Teach Them Plato or Hammer it into their Heads?

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If we read o ver the topic selected for this JSCOPE meeting and the questions stated as related to the main theme, a tiresome pedant might complain that the first question begs itself, for it assumes what ought to be proven: that ethics instruction should be incorporated in military education and, further, that it should be incorporated at all levels of the military. For it may be that ethics qua ethics qua ethics should not be incorporated at all in military education or perhaps only at some levels of the profession. Or it may be that whatever is denoted by the term "ethics" should flow from the very nature and character of competent military educaton and training at all levels of the services and should not be inserted as a separate unit of instruction.

The sub-question, "What are the military virtues and can they be inculcated" has two parts, each legitimate at least by tradition. Military virtues frequently listed include courage, skill, honor, obedience, loyalty, integrity. Audacity and cunning are not usually listed, though these appear to be qualities in successful commanders from Nelson to Rommel, the latter not

called "the Desert Fox" for nothing. Perhaps they are not moral virtues. In any case, traditional military virtues -- courage, honor, obedience, loyalty, integrity -- may also be found in civilian life, though without the corporate character and tension lent by military commitment.

Touching the possibility of <u>teaching</u> military virtues, tradition says that, as is the case with all virtue, it is possible, though difficult to do so. Aristotle reminds us that we are not born with the virtues but we are fitted by nature to receive them -- and that habit, the result of practice, completes and fulfils this ability.

Plato is more skeptical, at least in the <u>Meno</u>; there he says that the question, "Can virtue be taught?" cannot be answered at present, and we had better concede for the moment at least that virtue is a quality divinely endowed, that some have it and some do not. But we know that the <u>Meno</u> is only a curtain-raiser to the <u>Republic</u> in which Plato constructs a model state, its purpose to take a close look at human nature and to illumine the meaning of Justice, the virtue or virtues. Such a paradigm, Plato tells us, is incomplete without a program of education and training in the virtues or excellences, including the philosophical, the political, and the military.

Thomas Jefferson will have it that we are indeed endowed by nature with a moral sense. In a letter written from Paris in 1787 to his nephew Peter Carr, the great Virginian asserts

that we come into the world equipped with a moral sense just as we are born with muscles and sinews. Some humans, by constitution, have greater physical strength than others. So too we possess moral discrimination in greater or lesser degree. But he adds that, strong or weak, our moral sense can be developed, strengthened by exercise, just as we can build up our muscles by using them.

Our own century has seen the growth of positivist distrust of pretensions to ethical instruction. In his little book of 1938 that scared the daylights out of the philosophical profession,

Language, Truth, and Logic, A. J. Ayer declared that morality is not a subject like geology or art history, that there is no such thing as an authoritative guide to moral judgment of which the philosopher can acquire mastery, that as far as the conduct of life is concerned, he has no professional advantage over anyone else.

But leaders of public affairs in the United States today almost unanimously insist that virtue can and should be taught -particularly in the nation's public schools. They call it
instruction in "Values." By that they mean moral values. "Values"
alone won't do, for there is a whole stack of values we entertain
that have nothing directly to do with ethics or morality.
As long ago as 1925, in his novel <u>Babbitt</u>, Sinclair Lewis demonstrated that to the average American male a supreme value is
his automobile.

Assuming instruction in "values" to mean "moral values" we find that everyone in authroity today, including the U.S. military,

is for it. In August, 1986, Governor Mario Cuomo of New York declared that the nation's public schools had abandoned an important responsibility and that he was drawing up proposals to restore the teaching of "Values." Two weeks later the New York Times carried a front page story of great length showing that American public schools are indeed putting new stress on teaching of moral values. These values ranged from patriotism to "how to be a winner." A teacher in Oxford, Ohio's Talawanda High School calls attention of her pupils to the line of Polonius in Hamlet, "To thine own self be true. . . ," possibly omitting the caution that no man was ever truer to himself than Genghiz Khan.

Supporting much of the "teaching of values" concern we can read many "findings" based on the researches of psychologists investigating the moral realm. For many years now Professor Lawrence Kohlberg of Harvard has been writing that children learn moral behavior in "stages." (There is nothing that appears to U.S. Americans more than reading about things that come in "stages" whether it be explanation of onset of adolescence or the need of resigning oneself to one's last end. In 1978 a revision of the Navy's Leadership Management Education and Training program (LMET appeared with an ethics annex prominently featuring Professor Kohlberg's "stages" as aid to ethics!

More recently, another Harvard psychologist, Professor Jerome Kagan, has stated that brain development guides the moral sense

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sense of a child, that children distinguish right from wrong shortly before the age of two. A toddler who has been bashing playmates, Professor Kagan holds, generally quits before age two when "empathy" for others is first felt. Two centuries before PRofessor Kagan's finding, that old cognitive psychologist, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, had noticed the same thing, thus supporting his belief that we come into the world with two inborn tendencies, one to self-love, the other not "empathy" sympathy/for those not ourselves.

Turning to the U.S. military, we find that the highest authorities have declared themselves in favor of education in ethics for those under their command. Under the leadership of Chief of Staff John Wickham Jr, the Army announced the Army theme for 1986 to be simple "Values." It is only fair to set down what the Army leadership perceives as the purpose of the "Values" theme to make clear that this enterprise, however difficult its end may be to achieve, should not lightly be passed over:

To reaffirm to the American public our commitment to support and defend the Constitution of the United States.

To reaffirm the professional Army ethic. . . which supports our national values.

To increase understanding and commitment to the professional Army ethic and personal values which support the Army way of life.

To stress the ethical elements of leadership.

To foster a common bond built on service to our nation and our Army.

Throughout 1986, the year just drawn to its close, Admiral James B. Watkins, Chief of Naval Operations (now retired) devoted much of his time and energy during the last year of his tour as chief uniformed officer of the Navy to advocating and implementing a comprehensive upgrading of the Naval services commitment to Excellence, including personal ethical awareness. Under the banner of Excellence, Admiral Watkins aimed for across-the-borad upgrading of the quality of professional skill and moral consciousness on all levels of the Navy. His project rose out of his deep concern, as senior Naval officer, for the ethical fibre of his service and from his efforts to strengthen that fibre to strengthen in turn that of the nation served by the Navy.

In the Spring of 1986, a delegation of officers, active add retired, designated by CNO, came to the Naval War College, Newport, to ask for advice and help in preparing a "Code of Ethics" suitable for all levels of the uniformed Navy. The PResident of the College, through his Deputy, appointed a committee of sernior faculty members, both military and civilian, to render advice and support for this project. At the outset, the committee expressed its reluctance to draw up a code of ethics for the Navy. There was the conviction expressed by many of the student officers at the Naval War College that there were too many codes in effect already to which they were committed. In this they reflected the views of Captain Richard Stratton USN, former Vietnam POW:

We are a people with a rich naval tradition and history of war at sea. We already have the basic elements of our code in the naval oath and commission, the military Code of Conduct, the Code of Ethics for Government Service, the Secretary of the Navy's Standards of Conduct, and the Navy Military Personnel Manual.

Nevertheless the committee agreed to do what it could by way of a code of ethics, on the ground that if the Chief of Naval Operations was asking for help in this matter, it was the committee's duty to bear a hand. The committee insisted only that the document to be drawn up should not have the word "Code" in its title. The committee's product "The Navy Uniform" paper as Appendix A) did not represent CNO's final choice. Another simpler (and better) product appeared in draft form titled "The Sailor's Creed." (This also is attached as Appendix B.)

The call for teaching ethics in the U.S. military service

puzzles many in the military services of other nations. A question

on the matter directed to a representative of Britain's Royal

"Above all,"

Navy elicted the reply, "Don't write anything down." A naval

officer of a prominent Middle East coutry recently asked the

writer, "What is this thing -- ethics?" He had a perfectly

good command of English and did not want to be treated to a

dictionary definition. What he was lookn't for was some clue as

to why the armed services of the most powerful nations in the world

needed training in "ethics." The officer in question came from

a background in which a strict and highly structured religion,

governing even the details of daily life, played a prominent part. By contrast, we are often reminded that U.S. concern with military ethics is in part a function of a society in which the cohesiveness of older religious and family arrangements have, to a considerable extent, given way.

Some nations do not have this problem, at least not so acutely. In a recent seminar discussion section of the Naval War College's elective course "Foundations of Moral Obligation", an officer of the Royal Danish Navy was asked what his service did by way of attention to support ethical standards and values. Was there, perhaps, a Danish naval or military honor code? The officer replied that his service expected no more than the common decency that new naval personnel, officers and enlisted, brought with them from Danish civilian life. He summarized the basic rules: "Don't lie. Don't steal. Don't get drunk -- more than once a week." He was, of course, making his point by simplification. There was, he said, training in the tradition of the Danish navy but this came as part of standard instruction of the whole. He recalled no separate attempt to inculcate ethical values or to formulate honor codes. We can see why the Danish officer's navy could dispense with anxiety about ethics. His country and culture are, respectively, small and homogeneous, backed by a strong national tradition. The Danish flag, whose white cross on a red field first appeared to King Waldemar in the 13th century, means something to every Danish citizen, though the citizens seem not to think or talk about it much.

By contrast, we U.S. Americans live in a very large country with a great and variegated population representing an ever-increasing ethnic mix, in large part, though not entirely, urban. Large segments of this mix, through no fault of their own, are poor, semiliterate, of single-parent family or no family at all. Many of these lack totally a sense of social cohesiveness, save for those characteristics of an underclass which must make do with only a primitive instinct for survival. But this section of the U.S. population is not the only one in which serious erosion of national cohesiveness shows itself. Many segments of the middle classes feel the effects of diminution or outright cancelling of family and religious ties. With no disrespect to his Roman Catholic upbringing and loyalty that a retired naval officer, now pursuing the life of a scholar, answered a question posed to him at a cocktaile party, "What sort of man would you want to have beside you in combat today?" His answer, "A Marine who is a Southern Baptist."

It is not the responsibility of the U.S. military to set right the social ills of American society. First, we have had disruptive troubles before and have come through pretty well. No prophecy of doom, then. Second, the military services should not be expected to be "character factories" -- in the sense of the phrase intended by Michael Rosenthal in his book of that title about the founding of the Boy Scout movement wherein Lord Robert Baden Powell , its founder, set up a remarkably effective program for "character development" which meant inculcating British youth of the lower classes with the public school ideals of honor, duty, self-sacrifice, and obedience to authority.

Yet we do expect that the military services will do something for the young men and women whom they have in their charge, even for a limited time. An Army officer who served in the Army Studies group that, among other duties, advised General Wickham on the 1986 Army White Paper, "Values: the Bedrock of our Profession", writes "A great deal of what is going on has to do with our senior leadership being struck by a blinding flash of the obvious. They seem to have figured out that when the Army brings 135,000 youngsters in each year and sends almost the same number away each year, the issue of what those youngsters value has significance with respect to how they serve, how they learn, and how they remember their Army service." He adds that there is absolutely sincerity and concern by the Army Chief of Staff and the Secredtary of the Army, and that there is great benefit in having the Army discuss and teach moral values.

There is, of course, this difficulty: how do you teach ethical values within the education and training system of the military services? How do we avoid preaching, decked out as ethical isn'truction, much of which consists in reiterating good words like "integrity." How avoid the boredom that comes rolling in like a Newport fog when the beleaguered instructor is told that he must insert a unit on "ethics" into his leadership course? "Ethics," writes Captain Dick Stratton, " do not lend themselves to print like ordnance instructions or training manuals."

How does one avoid the free-for-all bull sessions that so often result when the method of ethics instruction consists of "case studies"?

How does one avoid presenting ethics as if it were a branch of psychology or, worse, as if it really belongs as an appendix to a business or management course? The reductio ad absurdum of the latter may be nicely indicated by the statement of a corporation executive (who shall be nameless), alumnus of an "ethics" seminar laid on by his conscientious company, "We got a lot of mileage out of Kant's categorical imperative; since we've tightened up on treating our employees as ends not as means our productivity has increased twenty percent."

To shift gears, let's admit that there is no such thing as a free-floating ethics. Save for the madness of anarchic armed conflict in the world today -- and that is a large exception -there is far more common agreement among humans on basic decencies than the bizarre divergencies celebrated in dated anthropology texts. Besides, those who say that morality is simply the expression of the values of a culture (and a lot of it is, but not all of it) should remember that the two greatest moral teachers of the West --Jesus and Socrates -- were indicted, tried, and condemned to death on the charge that they endangered the moral and religious values of their respective cultures. By "free-floating ethics" I don't mean & some sort of ethical relativism but the attempt to present instruction in moral values without grounding these values in something other than entmselves. One may quickly object that this denies the autonomy of ethical values, the sovereignty of the moral realm -- a position Kant so ably defended -- the unconditioned Ought, doing one's duty not in hope of reward but because it is one's duty.

The Kantian doctrine is admirable and has always had an appeal to the military. Count Gerhardt Scharnhorst, founder of the Prussian General Staff, made the study of Kant compulsory in L'Ecole militaire, the Prussian War College he founded. But here again what we have is a small, relatively homogeneous body — the Prussian officer corps which before its breakup in World War II and the years immediately preceding numbered a majority of strict Christian Protestants who saw the ethic of duty for duty's sake as the superior opposite of the merchant ethic, which they took to hold that the right and the good is that which leads to commercial profit.

For an individual person, not a member of a dedicated body of some kind, it requires a highly pulled-together Self to do one's duty simply for duty's sake. For such integrated characters as Socrates and William James to know the good was to do it.

The rest of us need a push, a little support, more than a little, and the most effective way of getting this back-up is real, not nominal membership in a corporate body, a commitment to some belief, some faith deeply held, a unity of some larger whole that has our trust and loyalty. So for a U.S. Marine it is useless to shoe-horn a two-lesson "ethics" unit into his training program in the belief that it will significantly increase his awareness of the evils of stealing or shooring unarmed prisoners or civilians. If he brings to the Corps his Roman Catholic, Southern Baptist, conservative Jewish, even (I would defend this) secular humanist convictions, deeply held, we won't have to worry much about him.

But whether he is one of that sort or not the training he receives as a Marine tells him that he is a member of a coherent corporate body and that certain stern expectations as to how he is to carry himself follow from this membership.

"A Marine does not steal. You're a Marine! Do you get it,

Mister, or do I have to hit you over the head?" Back of the baleful glare of the drill instructor stands the tradition of the Corps. When a smart young recruit or second lieutenant asks his mentor if this or that rule of the Code of Conduct has the force of law or is just a guideline, he is brusquely informed that such distinctions are not the issue at this point in his training, "You're a Marine! Do it! Understand?"

Here again we find with the Marine Corps a relatively small body, its advantage conducive to a dynamic esprit de corps not entirely enjoyed by the other services. Consider how many ways there exist by which a man or woman enters the officer corps of the Navy and the consequent unsureness of those who command them of jayt what they have brought with them by way of ethical ballast into the service. There is the Naval Academy, OCS, NROTIC; there are routes to comissions for qualified enlisted men and women, as well as various gateways open to staff: Supply, Chaplains, Judge Advocate, Medical, plus certain administrative positions that carry a comission with them. Will sixteen weeks of Navy indoctrination or even sixteen months make a proper Naval officer out of a male obstetrician who hates women?

The Army White Paper of 1986 "Values: the Bedrock of the Profession" may have its preachy side, but it is nevertheless one of many signs that the Army is working hard to forge some sense of unity out of a bewildering plurality, a unity needed to make its youngsters good soldiers and maybe better citizens than they were before they entered the service. The rusty old notion that sending a boy into the military may improve his character has a bit of folk wisdom behind it still applicable today. For a kid who has never lived within a social environment with any structure at all, the idea that he might profit by military service is not altogether vacuous. too, mutatis mutandis, with Admiral Watkins' farewell effort toward an all-Navy excellence in which the moral dimension will not be forgotten in the striving for professional techinical competence. The sensible Swiss (Switzerland doesn't have an army; it is an army!) see that their offspring, whether sons of bankers or Alpine peasants, do their annual military service and do it well. "It doesn't do a young man of good family any harm," says a high ranking Swiss officer, "to get shouted at a little."

In the end, the argument of this paper amounts to this -- that military service, though no moral panacea, has done and will continue to do something of benefit to the character of those who serve. Benefit of ethical quality will follow from well-organized, well-planned, well-staffed education and training. Even

more will it follow from the total experience we call service in the Armed Forces. What measure of ethical value we can hope for -- be it small or great -- will take care of itself by way of transmission from the general to the particular, from the more to the less comprehensive, from the good of the service's mission as a whole to the good of its parts. is separate instruction in ethics that is will not succeed compulsory, that has an official character. This brings puzzlement and boredom. At undergraduate academies and in the service graduate schools like the War Colleges, courses in ethics qua ethics may do much good, may fulfil a need long felt on the part of many officers, provided that these courses remain elective and are not required. Such courses will be particularly effective if they are broadly grounded in the tradition of the humanities as a whole, not tied to psychology or business management as appendices, not simply offered as abstract ethical distinctions, or free-for-all case studies. A problem here may be where to get instructors who are military and humanists, the latter in the old sense of the word; but they do exist. Philosophy -- a fortiori, moral philosophy -- comes from the mind and heart of a man or woman experiencing the world, confronting moral choice. Whether it be Socrates, Augustine, Wittgenstein, or Simone Weil, moral philosophy is not simply doctrine and precept, but a lived life, and should, if at all possible, be presented as such.

By way of epilogue we might remember the caution of G. E. Moore,

one of three most influential philosophers of the Anglo-American tradition of our century:

"It appears to me that in Ethics as in all other philosophical studies, the difficulties and disagreements, of which history is full, are due to a very simple cause, namely to the attempt to answer questions without first discovering what question question it is which you desire to answer."

What questions are we raising when we talk bout education in ethics for the military profession? Is our concern limited to personal ethics -- one does not lie, cheat, steal; one strives for personal honesty and authenticity? to avoid bad faith? Or do we also raise the question of the commensurability or incommensurability of personal ethics with that of the nation -- any nation, including our own -- conducting its foreign policy. We don't need Barbara Tuchman to tell us what we know already -- that throughout history nations have rarely conducted their foreign policy according to the rules of personal morality? How do we reconcile injunctions not to lie or deceive as soldiers or sailors when deception is a standard tool in working to ensure a nation's security, its value a function of its success, its use in protecting the nation's interest, its security?

If we don't know what questions we are asking about ethics and the teaching of ethics, our inquiry into it may have a shaky foundation or none at all. Then we'll be like the legendary Irishman who, run along to a banquet in his honor in a sedan chair with no bottom. said. "Faith, if it wasn't for the honor of the thing, I might as well have come on foot."

APPENDICES

Draft of Navy Code of Ethics proposed by · I. Committee at the Naval War College (4 pp.)

"The Sailor's Creed" draft from GNO's office. Naved
Operations ΙI

THE NAVY UNIFORM

You wear the Navy uniform.

That means a lot to your country, your service, yourself.

It means KNOWING THE JOB:

Professional competence comes first. Without skilled men and women, the Navy cannot carry out its mission. That mission is to defend the nation, at the MSK of dear.

It means COMMITMENT TO DUTY,

To serve for pay is good

To serve for travel, education, and training is better

To serve for love of country and comrades is best.

It means commitment to leadership.

Leadership consists of those qualities of skill and character that command respect and cause others to follow loyally and willingly. It, in turn, requires fairness, a reluctance to ask more than you yourself would give, a sense of justice.

It means HONESTY.

If you wear the Navy uniform, you don't lie; you don't cheat, you don't steal. If you lead others, those in charge are watching you and noting your example. The way you act, officer or enlisted, means "I'm saying that everybody should do this. I'm not making an exception of myself."

It means COURAGE.

You must also have courage, both moral and physical, for it is the virtue on which the exercise of all other virtues depend. You must have the strength of character to say "no" to what is wrong, to persevere in what is right no matter how difficult the task becomes, and, even to face pain and death in defense of the things you value and love, should honor and duty demand. Yours is not an easy commitment, but a worthy and noble one.

It means LOYALTY.

To let those over you know that they have your support. To show those in your charge you will go to bat for them, never asking them to do something you would not do yourself.

Sometimes loyalties conflict. You must choose. Never mistake loyalty for doing wrong to help someone out, even if he is your superior.

It means OBEDIENCE.

Obedience requires that you carry out the lawful orders of your superiors, as we are all pledged to do, with pride and determination.

It means COMMITMENT TO THE BEST. For the Navy, for comrades, for self. We give what we have. We do what we can. We commit the highest in us to the service.

For the Navy, only the best is enough.

Always to excel.

Always to be the best.

DRAFT

THE SAILOR'S CREED

I have chosen to serve in the United States Navy. America depends on my performance for her survival, and I accept the challenge to set my standards high, placing my country's well-being above self interest.

- I will be loyal to my country, its Constitution and laws,
 and to my shipmates.
- • I will be honest in my personal and professional life and encourage my shipmates to do the same.
- I will, to the best of my ability, do the right thing for its own sake, and I am prepared to face pain or death in defense of my country.
- I will be a professional, wearing my uniform with pride and accepting responsibility for my actions.
- I will set excellence as my standard and always strive for ways to make me a better sailor and my crew a better crew.

NOTES FOR BRENNAN MS JSCOPE 1987

- 1. Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, Bk II, 1, 18-26
- 2. Plato, Meno, 70a; 99c 100c
- 3. Jefferson, letter to Peter Carr, Paris, 10 August, 1787, in M. D. Peterson, ed., <u>The Portable Thomas Jefferson</u>, N.Y. Viking, 1975, pp 424-425.
- 4. A. J. Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic, rev. ed., London, Gollanz, 1948, ch VI, "Critique of Ethics and Theology." But the actual passage is taken from Ayer's Philosophy in the Twentieth Century, N.Y., 1982, p. 15.
- 5. Jeffrey Schmalz, "Cuomo Plans Effort to Get Schools to Return to Teaching of 'Values,'" The New York Times, 29 August, 1986, p. 1, p. B8, col 1.
- 6. Edward S. Fiske, "U.S. Schools Put New Stress on Teaching of Moral Values," The New York Times, 15 Sept., 1986, p. 1, p. B 8, col 3.
- 7. Lawrence Kohlberg, The Philosophy of Moral Development, N.Y. Harper & Row, 1981. See also Barry Chazan, Contemporary Approaches to Moral Education, N.Y., Teachers College Presss, Columbia University, pp 71-75.
- 8. Jerome Kagan, The Nature of the Child, N.Y., Basic Books, 1984. See review in TIME, 22 Oct., 1984, p. 97.
- 9. Army Game Plan, Headquarters, Department of the Army, April, 1986, p. 1.
- CAPT Richard A. Stratton USN (ret),
 10. May "Where's Our Code of Ethics?"

 Dec. 1986, p. 83
- 11. Michael Rosenthal, <u>Character Factory</u>: <u>Baden Powell's Boy Scouts and the Imperatives of Empire</u>, N.Y. <u>Pantheon</u>, 1986.

- ll a "Values, The Bedrock of Our Profession," Army White Paper, Headquarters, Department of the Army, June, 1986. Comment taken from letter to author by MAJ Michael Landrum USA, 23 April, 1986.
- 12. Stratton, source as in note 10.
- 13. John A. McPhee, La Place de la Concorde Suisse, N.Y., Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1984, p. 67.
- 14. G. E. Moore, <u>Principia Ethica</u>, (1903), London, Cambridge University Press, <u>1951</u>, p. viii.