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KING'S
College
LONDON

**Centre for
Military
Ethics**

An Introduction: The King's College London Centre for Military Ethics www.militaryethics.uk
Dr David Whetham

As many readers of the *Journal of Military Ethics* will be aware, there is a growing acknowledgment that military ethics and a genuine, deep appreciation of human rights issues is a crucial component of the education of every member of the armed forces, wherever they may serve. There is a clear linkage between ethical behaviour within armed forces and their conduct on operations. Fostering ethical awareness and moral decision-making in military personnel is a proven way of reducing harm and suffering in conflict situations.¹ Thinking about and understanding the moral foundation of what one does is also an important part of military professional identity. Therefore, there is substantial benefit for everyone in promoting and supporting this area as widely as possible. Due to regular international interventions at military institutions in multiple countries and substantial research into the approaches adopted in different contexts, I am very aware that there is a large and growing demand for military ethics education worldwide.² I am also aware that this demand is not being satisfied. For the last five years I have therefore been seeking new ways to deliver military ethics education in a way that can make it accessible as widely as possible. That was the motivation for convincing King's College London to set up the King's Centre for Military Ethics (KCME) in 2015.

King's has long had an interest in military affairs, having been awarded its Royal Charter by King George IV with the support of the victor of the Battle of Waterloo, the Duke of Wellington (then Prime Minister), in 1829. It is now the home of the world-famous Department of War Studies, dedicated to the multi-disciplinary study of war and diplomacy, and also its sister department of Defence Studies, based at the Joint Services Command and Staff College (JSCSC), part of the UK's Defence Academy in Shrivenham.³ Defence Studies has provided academic support to staff and military students at JSCSC since 1997, where King's intimate and long term relationship with military practitioners continues today. As one would expect, the provision of military ethics education at the JSCSC has evolved over time in response to the changing character of war and the perceived demands of the military institutions and professionals it serves.⁴ What has remained consistent is that for every course that is taught at the Staff College, whether for relatively junior officers with only one or two appointments under their belt,

¹ 'Effectiveness of battlefield-ethics training during combat deployment: a programme assessment', *The Lancet* Vol 378 (2011).

² For a brief overview, see D Whetham, 'Expeditionary Ethics Education', in George R Lucas, *Routledge Handbook of Military Ethics* (Routledge, May 2015).

³ <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/dsd/about/index.aspx>

⁴ For example, see D Whetham, 'The Moral, Legal and Ethical Dimensions of War at the Joint Services Command and Staff College', in Robinson, Connolly & Carrick (Eds), *Ethics Education for Irregular Warfare* (Ashgate, July 2009). D Whetham, 'Challenge to the Professional Military Ethics Education Landscape', in D. Carrick, J. Connelly and D. Whetham (Eds.), *Making the Military Moral: Contemporary Challenges and Responses in Military Ethics Education* (Routledge, 2017).

or Brigadier Generals being equipped for the very top jobs in the Armed Forces, there is a requirement that military ethics is covered in some way. Sharing this subject and supporting its development overseas is also often considered part of defence diplomacy (one of the core functions of the JSCSC) and I am regularly asked to contribute to international initiatives to develop military ethics education capacity in various parts of the world in addition to teaching in the UK.⁵ Many states aspire to deliver this subject but cannot, or try but end up delivering it in an incoherent or even inadvertently counterproductive way. While it is often politically difficult to acknowledge this publicly, many institutions do recognise their shortcomings in this area and would like to remedy it, but lack the tools or expertise to be able to do so. When asked, I consider it a privilege to be able to help, but it is obvious that even were this to become my only function as an academic, there is often neither the time nor budget for me to be able to do more than apply a pedagogical ‘sticking plaster’.

Due to the small size of the group that can be labelled ‘professional military ethicists’ worldwide, it is also obvious that this demand cannot currently be satisfied by other people, and there is currently insufficient capacity building to meet current demand, let alone future growth in this area. Seeking some kind of solution to this conundrum, and given the other calls upon my time as an academic, I realised that one of the ways to try and meet this demand in a more coherent and efficient way would be to offer quality distance learning material that can be accessed by anyone, either directly as students or as a train-the-trainer tool. Dialogue with various military institutions globally established that this was something that would be ‘very interesting’ if it could be done in the right way. This, therefore, is where the thinking behind the creation of the KCME came from.

Military Ethics Education - Distance Learning

While it is still very much a work in progress, to help build the material, the KCME has forged relationships with project partners around the world, at Australian National University, University of New South Wales and the Australian Defence Force Academy, Universities of Oxford, Glasgow, Newcastle, Leeds, Leicester, Zurich, Case Western Reserve University, the Royal Military College, Canada, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Blue Shield, United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as well as the Defence Academy of the UK. We have also been assisted by academic Visiting Fellows and King’s Undergraduate Research Fellows joining us during their summer vacations. With their help, we have been developing, filming, hosting and then publicising quality free online courses. These are designed according to research led findings with feedback from individuals and institutions informing the development of new material and the refinement of existing material. The courses are hosted by KCME and open to anyone free of any charge. Each module is designed to be self-contained and, while there is significant investment in production at the front end of each module, unlike a traditional MOOC concept, they do not require a dedicated tutor to support them.⁶ This means that there is little ongoing upkeep required once the courses have been launched.

While all the courses can be taken by individuals, cohorts of students can also be registered by military institutions for specific modules or a selection of them to build of a program. Those cohorts can then proceed through whichever modules the institution wishes them to engage with and form a closed community that can interact with each other and their own teaching staff. The institution can monitor how they do in the assessment exercises that are placed throughout the modules to help identify those students who need additional intervention. Each module can also be used as a train-the-trainer template for helping to build indigenous institutional capability and capacity – the ideal place to be working towards.

The KCME employs a version of the Creative Commons licensing that allows the use of each section for non-commercial purposes, in return for full credit and no abridgement of the material. That way, the

⁵ D Whetham, ‘Expeditionary Ethics Education’, in George R Lucas, *Routledge Handbook of Military Ethics* (Routledge, May 2015).

⁶ Massive Open Online Course.

materials can be incorporated into courses and used by universities or military institutions around the world (this also makes collaboration attractive to potential partners as they can also freely use the material they have contributed to in other ways). The first military institution to adopt the material was the Romanian National Defense University in Brasov, who provided valuable feedback for further development.

As well as a short *Introduction to Military Ethics*, modules that are already being used by military personnel around the world include *Armouring Against Atrocity* about how to maintain high moral standards while deployed on military operations. The module is led and delivered by military practitioners who bring alive the research by drawing on their own extensive experience of recent military operations. An Introduction to the Just War Tradition, explores where the ideas come from, what the Tradition says today, how it relates to international law and the challenges that the contemporary operating environment pose for it. The *Cultural and Heritage Property Protection in Conflict* module, developed by Oxford, Durham and Leicester Universities working with the Blue Shield and UNESCO, addresses the subject in a unique way and fills a lacuna in training for this area, helping military commanders and those interested in working with the military, understand why cultural property is important and how it can be protected during military operations. The latest addition – *Jus Post Bellum: Ending War and Ending Wars Well* module is a collaboration with the University of Glasgow. Courses currently in development include: *Military Medical Ethics* (University of Leeds, Geneva & Australian National University), *Gender & Conflict* (KCL) and *Managing Ethical Risk* (Canadian Royal Military College).

Military Ethics Education – Blended Learning

While this is already a significant contribution to promoting global military ethics education, the aspirations of KCME go much further than this. As part of a Euro and North American ISME project, I was first asked to assist the Colombian military in reforming their professional military education in 2013 and have been continuously engaged since that date.⁷ The Colombians recognise that the transition to post conflict military thinking and structures (and integration of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia or FARC into those structures) requires a different approach to professional military education and, while very short on resources, they are keen to avail themselves of proven international expertise that can be brought to bear. Modest support from the UK Ministry of Defence permitted the translation of some of the core material at KCME into Spanish. However, the Colombian War College or ESDEGUE – the *Escuela Superior de Guerra* – wished to go further than this, seeking a full military ethics curriculum that could be taught by their own people, supported by a strategic relationship with King's College London.

Collaboration between like-minded individuals and institutions has been a necessary and successful part of the recipe, the Colombian initiative even more so. To deliver a fully supported 20-part military ethics curriculum to ESDEGUE, KCME has been working in partnership with the Australian Centre for the Study of Armed Conflict and Society, based at the University of New South Wales. This will be ready to roll out in the Spring of 2019. The project involves the development of teaching guides for the military directing staff to be able to facilitate the appropriate classroom discussions, train-the-trainer sessions with those staff, a substantial package of pre-classroom materials (drawing on elements of our existing online courses and reading), a revised Spanish edition of Deane-Peter Baker's *Key Concepts in Military Ethics*, and assessment tools to gauge effect. Initially in Spanish and English, the aim is ultimately to use this model as a framework that can be adapted to other environments and we are confident that this will be a valuable contribution to making quality military ethics education more accessible.

Other Tools for Military Ethics Education

⁷ See the International Society for Military Ethics <http://www.internationalsocietyformilitaryethics.org> and its European chapter <http://www.euroisme.eu> for further details.

Experimental philosophy (applied philosophy drawing on social psychology) suggests that environment has an enormous effect on ethical awareness and motivation to act.⁸ Therefore, normalising routine engagement with ethical issues is hugely important in shaping behaviour. This is sometimes referred to as “ethical muscle memory”, representing the idea that it is easier to do the right thing if you have engaged with a situation in advance and are already familiar with the ethical landscape of the problem. To promote and support this kind of engagement, KCME have developed other innovative tools. Playing cards have long been utilised to support military training. Organisations such as the Royal Observer Corp issued aircraft recognition silhouette cards in the Second World War, and NATO uses them as a way of improving Explosive Hazard recognition. The Norwegian military have issued a Cultural Property Protection deck, and everyone will be familiar with the Operation Iraqi Freedom deck used to help identify the key personnel in Saddam Hussein’s Iraqi state. While not all of these might be celebrated as ethical goods, there is no doubting the familiarity of the tool, and the ease with which it can be issued to and used by military personnel. Building on this, the KCME developed the idea of using Ethics Education Playing Cards as a vehicle specifically for raising ethical awareness. The cards can be used to prompt informal discussion and debate, normalising the discussion of ethical challenges faced in military service.

Drawing on research from across the breadth of military ethics issues, and drawing on military ethics curricula across Europe and north America, we developed 52 questions. These were then tested and refined over a two-year period using military focus groups and in consultation with UK Ministry of Defence lawyers. The resulting questions, each matched to a playing card, are generally open ended and encourage people to think about the ethical issues that may arise in military environments. For example:

- Should a soldier challenge an order if they consider it to be illegal? How?
- Is necessity ever a reason to break the laws of war?
- Can soldiers refuse to serve if they disagree with their government’s decisions?

Where a subject has a clear, unambiguous legal answer, the question will be aimed at getting people to think about the reasoning for the rule rather than questioning the law. However, there are many other questions that may have different answers depending upon the context. Being able to explore these is an important part of developing ethical and professional awareness of duties and responsibilities. The cards are not a substitute for more formal military ethics education and training, but can be used alongside other approaches, or inserted into training sessions that are focusing on other areas of development. Suddenly pulling out a card and challenging someone to answer a challenging ethical question in the middle of a live-fire exercise is likely to have a very different pedagogical impact than a measured discussion in a classroom environment. The Military Ethics Playing Cards therefore provide a very versatile and effective tool for normalising the discussion of ethical issues in every part of military life.

The cards are available to anyone, at cost price, through the KCL eStore. While the cards are already unique, what makes them particularly innovative is that to support the right ‘take away’ from each topic, there is supporting material that can be accessed instantly via a scanned QR web link on each card via any smart phone. This links directly to the KCME’s webpages where there are additional prompts, questions, answers and information. Groups of questions can be thematically linked so that a teaching session can easily be pre-prepared in each area of military ethics using the open-access material at www.militaryethics.uk/en/playing-cards. Each card will also be linked to one or more chapters of the revised *Key Concepts in Military Ethics* volume, ensuring that there is something substantial to refer to for those who prefer to have something physical in their hands.

⁸ See, for example, see Martin L Cook, ‘Military Ethics and Character Development’, in George R Lucas, *Routledge Handbook of Military Ethics* (Routledge, May 2015).

The cards are already being used by military units as diverse as 45 Royal Marine Commando in the UK, the Colombian War College and the Warrant Officer and Non-Commissioned Officer Academy in Queensland Australia. They have been translated into a number of different languages, including Spanish, French, and Serbian, while Turkish, and Arabic will follow later in 2018.⁹ The next stage is to build on this proven and useful resource to make it even more effective by expanding the online supporting material further. Military ethics pedagogy best practice suggests that lessons are most successfully internalised when they come from a peer (or near peer), meaning the relative rank or status of the person transmitting the message matters. Hearing a message from someone that can be directly related to moves the narrative from “this is what I am being told to do” to “this is what *we* do”. Therefore, the next step is to record short ‘talking heads’ videos of people from as wide a range of ranks and backgrounds as possible, talking about their answers to the different questions, and perhaps, how they have dealt with a particular situation in their professional life.

The scope, focus and ambition of the King’s Centre for Military Ethics project is unique. While it is still very young, it has already changed the way that some military units approach military ethics training and education. However, this is just the start. It has the potential for significant impact by disseminating research-led education material to a group who make life and death decisions. The Centre is highly collaborative and is keen to find project partners who are willing to pool resources and share expertise. If you believe you might have something to offer in developing our material and approaches, please contact us.

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⁹ We are grateful to the European Chapter of the International Society for Military Ethics, the UK Ministry of Defence, King’s College London, and the British Academy for contributing resources to enable different translations to be done.

