

# H-Net Reviews

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**Martin L. Cook.** *Issues in Military Ethics: To Support and Defend the Constitution.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013. xv + 264 pp. \$80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4384-4691-2.



**Reviewed by** Donald MacCuish (Air Command and Staff College)

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**Commissioned by** Margaret Sankey (Air War College)

Ethics is a set of moral principles that guide people. They are, if you will, a code of conduct for individuals within a defined group. Lawyers have their own code of conduct, as do real estate agents, even gang members have a set of principles that guides their behavior within that group. So it is with the military. All military organizations have a set of ethical or moral principles that are considered the foundational elements that govern behavior in the profession of arms. Some of these principles are universal to soldiers, especially commissioned officers, across the world. Others are peculiar to a particular nation-state. Still others reflect the ethos of a particular service. This book by Martin L. Cook contains elements of each of these categories.

*Issues in Military Ethics* is an anthology of some of Cook's writings since 2004. Cook is well qualified to write on the topic of military ethics as he has taught ethics at the U.S. Air Force Academy for over six years. He is currently the James Bond Stockdale Professor of Professional Military Ethics at the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. In addition, he has a strong international reputation in this field.

The book is divided into five sections. The first is an overview. The second part, focused on civil-military rela-

tions in the United States, suggests that each nation-state and its military establishment have relationships unique to that nation and its culture. Section 3 is devoted to ethics education in the military, while the next section deals with the role of religion in the U.S. military. Finally, section 5 examines ethical issues in fighting war. Preceding the table of contents, the author also provides "The Officer's Oath to the Constitution," which many readers may find useful.

The first three chapters are quite straightforward. Chapter 2, a lecture that Cook presented at the 2012 Stockdale Symposium, offers some interesting thoughts to ponder about the legacy of Admiral James Stockdale, his experiences as a Prisoner of War, and his commitment to ethical education in the military. Many in the audience were Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) midshipmen and junior naval officers. The author could have edited his presentation to be more suitable for this book and a wider range of readers.

In chapter 3, he describes how September 11, 2001, changed the world. His view is that President George W. Bush's rationale for invading Afghanistan was based on the Taliban providing sanctuary to al-Qaeda. Countries have frequently provided sanctuary to foreign fighters;

and their borders have been respected. Cook misses an opportunity to follow this chapter with one elaborating on the legality and military ethics behind the president's decision and its larger implications.

The first chapter in section 2 raises the issue of senior officer involvement in policy formation while on active duty. Once retired, these officers criticize that very same policy. Here Cook adapts his original article successfully to fit this anthology. His other chapter in this section, coauthored with Mary Beth Ulrich, discusses several good points, such as the limits of dissent of senior military officers to their civilian masters, with regard to operational plans and strategy adjustment. They argue that officers' functional imperative of ensuring that political ends are attained cannot lead to the societal imperative of preserving the state's democratic institutions (p. 49).

Cook's best chapter in this section discusses his use of Thucydides's *The History of the Peloponnesian War* to teach strategy and leadership. He explains why the English translation by Robert Strassler is the best version available for senior officers. In chapter 9, the author does a sensational job of describing the tension between the principles of Christian peacemakers and Christians killing other human beings in war. Unfortunately, chapters 10 and 11 of section 4 read like a diatribe against Evangelical Christians (dispensationalists). Quite frankly his position is a little over the top. Cook implies

that since these non-mainstream Protestants actually believe in Jesus Christ's Second Coming, they would not be adverse to the use of weapons of mass destruction to step up the apocalyptic timetable.

The last two chapters in section 2 are quite interesting and worth reading. In both, he mentions several church fathers, Martin Luther, and Michael Walzer in the context of just war. Cook obviously supports the United Nations' Responsibility to Protect initiative, but in this discussion he misses the psychological, emotional, and mental traumas of soldiers involved in such actions as well as that of their family members. Finally, his dialogue about Europe's emphasis on soft power and the U.S. emphasis on hard power is quite good. Perhaps it would have been strengthened by mentioning Europe's two major wars of the twentieth century.

Cook's last section contains two chapters about the ethical uses of air power in small wars. Both chapters are from an airman's perspective. Perhaps other military ethicists would have a much different perspective particularly with regard to the use of drones and collateral damage.

Although some chapters in this book are well worth reading, overall this anthology is a disappointment given Cook's stature in the international military ethics community. It reads as a collection of works. The author should have taken the time to edit this collection into a coherent and smooth flowing volume.

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