusive meaning and practical application, the notion of leader *phronesis* demands addition research and subsequent discussions in order to properly determine *what* we might mean by such a notion and *how* or by what means such practical wisdom can be cultivated formally and informally in order

resources for practical application. The goal of effective content will be to help leaders establish a foundation for developing *orthos logos*, the growth in moral perception of knowing “what and that” to knowing the “how and why” the virtues matter in various situations and contexts, as well as how they pertain to their emotional growth (Athanasoulis, 2014). Establishing this foundation would involve helping leaders frame or reframe a moral view of the world and see themselves as *moral teachers* in their leadership contexts, to see the world as a place that rears moral questions and understand that this moral view pertains to every situation in life. Furthermore, virtues-content will have to engage leaders’ perceptions of self and challenge their willingness to be open to excellent moral-reasoning if they are to develop as exemplars and thus positively effect moral cultures of mutual understanding and trust. Finally, this foundational content will have to include instruction on how to utilize their leadership contexts—unit training, social settings, developmental counseling, etc.—to foster the most effective *forms* of virtue-acquisition: individual and situated learning.

The *form* of such a program is as if not more important than the content, given the significance of individual responsibility and the nature of virtues as practices in social contexts. With respect to individual discipline and reflective practices for the sake of developing a leader’s moral expertise, it will be important for program developers to further consider the analogy of virtues as moral skills (e.g. Annas, 2011) that are cultivated in stages of expertise, so as to better understand how leaders might deliberate practice them in multifaceted ways, apply self-regulation in addition to receiving

to aid in the development of leader virtues. Regardless of precisely what doctrinal content might be developed to this end, as I have argued in this paper, intellectual and emotional “wisdom” is critical for leadership excellence.

feedback from others, and thus develop an automaticity and flow of moral perception akin to expert performance in other areas of competency (Stichter, 2018). Another important consideration with respect to a skills-development pedagogy of virtues-cultivation is what Russell (2018) refers to as the “path-dependent approach to virtues,” in which the leader’s development is based on what *paths* are most readily available to her—goal-oriented, daily, mundane activities that require intentional repetition and the appropriate focus and guidance to become truly proficient—to help her experience gradual improvement and thus account for the dependent relationship between feasibility and aspiration inherent to virtue-acquisition. Such a path is also the bases for developing the virtue of *phronesis*—or practical wisdom or reasoning—by experiencing its interconnectedness with the other virtues.

One initial endeavor may be for the Army to utilize the framework provided in its existing publication on leader development (DA, 2015) and create a training pamphlet for ALV character development that capitalizes on existing situated learning and self-development activities, peer interaction and mentor relationships, and assessment processes with specific attention to the integration of leader virtues. This also would help incorporate the ALV between the operational and self-development learning domains, in which leaders could create context-dependent virtues-cultivation plans and receive assessments by way of both in-person peer group feedback and anonymous surveys.¹⁴ The ALV would also need to be incorporated into training plans and debriefings, so that leaders and their subordinates—interspersed in large settings and with their respective

¹⁴ For examples of virtues-assessment survey models and empirical theories for application, see Kristjánsson, 2018b; Morgan et al., 2017; Newstead et al., 2019, 2020; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Riggio et al., 2010; Sinnicks, 2019; Snow, 2009; Snow et al., 2020; Stichter & Saunders, 2019; Wang & Hackett, 2016.

peers in squad or platoon level settings—would build rhythms of discussing the impact of ethical issues pertaining not only to duty and the consequences of decisions, but also to moral perception (or the lack thereof), the moral components or demands of situations, and how they affect the climate and mission of the unit.

With respect to *forms* of practice and along thematically similar lines regarding the development of *phronesis* in conjunction with other virtues, Kristjánsson (2015) comments on the importance of not only intentionally designed and deliberative reflexive exercises, practicing shifting of one’s attention to the various aspects of moral situations, and consistently consulting and receiving feedback from more experienced and wise leaders, but more critically the learning that comes from dialogue in the context of *character friendships*, rather than friendships formed primarily for pleasure or utility. The Army would do well to consider how to emphasize the importance of and induct leaders into such friendships with their peers, so they might experience the mutual reshaping of their moral schemas, as well as orient mentor-mentee relationships already discussed in leader development doctrine (DA, 2015) along similar lines.

Gradually instituting these “character dialogues” as part of leaders’ daily or weekly operational rhythms could come in the form of “leader character development teams,” which, for example, could be structured as unit-level small groups of peers coupled with mentors (e.g. a total of 6-12 individuals) and purposed to provide a more trusting environment to have frank discussions regarding morally complex situations. Such teams would be opportunities for leaders to coach and guide virtue-learning and for subordinate leaders and soldiers to express and process frustrations in a constructive manner and thus experientially grow in moral perception so as to better internalize all

five of the character attributes. These teams could also be the basis for regular peer feedback in real time, so that leaders might gain constructive insight regarding how their character behaviors are perceived by others so as to help challenge their moral views of the world. The meeting of such teams could be scheduled to fit in with existing rhythms such as after physical training, during meal times, in conjunction with field training, as part of squad and platoon designated training blocks, etc.

This relational dynamic of virtue-cultivation demonstrates how the development of a leader's *orthos logos* and related *phronesis* must be considered not only with respect to individual but also social contexts, such as in situated learning environments which “give rise to *circumstances* that give *content* to virtues...[and leaders are thus required to use] faculties such as moral imagination and emotional sensitization” (Athanasoulis, 2014, p. 448, emphasis added). Only by requiring leaders to deliberately apply virtue-guided moral reasoning to their leadership contexts will they truly be able to develop the needed moral perception for excellence *and* be able to give an account of such skill.

These latter considerations point to the broader importance of the social nature of virtues: how they are individually shared and socially cooperative practices integrated and unified by narrative—personal and communal—and thus embedded in and dependent on the traditions of a given moral culture (MacIntyre, 1984). Therefore, *how* the Army decides to socially embed the leader virtues with respect to the kind and quality of a culture of mutual understanding and trust it desires will be just as important as the methods and techniques devised for leader character development. If the Army wants its leaders to be exemplars whose behaviors directly contribute to the well-being of the Army culture, then it must first design the path for an exemplary *leadership culture*.

8.4 Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have attempted to argue that the Army's conception of leader character is inadequate for supporting moral excellence. By way of analyzing a case study of a senior leader, I demonstrated that while the doctrinal attributes of character—the *Army Values*, the *Warrior Ethos*, *discipline*, *empathy*, and *humility*—sufficiently provide a leader's normative and aspirational guides and goals, individually and collectively they are insufficient to provide a leader the moral perception and skill required to recognize the relevant and salient features of any given morally complex situation. In addition to examining the shortfalls of the doctrinal conception of character, I also argued that conception of the “ideal leader” and its implied relationship to excellence with respect to leader competency is ultimately untenable without an explicit correlating precondition of exemplary character. In response I proposed a revised framework for character centered in Army leader virtues, so that the current character attributes might be effectively supported by requisite dispositions of leader excellence. Finally, I provided a cursory introduction to some of the organizational and pedagogical considerations that will need to be addressed in the initial development of a leader-virtues character program.

Regardless of what precise model or method the Army might adopt in an attempt to improve upon its existing efforts at developing leaders of character, it is without question that moral excellence is a theme of extreme importance that deserves utmost attention if its leaders are to be of the caliber required to handle the increasing moral demands of a modern Army. Given the evolving cultural climate and the ethical challenges leaders will face in the coming decades, a doctrinal framework and subsequent

training program for leader character must aspirationally and functionally guide leaders into moral excellence so that acceptable moral mediocrity can no longer disguise itself across the ranks in the form of “good enough” leadership, and even more so, so that future leaders would have the individual and organizational support needed to reach their full potential as holistic exemplars of the Army profession.

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