A Critique of the Air Force’s Core Values

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Editorial Abstract: The author performs a close reading and critique of the Air Force’s core values. Among his observations, he notes inconsistencies between their presentation in the United States Air Force Core Values booklet of 1997 and their treatment in Air Force Doctrine Document 1-1, Leadership and Force Development. He also argues that Air Force doctrine is written in a way that presents “obstacles to its own propagation.”

As most readers well know, the Air Force’s core values consist of “integrity first,” “service before self,” and “excellence in all we do.” Integrity deals largely with character (honesty, courage, and responsibility), service with commitment (duty, respect, and loyalty), and excellence with striving toward perfection (on personal, team, and operational levels). The United States Air Force Core Values booklet, January 1997, speaks of a strategy for infusing the core values into Air Force culture—a strategy involving training and education, leadership in the operational Air Force, discussions among Airmen at various levels, and so forth.1 Years later we can say that in many ways the strategy has succeeded. Every Airman knows the core values, and in my experience (as a former officer in a sister service and a current instructor at Air Command and Staff College), most do not regard them as a management fad but genuinely respect them. Commanders

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relate that a key factor in deciding whether to
rehabilitate or separate a troubled troop in-
volves determining his or her commitment to
the core values.

Although I could list many other indicators
of the health of the program, I will single out
one notable shortfall: the fact that most Air-
men do not know what I call the elements of
each core value (see table). To most of them,
integrity means honesty, service means duty,
and excellence means sure competence in
mission accomplishment. But as Col Charles
Myers points out in an influential article, the
Nazis could profess such values if that is all
they mean, thus reducing the core values to a
mantra that any military professional could
chant—the bad as well as the good. The
presence of such elements as justice and respect
for others as persons gives the core values sub-
stance and separates them from the “virtues of
the SS-man.” Of course it is the task of leaders
to overcome this shortfall, and sound doctrine
seems already in place to support them: the
United States Air Force Core Values booklet and
Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 1-1,

I argue, however, that the way doctrine is
currently written may present certain obstacles
to its own propagation. Air Force leaders as
well as the Airmen they lead and mentor will
in general find it much easier to “own” doc-
trine when it possesses internal coherence;
clear, logical flow; and an evident, convincing
rationale. In some respects, current doctrine
fails these tests.

Lack of Coherence between
the Air Force’s Formulations
of the Core Values

The core values have been with us in more
or less their current form for a number of
years now and, as is proper, have roots in the
historical experience of the Air Force and the
American military. Since 1997 they have circu-
lated (and continue to circulate) in a stand-
alone format—the core-values booklet. In 2004
the Air Force incorporated them into leader-
ship doctrine as one of the “Leadership Com-
ponents” (along with competencies and actions)
in the first chapter of AFDD 1-1. This is good
since a doctrine document is more authorita-
tive than other forms of publication, but it does
raise questions about the relationship between
the two formulations. Although they are quite
close in most respects, a side-by-side compar-
ison reveals some inconsistencies (see table). Boldfaced elements in the table appear in
the booklet but not in the doctrine document,
and the reverse applies to italicized elements.
Underlining indicates relabeled elements that
are essentially the same in both formulations.

Two ways of removing the inconsistency
suggest themselves. First, we might suppose
that AFDD 1-1’s formulation simply super-
sedes the booklet’s. But AFDD 1-1 does not
state this explicitly, as is usually the case when
one publication supersedes another. Nor
would this be wise since the booklet contains
(in sections 2-4) valuable supplementary ma-
terials—such as the core-values strategy men-
tioned at the outset—not contained in the
document. Second, we might hold that
the inconsistencies are merely apparent—the
changes merely verbal. This may well be in
some cases (e.g., the differently worded ele-
ments under “service” and “excellence,” under-
lined in the table). Other changes, however,
seem more substantive: AFDD 1-1 has added
“honor” and “loyalty,” and “duty” is a richer
notion than “rule following.” In these cases,
the later formulation expands and probably
improves upon the earlier. But if we look
closely at “operational excellence,” we can
note an important subtraction: in the booklet,
under “excellence of external operations,” we
find a requirement to fight in obedience to
the laws of war—a requirement not stated un-
der “operational excellence” in AFDD 1-1. I
am not claiming that AFDD 1-1 has backed
away from a commitment to the laws of war—simply that fighting in accordance with those
laws is no longer explicitly linked to opera-
tional excellence. This is regrettable; at the
least, it represents a substantive change in the
formulation of the core values.

I conclude that real inconsistency exists be-
tween the two formulations and, therefore, that
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The Air Force’s current teaching on the core values lacks, to some degree, the internal coherence mentioned above. To some extent, then, core-values doctrine needs some rewriting. But as I now argue, one can raise questions about logical flow and rationale as well—problems that may point to a need for further changes.

### The Problem of Logical Flow in the Arrangement of Elements

The core-values booklet tells us (in section 2, “Why These Core Values?”) that the values and their elements are the “price of admission” to the Air Force. Both documents make clear that their justification is functional: we need Airmen to be trustworthy, to put the service and its mission before their personal goals and desires, and to commit themselves to a high degree of competence. Functional justifications for most, if not all, of the elements of the core values are also fairly straightforward. Military service clearly requires elements such as courage, honesty, accountability, respect, duty, and so forth. Here the authors of the documents wisely follow in the tradition of such military theorists as Gen Sir John Hackett. Someone with a background in the Army or Marine Corps might champion other ways of articulating the values, and anyone might wish some further element explicitly included under one or another value, but there is no real objection here. The core-values booklet explains that it is impossible for three or six or nine Core Values to capture the richness that is at the heart of the profession of arms. The values are road signs inviting us to consider key features of the requirements of professional service, but they cannot hope to point to or pick out everything. By examining integrity, service, and excellence, we also eventually discover the importance of duty, honor, country, dedication, fidelity, competence, and a host of other professional requirements and attributes.

As “road signs,” the core values and their elements stress moral and professional fea-
tures of military service that, in the historical experience of the Air Force, have proven particularly important. The list of values and elements, compiled by authors well versed in Air Force tradition, remains open to development in the light of further experience and reflection. On the whole, this seems exactly the right approach for doctrine writers to take. Nevertheless, we might ask, given the list, whether the elements are suitably arranged under the values—whether they flow logically. Concerning this matter, I raise some objections.

People often consider integrity synonymous with honesty, but in fact it means something more like wholeness or integration—a fact acknowledged by the two formulations of the core values, AFDD 1-1 describing integrity in terms of "the ability to hold together and properly regulate all of the elements of one's personality." People often consider integrity synonymous with honesty, but in fact it means something more like wholeness or integration—a fact acknowledged by the two formulations of the core values, AFDD 1-1 describing integrity in terms of "the ability to hold together and properly regulate all of the elements of one's personality." Consistent with this recognition, both documents insist that integrity involves self-control, the core-values booklet speaking explicitly of controlling impulses and appetites. One wonders, then, why the booklet locates the element of discipline and self-control under the value of service and why AFDD 1-1, although breaking this one element into three (self-discipline, self-control, and appropriate actions or desires), follows suit. Here we seem to have a problem—not with the elements themselves but with their logical flow in relation to the values they fall under. Based on its doctrinal definition, self-control should fall under integrity.

Under the general heading of logical flow, a few other questions need answers (here I will just ask them). We seem to have more elements than strictly required. It is not clear, for example, why AFDD 1-1 breaks up the booklet's element of discipline and self-control into self-discipline, self-control, and appropriate actions or desires, mentioned above. The same holds true for the elements of responsibility and accountability, located in both documents under integrity. Although the location is appropriate, why should they constitute two separate elements since neither document (both use very similar language) makes obvious the difference between them? Both documents insist that Airmen "internalize" the core values, a process facilitated by ease of memorization and grasp of the logical flow—and therefore impeded by unnecessary multiplication of the elements.

Finally, one finds no obvious rhyme or reason to the elements' order of presentation under each value. For example, honesty and openness, listed under integrity, seem clearly related. Why then are they separated by three other elements (responsibility, accountability, and justice) rather than listed one after the other (as are responsibility and accountability)? Under service, why is respect for others followed by self-discipline and its allied elements and only then by tolerance, which is clearly related to respect? Duty and loyalty seem importantly related, but they are listed at the opposite ends of the spectrum of elements under service. Rather than illuminating the nature or structure of each core value, the lists of elements under each give the appearance of a grab bag of moral traits—a problem easily fixed by some cutting and pasting.

The Problem of the Rationale of the Core Values

Lastly, I wish to address the rationale or justification of the core values. In discussing doctrine (teaching), we can distinguish among the "what," the lessons taught, and the "why"—the rational process through which the lessons are formulated and justified. Doctrine documents, for good reason, tend to focus on the teaching of the "what," but they typically also tend to give us at least a glimpse of the "why"—of the rationale behind the teaching. Good reasons exist for this as well: understanding the "why" facilitates accepting and internalizing the "what."

Both documents on the core values give us the same glimpse of the rationale. The core-values booklet speaks of their "functional importance," and the doctrine document maintains that "success hinges on the incorporation of these values." That is, these are our values because we have found that they work. This is fine as far as it goes, but I want to suggest that going a little further could help Airmen understand how the core values are grounded in the
nature of their profession, which could then help them internalize the values.

As mentioned above, Colonel Myers has sought to ground the core values on the basic aspects of morality (character, actions, and consequences), but the question of how ultimately to ground values is controverted, and it can be dangerous to do philosophy in public. So one can understand that doctrine writers would shy away from seeking to justify the core values officially in terms of abstract moral theorizing (whether that of Myers or someone else). Bracketing such deep theoretical issues, however, one can offer a rationale for the core values that is deeper than a pragmatic appeal to "what works," while still avoiding the controversies of moral theory.

This rationale takes as its starting point the nature of professionalism. Famously, Samuel Huntington argues that the distinguishing mark of a profession is that its practitioners display expertise ("specialized knowledge and skill in a significant field of human endeavor"), responsibility ("the essential and general character of his service and his monopoly of his skill impose upon the professional man the responsibility to perform the service when required by society"), and corporateness. ("The members of a profession share a sense of organic unity and consciousness of themselves as a group apart from laymen. This collective sense has its origins in the lengthy discipline and training necessary for professional competence, the common bond of work, and the sharing of a unique social responsibility.") In the case of the military profession, the relevant expertise is "the management of violence," together with all that entails (such as training and organizing the force as well as planning and directing its operations). The military has the responsibility of providing security for its "client"—the state and its government. In discussing the corporateness of the military, Huntington focuses on its bureaucratic character—its formal, hierarchical structure—and what sets it apart from civilian culture. He also mentions informal aspects of military corporateness, such as associations, journals, and customs.

From these characteristics we can move to the appropriateness of the core values; before doing so, however, we must clarify that Huntington's conception of a profession is neither idiosyncratic nor, in essence, controversial. In his discussion of the professional status of the military, Brig Gen Anthony E. Hartle, USA, retired, begins with Huntington, whom he acknowledges as "a classic voice on the sociology of professions." He goes on to consider alternative definitions that stress elements not emphasized by Huntington. Although Hartle wishes to show that the military qualifies as a profession on any plausible conception of what constitutes a profession, we can extract another lesson as well: the differences between Huntington's and other influential conceptions of professionalism tend to be relatively minor matters of emphasis. For example, General Hartle mentions such criteria as having a systematic theory of professional practice and a distinct culture. These could be acknowledged by Huntington and captured under his notions of expertise and corporateness, respectively. One need not insist that Huntington's definition of profession is superior to all others. Rather, it is enough to see the plausibility of his definition and to know that any alternative put forward will need at least to cover the ground that Huntington covers—differences will tend to be matters of emphasis. In relying on his definition in what follows, therefore, I believe I am on solid ground.

With these three characteristics in hand, we can develop a fairly straightforward rationale for the core values. Arguably each characteristic of the profession may require all of these values, and I will pick up on this line of thought shortly. First I will argue that each characteristic of professionalism calls for one of the Air Force's core values in a certain way, thereby clarifying the particular appropriateness of these values to the military profession. Perhaps the most obvious correspondence lies between expertise and excellence in all we do. We saw that expertise in "the management of violence" entails attendant expertise in training, equipping, and organizing the force—and in planning and directing its operations. This clearly will require commitment to excellence (personal, organizational, resource, and operational).
Next, responsibility calls for service before self. In order to discharge their responsibility to society, professionals will require the “age-old military virtue of selfless dedication to duty” that AFDD 1-1 speaks of under the heading “Service before Self.” General Hackett reminds us that the military serves its society under conditions of “unlimited liability,” in that service members may well have to risk or lay down their lives—a point explicitly noted in the doctrine document’s discussion of service. Further, given that the military serves its society (i.e., operates under civilian control), the elements of duty and loyalty, as extending beyond the military itself to the duly constituted political authorities, are also clearly essential to the military’s discharging its social responsibility. As AFDD 1-1 notes with respect to loyalty, “American military professionals demonstrate allegiance to the Constitution and loyalty to the military chain of command and to the President and Secretary of Defense.”

Lastly, the corporateness essential to professionalism requires integrity. The corporateness required by military service covers more ground than Huntington’s description of it lets on. The rigors of service, especially in combat, require Airmen to put their lives into the hands of other Airmen—often individuals they do not personally know. This in turn requires a high degree of mutual trust. AFDD 1-1 describes integrity as the “moral compass” that serves as “the basis for the trust imperative in today’s Air Force” (emphasis added). As Air Force chief of staff, Gen Michael Ryan wrote that integrity is “the foundation of trust”—“the unbreakable bond that unifies the force” and enables Airmen to focus on their jobs, knowing that others are doing likewise. As Huntington says, corporateness does involve the “organic unity” of the profession: in the military, this unity must take the form of a force cemented by “the unbreakable bond” of trust whose foundation is integrity.

I suggested above that each professional characteristic may well require all three core values, and I would now like to show how this is indeed the case. While each of the core values “takes the lead” with respect to one or another professional characteristic, all need the support of the other two in meeting the requirements of the characteristic at stake. Let us take expertise first. We have seen how excellence in all we do acts as the lead value for this characteristic, but this commitment to excellence will demand support from elements of integrity (such as responsibility and courage) and service (such as duty and self-discipline). Organizational excellence especially will further require integrity (as the foundation of trust) and additional elements of service such as loyalty, tolerance, and respect for others, precisely because of the team mentality and, indeed, the corporateness (as discussed above in terms of mutual trust) it requires.

We can make similar points with respect to the other two characteristics. Service, for example, although the lead value with respect to the professional characteristic of responsibility, must have support from integrity and excellence. As we saw, the doctrine document speaks of service’s centrally involving the “age-old military virtue of selfless dedication to duty.” Airmen will not be able to maintain this sort of dedication without drawing upon several of the character traits under integrity: courage to accept risks in the performance of duty, a sense of responsibility, and honesty in dealing with superiors up to and including representatives of the state (here, think of the Lavelle affair in Vietnam or scandals in the acquisition world). Further, one needs a commitment to excellence to develop the character traits already mentioned (personal excellence) and to perform well the service that society requires (organizational and operational excellence).

Finally, we have seen that the lead value for corporateness is integrity, perceived as the foundation of the mutual trust that unifies the force. But if integrity takes the lead here, it will require support from elements of the other core values, such as loyalty and operational excellence (clearly, we cannot trust a disloyal or incompetent person). A commitment to organizational excellence will also be relevant. (Here again we see how interconnected and mutually supporting the core values and their elements are, for as discussed above, organizational excellence in turn calls
upon a number of elements of service and, indeed, upon integrity.)

This, then, is the rationale for the core values that goes deeper than the quick, functional justification asserted in current Air Force teaching, yet it does not risk the controversy involved in the attempt to penetrate the murky depths of abstract moral theory to reach a rock-bottom justification (the question of the ultimate “origin of the Values” that the core-values booklet shies away from). Surely we should not expect doctrine to include a fully worked-up theory of the role of core values in professionalism (of course here I have offered only an indication of how this would go), but it could conceivably include the basic or primary correspondence of characteristics to values, thus facilitating Airmen’s understanding of the importance of the Air Force’s core values to the service’s professionalism.

Beyond the Core Values

Yet, this way of grounding the core values still depends upon the nature and function of the Air Force profession and thus may raise in some minds the specter of relativism: are there really no universal moral standards on which to base our professional ethic? (Are we not “one nation, under God”?) Is there really one morality for one profession and another for another? I myself believe no such thing. However, in some roles certain virtues and, indeed, certain aspects of certain virtues come more into the foreground and therefore more to the notice of reflective practitioners when the time comes to formulate doctrine—including core values—for a given role or profession. All of us need, among other things, to acquire and exercise the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, courage, and temperance. Still, justice (roughly definable as the stable disposition of giving to each his or her due) will take somewhat different forms in, say, a mother, drill sergeant, squadron commander, and priest (think about how each might deal with a person under his or her care who has “gone wrong” in some way). The same will hold for the other virtues. That is why different professions will formulate different ethical codes or sets of core values—especially when their formulations deal in the road signs mentioned in the core-values booklet.

Some have argued that the military should explain “the moral framework within which military activities take place” in terms of the cardinal virtues instead of core values. I have considerable sympathy with this view in principle. It is worth noting, however, that these four virtues are taught as elements of the values. Further, the core values have a history of some years now (and an even longer history if we recognize that their framers did not create them from scratch but drew on American military tradition in formulating them). Given that integrity, service, and excellence have become substantially embedded in the culture of the Air Force, we should not too hastily set them aside for another set of values or virtues, especially if the core values already embrace this other set to some significant degree. Perhaps, in any event, the question of which virtues are “cardinal”—pivotal to living a good human life—goes beyond the purview of Air Force doctrine. Perhaps too the same might be said with respect to the debate between moral relativists and universalists. All of this, in any event, lies beyond the scope of this article.

Yet, we should note that a full understanding of the core values and their place in the military profession cannot altogether escape deeper questions about the “origin of the Values.” The core values may “work,” and military professionalism may need them; still, Airmen must face the question of whether they can fully internalize them—that is to say, harmonize them with their deepest convictions about how they should live. If they cannot, they should seek another vocation. Or if enough patriotic Americans could not (I mention this only as a theoretical possibility), then the military ethic as formulated in doctrine should be reconsidered.

The American people, too, must consider the role of the military profession in the life of the nation and in so doing must obviously appeal to moral principles more basic than the core values (the laws of nature and of nature’s God and certain truths held to be self-evident,
for example). For a society cannot endorse a
profession that violates its basic moral convictions. Thus, while torture, perfidy, terror
bombing, and other forms of indiscriminate or disproportionate warfare might contribute
to fighting effectively (taking this in a morally neutral sense of battlefield effectiveness), they
remain inconsistent with American values and concern for universal human rights. Therefore,
the Air Force core values rightly contain elements that rule out such practices (obedience
to laws of war under “excellence” in the core-values booklet and in both formulations, “justice”
under “integrity,” and the injunction to respect the worth and dignity of all humans as
part of “respect for others” under “service”). Such practices, although consistent with the
hypothetical function of (merely) fighting effectively, are inconsistent with the United
States Air Force’s actual function of serving militarily the moral ends of the American
Republic in accordance with its Constitution. This is a good thing, for it helps make unmistakable
the real difference between the core values and the “virtues of the SS-man.” Again,
doctrine writers might reasonably declare that abstract theoretical concerns about the basis
and validity of human-rights claims lie well beyond their purview. But it may well be worth
stressing that the American military’s function—which grounds the core values—itself
has moral content, namely serving, honoring, and promoting American values, treaty obliga-
tions, and so forth.

In closing, let me make a final remark about
the purpose of this article. The argument moves from some technical (at times nitpick-
ing) criticisms about the consistency between
the two existing formulations of the core values,
through some formal concerns about the
logical flow among values and their elements,
to some quite broad and suggestive concerns
about their rationale. Through all of this, the
article presents a critique of doctrine for which,
as a whole, I have a high regard. I offer these
comments in a collegial spirit, and if the article
opens a dialogue among readers, it will have
well served my purpose in writing it.

Notes

uses it: “Any US Air Force member (officer or enlisted; active, reserve, or guard; and Department of the Air
Force civilians) who supports and defends the US Constitution and serves our country.” AFDD 1-1. Leadership
Doctrine_Docs/afdd1-1.pdf. What of contractors? I think it would be wonderful if they would embrace and live
by the core values (although holding them accountable might prove difficult), but applying Airmen to them
would oversretch the term.

myers.pdf. Myers, of course, goes on to respond to this and other questions about the appropriateness of the
core values.

3. AFDD 1-1, Leadership and Force Development, 3.

4. Mr. Robert Christensen of the Air Force Doctrine Center pointed out to me that because the core-values
booklet was an unofficial publication (not a numbered doctrine document, instruction, or pamphlet), it did not
need to be superseded (in fact, in a sense, could not be superseded). Nevertheless, the booklet has a certain
amount of customary authority due to its circulation over time and its use in education and training (it clearly had
some sort of authoritative sanction, official or otherwise). Clearing up the conflict between the two documents,
then, would be a useful service, whether done in a revision of the doctrine document, a policy letter, or some
other appropriate format.

5. We might even suggest that one finds no unified
Air Force understanding of the core values that gets
beneath the bumper-sticker level down to the elements.
One would think that a doctrine document would codify
such an understanding, but two further points seem to
underline how this is not the case. First, in his Letter to Airmen dated 13 February 2006 (http://www.af.mil/library/
viewpoints/secaf.asp?id=217), Secretary of the Air Force
Michael W. Wynne discusses the core values in a way that
seems to place loyalty under integrity and honor under
excellence (contra both documents discussed here). Sec-
ond, the history of the core values presented at the January
2006 USAF Strategic Planning Workshop on Core Values
made no mention of AFDD 1-1, let alone of the doctrine
document’s reformulation of the elements of the values.

6. United States Air Force Core Values.

7. Ibid.


10. In the core-values booklet, we can identify a possible explanation of this apparent discrepancy. The elements of service are portrayed as "behaviors" (whereas the elements under integrity are portrayed as "moral traits"). United States Air Force Core Values. Presumably behavior displaying a lack of self-control (excessive shows of anger, inappropriate sexual overtures, etc.) is inconsistent with putting service before self, while the moral trait of self-control is part of integrity. Such a reading receives additional support from Colonel Myers's interpretation of the core values, according to which the values correspond to the elements of moral theory: integrity to character, service to action, excellence to consequences. Myers, "Core Values." But this sort of response is not available for AFDD 1-1, which explicitly treats the elements under service before self as "moral attributes." AFDD 1-1, Leadership and Force Development, 5-7. Taken in this way, the element of self-control clearly belongs under integrity, given the doctrine document's own definitions. Its inclusion (along with self-discipline and appropriate actions or desires) under integrity would greatly improve the logical flow of the formulation. Finally, let me note that an early draft of a revision of AFDD 1-1 that I have seen incorporates some of the changes I suggest.

11. The descriptions of the first two both speak of controlling anger, the description of self-discipline explicitly enjoins self-control, and the description of self-control explicitly rules out "inappropriate actions or desires." Perhaps self-discipline is intended to focus more on self-improvement while self-control focuses more on refraining from negative actions (one could read the text this way). Further, the language of the description of appropriate actions or desires focuses more explicitly on refraining from substance abuse or unprofessional relationships (such as fraternization). All of this content is fine, but given the very substantial overlap, it is just not clear why three separate elements are required.

12. United States Air Force Core Values; and AFDD 1-1, Leadership and Force Development, 5. Of course, it is easy to put plausible constructions upon them that distinguish them. One favored by me and many of my colleagues and students maintains that one accepts responsibility for one's own performance while one holds others accountable (and accepts being held accountable by others). If plausible, such a reading is not mandated by the documents, and there is certainly nothing unnatural about speaking of accepting accountability and holding others responsible. Both terms, of course, are prevalent in military culture, and it is understandable that doctrine writers would want to retain them. If so, however, and if they are to be listed as separate elements under integrity, then a clearer distinction between them would help Airmen grasp the structure of the "origin of the Values" and insisting that they are independent of "Chapel programs." United States Air Force Core Values.


17. Ibid., 11-18. I should note that he is quite restrictive about who counts as a military professional, essentially limiting membership to "line," "rated," or "combat arms" officers. Most of us today will be more inclusive, but we can be so without rejecting other aspects of Huntington's conception of military professionalism.


19. See ibid., 22, and chap. 2 as a whole.

20. In saying this I intend no slight toward the core values of the other services. One could pick out similar correspondences for honor, courage, and commitment or for duty, honor, country (traditional if not official core Army values). The value is the important thing—not the label.

21. We might prefer to come up with a more pleasant formulation, such as "the ordered application of force in the resolution of a social problem." See Gen Sir John Hackett, The Profession of Arms (London: Times Publishing Company, 1963), 3.

22. AFDD 1-1, Leadership and Force Development, 5.

23. Hackett, Profession of Arms, 63; and AFDD 1-1, Leadership and Force Development, 5.


25. Ibid., 4.


27. This case of dishonest reporting resulted in, among other things, a policy letter from Gen John Ryan, chief of staff at that time, on the absolute centrality of integrity to military service. I suspect that this letter influenced later work on the core values. For a brief account of the affair and a reference to General Ryan's letter, see James H. Toner, Morals under the Gun: The Cardinal Virtues, Military Ethics, and American Society (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 91-93.

28. United States Air Force Core Values.

29. One might ask whether this rationale proves too much. Does it not imply that every profession should adapt core values of integrity, service, and excellence? In a way, perhaps it does. Members of every profession will need to honor and embody values along these lines if they wish to maintain a cohesive corporateness, discharge their responsibility to society, and maintain and continually enhance their expertise. But nothing in this rationale implies that every profession will or should conceptualize these values in the same way or use the same labels. The legal profession, for example, surely requires integrity, but the kind of courage lawyers need—the nature and line of accountability, the particular requirements of honesty and openness, and so forth—will differ. Even within
other military services, different missions and traditions will fully justify different formulations of core values—both in terms of the "letter" (the names and ordering of the values and their elements) and to a lesser degree the "spirit" or substance of the ethic (the sort of character and behavior required by practitioners of that branch of the military profession).

30. One may debate the meaning of such a phrase in such a context, but it seems at the least to imply that we are answerable to some moral standard well above and beyond our own narrow interests.

31. AFDD 1-1, Leadership and Force Development. 4. Toner, for example, argues this in Morals under the Gun.

32. They are not labeled "cardinal virtues," but integrity includes justice and courage, and service includes temperance (self-control and appropriate actions or desires) and, most tenuously, prudence (the elements of rule following and duty speak of the importance of exercising good judgment in the performance of duty). Although we may debate whether they receive enough emphasis, at least they are there.

33. Here I wish to bracket thorny questions about whether there are ever times when it might be permissible to engage in practices of torture, terror bombing, or the like (say in a ticking-time-bomb scenario or a situation like that faced by Great Britain in late 1940)—my point is just that the core values correctly prohibit them (at least) in all but truly extreme circumstances. Anthony Hartle's Moral Issues in Military Decision Making takes up such questions and further provides an extended treatment of the relation among the three main influences on the American military ethic: the exigencies of the profession, the values of American society, and the laws of war. He argues (see especially the discussion of social differentiation in chap. 8) not only that American values and the laws of war serve as "boundary conditions" on the military ethic, but also that they have to a considerable extent penetrated the texture of that ethic, which is thus not merely functional. The case of the Air Force's teaching on respect for others is a partial confirmation of Hartle's thesis, as is the inclusion of obeying the laws of war under operational excellence (in the core-values booklet).