

**An Introduction to Military Ethics: A Reference Handbook.** By Bill Rhodes. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2009. 224 pages. \$44.95. **Reviewed by Dr. Rebecca J. Johnson**, Assistant Professor of National Security Affairs, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University.

Few people would contest the claim that contemporary war confronts today's service members with complex, often difficult moral challenges. In response, the services have dedicated significant attention to preparing their members to face these challenges honorably. The counterinsurgency field manual added a chapter on "Leadership and Ethics for Counterinsurgency;" the Marines launched the Lejeune Leadership Institute in 2005 to promote ethical leadership development; and the Army stood up the Army Center of Excellence for the Professional Military Ethic in 2007, and has dubbed 2011 "The Year of the Army Professional Ethic." The purpose of these efforts is to prepare US forces to face the complex moral challenges of today's battlefield. *An Introduction to Military Ethics* provides a useful contribution to this cause. Bill Rhodes offers an accessible, concise primer for both those junior members of the armed forces who confront the moral challenges of combat daily and those more senior military and civilian leaders who are charged with preparing them to fight honorably.

*An Introduction to Military Ethics* is precisely that; Rhodes begins with a basic introduction to ethics, different approaches to ethical decision-making, and the various ethical tensions that surface within the profession of arms—the tension between freedom and necessity, one's role as a soldier and family member, the imperatives to win and fight within restraints, and the sometimes inevitable tension between conscience and policy. Rhodes does not resolve these tensions in the first chapter but clearly identifies some of the main issues junior service members grapple with as they develop their understanding of the requirements of their vocation. There is plenty of grist in the first chapter alone to produce a robust discussion.

Rhodes's ability to translate often intricate and jargon-laden concepts into language that a midshipman or cadet could read and understand (or that faculty could walk into a classroom and teach) is one of this book's greatest strengths. One does not need to read far before being struck by how clearly and economically the author is able to communicate important issues of military ethics. With so much of the ethics literature hampered by overly academic language, this contribution alone is enough to commend the book.

*An Introduction to Military Ethics* then provides a useful history and overview of what Rhodes calls "Just War Thinking" (a nod to the disparate origins and continuing controversies within the field). These chapters cover a lot of ground quickly, so the review is necessarily cursory, but it is sufficient to provide context for the remainder of the book, which is a useful explanation of the ethics of the military profession—the moral nature of the profession itself, military virtues, and the subordination of self, among others—and the challenges this ethical standard faces today.

There is no new ground trod in Rhodes's review of these issues, but *An Introduction to Military Ethics* provides the necessary foundation on which to explore the more complex moral issues facing those in uniform: How does one prioritize between force protection and noncombatant immunity? Should we treat insurgents as our moral equals? What is a service member's obligation to both remain obedient and dissent when necessary? One will approach these issues with far greater depth and humility after having read Rhodes's book.

As with any book, *An Introduction to Military Ethics* has areas that are stronger than others. The chapter titled “Cultural Ethical Issues” does not address how warfighters might honor their moral code when it comes into conflict with allies and adversaries who operate in very different moral systems, arguably the greatest and least explored ethical challenge of those deployed today. Rather, it examines cultural differences within the US service community by discussing the ethical issues surrounding the challenges women, homosexuals, and evangelicals both face and pose with their service. While these are important issues for the profession, they are disconnected from the rest of the book and are not developed sufficiently in the chapter to have the same value as the remainder of the volume.

While one hopes a senior military professional would already be conversant in the topics Rhodes covers, this book still deserves a place on the bookshelf. It is useful not only as a quick reference guide but more importantly as a useful teaching and leadership tool for commanders and instructors who seek to instill an understanding and respect for why the American military fights with restraint, despite our adversary’s best efforts to exploit our commitment to do so. This book is no rallying cry for “ethical warriors,” but it provides the necessary explanations of what it means to fight and live honorably as a member of the profession of arms, in support of commanders’ and instructors’ efforts to shape the moral character of their subordinates.

Without question, *An Introduction to Military Ethics* should be required reading at the nation’s service academies and ROTC programs. Discussing these issues as Rhodes presents them will not guarantee the proper moral formation of America’s next generation of military leaders, but it will certainly prepare them to understand what is required of them morally as they enter and mature in their profession.