

## Ethical Aspects of the Work of Rescuers During Extraordinary Events

Stepan Kavan

Fire Rescue Service of Czech Republic, Prazska 52b,  
370 04 Ceske Budejovice, Czech Republic

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**Abstract:** The rescuer profession is a service to others in need and it requires a personal, value-based and character disposition, education and mainly the willingness to risk one's life for another's. In addition to professional and physical preparedness, rescuers must maintain high ethical principles. In limit life situations, rescuers must adhere to not only legal regulations but also ethical standards of behaviour that are "above" the regulations and they can sometimes be in conflict with legal provisions. It is always a matter of searching for what is right and good during a particular incident. This attitude is especially aimed at finding and defining the basic values by which we can live, under the assumption that they will lead to justice and happiness.

**Key words:** Affected person, ethical aspects, extraordinary events, rescuer, adhere

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### INTRODUCTION

In their profession, rescuers must often choose the correct behaviour and conduct. The work and mission of rescuers is the first line of assistance and its priority must be technical rescue procedures with set priorities in the goals of saving life, health, property and the environment. The tactics of the individual units are usually determined by methodical materials (e.g., the order of actions of fire protection units, type activity). A certain dilemma may occur when attempting to describe forms of correct human behaviour in tactics. Usually, practical questions arise such as "what must I do, what can I do and what I am not allowed to do." Rescuers agree that every emergency is unique. Even more unique is experiencing extraordinary events by those that are affected by them. This group includes the people who are affected, their relatives, colleagues, friends, neighbours, random witnesses, rescuers, etc.

Usually, affected persons and rescuers deal with the negative consequences of events in a shared space and time which they try to reduce or completely minimize. During this time, everyone involved must also find a way to cope with their anxiety. Anxiety is one of the basic human emotions. It accompanies us through life from the day we are born (child birth) and it is naturally associated with negative experiences. Yet anxiety also has a "signal" function. It tells us in which life situations we are going outside the boundaries of our ideas and values for life. Singer-songwriter Karel Kryl sings: "thanks to the pain that teaches me to ask". During an emergency, the affected person moves outside these boundaries within seconds and hence such situations are first naturally accompanied by shock and subsequently anxiety. It is

therefore, necessary during rescue works to also treat the group of affected persons with knowledge and respect for their growing anxiety. This anxiety is almost always accompanied by fear from the new, usually unknown situation and fear of the future.

This study aims to reflect on the ethical aspects of emergencies (crisis situations). This essentially means the characteristic of the confrontation of rescuers with ethical dilemmas. It focuses both on correct conduct during emergencies, the public's perception of the conduct of rescuers during disasters and it also addresses the ethical aspects from the point of view of rescuers. The selected situations are documented in selected case reports. During considering and subsequent processing of the text, we proceeded from the general to the specific, i.e. by deduction.

Prior to resolving the ethical aspects in relation to rescuers, it is first necessary to characterize what the term "rescuer" means. Rescuers are perceived as people who have gained and mastered the competencies and professional skills to save people's lives and health. Rescuers carry out their profession as a job (professional fire fighters, professional medical staff, mining rescue service) or on a voluntary basis (members of volunteer fire fighter units, water rescue service of the red cross, speleologists rescuers, dog trainers, etc.). Generally, a rescuer is qualified to carry out specifically-targeted activities relating to the rescue and assistance to members of the general public whose lives and health are in danger as well as property and the environment. Generally speaking, it is possible to state that on rescuers are placed demands such as professional readiness, physical fitness, mental toughness and moral quality. Rescue activities necessarily entail situations associated with ethical issues.

## **CONDUCT DURING EMERGENCIES**

Ethics involves studying and evaluating human behaviour. Therefore, questions focused on what people “should” do lead to fundamental questions about the nature and purpose of human life. Similarly, however, different conceptions of life, whether they have roots in philosophy, psychology or religion have an impact on human behaviour and thus also on ethics. When looking at emergencies, we are not dealing with normal standards of behaviour; it is about finding what is right and good and how best to live and act in emergencies. This approach is primarily designed to find (and sometimes even define) the core values by which we could live under the assumption that they will lead to fairness and happiness (Thompson, 2004). Considerable demands are placed on the personal and value profiles of rescuers who must face extraordinary stress situations.

One of the fundamental requirements for rescuers is the respecting of the values to which they are bound in the form of a legislative measure in the form of an oath in which the rescuers undertake to respect fundamental ethical imperatives. An example is the service oath of members of the security forces: “I swear on my honour and conscience that in my service duties I shall be impartial and shall strictly observe legal and service regulations, carry out the orders of my superiors and never misuse my official position. Always and everywhere, I shall behave in such a way that my actions do not endanger the good reputation of the security forces. I shall fulfil my service duties duly and conscientiously and I shall not hesitate to risk my own life to protect the interests of the Czech Republic” (Act 361/2003 Coll., Section 17, paragraph 3).

For reflection of moral arguments in emergencies in terms of rescuers, it is necessary to know what the legislative basis is and what options rescuers have in a given situation. The ethical argument must start on a factual basis. An ethical argument without a factual basis is insufficient as a moral decision is always related to a specific situation and is influenced by various factors that cannot be overlooked (Thompson, 2004). When analysing what rescuers do in different situations and how they justify their actions, we come to the question on what such conduct and its reasoning is based. If we examine what is right or wrong or how rescuers should behave, we find out the basis on which something can be considered correct or incorrect. This allows us to focus on what the standards of the behaviour rescuers are. In these investigations, we come to several ethical dilemmas and even this study cannot provide a clear answer to them; yet I deem the very formulation of these dilemmas useful.

Is there a point beyond which rescuers should not risk their lives to help others? Should rescuers risk their lives for affected persons who do not deserve their help from an ethical viewpoint? When is the right time to tell an affected person a white lie or how to “dispense” the harsh reality of life such as the total actual extent of an injury to persons close to them, the number of casualties or the extent of material damage? Surely many such questions could be thought up.

Emergencies are both personal and social issues. A tense situation affects the thinking and behaviour of rescuers and the affected persons. Human error may often occur on the basis of fear for one’s life, the lives of loved ones, feeling of a threat to property, loss of freedom of choice, fear of possible punishment, worry about the safety of oneself, family, etc. People usually judge and evaluate the level of a threat according to their own experience and not according to the actual situation. Accidents affect the psyche of anyone who is involved in an emergency and the mental toughness and ethical anchoring of each individual thus becomes very important (Antusak, 2009).

## **ETHICS OF EMERGENCIES IN A SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT**

All moral dilemmas arise in social contexts and relate to the ways people behave toward each other. One way of thinking about moral dilemmas is the perspective from the point of view of the needs of the society in which there is an artificial step back from the perspective of the individual and the particular situation. This approach has a long tradition from Plato’s arguments about the proper relationship between the three different classes of people in a state, through Hobbes and Locke and who observe the contractual basis of social behaviour all the way to thinkers such as Hegel and Marx, who perceive the growth of moral choices from social and political situations. In this conceptualization, ethics overlaps with social and political theories but its specific contribution is based on examining the rights that are granted to members of a relevant society and the obligations that such membership requires.

If we also think about society and its rules in general from the perspective of rescuers, it raises another perspective dimension. An individual can do something that he feels is right not out of conviction or on the basis of a conscious choice but only because society expects it of him and pays him to do it. Therefore, this approach can be seen as the result of social learning. Are these also cases of the moral behaviour of an individual? Do societal expectations force rescuers to act according to high moral

standards? Do the moral values of conduct depend on the individual or on the society that developed the relevant social norm and instilled it in the individual? Different societies hold different ethical standards. What one society considers to be good and right may be illegal in another society. It is therefore necessary to also think on the level of an argument that considers the rights and obligations recognized and required by a society and it is necessary to ask the question whether they can be rationally justified (Thompson, 2004). One example is the problematic situation of rescuers wherein an injured person or his loved ones claim to belong to the Jehovah's Witnesses and refuse a blood transfusion. In relation to these considerations, we return to the basic philosophical questions of what society is and how it is formed. These issues were examined by Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke and others. So should rescuers be taught to think philosophically?

One of the basic approaches when evaluating behaviour is the human conscience and the point of measure of assessing human behaviour is conscience. The conscience gives a person the ability to morally evaluate their conduct. The Latin word for conscience, "conscientia" is a combination of the words "con" (with) and "scire" (to know). Although, rational essence is etymologically highlighted, the concept of conscience is not clear and is used in various contexts (a conscientious person, freedom of conscience cannot be done on the basis of conscience, etc.). From the perspective of contemporary philosophical anthropology in particular man's responsibility comes to the forefront in connection with conscience and conscience is seen as a function of the entire personality. Conscience is thus "our own requirements on ourselves" (Jankovsky, 2003). With regard to rescuers experiences of rescue operations may intensively manifest as high-intensity personal experiences but also as a dimension that extends beyond man. The content of conscience is strongly influenced by sociocultural influences. Despite some dependence on external effects, conscience is contained within humans before hand (e.g., sense of gratitude, truth, value of life).

In terms of emergencies and crisis situations, it is necessary not to forget about crisis ethics which deals with the implementation and application of ethical principles to the level of crisis management, i.e., risk management and crisis management. Crisis ethics deals with the ethical aspects of decision-making of crisis authorities and managers in the process of coping with emergencies and crisis phenomena. It emphasizes theoretical knowledge and the pursuit of true knowledge of reality. Unlike normal life "at peace", during emergencies, the commander during an intervention and

other head employees are liable not only for the quality of their decisions but also for the social, moral and economic consequences. They must responsibly resolve how quickly they manage to eliminate the threat to the life and health of the population, how quickly they can get the situation under control and how to reduce or limit damage and loss. Apart from the perspective of society evaluating the activities of a crisis manager, the question arises how the crisis manager will evaluate the act himself (Antusak, 2009). In terms of management and command during emergencies, an essential fact is that the manager risks the rescuers' lives. He decides how far he will go in this moral dilemma.

In terms of social context, it is necessary to reflect on the fact that the affected person is that much more vulnerable the more passive his role in an assisting (saving) relationship is and his capacity and abilities are reduced. The risk that the impact of the rescue operation will include the inactivity of the affected person is contained in ethical decision-making regarding general help but it can also be applied to rescue operations. An ethical dilemma is there not only in situations when rescuers make decisions on the impact of their decisions on the affected person, who is the subject of the decision, over whom they therefore have "power" and if they establish a relationship with the affected person, they may find themselves in a situation where will be forced to deal with an ethical dilemma. These are so-called secondary risks that may change the nature of human behaviour and all of society (Princova, 2014).

## **PERFORMANCE OF THE RESCUE PROFESSION**

The rescue profession is connected to a number of difficulties, problems and disappointments. Work (service) for others requires from those who provide it certain personal, value-based and character dispositions as well as education and in particular the willingness to risk one's life for another. Not everyone who wants to become for example, a medical rescuer has the potential to become an expert and manage the profession in often extreme field conditions. The mission and occupation of rescuers cannot be successfully performed without respecting ethical principles. Another equally important prerequisite is the willingness to serve others and risk their own lives see the official oath of the security forces (Act 361/2003 Coll., Section 17, paragraph 3).

Some emergency services or other profession have formulated the basic requirements for their representatives for example in the already-mentioned service oath of members or the so-called Code of Ethics (e.g., Hippocratic

Oath, the Code of Ethics of the Czech Medical Chamber, the Code of Ethics of the Czech Nurses Association, the Code of Ethics of the Police of the Czech Republic, the Code of Ethics of Psychologists of the FRS of the Czech Republic). Codes of ethics are documents relating to general and specific rules of work within individual organizations and professions. From a formal point of view, they may be binding (a declaration, promise, etc. is signed) or non-binding (voluntary). The terms code of ethics or code of conduct mean a systematically-created set of standards and regulations that defines and regulates the relations between the members of a community. A code of ethics provides a detailed elaboration and specification of moral principles and their application in practice. Ethical codes and similar documents are used to cultivate a corporate climate and corporate culture (Antusak, 2009). Standards of professional ethics derive partly from general moral standards but they also relate to the essence of the relevant profession of a rescuer and its specific focus and professional expression.

Considerable demands on a rescue profession may pose an unreasonable burden for some employees which may cause complete mental and physical exhaustion in connection with the mental, emotional and physical demands of the rescue profession which is often diagnosed as the burn out syndrome. The burn out syndrome is an entire set of symptoms that manifest loss of enthusiasm, joy from life, energy and enthusiasm in the exercising of the rescue profession. This condition leads to stagnation, lack of motivation and resignation. A person is frustrated, irritable, distrustful, apathetic and cynical. Such a situation leads to a restriction in self-reflection and may even lead to a loss of basic life and ethical values.

#### **SELECTED ASPECTS OF THE BEHAVIOUR OF RESCUERS**

In its broadest sense, ethics is the study of human behaviour, what is right and what is wrong and ways in which people attempt to justify it (Thompson, 2004). In order for any behaviour to be described as truly ethical, it is necessary that the condition of free will is complied with. When there is no choice, it is not possible to make the right or wrong decision there is no distinction between good and evil (Opatrný *et al.*, 2012). The ethical question remains regarding what the limit is beyond which there is no longer a choice? We define this limit ourselves and determining it may be an expression of not only personal courage but also a case of trying to find an excuse.

When examining the behaviour of rescuers and their confrontation with ethical events, it is about a search for what is right and how to best work. That means how rescue works are to be carried out and how to properly react during such situations. In the context of fulfilling their vocation and mission, rescuers are very often faced with situations where they are forced to deal with the question of the correctness of their behaviour towards people affected by emergencies and often even towards their colleagues. Rescuers often base their decisions on the principle of the individual moral choice or the needs of society as a whole. Rescuers should avoid certain dilemmas in their activities (Pupalová and Svejda, 2012):

- Temptation to achieve goals using “shortcuts” (simplification)
- Fraud (swindle) leading to the attainment of the objectives
- Handling and treating people as objects
- One-sided and biased dishonest conduct on the basis of race, gender, social class and religion
- Self-enrichment, using information from rescue activities for personal benefit
- Rudeness and accusations instead of resolving the situation

During an intervention, rescuers are allowed relief from common standards by society. An example is a quick ride to the location of the rescue operation or entering into the private spaces of the affected persons. With regard to entry into confined spaces and resolving emergencies, it is necessary to reflect on the norms of human behaviour of rescuers, the decisions that rescuers make and the ways in which they justify their choices. The legislative definition of these situations undoubtedly plays a substantial role herein. Other important factors are social norms and the culture that shape the values of the relevant society. Ethics, therefore, examines the standards by which rescuers are governed in their decisions. The questions that need to be answered are “What are the obligations of rescuers? What should they do? What values are expressed by their decisions? What constitutes a good/bad life?” In addition to a statistical enumeration of entering into a confined space, it is a good idea to ask the question “was it necessary to intervene in this particular manner or inform the media, etc.?” These questions provide a more accurate perception of what is right and what is not.

From the perspective of rescuers, the professional ethics applied by the general ethical provisions, i.e., the so-called Code of Ethics for a particular professional activity are important. In their behaviour, rescuers must

accept the existing social standards and norms and must be aware of the potential impact of their behaviour on the public. The cornerstone of good behaviour can then be referred to as “the power to be able to and want to behave in the right way”. Adherence to ethics is formulated as a service obligation and is subject to institutional supervision. Serious violations there of are resolved via disciplinary actions, e.g., Act No. 361/2003 Coll., on the service of members of security forces (Opatrný *et al.*, 2012). For members of the Police of the Czech Republic, possible perspectives are directly regulated in Act No. 273/2008 Coll., on the Police of the Czech Republic as amended the principle of courtesy (Skoda *et al.*, 2013).

Of the principles of professional ethics, the following examples can be listed for rescuers when resolving emergencies (Pupalova and Svejda, 2012):

- Impartiality, objectivity
- Openness, complete revelation
- Confidentiality
- Due diligence
- Adherence to professional rescue responsibility
- Avoiding a potential or apparent conflict of interest

An ethical dilemma may occur for rescuers when having to enter into a foreign building. Ownership itself should serve both for human development and for the needs of the community. Injustice arises from the violation of the right of ownership. The severity of injustice is assessed according to the extent of the caused material damage. Whether the damage was caused to a rich or poor person also plays a role here. Assessing the extent of the damage is also always an individual matter. Situations may arise where an essentially useless item can have a great subjective value for someone (commemorative item), even if its material cost is negligible. The most well-known violation of property rights is robbery and theft. This category includes violation of ownership rights via entry into the foreign building or the removal of an obstacle at someone's land plot. Such a situation may arise in dire need during emergencies when there is a danger of loss of life, health, liberty, etc. (Jankovsky, 2003). In these situations, a right as well as a duty, arises for professional rescuers to violate ownership rights. A very problematic situation may also arise for rescuers when defining ownership rights is difficult or ambiguous and thus, it is not possible to determine with certainty the owner of the property or items for whom it is necessary to disrupt the ownership right (Kavan, 2014). Ethical standards begin where legal standards end.

During emergencies or otherwise tense situations, on the one hand the importance of ethics and demand for ethical conduct increases and decreases on the other. This may lead to a significant conflict of interest. For the first group which may represent employees, affected persons and the public, the ethical approach to solving the issues of emergencies is essential. The point of view in which the situation is seen is based on the fact: “this should not have happened but let us try to resolve it in the most honourable manner.” The second group which may consist of head employees, business leaders and politicians, perceive the controlling of a crisis as an existential question. Not being able to deal with a crisis usually has an impact on career advancement, good reputation, etc. Fear of the future and fear of endangering the current situation tempts the people involved to use almost any means and ways of handling emergencies including those which are unethical. When assessing such conduct (use of unethical practices), it is necessary to take into account whether it was deliberate or instinctive (Antusak, 2009).

During rescue works, rescuers are increasingly confronted with conflict situations. Rescuers primarily fulfil the orders of their commanders and do not usually deal with the fundamental question of good and evil. Yet many situations (communication of information, entry into confined spaces, etc.) they must face decision on how to proceed. For these reasons, when recruiting new rescuers it is essential to emphasize the moral character of a person and their skill, empathy and acceptance of human values.

A specific area of assistance on the part of rescuers is subsequent aid from first psychological assistance to psychosocial assistance which is provided by psychologists and trained members of rescue services. At this stage this is assistance which is based on values such as love and justice, right and duty, respect for human dignity and partnership. However, in a real situation the various values can get into mutual conflict, e.g., too much love can turn into a dispute with justice and respect for human dignity. An emphasis on the transparency of the process can mean a reduction in the effectiveness of the assistance and promoting a partnership may cause untimeliness of the assistance, etc. Some of these discrepancies and subsequent problems have the nature of ethical dilemmas when specific problems impact the persons affected by an emergency, especially in situations where the assisting person finds himself in a position of power. Another important factor is the specific form and degree of cooperation of rescuers the “helper” and the affected person the “beneficiary of the assistance”. This means gradual involvement based on the principle of partnership conduct (Princova, 2014).

## CONCLUSION

As already mentioned, the rescuer profession is a service to others in need which requires certain personal, value-based and character disposition, education and especially the willingness to risk one's life for another. Therefore, rescuers must comply with high ethical principles and when looking at emergencies, we are not dealing with the average standards of behaviour. The rescuer profession is usually socially perceived very positively. It can be deduced that it is to some extent expected and thus it is "socially learned". Carrying out the service is usually related to taking an oath. It follows that this profession requires more than just knowledge, experience and skills. Genuineness of character is assumed as well as moral purity and the awareness of a higher moral order (Jankovsky, 2003). In the context of security education, whose main objective is to prepare a group of experts for managing institutions of different sizes and varying degrees of complexity, it is necessary to acquire knowledge and skills in this area. Safety training should lead to the formation of a professional with extended powers who is active in the working process and who creates values for other people (Kovacova and Tyralla, 2011). The question is whether education should be supplemented by some philosophical and ethical themes to strengthen the certainty of rescuers in making decisions on moral dilemmas.

In terms of safety, we can speak about anxiety of society. This means an anxiety induced by the state of the world Auschwitz, Hiroshima and Chernobyl. Therefore, we often prefer to redirect our conversations to topics about sports and the weather. Today's society is also more complicated due to a post modern view of its values. Crises occur relatively frequently in human life. These situations are not "only a technical failure" that can be prevented by sufficient preparation and caution. A crisis means a certain stimulus for people for further development and often also a painful contribution to quality of life. For the affected person, this means a personal disaster wherein the person feels alone. At this point, there is room for rescuers and an entire system of immediate and follow-up assistance. The ability to find the right way and solution is a never-ending challenge.

In terms of human rights, the conscious awareness of affected persons of the provided emergency assistance and support is very important for the ethics of rescue operations during emergencies. Changing attitudes from charitable-philanthropic to human-legal ultimately impacts the persons affected by the emergency. The affected persons are perceived as beings with rights, decent

beings, equal and those for which justice happens. Rather than victimizing the affected persons, laws create a framework of values, relate to justice and promote dignity. (Princova, 2014).

Ideally, the legislative definition mainly helps define the basic paradigms of correct behaviour but does not fully address all situations with ethical dilemmas. It is also often necessary to reflect on whether legal regulations are set correctly or conversely, if their lack of clarity and ambiguity complicates the decision-making for proper conduct. This fact places high demands on rescuers. Emphasis must be placed on professional training, physical fitness and mental balance. In addition to the above requirements, equally essential conditions for the selection of rescuers are also features such as integrity, the maintaining of moral qualities in stressful situations and the ability to make morally-correct decisions.

Human life is accompanied by greater or lesser crises. States of happiness alternate with suffering in connection with emergencies or illnesses. People yearn for fulfilment in their lives so that their lives are integral and have continuity. It is important that rescuers anchor the perception of the holistic concept of rescue operations and thus manage to be the first ones who show the persons affected by an emergency that a stepping stone (something that remained) can be found after a disaster and that it can be used to start building again. Affected persons need the help of rescuers and subsequently that of other experts and the support of the local community. It is absolutely essential that the affected persons dedicate themselves and work together to find solutions for coping with their situation.

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