

6-21-2023

## Book Review: Military Virtues

George J. Fust

Follow this and additional works at: [https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters\\_bookshelf](https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters_bookshelf)



Part of the [Defense and Security Studies Commons](#), [Military and Veterans Studies Commons](#), and the [Science and Technology Studies Commons](#)

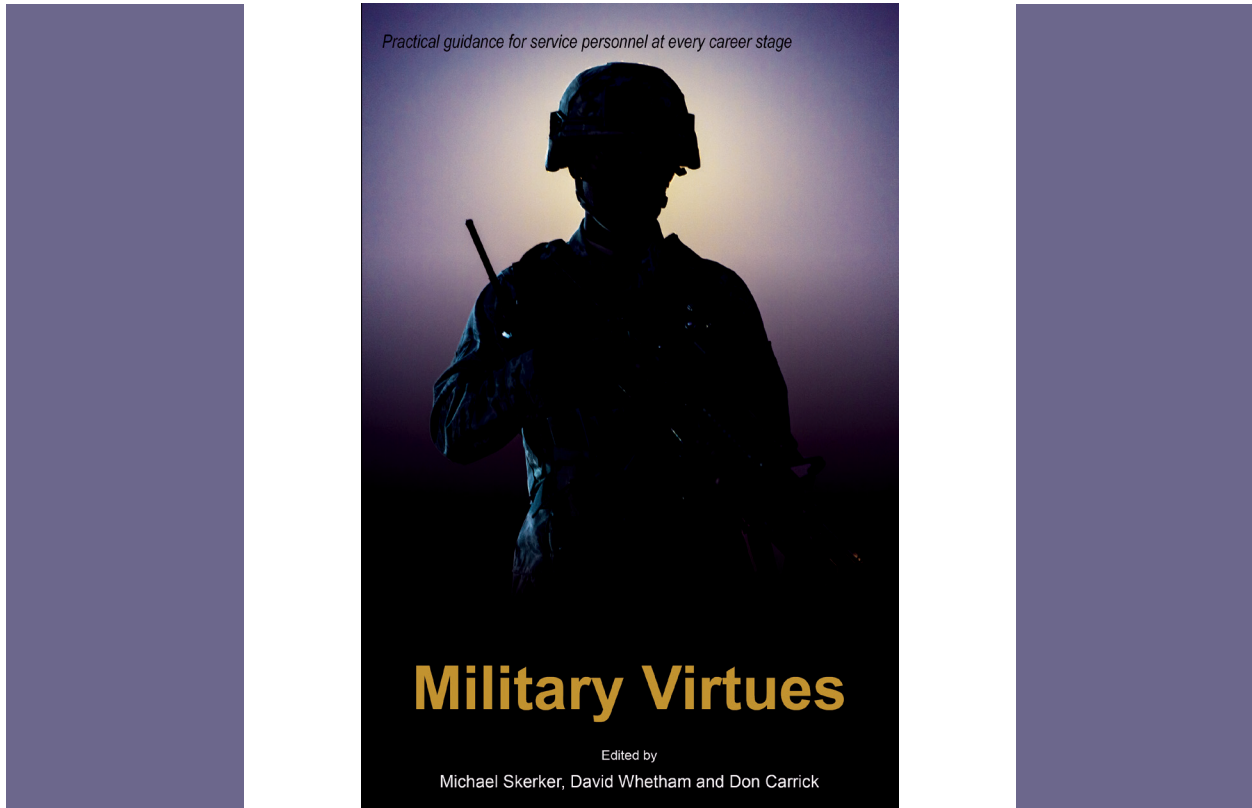
---

### Recommended Citation

George J. Fust, *Book Review: Military Virtues* ( US Army War College Press, 2023), [https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters\\_bookshelf/13](https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters_bookshelf/13)

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Parameters and Associated Collections at USAWC Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in Parameters Bookshelf – Online Book Reviews by an authorized administrator of USAWC Press.

## — PARAMETERS BOOKSHELF —



Reviewed by Major George J. Fust, active-duty US Army officer

Character development requires deliberate, lifelong practice, for which *Military Virtues* provides insight and an action strategy. The comparative advantage and underlying strength of the US military is often touted as values-based. The core curriculum across the Department of Defense enterprise includes basic instruction on intangible ideas meant to reinforce the ideology of a military built on virtue. These concepts are difficult to understand and implement. Noble efforts by the services to publish doctrine on the subject fall short of delivering precise tools for practitioners. They assume prior knowledge of the theoretical subjects or require personal experiences to draw on. For most, this approach lacks utility. *Military Virtues* serves as the missing link.

The anthology seeks to revitalize the application of virtue to the modern military environment. It is composed of a collection of essays by leading

scholars and practitioners. Case studies and vignettes in each chapter reinforce main arguments and drive further reflection. The book fills the gap between theoretical and practical application and answers the question, “Why did the service component choose this value?” After reading *Military Virtues*, readers will not have to accept military-prescribed virtues at face value because they will obtain an understanding and a moral map for dealing with ethical dilemmas in a clear and succinct way. Emerging adults responsible for the nation’s defense require actionable tools they can default to in demanding circumstances. This book is relevant to contemporary and future war in that it addresses remote killing, human enhancement, urban counterinsurgency, autonomous lethal strikes, and the use of cyber warfare.

The editors have linked the concepts together artfully. For example, trust and loyalty are approached from a vertical and horizontal perspective and then

nested with obedience. Current military doctrine lacks this clarity. Some chapters are at the graduate level and require more concentration and background knowledge, offering material for more seasoned leaders. Skerker, Whetham, and Carrick intentionally leave some questions unanswered to prompt discussion. At its core, *Military Virtues* offers unconventional, nonintuitive perspectives to reframe an important conversation and increase critical thinking and alternative outcomes.

The military must embrace the difficult but fundamental imperatives of virtues and moral relativism to function as advertised. *Military Virtues* provides a quick reference that belongs in every leader's unit development program. The format of vignettes relevant to key organizational values provides a foundation for servicemembers to face ambiguous situations. They offer mental models to complement the current top-down, rules-based method of military organizations

and can help mitigate blind obedience while strengthening an organization's moral courage. Addressing extremism and other corrosives in the military requires awareness of virtue ethics, and the development of virtuous soldiers prevents moral bankruptcy. It is not enough to teach character to soldiers only at initial entry because character derives from habits formed through virtuous behavior. Vignettes and literature guides such as *Military Virtues* serve as the missing link between desired outcomes and current character education.

Havant, UK: Howgate Publishing, 2019 • 410 pages • \$39.99

---

**Keywords: ethics, human enhancement, counterinsurgency, cyber warfare**

Disclaimer: Book reviews published in *Parameters* are unofficial expressions of opinion. The views and opinions expressed in *Parameters* book reviews are those of the reviewers and are not necessarily those of the Department of the Army, the US Army War College, or any other agency of the US government.