Outsourcing Duty:
The Moral Exploitation of the American Soldier

Michael J. Robillard and Bradley J. Strawser
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Are contemporary soldiers exploited by the state and society that they defend? More specifically, have America’s professional service members disproportionately carried the moral weight of America’s war-fighting decisions since the inception of an all-volunteer force? In this volume, Michael J. Robillard and Bradley J. Strawser, who have both served in the military, examine the question of whether and how American soldiers have been exploited in this way.

Robillard and Strawser offer an original normative theory of “moral exploitation”—the notion that persons or groups can be wrongfully exploited by being made to shoulder an excessive amount of moral weight. They make the case that this exploitation accurately describes the relationship between the United States and the members of its military, and offer a thorough and in-depth analysis of some of the exploitative and misleading elements of present-day military recruitment, the moral burdens soldiers often bear, and the stifling effect that a “Thank you for your service” and “I support the troops” culture has had on serious public engagement about America’s ongoing wars. Robillard and Strawser offer a piercing critique of the pernicious divide between military members and the civilians who direct them. They conclude by arguing for several normative and prudential prescriptions to help close this ever-widening fissure between the United States and its military, and within the United States itself. In so doing, their work gives a much needed and urgent voice to America’s soldiers, the other one percent.

About the Authors

Michael J. Robillard is a former fellow at the Notre Dame Institute for Advanced Studies. Prior to his time at Notre Dame, he was a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Oxford’s Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics, focusing on issues of counterterrorism ethics. As a former US Army officer and Iraq war veteran, his academic research has focused on a variety of contemporary issues within moral and political philosophy, just war theory, and philosophy of technology. He also has published several popular editorial articles concerning artificial intelligence as well as free speech in academia in Aeon, Quillette, and the New York Times.

Bradley J. Strawser is an associate professor of Philosophy in the Defense Analysis department at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, CA. Dr. Strawser, himself a US Air Force veteran, received his PhD in Philosophy from the University of Connecticut, and has lectured on the ethics of war and peace, military ethics, bioethics, and development ethics throughout the United States and Europe. He has published in such peer-reviewed journals as Analysis, Ethical Theory and Moral Practice, Philosophia, Journal of Military Ethics, Public Affairs Quarterly, Journal of Human Rights, and Epoché. Dr. Strawser has published books with Oxford University Press, Palgrave Macmillan, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, and Routledge.
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