

UNITED STATES ARMY

Preparing Soldiers of Character

US CGSC Ethics Symposium

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3/23/2015

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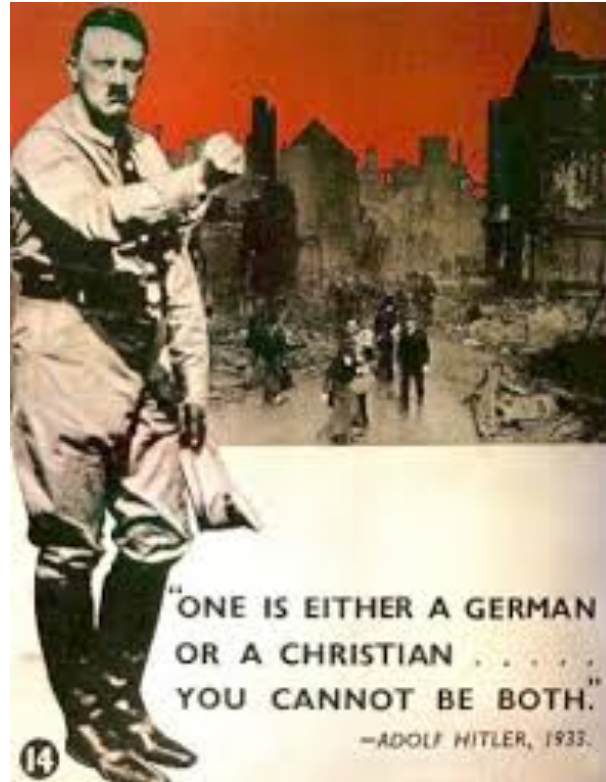
Dedication:

For Laura Arnold and teachers everywhere ---

“who change the world every day, one child at a time.”

Preparing Soldiers of Character

“Any society which evaluates its members by their worth to itself is “not” attaching value to the individual person at all, but only to his functions. When these functions no longer serve a useful purpose, the man ceases to have any value. This was Nietzsche's philosophy and Hitler's.” Arthur Custance ¹



While most readers will identify with Fredrick Nietzsche’s utilitarian philosophy as a catalyst for Adolph Hitler’s “final solution” few are aware of an American educator with similar views. The father of American modern educational system and a functional psychologist John Dewey shared the view of most nineteenth century Utilitarian moralists. The philosophy of those who view man apart from God understandably will emphasize “skill and technology” which encourages doing rather than placing value on the individual. This viewpoint, alive and well in the American educational system today, focuses on the consequences of human actions at the expense of placing value on the individual.

Thesis: the Army's focus on technical and tactical competence at the expense of developing Soldiers of character is deeply ingrained into both our national and Army culture. This fundamental defect has its origin in two sources. First, Soldiers must accomplish the mission and more importantly, achieve their higher commander's intent. An Army that cannot fire and maneuver, logistically sustain itself, out think through planning and decision-making, does not fulfil its central purpose for the nation. Coupled with this, the Army is the principle proponent for land operations. Land combat against an armed adversary is an intense, lethal human activity which involves complexity, chaos, fear, violence, fatigue, uncertainty and death in imposing the Nation's will on an enemy by force.³ Mission accomplishment and lethality of land operations are two fundamental considerations that motivate Army leaders at all levels to focus training, leader development and education predominantly on skills related to tactical and technical competence. A second and more subtle aspect of our Army's emphasis on technical skills and tactical competence at the expense of placing value on the individual and character development has its roots in John Dewey's "progressivism" inherited by our Soldiers from the American public and private education system. This pervasive and decidedly negative influence on the Army does not end with assessing of American youth at enlistment or commissioning. The generational influence associated with progressivism and John Dewey's educational philosophy continues to have a profound influence upon our Soldiers, leaders and the Army. This educational philosophy was subtly introduced during the past century by a host of well-meaning humanists, none more influential than John Dewey, the topic of this monograph.

This unbalanced approach is a blind spot to most commanders and leaders. We see this line of reasoning emphasized with the central focus in training on what our Soldier's do rather than who they are in terms of character and values. In the Army's Be-Know-Do leadership lexicon, this would be competencies, the behavior and activities of a Soldier or Army leader. The Army should shift focus in the direction of "who our Soldiers are," that is, the development of transformational leadership attributes such as character, values, presence and intellect. These are all aspects of the "be" attributes in the Leadership Requirements Model found in ADP 6-22 Army Leadership. Importantly, as our leadership doctrine mandates, building teams through mutual trust is how commanders and leaders move Soldiers from compliance to commitment. Strong character and commitment are both founded on timeless principles of selfless service and the rest of the Army values. Developing character starts with an accurate understanding of one's

personal and leader identity. Character is especially effective through activities with an emphasis on mutual trust such as our Army profession, Soldier for Life initiatives or in the long established creeds and oaths we find in the Army.

The Challenge: the Army's current approach to preparing Soldiers mentally and emotionally for combat is short sighted and should be expanded to include preparing Soldiers to be men and women of strong character. Religious or spiritual faith is among the most influential sources of personal values formation. This paper will show that the Judeo-Christian moral ethic established in the Bible, Jewish Old Testament and teachings of Jesus found in the New Testament, are the principle sources of values and character in the American culture, and thus the military and our Army.⁴ Developing character is best done by capitalizing on the moral values and principles found in the Judeo-Christian ethic. We should not aim for behavior compliance and rule following activities, rather Army leaders should strive to inculcate character and Army values into the being of our Soldiers through a commitment to the nation, the Army and their unit. Importantly, this is done best in an environment which never proselytizes one's personal faith by advocating or advancing one's religious or personal agenda or abusing the power our senior leaders have over junior Soldiers. Admittedly, parental and family values also have a significant influence on individual character and while most individuals do not fall far from the tree, the family influence is beyond the scope of this essay because for Soldiers serving today, this is part of their past. Education also has a profound impact on character and values in the individual and will be addressed in detail in this paper. Teaching concepts of character, Army values, integrity and high moral standards is tough government work because it calls for "transformational" change and placing value on the individual. It's also tough in today's politically correct environment which in many aspects is increasingly hostile to any profession of faith, particularly the Christian viewpoint.⁵



All change is likely to find resistance; it takes time, costs money and resources and requires personal investment by leaders, especially commanders. Finally, in the case of developing Soldiers of high moral character, our American educational system, our colleges and universities and our Army training and school (institutional and operational) culture is overly focused on developing skills (what our Soldiers do) rather than finding value in who they are (Soldiers of character, integrity and honor). The technical and scientific focus on Soldiers is a blind spot in large part because of the educational philosophy engrained in our American culture. Finally, in addition to the mission accomplishment and education culture the pressure to focus on skills is often done simply because it is easy to train and measure; yet it is the sure path of the easy wrong, as opposed to the hard right.

The Army Leadership Requirements Model⁷ (LRM) describes transactional leadership competencies such as leading others, building trust, creating a positive environment, getting results, preparing self and others, and communication skills as leadership competencies. There are in general a host of training, education, resources and the like to help develop these skills in our Soldiers. The Army's LRM also describes leadership "transformational" attributes such as character, presence and intellect. Character in the model includes concepts such as the Army values, empathy, the warrior ethos and discipline. There are very few meaningful training or educational resources provided by the Army to help leaders, especially commanders, achieve this important aspect of leader development.

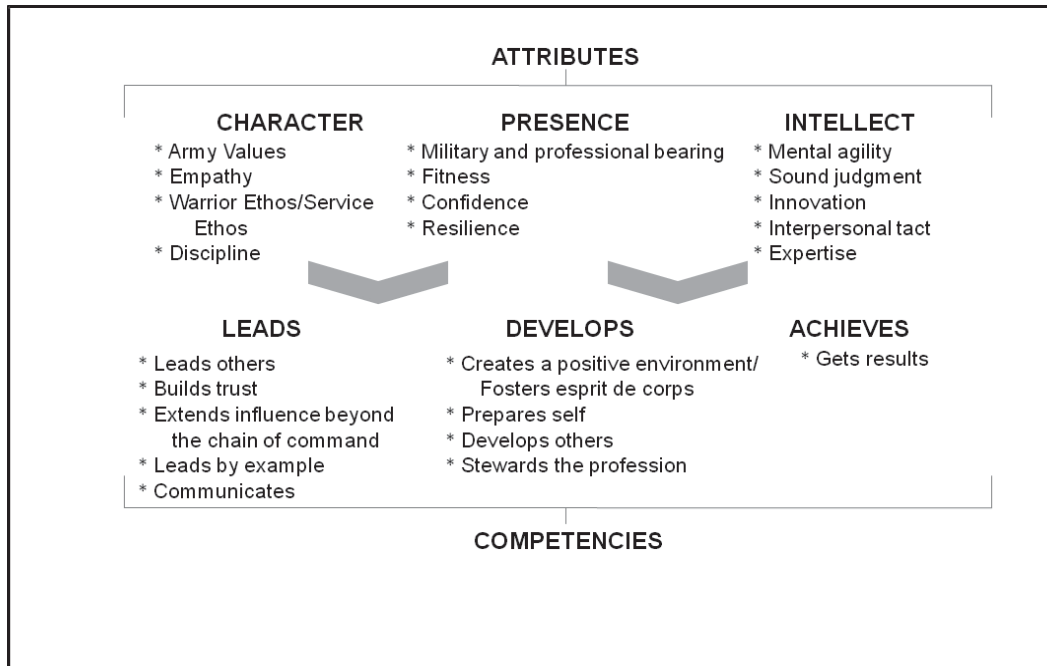
What is really tough government work -- the transformational change required for the institutional Army and operational commanders and leaders to build Soldiers of character, the inculcation of values, instilling moral standards and application of those values! Like all change, this hard government work takes a long time.

Background

"To be perfectly intelligible, one must be inaccurate; to be perfectly accurate, one must be unintelligible." Bertrand Russell⁸

"What is character?" is a question that lends itself to the demonstration that philosopher Bertrand Russell had it right when it comes to language. It's hard to define and character means something different to everyone. The Army defines the concept of character in doctrine as: "Leadership attributes are characteristics internal to a leader. Character, *a leadership attribute*, is the essence of who a person is, what a person believes, how a person acts. The internalization of Army Values is one type of character attribute. Empathy is identifying and understanding what others think, feel and believe. Leaders of character who embrace the Army leader attributes and competencies will be authentic, positive leaders. While *character* relates to the internal identity of the leader, *presence* attributes relate how others see the leader and *intellect* relates to what abilities and knowledge the leader possesses, or how a leader thinks and interacts with others."⁹

In the Leadership Requirements Model found below, character is a leadership attribute rather than a leadership competency. Doctrinally, character is comprised of Army values, empathy, the Warrior and Service Ethos as well as discipline. Character then in the vernacular of our Army doctrine has a threefold aspect: "what a person is, what a person believes and how a person acts."



The very terms in our doctrine such as “values, empathy and warrior ethos” imply moral principles which logically lends themselves to who a person is, rather than activities a person does. Standards are measurable goals that define how we behave or act. Standards are understood or codified by law or regulations. Standards, while a brilliant topic in their own right, are beyond the scope of this paper. Our Army values reflect the American society and are consistent with moral virtues and ethical principles that reinforce the nation. There are no universally agreed upon or published American values as a concept yet there are volumes written on the topic. Our American values are deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Enlightenment thought. These values are codified and evident in the US Constitution, Bill of Rights and especially the Federalist Papers and ideals of the nation’s founders.¹⁰

“One can always question the content or principles of general morality: What is moral in a particular case? Who decides what is moral? How universal are moral principles? These are fair questions and can be answered adequately by taking a good ethics course or reading several books on the issues”¹¹ LTG (Retired) James M. Dubik

In an otherwise brilliant paper, the sweeping generalization that taking an ethics course or reading some books about ethics can answer vital questions about what is moral and who decides

what is moral, is shortsighted. It is a commonly held belief that is fundamentally wrong. The thesis of this paper contends that ethics and morality as part of character development is a lifelong pursuit and like in other life endeavors, the character journey is often more important than the destination. Questions such as “what is moral” or who decides what is moral are of fundamental importance. Consider if we say that drunkenness, abortion, homosexuality or murder is wrong and justice is right, why is it wrong or right? What makes an act right or wrong and what is the basis of morality? Or consider, “is morality simply an illusion, foisted on one group of people by another?”¹² Thrasymachus, the late 5th Century BC Greek philosopher, argued that “all disputation about morality is empty, except in so far as it is reducible to a struggle for power.” Morality questions are by no means easy and have puzzled the best and brightest philosophers and theologians since the dawn of human history.

The Judeo-Christian Tradition

Christianity is the largest of all religious groups and represents well over two billion people worldwide. Islam (1.5 billion), Hinduism (one billion) and Buddhism (500 million), along with folk religions in China, Asia and Africa that represent about another one billion combined.¹³ There are an estimated 38,000 different religious groups on the planet. The largest group, Christianity possesses hundreds of different denominations, sects and groupings. Well over 97% of the people on earth are spiritual in the sense that they are not agnostic, nor professed atheists. Christianity remains the most predominant worldwide religious faith today and as it relates to this paper, note that 80% of the people in the United States are Christian.¹⁴ Since 1776 Christianity has continued as the most ubiquitous and leading faith in the United States. The current author makes no judgment as to the efficacy of the practice regarding the Christian faith in the United States. The Judeo-Christian ethic as it relates to character, morality and ethics in the United States is explored because the majority of the citizenry, thus the Army, profess to be Christian. For much of humanity, the concept of religion, spirituality or faith drives individual moral character. It is a fundamental part of any culture and while the United States is not a Christian theocracy, our nation is that of a secular government based on religious values. Artifacts of the Judeo-Christian ethic are ubiquitous in American culture. For example, “in God we Trust” on currency, sculpture of Moses and the ten commandments depicted on the Supreme Court Building, “one nation, under God” as part of the pledge of allegiance are prominent

artifacts. Since the middle ages, the abbreviations B.C. “Before Christ” and A.D. “anno Domini or the year of our Lord” have been pervasive in Western civilization. While a secular nation, the Judeo-Christian ethic had a profound impact on the founding fathers, the original national documents and the nation’s educational system. Arguably this influence has had a much more pronounced influence on American culture during the first 150 years of the nation, but clearly this influence extends to the present time.

The very word “Torah” in Hebrew is derived from the root “יָרָה”, which in the hif’il conjugation means to “guide or teach” rather than the commonly accepted transliteration accepted as the “law.”¹⁵ The Torah, or Pentateuch in the Greek and expanded Talmud Yerushalmi governs all aspects of Jewish culture and civilization. It is fundamental to the concept of religious Judaic tradition and sets standards for health, hygiene, ethics, culture, law and civil government as well as personal moral and ethical behavior. It has governed all aspects of character for the Jewish race and nation. The early Jewish teaching, written and practiced for well over the past three millennia, predates Greek and Roman cultures. H.C. Leupold dates the early Jewish culture to the time of Hammurabi, first Dynasty of Babylon.¹⁶ The Pentateuch code was practiced by the Hebrews at a time when many early civilizations, i.e., Greek, Roman, and Mesopotamian practiced decidedly immoral conduct such as infanticide and pederasty – immoral by the standards of Western civilization. The Judeo-Christian ethic was part of the fundamental beliefs of our founding fathers and pervasive in the nation’s early culture and educational institutions. Seven of the Ivy League schools were founded by Christian affiliation; only Cornell University, always strongly nonsectarian, was not. For example Harvard and Yale, the Calvinists; University of Pennsylvania, the Methodists; Princeton, Presbyterian; Columbia University, the Church of England and Brown University, Baptist. Most were originally seminaries with a denominational flavor and relics such as compulsory chapel which for many lasted well into the twentieth century.¹⁷ Seven of our nine current Supreme Court justices obtained either their undergraduate or law degrees from Ivy League schools. Dartmouth’s motto remains “a voice crying out in the wilderness” taken from Isaiah 40:3 and Princeton, “Under God’s power, she flourishes.” Harvard University motto is simply ‘Veritas,’ or Truth and even today, the University of Pennsylvania mascot remains “the Quakers.”

What the Judeo-Christian Ethic is not

Two prominent yet often misunderstood aspects of the Christian ethic are vital to understanding the mindset and approach towards education, law and government by the founding fathers; the depravity of mankind and the messiahship of the Christ. First, the issue of depravity is a central aspect of the Judeo-Christian ethic and was of vital importance to the nation's founding fathers. Depravity is the proclivity of men for moral corruption and wickedness. This depraved proclivity stands precisely opposite of what Soldiers should aspire to in terms of good character. In the Christian faith, the result of the fall was sin, death and depravity for the human race. For many of the Soldiers who read this paper, there will be no need to elaborate; many have witnessed first-hand plenty of moral corruption and evil behavior during combat actions. While the writings of many authors from the Age of Enlightenment such as HG Wells or Rousseau and more from recent times show mankind to be a noble and honorable creature, a more realistic approach would be found from self-professed agnostic Thomas H. Huxley:

“It is the secret of the superiority of the best theological teachers to the majority of their opponents that they substantially recognize these realities. . . . The doctrines of original sin, of the innate depravity of man . . . appear to me to be vastly nearer the truth than the literal, popular illusions that babies are all born good, and that the example of a corrupt society is responsible for their failure to remain so, that it is given to everybody to reach the ethic ideal if he will only try . . . and other optimistic figments.”¹⁸

Power corrupts and leads dogmatically to abuses of that power. Lord John Acton's famous quote to Bishop Mandell Creighton in 1887, “Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely” holds true today, perhaps more so. Just check out the latest internet videos about ISIS with beheading, hand chopping, burning alive, rape and murder. 20th Century history is filled with examples of widespread power abuses by the Bolsheviks, NAZIs or Chairman Mao's Cultural Revolution: all examples of depravity, murder and genocide on a global scale. These relatively recent historical examples show death, abuse and evil pointing to one central theme: the more power, the more abuse of power and depraved behavior by men. This concept

of a fallen depraved mankind is fundamental to the Judeo-Christian ethic with numerous examples from both the Old and New Testament.

"Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" ([Rom 1:29-32](#)); "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes" ([Rom 3:10-18](#)); "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like" ([Gal 5:19-21](#)); "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" ([Gen 6:5](#)); "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" ([Psa 51:5](#)); "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" ([Jer 17:9](#)); "From within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness" ([Mar 7:21, 22](#)); "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" ([John 3:6](#)); "Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be" ([Rom 8:7, R. V.](#)); "And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, --- and were by nature the children of wrath even as others" ([Eph 2:1, 3](#)); "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" ([Ecc 7:20](#)); "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" ([Isa 64:6](#)).¹⁹

Perhaps a bit much on examples of depravity but this aspect of the Judeo-Christian ethic was well understood and part of the fabric of life in early America. This viewpoint had a profound influence on our founding fathers, the early educational and jurisprudence systems in 18th Century America. The biblical viewpoint of the depravity of mankind was particularly predominant in the founding fathers early literature including the United States Constitution, Federalist papers, Bill of Rights and so on. We see this in comments from Hamilton, “Have we not already seen enough of the fallacy and extravagance of those idle theories which have amused us with promises of an exemption from the imperfections, weaknesses and evils incident to society in every shape?” Hamilton further writes, “As there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust.” Consider also James Madison, “I believe there are more instances of the abridgment of the freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments of those in power, than by violent and sudden usurpations; but, on a candid examination of history, we shall find that turbulence, violence, and abuse of power, by the majority trampling on the rights of the minority, have produced factions and commotions, which, in republics, have, more frequently than any other cause, produced despotism. If we go over the whole history of ancient and modern republics, we shall find their destruction to have generally resulted from those causes.”²⁰ Thus, the Judeo-Christian concept of depravity was fundamental to the founding fathers understanding that “citizens” need the protection from depraved leaders who inevitably abuse or in Lord Acton’s words, corrupt power.

The founding fathers early Christian viewpoint was colored by this concept of the inherent depravity in all men. Their remedy to depravity was lifelong learning with intellectual as well as a focus on spiritual growth in developing character. Much has been written about human bias. It takes many forms including mental, physical, tribal, religious and cultural to name just a few. One central aspect of bias however, it is largely self-centered and invisible to the individual possessing it.²¹ The founding fathers knowledge of their own depraved condition was often a blind spot visible only through the revelation found in the Judeo-Christian ethic. Like other fundamental biases of the human condition, they are mostly invisible to the individual and must be revealed by others. The rationality how to discern this corrupt depraved condition is provided by Custance:

“if the Bible is correct in saying that man is a fallen, sinful and depraved creature (and it never says this of any animal), that sin has affected not merely his spiritual nature, but also his mental faculties, so that he can neither be wholly right in his motivations nor completely sound in his thinking. It must be clear that man cannot define true humanness by studying himself as he now is. Just as the man whose vision is faulty cannot fit himself with corrective glasses unless he has the help of someone who is not similarly afflicted, so if man's perceptive abilities are at fault he cannot obtain a true picture of himself either without outside help. He requires some yardstick external to himself, some standard of reference with which to compare himself, and thus to correct his definition of what humanness really is. Or, alternatively, such knowledge must come to him through revelation. It cannot stem from his own reflections upon himself.”²²

This then is the key question: when it comes to what is moral or ethical who determines what is right? Being depraved was a blind spot for our founding fathers, and for many current day Christians, this concept of depravity is quite unknown and invisible. It follows that in developing character and determining what is moral or ethical is for most Americans, a spiritual question revealed by the Judeo-Christian ethic founded in the old and New Testament.²³ It is important for individuals and the nation as a whole to avoid anarchy with a drive towards “everyone did what was right in the sight of their own eyes.”²⁴ Likewise, for many Americans who find spiritualism in their Christian faith, the standard defining moral and ethical behavior would be the Judeo-Christian ethic aka., the biblical revelation, preaching or biblical based commentary and the like.²⁵ It certainly was a commonly held view to a greater degree in 18th Century America than today.

The second important aspect of the Judeo-Christian ethic, which is commonly misunderstood and yet is central purpose of Christian revelation as it relates to character development in the “spiritual” domain, Jesus of Nazareth was NOT a moral or ethical teacher in the sense of the historical view of moral and ethical codes. Unlike ethicists and moral philosophies found in Plato, Aristotle, Epicureanism, Stoicism (all pre-dating Christian writings) or say, Hobbs, Spinoza, Joseph Butler, Kant, Bentham or Mill, etc. from a more recent era, the teachings and claims of Jesus in the New Testament gospel derive their character from his role as

the messiah. He was not an ethics philosopher nor a moral teacher. There is nothing in the gospel that indicates Jesus was in the least preoccupied with his ethical condition.²⁶ He was sinless! Admittedly a number of ethical principles are found in the teaching of Jesus and the writings of his apostles. An ethical or moral life does not constitute the central theme of the New Testament message. Christian character for depraved mankind is not possible without the messiah and a relationship with the Christ. Character development as moral agent is a result of this relationship importantly, in a manner consistent with lifelong learning. In the New Testament the most explicit comments regarding the fruit of the spirit is recognizable in terms of development of character attributes such as: love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.²⁷ The moral and ethical character in thought and lifestyle are the result of growth in this relationship with the messiah, the achievement of a Christ-like personality, never the means. For example, the Apostles -- Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, all capture the ethical teaching of Jesus indicating the whole of the Old Testament law can be condensed into two simple "moral" imperatives: first, "love God with your whole heart, soul and mind" and second, "love your neighbor as yourself."²⁸ Yet all these same evangelists and other apostles as well, write of Jesus with one manifest focus, as the messiah.

This messiah aspect of Jesus is fundamentally different than all other ethical systems. According to Greek philosophy, the chief end of man was the perfect development of his natural abilities. Aristotle made "contemplation and reason" height of man's attainments while the Stoics said, "nature herself never gives us any but good inclinations" and so it goes. To the Greeks, the early Christians were considered deficient in education; the Romans accused them of defective patriotism.²⁹

Jesus of the New Testament is never portrayed as simply good, moral, or even a man of character, rather as a mediator between God and man. Without an essential focus on the Christian belief in Jesus as God incarnate, the Christian message is wholly misunderstood and misapplied. Consider the dogmatic and to many, very offensive statement by Jesus, "I am the way, the truth and life, No man comes to the Father but by me."³⁰ Jesus speaks not only as authoritative, but as sovereign God in the realm of truth. Jesus forgave people of their sin. He did not come to usher in a new ethical system or standard of morality rather he came to establish

a new kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount was viewed by many of his contemporary Greek and Roman ethical philosophers as weak and foolish; however, Jesus speaks of himself in the Day of Judgment.³¹ It is he who will decide the eternal destiny of humanity based on their relationship to him. His promise: *theirs* is the kingdom of heaven, *they* shall see God and *they* shall be satisfied with righteousness. Both aspects require the “grace” of God. This same principle was made by CS Lewis:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."³²

For the founding fathers and the typical Christians of that generation, and I might say for many today, the lifelong “spiritual” growth involving developing as men and women of character involves both breaking the power of sin and evil as well as embracing the power of good.

It follows that the nation’s Judeo-Christian tradition was well understood by the founding fathers and is evident in the Constitution, Federalist papers and much of the literature of the 18th Century American writers. The founding fathers were strongly influenced by the concept of the depravity and the human proclivity to abuse power. Constitutional separation of powers, both in the federal systems as well as the independent states, held to a careful balance power so as to check these fundamental abuses. Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence declared “self-evident truths, endowed by their creator” -- not a human system of morality or ethics. The bill of rights, the first ten amendments by James Madison all designed to limit the power of the federal government, are designed to protect the citizens (people of these United States) from (in the eyes of the founding fathers) a depraved, sinful, evil and powerful group like King George,

the British Empire who proved to be costly in blood and treasure to the fledgling nation during the Revolutionary War. These early national documents were also designed to protect the citizens from a depraved and powerful group of future American citizens who would be elected to office or appointed to the courts. England certainly did not hold the exclusive market on depraved men and women. Protections mandates in that Congress shall make no law...., rights of the people to be secure, no citizen shall be held, people enjoy the “right” to a speed and public trail, all federal powers not delegated by the constitution are reserved to the states or to the people.

Thomas Jefferson not only wrote the Declaration but is known as the father of education for Virginia and founded the University of Virginia in 1819. Thomas Jefferson argued that education and development of character for the citizenry were vital to the health and longevity of the country. Other founding fathers who wrote and spoke extensively on education include George Washington, Benjamin Rush and Benjamin Franklin.³³

Jefferson’s view on education was directed towards both the average citizen and those with superior capacity for larger leadership and service.³⁴ Importantly for Jefferson, a traditional liberal arts education played an important role in building character. His view of “moral sense” is developed by a diverse and lifelong education and he specially recommended the use of literature.³⁵ Moral sense and character included habits such as gratitude, generosity, charity, kindness, truthfulness, a sense of justice, stability, organization and courage.³⁶ For the professional Soldier, this list looks remarkably like the character attributes found in Army Values and the tone of our professional ethic. Jefferson’s emphasis on lifelong learning in the very broad study of literature, history, language and philosophy was a means of promoting moral, intellectual and civic virtue.³⁷ Tolerance, wisdom, patience and civility, character traits common in the genteel day of our founding fathers and to the “statesmen” of the 18th century, are often missing from the “in your face” politically charged, cyber environment of our day. The astute reader will see the parallel in these Jeffersonian ethical attributes and those writing of the Apostle Paul in the writing of the New Testament, the original source of character attributes such as love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, modesty, gentleness and self-control.³⁸

In the Tradition of John Dewey

John Dewey (1859 -1952) characterized in the words of the millennial generation is a Rock Star of modern education, not just in America but worldwide. Dewey lived in a period of incredible political, economic, social and technological change. He was born before the American civil war, educated during the 19th century and lived through two world wars and the early years of the Cold War. John Dewey has had a profound and lasting impact on education philosophy in the United States of America. John Dewey published a plethora of books and papers (over 300), many of which are still required reading for education curriculum, particularly for undergraduate level education students. His impact has been decidedly hostile to the development of character in our educational system, thus to our Soldiers for generations. John Dewey's humanist and progressivism through utilitarian philosophy emphasized the importance of cause and effect relationships and a training/education system which narrowly focuses on "consequences" as a part of ethical decision making. Central to progressivism is the lack of discipline in the classrooms in the efforts to bring out the natural proclivity of students. Dewey's focus on what students do and contribute to society remains an important aspect of progressivist philosophy. Who a person is in terms of character, values, patriotism and moral sense is not found in his philosophy.

Thus, John Dewey has had a profound and destructive influence on the nation's educational culture for at least two generations. The result of this influence in turn has had a decidedly negative influence on Soldiers in that our emphasis is on tactical and technical skills and training rather than developing character and leader attributes. The result of Dewey's influence has too often been an over-emphasis merely on technology, science, and the "functions" of our Soldiers. No one would argue against the need for tactically and technically competent Soldiers, particularly when considering more deployments into harm's way. On the other hand and in the words of GEN Martin Dempsey, "We learned after 12 years of war that character counts, and it counts mightily."³⁹ Striking the right balance is important. Why does character count and count mightily is a fair question. Consider LTC (Retired) then BG Jeff Sinclair, demoted two ranks for having an improper relationship with a subordinate and two other women. GEN (retired) David Petraeus, entered a plea agreement with the Justice Department for giving his mistress secret information, LTG (Retired) William "Kip" Ward was

demoted for lavish travel records and ordered to repay the government some \$ 82,000. The US Army had 129 battalion and brigade commanders relieved for cause since 2003, mostly for a negative ethical/command climate or personal behavior in violation of the UCMJ.⁴⁰ Our Army along with all of the services, continues to struggle with a host of sexual assault and harassment violations, numerous cases of contracting fraud/waste and abuse, and the list could go on. Earlier I included a rather long list of examples of “depravity” with corresponding bible references that went on and on and on. Here’s why, with more time this modern day list of character flaws altogether too common in our professional Army, could go on and on and on.

John Dewey remains a powerful influence in education today. Not just in America but his progressivist philosophy has spread worldwide. There continues to be a crisis in American education from the lack of discipline in the schools, incompetent teachers and curriculum such as Common Core which focuses narrowly on language arts and math skills at the expense of building moral character, the arts and a holistic approach to curriculum. John Dewey’s influence through proponents of his progressive education philosophy represents an unrelenting attack on parochial schooling, the traditional liberal education and a generally hostile attitude towards any religious or spiritual aspects found in education. Life lessons like teamwork, mutual trust, and character development through a comprehensive learning approach, in the words of Thomas Jefferson, “by reading good books, and lots of them” are all missing from progressivism. Like Fredrick Nietzsche, Dewey’s progressivism points toward the fallacy that conventional Judeo-Christian ethic has created a salve morality – it is an obstacle to education and he wrote that “religion is the opium of the people” in the style of Marx.⁴¹ In 1934, John Dewey signed the Humanist Manifesto written by Raymond Bragg, a document meant to transcend and replace previous deity-based systems.⁴²

For those readers who are parents of school aged children or who are familiar with state of education and schools, it is obvious that something is deeply flawed in the American classroom. For those readers who are not familiar with the generally dismal state of public education, note that all of our Soldiers experience some degree of this influence from their formative years as a student. Political philosopher (and parent) J. Martin Rochester rightfully is concerned in asserting, “It is hard to say which is declining faster, academic standards or ethical standards.”⁴³

Dewey's progressivism as an educational philosophy has for at least two generations included the need for teachers to approach learning with a "hands off" approach. Dewey's educational philosophy emphasizes the importance of letting the student set the curriculum as if the inclinations of the children, some of them spoiled, selfish and depraved little brats, are more important than the teachers or school boards or state educational administrators. While many teachers see the need to bring back character and values, of great concern is Sociologist James Hunter's observation, "Character in American education has not died a natural death. There has been an ironic and unintended complicity among the very people who have taken on the role of being its guardians."⁴⁴ The seeds of progressivism have found fertile ground in the American education system. Concepts such as "values clarification" for children or "I like me" proponents are inspired by Dewey's progressivism. Other programs strongly influenced by Dewey include "no child left behind" or "Race to the Top" and most recently the common core.

After generations of progressivism, our national school system, obsessed with an "I'm OK, you're OK" philosophy and the like, has come to the realization that our kids were not prepared for college and could not accomplish most basic reading or mathematics tasks. Thus, many education professionals, administrators and especially politicians at all levels have hopped on the "common core" band wagon. Common Core State Standards initiative is an educational assembly in the United States that details what K – 12 students should know in English and Mathematics at the end of each school year.⁴⁵ Common core is at best, "a band aid for a symptom of a much larger problem."⁴⁶ Standards emerged to remedy the problem of failing students on a national scale with fewer and fewer high school graduates prepared for higher learning challenges at university. We see the same challenge in our officer corps at the Command and General Staff College with numerous cases of plagiarism and the lack of fundamental writing skills. Concepts like common core as a curriculum guideline are sound in principle but shortsighted when it comes to lifelong learning. No one would argue the need for an education that sets a standard and holds both teachers and students accountable to meet that standard. More importantly and perhaps the only real good that will come as a result of common core is that for the first time since John Dewey's progressivism took hold in post-WW II America, the debate with education administrators, school boards, teachers and parents is ongoing and all are seriously discussing the role of a content-based curriculum designed to improve our students. Many would argue that states rather than the federal government are more

than qualified to set these educational standards. Much of the negative Common Core criticism stems from the federal bureaucratic approach in the Department of Education advocated by those who are acolytes of John Dewey's progressivist philosophy. Several significant common core issues exist, from its narrow focus on only English and mathematics or some of the ridiculous and unrealistic standards for young, especially K – 3rd graders. There are no standards or emphasis on teaching children to work together as a team, or on character and values development. Special needs children are apparently “left behind” – history, music, the arts are also left behind with common core. States, with help from educators, local school boards and districts rather than federal bureaucrats, should be responsible and held accountable for common core standards. The role of teachers and parents, perhaps the most critical element in the K-12 education system, are for the most part, AWOL in the common core political discussion. Common Core's shortsighted approach of narrowly focusing on just language and mathematics misses a fundamental point. What a student does in terms of passing a test, learning English or mathematics attaches value exclusively on those functions. While learning English and math are important, so are topics such as literature, history, language and arts, all of which promote moral, intellectual and civic virtue. All are missing from common core and is the fundamental point of this paper. The narrow focus on what skills a child possesses is not as important as who a child becomes in terms of character. The broad education of our children, these same children who grow up to join the profession of arms, services and other important vocations, deserve the broad education that develops intellect, patriotism and produces men and women of character.

The Remedy for Shallow Character

So Army leader, just what are you doing today to develop Soldiers of character? How are you inculcating the Army values into the being of your team? How are you communicating your own character to your team? Is your focus only narrowly on what your Soldiers do in terms of skills, tactical and technical competence? What time and intellectual energy are you investing in transformational leadership attributes such as our Army Values, empathy, the Army ethos and profession? Probably most of your focus is on transactional competencies because you find like most, it's a lot easier. Like the question earlier about what is “moral,” these types of questions about developing Soldiers of character are not easily answered. Life in the institutional Army is

busy, even busier in the operational units. Time is precious and hard decisions about where to take risk must be made daily.

Inculcating “character” into the being of our Soldiers has always been a daunting task, perhaps more so today than ever before. While an emotional word, “inculcating” is more precise and is value added. We don’t want our Soldiers to recite the Army values on a promotion board, we want them to live the Army values, particularly when making tough ethical choices so common to combat operations. As ambiguity, uncertainty and complexity increase in the operational environment, our Army leadership is relearning the hard lesson in importance of character. This challenge is becoming increasingly difficult as shown above with the challenges of a national education system focused predominantly on passing English and math tests rather than a holistic curriculum designed to make better thinkers, better learners and citizens grounded in ethics and character. John Dewey’s progressivism continues to have a strong and decidedly negative influence on character and ethical teaching. While changing the public school system in America is beyond the scope of this paper it is important for Army leaders to realize that “character” and living the Army Values is a foreign concept to many of the young Americans who join our team. Some of them are depraved and criminal in behavior and character but there is hope! Transactional competencies such as behavior and achieving tasks are what our Soldiers do -- relatively easy, a place to stop investing time, resources and effort. Changing Soldiers through transformational leadership is another story. Inculcating Army values while not proselytizing, building empathy while preparing Soldiers for the rigors of combat, instilling the Army ethos while discouraging arrogance or discipline without becoming a “yes – man” is tough government work.

“Not So” Critical Thinking Example

Army doctrine notes that critical and creative thinking assists commanders in understanding and decision making. Critical thinking examines problems in depth from multiple points of view and importantly, *critical thinkers are purposeful and reflective* thinkers who apply judgment about what to believe or what to do in response to known facts, observations, experience.⁴⁷ Note the italics in this sentence, particularly the second person, singular present tense of the word TO BE – critical thinkers “are” in this sentence. The doctrinal definition has it right, thank you Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate! Unfortunately and too often the Army’s

approach to critical thinking is that it is a set of skills or processes that methodically takes apart the parts of thinking in order to apply universal intellectual standards.⁴⁸ As if this shallow skill set is somehow magically transferred into the mind of commanders or Army leaders which will have utility. This approach is similar to the numerous “digital” training requirements which offer e-Learning, AR 350-1 required quarterly and annual training via a web site presentation mostly containing a “death by PowerPoint” approach. Topics such as Alcohol/Substance Abuse and Prevention or Sexual Harassment/Assault Response Prevention, Combating Human Trafficking, suicide prevention taught in this manner is mostly shallow learning that is flushed after the course. For many, it is a drill that involves going straight to the test page and Google the questions in order to get a 70% passing score. Not only is this an unethical approach, more importantly passing a test is a poor measure of learning things that really matter like how to build a team through mutual trust or character in our Soldiers or importantly, commitment to the profession of arms. Digital testing from this training approach, furthers the illusion that “what you do” is important, rather than who you are. This is foolishness and not good critical thinking as it is a costly investment and not just in dollars, in the most precious resource we have, our Soldiers time.

Developing leaders of character must get to the “who” an Army leader is and must be internalized into the very being or the DNA of our Soldiers. Concepts such as character must be lived rather than reduced to a set of Soldier of the Month board questions dutifully regurgitating the Army values. Staying with our critical thinking theme consider Facione’s approach:

"The ideal critical thinker is habitually inquisitive, well informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgments, willing to reconsider, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, diligent in seeking relevant information, reasonable in the selection of criteria, focused in inquiry, and persistent in seeking results which are as precise as the subject and circumstance of inquiry permit.”⁴⁹

Note the internalization of who a critical thinker is, not competencies one possesses. In many universities critical thinking is taught not just as a process or set of skills but as an approach to developing the individual into an intelligent thinker by developing the “practice” of

critical thinking in a manner designed to pursue lifelong learning.⁵⁰ Importantly, like developing character, there are no shortcuts to developing an intelligent and reasoning mind. Being a critical thinker comes only with a well-trained mind comfortable with logic, rhetoric and developed with experience. As Thomas Jefferson advised his nephew, “read good books” with a commitment to lifelong learning.⁵¹

Conclusion

For those readers looking for a check list or a process or perhaps some OER bullets indicating that they are serious about building character as part of their leader development program -- *sorry!*⁵² This expectation is as misguided as assuming that the Soldiers coming to your formation directly from nation’s educational system will come to you with a strong sense of character and intelligence. The many will not and will at best, be competent in English and mathematics, precisely as common core mandates.

It’s been said, “it takes about ten years for the Army to develop a Captain with ten years of experience.” Of course, there are no shortcuts to experience and unfortunately, many of our Soldiers receive only a year or two of experience every ten years. Like the Christian character development earlier in this paper, the apostle Paul’s guidance to the early church in Rome, “be transformed by the renewal of your mind” -- never says that it will easy or fast. Like Thomas Jefferson noted, it takes a lifelong learner and it is a lifetime pursuit. For every meaningful transformation involving growth, there is no short or easy solution. So it is with the development of character in our Soldiers, it must be done one Soldier at a time – the daily, monthly, year after year growth towards being a mature Soldier of character.

“Adaptive Army leaders for a complex world” is the Chief of Staff of the Army’s top priority and our approach to developing adaptive leaders demands that the Army’s leadership end the shallow focus on processes and skills. Just as our mission command doctrine is centered on the commander and human activities rather than on radios, computers, the cyber net and processes, so should the Army’s focus change when it comes to Army values in general, and character in particular! Changing Army leaders “being” should be the deeper focus when it

comes to transformational development of character. This type of change in the thinking and DNA of our Soldiers goes hand in hand with developing adaptive leaders and Soldiers who are committed to our Army profession. Let's not be seduced into thinking it is easy, short term or that developing men and women of character can be a checklist learned in a digital learning class. It will not be found in any religious, philosophy, history or science book that is gathering dust on the library shelf. It's not like those amusing hucksters who promise the Pilates 15 minute to the perfect abs, just buy my workout video. It takes patience and a lifetime of personal and professional experiences as well as the comprehensive study to develop intellect or in the words of Thomas Jefferson, by reading "good books" study and learn from a lifetime of example from ethical Army leaders. And sometimes, the best lessons in life are learned through failure or watching someone else fail when it comes to moral imperatives and the Army values. Importantly, developing character depends on the relationships of our senior Army leaders to our younger Soldiers demonstrating by example, the character traits of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage.

Finally, as GEN Dempsey noted "character matters and it matters mightily" because attaching value to the individual rather than the skills, tactical and technical competence that an individual possesses. This realization is where the long, arduous and lifetime journey to preparing leaders of character starts.

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- ¹⁹ The *Holy Bible*, <http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/>, accessed, 20 FEB 2015
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- ²¹ See 2013 Ethics symposium paper, *Foiled by Certainty*, by the current author. This paper leans heavily on the work of psychology and medical community giants such as: Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow* as well as Robert Burton, *On Being Certain*.
- ²² Arthur Culance, *The Doorway Papers, part V page 4*. <http://www.culance.org/> Author's note, this paragraph from Culance Doorway papers is paraphrased in order to explain this fundamental Christian viewpoint which was fully understood by the founding fathers -- that mankind is not only depraved but is also unable to see his own collective and personal depravity.
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- ²⁷ See Paul's letter to the *Galatians* 5:22, ibid, the *Holy Bible*, one of numerous examples.
- ²⁸ Matthew 22, Luke 10, Mark 12, John 13 & 15, ibid, the *Holy Bible*
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- ³³ Edmonson, *ibid*, page 60.
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- ⁴⁴ James David Hunter, *The Death of Character: Moral Education in an Age without Good and Evil*, New York Books, 2000, page xv.
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- ⁴⁶ Current author, often a well-expressed sweeping generalization is more effective than a poorly expressed fact, particularly in the realm of political science. Common Core is decidedly political, not educational.
- ⁴⁷ US Army, Army Doctrinal Reference Publication, 6-0, dated, 17 MAY 2012
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- ⁵⁰ Jackson Nickerson, *A guide to Understanding, Learning and Practicing Critical Thinking*, Olin Business School, Washington University, in St. Louis, 2012. Note: based on a detailed personal conversation with Dr. Nickerson, Frahm Family Professor of Organization and Strategy/Associate Dean, Brookings Executive Education.
- ⁵¹ Peterson, *ibid*, as quoted in Edmonson, *Dewey and the Decline of American Education*, page 104.
- ⁵² Remember Gilly, Saturday Night Live, mischievous schoolgirl played by Kristen Wiig? The current author regrets that he is unable to voice the word “sorry” in just that insincere manner. Leaders should be getting after building character as part of a lifelong learning challenge, not looking for a checklist or process.

Colonel (Retired) Michael C. Sevcik

Colonel (Retired) Sevcik enlisted in the Army in 1975 and was commissioned as a Transportation Officer upon graduation from Officer Candidate School in 1977.

Colonel (Retired) Sevcik assumed command of the 404th Aviation Support Battalion, 4th Infantry Division (Mechanized), at Fort Hood, Texas and subsequently served as the Assistant Chief of Staff, G4 (Logistics) for the division. Colonel (Retired) Sevcik attended the Advanced Operational Arts Studies Fellowship at Fort Leavenworth in 1999 and served as a seminar leader at the School of Advanced Military Studies in 2000. Colonel (Retired) Sevcik assumed command of CSCT #3 supporting the 3d ROK Army in Korea on 11 July 2001 and was subsequently assigned to joint duty with the USAF at Offutt, AFB, Nebraska, as the Commander of Team 1, National Airborne Operations Center working for the Director for Global Operations, JCS. In the summer of 2003, Colonel (Retired) Sevcik assumed command of the 16th Corps Support Group in Iraq during OIF I as part of V Corps/CJTF-7. Colonel (Retired) Sevcik relinquished command of the 16th Corps Support Group in 2005 and was assigned as the Director, Logistics and Resource Operations, CGSC, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in July 2005. He retired in 2007 and has taught at the School for Command Preparation since his retirement.

His awards and decorations include the Defense Superior Service Medal, the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star Medal, the Army Meritorious Service Medal and a number of other awards. In April 2001, Colonel (Retired) Sevcik was inducted into the Officer Candidate Hall of Fame at Fort Benning, Georgia.

Married to the former Tamara J. Adams of Granite City, Illinois, the Sevcik's have two children: Matthew, a former Army Captain, with combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, who works for Weigel Broadcasting Company in Chicago and Molly Jo, an Army 2LT of Transportation assigned to the 25th Infantry Division, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.