PHILOSOPHICAL DIALOGUE AND MILITARY DECISION MAKING

DIÁLOGO FILOSÓFICO Y TOMA DE DECISIÓN MILITAR

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Abstract: The military establishment plays an important role in society, not only because it is pivotal in securing the state from external and internal threats but also because the conduct of soldiers affect the fortunes of the state both fiscally and morally. Early in their career, soldiers are trained to be irreproachable in their loyalty, unquestioning in their obedience and unthinking in their pursuit of military objective. This, however changes as they move up into command positions and are required to decide on objectives as well as give orders for others to obey. For many officers, this is usually a difficult transition to make even though Staff School training is supposed to enable them to make this transition. This paper is based on an attempt to introduce philosophical dialogue to student officers of a military academy to help them make this difficult transition. It discusses the use of philosophical dialogue in facilitating officers' understanding of important issues in the military, including military decision making. It highlights the procedure, difficulties and dangers of facilitating philosophical dialogue between soldiers especially as it relates to the corporate unity and command structure of the military. The paper also reflects on the efficacy and desirability of involving soldiers in a dialogue process.
Keywords: Decision making, Military training, MDMP (Military Decision Making Process), Philosophical Dialogue,

Resumen: La institución militar y juega un papel importante en la sociedad, no sólo porque es una base crucial para la seguridad del estado frente a amenazas internas y externas sino porque la conducta de los soldados afecta al destino del estado tan física como moralmente. Al comienzo de sus carreras, los soldados son entrenados en el desarrollo de una lealtad indubitable, evitando el cuestionamiento y la crítica para incentivar el desarrollo de los objetivos militares. Esta situación cambia cuando asciende a posiciones superiores, donde se requiere que decidan sobre la consecución de ciertos objetivos y que den órdenes a otros. Para muchos oficiales, esto supone una difícil transición a pesar de que la escuela de oficiales se supone que los capacita para realizar esta transición. Este artículo pretende explicar cómo introducir el diálogo filosófico a los estudiantes que se preparan para ser oficiales en la academia militar, actividad que les ayudará a desenvolver esta complicada transición. El trabajo discute el uso del diálogo filosófico para facilitar a los oficiales la comprensión de los asuntos militares importantes, lo cual abarca la toma de decisión militar. Subrayará, el procedimiento, las dificultades y los peligros de facilitar un diálogo filosófico entre los soldados, particularmente cuando se dirige a la unidad militar y a la estructura de órdenes del

ejército. Además, esta investigación reflexiona sobre la eficacia y deseabilidad de incorporar a los soldados en un proceso dialógico.
Palabras clave: Toma de decisión, entrenamiento militar, Proceso de toma de decisión militar (PTDM), diálogo filosófico

Introduction

The war profession is a very serious business, not only because it is a matter of life and death for the officers and men of the military but also for the nation state whose continued existence and independence sometimes depends upon the prowess of its military. Second, it is a serious business because the deployment of military personnel for combat operations has an impact on society not just because it has to live with the emotional scars of raising children of deceased or maimed soldiers but also because it has to contend with the physical and emotional scars that result from the prosecution of war. It is in recognition of the enormity of this responsibility that nations expend a sizable chunk of their resources to train and equip its military. The assumption here is that a well trained and equipped military will better contain the enemies of the state and may thus avoid or at least reduce the physical, emotional, socio-political and economic fallouts of being second best in a military engagement. The political establishment in states with extensive military prowess sometimes assume an arrogant stance in their relationship with others based on their belief that their military can stand up to the best. But those who actively engage in prosecuting wars know that warfare is not only precarious but is also unpredictable. This is because the size of an army is no guarantee of victory and the sophistication of weaponry does not readily translate into military supremacy. This is why discerning rulers abhor warfare and use an intricate system of conventional ties and treaties to keep its officers and men in the barracks. But part of the unpredictability of war is that it is sometimes visited on those who earnestly abhor it, such that pacifism by a nation cannot guarantee it peace. Thus even when a nation earnestly abhors war, reason dictates that it prepare its forces to defend it from rumblings within and perils from afar.

A professional army is not merely a group of armed men and women that is mustered to defend the interest of a state but should ideally be a professional group that is highly trained in "certain skills and perhaps even a sense of responsibility to exercise these skills in certain ways and at certain times."[1] This is important because it is only when an army is properly trained in all aspects of the conduct of war that it is capable of protecting the state from internal and external threats. It is also proper training that ensures that a military does not turn its enormous capacity for violence on the state and its citizens. But training does not only consist in developing proficiency in the deployment of men and material but also extends to the capacity do so within the ambits of national laws and international conventions. Thus, whereas having the capacity for violence and developing proficiency at deploying men and material may be adequate for success at a tactical level, managing violence, which Harold Lasswell refers to as the peculiar skill and defining feature of a professional soldier, requires much more than the ability to deploy military resources. This paper is about the enhanced military training that helps officers in the management of violence. It evaluates the processes and outcomes of integrating philosophical practice into military training, especially as it relates to the attempt to introduce philosophical dialogue into the military decision making process. It makes a distinction between the two types of military decisions to which philosophical dialogue may be applied, viz., ethical and tactical decisions and examines the processes through which philosophical dialogue may be employed appropriately. It examines the relative success of the dialogue process in their ethical and tactical applications and the difficulties of making decisions in time-critical-situations. In conclusion, it argues that while the dialogue process helps in sharpening the critical thinking capacities and contributes to the general intellectual alertness of the soldier, it may not be a good tool for the time-critical-decisions of warfare.

[1] FOTION, N. - ELFSTROM, G.: *Military Ethics: Guidelines for Peace and War*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1986, p. 48

Training and the Military

Although the ultimate aim of any military formation is to deter enemies of the state or otherwise subdue such enemies that are undeterred, doing so with finesse is usually the goal of every military and it is this finesse that is usually referred to as professionalism. As Sarkesian observes, "the label, professional is a mark of distinction. Not only does it indicate an exceptional competence but also a commitment to a particular lifelong career."[2] This distinction is highly priced by every military not just for itself but also as honour to the country that promotes and sponsors it. To ensure professionalism different armies develop complex training programmes at all levels to enhance its physical, mental and technical readiness. For people outside the military, the most visible part of this training is the fitness training which involves drill, physical training, weapons handling, field craft, and first aid and is usually characteristic of military training at the lower ranks. At this level of training, the primary aim is to socialize the men into the military culture of the particular army formation. This is because "a soldier's physical survival and vulnerability to psychological attrition, as well as the successful accomplishment of the unit's mission, depends to a large measure upon the extent to which cooperative and mutually supportive interpersonal relationships prevail in the small unit."[3] Thus, at this level of training, emphasis is laid on obedience, honour, teamwork, and dedication to duty within a strict hierarchical system. This is necessary not only to enable the soldier perform under the stress of battle but also to cocoon him against such praetorian tendencies that could easily mislead a soldier. Thus training at this level is highly regimented with tightly scheduled routines and the strict enforcement of several regulations relating to physical health, equipment care, personal conduct and unit cohesion.

Beyond this level of training lies a more sophisticated and technical level of education which is reserved for a section of the officer corps and is geared towards helping war professionals to excel in command and

[2] SARKESIAN,S. C.: *Beyond the Battlefield: The new Military Professionalism*, Pergamon Press, NYC, 1981, p. 5
[3] GAL, R.: *A Portrait of the Israeli Soldier*, Greenwood Press, NYC, 1986, p. 235

staff responsibilities. Commenting on the aim of the United Kingdom's Joint Service Command and Staff College, Till et. al.[4] observes that the "Advance Course is to prepare officers for high-grade command and staff appointments over the next 10 years of their careers. Such appointments are likely to include command, headquarters' staff posts, policy, acquisitions and finance." Training at this level usually exerts severe physical and mental stress upon the officer and is meant to sharpen his command capabilities and enable him to make wise, sensitive, ethically legitimate and life changing decisions while operating in a complex, ambiguous and unpredictable military environment. The understanding here is that neither extreme mental and physical suffering nor fatigue and injury should prevent the officer from making sound tactical decisions. Officer training at this level, however, is not limited to the development of tactical competence but also involves the intellectual development of the officer. This is achieved through a broadening of the military curriculum by including courses in logical and critical thinking, human rights and international relations, politics, the economy, social and cultural issues. Such intellectual development "highlights the invaluable benefits of sound institutional education in non-military disciplines as well as education and training specifically targeted for various organizational levels. This view contends that institutions which instil the value of intellectual broad-mindedness, rigor, and freedom will produce members capable of sound critical thinking."[5]

The specific emphasis on developing the critical thinking capacity of the officer is based on the understanding that critical thinking adds value to officers and broadens their mind-set, not only in the area of military operations but also in terms of their moral and social responsibilities. As Cardon and Leonard put it,

> Critical thinking derives from purposeful, reflective judgment and reasoning, and drives the continuous learning essential to adaptation in design. Creative thinking

[4]TILL, G. - BOWEN, W. - HALL, D. - Burridge Air Vice-Marshal Brian, "Post modern Military education: Are we meeting the challenge"? *Defence Studies vol 1:1*, London, 2001, pp. xii.

[5] PAZ, Major Richard D.: *A Systems Critique of the Military Decision-Making Process at the Operational Level of War*, Unpublished Monograph, United States Army, School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas,2003, p. 34

> fosters innovation by capitalizing on imagination, insight, and novel ideas. In applying critical and creative thinking, continuous dialog and collaboration help to develop a shared understanding of the situation and the operational environment while improving upon the often-flawed nature of individual thought. Critical thinking involves asking appropriate questions, gathering relevant information, deriving sound conclusions, and effectively communicating the essence of those conclusions to others[6]

In other words there is a belief in the military that an officer with a capacity to think is an asset to the command. There is also the belief that the use of collaborative thinking leads to better decisions and therefore benefits the men, the military establishment and the nation that established and sustains the military.

Decision Making in the Military

The military establishment is structured in a hierarchal manner in order to maintain the level of discipline required in an effective military formation. This arrangement ensures a strict chain of command from the highest military officer, through the intervening structures, to the men that constitute the rank and file. This strict hierarchy ensures that it is only officers with an appropriate level of training, education and experience that make decisions for the rest of the organization. This is important because of the need to ensure that military decisions reflect the culture of the particular military, the policies of the state, and the virtues of international military norms. As Eriksen observes, "the fact that a single wrong response may have huge consequences for the armed conflict, both on a military operational and political level, contributes further to the importance of good decision-making."[7] In order to ensure that command decisions are appropriate for designated purposes and that the officers who issue such commands are sufficiently equipped to do so, further education and training are made mandatory for the higher ranks.

[6] CARDON, Brigadier General (P) Edward C., and LEONARD, Lieutenant Colonel Steve, Unleashing Design: Planning and the Art of Battle Command, Military Review, Vol, 16. March-April 2010, p. 6

[7] ERIKSEN, Jørgen Weidemann, "Should Soldiers Think before They Shoot?" Journal of Military Ethics, Vol. 9, No. 3, 2010, p. 196

This usually begins with the Staff college education and is meant to equip officers for decision making roles within the military. It is not only designed to increase the general and tactical knowledge of the officer but also to imbue him with the right dispositions, attitudes, habits of mind, and character traits. This is especially important because the military decisions that matter are made in time-critical situations when officers are under intense physical and mental stress. Since individual military officers are likely to approach issues differently, Staff College education is structured to ensure that officers operate within appropriate world views and that their decisions are not left to their individual whims and caprices.

The importance of making the right military decisions has been evident throughout history. The rise and fall of nations as well as the influence that nation-states exert on world affairs are often linked to its military prowess and by extension, the tactical ingenuity of its commanders. Early military commanders like Julius Caesar, Hannibal Barca and Napoleon Bonaparte, as well as more recent ones such as Erwin Rommel, George Patton, Bernard Montgomery displayed tactical ingenuity that led to highly successful military careers. Their battlefield exploits did not only recommended them to their superiors but also earned them the respect of their enemies. Commanders such as Caesar were not only expected to make important tactical decisions personally but were required by circumstances, to do so. This ensured that his full military ingenuity was utilized in every offensive and that responsibility for success or failure rested solely with him. In such early warfare, it was possible for the commander to make important decisions by himself because, though they sometimes commanded large armies, warfare was simple and restricted to formal battlefields where combatants faced each other across clearly defined battle lines. Military acumen merely involved outmanoeuvring and annihilating the enemy on that battle field and thereafter inheriting swaths of territory that, hitherto, belonged to the enemy. Such ingenuity not only resulted in great personal wealth for commanders but also brought them into the political mainstream as governors of conquered territories or lawmakers. Contemporary military commanders, irrespective of their ingenuity are not expected to make military decisions alone. The complexity of contemporary warfare,

coupled with the large size of forces and advances in technology entail more information and calculation[8] that cannot be processed by any one person. Thus, though contemporary military decision making still remains the responsibility of particular military commanders, whose full genius is sometimes reflected in the decisions, the process of making such decisions is heavily regulated by the military establishment and often requires the contribution of officers and staff under the commander. Regulation by the military establishment often entails the adoption of standardized decision making procedures such as the Military Decision Making Process (MDMP), the Command Estimate Process and the Troop Leading Procedures. The oversight enforced by these procedures ensures that the command hierarchy maintains a semblance of control of all decision irrespective of the nature of the command environment.

The Military Decision-Making Process (MDMP) is a standardized reasoning calculus used by many military establishments to ensure precision and uniformity in military decision making. It is an analytical tool "employing a time-intensive, but logical sequence to analyze the situation, develop a range of options, compare these options, and then select the option that best solves the problem."[9] It usually entails the commander and his staff officers using the men and material available to them at any given time to accomplish a set mission. It emphasizes and acknowledges the expertise of staff officers and portrays them as indispensable to the overall success of the mission. In planning the mission, the commander seeks the contributions of such staff officers as in intelligence, logistics, air support, artillery, infantry, etc. and uses their contributions in the planning process. The plan ends up reflecting the perspectives of the different experts and is said to be superior to any plan that could have been made independently by the commander. In employing the calculus there is an assumption that if sustained and appropriate reasoning is applied to a military objective, such an objective could be achieved efficiently. The MDMP consists of seven steps:

[8] GARCIA, Maj. Jacob A., The Requirement for an Abbreviated Military Decision-Making Process in Doctrine, Unpublished Master's Thesis, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, California, 1980, p. 1

[9] MARR, Major John J., *The Military Decision Making Process: Making Better Decisions Versus Making Decisions Better*, Unpublished monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

Step 1 - Receipt of Mission
Step 2 - Mission Analysis
Step 3 - Course of Action Development
Step 4 - Course of Action Analysis
Step 5 - Course of Action Comparison
Step 6 - Course of Action Approval
Step 7 - Orders Production

Although a few of the tasks of the MDMP appear perfunctory and predictable, there is no doubt that a majority of the other tasks require purposeful and reflective judgment which is the hallmark of critical thinking. The assumption here is that the enemy is thinking, innovative and unpredictable and will employ every possible guile in pursuing his objective. Critical thinking, therefore, is indispensable and this is underscored by Cardon and Leonard when they argue;

> Critical thinking also helps distil the immense amounts of information and determine those elements of information that are most relevant to the situation. This is an important step in mitigating the risk associated with guidance that does not fully account for the complexities of the operational environment. Critical thinking helps to clarify guidance and enables commanders to achieve a mutual understanding of the current situation and the desired end state.[10]

The above emphasizes the fact that it is the field commanders that are conversant with the operational environment and should therefore be in a position to creatively interpret the warning order (WngO) that they receive from headquarters. The MDMP therefore encourages the use of Critical thinking by operational planning team to make decisions on the basis of a thorough analysis of the enemy and the combat environment.

Although the MDMP emphasizes critical thinking in operational planning, the circumstance of military operations sometimes makes such thinking impracticable. Also, one could argue that military culture predisposes officers and men to operate within time tested parameters, thereby avoiding the adventitious reasoning that is associated with critical thinking. In their cadet training for instance, officer cadets are instilled with the culture of obedience which Huntington refers to it as the

[10] CARDON, and Leonard, *op.cit.*, 2010, p. 6.

"supreme military virtue."[11] In obeying an order, a subordinate forgoes critical judgment in the selection of alternatives and "uses the formal criterion of the receipt of a command or signal as his basis of choice."[12] Cadet Officers are made to understand that they should defer to the superior knowledge and experience of the commander, trusting that the net effect of carrying out the command will be beneficial to all concerned. A culture of obedience is important, not only because it ensures the cohesion that a military needs when confronting a set objective but also because such a unity of purpose translates into efficiency and efficacy. This culture of obedience is sometimes carried over into command and staff positions and acts as a disincentive for critical judgments and the entertainment of opinions. Some officers would rather recycle a judgment made by their superior in a similar circumstance or adopt a position from the military operational manual than make a critical judgment of their own. Another disincentive for critical judgement, in officers assuming command and staff responsibilities for the first time, is the need to avoid blame for operational failures. A failure to achieve a command objective sometimes entails catastrophic outcomes which weigh heavily on the officer responsible. Blame for such failure would be mediated if the decision is based on ideas that emanate from the rule book or from what has been done in the past but would be severe if it is a novel idea that emanates from critical judgment of the officer. This is to say that critical judgment and the resultant new approach to a mission is fine, so long as it achieves its set objective and since no one can say for certain when actions derived from such critical judgment will achieve its set objective, officers are more likely to make "safe" decisions rather than make decisions that are reasonable but fall outside the dictates of their rulebook. Thus whereas in making decisions, commanders are expected to be guided by professional judgement gained from experience, knowledge, education, intelligence and intuition, this is not always the case in reality. This is especially so for officers that are new to command responsibilities. Their lack of experience sometimes makes them unsure of their capabilities and casts

[11] HUNTINGTON, Samuel P.: *The Soldier and the State*, Belknap Press, Cambridge, 1985, p. 74
[12] COCKERHAM William C. and COHEN, Lawrence E., "Obedience to Orders: Issues of Morality and Legality in Combat among U.S. Army Paratroopers", *Social Forces*, Vol. 58: 4 (1980), p. 1273.

doubts over their intelligence and intuitions. They are, therefore, more likely to avoid critical judgement and more likely to try to second guess the kind of decision that their superiors would expect in the circumstance, or stick to what has worked in the past.

But even where a commander or staff officer wants to use critical judgment in making innovative decisions on military strategy they may be handicapped by the limited alternatives that standard military training accords them. This is not to say that soldiers are not sufficiently intelligent or that they do not apply their mind appropriately to their task but it is saying that what is considered as alternatives in the military, just as it is in everyday life, is limited. For instance, when faced with a decision about starting a family, most people think of it in terms of getting married and having children. Few consider adoption, cohabiting, homosexual coupling and single parenting as reasonable alternatives. In the same way, when faced with the question of how to engage an enemy, a commander should not think that their alternatives are limited to either attacking or not attacking. They should also consider a retreat, a siege, infiltration, psychological warfare and sabotage as viable alternatives. Developing a capacity for identifying alternatives therefore becomes indispensable especially in an ethical military that can ill afford to waste its human and material resources. Such a development is only possible at the level of the staff college where the officer is guided by the directing staff and other instructors and also has the support of his college colleagues. It is also within such a setting that the viability of dialogue as tool in the development of critical judgements can be explored.

Philosophical Dialogue in Military Training

The need for philosophical dialogue in military training arises from the special circumstances of contemporary warfare, especially with the intersection of ethical and operational issues in military decision making. Military commanders of the past did not have to contend with ethical issues even though the culture of chivalry made them mindful of some of them. Early writers on military strategy such as Sun Tzu and Hsün Tzu merely dwelt on the strategy for winning wars, without any

complimentary discussion of ethics. They did not have to contend with the growth in information technology and the attendant increase in the advocacy for human rights which has brought the activity of soldiers under such stringent scrutiny that, the popular dictum that "all is fair in love and war" is no longer valid in warfare. International restrictions on warfare, such as the ban on the use of anti-personnel land mines and chemical weapons, show that the methods of war are now as important as victory itself. Military events like the firebombing of Dresden, the Mai Lai massacre and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which were accepted as the collateral damage of war, would probably be looked upon differently in today's world of human rights advocacy. This is why, when preparing officers for command and staff appointments, it is important to emphasize the fact that military decision making is no longer focused only on tactical issues but also involves ethical and environmental issues. For an African military, such decisions are further complicated by the presence of irregular combatants and child soldiers in the theatre as well as the use of unorthodox combat methods. The need for philosophical dialogue arises because, since Socratic times, it has been known to improve the quality of reasoning and by extension the quality of decisions that follow from such reasoning. The following is an attempt to see whether such dialogue could help the quality of military decisions and emanates from an attempt to use philosophical dialogue to sharpen the decision making abilities of student-officers in a military college. The aim of the dialogue is not as much to find an appropriate decision as it is to explore the various options that are available. The dialogue is expected to improve the quality of command by helping the student officer to develop an in-depth understanding of the Military Decision Making Process and the ethical issues that arise both in combat and peace time.

Introducing philosophical dialogue to student officers usually starts with an attempt to resolve serious ethical issues that arise within the conduct of war. The intention is not usually to find a solution to the issues but rather to broaden the perspectives of the officers involved so that they could better understand the issue and take it into account in operational planning. As a background to this, student officers are given a brief introduction to philosophical dialogue. For this purpose, philosophical

dialogue is regarded, not as "a conversation in which two people equally committed to and fluent in philosophy disagree about a fundamental issue"[13] but rather as a conversation between two people who disagree with each other on an issue but are equally committed to exploring different alternatives with the hope of finding one that is best suited for the circumstance surrounding the issue. It is important to emphasize that such a dialogue is not the exclusive preserve of philosophers but could take place between any two reasonably intelligent people who genuinely seek to discover hidden meanings and explore various possibilities concerning any subject matter. Also, it is important to emphasize that the issue to which philosophical dialogue is applied need not be fundamental in the philosophical sense but can relate to any situation where there is need for a better understanding. Again, for our purpose, it is important to make it clear that philosophical dialogue extends beyond the clarification of concepts to problem solving. Thus while the dialogue may not necessarily find a solution to ethical dilemmas in the conduct of war, it can result in a better understanding of the issue and thus help commanders to make decisions that are reasonable within the context of a particular military engagement.

A traditional approach to demonstrating the efficacy of philosophical dialogue in the clarification of thought would have been through the dialogues of Plato which would also have helped the student-officers to familiarize themselves with the dialogue process. In this case, the dogfight in Plato's Gorgias between Socrates and Callicles in their attempt to establish the true meaning of 'justice' seemed especially appealing but the diction, length, context and content of the dialogue were a disincentive. As alternatives, short dialogues of varying length and content were adopted. The first, based on a supposed dialogue between Snoop Dogg and Thales of Miletus[14] is relatively simple and was used to introduce student-officers to the dialogue process. This was followed by a longer and more intense dialogue titled "An example of philosophical

[13] ROOCHNIK, David L.: The Impossibility of Philosophical Dialogue, Philosophy & Rhetoric Vol. 19, No. 3, 1986, p. 148

[14] CHICAGO MILITARY ACADEMY, E4AP: "Philosophy: Philosopher Dialogue", available online at http://www.chicagomilitaryacademy.org/ourpages/auto/2007/9/23/1190595536921/Philosophy%20dialogue%20example.doc, last accessed 15/4/2008.

discussion / Free Will and Determinism,"[15] and finally by David and Stephanie Lewis's *Holes*[16]. The purpose was to introduce and gradually get the student-officers to be more conversant with the dialogue process before being asked to engage in their own dialogue. Although the above dialogues deal with fundamental philosophical issues whose content and context would not have been appropriate for fighting men, their simplicity and the fact that the interlocutors appear to be ordinary everyday people made them ideal for the purpose. In studying the dialogues, student-officers were encouraged to relate to the issues raised and identify with the position of one of the characters.

The actual dialogue in which the student-officers participate started with the instructor leading the dialogue through questions and student-officers trying to establish the truth as they answer and comment on the questions. It involved a re-enactment of Bertrand Russell's "Appearance and Reality" where the question is posed as to whether there is any knowledge in the world which is so certain that no reasonable person could doubt it. The dialogue progresses with student officers identifying knowledge that they adjudge to be indubitable and the instructor taking them through a series of questions to the realization that such knowledge could actually be doubted. The instructor performs this role over five different knowledge ascriptions before asking the student officers to continue with the dialogue on their own. For this purpose, the twenty student-officers were divided into groups of four with two members of each group identifying something which in their opinion could be known without doubt and the other two members trying to identify circumstances under which such knowledge could be doubted. At the end of each dialogue, the group members change roles and re-enact the process. The instructor moves around the groups to observe the dialogues and offers suggestions as appropriate. After two full length dialogues the student-officers reassemble to discuss their experience with the dialogues and ask questions concerning the dialogue process and their progress. This process is repeated several times until the instructor is satisfied that

[15] VILKKA, Jouni: "An example of philosophical discussion / Free Will and Determinism", available online at http://personal.inet.fi/koti/jouni_vilkka/ExampleDialogue.htm, lasr accessed 15/4/2008
[16] LEWIS, David & LEWIS, Stephanie; *Holes, Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 48:2, 1970, pp. 206-212

student-officers had a full grasp of the process of using dialogue to expand one's horizons about a specific issue. This session served the dual purpose of familiarizing student officers with the dialogue process and exposing them to the infinite possibilities that are discoverable through dialogue.

The next step was to use dialogue to understand and form an opinion on an issue in military ethics. For this purpose, a recurrent ethical issue for the African military - the presence of child soldiers in a theatre of operations – was chosen for exploration. The main issue in the dialogue was whether or not an officer should order the use of lethal force on a group of child soldiers. In the dialogue process, one section of the group proposes and actively defends the point of view while the other section asks questions, seeks clarifications, criticizes, and generally engages the other group in an attempt to arrive at a position that is acceptable to all. The initial response to the question as to whether child soldiers should be visited with lethal force was an overwhelming yes and it appeared that both sections of the class felt there should be no further progress with the dialogue. The primary focus of their argument was that child soldiers present an imminent danger to the men and mission; therefore, there should be no hesitation in visiting them with lethal force. This unanimity of views and the danger of an impromptu end to the dialogue forced the instructor to intervene by introducing the UN definition of child soldiers and using dialogue to explore the definition with student-officers. The UN definition of a child soldier as "any child – boy or girl – under 18 years of age, who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including, but not limited to: cooks, porters, messengers, and anyone accompanying such groups other than family members. It includes girls and boys recruited for forced sexual purposes and/or forced marriage"[17] led to a significant revision of opinion. The idea that a child soldier is not always an armed combatant contributed to a rethink of the initial position and played a vital role in its reversal. While some were ready to visit lethal force on armed child soldiers, they were not so ready to do the same for unarmed youths who, while not armed were strategic to the success of the enemy force. Again

[17] UNICEF, Factsheet: *Child Soldiers*, available online at http://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/childsoldiers.pdf, last accessed 14/05/13

the idea that child soldiering is not always voluntary on the part of the children led to a drawn out debate where, for the first time, they were seen as victims rather than adventurers or mischief makers.

The idea that a child soldier is not always an irregular combatant but can be part of the regular army was introduced by the instructor and this further complicated the issue. The dialogue then turned to whether or not a 16 year old who voluntarily enlists in an army and has received full military training could be regarded as a victim in the same way as a 16 year old that has been abducted by an armed group and forced to fight. Variations in the circumstance of a 16 year old who enlists in the military were discussed. For instance a 16 year-old whose mother is suffering from a chronic illness and he enlists in the military because he needs the money for the mother's medical treatment. Suppose our 16 year old is really a pacifist but has been conscripted into the military? Then there was the question as to whether it would make any difference if the 16 year old is not combat personnel but rather belonged to the medical corps, corps of engineers or logistics. Student-officers explored the circumstances where 16 years of age would be a mitigating factor in deciding whether or not to use lethal force on a child within a regular army. To further enrich the dialogue, the instructor introduced the idea that child soldiers, by virtue of their age, are protected by several international conventions (including, the Four Geneva Conventions (1949), the Additional Protocols I and II to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 (1977), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), regional agreements (e.g. the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child 1990), the Convention 182 of the International Labour Organisation concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2000)among others.[18] The idea that child soldiers are not legally and morally culpable for their actions also raised concerns. Does a military engagement with children constitute a war crime, especially given the risk posed by child combatants who, despite their age are skilled in military manoeuvres and have been known to

[18] DRUBA, Volker, "The Problem of Child Soldiers", *International Review of Education*, Vol. 48: 3/42002, p. 272

pursue military objectives without inhibitions? Is it not the responsibility of states to protect its children and as such in a situation where one is on a peace enforcement mission is one absolved of such responsibility?

In the end, student-officers agreed that tactical and ethical decisions concerning child soldiers were not as simple as they initially appeared. But even more important was the fact that this conclusion was reached following philosophical dialogue by the student-officers who provided valuable insights to the issues discussed. The success of this initial dialogue laid the foundation for other dialogues on issues related to military ethics. Ethical and tactical problems relating to obedience (including illegal orders), regimentation, conscientious objection, sexual harassment and discrimination as well as homosexuality formed part of subsequent dialogues. In each case the dialogue was undertaken from a command perspective, in other words, what a commander would do when confronted with a situation. The issue of sexual harassment was approached from the perspective of harassment both within (when a soldier within ones command harasses another) and outside (when a member of the public reports harassment) the force and were considered in the context of peace and war. In these subsequent dialogues, student-officers were divided into two groups, with each group representing a different opinion on the issue. In all cases, the instructor was on hand to interject questions and introduce new trends when it appeared that a particular trend in the dialogue is no longer fruitful.

After a series of dialogues on issues that form part of the military ethics curriculum, student-officers were required to write and submit a dialogue of not less than two thousand words on an ethical issue relating to the speciality of the officer and arising from within a theatre of operations. As part of the preparation for writing their own dialogues, student-officers were encouraged to organise a conversation with their peers (who may or may not be members of the class) around the issue of their dialogue and record the conversation so that it could be analysed. The written dialogue however, is not supposed to be a mere transcript of the conversation but may be developed based on the discussions. In developing the dialogue, each of the characters should be presented as intelligent and discerning. He should be in a position to build good arguments that contribute meaningfully to the dialogue and not simply be

a straw-man that is refuted by the philosopher. They should be shown to be capable of criticising the central view of the discussion and making the dialogue philosophically interesting. The goal of the dialogue should not be to make one character appear more philosophically sophisticated than the others but rather to engender mutual understanding and appreciation of the issues in the dialogue.

The final stage in the use of philosophical dialogue in military training is to apply it to the Military Decision Making Process (MDMP). At this point, student-officers should already be well versed in the dialogue process to be able to apply it in war-gaming. The process usually starts with the receipt of a mission from higher headquarters. Following the MDMP the commander with his Chief of Staff (COS) or Second in Command (2ic), using the Standing Operating Procedure (SOP) are expected to make an initial assessment of the mission in order to determine what will be required for the operation. Student officers in staff colleges are introduced to such command duties during war-gaming within which real battle situations are simulated and student-officers are required to make decisions as they would in real war situations. Since war-gaming is a closed military affair, the extent to which philosophical dialogue helps tactical decision making can only be assessed indirectly by asking student-officers and the Directing Staff (DS) to report on it. In conducting the initial assessment of the mission, the general feeling was that sustained dialogue concerning the objective was not useful since the tasks involved where perfunctory and as such could not be refined and improved with dialogue. This is because officers are merely expected to perform very practical tasks which includes gathering such tools (Higher headquarters plan and operational graphics, map of the area of operations (AO), SOPs field manuals current running estimates) as would be required for operational planning, then update running estimates, especially the status of friendly forces and resources. The final task of this step which requires the commander and staff to conducting an initial assessment of the mission entails, setting the operational timeline, reviewing intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) and running estimates as well as setting the time required to position critical elements. Once this initial assessment had been done, the commander issues an initial warning order (WngO) for the mission.

Although philosophical dialogue has been adjudged as inapplicable during Step 1 of the MDMP, there are other steps in the process to which dialogue is applicable and they include; analysis of mission, Course of Action COA Development, COA Analysis, COA Comparison and COA Approval. It is within some of the tasks that constitute these events that the commander engages in what the military refers to as objective dialogue with his staff. According to Marr,

> Objective dialogue is the process, by which a staff enhances, or increases, the experience level of the commander by discussing the positive and negative aspects of a potential decision. By exposing the commander – virtually – to new or unfamiliar situations through mental simulation, objective dialogue counteracts the limiting effects of experience, and assists in preventing the effects of uncertainty, expectations and information inhibitors as well[19]

The above clearly illustrates why a course in Critical Thinking is an indispensable part of Staff College education and why it is important for its graduates to develop an enhanced vision of alternatives. A vision of alternatives is indispensable if staff officers are to adequately enhance and increase the experience level of the commander. This is because it is such a vision that will inform the preparations for their objective dialogue with the commander. Such a vision of alternatives is easily attainable if philosophical dialogue is utilized in developing the COAs for the different branches of the force that are participating in the mission. Thus in his pre-planning assessment of the operational terrain for instance, an intelligence officer will not only be asking his reconnaissance team for the usual information about the position, strength, hardware, supply route and morale of the enemy, the natural and manmade obstacles in the area, the presence of human settlements, economic infrastructure, places of worship, friendly forces, and so on but also about other seemingly irrelevant details which may enhance his vision of alternatives. What this means is that in debriefing the reconnaissance team, the staff officer will not only be interested in the bare facts but will also probe for hidden meanings which may not be apparent to the team at its initial assessment

[19] MARR, Maj. John J.: *The Military Decision Making Process: Making Better Decisions Versus Making Decisions Better*, unpublished monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

of the terrain. This ensures that his contribution to the commander's objective dialogue is rich, varied and comprehensive.

Introducing Philosophical Dialogue into the commander's Objective Dialogue process has the potential to expand the options available to the commander, but experience has shown that it irritates many commanders who view it as a waste of time. Such commanders could not understand the need for the extensive probing that goes with philosophical dialogue. For them, the dialogue puts pressure on other decision making processes by eating into the operational timeline which, even at the best of times, is usually inadequate. This is because the MDMP is, itself, is a laborious process. For instance, the commander and staff need to perform 41 tasks between the receipt of mission to the issuing of the Warning Order (WngO) for the mission. The tasks, a mixed bag of technical and analytical duties, also require interaction with other units, friendly forces and enemy forces. Even without the added complications of philosophical dialogue, commanders and staff have for a long time complained about the time and resources that go into using the MDMP in operational planning. Marr, for instance, observes that "unit performance at the U.S. Army's combat training centres (CTCs) suggests that tactical units have difficulties in applying the MDMP," and part of the reason for this is because they are too long for use in time-critical combat environments. This view is corroborated by Garcia when he claims that "observations from subject matter experts observing staffs during training indicate that they have difficulty conducting the military decision-making process." It is therefore no surprise that the officers did not warm up to Philosophical Dialogue at this level.

Conclusion

Since Socratic times, philosophical dialogue has been known to improve the quality of reasoning and by extension the quality of decisions that follow from such reasoning. The attempt to use such dialogue in military decision making followed from this proud history and from the onset, it was clear that there are benefits in philosophical dialogue training, just as there are benefits in other aspects of military training that aims at

developing the intellectual outlook of the officer. There is no doubt that philosophical dialogue is very useful in uncovering and understanding the myriad of ethical issues that arise in the conduct of war. Not only does it help officers to be conversant with current ethical debates but it also enables them to test the boundaries of what is and is not ethically acceptable. The efficacy of philosophical dialogue in operational planning, on the other hand, is not as generally accepted. Despite the use, by commanders, of objective dialogue in operational planning, an indication that a dialogue process is not entirely antithetical to military doctrine, making such dialogue philosophical, presented challenges, especially for officers who are used to dealing with 'facts.' Although it is common for staff officers to query each other's contribution to the commander's objective dialogue for hidden flaws and inconsistencies, making the dialogue process philosophical proved to be unnecessarily detailed for operational planning. This is especially so in combat operations or war-gaming situations where decisions have to be taken quickly. Given the fact that opinion is evenly divided in the ongoing debate as to whether the quality of decisions made using an analytical decision making process (such as the MDMP) is superior to one made with an intuitive process, it is obvious that extending decision making time through the use of philosophical dialogue is never going to be popular. This is despite the general agreement that a philosophical dialogue process had the advantage of uncovering vital information that would otherwise have been lost. This notwithstanding, there is general agreement that making philosophical dialogue an integral part of military training is indeed advantageous. Those who support the intuitive method as the ideal decision making tool for the military argue that, a training in philosophical dialogue could help expand the commander's experience, thereby enriching the knowledge database upon which his intuition is derived. Despite having doubts as to the efficacy of philosophical dialogue in operational planning, those who argue for an analytical decision making regime maintain that making philosophical dialogue part of military training sharpens the critical outlook of the officer and thus enhances his contributions to the commander's objective dialogue. In the case of the intelligence officer discussed above for instance, it is clear that a dialogue with his team as part of their training exposes them to the

significance of paying attention to detail thus making the content of their report richer. This tends to show that philosophical dialogue could have a multiplicity of applications when used appropriately and creatively.

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