

Evolution of the Axiology of Military Leadership: Historical and Philosophical Aspect in the Context of the russian-Ukrainian War

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The theses of our research are the following: 1) the ideal of a military leader depends on the axiological field of culture and evolves from taking into account only military prowess to prioritising moral values; 2) this ideal is significantly modified under the influence of Christianity; 3) the current russian-Ukrainian war has demonstrated a conflict of axiologies and different understandings of military leadership.

The article demonstrates how the ideal of a military leader has changed. This makes it possible to understand the value conflict that is the basis of the russian-Ukrainian war: the Ukrainian military leader is oriented towards the Western paradigm, while the russian military leader is drawn to archaic ideals of warfare with their inherent cruelty and desire to win at any cost.

Keywords: military leadership, military leader, war, axiology

INTRODUCTION

War is a constant parameter of human existence. This was already noted by ancient thought, and it is not for nothing that Heraclitus, the first dialectician, wrote about the struggle of opposites as the basis for the existence of the world, calling enmity (war) the father of everything. Plato emphasised that eternal irreconcilable war between all states is an entirely natural phenomenon. Modern research only strengthens us in the rightness of the ancient sages. Thus, Z. Freud came to the conclusion that the irrational desire for death (Thanatos) is as powerful a primal force in the human psyche as the desire for life (Eros). Thus, according to Freud, war is a lifelong companion of humanity. The era of the collapse of colonial empires, which was the 20th century and later the 21st century, stimulated the accumulation processes of misunderstandings, conflicts, and destructive sentiments on a global scale. Ukraine has extensive experience in dealing with russians, who permanently return in their history to autocracy and tyranny, to the neglect, oppression and destruction of conquered nations. The problem of

military leadership, if we take the axiological aspect as one of its fundamental angles, is inseparable from the definitions of a just or unjust war since one should present a particular (de)heroised historical figure as a model with the ideals that inspired them to noble or man-hating deeds.

The current 'Doctrine of Military Leadership Development in the Armed Forces of Ukraine' emphasises the importance of the axiological factor: 'The leadership of military personnel is based on a common understanding of the values, normative rules, ethical standards, requirements, guidelines and characteristics of the results of leadership behavior, which are defined in the Doctrine. The general definition of military leadership can be expressed in one word – "trust"' (Doctrine of Development 2020: 9).

The article *aims* to provide a historical overview of the typology of military leadership in diachrony and to present the axiological principles that have become fundamental to modern Ukrainian leadership.

In our research, which synthesises axiology and philosophy's history, we use comparative and axiological approaches.

ANALYSIS OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

The problem of military leadership has repeatedly been the focus of researchers' attention. First of all, this is the psychological dimension of military leadership – the impact of the emotional state on leadership effectiveness, the role of the psychologist in its formation, behavioural reactions of the leader, algorithms of interpersonal interaction, issues of identity and self-awareness, etc. (Bartone 2006; Buresová et al. 2021; Chemers et al. 2000; Knippenberg et al. 2024; Luria et al. 2019; Ruiz et al. 2021; Shamir et al. 1998; Schaubroeck et al. 2021; Staal 2023). Related to this issue are questions about the socio-cultural context of military leadership: the impact of patriotism on military behaviour, the role of cultural intelligence, the universality of transformational leadership in different cultural paradigms, the effectiveness of differentiated leadership styles, etc. (Baker, Oneal 2001; Bass 1997; Benbenisty, Luria 2021; Rockstuhl et al. 2011; Wu et al. 2010).

Issues of axiology related to military leadership are usually understood by scholars in the context of practical ethics: the formation of a moral climate, its impact on the military, the implementation of ethical and avoidance of unethical behavioural patterns, ways to unite the community and implement a team philosophy, the role of spiritual leadership, etc. (Damian et al. 2023; Fry et al. 2005; Hannah et al. 2011; Kim, Vandenberghe 2020; Kolár, Rak 2018; Martin et al. 2021; Meerits, Kivipõld 2020; Salas et al. 2018).

In Ukraine, 'practical manuals with a psychological bias' prevail. This is, for example, the book by V. M. Moroz and O. H. Skrypkin referred to as 'Guiding Psychological Techniques: A Manual for the Company (Platoon) Commander' (Moroz, Skrypkin 2020). Let us consider that we are primarily interested in the history of the formation of the moral aspect of the problem, which is necessarily considered in NATO military standards. It turns out that we must look for sources not so much in military literature itself as in philosophical and cultural studies. These include such somewhat disparate studies as S. Abramovych's article on conscience as a historical and cultural category (Abramovych 2015), analysis of conflict in the works of Plato and Aristotle (Hirnyk 2003), research on the Roman army (Oliinyk, Stadnyk 2022), and some aspects of the chivalric ideal of the Middle Ages (Humennyi 2013; Zabzaliuk 2013).

Our topic is already considered in detail by the ancient Chinese commander and historian Sun Tzu (Sun 2024); it is also touched upon by R. Bonadonna, a modern foreign researcher who analyses Thomas Aquinas' view of the military leader (Bonadonna 2017).

The current 'Doctrine of Military Leadership Development in the Armed Forces of Ukraine' proclaims that 'the core values of the military personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine are honor, courage, loyalty, brotherhood' (Doctrine of Development 2020: 13) and even talks about the formation of a 'Warrior Ethos' (Doctrine of Development 2020: 10). However, how and why this value basis emerged, what stages of development it has gone through – all this is still out of the focus of researchers.

DIALECTIC AND EVOLUTION OF THE IDEAL OF THE MILITARY LEADER IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

The mass consciousness tends to attribute exclusively virginity to 'its' hero and exclusively negative traits to the 'other' hero, which in the 21st century is manifested in the situation of information wars. However, suppose we put aside the emotional aspect. In that case, it becomes evident that there is an almost complete identity of the ideal of a military leader in the Ancient East, in Eurasia during the Crusades, and among citizens of the USSR and citizens of Nazi Germany. In addition, it is sometimes difficult to tell where the border between an honourable warrior and a bloody criminal lies.

Thus, Homer poeticises his people, the Greeks. The plot of the 'Iliad' is not so much the story of the return to the Greek king Menelaus of his lawful wife Helen but rather the long siege of the magnificent city of Troy by the Greek invaders. The hero of the 'Iliad', Achilles, who can commit real sabotage, refuses to fight when other leaders take away his 'extra' captive Briseis, generously gives the corpse of the Trojan warrior Hector, whom he killed, to his wife and father for a decent burial. Thus, it is impossible to unequivocally assess the figure of Achilles, a semi-savage, crucified in his passions and violence, and simultaneously a model of nobility. For enemy soldiers and military leaders who adhere to a specific code of honour, their enemy sometimes develops this irrational respect, which means that the non-ideological ideal of the military leader is, to some extent, realised in the most horrific conditions of various military struggles.

This ideal did not develop overnight. However, it is impossible to deny the opinion of the great ancient Chinese strategist and historian Sun Tzu, who said that a wise military leader must consider such factors of the military situation as weather, terrain, morale and command (Sun, Tzu, 2024). Let us compare the strategic principles of such military leaders, quite distant from each other in time and space, as Sun Tzu, Alexander the Great, Hannibal, and Julius Caesar. It is obvious that they were all guided by common tenets: to concentrate their forces, to hurry to take significant positions, to raise the authority of their army in every possible way, which keeps the conquered territories in subjection, gives hope to their allies and terrifies their enemies, and not to neglect the political and moral resonance of their military actions.

Let us also consider the eternal problem of selecting the military elite. And here, numerical superiority, a 'meat' war (which, along with nuclear blackmail, is what Kremlin leader Putin counts on, in the absence of other factors), often solves nothing. The legendary feat of the 300 Spartans, who, under the leadership of King Leonidas, defended an essential position in the battle of Thermopylae against the Persian army of thousands, demonstrating the superiority of high spirit and conscious heroism over the slavish psychology of the enslaved crowd.

History has seen attempts to select the most potent and reliable warriors by considering 'natural philosophical' factors, such as Julius Caesar's recommendation to rely on those who blush in times of danger or Gideon's selection of warriors who drank from folded palms.

Sages have always conceived war as a bloody and even shameful affair. Situations such as the confrontation between the castes of priests and warriors (such as Brahmins and Kshatriyas in India) are characteristic of almost all archaic communities (see the so-called 'theory of three functions' by J. Dumezil (Dumezil 1952)). 'Thou shalt not kill' is one of the commandments of Moses, which separates man from God; Moses and David were punished for shedding blood (Psalm 5: 7). Military valour, however, has often been associated with cruelty and murder: David became a hero after killing Olofern, making Saul jealous, and Arjuna in the Mahabharata, on the advice of Shiva, begins to calmly kill his family members, fulfilling his duty as a Kshatriya. The ability to kill was a key indicator of military prowess in the ancient world.

However, from about the 6th century B. C., the period that K. Jaspers defined as the 'axial time' of history when eschatological consciousness emerges, and the sense of the value of each existence becomes unprecedentedly acute, respect for the enemy, even the desire to learn from him, is formed as a particular ethical principle. This is born in the format of the process of the first 'globalisation' initiated by the pharaohs and Assyrian-Babylonian kings. Finally, Alexander the Great, who defeats the Persian king Darius's army and causes his death, treats his enemy with absolute respect. This magnanimity gave him moral authority in the eyes of generations.

Accordingly, an indispensable feature of a noble military leader is now considered to be his morality; a new approach – in the spirit of moral evaluation – was formed in the bosom of globalised Hellenistic thinking.¹ A civilised military leader can learn, even to adopt the experience of his enemies: 'As Hans Delbrück noted, Caesar managed to concentrate in his army all the achievements of ancient military art <...> We can add that he accumulated not only Roman (cohors, acies triplex) but also barbarian (auxiliary units, battle tactics, elements of weapons) achievements from the field of military art, successfully combining them. Undoubtedly, he also referred to the military achievements of such figures as Alexander the Great, Scipio Africanus and Gaius Marius. Caesar may have even copied their methods (planning, offensive, element of surprise, reconnaissance, training, innovation, approach to soldiers, excellent command of tactics and strategy). Still, he managed to create his unique style of command and warfare' (Oliynyk, Stadnyk 2022: 228).

At the beginning of the 1st century CE, Plutarch's 'Comparative Lives' appeared, comparing about 50 biographies of prominent Greeks and Romans, most often famous as military leaders (Alexander the Great – Julius Caesar, etc.). Plutarch created, one might say, a canon of heroised life narrative, introducing, in fact, a biographical method: the author focuses on minor actions, words and jokes that reveal the hero's personality better than battles and glorious deeds, describes his education and upbringing in detail, and only then characterises great deeds and battles. It is characteristic that the 'Lives of the Twelve Caesars,' written at about the same time by the secretary of Emperor Hadrian Suetonius, contains, along with examples of true virtue, courage and nobility, evidence of depravity, sadism and profound contempt for the ordinary person. Greatness in the eyes of the Roman ruler is, first of all, the enormous scale of bloodshed and violence, the humiliation of individuals and entire communities. The same thing is essentially true in the Indo-Buddhist East, in ancient

¹ Of course, we mean the plane of the morality that was accepted in ancient pagan Rome.

China, and throughout the ancient world in the broadest sense of the word. The relativism of pagan morality, the indistinguishability of good and evil, the complete lack of empathy, and the underdevelopment of the category of conscience (Abramovich 2015) are due to the fear and worship of the blind forces of nature embodied in polytheistic pantheons.

THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIAN AXIOLOGY ON THE MODIFICATION OF THE WARRIOR'S IDEAL

A revolution in the view of the problem of 'war and morality' occurred with the spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire during the first three centuries of the Christian era. After adopting Christianity, a new view of war and, accordingly, of the commander was formed in European consciousness. On the one hand, the Bible, as already mentioned, proclaims 'Thou shalt not kill' as one of its fundamental maxims. On the other hand, it perceives war as a grave reality and calls on the commander to be firm in his calling while acting following specific moral criteria. Thus, the Lord addresses one of the judges of the Israelite Exodus with an appeal: 'Only be courageous and brave enough to do the law, as Moses my servant commanded you' (Nahum 1: 7). And since the church from the beginning sought to combine the spiritual heritage of Israel with the experience of ancient wisdom and recognised, for example, the authority of Plato and Aristotle, it was emphasised that the concept of just war in Scripture coincides in its main features with the reasoning of the same Aristotle, who considered just war to be a defense of one's community against enemies.²

This is connected with the final formation of the chivalric ideal, around which a lot of speculation has accumulated in our national science. This ideal had a powerful influence on forming the military elite in the civilised world.

Chivalry was a military structure in Western Europe (ακμή – 10th to 14th centuries); knights had to be guided by the moral models that were formed in the bosom of the Church. The starting point here was figures like Charlemagne, who tried to restore the Holy Roman Empire, albeit under the leadership of the Germans. The Christian understanding of military service and the view of the knight as a bearer of the highest moral virtues are now strongly disavowed since in post-Renaissance Europe, the ethics of Machiavelli, whose treatise 'The Prince' still defines the immorality that a ruler, and therefore a military leader, is supposed to cultivate in himself, prevailed in the field of politics and the continuation of politics by armed means. The ridicule to which Cervantes subjected the chivalric ideal in his 'Don Quixote' seems to have drawn a line under attempts to ennoble and spiritualise the military class. Nevertheless, chivalric virtues remain morally attractive to subsequent generations. A knight was supposed to be a servant of Good and Justice, associated with God and conscience. He had to be decent and brave in the eyes of others and in private before the All-Seeing Eye. A knight must be chaste, generous and faithful to his obligations. His word of honour guaranteed his contractual capacity; he had to defend the weak, help widows and orphans, and be honest and generous with his people and the enemy.

It was the reliance on the practice of chivalric behaviour that gave one of the greatest Catholic authorities, Thomas Aquinas, the basis for allocating space in his grandiose theological

² At the same time, Stagyritus also considered wars waged against barbarians in order to civilise them to be just. It is in this spirit that the philosopher raised Alexander the Great, for whom war became not only a field of self-assertion as a military leader, but also a way to spread Greek culture, which the Macedonian king sincerely admired.

treatise 'Summa Theologiae' to cover the issue of military command, which reminds the philosopher of an art that requires spiritual power above all. Aquinas's considerations of military command, in particular, lead to the recognition of the decisive role of the moral dimensions of the military profession (Bonadonna 2017).

It should be noted that Reformation thinkers inherited this set of ideas. Since the 18th century, these ideas of Grotius have become the basis of modern international law and the just war formula formed in the Reformation-inspired Anglo-Saxon environment (Great Britain and the United States). NATO's Euro-Atlantic standards are primarily aimed at ensuring the moral motivation of the military, and they are based on several thousand years of European and global experience in defending the homeland and its sacred places. Therefore, the introduction of NATO standards (about 1,200 of them) and their adaptation to Ukrainian realities is a priority for Ukraine. First and foremost, these are memoranda of the North Atlantic Council and its senior leadership: NATO's Strategic Command, its Military Committee, the International Military Staff, etc. These tasks are defined by our legislation ('Law on National Security of Ukraine' and Ukraine's strategic defense documents – the Military Doctrine, etc.). They include ensuring transparency of management decisions, democratic civilian control over the defense forces, attention to gender issues, combating corruption, etc. For example, in America, a statute has been created that deals with leadership in the army, and considerable attention is paid to the value system. Army honour is not just a moral guideline but is postulated as a virtue that binds all army values (FM 6–22, 2006, chapter 2, 2–2). It also states the need for empathy for prisoners of war and civilians, etc.

In contrast, Russia is guided by archaic ideas about how to wage war, which in this situation indicates the destruction of the moral factor. 'In the case of the Russian-Ukrainian War, we face a clash of European values and Russo-centric ideology' (Kačerauskas 2023, 149). Decisions are made by the aggressor in secret (in fact, solely), and the strategy and tactics of military operations against Ukraine are devoid of motivation. They are based on pseudo-historical mythology and outright lies, and numerous crimes are committed for which there is no amnesty: the destruction of hospitals, housing, kindergartens, churches, and educational institutions, abduction of children, the occupiers torture not only prisoners but also residents of the occupied territories, etc. The axiology of our northern neighbour is based on Soviet myths, which it is trying to impose on Ukraine at the time when our country is trying to get rid of the Soviet colonial past. Their commander-in-chief does not hesitate to voice lies about the 'brotherly' people and Russian soldiers-liberators who save Ukrainians to the whole world. He also does not hesitate to consecrate crosses from Patriarch Kirill, who in Russia calls on Christians to go kill Ukrainians, and 'political technologies simulate a reality in the minds of Russians in which they see themselves as defenders of peace (Honcharenko 2024: 333).

CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, we can reveal the genesis and nature of the evolution of the ideal of a military leader by isolating from the vast historical material the provisions that together form a specific idealised portrait that should serve as a moral model for the modern defender of Ukraine:

– The ideal of a military leader has been formed over many centuries, having gone from animal cruelty (when the number of enemies killed was valued above all) to a clear orientation towards a specific axiological scale, which can now be more important than a battle won by any means;

– A modern military leader relies on the general cultural experience of humankind, primarily the Western paradigm; the military ideal of the West was formed, among other things, in the mainstream of Christian doctrine (the theory of ‘just war’, chivalric ideals, etc.);

– Along with such traditional virtues of a military leader as *wisdom*, *courage* and *severity*, there is also an obligatory *moral factor*, which includes such aspects as *sincerity* and *humanity*; this is in line with modern NATO standards and is a guideline for our national commander, helping to solve the issues of everyday military struggle against the Russian invaders;

– The type of ‘Russian world’ military leader with a focus on disregard for human life and moral values of a European, deceitfulness, treachery, cruelty to his own and other soldiers, treason, dehumanisation, lack of concept of officer’s honour, and, finally, quasi-Christian religiosity combined with archaic pagan ideas, contrasts with the Western cultural experience.

Received 1 August 2024

Accepted 16 January 2025

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Karinės vadovavimo aksiologijos evoliucija: istorinis ir filosofinis aspektas Rusijos karo prieš Ukrainą kontekste

Santrauka

Mūsų tyrimo tezės: 1) karinio lyderio idealas priklauso nuo aksiologinio kultūros lauko ir vystosi atsižvelgiant į karinį meistriškumą ir moralinių vertybių prioritetą; 2) šis idealas veikiant krikščionybei gerokai pakito; 3) dabartinis Rusijos karas prieš Ukrainą parodė aksiologijų ir skirtingo supratimo apie karinę vadovybę konfliktą. Straipsnyje parodoma, kaip pasikeitė karinio lyderio idealas. Tai leidžia suprasti vertybinį konfliktą, kuris yra Rusijos karo prieš Ukrainą pagrindas: Ukrainos karinis lyderis orientuotas į Vakarų paradigmą, o Rusijos karinį lyderį traukia archajiški karo idealai, kuriems būdingas žiaurumas ir noras laimėti bet kokia kaina.

Raktažodžiai: karinė vadovybė, karinis lyderis, karas, aksiologija