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Sailing True North: Ten Admirals and the Voyage of Character

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Personhood is important for ethics and moral agency, and ultimately for moral responsibility. The machines in the novel know humans' psychological and other tendencies and preferences and can respond to appropriate, inappropriate, and manipulative ways of achieving mission success. Who really is making decisions and who has agency here—the machines or the humans? Keegan notes, "Machines don't have ethics. They can be programmed to lie and not even know it" (p. 92), supporting the classical view that machines are instruments, while humans retain agency and judgment. For instance, TAMS can sift quickly through data and analyze them as instructed, but it does not know what questions to ask or how to weight the data given. Agent Keegan, however, can deliver meaning, follow her experience-based intuition, and render judgments about the data and what to do with them.

Second, the issue of trust in many guises is woven throughout: trust between humans and machines, between humans, between citizens and their government, and within organizations. Whom can one trust, and what is the basis of this trust? Philosopher Annette C. Baier thinks of *trust* in terms of goodwill and vulnerability; we trust those we think have our best interests in mind around issues with which we need help ("Trust and Antitrust," *Ethics* 96, no. 2 [January 1986], pp. 234–35). This is quite different from trust in a context of military and technology discussions, where trust is about predictability and reliability. Can machines such as TAMS be trusted to exercise judgment and discretion relative to their expertise, as humans can? Or must humans maintain control of these kinds of judgments, since machines cannot be moral agents?

What kind of partner can TAMS be for Agent Keegan: a good partner, like a human partner—one that can be trusted? The novel tends to focus on trust as predictability—that is, the machine will not do anything unexpected; except that, by the end of the narrative, TAMS can engage in deception. At that point, Keegan muses about another option. "It didn't have to be a binary choice if she was willing to give a machine the most human gift of all. Not trust that TAMS would do what she expected, but trust that it would do the right thing on its own" (p. 370). *Right* is, of course, a loaded term, suggesting a definition of either "appropriate to the context" or "moral."

Personhood and trust highlight another theme in the novel: how we ought to approach society, in which the machine-human interface is but one aspect to consider. The high-tech-guru character Shaw views society as a problem to be solved and fixed rather than as an ongoing dynamic process. Keegan resists this view, as problem solving highlights control and predictability, while ongoing engagement and relationships of all kinds require Baier's more robust sense of trust, and perhaps an expanded notion of personhood.

PAULINE SHANKS KAURIN

Sailing True North: Ten Admirals and the Voyage of Character, by James Stavridis [Adm., USN (Ret.)]. New York: Penguin, 2019. 312 pages. $28.

We are witnessing the slow death of character, postulates Admiral Stavridis in his new book. Using sea stories from a colorful group of admirals stretching across 2,500 years of history, Stavridis illuminates the most essential qualities

of character, showing how these qualities can be used as sea buoys—marking big rocks and shoal water—to help us navigate more effectively across the inner sea we all must sail.

At first glance, the book seems to fall into a long line of heroic leadership books that often trot out the same decorated military leaders and identify the same admirable character traits. But *Sailing True North* is different in significant ways. Some of the admirals Stavridis discusses were not heroic. Some are phantoms of history—names that so few people know that they might seem mythical, such as Chinese admiral Zheng He. Born to a Muslim family in 1371, Zheng was ten years old when he was taken prisoner and castrated. Despite being a eunuch, he became a fierce warrior and built China's first deep-ocean fleet. The nine other illustrious naval commanders whose stories Stavridis tells are Themistocles, Francis Drake, Horatio Nelson, Alfred Thayer Mahan, John Fisher, Chester Nimitz, Hyman Rickover, Elmo Zumwalt Jr., and Grace Hopper.

But ultimately the book is about leadership and how character influences it. Stavridis sees *leadership* not as a quality but as a tool to influence others to accomplish a specific purpose. Both good and evil people can be influential leaders. *Character* is the inner quality that enables leaders to steer the right course. Leadership without character is like a ship under way without a rudder, sailing toward bad ends. If character as a virtue continues to die, throughout our life's voyage we are going to encounter more and more rudderless ships.

Stavridis distinguishes between what he calls "résumé virtues"—schools attended, prizes won—and "eulogy virtues"—the character values that we hope people attribute to us at our funerals, such as honesty and courage. Admittedly, he has not unearthed any new character attributes, but it is how he links them—through the lens of a senior warfighter and a disruptive innovator—that is new and intriguing.

The narrative is structured like the double helix of a DNA molecule; one strand consists of the stories of the ten admirals, the other of lessons that Stavridis learned during his own naval career. The two strands wind around each other like a twisted ladder, connected through the interactions of the ten character qualities. This structure enables the author to discuss both the good and the bad traits of these ten admirals, juxtaposed with his own career experience of wrestling with the challenges of character.

A great strength of Stavridis and his insightful book lies in his vulnerability and its openness. He does not pull his punches—including the ones he throws at himself—in discussing both the strengths and weaknesses of each admiral. This is rare; few, if any, senior military leaders are so frank about their own shortcomings. It is his discussion of his own character flaws and how he worked to fix them that makes this book truly remarkable.

Stavridis argues that if we are going to change our moral compass, we must have the desire and ability to innovate. Character innovation requires both creativity and courage, especially moral courage. Both Drake and Fisher—Stavridis's least and most favorite subjects, respectively—highlight boldness and creativity.

Drake was dark and hot-blooded, a brutal tactician who did whatever it

took to succeed. Stavridis sees the Drake story as a cautionary tale of a swash-buckling pirate who led by bullying and terrifying his men. "Not everyone has the bold personality of Drake but building the habit of courage—no matter the venue—is within everyone's reach and is part of the voyage of character" (p. 67). Drake's brand of boldness is necessary for achieving disruptive innovations. Stavridis tells the story of how he himself survived the antibodies of a rigid bureaucracy that wanted to end his career as a one-star admiral for his role in leading the Navy's successfully disruptive think tank, Deep Blue. To his credit, he also draws lessons from his innovation failures while leading Southern Command.

Fisher, Stavridis's favorite, was extraordinarily creative. An undiplomatic leader possessing a bitter bark, "Fisher never saw a windmill at which he could resist tilting" (p. 121). He championed gunnery and advanced submarine innovations. As most disrupters do in their professions, Fisher created plenty of enemies in the Royal Navy. "If I could pick only one admiral to spend a long evening with," Stavridis states, "it would be Jacky Fisher. That combination of relentless perseverance and an unbounded desire to 'seize the new' is very, very rare in leaders" (p. 142).

Stavridis then recounts his own attempts to tilt at his share of windmills, including his experiences, both good and bad, in wrestling with the challenges of character. He ends with this question to help us judge our own moral compass: Who are our heroes? Do we admire them because they have a superb list of résumé-virtue accomplishments? Or do we admire them for their eulogy virtues, the character values for which

people are remembered kindly, such as empathy and resilience? If our résumé virtues overshadow our eulogy virtues, we may need to innovate and disrupt, recalibrating our moral compass to avoid the big rocks and shoals toward which we are headed.

TERRY PIERCE

The Ambassadors: America's Diplomats on the Front Lines, by Paul Richter. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2019. 352 pages. $28.

Over the past several years, politicians and pundits regularly have attacked members of the American Foreign Service as being part of a "deep state" that has some nefarious agenda against certain elected leaders. Members of the American diplomatic corps are portrayed as either elites or partisan supporters of political rivals and previous administrations. Such would run totally counter to the way the Foreign Service was envisioned when Congress established it in 1924 to be a professional, nonpartisan group in which an individual's success would be based on ability and merit.

In *The Ambassadors: America's Diplomats on the Front Lines,* Paul Richter, a former journalist who covered the State Department and foreign policy and the Pentagon for the *Los Angeles Times* out of its Washington bureau, surveys the careers of Ryan Crocker, Robert Ford, Anne Patterson, and J. Christopher Stevens. These four members of the Foreign Service held a combined fourteen ambassadorships and deputy chief of mission posts in the greater Middle East, and played critical roles in efforts to stabilize the region. Richter