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AN EXAMINATION OF THE CORPORATE AND INDIVIDUAL ETHICAL DILEMMAS FACED BY A MEDICAL DEFENSE CONTRACTOR

BY

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COLONEL A. T. HADLEY III
United States Army

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE CORPORATE AND INDIVIDUAL ETHICAL DILEMMAS FACED
BY A MEDICAL DEFENSE CONTRACTOR

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

Colonel A.T.Hadley 111
United States Army

Colonel John F. Connolly
Project Advisor

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U.S. Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the ethical pressures and dilemmas faced by a medical contractor. Two fictional retired military officers, Plato and Glaucoma (known for his ethical short-sightedness) work through a variety of ethical problems, ranging from gross acts of impropriety to seemingly minor violations of ethics. Extensive use of conversation is used between these two characters to facilitate the free play of ideas and to make the discussion interesting. The conclusions reached are that consequentialism and compartmentalization work contrary to national interests in defense contracting. Additionally, other situations reveal that following the behavior set by others may lead to a downward spiral of ethical conduct. Also, the notion that one must draw a self-defined line and not cross it, even though the circumstances appear to be trivial, is discussed.

The first time Plato met Glaucoma was in Vietnam. Then it was Captain Glaucoma and Lieutenant Colonel Plato. CPT Glaucoma was the battalion surgeon, straight out of his general surgery residency at Boston City Hospital, and very new to Vietnam. Glaucoma wasn't his real last name, but a nickname given to him by his medics. It seems that he was always putting his glasses down, because of the heat and humidity, and then couldn't find them again. The medics thought that funny, irritating at times when they had to join the search, and the nickname of someone with short-sightedness took hold.

Plato wasn't the real name of the battalion commander either. He got his nickname because he was the old man of the battalion and was really excellent at teaching anything. He was thoroughly respected and admired because he always found ideas to teach the battalion new ways of staying alive. His success and his popularity was legion, and the battalion enjoyed one of the lowest casualty rates during his tenure in the war.

The two men found great pleasure in each other's company. Glaucoma had never seen a true leader before, just heads of department whose publications and academic prowess had allowed them to rise up the academic ladder. There was tremendous morale here, and Glaucoma had never felt more at home with a group of men, or more at ease, than when he was with the battalion, especially with Plato. Though he thought when he entered the Army that he would just do his time and leave after his Berry plan obligation was

completed, the battalion experience pushed his decision differently, so he remained in the Army, retiring as a Colonel.

Plato for his part found Glaucoma refreshing. The young surgeon was outstanding technically, didn't give out profiles by the score, and seemed interested about the welfare of the men, and didn't bitch about the Army. The battalion commander knew he had to work with Glaucoma because glaucoma had no vision of interpersonal relationships and working with people. His doctor would throw instruments at medics if they did not give him the right instruments, and he would chew them out in front of other sections, if they did things wrong, like not checking on the anti-malarial supplies. Such tactics might be all right in the closed environment of the surgical suite in Boston, but that inappropriate lack of vision in interpersonal relationships could hurt the unit. That quality, though, led Plato to chuckle whenever he used Glaucoma as a nickname.

In conversations with one another, each was curious about how the other had become the way they had. Glaucoma wanted to be a leader, and Plato was the finest man he had ever met. Plato, for his part, wanted to make his surgeon, and the aid station, part of a high performing team. It was a surprise to Plato that Glaucoma had patterned his behavior after other successful residents. The environment had shaped him. He just behaved as others did and thought

little of it. Plato wondered at that for he knew ever since his cadet days that he could not afford to let his actions go unexamined.

Still, Plato had admiration for Glaucoma. He was a very good doctor. That Plato knew first hand. That very delicate removal of mortar fragments, from in and around the nerve in his right arm, in the aid station had saved the use of his arm, he was later told by doctors as he was being evacuated back to the United States. Plato followed Glaucoma's military career but was disappointed that he learned that Glaucoma retired from the Army early. Glaucoma had always liked his first boss. He was not surprised that Plato had retired as a Major General. The two would meet years later in the Pentagon.

This time it was Plato that was the doctor. The form that this service took was a type of moral doctoring. Glaucoma had fallen prey to the temptation of some of the prevailing ethics that being a "beltway bandit" offered. Plato always had an interest in his battalion surgeon. Anytime he used his right arm, he thought of the fragmentation wounds he received in Vietnam. How and why had his doctor gone astray again? These were the questions on his mind.

Plato had become a consultant for one of the defense contractors. Now, semi-retired he still liked to roam the building and see an occasional old friend. It was true that he missed the Army. Being with people that served was what

he missed most, but he still enjoyed his title of Plato, a wise old man that knew life and what was right.

Glaucoma had joined a high technology medical company that was trying to sell their products to the armed services. The company used the space shuttle to manufacture their products. The microgravity environment, the absence of convection, and space based electrophoresis provided the environment to manufacture medical products of incredible purity.

What the remainder of this study does is to examine, in a conversational mode, the ethical challenges and pitfalls of such an environment. Some of these situations display rather gross acts of impropriety. Others seem very minor but, in combination, add up to some significant violations of ethics. The basic question that each of these situations ask is what if everyone behaved in the same fashion, and is there a line that you absolutely will not cross? If there is, how do you define that line for yourself? Plato and Glaucoma, through their conversation, will try to provide these answers.

The next meeting occurs in one of the many Pentagon hallways. Plato had been asked by DCSOPS to give advice on weapons integration in low intensity conflict. Glaucoma has just left an IPR dealing with the purification of bacterial antigen components for later vaccine use. Their chance encounter is filled with surprise.

PL. Hey, Glaucoma is that you?

GL. Sir, how are you doing?

PL. Well, I'm almost retired now. Occasionally, people ask me for some advice based on my experience. How about you?

GL. Trying to make megabucks in the contracting world. The rules are very different here. The competition is intense.

PL. What do you mean?

GL. Whoever wins the contract wins and wins big. Once that contract has been awarded, you have a real steady stream of income.

PL. I know there is a lot of pressure, but how do you keep everything above board?

GL. Above board? Those guys are the losers around here. You have to find an edge to win.

PL. What's yours?

GL. You have to know the folks and know them real well. That way you can learn the specifications before the contract is announced. Let me tell you that provides advantage, especially if you can have someone you know write the specs so that it benefits your company.

PL. You don't do that do you?

GL. Of course I do it. That's one of the reasons I will do a clinic a half day a week at Walter Reed. You know how hard it is for retirees to get seen at a Medical Center. I pave the way for them and their families, and I learn what is what in the way of new contracts.

PL. Kind of a you scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours?

GL. Sure. It's better than that. You know how some contractors let go-- like that word-- their retired officers when they run out of connections. Instead, my name gets passed around if you have a medical problem. So I am not going to run out of contacts.

PL. What's your boss think of that, or does he know?

GL. Of course, he knows. He thinks running the clinic is a great angle. A good deal of business comes in that way.

PL. You know what I think Glaucoma? I think what you are doing is bribery. I know that is tough for you to handle, but ever since battalion, I have told you to set the tone. Looks like the tone has been set but in the wrong direction.

GL. Come on now. This isn't the Army.

PL. You didn't like the term let go. Should I use the term influence peddling to what you are doing? Do you tell your children that's what you do?

GL. No. I tell them I work for a contractor.

PL. You remember way back when you were throwing instruments. I told you then that just because all the other doctors behaved that way in the operating room did not mean that you had to. You don't have to follow the standards of your boss, if they are not right. Remember that talk?

GL. I do actually. The medics and I got along better after that. But things are different now?

PL. Are they? Let me tell you a few things. We are all still in the business of defending the country and all that it stands for, soldiers and contractors alike. At the very least, your practices make the defense of the country more expensive, and you profit from that expense.

GL. Well, that is true. But everybody else does it.

PL. So what. Just think if you didn't. What would happen if you didn't need to use unfair practices to win. Why the Department of Defense would give you more business because they know that you are not cutting corners.

GL. You are telling me that ethical behavior works in this business?

PL. I sure am. Look at the example Nixon set. He brought the whole country down when he acted as he did. People want ethical leadership.

GL. Soldiers reenlist for a good unit that's for sure. Never thought that would apply outside the Army.

PL. Everything you do for the country should be scrutinized. Think of some of the values that come out of the constitution. Liberty and justice for all, or is there a privileged minority that bends and shapes the rules for their own interest?

GL. I have heard some of this conversation before.

PL. You have. You don't promote democracy by excluding others. Captains and Lieutenants got their share of pulling patrol. It is not winning, but the competition that makes this country what it is. I don't feel good when my team wins, but there's a point shaving scandal. Healthy competition, that's another thing. Everyone has a chance of winning.

GL. Put it that way, and you are right, I have done some point shaving to get advantage, but I didn't see beyond the day to day contracting. I never thought that my actions could, in some way, pull the country in a negative direction. I thought that it was just me and the company, and we didn't didn't count for much.

PL. Each person has a vote. We who deal with lives should exercise that vote carefully.

GL. Well said, Plato. It looks like I have a lot of remembering to do. Listen, I have to run. I have a meeting with my boss, Mr. Fascoine, in half an hour. Lunch, tuesday?

PL. I can do that.

The time passes over the weekend and the two meet over lunch on tuesday. Lunch is almost over as the two have caught up with each other over the intervening years.

PL. Thanks Glaucoma for lunch. I never did ask you how your session with Fascoine went last friday.

GL. Not too bad, really. We are going to be part of the Space Station. One of our divisions is playing heavily with the construction. The government made a mistake in the contracting. Simple but stupid, but they had developed all their tolerances to plus or minus ten percent. That means that a screw and the hole that it has to go into can both be within specs, but the two will never marry up with one another.

PL. You did tell the contracting officer?

GL. No, we did not. They developed the contract. We followed it to the letter. The contract modification is going to make us millions.

PL. You mean that the taxpayer is losing millions. Did you ever correct a cashier when you got the wrong change in your favor? It is the same thing here. Ask yourself the same questions that I asked you earlier.

GL. You mean is defense being bettered? No, I guess not. It seems that once again the chase for the almighty dollar has interfered with providing for the common defense. Some of the dollars we could have gained would be better spent elsewhere.

PL. Right. Making money at all costs is not what it's about in the defense industry. The real issue is to provide for the common defense. You doctors should know about providing cost effective quality care. Ripping off the government is not in keeping with those ideals.

GL. True. We really did not render unto Caesar as we should have. That is a little profound for lunch time conversation, but I have the idea. If I run into you again, I have some other matters I want to talk to you about. You know it is easy to lose your way, if you follow everyone else.

PL. It does make sense to keep your own ethical compass.

The two meet again for lunch as planned. They are in one of the quieter spots of "the building's" restaurants.

Plato, as is his way, has learned much about Glaucoma from gossip and old friends. The two launch into a conversation. Plato still commands respect from his former surgeon. Glaucoma, for his part, is eager to talk to the one man that he revered.

PL. What's this I hear about your new contract? Selling things to the Army that it doesn't really need?

GL. That's a little harsh isn't it? The Army needed it because they bought it. That's what the philosophy is around here.

PL. I see. Listen, what is the product that the Army bought?

GL. Smart spheres, genetically produced microspheres, injected into the body, that recognize bacteria or viruses and then fight off the disease.

PL. Sounds impressive. How well do they work?

GL. No better than, or worse than, vaccines that are available in the open market. However, we are in product development now for smart spheres that work against non-vaccine recognized diseases. Getting our foot in the door is a major push now. After that it will really be big money, if we can sell the non-vaccine related smart spheres.

PL. You guys making much profit now?

GL. We do all right. The industry standard may be the Air Force Hammer. From that standpoint, we are playing catch-up.

PL. Why don't we talk about that?

GL. Why, you sound like one of those investigators from the GAO. You aren't going to talk to me about my conscience and business ethics, are you?

PL. Personally, I liked the phrase conscience is the inner voice that warns us that somebody may be looking. 1

GL. What's that supposed to mean? I want to tell you that around here it is okay to do what you are doing because all the other contractors are doing exactly the same thing?

PL. Don't get testy. Let me ask you another question. Do you think that what you are doing should be the standard for all of your fellow contractors to follow? I mean it seems to me that those that guard the welfare of the United States should have its interest first and foremost in mind. 2

GL. I don't quite get what you mean.

PL. Put it this way. It looks like you have come a long way from Duty, Honor, and Country, and what we talked about in battalion. Medical contractors should have the most character₃ of all the contractors because you have been tested early in ethics throughout medical school, hospital

practice, and public service. You told me that you didn't clip reserve articles out of library journals to score higher than your classmates in medical school. That really frosted you back then. After that, you made ethical decisions on a daily basis involving people's lives. Let me ask you, aren't you doing the same thing now?

GL. No, it is not the same. I am within a standard, a norm, of what I do now, just as I was as a physician. Until that standard is changed, then what I do is perfectly okay.

PL. Before we discuss doing that, remember the definitions of Duty, Honor, and Country in the Officer's Guide. You remember those don't you? "To do the best I know how, the very best I can." ⁴ Just being part of the group doesn't distinguish you, doctors, contractors or the country. You could all be slime.

GL. Oh, come on, I just do what the rest of the industry, and my company, does. They don't think what I do is wrong.

PL. Let me try again. Remember that country means working for a greater cause. "It is the willingness to sacrifice and endure discipline for the welfare of the community." ⁵ Have you sacrificed, or have you gained unduely from your actions in selling smart spheres? But if you gained, ask yourself has the country lost?

GL. Well, if you put it that way, my gain from smart spheres was the country's loss. I didn't see it that way. We didn't harm anybody, but we sure did not promote those Officer's Guide values. I guess what you are saying, Plato, is that if everyone behaved as everybody else did, then individuality, and the value of the individual to contribute would be lost.

PL. True. Remember the Army slogan "be all that you can be." You have to set the standards, and live up to them. Change occurs when an individual decides to act on something he feels is not right. Group standards fall far from that slogan of being all you can be.

GL. But what happens if each contractor sets a different standard? Some contractors will surely set low standards.

PL. You know, no one comes to work to louse things up. Yet, there is a problem. It is still hard to say or do something merely because it is right. That is an individual choice. So what are you going to do now?

GL. Following your lead, I could try to set, and act like the standard that I will set for myself. A few good actions might lead others in my company to remember the concepts of Duty, Honor, and Country also.

PL. And if they don't follow the example?

GL. It's their choice. But in my division I can set the standard for others formally with the performance appraisal.

PL. You know that you have put a smile on my face. If you choose to do the right thing, you really can do enormous good. What you do in your division in your company may pull the rest of the company along. Not only that, but others may even start to wonder about the possibility for society if they acted according to a higher individual standard. Have a nice day, Glaucoma.

Plato thought that the last dialogue was still a little too easy. It was fine to have Glaucoma recognize his shortsightedness. There should be a higher standard than that of a self-serving group. Also, it was great that Glaucoma was beginning to recognize the pressures of consequentialism. Still, Plato wondered if the transition between thought and deed would occur. Nevertheless, it was an important step for Glaucoma to take to say that he would try to set the ethical standard in his company. But would he? Plato recalled that students cheat on their final ethics exam, and "studies at Cornell University have tended to show that the average child of ten in the United States has already developed a noncondemning attitude toward cheating." Indeed, there's a many a slip twixt cup and

lip. The question being what would Glaucoma do in the day to day circumstances of everyday life?

GL. Plato, you really got me between a rock and a hard place. I suggested to my boss that we revise our standards, and that we only market items that are significantly better than what's out there already.

PL. So what did your boss say?

GL. Give me an example, he said. So I told him that we were really marketing the sizzle and not the steak in the case of smart spheres. I said that current vaccines would save the government money. Smart spheres do not work any better and cost more. Then my boss interrupted me asking who the hell had I been talking to? I told him.

PL. And...

GL. He said that at best you were a sanctimonious prig.

PL. You know, your boss, Fascolne, has a bit of a point. I get embarrassed myself when people flaunt their self-righteousness. Sometimes when I hear myself say certain things in a holler-than-thou way, I shudder. Many times, though, the most muddled of gray areas can be broken into white and black zones.

GL. You are getting ahead of me, Plato. Let me tell you that I agreed with Fascolne.

PL. You what?

GL. Agreed with him. Nothing wrong with that. It's like laughing at the bosses' jokes. No harm in that. Have you heard the joke about...

PL. Sanctimonious prig, huh?

GL. Oh, come on, I thought it was pretty funny. And you know as well as I do that brown-nosing is a fact of life and a way up the corporate ladder.

PL. It may be a little thing, but it is one of my pet peeves. I have seen a lot of people agree with too much. There is a fine line between being diplomatic and giving up a little bit of your soul. You do have to give a little, or you might not be putting food on the table. All right, then, let's hear this little joke that you and Fascoine thought so funny.

GL. How do stop five blacks from raping a white woman?

PL. I give up, how?

GL. By throwing them a basketball.

PL. I'm glad you told that joke, Glaucoma.

GL. Pretty funny, wasn't it?

PL. Yes, actually. But let me throw something at you? Ever think that ethnic jokes and brown-nosing have something

In common? Over the years, these jokes take on a reality of their own. Blacks are thought of as dominating basketball as well as being threatening and menacing. If you accept that, then you have just shown a little prejudice, or at least something that does not show your good side. Maybe, we shouldn't tell those jokes.

GL. Get off it. Tell me about your pet peeve.

PL. First, would you tell that joke to a black.

GL. No.

PL. Why not?

GL. I'd be afraid that the mother might smash me.

PL. Right. See with every joke like that one that you laugh at just because your supervisor tells it, with every little agreement made that one doesn't one hundred percent agree with, and when one doesn't voice a contrary opinion, then one gives away a little bit of one's very essence. Religiously, that would be called the soul, if you will. Ever had an experience like that?"

GL. No one has that much time to be captain of the universe.

PL. All right, but have you ever wished that you had stood up for something, or that you hadn't said something.

GL. Of course. Haven't we all.

PL. Tell me about a time then when you crossed one of your own boundaries, then kept up the behaviour and, much later, changed your behavior because you thought better of it.

GL. Well, you will think this silly Plato, but there was one type of experience that I went through when I was in college. I graduated in the sixties, a time when property was regarded as bad because it was owned by the military-industrial complex....

PL. This is unlike me Glaucoma, but could you get to the point.

GL. Anyway, I shoplifted. I took a yellow and blue polka dot tie from the on sale rack from at a campus store. There was something in my gut that gave and guilt overwhelmed me. After that experience, however, shoplifting became easier and easier, and the guilt became less and less. It was like that way until I got caught taking a Playboy magazine from a New York City hotel lobby.

PL. What happened then?

GL. A good deal of self-hate. However, I will tell you there was an advantage to that experience. I never shoplifted again, and just as much as I was filled with the feeling of self-hate, I enjoyed being honest after that. It was also easier to live with myself.

PL. Let me make a guess, Glaucoma. You had the same feeling when you thought about padding your expense account and didn't do it. Am I right?

GL. How did you know?"

PL. Easy with an experience like that. Honesty is a habit, too, and a far better one to live, and to keep company, with. You don't have to go seven years to a psychotherapist to get your respect back. You see that a lot today. Also I am glad that you didn't learn to do the right thing for the wrong reason. Many think that if Mike Milliken got caught, they could get caught too. Hardly, the moral point of view.⁷

GL. It is my turn to remind you to get to the point.

PL. Glaucoma, I have been making it a number of ways. Is it possible to spend time at work, really doing an act of brown-nosing the boss, while not losing a part of yourself and your independence? If you tailor your behavior to fit other's actions and beliefs, are you not putting on false behavior? If the shoe fits, wear it, may be a proverb of some worth, unless that proverb means if it works for you at the expense of your own and the nation's values. With the excuse, everybody is doing it, "normal guilt feelings are stifled,"⁸ and unethical behavior may result.

GL. Is that the lesson for today?

PL. Yes. Remember that sixties song, a little bit of soul. That's what you can give away by exercising the time-honored way to the top of the corporate ladder.

GL. A little strong, if you ask me.

PL. Watch it, Glaucoma. Let me put it like this. If everybody acted strictly in their own interest, then we, as society, have homogenized our society. There would be no ideal to follow. Where would the idea of working for the common good be? There could be no heroes in such a society because all of us would be working for just our interest and no one else's. That is why we must take an unequivocal stand against what we feel to be unethical behavior.

GL. Where to draw that line is difficult. I think I see the danger to ourselves and, as you said, to society at large. We could not have a sense of purpose, if people are incapable of believing that there are some lines that should never be crossed, some deeds that should never be done, and even some jokes that should never be told.

PL. Well, said indeed.

GL. One thing, Plato. No one likes a martyr, and the career itself is distinctly unpleasant.

PL. So remember to fight your ethical battles carefully. I knew a guy like that once, who was always telling me he was too principled to succeed. IBM fired him

because he busted their dress code when he refused to wear a white shirt and a tie. What was the point in that?

Pl. That's what I mean by choosing the ethical battlefield carefully. But right now, I have to run to my car pool. Let's do this again sometime. I learn a lot from you.

Glaucoma and Plato meet again. Glaucoma had been pondering Plato's last words and the discussion of brown-nosing and ethnic jokes. He understood now that it was much easier not to deal with an individual as an individual once he had been reduced to a stereotype. He recognized that he held prejudices, but as Plato had suggested, those prejudices did not reflect the best in himself. As a consequence, he promised himself that he would at least reflect before repeating those type of jokes. He would work on changing his behaviour too and, hopefully, his attitude would follow. Glaucoma had thought on the problem of brown-nosing as well. His problem was his self-respect. He needed to be independent and to work with dignity, but he needed to bring home the monthly check. Yet, like the ethnic jokes where he couldn't relate to minorities, Glaucoma could not relate to his boss. Being servile and unctuous was the easiest path for him to follow. Yet, this thought brought violence to his logic. Yes, sometimes you do have to give a little, but like a slow

degenerative neurological disease, every time you do so for your own promotion and well being, you do, as Plato said, give away a part of your soul. How could looking out for number one have become so important? How could things have turned out this way?

PL. There you are Glaucoma. Nice spot you picked out for lunch.

GL. Thanks. It is better than eating in the building. I was doing some thinking about what we talked about last time. Do you have any thoughts about looking out for number one? Did anything in the business ethic contribute to where we are today?

PL. Yes. That gonzo Journalist Hunter Thompson said it well. "In order to make money, they praised the ends and ignored the means, a time-honored custom that justifies almost anything except shrinking profits."

GL. Well, there is a lot of that going around these days. More and more, you see videos, tapes, and books urging people to take power at the expense of others, assert themselves and look out for old number one.

PL. And that happiness can be found in the fold of a large paycheck. Let me put some ideas into your head about how I think all this started. Tell me about the standards your company, HI Tech Tronics Incorporated, uses to evaluate performance.

GL. That's easy. It's all related to the bottom line of how much we make for the firm.

PL. That mistake again. You were in Vietnam. Tell me about the progress reports.

GL. They reported the progress that a unit was making.

PL. Ever see a bad one?

GL. No.

PL. That's the point. When the intangibles and personal integrity are not given weight by a progress report, "then a company is lending itself to a continuing, calculated deception in the restraint of candor."¹⁰ In other words, progress will always be reported no matter what. There is a great deal of pressure to measure what is easy to measure, and the easy way is not necessarily the right way.

GL. That first bit is a pretty elegant way of saying that there are some things that can not be measured. I can see how pure numbers and statistical reports can dilute the quality of moral leadership.¹¹ But how does this relate to the question of doing what is best for number one?

PL. In a moment, Glaucoma. You see that bottom line philosophy has a number of consequences. It fosters the production of inaccurate information, especially if the individual inputs those numbers into the report itself, and

It shields the top corporate leaders from any type of bad news. Worse than that, however, is that the bottom line reporting system rewards trivial, measurable, quota-filling accomplishments; and eventually squeezes much of the inner satisfaction and personal enjoyment out of being a professional.¹²

GL. Well, I guess HI Tech Tronics hasn't learned all the lessons of the indiscriminate use of statistics. But still, how does the reporting system relate to the concept of number onelism? Doesn't that preclude ambition?

PL. If the bottom line is everything, then all else is secondary. When the most important thing to you becomes that bottom line, then one becomes addicted to it and serving it at the expense of yourself and others. The bottom line, then, rules you instead of the other way around. You see, Glaucoma, no one is corruptible unless he lets himself be corrupted. That is why it so important to remember that the journey itself is as important as the arrival.

GL. Huh? I think that I understand some of that. The problem today is that people want to be one regardless of anything else. The Jerry Tarkanian's that have a number one basketball team but play cocaine dealers, and the Mike Milken's that become enormously wealthy because they gave and took insider information are examples of the bottom-line-is-everything-mentality.

PL. Exactly. Now, you must learn that how you get there is as important as what you achieve. It's like algebra in some ways. If there is a negative in your success, it taints that success, like the negative in multiplication of two products will always turn out negative.

GL. You are awfully cerebral today. So there is no exclusion between ambition and integrity?

PL. None at all if you remember the journey itself. Indeed, the very impulse to succeed is what makes human beings great in the first place. It is that drive to succeed itself that creates great works and makes man perform heroically. The problem is to get rid of the basest notion of number onelism, which is now bound to our values of success.

GL. So how do you do that, Plato?

PL. There are two ways-- individually and organizationally. Individually, we need to take responsibility, and ask ourselves the tough questions. We need to strip away that veneer of glibness that says because we are number one, everything else must be all right. We need to avoid that type of intellectual tap dancing, that hectic motion that leads nowhere, with ourselves. Only in this way will we read, and know, ourselves. Like Lao Tzu said, "The way to do is to be."¹³

GL. But the firms, like HI Tech Tronicsronics, set the standards for me to follow. Aren't they at fault?

PL. They share the blame, Glaucoma. Firms should recognize the fact that where the system does not corrupt, the individual usually performs creditably; where the system corrupts, most individuals give in.¹⁴ We need, throughout the defense contractor network, people who will try to affect the norms of behaviour by example and persuasion.¹⁵

GL. Doesn't that fly in the face of management by objective?

PL. It certainly does. That practice should be eliminated as should other practices that rob people of their pride, produce a zero defect mentality, and rely on standards rather than leadership.

GL. Sounds like what the Japanese are trying to do with their businesses.

PL. You are right. The survival of firms is so hazardous in hard times that their continued existence depends on the day-to-day mobilization of every ounce of intelligence. ¹⁶

GL. And ethics, Plato.

PL. I thought you would pick up on that. The process will not be easy. You see, real change in ourselves, and in

the institutions and companies about us, involves much work, effort, and real pain. No one said it was going to be easy.

GL. You know, Plato, I mentioned those self-help books, and you mentioned intellectual tap dancing. Both of those things are aimed at producing an individual that can avoid thinking about the real issues.

PL. Right again, Glaucoma. The challenge is to change.

GL. Can I quote you on that?

Glaucoma was indeed hard at thought. He had left his ethical friend Plato on a somber note. Around him few appeared to have that gut level acceptance of responsibility. His own case mirrored what Plato had brought out. The bottom line was what had counted most. As a marketer of "smart spheres," his only ethic had been to represent his firm and win for the ever rising profits of Hi Tech Tronics. Perhaps, the bottom line was the cancer of the professions.¹⁷ Indeed, the larger question was how can a civilization advance, or even continue, if it loses its sense of moral direction? ¹⁸

On a more personal vein, however, was Glaucoma's gnawing irritability within himself. He wanted to change. His frustration would result in unpleasant words with his psychiatrist. It seemed like the psychotherapy was only an indulgence to him. The psychiatrist gave him permission to

feel good about himself, which gave him license to keep on behaving and acting the way he did. There was no incentive to change, which he felt he must. In his case, there would be no gain, unless he changed. These thoughts were fairly lofty for a Friday evening. Glaucoma was working through them, at his favorite watering hole, when he sighted Plato.

PL. What's up, Glaucoma?

GL. Not too much, Plato. Listen, I was doing some thinking about the bottom line and all, and how both individuals and corporations need to change their ethic. That duty, honor, country concept makes good sense to me. My mistress thinks so as well.

PL. I see we have some ground to cover, Glaucoma.

GL. I'm not so sure about that. I changed some of work ethic substantially, and I am working on some other behaviors at the office that I am not so pleased with. I am doing so well, in fact, that I plan to terminate my psychoanalysis.

PL. Do you really think you can separate your job and your personal life, Glaucoma?

GL. Sure you can. Even that great military mind, Maxwell Taylor thinks you can. Remember that he wrote, an officer "may be loyal to his superiors and his profession but disloyal to his wife."¹⁹

PL. I have to disagree with that. As we launch into our drinks, let's discuss that point. But an aside, though, Taylor did say that he would expect some disagreement on that point.²⁰ Do you ever think of the number of people having affairs, the number of TDY one nighters, or the damage that infidelity causes?

GL. No. My shrink used to tell me that an affair could be therapeutic. It took the pressure off my wife sexually. I was trying to save my marriage. You know, the French even have a word, cinq-a-sept, a five to seven, so they don't even have to be late for dinner. What do you think of that?

PL. I think that you are making excuses, Plato. Irrespective of what I think of the French morality, it is impossible for people to compartmentalize their lives. You can't live that way where some of your life is locked up and some parts are completely open for examination. People aren't born with that type of ethical key.

GL. Then show me the carry over.

PL. Have you ever thought how inconsistent it is for you to demand loyalty from your people that you work with and yet be unfaithful to your wife? What about cheating on the income tax return, and asking for honest expense account recording? No, Glaucoma, "One's character is what counts and evaluations of character are all encompassing."²¹

GL. Perhaps my view was a little narrow. I always thought that the military might collapse without the conservative values of loyalty, obedience, and self-restraint.²² The human relations values of contemporary society and of infidelity do not fit into the military, and maybe, we, as contractors and former military officers, should act with dignity and restraint.

PL. Glaucoma, remember what we agreed on last time-- that change requires effort? Well, an affair, and duplicity, usually make people feel awful. The alternative, trying to nurture trust and trying to make it grow is not a sure shot-- just look at the soaring divorce rate-- mutual respect is hard work. But what is the right choice, or do you still have those uncontrollable physical needs that your wife just can't satisfy?

GL. Enough, you win. I agree. I would be crushed if my wife found out about my affair, and I would like to stay married to my wife. What I did was more than stupid. Listen, now I have another problem now. See that tall blond over there?

PL. The one in the red dress? Is she the one that you are having the affair with?

GL. No, I'm not having an affair with her. She is supposedly just a good friend, but I have a problem.

PL. That's interesting. At least you are being open about your problems now. Tell me about more about these woman problems.

GL. Well, she asked me to write her a recommendation for a GS 13 position. She really wants the job. My problem is that, if I wrote what I really I think, then there is no way whatsoever that Louise, the woman over there, would get the job. Sam, the guy I work with doesn't see any problem at all. He tells me to write the recommendation and write it good. Isn't that what friends are for he says?

PL. Your friend, Sam, has responded like many to this dilemma. You know that back scratching is really in vogue now, but friends should be worth more than that.

GL. As in vogue as MacDonalds ethnic jokes?"

PL. And just as accepted, unfortunately.

GL. So what do I tell her?

PL. Tell her that you prefer to write nothing at all. Falling that, tell her you will not write anything positive in the recommendation.

GL. She'll hate me if I do that. She probably will stop seeing me.

PL. So? If she recognizes the truth, you will still be friends. If not, it wasn't worth it in the first place.

Glaucoma, I have tracked a lot of people, like your boss, Fascolne. He is an individual that makes friends for what they could do for him. And then, when he is on another pinnacle, another peak of success, he stops seeing them. He tells others that he feels guilty, but, in the same breath, says that is the way the world goes around.

GL. What's the point besides telling me that the world is becoming increasingly amoral and inhospitable, a point that you have made many times.

PL. Remember what we said earlier about compartmentalizing? If you try to get away with compartmentalizing your life, Plato, you will pay an ethical price. You see, it becomes impossible to have false friends part of the time and to have real ones the rest of the time. Some kinds of behavior should really be mutually exclusive. How can you tell your wife that you love her Monday through Friday and then head on out to the single bars Friday night when she is visiting her parents?

Glaucoma was beginning to see what could happen if people were treated with respect and dignity and what could happen if they were not. He wanted to explore with Plato some other behaviors that he had seen that he didn't feel quite comfortable with. That was important to him because, like shoplifting, he didn't want to feel comfortable and accept certain behaviours. He thought of Voltaire's remark

that people are like oranges-- to be sucked dry and then discarded. How different that way was to the way that Plato showed him. Plato and Glaucoma met again in the Pentagon, while waiting for a contract to be announced. His thoughts wandered a bit to the new townhouse he decided not to buy.

PL. How's life in the fast lane, Glaucoma?

GL. Not too bad, if we get the contract. You know I had a good thought on the way home the other night. We are a convenience society, and we have become too accustomed to it. Take friendship, friendship can be inconvenient as we have to pay attention to other's needs which takes time and effort.

PL. Like anything else, it is what you put into it that makes it valuable. I have some ideas on that. I think it relates to the struggle that certain professions have with themselves. By the way, did you hear that your counterpart at Universal Panacea was awarded a million dollar bonus?

GL. Why doesn't anything like that ever happen to me? I might make twenty-five thousand if we get this contract for pure vaccines. I'll just bet that he stole some of my ideas from the last project.

PL. Nobody said that the world is a fair place.

GL. Very funny. Is that all you are going to say? I mean that schmuck from Universal Panacea makes megabucks, and you just say that life isn't fair. God, I could kill him.

PL. Sounds like you are envious, Glaucoma. What is envy but self-hate anyway?

GL. Envy is what makes the world go around. How can you keep up with the Joneses, how can you not want a bigger house, higher salary, or a faster car? Like it or not, Plato, envy is here to stay.

PL. You are right, it is. That's a fact of life. But how can you do it with style and grace? Think what envy produces, begrudging congratulations, revenge, and pettiness to name just a few qualities that come out of envy's production line. "Envy's a coal comes hissing hot from hell."²³

GL. Sure, and the folks concerned with type A behavior say that it is a life shortener too. But it is difficult in today's world not to get the message that one is measured by what one has. How can I not be envious of multi-millionaire second rate sports figures?

PL. Yes, I agree with you in some ways. We have turned our thoughts and efforts to consumer goods--another type of bottom line by the way. At the same time, we have turned away from people, and major issues. About half the people don't even vote.

GL. I know you have some suggestions about this dilemma, Plato.

PL. Well, you could try to cut your losses. Don't be obsessed with owning the next possession. Try not to let the greed show. And why let yourself be tormented by the successes of Universal Panacea.

GL. Surely there is a better way.

PL. There is. Remember World War II, when there was a unity of purpose both on the battlefield and the homefront. People and soldiers had a real sense of community back then.

GL. But we don't need a war for everybody to pull together.

PL. Right you are, Glaucoma. All we need are people to work together for mutually agreed upon goals. Then we need for people to adhere to some common value system. Your role, in this grand scheme, is to move away from the public be damned motto. Try to help recover the mental and moral force necessary for defense contracting to flourish.²⁴

GL. So, that is what you think is necessary to break out of this envy-and-self hatred cycle to have peace of mind. Just having values, sticking to them, and not worrying about how other people live their lives. Seems simple enough.

PL. Hey type A, it is a state of mind, you're right. But better than being eaten away by vague free floating anxiety and directing hostility everywhere. Let's finish up this topic about envy. When we started this conversation, you were plotting to get even with that person from Universal Panacea. You had that don't get mad, get even philosophy. See anything wrong with that?

GL. It's that hostility thing again. Control yourself, and you will be better off.

PL. No, Glaucoma this has nothing to do with type A. Revenge does not usually sweeten the personality. Also, what happens if you get caught?

GL. I'll finish your thought for you. There seems to be a trend here. People at peace with themselves, don't act perversely towards others. There is no need. Perhaps, we could all follow that dictum, Plato, in an ideal world.

PL. Good thought. You surprise me sometimes by fast you catch on. Let's talk about that townhouse you are thinking of buying.

GL. Well, I have some problems with my wife on this one. The townhouse was converted from a homeless shelter. It was bought out by a developer, and now some 125 people are back on the streets with nowhere to go. My wife says that it is convenient, and that if someone is going to live there it might as well be us. Personally, I would like to see the developers homeless.

PL. You might as well face up to the consequences. Your thoughts should govern your actions and feelings. Think about the principle.

GL. I did. I told my wife that self-justification is a well conditioned reflex these days, but we need to do the right thing. She told me that my principled behavior was going to be its own reward, and I was still going to be commuting.

PL. So what did you say?

GL. I said something that I will remember each day I make the long drive in. I said that in these days of doing-it-if-it-feels-good, there are some lines that we will not cross at any time. Those lines will be our battlefield. Taking a home from someone is something we decided not to participate in.

PL. Thanks for telling me that Glaucoma and for putting those self-justifications aside. But you missed the big picture. You made one of those slick New York City commitments.

GL. What?

PL. If you wanted to right that wrong, do something for the 125 that are on the streets. That would really be commitment.

GL. Let me think about that.

PL. You do that. In the meantime, enjoy your daily commute.

Glaucoma had done much work with Plato. He realized that there some ethical lines that could not be crossed, and that societal and peer pressures would always weigh heavily on what he ought to do. He had examined many of those issues and pressures, but he was looking for some type of higher law or calling because he was tired of defining each and every situation. What could that be? Plato had, for his part, worked hard with Glaucoma, who was now fast beginning to see the ethical details and implications more clearly. Plato had also recognized that he could not always be at Glaucoma's side. Therefore, Plato had to put Glaucoma into a position to set his own ethical course. Glaucoma had to be able before the two parted, to learn that

the only true knowledge was the knowledge that one finds for himself.

PL. Going on leave, Glaucoma?

GL. Yes, I need to do some thinking. By the way, did you hear about the new findings in artificial intelligence? The machines are now smarter than we are. Not only can they calculate faster, but they can think better.

PL. In your case that may be true. Yet where is this getting us, Glaucoma?

GL. Times have changed. We are in a very different place than when man thought he was at the center of the universe, or when man thought he was unique because of his intellect. Now it seems that man is not intellectually unique. His only chance of uniqueness now is at making moral and ethical choices.

PL. Doing a little historical and philosophical reflection, Glaucoma?

GL. And some personal reflection on my own history as well. Ernest Hemingway said that a man's life is cheap beside his work. So it is time, I think, to define myself by what I do and not what others think.

PL. Not bad at all, Glaucoma. It seems that you are growing up by leap and bounds morally. Keep that moral introspective up, Glaucoma, that's part of the challenge to

understand what William James said when he said that we lead lives inferior to ourselves. Note that he said to not to others, but to ourselves.

GL. Nice quote. You see a lot of that. Look at the supposedly responsible use of recreational drugs by the trendy where people slowly or suddenly kill themselves. This lack of responsibility extends to ourselves even to those who should be leaders.

PL. Wandering a little, aren't we?

GL. Not really, Plato. There has to be some gut level of acceptance of responsibility. I call it thinking with one's guts and not getting used to something you were once uncomfortable with. I was one of those hustlers looking to make fast and easy money with the public and the moral consequences be damned.

PL. Good, but that is a negative. What about the higher calling?

GL. You mentioned growing up morally, call it moral maturity, if you will. That is the crux of arriving at the point where you would give up your life for another person, concept, or for your country -- the ultimate altruism.

PL. There is personal risk in that position as it involves taking dangerous and unpopular decisions that many times do not reflect the common views. Yet, you are right,

this moral maturity you spoke of involves growth and change, which can be uncomfortable and painful.

GL. Yet, that's the whole concept of being a professional. To be accountable to others and to serve them. Being a medical defense contractor requires that altruism and painful growth. Some would call that part of that acceptance integrity, the ability to call it like it is in spite of fear for his or her career.²⁵

PL. Tell me some more about the risks involved, Glaucoma.

GL. You know, I finally understand what Thoreau meant when he said that most men live lives of quiet desperation. You can always find reasons for your own behavior, if you have the need to find them. The courage to confront what is wrong, and the courage to pursue what is right are part of the matrix of risk. The man that does not pursue, or confront, lives in quiet desperation.

PL. Interesting, indeed. Let me expound on that concept. Remember Hitler's Big Lie where the "masses of people felt very little shame at being terrorized intellectually and were scarcely conscious of the fact that their freedom as human beings was impudently abused."²⁶

GL. True, Plato. Those people did not accept that gross injustice as much as they were inculcated by it--like

some of the smoking advertisements on television--that occur over and over again.

PL. Indeed, if we look at societies throughout history, there has never been "an instance of a healthy society in which humans have not devised a framework of values, norms of conduct, a moral order."²⁷ That fact underscores the individual's right and importance to contribute to that moral fabric.

GL. No one gets out of this life alive. You might as well try and give it meaning.

PL. A little trite ...

GL. See, moral direction sets our course for us. One doesn't have to feel powerless or be without a sense of direction. What can, and should, sustain you throughout your lifetime is the faith in your own possibilities. That's why I got so mad at my psychiatrist. If he was half the doctor he thought he was, and genuinely interested in the welfare of people, he would encourage them to work for the good of society. The psychiatric goal should not be for people to merely to accept themselves and to glorify in that acceptance.

PL. A little harsh on the shrinks, but you don't need a psychiatrist to accept that challenge. You mentioned before that nothing worthwhile is easy. Being frustrated

with your yourself, your Job, or society is no reason to let go of that moral responsibility to work for the common good.

GL. I suppose that is true. There is an old saying, "If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem." That means two things to me. First, we need to shed the arrogance and, even, pettiness that we use to justify our actions. Second, we should try to put ourselves in other's shoes.

Pl. That platitude has always made sense to me. As part of systems theory, no one, or organization for that matter, exists in isolation. Looking at the grand scale of things, our nation even makes that mistake frequently. It may even interfere with our ability to make a moral foreign policy. For example, we have had high ranking officials not know where Italy was. How could we make decent foreign policy with that ignorance?

GL. Exactly. In shutting ourselves out and living only in the comfortable and familiar routine of day to day life, we have become shallower and less moral human beings. We see the effects of agent orange on our soldiers who fought in Vietnam on television, but we don't ask about the effects on the Vietnamese. If you don't have consideration for others, then you have only consideration for yourself.

PL. You are really doing well with this idea. Here is a real chance to stand up. Your business of selling health to the Armed Services should give you plenty of opportunity to be counted.

GL. I have seen that my own personal life reflected my view of the world at large. I became so indifferent to the plight of others that I lost my bearings. In fact, I couldn't recognize my own pain because I was living a life that centered on just me and the pursuit of my own happiness. Imagine hustling smart spheres.

PL. It looks like, as they say, you have it all together. That type of discipline to examine yourself really takes a great deal of character. Yet, it is true. If you love only yourself, there is little room, if any, for anyone or anything else. Your actions, and potential to do real good, become very constricted. Do you have something to add to that.

GL. No, but I have some concluding thoughts. I want to thank you, Plato. I learned a lot from you. Each of us has to bear the burden of our own morality or lack of it. This is especially true for those of us entrusted with the health and welfare of individuals responsible for defending the nation. We need also to establish standards of conduct and behavior for ourselves, abide by them, not cross them, and then defend them when they are challenged. Last, we need not to be sucked into the many statements of

self-justification that abound today. Those, too need to be challenged--in ourselves and others.

PL. Good luck, Glaucoma. But I shouldn't call you that anymore. You taught me some things in this session. You're on your own now. Continue with that clear moral vision. Goodbye and good luck. Remember the only reward for acting ethically, sometimes, is the way you feel about yourself.

In conclusion, this study has examined a number of issues. Because the discipline and writings of ethics itself can be too cerebral for ready comprehension, a conversational style was used between the two characters. This use of conversation emphasized the salient point that ethical predicaments may occur daily, even on a minute-to-minute basis.

At first, Glaucoma did not appreciate this challenge. His ignorance was largely due to the fact that he simply followed the norms, set by his boss and other contractors, unthinkingly. Plato showed Glaucoma that bottom-line-consequentialism and compartmentalization were detrimental to the true mission of medical defense contracting, which was to provide better health to the men and women in the Armed Services. However, Glaucoma became more adroit at recognizing the ethical issues as this study continued. His conclusion, that there is an absolute standard--one of Duty,

Honor, Country-- to live up to, coincided with his belief that there were some ethical lines that could not be crossed. The seemingly trivial events, such as brown-nosing or telling ethnic jokes, were used as a "piling on" effect not only to highlight ethical short-comings, but also to portray the difficulty of where to draw the line. This difficulty of exactly where to draw the line led to the final conclusion that ethical behavior may in and of itself be its own reward of feeling good within one's own self.

ENDNOTES

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9. Hunter Thompson, Songs of the Doomed, p. 74.
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25. Malham Wakin, "The Ethics of Leadership II," In War, Morality, and the Military Profession ed. by Malham Wakin, p. 209.

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