



Introduction to ethics in the profession of arms

Reflection circle G2S - n° 23

Général de corps d'armée (2S) Alain BOUQUIN

Published on 01/04/2019

L'Armée de Terre dans la société

Why a dossier on ethics? So much has already been said on the subject. Moreover, are the moral principles on which the military must base its action not well framed, accepted and recognized in our democracies?

The reasons are very simple: when one practices the profession of arms, a permanent reflection on ethics is indispensable. Indeed, the conditions, the context, the environment in which warlike action is carried out, as well as the nature of the adversary, because they are constantly evolving, require that these questions be constantly revisited.

It is a reflection that concerns both those who are preparing the future of armies and those who have to make employment decisions on a daily basis. This is what the French Army is committed to, which enriches its thinking on the exercise of the profession of arms, through a green paper entitled ["The alliance of meaning and strength"](#) which has just been published.

It is also a subject on which we old people, because of our experience, have things to say to the younger generations; if only to bring télt is, moreover, a subject on which we old people, because of our experience, have things to say to the younger generations; if only to bear witness, without trying to give lessons, but more by delivering the fruit of what may have been our debates, our dilemmas, our states of mind, with the hindsight that time provides...

What is striking is that this reflection seems to follow a pattern, to follow a path. The discussions held within the G2S illustrate this path.

In the beginning was the war...

Combat, the prospect of death, the one that one may be led to carry or the one that one accepts in advance, are at the centre of any attempt to reason the meaning given to military action. They determine the direction that soldiers want to give to an ethic that is specific to them and adapted to their needs.

Morality and ethics, force and violence, legitimacy and legality... are at the heart of their moral issues and their vocation. One cannot reflect on military ethics without first dissecting what the ethics of warrior commitment should be.

Larmaments

Immediately after considerations on the use of armed force come questions about the weapons themselves. Are they "clean", lawful, dignified?

These questions are particularly acute today at a time when the progress of artificial intelligence is opening up new prospects in terms of drones, killer robots and Autonomous Lethal Weapons Systems (ALWS): is it still up to man and not to the "machine" to decide whether or not to kill?

The growing confrontation with terrorist type adversaries, who no longer respect the combatant's ethics according to our criteria, and may use dirty weapons, raises other forms of questioning as to the nature of the equipment and combat procedures to be used to deal with them effectively.

Finally, it should be noted that military action is no longer confined to external theatres. It is also on national territory that the soldier must act, under the watchful eye of particularly attentive public opinion. It is therefore also the conditions of this new mission that should be considered in order to prepare for it.

Un original social model

This military ethic, which is largely rooted in operational engagement, determines more broadly the establishment of an organic, peacetime ethic that models the learning and adoption of a particular social behaviour: command ethics, ethics of human relations, a body of shared values cultivated with a view to the military purpose, specific status is a real military know-how that has been built up over time and is based on a deep awareness of the singularity of a military ethic.

Everything is conceived within the armies as if the fact of being potential comrades-in-arms were to guide a specific form of social structure: discipline, justice, spirit of sacrifice, relationship to decision-making, sometimes abrupt frankness, loyalty... are the most illustrative aspects.

A combatant ethic thus ended up setting the outline of a broader soldier ethic covering all fields of military life.

The dossier that the G2S is delivering to you proposes to follow this path of ethical reflection. It is not intended to set out intangible evidences or immutable rules: it reviews

questions that must be those of all those who practice the profession of arms (or intend to do so).

Enjoy reading it!

Title :	Général de corps d'armée (2S) Alain BOUQUIN
Author (s) :	Général de corps d'armée (2S) Alain BOUQUIN
Release date	19/03/2019

[FIND OUT MORE](#)
