

MASTER DRAPERS: 14 Jan 2011

I have been asked to speak on an ethically related topic entirely of my choice; I am going to fulfil that mission by establishing three Reference Points and issuing a challenge; a challenge in relation to what I will argue is a malignant cancer eating away at the heart of Nation today.

If I were to ask you how you would judge which Army would win on a particular battlefield, I wonder what would run through your mind. The British Army argues that its Fighting Power is made up of 3 components; the first of these is **The Physical Component** is the means to fight – the ‘stuff’. Having the latest and best equipment – weapons, helicopters, armoured vehicles and so on - is obviously pretty crucial to winning, as is sustaining it all at peak capability.

The second is **The Conceptual Component** - the thought process behind the ability to fight; the thinking that goes into how to operate on the battlefield – an understanding of how to get best out of all the stuff we have, and of how we best manoeuvre to defeat the enemy.

For many that might be it – stuff and understanding. **But formally written into our Doctrine we also have a third Component – what we call the Moral Component** – which is all about the ability to get soldiers to fight, and if necessary to die for the cause. What is it that gets a soldier out on patrol in Afghanistan each morning, knowing that there is a fair to middling chance that he will be injured or killed? Our Doctrine argues that there are 3 fundamental elements to the answer to this question:

- Effective leadership and management from those placed in authority;
- The Motivation to achieve the task in hand;
- An Ethical Base and a Moral Cohesion.

Professor Martin Van Crefeld once commented that “**War is - before anything else - a matter of psychology.**” And the essential truth is that together these 3 - Leadership, Motivation, a Moral Cohesion and an Ethical Base produce the essence of Fighting Power – the **‘Will to Fight’**,

Now whilst this may be easy to talk about, it is much more difficult to define and to calculate. The Moral Component is fostered by words like trust and loyalty, duty and honour, integrity and courage, particularly within those who command and lead. And unlike mere numbers or doctrinal niceties it also centres on issues like a sense of justice and righteousness and a determination to adhere to certain codes of behaviour. Ultimately it rests on Character – which is what separates the ‘good’ army from the brutish.

So, a moral component to Fighting Power – my first reference point.

My second is about how this idea plays out within a Society as a whole – at a National level. To establish it I want you to imagine that you are standing in a 'pod' at the top of the Millennium Wheel, looking out across the Thames. In one direction are the Houses of Parliament. In another are the office blocks here in the City. Scattered between the two are the spires and steeples of the churches which once dominated the skyline but, except for St Paul's and Westminster Abbey, do so no longer. Now suppose that with you is an eleven-year-old child, who says "What are all these different buildings; what do people do in them; what are they for?" So you point first to the Houses of Parliament and say, "That is the seat of Government. What they do there is to produce and distribute political power – passing the laws that make up the architecture of our society". And then you point to the offices in the City and say, "All those buildings are part of the economy, and what the economy does is to produce and distribute wealth". After a pause the child then says "What are those other buildings, the ones with the spires and steeples - what do they produce and distribute there?" How do you reply? Let me try to frame an answer.

The world of nation states is largely focused on the first two, which, on the face of it, are all that is needed to run a successful society; the state and the economy; the government and the market; politics and economics. **Politics is about society as a collective body**; collectively the citizens agree to abide by certain laws, recognising that it is in their collective and individual interest to do so. **The economy and the market is about society made up of private individuals who are free to choose** to do what they like within the framework of the law; to buy and sell as long as there is someone willing to sell to them or buy from them. **That's the essence of it. Power mediated through government, laws, politics and the courts; exchange mediated by money and markets.** Nations/societies of any shade or colour around the world have approached the execution of these two over the centuries in different ways, but most would still argue that any problem can be solved by one or other, the state or the individual. Either there should be a law about it or we should, as individuals, be free to choose to do what we like. These are the equivalents of the Physical and Conceptual Components of a Society.

But there is a problem. As with Fighting Power what this leaves out is some exceptionally important things; words like love, loyalty, friendship, trust, commitment, fidelity, integrity, honour and duty. For the sake of simplicity, let's call these things *ethical goods*. What is interesting about these goods is that you can't account for them in terms of politics or economics, the State or the individual, the law or the market. Take friendship, for example.

In my capacity as an adviser to the Defence Committee I was in the House of Commons the other day and I was a bit surprised to hear that the new Coalition Government had just announced a new law to say that you are to be my friends; this is clearly nonsense - **if someone helps me because there is a law**

that says that in certain circumstances they have to, then they are clearly not doing it as a friend.

Now I know that, so I have in my pocket sufficient cash to ensure that I can slip you all a fiver when you leave - and then perhaps you will become my friends! Again we know that this is nonsense – **we can't buy true friendship**. If you try to analyse friendship in terms of the state or the market, it doesn't work. Friendship is about something else; it can't be explained in terms of law on the one hand or exchange on the other.

But friendship is important to us, individually and collectively. In the military culture it is a vital part of the Moral Component - it makes a significant difference to our lives. In the fusion of friendship we discover strength and power that could never otherwise have been discovered; our strength plus our mate's strength produces a new and even greater - more powerful strength. We see that in spades on the battlefield, and hopefully you see it too in elements of your day to day lives.

It is from such words as friendship and love that the other Ethical Goods flow – a sense of honour and duty; integrity; loyalty; fidelity – none of which can be explained in terms of the law or the market.

And there is one crucial difference between the State and the market on the one hand, and Ethical goods on the other. Suppose you have total political power but then you find you have to share it with other people – as in the Coalition. Do you have more or less than you started with? Suppose you have a thousand pounds and then you divide it with other people. Do you have more or less than you started with? The State, which deals with power, and the markets, which deal with wealth are, in short, essentially *Zero Sum Games*. The more I share, the less I have.

Now, think of the Ethical Goods I mentioned – love, friendship, trust, integrity etc. If I share these with other people, do I have more or less? Here is the crux. Ethical Goods are things of which the more I give away the more I have – the more I share the more I possess – this is because friendship, love, trust, commitment, honour, fidelity, integrity, **ONLY EXIST IN VIRTUE OF BEING SHARED AND BEING EXERCISED**. And when these goods are instinctively a part of who I am then the total grows exponentially. Between them they define who we really are, and from them we find the ability to dig deep, to go the extra mile; to carry the extra burden, and press on in the face of hardship.

Now perhaps we can begin to answer the child's question. These other buildings – Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral, St Michael's here in the City - are places which produce and distribute the ethical - the moral - the spiritual - goods of a society as a whole, goods which permeate in and throughout our personal and corporate business and political lives – or should do. These places represent a crucial and distinct part of the space in our Civil Society – a space that doesn't just live within and alongside the political and economic space, but actually frames them – or used to.

So, that's my second reference point.

My third relates to business. In putting together his best selling book 'Good to Great' Jim Collins and his team looked at companies which had made the transition from bring just good organisations to becoming great ones. They subsequently looked at how great organisations stumble; how the mighty fall.

Analysing the data the biggest lesson that Collins learned - both for moving to greatness in the first place and then falling - was that this was not about 'circumstances'; it was largely a matter of choice and discipline. He found that there were a series of stages that great organisations went through on the way up, and another set on the way down. Now we haven't got the time to look at all of these in detail, but I want to highlight just 2 of the headlines – gleaned, I stress, from the data gathered by a bunch of hardened business analysts.

First, the **leaders of great organisations are ambitious first and foremost for the cause** - not for themselves; they are **people** focussed. What Collins calls a 'Level 5' leader displays a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will. It has nothing to do with style, or charisma, or personality. This humility is not softness - it is rather about a deep desire to serve – to serve the people, to serve the company. It is not about me – the leader – it is about them – those I am leading. **It is not by chance that the hat-badge of the RMAS is: 'Serve to Lead'**

Secondly – and probably most crucially in my view – these organisations and their leaders adhere to core values; they will display a willingness to challenge and change everything - except those core values. They keep an absolute and clear distinction between “what we stand for” - which will never change - and “how we do things” - which never stops changing. Establishing and holding firm to enduring 'principles' they constantly adapt the 'practice' to meet the constantly changing business environment. Great companies thus have a purpose - a reason for being - that goes far beyond just making money and success. They ask themselves what would be lost if their business were to disappear, and why therefore they **must** endure, why they must continue the struggle; their purpose goes well beyond shareholder value, stock returns or corporate growth – it rests on core values that will never be compromised.

In their research Collins and his team also found that this reality in business was just as real in society as a whole. Using my language rather than theirs, they argue that, just like in business, any society that loses sight of the cause, that fails to serve the people – **all of the people** – that doesn't have disciplined

leadership that understands and constantly recognises some core values, then that society will not survive in the long run.

Jewry was always a very tiny people. Christianity in its early period was a tiny sect. Yet they have both survived – Christianity for 2000 years, Judaism for 4000. Meanwhile the great Empires that seemed invincible – Egypt and Syria, Babylon and Persia, ancient Greece and Rome, all the way through to Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union – all have crumbled and fallen. Why?

In the 1870's Nietzsche wrote a series of books attacking the values of Judaism and Christianity. His argument was simple. He said that what was natural to human beings was the 'will to power' – all that mattered was political and economic power. What is wrong with Judaism and Christianity, he argued, is that they are unnatural in putting right above might, compassion above ruthlessness. Instead of power they are concerned with the powerless – the widow, the orphan, the stranger, the vulnerable. Nietzsche's case was that Judaism and Christianity were an inversion of our natural instincts. He argued that they would never produce a society of strong, free human beings.

Now, Nietzsche was not a Nazi but his philosophy was admired by many Nazis who followed his ideas to their logical conclusion – with catastrophic consequences. The evidence of history is that precisely those civilisations that value right rather than might; that care for the vulnerable as much as for the strong; that defend the sanctity of human life and fight for the rights of the individual; these have been the ones that have flourished. No political system that denied these things has ever survived for very long. The Third Reich was going to last for a thousand years – it survived for 12. Communism was going to flourish to the end of history – it lasted 70 years. Why?

The brutal reality is that an individual person, or a business, or a nation, may look to be the picture of health and strength on the outside - but it can still be very sick on the inside. In short, someone who looks fit and invulnerable today can be gone in 3 months time as a result of a malignant cancer on the inside - and in the same way great companies or businesses, great nations or civilisations can also crash and burn. Great on the outside but sick on the inside, they crumble and fall over time.

My argument is therefore simple - if you de-moralise society, de-sensitise its ethical values, lose a sense of moral vision, - then it is destroyed, usually from within; it implodes. That is why moral/ethical societies survive, and non-ethical ones do not.

So, finally, to my challenge - where does all of this leave us and our Society today? How do our businesses, our Nation, our civilisation stack up? Are we with Nietzsche? Is it all about political power – economic growth; is it all about ‘stuff’ and ‘knowledge’ – the physical and conceptual components?

I would argue that there is a cancer at the heart of British Society today; it is not a cancer of immorality – there has always been immorality. Our cancer is the malignant growth of ‘Amorality’ - a society where anything goes; where there is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ – where everything is equally valid and valuable. A society which has lost sight of its Christian – its Biblical - roots.

For the majority today, truth for example is not about ‘is it true’, but about ‘whose truth is it; and which power – or who – stands to gain from proclaiming it? As Mort Sahl famously remarked “**George Washington couldn’t tell a lie; Richard Nixon couldn’t tell the truth, Bill Clinton couldn’t tell the difference**” – but nobody seemed to mind too much. Why? Because in the view of many truth is created, not discovered, and to be correct we must therefore talk about “truths” not ‘Truth’. Lying is no longer lying if you are telling your own personal truth, or speaking for the larger truth of the group. No judgments can be made. Not surprisingly the result is, as Os Guinness’s says in his great little book on Truth, we live in a world of lies, hype and spin; moving values that are dictated by circumstance, and not by eternal – Biblical - perspectives.

The problem is that when they are needed, integrity, honour and moral courage do not just materialise like magic - emerging overnight as a result of some wishful thinking because the going has got tough - ethical values need to be inculcated and lived day by day; and if they aren’t then we have to live with the downstream consequences. Society always suffers when individual selfishness and greed rule the roost.

A previous Bishop of Durham, in a lecture at St Andrew’s University in 1934, said that the safety of Britain depends not on her wealth and administration, but on the **character** of her people. This in turn depends on the institutions, he argued, which form character; institutions like the Church. Like the Moral Component, Character is difficult to define; it can’t be legislated for or bought. Character as Aristotle taught it is a habit – the daily choice of right instead of wrong; it determines our behaviour – it is who we are and what we get up to in the dark or when we think that no-one is looking. Character is a moral quality which grows to maturity in peace and is not suddenly developed on the outbreak of war or at the onset of a major problem at work or in the family or in the Nation. Our fate in life’s battle is worked out long before the wars begin.

Our society – our civilisation, like other great civilisations before us – stands in real danger. It may be true that our civilisation was once embedded in the earth of Judeo-Christianity, and that our accepted standards of morality grew out of that Biblical earth, but it seems to me that our nation has consciously decided to separate itself from its heritage. We live today in what has been called a ‘cut-flower’ society. Flowers cut from the ground and put in a vase may look fine for a while, but the simple and brutal reality is that such flowers will wither and die; cut flowers never reach their full potential; never spread fresh seeds to create new life. It doesn’t happen overnight – but it happens. The same will happen – I would argue is happening – to our values; separated from their Biblical foundations they are dying.

There is no clever technique that will reverse this – no Act of Parliament will make it right; we can pour billions into the problem and it will make no difference. What we need are great leaders – level 5 leaders – to emerge and stand firm against the tide. It was Field Marshall Montgomery who said well over 60 years ago that “I do not believe that a commander can inspire great armies, or single units, or even individual men, unless he has a proper sense of religious truth. All Leadership – he said – is based on what he called the spiritual quality; the power to inspire others to follow.”

There has been a malignant cancer growing in our Nation and we have failed to recognise and deal with it. Cancers are of course very difficult to detect early, but if the brutal symptoms are recognised and faced up to then they can be relatively easy to cure. Conversely they are easy to detect late on, but very difficult – maybe even impossible - to cure.

If we are to succeed in the years ahead, we need to face up to this reality. We collectively need to re-establish a Moral Component in our nation, our society, our politics, our businesses, and in our individual and family lives. To do so will take courageous leadership – morally/ethically courageous leadership stemming from character built on Biblical Truth. And the time to start is now.