

## **MILITARY ETHICS: THE DUTCH APPROACH – A PRACTICAL GUIDE**

**Th. A. Van Baarda and D.E.M. Verweij (eds.)**

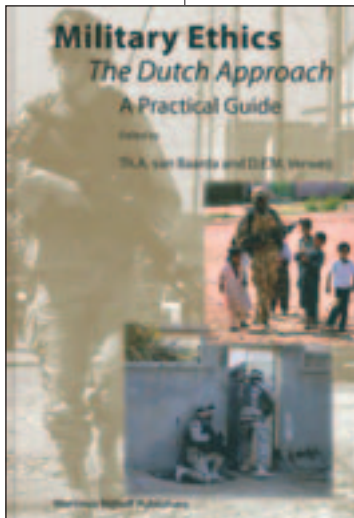
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**Reviewed by Dr. Daniel Lagacé-Roy**

**I**n the early 1990s, Major-General Messerschmidt, then commandant of the Royal Netherlands Army (Koninklijke Landmacht), recommended the introduction of ethics in military establishments to improve the quality of training with respect to ethical dilemmas. As a result, ethicists were appointed to the Royal Military Academy, and, during the autumn of 1999, the Ministry of Defence established the Bureau of Ethics and the Armed Forces. Soon thereafter, the State Secretary for Defence commissioned that bureau to draft a first book entitled *Militaire ethiek – morele dilemma’s van militairen in theorie en praktijk* (2002), and a second book entitled *Praktijkboek Militaire Ethiek*, which has been translated into English, the only difference being that Chapter 1 of the English translation is new.

*Military Ethics: The Dutch Approach – A Practical Guide* addresses the practical and the methodological aspects of ethical issues. It is aimed at those responsible for training and education, and is one of the few publications that deal with the question of ethics as applied in a military context. It is also useful for anyone interested in the subject of military ethics. This publication is an educational tool for preparing military members to recognize and understand ethical dilemmas, with the intention of improving their behaviour while engaged in operations.

The book deals with three major divisions of ethics as they apply to the military. The first division, which covers the first three chapters, addresses the nature of ethics as it relates to pedagogy, leadership, and ethical behaviour during operations. The second, which includes eight chapters, deals mainly with ethics as practised in the service environments; (i.e., navy, army, and air force); units (i.e., Royal Marechaussee/Constabulary); and support occupations (i.e., health care, psychology, social work, and counselling). The third division, which consists of five chapters, focuses upon training and the development of military members’ moral judgment by utilizing a dynamic model and a Socratic approach to teaching.



In the first section of the book, particularly Chapter 1, the editors have laid the foundation upon which the rest of book is based. For example, the nature of military ethics is presented as a “form of applied ethics,” and as a “teaching subject.” It requires a special approach that includes the self-development of military members (i.e., character-building) and recognition of the fundamental nature of the military as a profession. The importance of the development of military members is emphasized as a prerequisite to achieving “moral competence” and “moral integrity.” As for the military profession, the leadership component (Chapter 2) serves as a reminder that military leaders set the tone for “moral climate.” Finally, Chapter 3 addresses ethical and unethical behaviour during operations, and how such behaviour can be explained and interpreted. These three chapters remind the reader that military ethics requires members to continue to develop personally, professionally, and intellectually in order to cope with dilemmas encountered during operations.

Chapters 4, 5, and 7 through 12, written mainly by serving military members in different national armed forces, environments, and support occupations, are designed to present issues that arise in various situations. More importantly, while military members differ in the way they approach their specific dilemmas, their preparation for achieving ethical behaviour is quite similar. For example, in the Royal Navy, the teaching of ethics encourages the development of cadet officer identity (i.e., identity-seeking) by emphasizing their ability to make their own ethical choices. In the British Army, the focus of ethics is upon the development of “morally competent soldiers,” who, in turn, perform their tasks “...based on a reasonable assessment of the relevant facts.” In the Royal Air Force, ethics is addressed, using “moral competence” as a means to achieve the “knowledge and skills” necessary for assessing and resolving ethical dilemmas.

With respect to the chapters dealing with Royal Marechaussee and the support occupations, it is clearly identified that each of these specific areas of expertise relies upon the ability of members to exercise their duties, as prescribed by either their own set of values and legal frame of reference; (i.e., Marechaussee); oath (i.e., physician’s oath); standard of professional conduct (i.e., military psychologists); professional code (i.e., military social workers); or guidelines (i.e., confidential counsellor with respect to undesirable conduct). It is worthy of mention that these dual professionals present at least one common dilemma – the

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conflict between their original professional code of conduct and the military code of conduct. This specific moral dilemma, informally known as the “two-hats problem,” requires a “great asset” for solution, that is, the “individual’s integrity.” Consequently, a member should know how to resolve this dilemma by protecting both the “interests of the client” and the “interests of the organization.”

The last section of the book (Chapters 13 through 16) deals mainly with training and the teaching of ethics. From a logical point of view, Chapter 6 should be linked to this last section. While the target audience for this chapter is non-commissioned officers in the British Army, the information provided could easily be used by anyone interested in teaching ethics. The chapter’s main objective is to help “...the process of growing to maturity of the trainee,” and to prepare soldiers “...to reflect on a [an ethical] situation” by presenting the fundamentals (i.e., knowledge, scenario-period, role-play) of teaching ethics. For that reason, it is closely related to Chapter 13, in which a dynamic model, entitled “flow-model for a “well-balanced judgment” is offered. A step-by-step presentation of the model is described in Chapter 14. It is an introduction to its different aspects, and by means of a specific case study, it facilitates the application of the model by the instructor. It is also a detailed guide to engage an instructor in the development of a student’s moral judgment.

Chapter 15 recommends the Socratic dialogue as a valuable form of interlocution between student and teacher. The benefit of a Socratic dialogue is that “...the parties are themselves put to work in thinking about the question at hand; according to Socrates, truth that one has not discovered for oneself has no real meaning.” To practise such dialogue, Chapter 17 suggests a list of ethical dilemmas, meant “...[to] be used in dilemma training.” Finally, the Annex introduces three major ethical schools of thought: deontology, consequentialism, and virtue ethics as different methods of reasoning in terms of how to approach ethical dilemmas.

The nub of the preceding analysis is that the *Military Ethics: The Dutch Approach – A Practical Guide* is a teaching tool in terms of introducing the teaching of ethics from various areas of expertise, and an excellent source of information regarding ethics as it applies to the military. It is well documented, with good ethical dilemmas to illustrate the themes presented. From an instructor/teacher perspective, this book covers a range of themes that helps one comprehend and understand the nature of military ethics, and what teaching ethics implies.

The downfall of a book that covers a substantial amount of topics is that some of them may be, at times, redundant. To avoid this repetitive feature, an instructor/teacher could easily focus attention upon the three first chapters (the fundamentals of military ethics), then direct interest to a specific chapter that relates to their particular area of expertise, and, finally, consult the chapters that address the dynamic model and the Socratic dialogue.

Since this book is primarily designed for instructors and teachers, it requires a certain amount of experience with respect to the military and teaching fields in order to fully appreciate the different components of the argument. In addition, a certain knowledge of psychology and philosophy would be very helpful in grasping the subtle nuances that are associated with the development of “moral judgment.” The strength of this book is that it identifies ethics as an important “ingredient” in dealing with the complex and chaotic environment within which soldiers are now embedded. Moreover, it recognizes that the subject of ethics demands a way of thinking that requires a certain level of abstraction. While this is an asset for students in training when dealing with ethical dilemmas in a classroom setting, it could be a weakness for soldiers faced with ethical uncertainties while under fire, or when faced with other “real world” dilemmas. Time is therefore limited, and thinking through an ethical situation often occurs “after the fact.” This particular issue does not take away the need for ethical education and for “moral competence.” It only points out that ethical reasoning, as it applies to the military, is a long process, and, therefore, it takes time. Thus, a fundamental question is: Do military forces have time to devote for what is, in fact, the ethical development of their members?

In all, *Military Ethics: The Dutch Approach – A Practical Guide* is very welcome in the world of many close-knit military ethicists, and it fills a gap in providing the foundations for good practices in military ethics. It is an excellent read and it is highly recommended.

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