

“Forgetful Warriors”

--Neglected Lessons on Leadership from Plato’s *Republic*--

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Toward the middle of Plato’s *Republic*,¹ Socrates is portrayed as offering a somewhat unusual piece of advice concerning warriors and leadership. The advice is buried in the midst of a lengthy and somewhat rambling discussion, extending from Book III through VII, concerning the selection and education of a nation’s warriors and, ultimately, its political leaders. The commentary I wish to highlight occurs early in Book VI, immediately after the better-known discussions in Book V that culminate in Socrates’ famous suggestion that philosophers alone are qualified to rule the State [473 d].

The wide-ranging discussion to this point has led to consensus among the dinner-party participants that the proper education and training of the warrior and leader is a curriculum in what Socrates explicitly terms “military science” [πολεμική]². Such a curriculum properly consists (Socrates maintains) in a careful study of the core subjects that we now identify as “the liberal arts.” Having early on [Book III] discussed gymnastics, and “music” (which, with due caution about their heady effects on the young, encompasses literature and poetry), Socrates subsequent adds to these studies of “imitative” and transient subjects the study of what is timeless and enduring,³ as the

¹ I have used the translation by Raymond Larson, with introduction by Eva T. H. Brann (Chicago: AHM Publishing/Crofts Classics, 1979). All references, citations in square brackets in the text, and discussion of terminology and translations refer to the Loeb Classic edition of the original Greek, edited by Paul Shorey (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), and to Liddell & Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 7th ed. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975).

² 522 c, also translated as “the art of war,” or “warlike exercises” in Plato and Thucydides.

³ It is core Platonic doctrine, of course, that the study of the transient is of less importance than the study of what abides, and also (according to the simile of “the divided line”) that the study imitations of genuine things (e.g., art and poetry) is correspondingly of lesser value than a direct encounter with the things

course of study that will prove “most useful for warriors.” [Book VI, 521 d] These “higher” subjects include arithmetic (so that we might reliably inventory our ships and hoplites), geometry (so that we may size up the battlefield terrain, organize the proper number of hoplites into each phalynx, and deploy ships and troops to military advantage), astronomy (so that we might navigate the ships and position soldiers properly), and finally, dialectic, so that we might gain the wisdom and judgment to lead – i.e, the capacity to recognize, as Sun Tze also counsels, exactly when and where to engage the enemy, and when to refrain from battle.

Concerning the former subjects: in contrast to our modern tendency to emphasize the physical training of warriors, Socrates advises that too much poetry makes a person soft and dreamy, but too little renders them ignorant and incapable of sound judgment. [Book III, 411-412] Concerning the latter subjects, and especially dialectic: the often caricatured and somewhat misconstrued argument about philosophers in this regard is, in fact, a claim that the individuals who can best be expected to profit from such a curriculum are those rare individuals who innately possess what Socrates terms a “philosophic soul”—that is, these rare individuals are consumed by a love of learning for its own sake, together with a desire to understand what is unchangingly good and true amidst the bewildering backdrop of fleeting and transient opinion. Socrates and his companions concur that only such individuals, possessed of such learning, can be vouchsafed to place the welfare of the State and its citizens ahead of their own.

themselves. That does not mean that imitation and right example are without value, however. Socrates counsels: “If we want to keep to our original idea that our [*phulaké*, warriors and leaders] must be freed from all other crafts to be painstaking craftsmen of their city’s freedom, pursuing nothing that doesn’t contribute to this end, then they mustn’t do or imitate anything else. If they imitate anything, it must, from childhood on, be *men with qualities befitting a [phulaké]: courage, temperance, liberality, reverence, and so on.*” [Book III; 395 c; my emphasis]

To the skeptics and nay-sayers, moreover, who doubt the efficacy of such knowledge for the practice of military leadership, Socrates offers the amusing but telling allegory of a “topsy-turvy” ship:

“Imagine a situation like this, on one ship or many: a captain who outstrips everyone on board in size and strength, but [is also] nearsighted, partially deaf, and with [a] knowledge of sailing to match; sailors in mutiny over navigation, each thinking that he ought to steer, though none has learned the skill or can point to his teacher or to the time when he learned it, *who deny in fact that navigation can even be taught, and are ready to cut down anyone who says that it can,* always swarming around the captain and begging for the wheel. . .and on top of it all, they praise as a navigator and sailor with a [true] knowledge of shipcraft the man who [in fact] is sharpest [simply] at persuading or coercing the captain into letting him [steer]. . .refusing even to hear that a navigator must necessarily study the seasons and climates, the sky, the stars, the winds and everything else that pertains to his craft if he’s to become a true shipmaster. . .and [persisting in] disbelieving that there is a skill or practice of steering that can be acquired along with navigation. In such a state of affairs, is it any wonder that the true navigator is called a useless, babbling stargazer by the crews of such topsy-turvy ships?”

[Book VI; 488 b-e; my emphasis]⁴

⁴ The transparent comparison of such shipboard nonsense to analogous beliefs in the “ship of State” about the relative importance of the study of ethics for the practice of leadership, helps midshipmen and cadets understand that the widespread opinions of their elders that such subjects cannot be taught, or that their study serves no useful purpose, is hardly a modern (let alone a very sophisticated) conceit.

All these provisional findings converge toward a discussion of the characteristics of individuals that might distinguish them as suitable or unsuitable candidates for selection and education as warriors and leaders. If we seek to identify and enlist the right kind of individuals to study in our leadership⁵ development curriculum, and groom them as future guardians of the State (bearing in mind that any such individual will naturally be reluctant to assume the mantle of leadership), then, Socrates observes:

“ . . .we must first understand their nature. If we can agree on that [i.e., on what that essential nature consists of], then I think we’ll also agree. . .that no one else should lead in the cities.” [485 a]

He then begins to outline, with the help of his dinner companions, a provisional checklist of the *ἀρετή*⁶ -- the excellences, the necessary and sufficient characteristics -- that such individuals would possess as constituting their *physis*, their nature. They would, for example, love the truth for its own sake, and seek ever the knowledge of that which abides, rather than trafficking in the constantly-changing and usually uninformed opinions of society. [485 b-c] They will be concerned only with pleasures of the soul, rather than the desires of the body, and so will be temperate rather than greedy or

⁵ It is more customary to render *Φύλακῆ* as “guardians,” and the excellence or fittingness to serve in this capacity as *Φύλακικῆ* (“guardianship”), whereas a “leader” is customarily translated as *ἄρχον*. The latter is a *de facto* designation, however, e.g., for royalty, or for one of the nine magistrates of Athens, or for Agamemnon at Troy. The magistrates were corrupt and unjust, and Agamemnon was incompetent and tyrannical. *Φύλακῆ*, in Plato’s account, is a normative designation of merit, earned not conferred, and one who is a *phulaké* has already had to prove himself (or herself) incapable of being tyrannical, corrupt, or incompetent. Hence it seems clear in context that “leaders” and “leadership” would be as apt, or even more apt translations into English. Thus “guardianship” or leadership is the property of “citizens [who] have a knowledge, not of something in the city but of the city as a whole, that judges and deliberates how she may have the best relations with herself and other cities.” [428d].

⁶ Again, though *arête* is translated as “virtue,” it shares the same root as Ares, the Greek goddess of war, and connotes those excellences (like courage) most conducive to the warrior.

extravagant. They will not be slavish or petty; they will be orderly, but not cowardly or boastful [486 b]; and, in order to determine whether an individual possesses a soul suitable for the life of the warrior and the leader or not, Socrates advises Glaucon, “you’ll examine it from childhood up to see whether it is gentle and just, or savage and unsociable.” [486 c].

Plato is renowned (and sometimes reviled) for this kind of indifferent, other-worldly asceticism, and we might well wonder, perhaps with some amusement, to what extent his own list of essential virtues constitutes an exhaustive or even fully appropriate set of criteria for those who aspire to become military cadets or midshipmen today. In the midst of this discourse, however, Socrates unexpectedly offers the brief and somewhat unusual addition to the list of essential leadership traits to which I would like to call your attention today. He warns:

“If he [the candidate] is *full of forgetfulness*, won’t he be empty of knowledge?...Therefore we won’t admit a *forgetful soul* to our [community of leader-candidates]; [instead], *we’ll seek out the one that remembers.*” [486 d; my emphases]

Scholars of Plato’s writings are, of course, quite familiar with the theme of memory and forgetting in Platonic dialogues generally. But what are we to make of this reference, in this particular context, in which we are explicitly invited to consider the essential and necessary characteristics of the soul requisite for candidacy as effective warriors and ultimately, as the State’s leaders? What sort of “forgetfulness” is it that

Socrates has in mind, that would so decidedly *disqualify* a person for prospective future service as a warrior and guardian of the State?

There are, in the larger Platonic corpus, all sorts of references to forgetting and forgetfulness, of the sort that the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, found extremely suggestive. Not all of these references have a negative connotation, as the reference above clearly does. For example, the forgetting that takes place in the “Myth of Er,” in Book X at the end of the *Republic*, in which righteous souls are cleansed and reborn by crossing the “river of Lethe” in the underworld [610 c], seems to be a neutral if not a positive event (see below). Indeed, despite Heidegger’s interest in this theme in Plato and the pre-Socratics, the fascinating topic of forgetting in Plato’s dialogues generally has been slighted in favor of his more conventional discussions of remembering – that is, the so-called Platonic Doctrine of Recollection.⁷

The *amnesia* mentioned in this passage that I have highlighted, however, does not appear to be a constructive form of forgetfulness, but something that is negative and destructive, and to be avoided at all costs in the life of the warrior and leader. What sort of “forgetting” is this? All Socrates offers by way of illustration is the student or candidate who has difficulty learning, or cannot retain what he learns. So, not surprisingly, we recognize by analogy that the individual who cannot remember where he has put his rifle or his uniform, let alone remember how to clean, wear, or discharge them is incompetent, and not suitable as a warrior or a leader. The student who is weak-minded, and cannot remember or retain his or her trigonometric identities or derivative forms in calculus, or cannot master the essential regulations of the military code of

⁷ The sole exception is a remarkable dissertation by Patricia J. Cook, “Memory and Forgetting in the Dialogues of Plato” (Atlanta, GA: Emory University, 1992), which regrettably remains unpublished.

conduct, is likewise “forgetful” and (we might therefore suppose) not very promising as a candidate to fight for and protect, let alone lead the State.

Something about the entire, remarkable sweep of this discussion in the *Republic*, however, leads me to believe that Plato had more in mind than simple intellectual incompetence. He has, after all, taken pains (and as my mentor, Admiral Stockdale himself, might observe, quite a few rolls of parchment) to allow Socrates and his companions to explore the wider nature of leadership, and of the quest for leaders who would “not turn on us, but would love the State more than themselves.” And likewise, we know many fine candidates for commissioning who may not be “the sharpest tools in the shed” when it comes to remembering mathematical formulae, or keeping track of their car keys, but still seem to us exemplary candidates for service to their country.

At this point in Plato’s most famous dialogue, we are in fact primarily concerned with the themes of character and moral courage, and the kinds of properties and preparations that will, when combined, produce leaders of character, and warriors of moral courage, who can be relied upon to resist the temptations of power and corruption, and counted upon to do their duty in behalf of their fellow citizens and the State. What sort of “forgetting,” then, would it be that might threaten so gravely these desirable outcomes as to be specifically denounced and decried? Let me follow good Platonic practice, and sketch a hypothesis -- one that, I believe, comes close to teasing out Plato’s deeper meaning.

II.

A few years after the end of the Cold War, following the final collapse of the Berlin Wall in the fall of 1989, a retired former Soviet army officer, Colonel Vladimir

Malinin, related how he and his wife, Yevgenia, first learned for themselves of how the Soviet state dealt with political prisoners:

Yevgenia, an archivist for the state prison system, accidentally discovered a secret report written to Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev by the director of the camps administration in the Far East. The report recited a litany of horrors that shocked the couple out of their previous unquestioning devotion to the Soviet state. According to Mr. Malinin, the report recounted that 17.5 million people had been imprisoned in a sprawling network of labor camps for political prisoners in the Kolyma River valley north of Magadan between 1933 and 1952. Of those, the report said, 16.3 million had died of exhaustion or illness and another 85,877 had been shot to death. Having stumbled upon such forbidden knowledge, Mr. Malinin said, he agonized over it for months, then finally shared his secret and sought advice from a friend named Ivan Chistiakov, who held a high position in the Magadan regional administration. "He told me, 'It's better you *forget all about it*,'" Mr. Malinin said.⁸

Likewise, at the relatively advanced age of seventy-six, a former Japanese army physician decided to break a longstanding code of silence and denial and speak out for the record concerning Japanese military atrocities during World War II. At issue were allegations, never acknowledged by the Japanese, that army doctors had conducted a variety of cruel and scientifically unwarranted experiments on Chinese and Korean prisoners of war. The physician, Dr. Ken Yuasa, remarked:

⁸ *Newsday* article on Soviet prison camps, reprinted in *The Baltimore Sun*, "Photo helps ex-Soviet officer recall U. S. prisoner." Monday, September 20, 1993, p. 3A.

I must confess, with embarrassment for myself and the country, because I strongly believe everyone should know the truth. If I don't tell my story, *what the Japanese military has done will be forgotten* (erased from history).⁹

Forgetting, it would seem, is not always about mere dull-wittedness or simple-mindedness. Rather than being unavoidable or inescapable, it is often intentional. Forgetting, indeed, is the stock in trade of tyranny. What Col. Malinin uncovered was a strategy to *suppress* the deeds of an evil regime. Dr. Yuasa, by comparison, finally refused to condone *repression*, a conspiracy of silence and denial concerning medical and pseudo-scientific activities that violated established, universal codes of decency and humanity. The motivations in both instances are literally to cast these black deeds into historical oblivion, to have them (and the guilt of their perpetrators) *erased from history*. “We would not want the forgetful ones to be our warriors, or our leaders,” Socrates warns us.

Both strategies very nearly succeeded, save that someone, somewhere, chose instead to “remember,” for remembering is an act of caring. Czech author Milan Kundera maintains, in his *Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, that “the only reason people want to be masters of the future is to change the past.”¹⁰ Tyrants often see the need for this social or cultural amnesia,

⁹ Dr. Yuasa, imprisoned for three years as a war criminal at the conclusion of WWII, as quoted in an Associated Press article on Japanese war crimes: *The Baltimore Sun*, Tuesday, September 7, 1993, p. 7A. My emphasis.

¹⁰ Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (London: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 22.

this need "to change the past" either to hide what they have done or to disguise or distort what they propose to do. They threaten to succeed only when the rest of us cease to care.¹¹

“Therefore,” Socrates concludes, “we won’t admit a *forgetful soul* to our [community of leader-candidates]; [instead], we’ll seek out the one that remembers.” Could Plato be intimating something like this? It is not merely that we don’t want dim or dull-witted or thoughtless people to serve as our warriors and leaders. Even more we desire to exclude tyrants, for whom forgetfulness, cultural amnesia, is itself an instrument of ruthless, unprincipled political power? There are some things, terrible things, about which it is not finally “better that we forget all about it.”¹²

Lest my proposal sound like the worst kind of postmodernist anachronism, consider that several, and very likely most of the characters with whom Plato populates his splendid dialogue are, or rather were, in their real life, ghosts. Several of the voices gathered around that dinner table in this dialogue -- offering hypotheses about justice, moral virtue, a functional military science curriculum, leadership, and the State (including Socrates and Polemarchus surely, and on some less certain accounts, Plato’s brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus, as well) -- were, in real life, victims in the ancient “reign of Terror” that followed hard upon the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian war. Only the author of the dialogue, who lies hidden, concealed within it,

¹¹ Heidegger himself famously, if somewhat obscurely observes that “Care [*Sorge*] is the Being of Dasein.” See *Being and Time* (1925), translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. (New York, Harper, 1962), pp. 225-241.

¹² My reading is consistent with an earlier comment by Socrates [in Book III], concerning the method of educating potential guardians who would, later in life, transition from the role of warrior-protector to leader. For these, Socrates states: “we must examine the guardians and choose the ones who all their lives appear eager to do whatever they think will be advantageous to the city and who refuse to do anything harmful. . . .It seems to me they must be watched at every stage of life, to make sure they guard this conviction—always to do whatever seems best for the city—and *not forgetfully drop it through beguilement or force.*” [412e] As a result, Socrates suggests, “[f]rom childhood up...we must set them tasks that especially deceive and *make one forget such convictions.* We must watch them carefully and *choose the one who remembers and is hard to deceive,* and reject the rest.” [413d; my emphases]

was for certain spared. The very presence of these forgotten ghosts in that dialogue is an act of remembrance, recollection, resurrection -- an act of care, one that inhibits the otherwise-inevitable forgetfulness that is the cloak of tyranny and injustice.

And what is it that these forgotten ghosts discuss? Only a few pages earlier (fifteen, to be exact), toward the end of Book V, they discuss the terrible things that were done by Athenians in that war. Here Socrates gives what is generally regarded as the earliest systematic discussion in all of world history of what we now term *jus in bello*, the laws of war, the proper conduct of war, and the proper restraints that the warrior should observe, by asking the question we still have before us at this conference today: “how shall our warriors act toward the enemy?” [469 c] The ensuing discussion, to be sure, is only about what Greeks have done (and should not have done) to other Greeks. But we recognize that as an acknowledgement of what those who enjoy a moral status or standing owe to others who have an equivalent moral standing – what, in our idiom, human beings owe to other human beings who are not animals or ruthless barbarians.

For example, should we enslave our enemies, Socrates asks, or should we abolish this practice? What about plundering the dead in a battle? “Is it good to take anything but their armor, or is that just an excuse for cowards to avoid facing the enemy by pretending to do something necessary in poking around with the dead?” What about ravaging the land and burning the houses of adversaries? What about treating every man, woman, and child in a neighboring hostile or neutral state as our enemies, and killing or enslaving them after defeating them?

Wouldn’t these acts, Socrates asks, seem unreasonable and excessive? “Shall we make it a law for our leaders and warriors not to ravage land or burn houses,” he asks?

Shouldn't our warriors instead refuse to engage in such atrocities and instead pursue the quarrel only with sufficient force to resolve the dispute, regarding enemy combatants as potential future allies with whom they may one day be reconciled, and so refuse arbitrarily to burn their land, raze their houses, or to punish all of them indiscriminately with death or slavery? Wouldn't we want our warriors, Socrates asks, to behave with this kind of disciplined restraint? We would want our warriors not to "forget themselves."
[469c-471c]

The argument here seems quite clearly to be that those individuals who are prone to this special kind of forgetfulness are precisely those who would be most likely to commit war crimes. We would not want the forgetful ones to be our warriors and leaders, because they might forget themselves, forget who they are, and so engage in all sorts of terrible deeds in war. Socrates refers in passing illustration to the Homer's mythic hero, Achilles, who, in his raging, "forgets himself" and disgraces himself in the wanton and cruel desecration of the noble Hector. Sadly, however, the true historical referents for these discussions were not the mythical heroes of the long-distant past, but the Athenians themselves. In marked contrast to the advice emanating from the ghosts of their victims around the dinner table, the Athenians had certainly forgotten themselves, and had done all of the terrible things mentioned to one another, repeatedly: they had looted the dead, razed houses, burned neighboring cities, and slaughtered or enslaved their citizens – and, in the end, they had, during Plato's lifetime, turned upon one another, adding fratricide to their list of atrocities in an unjust cause. It seems quite reasonable to believe that, as Plato worked out this dialogue, he had before him the same memories as those of Thucydides, of what actual warriors had actually done, for example, at Melos.

In recounting that terrible and cruel encounter, Thucydides is often portrayed as an advocate of what we have come to call “moral realism.” The so-called “Melian dialogues” are virtually required reading in every introductory course in political science, where they are solemnly offered by guileless instructors as proof of the irrelevance of ethics in politics and international relations. Moral realism, or *realpolitik*, is the modern name formally given to the doctrine that the Athenians themselves espouse at the alleged meeting of their emissaries with the elders of Melos, that “ethics” is all about appearances, when in reality, the strong do as they will, and the weak are condemned to seek as good a bargain as they can obtain.¹³

The author of *The Peloponnesian Wars*, however, had a very different lesson in mind. Thucydides was a historian who first patterned historical narrative after Greek tragedy. As the disappointed and exiled Athenian general recounts the events of that lengthy war, the dismal end is already known to all his readers, and is throughout prefigured in the proud beginnings he relates. The tragedy of Athens works itself out relentlessly and remorselessly to its inevitable conclusion. The sin, as in all Greek drama, is *hybris*, arrogant pride, perfectly and poignantly captured in the Athenians’ haughty and contemptuous manner of addressing the elders of this neutral city. The lesson is hardly that “ethics doesn’t matter.” Quite the opposite, the clear moral of this story is what will happen to a people or a nation that loses sight of its moral compass, and forgets its way.

After Melos, who can shed a tear for the ultimate and inevitable fate of the Athenians themselves? They get what they themselves have given, and no worse than

¹³ Recall that toward the conclusion of Book I, Plato has the rival tutor, Thrasymachus, offer a highly similar account of the “true” relationship of justice to unprincipled power, only to have that doctrine’s incoherence and self-contradiction exposed easily by Socrates.

they deserve. We find ourselves wondering, as we read Thucydides' account of the relentless siege, persecution, and destruction of those who posed no threat, meant no harm, and had asked only to be left alone: is this what democracy, and the highest humanistic ideals of Greek civilization and culture, have come to?¹⁴ The great democratic experiment forged under Pericles, the shining city on the hill, has been forgotten. The Athenians, in their arrogance and cruelty, have forgotten themselves, and engaged in all manner of terrible excesses in war. Many of Plato's dinner-table philosophers were, in real life, among the last of Athens' victims, as that defeated society crumbled amidst recrimination, suspicion, and vilification following its military defeat.

More than two millennia later, an American Army helicopter pilot, flying a reconnaissance mission low over the treetops in central Vietnam, came across a terrifying sight. He saw his own troops systematically rounding up and executing unarmed and helpless old men, women, and children in a small village below. Chief Warrant Officer Hugh W. Thompson was a shy, humble, plain-spoken and largely uneducated man. He had certainly never read Plato. When he was asked, some thirty years later, why he landed his helicopter, pointed his weapon at his own soldiers, and thereby stopped the My Lai massacre, however, he answered: "those men down there that day had *forgotten* what we had come here to do."¹⁵ We would not want the forgetful ones to be our warriors, or our leaders. When Major General Anthony Taguba, U.S. Army, was asked to summarize the findings of the commission he headed, investigating the abuse and torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, he summarized the problem as a failure of leadership: "those men and

¹⁴ For this interpretation of Thucydides, which now enjoys wide currency, see the first chapter of Martin L. Cook, *The Moral Warrior* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), ch. 1.

¹⁵ Cf. the case study on Hugh Thompson in *Case Studies in Military Ethics*, eds. Rick Rubel and George Lucas (NY: Pearson Publishers, 2005).

women forgot their mission, forgot their core values, they forgot themselves,” he explained.¹⁶

It is thus not the forgetting of our wallet, or car keys, or even of mathematical formulae or legal cases that is to be avoided. Rather, it is the warrior’s or the leader’s *forgetting themselves* that is the unacceptable tragedy. We must not, Socrates warns, allow the forgetful ones to be our warriors or our leaders, lest in politics or in battle, they “forget themselves,” and engage in all kinds of terrible atrocities. The Athenians “forgot themselves.” Such forgetting occurs all the time, and is a constant danger, in Rwanda, at My Lai or in Abu Ghraib, in Somalia, Bosnia, or Sudan. Those who are forgetful engage in all kinds of terrible behavior, Socrates warns. We would not wish these forgetful ones to be our guardians, our leaders, our warriors.

Warriors, as guardians and protectors of the State, don’t do these terrible things – they themselves do not massacre, torture, or enslave the innocent. Rather, they themselves exist in order to prevent such terrible things from occurring, or stop them whenever and wherever encountered. Warriors themselves must always care, and must never become complicit in these ongoing acts of loss and forgetfulness.

In my country, and in the nations represented among the contributors to this volume, military service as a profession is now clearly linked to its high moral purpose in the defense of liberty, the protection of the most basic human rights, enforcing justice, and upholding the rule of law. The high moral purpose of military service is not simply the “defense of the homeland,” but in protecting homelands that are themselves morally deserving of such defense.

¹⁶ *viva voce*, in discussions following his lecture at the U.S. Naval Academy, during which it was clear that the “forgetting” involved was not confined to a few reserve enlisted personnel, but extended to the highest reaches of command. Cf. “Ethical Leadership, Your Challenge, Your Responsibility), 11th annual Stutt Lecture (March 22, 2005).

The role of the modern warrior is the never-ending struggle against the abuse of power by tyrants and criminals, as portrayed in the foregoing examples, and the protection of the vulnerable rights and liberties of their prospective victims. Warriors, as distinct from tyrants and criminals, use force reluctantly, and only when necessary, for this sole purpose: to protect the well-being of others, and never simply to harm them.

Warriors, of course, have not always remembered these things. And neither have the nations that select, educate, and deploy them. Remembering is an ongoing act of reminding, recollecting, and caring. Some might think it hypocritical or presumptuous of an American citizen, at present, to utter such sentiments. “Has not your own nation,” critics may ask, “forgotten itself, just like Athens did, as you likewise emerged somewhat unintentionally and unexpectedly from the Cold War as the world’s sole remaining superpower? Did your nation not “forget itself” by responding to terrorist attacks with torture, or with unauthorized war, or with domestic legislation (like the “Patriot Act”) abridging the rights of its own citizens at home?”

I am less certain than many critics that all of these charges are entirely true, or completely fair. What I would acknowledge is that, regardless of the arguments and interpretations attached to each of these specific charges, it is wise to confront them as cautionary tales of how easy it is for citizens and elected leaders to forget, and lose their way. As in Athens itself, such forgetting is the ever-present danger of democracy – as Socrates portrays it, “going here and there after transient opinion.”

What is genuinely new, different, and to my mind, hopeful, is that we have unquestionably committed in my country to ensuring that our nation’s *warriors* will not be so forgetful. Our students and future warriors are strictly counseled to stand by

respectfully, and place themselves outside the realm of public political discourse. Their role is not to participate, take sides, or become partisans in that discourse, but to protect the rights and liberties of those citizens who do. Their role is, as Socrates advocates, “to care about the State more than themselves.”

To this end, we now have a system of education not unlike that which Socrates recommended. Our warriors not only reflect upon the irreducible foundations of military leadership in justice and the Good. They also study the dangers of forgetting. From Melos to My Lai, from Achilles to Abu Ghraib, from Syracuse to Somalia, and on to Rwanda, Bosnia, and Sudan: they study warrior memory, and the dangers of forgetting. They are encouraged to reflect, through these case studies, upon the noble things expected of warriors (in contrast to murderers, tyrants, and terrorists), as well as upon the terrible things that otherwise ordinary, decent people may allow themselves to do, when they forget who they are.¹⁷

They remember that warriors abide by a code that is invariant, timeless, and eternal, and they remember the tenets of that code, the “Warrior’s Honor:” to use force reluctantly, and as a last resort, and only insofar as is necessary to attain their lawful and just ends; to respect the immunity of noncombatants, even when their enemies forget this, and to remember that they themselves must never become like their enemies in this respect.¹⁸ Most of all, they are encouraged to remember that no abstract cause or

¹⁷ One of the cases featured early on in the development of my institution’s character education program was the compelling book by Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the “Final Solution” in Poland* (NY: HarperCollins, 1993).

¹⁸ This phrase is taken from the title of a book by Michael Ignatieff, *The Warriors Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (Toronto, CA: Penguin Canada, 1998); these specific tenets are outlined by him at a lecture at the Naval Academy on “Virtual War” in the aftermath of the attack on the U.S.S. Cole (March, 2002). The broader concept of a “Code of the Warrior” is hauntingly summarized in a remarkable book of

principle is more important than those citizens who are its alleged beneficiaries. Thus no cause or principle is ever sufficient to justify instrumentalizing its likely beneficiaries for the sake of its attainment. Warriors do not break the law in order to uphold it, nor violate basic rights in order to defend them.

Warriors must never forget these things. In remembrance of these things lies the warrior's honor and moral strength, the trust of their nation, and the well-being of the world's nations and peoples whom they have sworn to serve and protect. And if we, too, continue to listen (as Socrates advises), such lessons:

“may preserve us, and we shall cross the River of Lethe without defiling our souls. And if we believe what I say. . . we shall ever hold to the upward path, and practice justice with knowledge in all that we do. . . and when, like victorious athletes collecting their spoils, we have won the prize for justice, both here and in the thousand-year journey we have gone through, we shall fare well.” [Book X, conclusion]

that title by Shannon E. French, *The Code of the Warrior: Exploring Warrior Values Past and Present* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).