
VALUES AND NORMS: DON'T "TEACH", ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENT ACQUISITION!

Author: Gerhard Kruip

In a world that is becoming increasingly complicated and ever more plural, not everything can be prescribed by laws and regulations. Furthermore, as individualization progresses, ties to conventions and social control become weaker. For these reasons, personal moral consciousness has to play a major role in our actions, if they are to be guided by moral rules. Professional ethics is therefore becoming more and more important, especially in areas that are literally a matter of life and death – such as medicine, but also the military. Though it may sound old-fashioned, “virtues”, meaning acquired moral skills, remain indispensable today. Moreover, since it is important that in any democratic society, members of its armed forces should regard themselves as “citizens in uniform” and conduct themselves accordingly, it is essential for military personnel to acquire a high level of ethical competence. Germany’s past renders this necessity particularly obvious. In extreme cases, military personnel should even be capable of refusing to carry out orders that violate human rights, based on the decision of their own conscience. In the German armed forces, this is to be achieved by putting into practice the concept of “*Innere Führung*”¹ (leadership development and civic education), accompanied among other things by “character guidance training” (*Lebenskundlicher Unterricht*). While the latter is provided by military chaplains, it is explicitly not “religious education”.

But what is ethical competence – and how can we help people to acquire it?²

Moral action cannot simply be equated with abiding by the law or following passed-down conventions or traditions. While neither are necessarily morally wrong, according to a demanding understanding of morals it is central that actors do not act on account of the prospect of a reward, nor out of fear of punishment, nor through conformity to a regulation or order, but based on their own moral conviction. As Kant says: “Nothing in the world, indeed nothing even beyond the world, can possibly be conceived which could be called good without qualification except a good will.”³ Thus

Abstract

Gerhard Kruip explains why ethical competence is indispensable for military personnel. Firstly, as a result of individualization, the individual’s moral awareness is increasingly important, and secondly, expectations concerning the moral judgement of “citizens in uniform” are generally high. Kruip believes that this conflict between subjectivity and the claim to universal validity of moral norms can be resolved from a cognitivist perspective: only a rationally justifiable morality can be acknowledged as right by each individual and at the same time by all. In other words, the justification must not rely solely on the individuals themselves, or on traditions or authorities.

From this starting point, one can sketch out the dimensions of ethical competence. The first of these, according to the author, is a cognitive, argumentative dimension. It consists of the ability to examine norms to determine whether they are right, as well as to analyze specific situations and the moral legitimacy of actions. The author outlines various suitable methods. However, it is essential that these partial competences be complemented by emotional and motivational aspects – in a sense, the “moral drive” that precedes any reflection.

This moral drive depends on internalization through the setting of examples, encouragement and recognition; classroom teaching of content and methods will not help to develop it. The corresponding learning processes should be based on “open communication oriented toward understanding, without coercion or discrimination”. Especially in an organization like the Bundeswehr that is strictly regimented and subject to everyday practical constraints, Kruip argues that it is important to create and enlarge islands of freedom to allow reflection on ethical issues away from day-to-day pressures of the job.

morality is necessarily something highly individual, highly personal. But how does that fit with the notion of common moral standards, which are also necessary? We generally understand morality to mean a fabric of norms that by definition is not different for every actor, but has a claim to universal validity. Kant, too, formulates his categorical imperative in this way: “[...] act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law.”⁴ For example, to assert as a moral demand that one must not commit murder only makes sense if it means that nobody anywhere at any time is allowed to commit murder – while acknowledging the

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difficulty that not every act of killing is murder (e.g. self-defense). But if moral norms are “general laws”, this can only be reconciled with the subjectivity of moral norms mentioned above if we simultaneously assert that morality must be rationally justifiable. Only then can one argue on moral questions and ask that others also engage argumentatively with the moral demand in order to understand that it is right (or possibly wrong) and act accordingly. Thus, the moral understanding that emphasizes the individual’s “good will” is associated with the choice in favor of a rational morality. It is a choice against conceptions of morality that trace the validity of moral norms back to feelings, intuitions or authorities of any kind. If the concept of “autonomy”, i.e. “self-legislation” (*Selbstgesetzgebung*), is central for Kant in this context, then this does not just mean a more or less arbitrary subjective self-determination – the meaning that has now mistakenly become established in everyday German. Rather, it means the orientation of one’s own good will to the moral demands that one has recognized as being right.

Justify norms, form judgments

This fundamental insight has impacts on our understanding of ethical competence. It must at least imply the ability to examine proposed norms with the aid of arguments to determine whether they can be considered morally right. There are various methods for doing this. In my experience, John Rawls’ thought model is particularly well suited to this task. It can be used without having to adopt his “theory of justice”⁵ in its entirety. Rawls proposes a thought experiment: he invites us to imagine an “original position”, where members of a future society meet to reach a consensus on the rules that will govern their future lives in that society. At this constitutional assembly, not only do all parties have the same right to speak and express their opinion, but they also make their choices from behind a “veil of ignorance”⁶. In other words, the participants at the meeting in the “original position” do not know what social status they will have in the future society. For instance, they do not know whether they will be an employer or wage-earner, black or white, rich or poor, male or female. This veil of ignorance has a very important effect on the moral quality of the consensus that is reached. Faced with a proposal for a norm, all parties in the original position ask themselves what it could mean for them in the various possible situations. They try to avoid possible disadvantageous outcomes for themselves. Thus the veil of ignorance forces everyone to picture themselves in every possible future situation, with the result that they adopt a “moral point of view” independent of possible selfish minority interests. Under this veil of ignorance, unjust norms that one-sidedly favored only certain persons would not be accepted. Participants in the meeting know that they could be among those who benefit least or not at all, so they will reject this norm. It is often possible to try to solve morally controversial issues by actually playing out a thought experiment of this kind (in a group, possibly also with shared roles).

But ethical competence certainly has another dimension, too. That is, if we wish to derive individual conclusions for action from moral norms, we have to apply those norms to specif-

ic situations and also analyze these situations as best we can. Just as a prescription cannot be derived from a mere description, nor can moral norms be usefully and correctly applied if we do not have sufficient clarity about the application situation. To obtain clarity, the Toulmin method has proven helpful as an educational “tool”.⁷ First we need information about the situation (“data”), which we then have to connect to a moral norm or to a value (“warrant”), via which we arrive at a “conclusion” about what to do. Furthermore, this norm or this value is based in more extensive value systems or moral theories (“backing”), which form the background for the validity of the applied norm. In moral controversies, the Toulmin method helps to identify exactly where disagreement lies. Participants in the debate may differ in their perception of the situation, or they may have different norms. This can occur both within one and the same system of norms, or they may come from different theoretical or cultural backgrounds. For this reason, every moral judgment must be justified with reference to the situation in which action is to be taken, with reference to the norms being applied, and with reference to the theoretical or cultural backgrounds of these norms. Exploring these distinctions can contribute significantly to making sure that in a discussion, everyone always knows exactly what everyone is talking about. This can then facilitate reaching an understanding, or at least provide a clearer view of why there is no agreement. One example of where this is helpful is in the case of an intercultural debate on the validity of norms.

A purely theoretical approach with situational analyses and moral arguments – a sort of ethical “dry run” – has its limits, of course. Things are more exciting and motivating if moral disputes between members of a learning group can be addressed. For-and-against discussions provide an opportunity to hone and examine the individual arguments, for example.⁸ Such debates take on a particular relevance when the participants find themselves in an actual situation that requires them to analyze and reflect on possible morally legitimate options for action. Ideally one would be able to take the time to do this at the moment in question. Al-

ternatively, it can also be useful to run through relevant considerations subsequently or based on a real example that has affected other actors. This would suggest that ethics teaching should be more closely integrated with other subjects in the overall educational or training context, at least at times.⁹

Moral sensitivity

The two cognitive dimensions discussed so far – analysis of the situation requiring action and the argumentative justification of moral correctness – are not sufficient for a complete description of ethical competence. There are two further dimensions, which are more emotional and concern the depth dimension of personality. One is the sensitivity to morally relevant aspects of a situation through which one allows oneself to be “affected” and challenged. This is often associated with empathic capacity, and requires receptiveness to the suffering of others. This sensitivity is closely linked to the fundamental willingness to be moral at all, to see oneself as a moral subject. Without this willingness, you do not even let things touch you in the first place, you do not want to be more

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accurately aware of the situation, and you do not take the trouble to reflect on whether the relevant prescriptive expectations are right or wrong.

In the case of the first two, more cognitive, dimensions of situational perception and moral argument, it is still relatively easy to imagine how the corresponding skills can be taught as a form of classroom “instruction”. The other two dimensions, however, can hardly be “taught” as a simple transfer of knowledge. At best, one can encourage and supervise learning processes – processes which certainly cannot remain extrinsic to the learners, but rather have a great influence on their personal development and

identity.¹⁰ Everyone will probably bring along some degree of moral sensitivity and moral motivation as a result of their upbringing and socialization. Yet development of the personality is surely not complete when we reach adulthood. Ethical learning should still continue after that time. Moral sensitivity and moral motivation are strengthened by people's experiences of receiving recognition in their environment as empathic and morally motivated individuals. For educational contexts, this means that the teacher as a personality and the learning group as a supportive environment gain particular importance. Recognition within a moral community, which the learning group can also represent, being confronted with personal stories, and the role model set by people who are

group reflects together on its learning process and possible disturbances or obstacles, analyzing and criticizing any possible hidden abuse of power, tabooization or threats of exclusion that may come either from the teachers or from the learning group. As part of such a feedback culture, teachers should also be willing to expose themselves to criticism, and sometimes even demand it, so that they can then attempt to improve their teaching practice and the associated appreciative and supportive attitude towards the learners. To encourage people's development into more reflective and motivated moral subjects requires a teacher who imposes the same demands on him- or herself, and who in this regard still sees him- or herself as a learner.

Of course, all organizations are influenced by practical constraints, command structures and specific rules that provide only limited room for communication oriented towards understanding. This is certainly true of the *Bundeswehr* with its strict hierarchy. Nevertheless, even there it could be possible, at least in training phases, to permit "interruptions"¹¹ in suitable moments, to allow context-based reflection on ethical questions. Jürgen Habermas uses a nice metaphor: "practical discourses, like all arguments, [are like] islands at risk of flooding in a sea of practice where the model of consensual resolution of action conflicts is by no means dominant."¹² When it comes to teaching ethical competence and its implementation, it is vital to protect these islands from being completely flooded. Instead they should be kept intact and, if possible, enlarged. Character guidance training offers the best opportunities for this if it enables at least a minimum "downtime" with critical distance from practice in the German armed forces. This would allow military personnel to establish relationships between their profession on the one hand and their personality and lifeworld on the other, without of course disconnecting themselves from their professional practice.

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acting in the morally right way can mean that morality becomes more important to a person and their moral motivation is strengthened. However, such learning processes must not be manipulatively shaped. They should remain transparent so that participants can explicitly reflect on them. This in turn requires open communication oriented toward understanding, without coercion or discrimination. To enable such communication, it is recommended to regularly set aside times for meta-communication in a learning group. This is where the

The Author



Gerhard Kruip was born in Munich in 1957. He is currently Professor of Christian Anthropology and Social Ethics at the University of Mainz, a post he has held since 2006. From 1975 to 1981 he studied mathematics and Catholic theology at Würzburg University, gaining his doctorate in 1989 and habilitation in 1995. From 1995 to 2000 he was director of the Catholic Academy for Youth Issues, and from 2000 to 2009 he was director of the Hannover Institute for Philosophical Research (FIPH). Since 2012, he has edited the theological journal

"ET-Studies" (Journal of the European Society for Catholic Theology).

1 The 2016/1 edition of *Ethics and Armed Forces* was devoted to “Innere Führung”, but it hardly touched on questions of teaching ethics. See http://www.ethikundmilitaer.de/fileadmin/ethik_und_militaer/E-Journal_2016-012-Deutsch.pdf (accessed August 17, 2019).

2 In the following, I refer both to my own experiences in university teaching, general adult education and ethics training for managers in the private sector, and to a project that was carried out jointly with the Working Group for Catholic Adult Education (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Katholische Erwachsenenbildung): Gisbertz, Helga; Kruip, Gerhard; Tolksdorf, Markus (eds.) (2010): *Ethisches Lernen in der allgemeinen Erwachsenenbildung*. Bielefeld. Specifically on ethical competence, see also with a similar concept: Dietrich, Julia (2007): “Was ist ethische Kompetenz? Ein philosophischer Versuch einer Systematisierung und Konkretion.” In: Ammicht Quinn, Regina et al. (eds.) (2007): *Wertloses Wissen? Fachunterricht als Ort ethischer Reflexion*. Bad Heilbrunn, pp. 30–51.

3 (Translated from German). The famous first sentence of the first section of Kant’s “Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals”. I recommend the following edition with its excellent commentary: Horn, Christoph; Mieth, Corinna; Scarano, Nico (2007): *Kant, Immanuel: Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*. Frankfurt am Main, here p. 18.

4 (Translated from German). *Ibid.*, p. 52.

5 Rawls, John (1993): *Eine Theorie der Gerechtigkeit*. 7th ed. Frankfurt am Main. [Rawls, John (1971): *A Theory of Justice*. Belknap.]

6 Originally, Rawls developed his thought experiment with the “veil of ignorance” to characterize the conditions of a just social order in the form of his two famous principles of justice. But it also provides a vivid method to check one’s own moral convictions for their fairness (impartiality). Therefore, moral questions about personal values can also be elucidated from a convincing perspective, which is why the “veil of ignorance” is often used as a catalyst for moral-practical discourses in adult education.

7 This stems from Toulmin, Stephen Edelston (1996): *Der Gebrauch von Argumenten*. 2nd ed. Weinheim. [Toulmin, Stephen Edelston (1958): *The Uses of Argument*. Cambridge.]

8 On this point, cf. Kruip, Gerhard (2015): “Moralische Konflikte – eine Chance zum ethischen Lernen?” In: *DIE – Zeitschrift für Erwachsenenbildung* 22 (1), pp. 45–47.

9 For this reason, in the Catholic adult education project mentioned above, we developed a concept for identifying implicitly existing ethical issues, initiating and monitoring a learning process in this regard, and then usefully concluding such an excursion into ethics in order to return to the original topic. See in particular the section “Vier Schritte zur Gestaltung ethischen Lernens” in Kruip, Gerhard; Winkler, Katja (2010): “Moraltheoretische, entwicklungspsychologische und andragogisch-konzeptionelle Grundlagen ethischen Lernens.” In: Gisbertz, Helga/Kruip, Gerhard/Tolksdorf, Markus (eds.): *Ethisches Lernen in der allgemeinen Erwachsenenbildung*. Bielefeld, pp. 15–55, here pp. 32–47.

10 Because the concept of “inculcation of values” sounds very much like a heteronomous transmission of moral ideas, in which the “obstinacy” of the subjects is taken too little seriously, today the moral education prefers other models of moral education such as “values clarification”,

“values development” and “values communication”. See in detail Roebben, Bert (2011): *Religious Education of Hope*. Berlin, pp. 19–41, and also Ziebertz, Hans-Georg (2003): “Ethisches Lernen.” In: Hilger, Georg/Leimgruber, Stephan/Ziebertz, Hans-Georg (eds.): *Religionsdidaktik. Ein Leitfaden für Studium, Ausbildung und Beruf*. 2nd edition Munich, pp. 402–419. However, the problem with this way of speaking is that the notion of “values” is notoriously blurred, which is why I tend to avoid it. Often it is more precise to speak of rights, duties, norms or principles or of attitudes and virtues, especially since the term “values” also plays a role in the non-ethical area, when talking about economic values.

11 Ralph Bergold made the interesting suggestion that ethical education could be conceptualized in the context of adult education as a “break”: Bergold, Ralph (2005): *Unterbrechende Ethik. Ein neues religionspädagogisches Konzept für ethische Bildungsarbeit mit Erwachsenen*. Frankfurt am Main.

12 (Translated from German). Habermas, Jürgen (1996): “Diskursethik – Notizen zu einem Begründungsprogramm.” In: by the same author: *Moralbewußtsein und kommunikatives Handeln*. 6th ed. Frankfurt am Main, pp. 53–126, p. 116.