

# Kantian Consistency and Military Atrocity: Holding Military Personnel Responsible for Atrocity

**Joel Anderson**  
Bethel University

## **ABSTRACT**

Citing empirical evidence like the Stanford Prison and Milgram Obedience experiments philosophers like John Doris and Dominic Murphy claim individuals lack notions of character and military members who are present in military atrocities should not be held responsible for their actions in excusing conditions. They conclude military atrocities like the My Lai Massacre and Abu Ghraib Prison scandals have powerful situational forces present to warrant mitigation or acquittal of punishment. This essay contests their claim and argues for notions of a self-mastered character under what Wielenberg calls *Kantian Consistency*. The paper concludes this type of character survives situational attacks and argues that though situational forces are strong they do not remove responsibility from soldiers in military atrocities like My Lai and Abu Ghraib.

Keywords: Situationism, Character, Virtue Ethics, My Lai, Abu Ghraib, Atrocity, Responsibility, Kantian Consistency

Soldiers can never be transformed into mere instruments of war. The trigger is always part of the gun, not part of the man. If they are not machines that can just be turned off, they are also not machines that can just be turned on. Trained to obey "without hesitation," they remain nevertheless capable of hesitation. (Walzer 1977, 311)

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Over the last fifty years there has been a great debate between social psychologists and virtue ethicists on the nature of character. Boiled down to the core argument the debate revolves around one central thesis; namely, whether or not a person's internal character is the best determinate of behavior or if the situation and context are, in fact, the greatest factor. Looming large in this debate are many

## compos mentis

social psychologists that cite from empirical evidence that one's character means little in predicting behavior (Ross and Nisbett 1991, 1-8). From these sources and other situational evidence philosophers like John Doris and Dominic Murphy claim military members who are present or participate in military atrocities should not be held responsible for their actions in excusing conditions (Doris and Murphy 2007, 25-55). They conclude in many contexts enough situational forces are present to warrant excusing conditions, in which actors are either not criminally charged or punishment is mitigated based on judged responsibility, for both officers and subordinate personnel (50). It is the intent of this paper to contest their conclusion. Though combat is a great calamity capable of deceiving moral perception one's personal conduct should still be held responsible. Even when strong situational forces are involved officers, as well as enlisted personnel, to at least some degree, should be held responsible for military atrocities. Past the bullets, screams, and blood a soldier's character does survive. I therefore contend human beings, and soldiers, still have what Wielenberg calls *Kantian Consistency* (Wielenberg 2006, 467) which survives situational attacks and though situational forces are strong they do not remove responsibility from military atrocities in places like My Lai and Abu Ghraib (Upton 2009, 103-115).

### 1.1 Definition of Terms

On a clarifying note, atrocity will be described in this paper as any action that violates standard military ethical law. Because this essay is premised around American standards post Geneva and Hague Conventions it will follow the Law of War prescribed therein (FM 27-10 1956). Under this system a set of norms exists in conventional land warfare. For example, it is currently, and has been in the past, called wrong to kill unarmed civilians for no reason. Similarly, it is called wrong to torture and humiliate prisoners for no other purpose than entertainment. These examples are what is meant here as atrocity. It is intentional killing or harm beyond any military strategy or purpose for malicious ends. Though an accidental death of a noncombatant in a combat zone, despite the preventative measures done by belligerents, can be called wrong, it will not be in this paper discussed as atrocity. Atrocity for this paper's purposes is an intentional killing or harming of persons outside the bounds of military ethics.

Similarly, terms such as "cognitively degrading," "excusing conditions," and events like My Lai and Abu Ghraib need to be described. When factors are

“cognitively degrading” they can be considered to consist of ego depletion (the loss of will power) or tasks that reduce the ability to logically think or morally comprehend right from wrong. They are factors that stress the mind and hinder its ability to make decisions. “Excusing conditions” can be interpreted as factors that either mitigate, and thereby reduce punishment, or acquit actors altogether of criminal charges. Under these influences, actors are not held legally liable for their actions. Conditions of this sort must ultimately rest on a case-by-case basis and can only be determined through careful deliberation of the forces present.

### 1.2 My Lai and Abu Ghraib

My Lai and Abu Ghraib were atrocities committed by US military personnel in 1968 and late 2003 to early 2004. During the Vietnam War, a company of infantry men were sent to secure a village in the My Lai 4 area for war time operations. When the company entered the village they promptly began to round up civilians and then started to execute everyone they found. They did not discriminate as most of the civilians were old men, women, and children. Approximately 450 to 500 were killed with only three captured weapons (Hersh 1970, 74–75). Many of the killings were done point blank despite the pleas for mercy. US soldiers gathered up civilians, threw grenades into homes, and conducted mass executions. The Abu Ghraib scandal, occurring in the troop surges of the Iraq War, was a group of American soldiers who tortured and sexually abused prisoners in an Iraqi POW camp. The guards put the prisoners into various naked positions, subjected them to humiliating photo shoots, and threatened them with attack dogs. Because of the many “trophy” pictures, the military police group was ultimately caught and revealed to the American public (Zimbardo 2007, 324–337).

## **2. SITUATIONISM**

According to Situationists, situations are stronger than character and it would be wiser to adjust responsibility to those who created the environment rather than the actors within it (Doris 2010, 204). It can then be no surprise that John Doris and Dominic Murphy can make such a claim that “Perpetrators of atrocity typically occupy excusing conditions and are therefore not morally responsible for their conduct” (Doris and Murphy 2007, 26). They claim cognitive degrading factors, lack of moral perception and the military hierarchal system should excuse, or mitigate the criminal charges, soldiers of misconduct in places like My Lai and Abu

Chraib.

Traditional virtue ethics, as espoused by Aristotle, means a virtuous individual becomes virtuous by always acting in a virtuous manner. In order to accomplish this, the individual becomes habituated to virtue through action. Over time, one can learn to correctly perceive the ideal action because they have become accustomed to it and have learned to do that action to the right extent. For example, a courageous person must overcome both fear and pride. To be too afraid is to flee the situation and to be too prideful is to foolishly seek danger. One has to find the right balance between the two to be properly called courageous. Through action and habituation one can find the right mean between the two extremes in whatever situation. The right mean is not an objective place but rather subjective to the individual and the context. After a while, these actions become habits and these habits become character traits. Thus, if one follows Aristotle's line of reasoning a truly virtuous person will always make what is personally perceived to be the most virtuous action possible in the specific context (Aristotle 1996, 1104a-1104b3). They will act courageously and possess a courageous character trait in every circumstance.

Maria Merritt, John Doris, and Gilbert Harman (2010) call these *robust character traits* (356). They are global traits which should influence and stimulate behavior in each context. Global traits imply that a person who has a character trait, say charity, should then behave charitable across situations. The problem with robust character traits, as the Situationists argue, is that they are not empirically valid (109). Situationists often cite a few key experiments that suggest seemingly insignificant situational factors considerably influencing the actors. For example, Darley and Batson found Princeton Seminary students who were rushed, to preach a message on the good Samaritan, helped an unfortunate person in obvious distress only 10% of the time. This is opposed to other students who helped 63% when they were not in any hurry. Even smaller factors were seen to be highly influential when Mathews and Cannon found subjects were five times more likely to assist an injured person when background noise was normal as opposed to a loud background lawnmower in operation (80% to 15%). The Milgram experiment is also frequently pointed towards as well. Milgram found that average people were willing to shock individuals because of small situational forces that suggested the experimenter had scientific authority.<sup>1</sup> When role permutations were introduced obedience to authority

---

1. The original experiment consisted of 40 males who believed they were conducting a learning experiment by shocking a "learner" when he failed to correctly match word pairs. The experiment was conducted at the prestigious university of Yale and the experimenter wore a lab coat. These situational

did not change but remained a constant. What changed, however, was how willing subjects were to obey based on how authority presented itself (Milgram 1969, 32–43, 89–112). A final example comes from Zimbardo’s Stanford prison experiment where students quickly acclimated to their roles as guards and humiliated and hazed (much like Abu Ghraib) other student prisoners (Zimbardo 2007, 380–443).<sup>2</sup> The conclusions drawn from these experiments demonstrate that robust character traits do not hold empirical water. Average people, who are expected by society to act in a decent manner, were found to act poorly when placed in difficult situations. If small factors like a lab coat or ambient noise can influence to a large extent then notions of character must be reevaluated.

Doris and others find it is much more likely individuals have a fragmented series of local traits that all influence behavior. This is empirically valid according to Doris. As in the seminary or Milgram experiment subjects’ moral sensitivities or perceptions seemed to be intact but they still failed to act morally. Their disposition and intellectual ability failed to act in a way their character should have predicted. They seem to have perceived the correct action, as virtue theory requires, but this did not motivate corresponding behavior. Their perception meant little when it came to doing the right thing.

### **3. ATROCITY AND CHARACTER**

The above is just a sample of Situationist’s empirical evidence against character. Other philosophers like Peter Vranas, Jesse Prinz, and Gilbert Harman pose normative, epistemic, and illusionary claims against virtue ethics’ character.<sup>3</sup> But, for now, the present thesis is enough to continue towards atrocity responsibility. It focuses the contention around military atrocity and character.

#### 3.1 John Doris and Dominic Murphy’s Argument

Doris and Murphy center their defense of atrocities on a system of very persuasive premises. At the core of their argument is the idea that Aristotelian

---

forces are cited as giving the experiment authenticity and legitimate authority in the eyes of the subjects.

2. Because of the likeness of his experiment to Abu Ghraib testified on behalf of the soldiers responsible for the atrocity. He advocated putting the system on trial rather than the soldiers who were caught up in the situation.

3. For more resources on the Situationist Thesis see: Vranas, “Against Moral Character,” Prinz, “The Normativity Challenge” and Harman, “Skepticism About Character Traits.”

notions of character do not exist, or at least not strong enough to reliably motivate proper behavior. They reason correctly that justice systems do not hold accountable the “hopeless deranged for their acts because they lack the capacities that underpin normative competence” and that soldiers in combat situations are involved in very cognitively degrading tasks (Doris and Murphy 2007, 27, 30). At first glance, it is very hard to disagree with their assertion. Any military member would understand the complex situations in which they operate. Citing the empirical evidence above, the authors claim again how *insubstantial* situational factors have major influence (34). In combat, these factors are all the more present as stress, sleep deprivation, fatigue, and shock can reduce the ability to think clearly and perceive right from wrong. Logically comprehending anything other than staying alive or accomplishing the mission becomes a difficult task.

### 3.2 Will and Wielenberg’s Kantian Consistency

However, as E.J. Wielenberg admits, Doris and Murphy neglect will in their evaluation of degrading cognitive factors. Will power is “signified [as] an ability to resist temptations, to suppress feelings of desire, to practice self-denial, to overcome habits” (Wielenberg 2006, 484). It is a conscious, intentional effort that is integral to real notions of character. Doris comments that Situationist experiments show dispositions have been “overridden” by insignificant situational factors (Doris 2010, 201). That is to say situational factors were too powerful for individuals to make appropriate moral choices despite their best intentions. According to Wielenberg, Doris’ and other Situationists attack what he calls *Socratic consistency*, by which he means broad-based cross-situational consistency (the *robust character traits* already mentioned), but not *Kantian consistency* (467). As Wielenberg puts it, “Kant sees virtue as a kind of self-mastery or strength. A fully virtuous person is one who has mastered the various desires and temptations that continually threaten to pull him from the path of duty” (465). As a soldier, ideas of duty and self-mastery are central to personal identity.

Wielenberg’s notion of Kantian consistency is a powerful contention against situationism for atrocity responsibility. It strongly asserts a part of character which survives the experiments is the will to be self-mastered. Though individuals do not exhibit global traits in all situations this does not discredit the effect will power has in situations that involve military atrocity. The presence of counter-imposed psychological urges in the Milgram experiment demonstrates that individuals had

competing desires to act. They realized there was an option or choice available. Milgram makes this distinction when he comments on the prevalence of strain inherent within the experiment (Milgram 1969, 155–156). Subjects were caught between competing desires to listen to the instructor and shock the victim or disobey. Perception was not the issue. Subjects lacked the will power to stop the experiment and walk away. However, a strong authority figure or realistic prison scenario is not something to be overlooked as a slight force but should be fully evaluated in the context of one's will power to act ethically. The tension between obedience and disobedience is especially strong when one considers ordinary people followed authority so easily. Soldiers, who are trained to obey the commands of their superiors, can be surmised to perceive authority as a much stronger factor than those in the social experiments. But, as Wielenberg argues the experiments Situationists cite do not establish the lack of character in resisting orders but rather the role will power and the power of perception plays in ethical action. It is important to admit that in all experiments someone resisted or acted ethically despite the authority forces present (Wielenberg 2006, 488). This strain was inherent in the subjects of the experiments and the soldiers in combat. When some report the subjects perceived correctly but acted contrary it does not mean their actions were not in their control. Their actions were not "overridden" and taken out of their hands. It actually attests to the fact that even if they did perceive the situation correctly they may have lacked the will to reflect on their possible actions. German Holocaust policemen who participated in their first Jewish shootings cited "sheer physical revulsion" against what they were doing (Browning 1998, 74). A soldier at My Lai shot himself in the foot rather than participate. In later years, soldiers from My Lai still suffered from the anxiety of upfront killings (Hersh 1970, 181–187). Why? Because they were appalled by their actions. Some may have recognized they had the burden of choice but did not will the better of the two options. Others may have believed the punishment they would have received outweighed the moral prospects of disobeying. Regardless of the two options will power ultimately played a role in their acts.

### 3.3 The Character of Kantian Consistency

But when Situationists cite "cognitively degrading factors," they argue will power is not as strong as Wielenberg holds. As Baumeister, Vohs and Tice (2007) can attest will power can be depleted (351–355). This is apparent and can be a cause to consider mitigating punishment. But to assume a person's will power was

## compos mentis

completely drained is a difficult claim to make. What happened at My Lai and Abu Ghraib was the failing to resist causing harm unnecessarily. It was a lack of discipline. This does not mean soldiers forgot the difference between right and wrong or were running empty on will power. It seems much more likely the officers at My Lai were looking for an excuse to kill rather than acting in a cognitively drained state (Hersh 1970, 43). The unit had received heavy casualties previous to the massacre, but this does not constitute a mitigation of responsibility. No one would suggest murder is justified because a belligerent wanted revenge for an antagonistic action. When one gets angry and has the opportunity to do evil things they are expected to control themselves and resist by using their will power. In warfare, soldiers are expected to suffer rage for enemy actions but they are not expected to let a lack of discipline allow emotions to govern their actions. They are supposed to have a *Kantian Consistency*. Abu Ghraib was also a site where the guards were under physical and psychological stress. They were afraid and probably did their actions to "relieve the pressure of deep-seated, unmet needs for physical safety and self-esteem" (Snow 2009, 68). But as soldiers they are expected to understand fear and still accomplish their mission. An aspect of discipline is the mastery of emotion. It is the conscious choice to will the better of options, make the hard choices despite the situational forces present and exhibit *Kantian Consistency*.

What happened in these events was the failure of a *Kantian* character rather than a superior situation. Ego depletion is a serious phenomenon but considering the aversion and strain present in individuals, and some who resisted altogether, it is apparent this type of character can prevail. Situationists can claim the resisters were extraordinary people but that claim must have evidence. They were more likely average people who acted correctly when they realized the actions they were doing. They were subject to the same cognitive draining milieu the others were. Although ego depletion plays a role in atrocities, it cannot explain or dismiss responsibility to the extent the Situationists claim. Doris and Murphy must somehow distinguish the resisters from all the others in order to definitively claim ego depletion as a cause for acquittal.

An argument can be raised here to state not all people have the same ability to will actions and make moral judgments. Some people are better in these areas than others. But society does not make laws premised around the plurality of moral capabilities. It expects all people have the capacity of a baseline set of moral capabilities. This standard consists of looming moral laws such as not needlessly killing people or torturing prisoners. The acts done at My Lai and Abu Ghraib are

much more salient than testing whether or not a lawn mower influences small moral actions. Military atrocities concern truly terrible acts and are not comparable to these experiments. In situations where people are shooting women and children society expects not only would the moral saint, who has spent years cultivating virtue, object but also the ordinary person. Both the saints and the laypersons undoubtedly possess the capacity to realize, and to will against, such a horrible moral wrong. The distinction is more likely not some natural or biological difference between the resisters and compliers but the failure to will the better of options.

### 3.4 Moral Perception

Another claim by Doris to excuse misconduct is the lack of moral perception in combat. Doris and Murphy are right in their contention that moral behavior requires an accurate interpretation. Without a clear vision, the lines separating right and wrong become indistinguishable and what else can be more uncertain as accurate perception in warfare? Sleep deprivation and other combat pressures can reduce moral clarity to a foggy haze. War is by nature a place of deception and deceit. Frontline soldiers are seldom only aware that they are being shot at. The average soldier cannot be expected to know what is entirely happening. To this stimulus soldiers are taught basic battle drills to respond instinctively. Their combat experiences consist of what they must do to survive and fight reflexively rather than a slow, methodical evaluation before action. Doris and Murphy contend soldiers adjust to wartime pressures and undergo "moral drift" where once atrocious behavior becomes acceptable (Doris and Murphy 2007, 35, 38). Actors involved in scenarios are prevented by battle from perceiving not only what was once morally right and wrong but what it has become in a state of warfare.

It would be difficult to deny warfare can desensitize individuals, but it would also be hard to say the soldiers who pulled men, women, and children out of their homes, ignored their pleas for mercy, and calmly set up a machine gun had no opportunity to think otherwise (Hersh 1970, 50). The inherent racism of the Vietnam War and the "us" vs. "them" distinction in Abu Ghraib ultimately influenced the actors, but it is a bitter pill to swallow to suggest individuals could not have perceived the effects of their actions. It is often thought soldiers blindly follow orders without second thought but this is much too limited a perspective to take. Upon landing, the soldiers of the My Lai massacre received little to none enemy contact (45–46). What the attack amounted to was the wholesale murder of innocent civilians. This

## compos mentis

is not denying the fact clear moral perception is difficult in wartime and its lack of clarity affected the actors in these atrocities but to assume the situation completely overrode a person's ability to refuse is difficult considering the fact that average people did. Joe Darby, who exposed Abu Ghraib, was considered to be a "hero" by Zimbardo. Darby commented the activities of the prison, "didn't sit right with me" (Zimbardo 2007, 330). Contrary to My Lai, the scandals at Abu Ghraib occurred without direct order. Though Situationists may claim the area had been given a "carte blanche" it does not morally permit their activities (Merrit, Doris and Harman 2010, 356). It is one thing to be directly ordered to do so and another to act malicious because leadership is not present. Breaking into an empty house is still illegal.

This does not entail the soldiers at Abu Ghraib were all vicious people with an evil character. Studies looking into the perpetrators of genocide and the holocaust can show not all of them had evil characters. These tragedies alongside My Lai and Abu Ghraib demonstrate that mostly ordinary people carry out the gruesome acts (Walzer 1977, 94–123). What befell the military atrocities is exactly what the Situationists have pointed to. Strong situational forces such as social conformity and role orientation, like the Stanford Prison Experiment, expressed its influence on the actors who, through their choice, chose not to resist the temptations and master their emotions as a strong *Kantian Consistency* describes.

### 3.5 Orders to Kill

When subordinate personnel are under orders to act unethically responsibility can become harder to determine. On one hand soldiers are expected to follow orders but on the other hand they are also held to act "in accordance with our societal values and the rules of war" (Mastroianni 2011, 7). Milgram's experiment demonstrates obedience in a civilian populace and its results can, with a reasonable degree of accuracy, be transferred to a military setting. Soldiers, especially the rank and file, are taught to obey orders to accomplish the mission. In one sense soldiers are in a contradictory position. They are trained to obey yet disobey when the orders are highly unethical or illegal. As was seen at My Lai this is a difficult task to accomplish.

However, this does not entirely excuse them either unless they were forced to obey orders or believed disobedience would lead to hugely significant consequences. If soldiers are aware they can refuse orders on ethical grounds without sufficient penalties then they cannot be excused for not doing so. It is important to note here

that even if soldiers are given the permission to refuse malicious leadership may still punish them. This is dependent on leadership. The officers at My Lai, Lieutenant Calley and Captain Medina, had been seen by past example to be ruthless to the enemy and this undoubtedly affected the way subordinates viewed them. But there was no incident where these officers killed or lashed out in a significant or physical fashion toward disobedient soldiers. Their most likely course of action, which was seen by personnel, was verbal accusations (Hersh 1970, 18-31).<sup>4</sup> It can be posited this is not significant enough to constitute being forced.

Furthermore, leadership is also concentrated in the sergeants and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) of the units. Leadership in the armed forces is not exclusive to officers but is present whenever there is a team operating. NCOs are the closest to individual soldiers and their presence, though often overlooked, cannot be dismissed. Rank and file soldiers report first to NCOs who then report to the officers. The NCOs are considered the backbone of the US military and are not only present among the lower enlisted but also mentor younger officers. In the case of Abu Ghraib officers were absent yet leadership was not. NCOs were present and responsible for the actions of their subordinates (Zimbardo 2007, 346).

When assigning punishment for atrocities soldiers who were under orders have the greatest cause for excusing conditions. Again, either mitigating punishment or acquitting altogether is something that must be done on a case-by-case basis. It can be presumed the youngest members and lowest ranked soldiers often occupy the most excusing cases. But, higher leadership does not. Leaders are expected by the military to understand the laws of war, lead by example and demonstrate control over their emotions. They are undoubtedly most responsible and liable for punishment.

#### **4. A HOLISTIC CHARACTER**

In the beginning of his book Zimbardo invites the reader to continually ask "Me also?" (6). His suggestion forces the reader to consider if they would also act in the morally irreprehensible way as the soldiers did at My Lai and Abu Ghraib. Situationists claim those who deny what their actions would be cannot do so without actually being tested in the situation. It is easy to say one would do the right thing

---

4. Captain Medina beat and terrorized suspected Viet Cong members. Lieutenant Calley also killed a farmer thought to be innocent by the translator present. Both officers are generally remarked to have been ruthless toward the enemy. In the end this would have undoubtedly influenced their command platform.

## compos mentis

when asked but "in the thick of it" is a different story. But this is not to say a character of *Kantian Consistency* does not survive in such places nor should individuals in bad situations not be held responsible.

As Kamtekar states, general notions of character are a holistic inclusion of a person's desires, aspirations and beliefs (Kamtekar 2010, 211). Despite psychologists' attempts, they cannot test for specific character traits in order to ascertain whether or not whole character really exists. Testing for the presence of one trait, such as honesty, is not the same as testing for an honest controlled character. Kamtekar goes farther and claims the Situationists miss a subject's construal (213). Each person has his or her own beliefs and these ideals cannot be separated from their character. To admit the situation is the cause of a person's behavior and to neglect what that person's ultimate goal may be is a large error to commit. An individual's construal of their own important traits in specific situations cannot be forgotten in any character-based experiment. In this examination the important traits are undoubtedly dutiful action. Some soldiers may interpret following orders as the right character trait of their profession but it does constitute their whole character. Following orders is only one part of being a soldier, there are many more parts to soldier's identity. Soldiers fight wars, not kill civilians for no reason. Those who think otherwise may be the deranged Doris spoke of but the entirety of the actors of My Lai and Abu Ghraib are undoubtedly not within their number.

Finally, as Kamtekar states, "*virtues* are not dispositions to perform stereotype actions popularly associated with a given trait, but rather dispositions to respond appropriately – in judgment, feeling, and action to one's situation" (216). The virtue of soldiers is the discipline to act as is needed in often terrible situations. They have to be held to a high standard to always react in appropriate ways consistent with the rule of law. When Situationists hold situational factors are ultimately superior to a person's character they dismiss a *Socratic Consistency* but not a *Kantian* one. They go too far as to suggest the immense amount of forces drive soldiers in their actions. Though human beings are not always rational and warfare is very emotional they forget people have the power to master their character and thus their actions. A soldier's ultimate goal is to master their body and actions to do what is necessary. In order to do their job, they must. When situations get tough they are expected to rise above the powerful situational forces. It is a difficult claim to make, but it is not without its merits and truths.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This paper does not make the conclusion that the situation is not important; it should have been revealed that it is indeed very much so. As Zimbardo asserts, putting the system on trial is a valid option and should often be done. Officers who are incompetent, cruel, and undisciplined or poorly trained prison guards and “green” soldiers should not be sent into environments where unethical action can be done. There will be time when soldiers do legitimately occupy excusing conditions. Sometimes subordinate soldiers should be acquitted. But this does not discredit a *Kantian* character or responsibility at My Lai and Abu Ghraib. Self-mastery involves constant work and habit in order to correctly proceed in any context. Every person will behave to varying degrees of virtue with the most virtuous a rare phenomenon indeed. Ultimately virtue ethics is about training oneself through action and habituation to be as virtuous as possible as much as possible. As an ethical system, virtue ethics is about discipline which is the ultimate goal of any soldier. Any soldier quickly realizes the necessity of will power and hopefully uses it always. It is engrained from day one of any training. What occurred at My Lai and Abu Ghraib as a military atrocity thus did not happen because of situational forces, but from the lack of a *Kantian Consistency* and discipline to act in an ethical manner. They let their emotions affect their discipline. To presume behavior is determined by the situation rather than character “reduces soldiers to automatons or puppets unable to control themselves in the face of ‘situational pressures.’ Our soldiers deserve more respect than that” (Mastroianni 2011, 11). Indeed, we all do.

## REFERENCES

- Aristotle. 1996. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Terence Irwin and Gail Fine. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
- Browning, Christopher. 1998. *Ordinary Men*. New York: Harper and Perennial.
- Baumeister, Roy F., Kathleen D. Vohs, and Dianne M. Tice. 2007. “The Strength Model of Self-Control.” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 16: 351–5.
- Doris, John M., and Dominic Murphy. 2007. “From My Lai to Abu Ghraib: The Moral Psychology of Atrocity.” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 31: 25–55.
- Doris, John. 2010. “Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics.” In *Moral Psychology: Historical and Contemporary Readings*, edited by Thomas Nadelhoffer, Eddy Nahmias and Shaun Nichols, 197–209. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell. Originally

## compos mentis

published in *Noûs*, 32 (4) (Malden: Blackwell Publishers inc., 1998).

- Harman, Gilbert. 2009. "Skepticism About Character Traits." *Journal of Ethics* 13: 235–42.
- Headquarters, Department of the Army FM 27–10. 1956. "The Law of Land Warfare." Last modified July 18. [http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/DR\\_pubs/dr\\_a/pdf/fm27\\_10.pdf](http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/DR_pubs/dr_a/pdf/fm27_10.pdf).
- Hersh, Seymour. 1970. *My Lai 4: A Report on the Massacre and Its Aftermath*. New York: Random House.
- Kamtekar, Rachana. 2010. "Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character." In *Moral Psychology: Historical and Contemporary Readings*, edited by Thomas Nadelhoffer, Eddy Nahmias and Shaun Nichols, 210–223. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell. Originally published in *Ethics* 114 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
- Mastroianni, George R. 2011. "The Person-Situation Debate: Implications for Military Leadership and Civilian-Military Relations." *Journal of Military Ethics* 10: 2–16.
- Merritt, Maria, Doris, John and Gilbert Harman. 2010. "Character" In *The Moral Psychology Handbook*, edited by John M. Doris and Fiery Cushman, 355–401. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Milgram, Stanley. 1969. *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Prinz, Jesse. 2009. "The Normativity Challenge: Culturally Psychology Provides the Real Threat to Virtue Ethics." *Journal of Ethics* 13: 117–44.
- Ross, Lee, and Richard E. Nisbett. 1991. *The Person and the Situation: Perspectives of Social Psychology*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Snow, Nancy E. 2009. "How Ethical Theory Can Improve Practice: Lessons from Abu Ghraib." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 12: 555–68.
- Upton, Candace. 2009. "The Structure of Character." *Journal of Ethics* 13: 175–93.
- . "Virtue Ethics and Moral Psychology: The Situationism Debate." *Journal of Ethics* 13: 103–15.

## Anderson

- Vranas, Peter. 2009. "Against Moral Character Evaluations: The Undetectability of Virtue and Vice." *Journal of Ethics* 13: 213–33.
- Waller, James. 2002. *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Walzer, Michael. 1977. *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*. New York: Basic Books.
- Wielenberg, Erik J. 2006. "Saving Character." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 9: 461–91.
- Zimbardo, Philip. 2007. *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*. New York: Random House.