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Chapter II

Do you care? Leadership and Care Ethics

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Abstract

The systematic focus on the ethical dimension is absent in most research on leadership. However, many of the problematic decisions that military leaders face in an operational context can be defined as moral questions and dilemmas.

Paying attention to the ethical perspective and so to the values and normative presuppositions in leadership research and practice is crucial. In this article the importance of the interrelation of leadership and ethics, and in particular Care Ethics, will be discussed.

Introduction

Many of the problematic decisions that military leaders face in an operational context can be defined as moral questions and dilemmas. They underline the importance of the theme ‘ethics and leadership’ and the interrelation of the two core elements of this theme. Yet, this interrelation is not always acknowledged.

What is acknowledged however, especially nowadays, is the fact that leaders often fail, either in politics or in business or in banking. In these contexts we seem to have many failing leaders. Business ethicist Ciulla starts the chapter ‘Leadership Ethics’ in her book *Ethics the heart of leadership* with the statement: “We live in a world where leaders are often morally disappointing”. Ciulla points out that not only leaders are disappointing; the research on leadership is disappointing as well. She maintains that research on leadership seems to be based on the question “What is leadership”. However, it should be based on the question; “What is good leadership”? ‘Good’ implies ‘morally good’ and ‘technically good and effective’. With reference to several philosophers Ciulla illustrates that the statement “he or she is a good leader” can only be true if the person in question is also ethically responsible. ‘Good’ can only be good when the ethical perspective is also taken into account. This seems convincing, notably, ‘good’ is a value judgement and values form the foundation of ethics. Ciulla shows that the problem with a lot of research on leadership is that the ethical perspective is not taken into account. Moreover, the systematic focus on the ethical dimension is absent in most research on leadership. This implies that important aspects of leadership are not taken into account. What is absent in most research is the description of the underlying commitments in the leader-follower relationship. It does not matter how much empirical data are collected with regard to leadership if no attention is paid to the ethical implications of these empirical data. Paying attention to the ethical perspective and thus paying attention to the values and normative presuppositions in leadership research is crucial, but, as indicated before, is unfortunately something that is not done. This is also indicated by Kalshoven (2010) in her book *Ethical Leadership. Through the eyes of*

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employees. To compensate for the absence of the ethical dimension Ciulla introduces the concept of 'leadership ethics' as a form of applied ethics that can contribute -in a substantial way- to the phenomenon of leadership.

The concept of 'leadership ethics' as introduced by Ciulla, can, in my opinion benefit from ideas developed in care ethics, as I will hope to show in this article.

Care Ethics

Care Ethics, one of the ethics theories and as such the youngest theory and the little brother -or sister if you like- of Utilitarianism, Duty ethics and Virtue ethics, can be of relevance with regard to leadership. In Care Ethics the relationship with the other (in non-philosophical jargon: the other person) forms the point of departure. This implies that Care Ethics does not start from an atomic concept of man, but focuses on the individual as embedded in a web of relations. This implies that it is thus a form of situated thinking and situated ethics and that it is concerned with values such as solidarity and empathy. Every individual is vulnerable and dependant and thus, in his or her existence, in need of attention and care. The principle of care is a *conditio sine qua non* in that sense. It forms the basis for moral and political judgement. 'Care' can be seen as a social practice. This focus on social practice is not always present in the traditional ethics theories, in which 'the other' is always 'a generalized other'. In Care Ethics the concern is about the concrete other, the actual other person.

As indicated before, Care Ethics places a relational concept of man opposite the atomic concept of man. A human being is embedded in concrete relations with others and this implies that care is closely connected to responsibility and the ability to assess what is necessary is a particular situation. The willingness to take care of the other is crucial in this respect. Tronto, one of the leading philosophers with regard to Care Ethics, maintains that the values 'attention and consideration', 'responsibility', 'responsiveness' and 'durability' form the nucleus of Care Ethics. Tronto has made a distinction between four aspects, or rather four parts, of care: The first part is 'caring about' which implies seeing and acknowledging the need for care. It implies knowing what is needed in a particular situation. I would like to add that this implies awareness, as will be shown later on. The second part of care is 'caring for'. This implies taking responsibility for the start of the actual process of caring. It requires more specific knowledge of the situation and it also requires empathy. For only on the basis of the ability to identify with a person (or persons) in a particular situation can care be granted. The third part of care is 'taking care of'. This implies the act of caring. Tronto also calls this 'repairing' and 'maintenance'. The fourth part of care is 'care receiving'. This fourth part, or form of care, is about the reactions of those who are the subject of care; those who receive the care that is given to them. These reactions are important with regard to the quality of care. Is the care that is needed and asked for, the care that is actually given? Or, is a different way of caring, or a different form of care, needed?

Tronto defines care in the following way: "On the most general level we suggest that caring be viewed as an activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web". 'Caring' and 'taking care' thus imply the

ability and the willingness to see and hear what is needed. It thus implies the ability and willingness to take responsibility.

Moral and emotional impact of military operations

The caring leader, who cares and takes care in the four-layered perspective on care, can be considered a 'good' leader in the moral/ethical sense. Against the background of Toronto's description of care we can state that 'good' -in the sense of caring- leaders are necessary, especially given the complexity of military operations, and given the moral and emotional impact of these complex operations. This moral and emotional impact is enormous. "There never was a war that was not inward" is the motto of Nancy Sherman's book *The Untold War. Inside the hearts, minds and souls of our soldiers*. Sherman, professor at Georgetown University and at the Naval Academy and trained as both a philosopher and a psychoanalyst, lectures on resilience, trauma and military ethics. Sherman's book focuses on the inner battles soldiers wage and on the moral weight of war. As Sherman puts it: "Most soldiers, at least the honest among them, fight inner wars as well. They wrestle with the guilt of luck and accident and the uneasy burden of killing and leaving the killing behind"². Yet, the moral and emotional impact of military operations on individual soldiers is not always acknowledged, neither by military organisations, nor by military personnel. The reigning digital mental model of idealized macho toughness in opposition to contemptible pusillanimity results in preference for a hard robust 'Stoic' attitude. However, this attitude shows a dangerous similarity with the strategy of ostriches, who, in an attempt not to look at the approaching danger burry their heads in the sand. Suppressing emotions and rejecting the learning process of creating an equilibrium with regard to the moral and emotional impact of war and the moral and emotional buoyancy to counter this impact, will eventually lead to psychological and social problems. I will come back to the concept of buoyancy at the end of this article.

The moral and emotional impact of war is indicated in an alarming article in the English paper The Guardian in September 2009, entitled 'The Hidden Army in UK Prisons'. It is written by Alan Travis, home affairs editor of the Guardian. Travis states that according to a new survey, the number of former servicemen in prison or on probation or parole is now more than double the total British deployment in Afghanistan. An estimated 20,000 veterans are in the criminal justice system, with 8,500 behind bars, almost one in 10 of the prison population. The proportion of those in prison who are veterans has risen by more than 30% in the last five years. The study by the probation officers' union Napo uncovers the hidden cost of recent conflicts. The snapshot survey of 90 probation case histories of convicted veterans shows a majority with chronic alcohol or drug problems, and nearly half suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder or depression as a result of their wartime experiences on active service. Those involved had served in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan. They are most likely to have been convicted of a violent offence, particularly domestic violence. The study provides the strongest evidence yet of a direct link between the mental health of those returning from combat zones, chronic alcohol and drug abuse and domestic violence. In many cases the symptoms of depression or stress did not become apparent for many years and included persistent flashbacks and nightmares. Professor Tim Robbins, con-

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2 Sherman, 2010, p. 1.

sultant clinical psychologist and former head of traumatic stress services at St George's hospital, London, states: "If we are asking people to do appalling things, to take part in regular fire fights and hand-to-hand combat, you get to the stage where it de-sensitises them to violence. It is not just these specific things, but also [for soldiers] there is the constant rising and falling of the level of tension. In combat, they are constantly on edge and after a while they become constantly on edge." Harry Fletcher, Napo's assistant general secretary, states that the high numbers of former soldiers in prison was unacceptable: "There is overwhelming evidence that support is not available of sufficient calibre when soldiers leave the service. The preponderance of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression is also alarming." Probation staff in 62 offices across England and Wales say the vast majority of former soldiers referred by the courts for criminal justice supervision did not receive adequate support or counselling on leaving the armed forces. Napo also maintains their military experience and background is not being routinely identified when they are arrested or convicted in the courts. It wants a specific duty to be placed on criminal justice agencies to refer service personnel for appropriate help and counselling. Probation officers point out that the military also urgently needs to provide programmes to tackle chronic alcohol abuse and domestic violence committed by those in their ranks and on discharge. The probation union's estimate of 20,000 veterans in the criminal justice system breaks down into 12,000 veterans on probation or parole, and a further 8,500 in custody. These figures represent 8.5% of the total UK prison population, and 6% of all those on probation or parole.

Obviously this is not just a problem in Great Britain, as is becoming more and more clear, given the reports on psychological problems of veterans in several countries. It seems dangerous to turn a blind eye on the consequences of the moral and emotional impact of military operations.

Moral professionalization

The danger of turning a blind eye on the consequences of the moral and emotional impact of military operations is underlined in Sherman's book. She points out that psychological anguish in war is also moral anguish, which is a fact that is too often ignored. There are always moral and emotional tensions involved. With regard to these tensions Sherman refers to "the inner war and its subtle moral contours"³ and the "healthy struggle in the best soldier"⁴. The story soldiers tell over and over again is about the battle to reclaim personal accountability and sometimes they don't succeed. Sherman tells us the story about Ted, a top-ranked West-point graduate and elite Army ranger, whom she interviewed for her book. Sherman writes: "I was stunned when I heard on the news in the summer of 2005 that he (Ted) had taken his life in Iraq with his own service weapon. (...) his moral idealism collided with the reality of the war in Iraq and the corruption of contractors whom it was his job to oversee. He went to war seeking adventure and proof of his warrior virtue. In the end he was sullied, morally undone, morally stripped. (...) Ted was the best of the best, but somehow war was able to undo him"⁵. There are more examples like Ted in Sherman's book. With regard to these soldiers Sherman states: "Though they do no wrong by war's best

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3 Sherman, 2010, p. 2.

4 Sherman, 2010, p. 2.

5 Sherman, 2010, p. 3.

standards, they often feel wracked by guilt, betrayal, and a need to make reparations”⁶. And she continues: “I urge that soldiers should not bear the moral burdens of war on their own (...) we need to understand the moral psyche of the soldiers far better than we do”.

‘We’ is the public in Sherman’s text. I would like to broaden to ‘we’ to military leaders, military educators and (maybe most important) politicians. Understanding the moral psyche (as we should do as Sherman points out) implies insight in ethics and psychology. In this article I will focus on military ethics, which I think, can play an important role, especially for the caring leader. As I stated before, it is dangerous to turn a blind eye on the moral and emotional impact of military operations, since moral questions and dilemmas - especially tragic moral questions and dilemmas - can have a detrimental effect on mental health, as Sherman shows in her book. And it is of course not just Sherman who provides us with this information. More and more reports on this subject are being issued.

The question that needs to be addressed is the question how military ethics can be of help in this context. My answer is simple, however, putting this answer into practice takes time and effort. So how can military ethics help? It can help by providing insight in the moral dimension of military practice and by creating and stimulating moral professionalization. In order to explain the meaning and implications of the core concepts in this statement I first have to define ethics and military ethics. Ethics can be defined as critical reflection on values, norms and related interests. Given this definition of ethics, military ethics can be defined as a form of applied ethics, which, like other forms of applied ethics such as medical ethics and business ethics, implies critical reflection on the values, norms and related interests in military practice. I want to underline the meaning of critical in this context. I use ‘critical’ in the sense of the Greek word ‘krinein’ which means ‘to distinguish’ or ‘to judge’. This meaning of ‘critical’, used by many philosophers, refers to the ability to judge. This first of all implies awareness of the signification and impact of values and possibly virtues that play a role in military practice. For instance the value of humanity and the virtue of integrity. Do the people involved in the practices in which values and virtues like these play a role, really care about these values and virtues or are they merely window-dressing or being politically correct? ‘Care’ implies, as is outlined above, that there can be no such thing as political correctness and window-dressing. What is the meaning of humanity and integrity, or, of traditional military virtues like courage, obedience and comradeship? Is the focus of these values and virtues inward or outward? For instance, are soldiers concerned about the civilians in their area of operation or only about themselves and their buddies? In philosophical terms: is the focus on the ‘self’ or the ‘other’? Or is it on the ‘self’ and on ‘the other’? And how can people learn to deal with the moral questions and dilemmas that result from this dual focus that is expected of military personnel? It seems obvious that military ethics and thus critical reflection is needed because of the complexity of military practice. This complexity is related to the monopoly of violence that is given to the military by the state in order to protect the values that the states wishes to hold on to (peace, security, humanity). However, military ethics is not an end in itself; the goal of military ethics is the development and stimulation of moral professionalization, which consists of six aspects. It firstly implies awareness of the moral dimension. This means that one knows and sees that there is a moral/ ethical question or dilemma at stake and that one can identify its underlying values, its rules and interests. Knowing and identifying, however, are not enough. For knowing that

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6 Sherman, 2010, p. 3.

there is a moral dilemma does not necessary imply that one is also capable of making an adequate evaluation of the different alternatives. One therefore, in addition (and thus secondly) needs judgement and (thirdly) the ability to communicate. The latter means that someone is able to discuss possible solutions, but also knows how to explain the moral dimension to others who may not have the same awareness. Subsequently, (fourthly) one must be able and willing to act, if that is what is called for. And do so in a responsible way. It is most important, however, that one must be ready to be held accountable (fifthly) for one's actions and decisions. This will be less of a problem, of course, if prudent reflection has accompanied the whole process. Last but not least, the sixth aspect of moral professionalization: moral buoyancy. This concept is related to the impact of the confrontation with moral/ethical questions and dilemmas. This impact can be severe as Sherman shows us in her book, and as the many reports on veterans indicate. Even if one is able to act in a responsible way when confronted with a moral/ ethical question or dilemma, and thus demonstrates the before mentioned aspects of moral professionalization, one's peace of mind can still be disrupted by the tragic choices one had to make. What is also required then is a good measure of buoyancy or resilience in order to deal with the impact of tragic choices. Moral buoyancy implies a humane attitude, moreover, it implies the ability to cope in a constructive way with tension, duality, multiplicity, doubt and conflicting emotions, all of which are part of military practice in complex circumstances. Soldiers are no robots and cannot become robots, for that would imply moral blindness and moral blindness easily leads to immoral and illegal behaviour. With reference to Shannon French, who maintains that the purpose of a code for warriors is to restrain warriors for their own good as much as for the good of others, I would like to end by stating that moral professionalism not only guarantees moral responsible behaviour it can also safeguard the person in question from the detrimental effects of the moral and emotional impact of war. Moral professionalization thus seems an important goal for caring leaders.