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Applied Ethics in Theory and Practice

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The position and development of military ethics in Slovakia

Jozef Rojik

Abstract

The present dynamic, complex, and complicated time period affects our lives seriously at both levels of global and regional relationships, which are becoming more complicated as well and, as a result, endangers the existence of the human life itself. As a result, people search for ways and possibilities to settle the situation with the aim to provide for their future existence. It is natural that there is less and less room to solve all the complications that are arising due to the development. In the present, a way which can be considered a solution is represented by an orientation to the positive influence of man, their actions, relationships to values and life. This path is especially closely related to moral values of man that are subject of ethics. Ethics as a science about morality is considered to be a practical philosophy ever since its establishment. This implies that it concentrates on the regulation of practical life, not on solving metaphysical problems of ontology or other theoretic areas of philosophy, although it is not possible to avoid these issues completely. To be able to perform its tasks in modern society, ethics must look for room especially in the area of mutual relationships and not in the area of separating people. Interpretations of morality are historically determined. Each individual has his/her own idea regarding the morality of people, his/her own ideals of morality, and selects paths and measures how to obtain them. We consider it necessary for the employees (Professional soldiers) of the Ministry of Defense as a part of their preparation to obtain required knowledge of this field, not only to be able to follow this knowledge but also to be able to form required values. This is the message of the article, which describes situation and development of military ethics in Slovakia, bringing changes to one attention since 1989; from after the revolution up to the present.

Keywords: ethics, morality, military ethics, sense of morale, ethical code of a military professional, ethical education, moral dilemma, reestablishing values, applied (practical) ethics, moral requirements.

In common and everyday life, we use many terms, the real contents of which we sometimes do not even realize. Frequently, we start to realize their real contents and meaning after we encounter a particular moral dilemma or a sensitive issue, or when we have to take up a position on an important moral issue. In particular, we realize the importance of moral approach or assessment in such extreme situations, as in the recent (19th January 2006) air tragedy of the military aircraft of the Slovak republic returning from a mission in Kosovo where 42 military contingent members died; when assessing the war in Kosovo; or various military practices in conflict regions, etc. Morality is a real social phenomenon and ethics is a rational reflection of a particular moral situation or a problem. Due to this practical and real dimension, we realize the importance of applied ethics as ethics focused on real practical problems. "Applied ethics enhanced its referential framework of theoretical ethics, it updates the ethical contents with a new aspect and practical intention." (Fobel, 2001, p. 17)

Even until recently, ethics used to be called the science about manners, i.e. science about morality and a relatively independent branch of study. Even if this basic orientation of ethics is still valid at present, we need to state that it exceeds its framework in the area of specificity and constructiveness. Current ethics is not a mere reflection of morality or a mere science about manners, but it is an active tool of change, of installing ethics into the specific and complex conditions of the praxis, including the military area. It has gained a higher degree of specialization and constructiveness. Its task is first to evaluate a certain level of the morality, but also to propose solutions, to help resolve moral issues in specific conditions effectively. Ethics of the enlightenment type is enhanced by ethical expertise, expert analysis and a suitable resolution of specific problems with moral content. This practical orientation is in compliance with new problems and ethical challenges. "The practical orientation of science, philosophy, ethics is in compliance with the new challenge and paradigm." (Fobel, 2002. p. 20)

In the area of military ethics after the revolutionary changes in 1989, the focus of attention became not only the issues of ethics education, which had been a part of military education in the previous regime, but also the issues of professional ethics of a soldier and the ethical aspects of a modern army in relation to the strategic orientation and integration into NATO. Re-installation of values was the hardest task in forming the new military ethics. Problems endured with values in relation to the functioning of the army of pre-revolution type, with personnel continuity, as well as discussions about the reform of the army. Moreover, this change was complicated and, at the same time, enhanced by the split-up of Czechoslovakia in 1993 and the formation of a new national type of army. The values, upon which the Czechoslovak army was built, education, and value preferences based on federal identity lost their importance and it was necessary to develop a new military awareness based on new identity, vision, as well as on education. Naturally, this fast and complex process caused value collisions and several hardships which were related to the issues of responsibility and competency in the new organizational arrangement, and how to execute value transformation which would reflect the new national and international element.

Education in the Ministry of Defense sector has been performed based on accepted concepts. However, none of these concepts has ever addressed education thoroughly, they are narrowed to one side of education, rather knowledge-based, only to apply certain forms of education, called "service forms of preparation", and only given to the personnel of the Slovak Armed Forces – professional soldiers and employees with the prevalence of mental work.

Education in the developing Army of the Slovak Republic, understood in such a reduced way, was executed based on the "Concept of Military-Civilian Preparation and Education of the Czechoslovak Army", accepted in 1991.

In 1993, the "Concept of Education in the Army of the SR" was accepted, introducing "service forms of preparation", social-scientific preparation for professional soldiers and civilian employees and military-civilian preparation for conscripts, which was changed to the patriotic and ethical education closely related to the use of traditions and work with the printed media.

In 1995, two forms of service preparation were introduced for professional soldiers: social-psychological and legal education, focusing on international humanitarian and military law and courses for commanders beginners focused on leadership.

A thought framework for purposeful educational work in the Army of the SR was given by military regulation Vých-1-1 "Education of the Army of the SR Members", effective as of 1st July 2004, which formulated a qualitatively different understanding of education, its position, and task in the Army of the SR. It introduced another service form of education focused on leadership in small units for small unit commanders.

Each activity performed in the Ministry of Defense sector and especially in the Armed Forces has a moral aspect. The purpose of ethical education therefore becomes a purposeful and systematic creation of values, norms, and ideals of the Armed Forces – a certain new military ethics. This also covers the ethics of a state employee and ethics of a professional soldier. A part of ethical education is the process focused on gaining habits and manners of social behavior required in society and in the Armed Forces in particular. The didactical intent of ethical education is the explanation of norms, principles, and rules of military ethics of a state employee, the development of positive habits and skills of solving various problems of moral action and social situations. From the point of this concept, the result of ethical education is a professional soldier – employee, who honors the required values, principles, and norms and acts accordingly.

Major methods used in this area, except for the necessary provision of knowledge, are argumentation approaches, evaluation, practical exercises, modeling of exemplary situations, and situation games.

Currently, this education is focused on the following objective groups and forms of education:

a) professional soldiers,

- Officers and Warrant Officers – social-scientific seminars

The topic is focused on psychological and legal aspects, leadership, current problems of the society and the Armed Forces.

- Beginning professional soldiers and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) - social-scientific seminars.

- Beginning professional squad and platoon commanders – basics of pedagogy, psychology, law, and leadership.

b) State service employees and public service employees with the prevalence of mental work – social-scientific seminars.

A challenge for the support of ethics in the AF SR was that the National Council of the SR accepted Law No. 321/2002 Coll. on the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic. The oath and moral values of the AF SR soldiers ultimately express what moral characteristics and values of soldiers of reformed AF SR are meant. According to the military oath, the main moral requirements are the fidelity to the Slovak republic, responsibility, honesty, bravery, discipline, and self-sacrifice of a soldier.

An ethical code is of great importance from the point of institutionalization of ethics in the Slovak Armed Forces. Since 2005, a committee of experts has been developing "Service Regulation on the Ethical Code of the Professional Soldier of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic". The service regulation is developed based on the Law No. 346/2005 Coll. on the State Service of Professional Soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic and it addresses:

- Human qualities in general. This point should contain qualities characterizing current humanistic principles. From the contents point of view, it should include the qualities, such as humanism, human rights for freedom and its forms, solidarity with other people, love the fatherland, attitude to nature and the environment, peace solutions for disputed issues anywhere on earth, right for information, etc.
- Personal qualities of a military professional. These should be divided into work qualities, to which belong the attitude to work and to profession, the development of relationships towards other military professionals, the ability to sustain creative environment, attitude to discipline, responsibility, creativity, assertiveness, attitude to education, etc. This part also includes qualities of will, to which belong purposefulness, patience, deliberation in action, psychical resistance, modesty, temperance, etc.
- An important group of qualities are social and moral qualities which need to include responsibility, honesty, bravery, a sense of righteousness, sense of duty, etc.

The purpose of this ethical code for a soldier is to adequately formulate the rules of behavior of professional soldiers of the Armed Forces of the SR. It stipulates the principles of behavior of a professional soldier of the AF SR when performing state service based on generally accepted and generally applied moral principles and values of social intercourse. Furthermore, it is a set of binding requirements for the behavior and action of a soldier. It stipulates the criteria for the assessment of moral behavior and action. It stipulates the criteria for the fulfillment of duties in the civilian life of a soldier, for the purposeful development of professional environment in the Armed Forces, i.e. the professional environment of military profession. It stipulates the criteria and binding norms of behavior, resulting from the best traditions of soldiers which originally in social values, which this profession serves, and which give identity

APPLIED ETHICS IN THE THEORY AND PRACTICE
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