

MORAL REALISM AND THE OPERATIONAL ART

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fulfillment of the requirements for the
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MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
General Studies

by

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This study seeks to provide an analytic framework for modeling moral influences. A moral influence is any person, institution, law, custom, or system that improves or worsens the moral capacities of actors in the operational environment. Joint doctrine obstructs analysis of moral influences because it implicitly accepts antirealism, a metaethical view according to which the truth-value of moral claims is subjective. Antirealism undermines commonsense explanations of moral influences. Worse yet, antirealism is incompatible with the moral foundation of the profession of arms. This study provides philosophical and practical arguments for rejecting antirealism. It provides a model for moral influences based on moral realism, the view that the truth-value of moral claims does not depend on the perspective of any person or group. The model offered here integrates with the system-centric descriptions of the operational environment offered in <i>Joint Planning</i> and <i>Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment</i> .					
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ABSTRACT

MORAL REALISM AND THE OPERATIONAL ART, by Anthony C. Lupo, 164 pages.

This study seeks to provide an analytic framework for modeling moral influences. A moral influence is any person, institution, law, custom, or system that improves or worsens the moral capacities of actors in the operational environment. Joint doctrine obstructs analysis of moral influences because it implicitly accepts antirealism, a metaethical view according to which the truth-value of moral claims is subjective. Antirealism undermines commonsense explanations of moral influences. Worse yet, antirealism is incompatible with the moral foundation of the profession of arms. This study provides philosophical and practical arguments for rejecting antirealism. It provides a model for moral influences based on moral realism, the view that the truth-value of moral claims does not depend on the perspective of any person or group. The model offered here integrates with the system-centric descriptions of the operational environment offered in *Joint Planning* and *Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment*.

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This thesis is dedicated to Saint Thomas More.

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ACRONYMS

CMR	Civil-Military Relations
HQDA	Headquarters Department of the Army
JCOIE	Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JIA	Joint and Interagency
JIPOE	Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment
NIC	National Intelligence Council
OE	Operational Environment
PAAA	Practical Argument Against Antirealism
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
VOAP	Values of the American People
VPP	Vicious Profession Premise

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Title 18, Section 1621 of U.S. Code, named “Perjury Generally,” discourages witnesses from providing false testimony (U.S. Code 18 1994, §1621). The Muslim duty to almsgiving, *zakat*, assists the poor and encourages charity. Russian New Generation Warfare seeks “reflexive control,” or to “locate the weak link in [its adversary’s] system and exploit it through moral arguments, psychological tactics, or appeals to specific leaders’ character.” (Kowalski 2017) American military officers swear to ‘support and defend’ the Constitution to reinforce their commitment to the rule of law. Youth basketball leagues provide young men and women a place to learn the value of teamwork.

These are all examples of moral influences. A moral influence is any person, institution, law, custom, or system that improves or worsens the moral capacities of actors in the operational environment. Moral influences are so common that we take them for granted. But what are moral influences really? How does a moral fact produce a moral effect? According to whom or by what standard is an influence moral? What makes a moral influence good or bad?

These are thorny philosophical questions. Joint planners may be surprised to learn that joint doctrine has answered them by relying on a position in philosophy called ‘moral antirealism.’ In slogan form, antirealism holds that morality is subjective. It is the philosophical basis for many views, including ‘cultural relativism,’ ‘subjectivism,’ ‘moral skepticism,’ and ‘constructivism.’ These positions share the antirealist claim that moral standards depend on the beliefs or perspective of some person or group. According to

Army doctrine, antirealism holds that “moral judgments are . . . authoritative only in a descriptive sense for those who accept those judgments.” (HQDA 2020, 21)

As this thesis argues, antirealism cannot serve as the basis of the joint framework for understanding moral influences. For logical reasons to be explained, no ‘descriptive’ account of moral influences can adequately explain why agents in the operational environment hold them to be moral or ‘normative.’ Antirealism faces many serious philosophical challenges. Finally, when turned inward, antirealism erodes the moral foundation of the profession of arms; it is neither feasible nor acceptable. Consequently, the joint and interagency community (JIA) must reject antirealism for both philosophical and practical reasons.

This thesis provides a model for moral influences based on an opposing view called ‘moral realism.’ On realism, moral claims are true or false according to objective (i.e., belief-independent) standards. Using realism as a foundation, the JIA can interpret and characterize influences on the operational environment using both descriptive and normative claims. Realism preserves the uniqueness of moral claims and their role as an influence both within and above culture. Internally, moral realism is consistent with the moral underpinnings of the profession of arms.

Moral influences matter because they shape the way actors view the world and make decisions. As the current *National Defense Strategy* seeks to “strengthen alliances and attract new partnerships,” the joint force should expect the global appeal of “a free and open international order” to depend on moral influences (DOD 2018, 8). To this end, the JIA must make sense of what moral influences are. To engage seriously with this question is to engage with important and contentious questions at the intersection of

philosophy and JIA planning. In the main, these questions turn on philosophical questions, not scientific hypotheses.

Of the arguments presented in this thesis, the following captures the main critique of antirealism in joint doctrine:

1. The JIA must model moral influences in the operational environment.
2. The JIA cannot compromise the moral foundation of the profession of arms.
3. The JIA cannot model moral influences on the operational environment on an antirealist worldview without compromising the moral foundation of the profession of arms.
4. Realism allows the JIA to model moral influences on the operational environment and maintain the moral foundation of the profession of arms.

Therefore, the JIA must reject moral antirealism and accept moral realism.

This argument does not require a decisive (philosophical) argument against antirealism (i.e., it is sound without one), but it does require that moral realism be plausible. To this end, chapter 2 surveys important work in moral philosophy, endorses the best realist positions available, and responds to antirealist objections. Chapter 2 draws on Aristotle and others to provide an account of ‘moral influences.’ Chapter 4 presents the argument above, with special emphasis on the third and fourth premises. Chapter 4 shows how antirealism undermines the Constitution and the moral foundation of the profession of arms. Chapter 5 provides a model that corrects the mistakes of the current approach. This model uses existing concepts in joint doctrine and only requires a few minor but critical modifications to doctrine as written. Although this study focuses on

joint doctrine, the recommendations provided in chapter 5 apply to all JIA national security activities.

As of this writing, there is no literature addressing the touchpoint between the nature of morality (i.e., what chapter 4 introduces as ‘metaethics’) and the operational art. This is surprising. In a world characterized by truth decay, election interference, and political warfare, one should wonder whether it is enough to see these phenomena as just wrinkles in a never-ending information contest (Robinson 2018; Hickey 2018). If volume is the only variable that matters to reception of moral influences, then a close study of moral question is unnecessary. But if the uniquely moral character of influences in the operational environment helps military professionals understand the ‘complexity’ of the modern security environment, then it is time to play catch-up. The Cleon’s and Putin’s of the world have a head start.

The above outlines the major goals of this project but does little to show why moral realism matters, what it means, and how joint doctrine, in its present form, relates to it. Later chapters cover these issues in depth. The following vignettes introduce basic concepts and illustrate the stakes. The first outlines the moral problem with joint doctrine by highlighting a particularly egregious example from the Army’s *Moral Leadership*. The second offers a brief case study of moral influences in Thucydides’s *The Peloponnesian War*. The rest of the chapter covers the formal goals of this research.

Vignette: *Moral Leadership* and the Hazards of Antirealism

The Department of the Army released *Moral Leadership* in November 2020. It is the only service-level document that addresses a form of moral realism by name, albeit through the imprecise terms ‘moral objectivism’ and ‘relativism.’ For this vignette,

‘objectivism’ and ‘relativism’ are approximate stand-ins for realism and antirealism

respectfully. *Moral Leadership* contains a striking comment worth quoting in full:

The final lens in the applied ethical framework for the profession of arms focuses on the environment, offering two alternative viewpoints. Moral objectivism holds that universal moral principles exist and cross cultures, allowing for meaningful moral judgments between people of different cultures. Moral relativism maintains that moral judgments are relative to cultures, and authoritative only in a descriptive sense for those who accept those judgments. This lens is especially important where coalition partners may hold moral commitments at odds with those of other leaders on the ground. (HQDA 2020, 21)

Moral Leadership offers a choice. A member of the profession of arms may choose whether she will be a moral objectivist or relativist on any given day, whenever the question is put before her. Thus, she may choose that moral principles exist independently of her beliefs about them (i.e., objectivism or ‘realism’), or she may choose that morality consists in those beliefs (i.e., relativism or ‘antirealism’). She may choose whether “meaningful moral judgments” are possible across cultures or if all talk of universal moral norms is nonsense. Indeed, she may choose the degree to which moral judgments have authority, guide action, are worth dying for, etc.

The profession demands that she choose. She may kill or order others to kill based on the consequences of that choice. She may kill or order others to kill regardless of her choice, perhaps because she is ordered to; it is her mission; she chooses simply not to care; etc. What justification she has for killing depends on whether justification is, in principle, possible. Thankfully, many of her choices are constrained by law and regulation. Yet the justification of those laws, regulations, and orders depends, at least to her, on what she chooses. If she chooses to be a descriptive relativist, then she may also choose whether to accept the moral standards represented in law (even if she is compelled to comply with them).

The notion that one might choose what view to take on the nature of morality is not interesting. To make any moral judgment, one implicitly asserts or denies claims about morality. To use moral terms competently, one must have some idea of what one means to say, if only superficially. Therefore, *Moral Leadership* presents the basic condition of thinking about morality as if it were the destination and provides nothing more than a menu of options. It provides no guidance for what makes claims about morality true.

By posing the choice bluntly, *Moral Leadership* makes the ambiguity at the heart of Army and joint moral thought explicit. By not offering any reason for the profession to choose one position over the other (except the irrelevant consideration of whether coalition partners are involved), the Army implies there is no principled reason on which to choose. To a critical observer, this seems to accept the central pessimism about moral claims that motivates descriptive relativism.

A moral objectivist would reject the framework offered in *Moral Leadership*. The choice is posed in a manner that seems to undermine the possibility that moral facts are fixed by a belief-independent reality. A relativist can accept *Moral Leadership*'s framework if objectivism is understood in a relativized way, as in a claim believed to be 'objective' by such-and-such group of people. Hence, what *Moral Leadership* offers as a choice, or "lens," is in fact a decision already made in favor of relativism, at least regarding any issue not explicitly covered by law or regulations (even these 'positivist' justifications are antirealist, see chapter 4). A perceptive cynic might see *Moral Leadership* as little more than a thinly veiled egoism.

Perhaps the Army only intends to highlight the observation that people disagree about the truth of various moral claims, often along cultural lines. However, both moral objectivism and relativism allow that people can disagree or be mistaken (although relativism often embraces disagreement as evidence). In philosophy, objectivism and relativism are claims about the nature of reality: to what extent a ‘moral reality’ exists at all and whether the truth of moral claims depends on the beliefs of the person making them (Sayre-McChord 1988, 1-21). They are not the sort of thing one chooses as part of an operational framework. If a moral claim is true, we conform to it (to the extent we can) or do evil (to the extent we are culpable). If morality does not exist but in the individualized, egoist sense, then one wonders why a ‘moral’ framework is required at all. Surely a survey of moral opinions would suffice.

For these reasons, the moral framework provided in *Moral Leadership* is conceptually flawed. As shown in chapter 2, this error is common across the body of joint and service-level doctrine. What are the consequences of this mistake? Two immediate issues come to mind: (1) the profession is left with an ambiguous framework for understanding the moral dimension of the operational environment; and (2) there is an increased risk of moral injury. Ironically, *Moral Leadership* addresses the second:

Moral injury is a form of psychological, mental, or spiritual trauma, distinct from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) but often accompanied by PTSD, whereby an individual’s observation of, or participation in certain acts runs counter to deeply held moral beliefs . . . Moral injury can also be related to mental stress or discomfort from holding two or more opposing beliefs or values, performing actions contradictory to one or more beliefs or values, or confrontation with information that conflicts with existing beliefs or values. (HQDA 2020, 7)

Ambiguity in the profession of arm’s moral frameworks exacerbates the likelihood of “confrontation” between value structures. The individual professional bears

the burden of deciding what is true. The joint force passed it to her. These inconsistencies, ambiguities, and injuries are felt only by persons because only persons possess a conscience. This is the immediate, individual-level harm this paper seeks to address, although it will not do so directly. Other work, even that cited above, sets the foundation.

Doctrine may seek to apply descriptive relativism to the rest of the world (see chapter 2), but the joint force would hesitate to view American society this way. As the American narrative goes, American values are appealing not because they are American, but because they are good—or at least they are appealing to the extent that they are good (i.e., have the potential of being good). Paradoxically, a relativist who “supports and defends” the Constitution must reject the realist reasons the Founding Fathers proposed. As shown in chapter 4, this and other difficulties only emerge on antirealist models. These challenges pressure the acceptability of joint doctrine’s current model. According to the law of non-contradiction, the joint force must be consistent both internally (i.e., how we view ourselves) and externally (i.e., how we view others). This requirement has somehow escaped notice.

Vignette: *The Peloponnesian War*

Moral influences are operationally relevant. At times, they are critical. Thucydides provides an illuminating and tragic example. Though ancient, it highlights how moral causes may prove essential to interpreting the actions of actors in the operational environment. To review, a moral influence is any person, law, institution, or system that improves or worsens the moral capacities of a person or group.

During a peaceful interlude in the Peloponnesian War, Athens, the most powerful of the Greek city-states, voted to invade the large island of Sicily. Lured by the alleged wealth of the Sicilian city-states, and “ambitious in real truth of conquering the whole” of Sicily, the Athenian ‘Assembly,’ its democratic governing body, commissioned the massive undertaking (“the most costly and splendid Hellenic force . . . by a single city up to that time”) in 415 BCE (TH 1996, 6.6-6.8, 6.31). At the time, no Sicilian city-state had the capability or desire to influence the Athenian empire (TH 1996, 6.36). Meanwhile, Athens faced active rebellions within its own empire. As Nicias, Athens’s most prudent general counseled, the invasion “would leave many enemies behind . . . and bring more back” (TH 1996, 6.10). In the winter of 413-2 BCE, Spartan and Sicilian forces annihilated the Athenian army and navy in Sicily and slaughtered her finest commanders. The disaster marked the beginning of the end of the Athenian empire.

An immediate question arises. Why did Athens neglect its security interests to pursue an elective war in a foreign land? Why did Athens, in the words of Nicias, “[grasp] at another empire before [it] secured the one [it had] already?” (TH 1996, 6.10). “Miscalculation” and poor operational design cannot explain the decision (TH 1996, 2.65.11). As Thucydides argued, Athens “[allowed] private ambitions and private interests, in matters quite foreign to the war, to lead them into projects unjust to themselves and their allies—projects whose success would only conduce to the honor and advantage of private persons, and whose failure entailed certain disaster” (TH 1996, 2.65). Private interest, the siren call of wealth and honor, and “squabbles for the leadership of the People” explain Athens’s disastrous decision-making (TH 1996, 2.65).

The role of moral influences in Thucydides' telling of Athens's poor choices is difficult to overstate. To Thucydides, the Athenian national character decayed during the war. Where there were once strong leaders, demagogues and private factions came to dominate the Athenian political landscape. The sum of these influences manifested in terrible strategic judgments that overwhelmed Athens's overwhelming material advantages in the war (TH 1996, 2.65.13).

Thucydides might be mistaken in one or several ways. Even so, his argument is easy to understand and is at least plausible. This intelligibility implies realism is correct. Since the problem is that Athens made a poor decision, the explanation of its failure must account for the difference between what Athens ought to have decided and what Athens (in fact) decided. On realism, there is a sense in which Athens ought to have done something according to some standard of prudent governance. Negative moral influences explain this deviation and therefore Athens's pattern of poor choices.

On antirealism, this 'standard' is internal to Athenian culture. Hence it is difficult to say that Athens made an error, as the decision reflected Athenian culture at the time (as a vote of direct democracy). Since culture is the truth-maker of moral claims, Athens must have made the right decision given what was 'true' of it. This is absurd. On an antirealist model, the operational environment is tough to parse.

Those familiar with joint planning doctrine know it emphasizes the Political, Military, Economy, Social, Infrastructure, and Information (PMESII) variables. These are called the 'operational variables;' they comprise the joint framework for conceptualizing and depicting the operational environment (JCS 2009, III-34). Their use in doctrine supports a social scientific approach to understanding influences on the environment. As

chapter 2 shows, analysts are directed to compress moral influences into these categories in a way that strains common sense. This framework is useful for non-moral influences, but it cannot account for moral ones. As chapter 4 explains, a PMESII description of a moral influence will likely obscure rather than illuminate the nature of the explanation. Moreover, a non-moral list of influences, whether as Political or Social variables, cannot explain why a person or groups holds a belief to be moral in the first place. To attempt an explanation of this kind commits the naturalistic fallacy. This well-recognized fallacy is explained in chapter 2.

This thesis seeks to make arguments like Thucydides's intelligible to the JIA. If this is how average people (and most philosophers) explain moral influences in the world, then antirealists need to provide strong reasons to abandon it. Chapter 4 shows that antirealism fails to meet this burden.

Problem Statement

The JIA “[requires] the capability to understand the interrelated cognitive, moral, physical, and socio-economic factors of the operational environment (OE)” (TRADOC 2017, 40). Although joint doctrine captures some cognitive, physical, and socio-economic factors at the operational and strategic levels, the JIA lacks an accurate model depicting moral influences in the OE. Moreover, joint doctrine is incapable of providing a basis for a model unless it resolves internal ambiguities regarding moral causation, objectivity, and semantics. Finally, joint doctrine's current approach is incompatible with the moral foundation of the profession arms.

Purpose of Study

The primary purpose of this study is to enable the JIA to depict moral influences in the OE when conducting operational planning. This study improves the JIA's overall capability to conduct operational design, especially regarding OEs with moral critical factors (JCS 2009, II-65). The model offered has gaps, but it provides a useable structure that other disciplines can expand upon. The model itself will not require planners to master esoteric moral concepts. Finally, the model must be philosophically robust and consistent with other aspects of the JIA's moral framework, specifically just war theory and professional military ethics.

Research Questions

This study attempts to solve the problem by answering one primary and three subordinate research questions. These research questions are mutually dependent on one another, as indicated in figure 1.

The primary research question (PRQ) is: how should the JIA model moral, causal influences in the operational environment? The following subordinate research questions (SRQ) satisfy this question.

SRQ1: Is objective moral realism the best metaethical position for the JIA?

SRQ2: How do moral facts exert causal influence on the OE?

SRQ3: What terms and concepts in doctrine are most amenable to moral facts and causes?

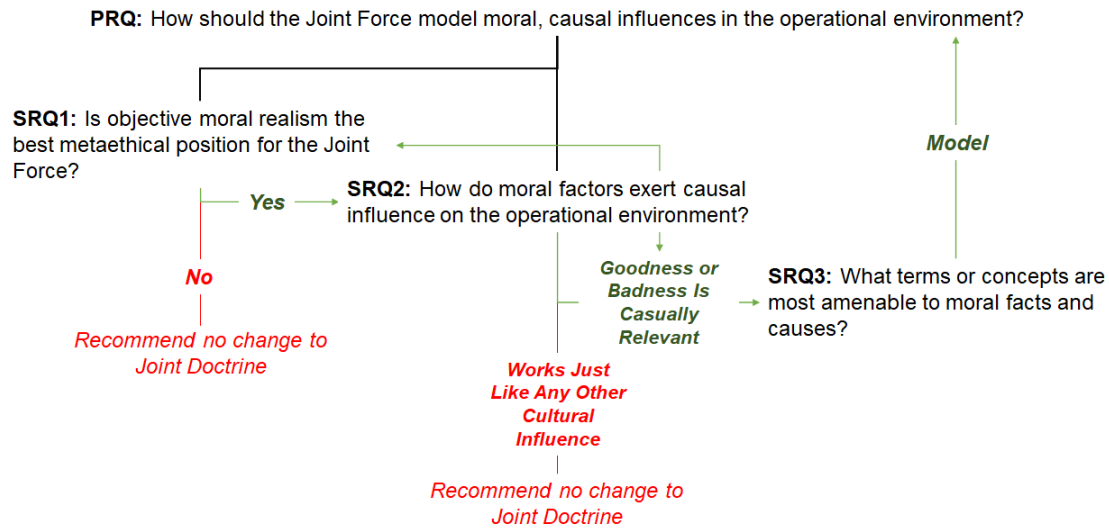


Figure 1. Relationship between Research Questions

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Significance of the Study

Joint doctrine leaves too much to chance. If moral realism is correct (see chapter 4), then the JIA courts risk on the ‘hear, see, and speak no evil’ method. The JIA lacks the vocabulary to express this risk for the same reason the risk exists in the first place: the fundamental and necessary moral and causal concepts are absent, muddled, or antirealist in doctrine. Future conflicts will likely feature prominent moral causes. This study mitigates risk to the JIA by offering a practical model supported by strong philosophical arguments. It preserves the moral foundation of the military profession against antirealism.

Scope

This study focuses on the JIA at operational and strategic levels of war, although it will use service-specific information when joint information is not available. This

thesis uses a joint rather than service lens for three reasons: (1) joint doctrine provides more detail on the systems approach to describing the operational environment; (2) a model of moral causes will tend to be more relevant to operational and strategic level planning; and (3) joint force commanders are more likely to conduct operational design than service-specific forces (all things equal). This focus best captures the ‘central cases’ the model seeks to describe. Finally, this study emphasizes joint doctrine over interagency (IA) policy because the former is systematically developed using defined terms. The findings are relevant to the IA generally, but they apply more directly to cases where the military instrument of national power is substantially committed. This study does not offer recommendations to IA policy, as it primarily concerns Department of Defense equities in the JIA.

This study does not evaluate substantive ethical theories, although it will outline a candidate theory in chapter 4 for illustration purposes. Of note, moral realism is compatible with several ethical theories. A fully developed model would provide causes attending to different ethical theories, assuming there is some way of harmonizing them.

Assumptions

1. The JIA is not legally committed to moral antirealism.
2. Joint doctrine correctly offers a system-centric view of the operational environment.
3. Joint doctrine is permitted to be out-of-step with American cultural views about morality provided there are good reasons for it, since professional military ethics demands specialized “moral-ethical” expertise (HQDA 2019, 1-4). This assumption is addressed in chapter 4.

4. The JIA must model moral influences to characterize the operational environment. (This assumption is named the Necessity Assumption in chapter 4.)
5. Recommended changes to joint doctrine will not hinder inter-JIA cooperation.
6. If a model is unacceptable to the joint force, then it is unacceptable to the JIA.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study is qualitative: it cannot receive quantitative inputs or deliver quantitative outputs. It may be possible to create quantitative models for some moral influences, but this study cannot provide that level of detail.

Only the most prominent philosophical authors on moral realism and antirealism are considered here. A broader study would include more historical examples; evaluate ethical theories for appropriateness with the model; include less well-known authors; and consider research in psychology, social science, and experimental philosophy. A richer study would incorporate theories of human action and a more rigorous refutation of constructivist positions in metaethics (see chapters 2 and 4).

Chapter Summary

This chapter clarified the assumptions and scope of this study and established its urgency. As stated in the introduction, this study will provide: (1) an argument for why the JIA should incorporate moral facts and causes into its description of the operational environment (using moral realism as a basis); and (2) a model that enables analysts to identify and characterize moral facts and causes.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem.
[Out of shadows and images into truth.]

—John Henry Newman, epitaph

Littera gesta docet, quid credas, allegoria . . .
[The literal teaches what happened, the allegorical what to believe.]
—Author Unknown

Chapter Introduction

This section begins with a primer and one illustrative vignette. The rest of the chapter is organized around each of the research questions below.

PRQ: How should the JIA model moral factors in the OE?

SRQ1: Is objective moral realism the best metaethical position for the JIA?

SRQ2: How do moral facts influence the OE?

SRQ3: What terms and concepts in doctrine are most amenable to moral facts and causes?

SRQ 1 is answered in chapter 4. The PRQ is answered in chapter 5. This chapter explains moral realism and responds to antirealist critiques (SRQ1). It defines and describes moral causes (SRQ2). It substantiates the claim that joint doctrine is antirealist as written and summarizes the joint approach to characterizing influences in the operational environment (SRQ3). These are the basic building blocks for the argument offered in chapter 4. After a brief introduction of some basic concepts in moral philosophy, the chapter uses a vignette based on Plato's allegory of the cave to highlight the difference between realism and antirealism.

Basic Concepts in Moral Philosophy

Ethics is the branch of philosophy that takes ‘goodness’ as its object. Ethics seeks to describe the conditions or rules according to which the predicates ‘good’ and ‘evil’ (or synonyms for these terms) apply to an act, person, situation, law, etc. (Moore 1903, 1). For instance, most people generally agree that murder is wrong: killing an innocent person, without cause, violates some constitutive principle of goodness. People have many observations of this kind about theft, torture, slavery, and so on. Ethics seeks to set these observations together in a theory that explains which acts are good, which are evil, and what members in each category have in common with one another. Virtue ethics, deontological (duty-based) ethics, natural law theory, and utilitarianism are well-known examples of ethical theories.

Some of these theories involve sweeping claims about the purpose of human life (i.e., natural law or teleology) or the intentions of a divine being (i.e., divine command theory). Other theories center on pleasure and pain (i.e., classical hedonism), the perspective of an unbiased observer (i.e., ideal observer theory), etc. Many are championed by religious or cultural traditions.

For all their variety, ethical theories make competing, mutually exclusive claims about goodness. For this reason, it is impossible for all ethical theories to be true (to the full extent of the theory) at the same time. For this reason, either all such theories are meaningless; only one is correct; none are correct; no generalizations are possible (i.e., many are correct in part); or ethics amounts to little more than a peculiar way of speaking about personal preferences.

Many philosophers seek to resolve disputes in ethics by going one level deeper. They question the nature of morality, rather than the content of it. Does normative morality exist at all? How does morality fit into reality? How is morality known, given ethical disagreements between reasonable people? This approach borrows lines of inquiry from metaphysics (i.e., the nature of reality), ontology (i.e., study of what exists), epistemology (i.e., study of what constitutes knowledge), and semantics (i.e., theories of meaning). The branch of philosophy that deals with these questions is called metaethics. As described later in this chapter, moral realism and antirealism are metaethical theories because they seek to describe the underlying nature of morality.

The distinction between metaethics and ethics is easier to identify in practice than in theory. For example, whether bombing civilian targets in war is morally acceptable is an ethical question (e.g., *jus in bello*); but whether moral standards (e.g., the norms protecting non-combatants) are objective, over-and-above culture, is a metaethical question. Clearly, these questions are related. Even if correct, an ethical theory does not make an act good or evil; it is good or evil based on features of belief-independent reality (in the case of realism) or culture (in the case of some antirealisms). In this way, ethical theories draw on positions in metaethics, even while they remain focused on the content of ethics.

The term ‘metaethics’ only came into use following G.E. Moore’s *Principia Ethica* (1903). Certainly, metaethics is mindful of its impact on ethical theories (see Kramer 2009). In the end, the distinction is meant to highlight the central aim of each approach to morality.

Vignette: Plato's Allegory of the Cave

Plato offered one of the oldest and most illuminating realist depictions of the human, moral condition in *Republic*. Known in philosophy as the 'allegory of the cave,' it illustrates many aspects of Plato's political, moral, and metaphysical philosophy. For our purposes, it provides a helpful and dramatic way to highlight the difference between realism and antirealism.

Through the character of Socrates, Plato asks us to imagine a deep, dark cave. People are raised from birth in the cave, chained as prisoners. Their bodies and heads are "fettered" such that they can only look at a screen placed in front of them (Plato 2004, 514a). "Light is provided by a fire burning far above and behind them" (Plato 2004, 514a). "Between the prisoners and the fire," puppeteers move puppets, or "statues of people and other animals," above a narrow wall (Plato 2004, 514b-515a). The puppets cast a shadow on the screen in front of the prisoners. Since shadows are all the prisoners can see, they take them for "true reality" (Plato 2004, 515b). The prisoners even name the shadows, referring to them as real, substantive things. Such is the situation of the "bound cave-dwellers" (Reeve 2006, 51).

Imagine a prisoner is released from his chains. Now able to see the fire and the puppeteers, the prisoner realizes the shadows he previously took for reality are "silly nonsense" (Plato 2004, 515d). This prisoner would come to believe the puppets are the genuine article. He may even regard the puppeteers with some suspicion, as they seem to have stewarded reality. Following C.D.C. Reeve, a prisoner in this position is an "unbound cave-dweller" (2006, 51).

Now imagine one of these ‘unbound cave-dwellers’ is dragged up a “rough, steep, upward path” to the entrance of the cave (Plato 2004, 515e). As Plato says, “wouldn’t [the prisoner] be pained and angry at being treated this way?” (Plato 2004, 515e-516a). At the entrance to the cave, the prisoner would first be blinded by daylight. Yet if he persisted, despite the pain and surprise, his eyes would adjust, and he would finally see the reality as it is. This prisoner is free, a “daylight dweller” (Reeve 2006, 51-2).

Metaphysically, the debate between realism and antirealism centers on whether there is such a thing as ‘outside of the cave.’ For most of human history, realists have held that there is a difference: moral truth resides ‘outside’ of the cave, under the light of the sun. Yet the allegory also characterizes moral education and experience given this reality. Those who deny there is anything outside of the cave are antirealists. To antirealists, truth is a convention the bound cave-dwellers use to name the shadows on the screen. There is no reality into which prisoners can escape. As Hannah Arendt remarks,

Plato described the sphere of human affairs—all that belongs to the living together of men in a common world—in terms of darkness, confusion, and deception which those aspiring to true being must turn away from . . . if they want to discover the clear sky of eternal ideas. The end came with [Karl] Marx’s declaration that philosophy and its truth are located not outside of the cave but precisely in them. (2006, 17)

Of course, one can be an antirealist without being a Marxist. Arendt’s observation is that Marxism, as a species of antirealism, reduces morality to political action. Like Marxism, antirealism’s tendency is to reduce morality to a description of some other phenomena, like culture, reflective equilibrium (i.e., a political or social dialectic), divine command, etc. This compression serves to make some problematic features of morality easier to accommodate. These problems are introduced in the next section.

Subordinate Research Question 1: Metaethics

Moral realism is a position in the sub-discipline of moral philosophy called metaethics. Although the questions raised in metaethics are ancient, metaethics only emerged as a separate discipline in the last century, following G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* (1903). Contemporary metaethics is largely an attempt to grapple with Moore's basic arguments.

Principia Ethica argued against (philosophical) hedonists, like Jeremy Bentham and Henry Sidgwick, who claimed that goodness can be defined as the natural property of pleasure (Moore 1903, 13; Sayre-McCord 2020). Against Sidgwick, Moore argued that goodness is a non-natural, fundamental property. By non-natural, Moore meant it cannot be directly observed according to techniques associated with the scientific method or defined in terms of a physical fact. Goodness is fundamental in the sense that it must be taken as a basic property, unanalyzable in terms of anything else (e.g., pleasure).

Moore's first argument echoes an observation made by the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume. Following Hume, Moore showed that non-evaluative facts (e.g., 'this apple is red,' 'apples are nutrient-rich,' etc.) cannot entail evaluative conclusions (e.g., 'apples are good,' 'pleasure is praiseworthy') on their own. No number of non-evaluative, or 'descriptive,' facts about apples can establish the evaluative fact that apples are good. An evaluative conclusion requires at least one evaluative premise (e.g., 'healthy food is good') to be a valid inference. Since Moore, philosophers call drawing evaluative conclusions (i.e., the kind to which morality is assumed to belong) from only descriptive premises the 'naturalistic fallacy.' The problem is often called the 'is/ought problem' or 'Hume's law.' Arguments based on variations of

Hume's law remain influential today (see Parfit 2011). It is a leading challenge to naturalistic reductions of morality and descriptive moral theories (see Grant 2004, 168-181).

Moore's argument contained one further nuance. All competent language users understand a triangle to be a three-sided polygon; triangles are defined in this way. To Moore, it always seems appropriate to doubt identity definitions of goodness, indicating 'what is goodness?' is necessarily an "open question" (Moore 1903, 13). Given the strength of this intuition, Moore thought it was arbitrary for naturalists to claim that goodness is pleasure since it does not follow from competent language use. Moore believed the openness of goodness was evidence of its irreducibility to any other property. For this reason, Moore held that goodness is fundamental and austere, incapable of any definition of the kind: goodness is *x*.

As originally conceived, Moore's open question argument fails (see Ridge 2019), but the general thrust of his critique of naturalistic ethics remains very influential (Sayre-McCord 2020). Modern metaethics is a dialectical reaction to Moore's arguments, spread out across many branches of philosophy, including semantics, metaphysics, and epistemology. The debate raises many difficult problems. For instance, if goodness is not a natural property, what sort of property is it? How can we know what is good if goodness is not amenable to the scientific method? How do non-natural properties interact with the real world? The difficulty of these questions causes some philosophers to doubt whether morality is real at all, whether 'moral' claims are merely a way of dressing up preferences we seek to impose on others, and so on (see MacIntyre 2007; Mackie 1977).

Philosophers try to solve these questions in favor of one of few positions. Reductionist or classical naturalistic versions of moral realism explain morality as a physical fact. Due to the naturalistic fallacy, these views are unpopular in philosophy. Newer forms of naturalistic moral realism hold that morality is a complex and indeterminate, or ‘homeostatic cluster,’ of facts (Boyd 1988, 181-228). On non-natural moral realism, morality is a non-natural property. Like consciousness, goodness cannot be reduced to any physical fact, even if it depends on them. Antirealists are unsatisfied by both naturalistic and non-naturalistic moral realism, and therefore conclude that moral facts either do not exist or are constructions of culture.

Positions in metaethics are difficult to prove, which is why metaethicists typically argue by elimination. To make an argument by elimination, one lists possible positions and shows why all positions fail except one’s favored view (Shafer-Landau 2003, 58). For this reason, there are two ways to locate positions in metaethics: by how they answer fundamental questions about morality or by the central critiques of moral realism that motivate antirealism. For reference, figure 2 charts positions in metaethics as a series of answers to branching questions. Non-natural moral realism, the version endorsed in this thesis, follows the green track in figure 2.

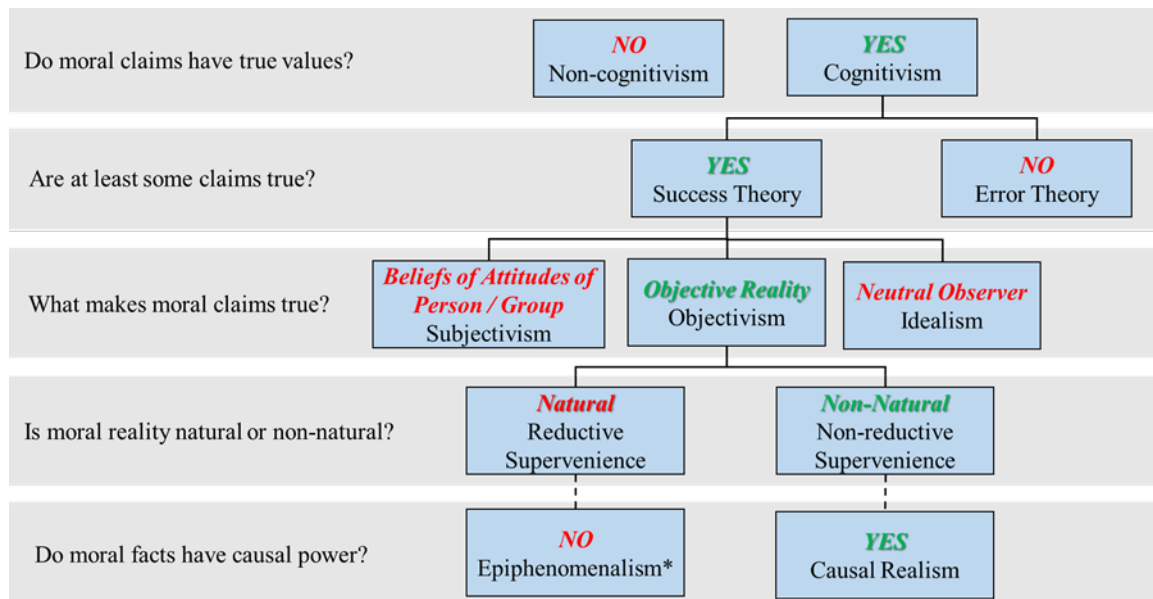


Figure 2. Flowchart of Positions in Metaethics

Source: Created by author with data from Sayre-McCord 1988, 1-23.

This thesis will defend the version of non-natural moral realism offered by Shafer-Landau (2003). Non-natural realism is privileged over naturalist realism because the former preserves more of our commonsense intuitions about morality. In other words, it is easier to explain, defend, and use in a model. However, non-reductive versions of naturalistic moral realism, such as those offered by the ‘Cornell realists,’ lead to similar conclusions, so there is little at stake for the purposes of this paper. Details of this alternative are available in Boyd (1988) and Lutz and Lenman (2021).

Moral Realism and Antirealism

Non-natural moral realism is the everyman’s understanding of moral reality, the position with “common sense and initial appearances on its side” (Sayre-McChord 2020). When an average, competent language user says, “murder is wrong,” they typically mean

that murder is ‘objectively’ wrong in a way that provides us with reasons to avoid murder. A normal language user generally does not assume ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ are exhaustively contained by a description of physical facts, even though there are plausible philosophical arguments on this point (see Boyd 1988). It is in this plain sense that non-natural moral realism holds moral claims “should be taken at face value” (Sayre-McChord 2020). If true, these claims apply to different people in different situations so long as the same morally relevant facts apply. Hence, if murder is wrong in Paris, it is also wrong in Beijing. Moral realists endeavor to preserve the commonsense appeal of their view against technical challenges posed by philosophers.

Moral realism is the view that moral claims are capable of being true and are true or false regardless of subjective beliefs about them. There are semantic, metaphysical, and epistemological aspects of moral realism. These emerge in the technical definition: “realists believe that there are moral truths that obtain independently of any preferred perspective, in the sense that the moral standards *that fix the moral facts are not made true by virtue of their ratification from within any given actual or hypothetical perspective*” (Shafer-Landau 2003, 15; emphasis in original). There are three ideas contained in this definition:

1. Moral standards, whatever they might be, are ‘objective’ in the sense that they do not depend on the beliefs of anyone, real (e.g., Parisians) or imagined (e.g., an ideal observer). Ethical theory fleshes out these standards, which may be pluralistic and indeterminate.
2. Moral claims are normative, not descriptive. Broadly, they are claims about what one should do or avoid; what things are good or bad; etc. As normative

claims, they provide us with reasons for action. (Whether we are motivated by these reasons is different matter.)

3. True moral claims are facts. A ‘moral fact’ is any correct predication of moral properties or a normative claim (e.g., ‘Jack is a good person’ or ‘killing is wrong,’ respectively). Moral claims can be facts because there is something that makes them true.

We will augment this definition with two further notions required by a model of moral influences (PRQ):

4. Moral facts are ‘non-natural.’ Moral facts are not a particular way of viewing or describing physical facts, like brain states or genetic predispositions, even though physical facts may ‘fix’ moral facts (as described below). This preserves moral realism from the naturalistic fallacy.
5. Moral facts possess causal power. In one sense, moral facts justify reasons for doing or avoiding certain acts. On another, moral facts feature in the causal systems that animate a world populated by individual wills. Moral facts with causal power are an example of moral influences, as described below.

The technical definition of moral realism is, admittedly, complicated. These complications have less to do with understanding realism than with guarding it against antirealist objections. Each of these features of moral realism are present in the example from *The Peloponnesian War* vignette:

1. Moral facts are objective: ‘Athens should not have invaded Sicily because the invasion was imprudent, regardless of one’s perspective.’
2. Moral claims are normative: ‘Athens should not have invaded Sicily.’

3. True moral claims are facts: 'It is a fact that Athens's invasion of Sicily was imprudent;' 'It is a fact that Athens's declining political virtue caused it to make an imprudent decision.'
4. Moral facts are non-natural. 'The physical facts of Athens do not fully explain Athens's political virtue.'
5. Moral facts have causal power. 'Athens's declining political virtue (as a moral fact) caused it to make an imprudent decision.'

Therefore, non-natural moral realism allows for some claims to simultaneously be moral, causal, and factual—as a theory of meaning and a true way of speaking about the world—without holding morality as a species of physical facts.

Moral antirealism refers to any view that rejects one or more of the qualities of moral claims given above. Some popular views are below:

1. Noncognitivists deny that moral claims have truth values (Sayre-McCord 1988, 1-23). A moral utterance merely expresses the speaker's attitude about something rather than a belief about it and therefore has no inferential role to play (see Geach 1965, 449-465). If John says, 'murder is wrong,' John actually means 'John hates murder!'
2. Subjectivists challenge the independence of morality from the beliefs of rational beings, real or hypothetical (Sayre-McCord 1988, 1-23). To subjectivists, the truth of a moral claim is fixed by the perspective of someone, whether an impartial observer, cultural group, individual person, law-making body, etc. If John says 'murder is wrong,' he is correct if this belief coheres within the value structure of his society (on cultural relativism).

Noncognitivism posits a highly unusual theory of meaning for moral claims. If John says, ‘murder is wrong,’ he almost certainly does not believe himself to be saying, ‘John hates murder’ (even though he probably does hate murder). John thinks he is communicating a universal prohibition of murder. In other words, noncognitivism contradicts what normal language users mean when they use moral terms. Further, for logical reasons, noncognitivism does not allow moral claims to feature in inferences and arguments (see Geach 1965). For instance, it is absurd to say: ‘Thucydides’s attitude about the Athenian national character caused the ruin of the Athenian empire.’ Yet this is how noncognitivists must interpret Thucydides’s argument.

Subjectivism has similar problems. Few people making moral arguments believe that their arguments are only true subjectively. As Martha Nussbaum writes, “people are searching for the good, not just the way of their ancestors” (Nussbaum 1993, 259). People provide reasons to one another and argue about moral and practical issues across cultural boundaries, seemingly on the assumption that their reasons are meaningful to others. (It is possible that everyone who argues is mistaken. For a related position, called ‘error theory,’ see Mackie 1988.) The burden falls to subjectivists to demonstrate that common moral behavior is mistaken. (Of note, some versions of constructivism avoid this objection but are exposed to others, as discussed below.)

Finally, most forms of subjectivism employ exclusively descriptive claims about morality. For this reason, subjectivism cannot hold that moral beliefs are normative, except in the sense that they may be motivating to the people that hold them. The naturalistic fallacy prevents subjectivists from crossing this threshold, but they understand and embrace this limitation. For subjectivists, it is a virtue rather than a flaw

of subjectivism that all moral claims are psychological claims about beliefs. When put this way, the space between subjectivism and skepticism appears narrow.

Nevertheless, there are four primary reasons why many philosophers accept some form of antirealism. In headline form, they are: (1) the problem of moral disagreement; (2) the queerness of moral facts; (3) the explanatory and causal impotence of moral facts; and (4) realism's hesitancy to provide the truth-makers of moral claims (Mackie 1977, 15-49; Harman 1988, 119-124; Shafer-Landau 2003, 45, 80-114). Antirealists generally find realist attempts to respond to these questions less satisfying than biting the bullet on subjectivism. The next section briefly considers each of these objections and provides a survey of realist responses.

The Problem of Moral Disagreement

The problem of moral disagreement is probably the most culturally influential objection to moral realism. Many moral philosophers observe widespread disagreement between the moral claims of different people (and even between philosophers from similar backgrounds) that seem to stem from preferred ways of living inherited from culture. As J. L. Mackie writes, "radical disagreement between first-order moral judgments make it difficult to treat those judgments as apprehensions of moral truth" (1988, 109). Hence, subjectivists and antirealists generally find their positions to be a better explanation of moral disagreement (or the apparent subjectivity of values) than moral realism.

Moral realists respond to this objection in a few ways. First, they note that disagreement is not unique to moral claims, and that disagreement may be an indication of the "austerity" of moral facts rather than evidence that there are no moral facts (Platts

1988, 282-300). As Platts explains, “moral language, like all other realistic areas of language, is trying to grapple, in ways that transcend our present practical capabilities, with a recalcitrant world” (1988, 287). By ‘austere,’ Platts means moral reasoning is difficult and indirect: moral observations are not as readily apparent as observations of other kinds (i.e., whether a stool has three legs is a more direct question than whether the stool was manufactured according to just labor laws). Other responses attempt to show that disagreement is overstated, ignores large areas of moral agreement, or is common to many realist projects (including the sciences, see Brink 1989, 197-210; Sturgeon 1988, 229-230). Finally, moral disagreement reflects passions, interests, and influences that “all play complex roles in generating the moral views one holds,” even if each is not oriented on the goodness as its object (Shafer-Landau 2003, 217). In sum, realists contend that there are many plausible ways to account for moral disagreement that are compatible with realism.

The Queerness of Moral Facts

The term ‘queerness’ is meant to highlight the strangeness of moral facts from the perspective of naturalist psychology, metaphysics, and epistemology (Mackie 1988, 111). As Mackie writes, “if there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe” (Mackie 1988, 111). The psychological strangeness of moral facts arises from the connection between morality’s allegedly objective quality and its ability to motivate individual action (Shafer-Landau 2003, 82). The metaphysical worry highlights the implausibility of a relationship between moral and physical facts. Finally, the epistemological objection stresses how realists are committed to believing in a strange

‘moral intuition’ that posits access to moral knowledge (Mackie 1988, 111). This section briefly summarizes realist responses to these difficulties.

The ‘motivational’ argument from queerness plays upon the dynamics of philosophical debates about the nature of motivation, action, and reasons. As Shafer-Landau puts it, “since realism insists on the fixed content of moral demands in a stance-independent way, realists have encountered more difficulty in explaining how morality supplies us with reasons” (2003, 169). This concern traces its origins to Hume’s claim that only desires motivate action, a position that would evolve into a view called ‘motivational judgment externalism’ (Hume 1739, 2.3; Sayre-McCord 2020).

Realism is not technically committed to any view about the motivational force of moral facts, although many realists do advance theories of practical reason (Shafer-Landau 2003, 165). Hence, the first realist option is to side-step these concerns, and restrict the queerness argument to its metaphysical and epistemological dimensions. This approach preserves moral realism at the cost of undermining its significance to the moral lives of persons. For present purposes, the most compelling realist responses emphasize our tendency to do what is right even if it “satisfies none of our desires and may cost us our livelihood or our lives” (Shafer-Landau 2003, 170). Since sacrifice for the greater good, over-and-above one’s desires, is characteristic of the professional military ethic, the Humean position has an equal share of the burden of proof, at least as far as this profession of arms is concerned (HQDA 2019, 1-2). As a Union soldier would remark in 1863, “sick as I am of this war and bloodshed, as much oh how much I want to be at home with my dear wife and children . . . every day I have a more religious feeling, that this war is a crusade for the good of mankind” (Hough 1957, 165, 178; McPherson 1994,

43). Nevertheless, Shafer-Landau (2003), Brink (1987), Audi (1997), Platts (1988) and Parfit (2011) provide further realist responses to the Humean view of moral psychology.

The second aspect of the argument from queerness exploits the difficulties of explaining the relationship between moral (non-natural) and physical (natural) facts in a coherent metaphysics. The burden is on the moral realist to explain where moral facts fit in the universe. Platts provides a helpful illustration of the relationship between moral and physical facts:

The parallel to exploit in understanding this autonomy is . . . between there being a certain arrangement of black dots on a white card and there being a face there pictured to be seen. There is only a face there to be seen because the dot-arrangement is as it is, the dot arrangement fixes . . . a face there to be seen. Still, we do not see the face by attending to that dot-arrangement . . . Indeed, the more we so attend, the less likely we are to see the face. (Platts 1988, 283)

As this analogy illustrates, realists attempt to demystify the relationship between moral and physical facts by showing how moral facts depend on (i.e., ‘are fixed by’) physical facts but are not reducible to them. Moral terms are semantically independent (i.e., ‘autonomous’) of physical facts while being fixed (i.e., realized in concrete instances) by them, roughly according to what is called a supervenience relation (Platts 1988, 283; Shafer-Landau 2003, 77). Briefly, a set [X] supervenes on a set [Y] just in case there can be no change in [X] without some change in [Y] (i.e., as is often said in philosophy courses, ‘no [X] change without a [Y] change’). For example, the truth value of the sentence ‘the king is a just ruler’ cannot change unless some physical facts about the kingdom also change (e.g., the king condemns an innocent man to death, raises taxes to extreme levels, starts an unjust war, etc.).

Although physical facts fix the truth value of moral facts, it does not follow that morality is reducible to physical facts. Consider an analogy:

Pain is realized in beings like us by c-fibre firings. But were we to identify pain with c-fibre firings, then there would be no possible world in which something experiences pain and does not experience c-fibre firing. This seems too restrictive: we want to allow for the possibility of pain even in beings who are not physically constituted just like us, and so lack c-fibres. (Shafer-Landau 2003, 73)

Moral predicates like ‘good’ and ‘just’ are multiply realizable, which means they, like pain, may apply to different situations comprised of notably different physical facts. For instance, no one thinks it is metaphysically impossible for a human, John, and a Martian, Marvin, to both be good, even if Marvin is comprised of different physical materials than John. Therefore, the moral property ‘goodness’ cannot be identical to some set of physical facts. To realists, moral facts fit into our conception of the universe in the same slightly awkward way that mental facts do. They lack the cut-and-dry, scientific standing of physical facts, but they are an undeniable feature of reality nonetheless.

The epistemological thrust of the argument from queerness puts the realist in a dilemma. Either the truth of moral claims is accessible by some mysterious moral faculty or realists cannot explain how we come to know moral facts. The first horn of the dilemma invokes the increasingly negative view philosophers take on intuition (see chapter 3). The second horn lends itself to skepticism about morality. Platts (1988) escapes the dilemma by arguing for “pluralistic” intuitionism. We perceive many subordinate ethical properties like “sincerity, loyalty, honesty, and so on;” through these intermediary concepts, we arrive at a fallible understanding of “*The Good* [as] an *indirect* object of moral judgment” (Platts 1988, 284-5; emphasis in original). According to this view, “we detect moral aspects in the same way we detect (nearly all) other aspects: by looking and seeing” (Platts 1988, 285). Since the normative demands of ethical properties (e.g., “sincerity, loyalty, honesty, and so on”) often come into conflict in practice, as

professional military literature attests (see Kem 2016), pluralistic intuitionism helps explain moral disagreement while accepting an appropriately conservative estimate of moral knowledge (Platts 1988).

Explanatory and Causal Impotence

The explanatory and causal impotence argument attempts to show that moral facts are superfluous. Per Ockham's razor, all things equal, we should prefer the theory that posits a fewer number of objects in the universe. (This is also called 'ontological parsimony.') Since moral realists argue there are moral and physical facts, realists must show that moral facts perform some explanatory requirement that physical facts do not. Yet, unlike physical facts, which are knowable through science, moral facts are 'cut-off' from the senses and therefore cannot be tested through observation (Harman 1988, 119-124). This makes the burden on realism harder to clear. Additionally, since realists argue moral facts supervene on physical facts, it seems unlikely that moral facts possess causal powers (i.e., can bring about effects in the real world). Therefore, moral realism is guilty of ontological excess, or needlessly multiplying 'entities' in the universe.

To a realist, the explanatory test is a case of question begging. Realism is motivated by an appreciation of the role of commonsense moral reasoning in our lives. Consider the question 'why did John donate money to the poor?' A realist would explain that the goodness of charity provided John with reasons to donate. The realist would hold that this is a better explanation of John's actions than a purely descriptive account of John's desires (see Sturgeon 1988, 229-255). This is precisely the issue at debate. Moreover, moral facts may have greater explanatory power in many cases. First, reductionist accounts cannot explain why a person believes a claim is moral in the first

place (see ‘Aristotelian Moral Causes’ below). Secondly, substantive moral theory, if correct, will likely have some explanatory power insofar as it is true (and its predictions prove accurate) (Sturgeon 1988, 229-231). Finally, as mentioned earlier, moral properties are multiply realizable. For example, there are innumerable arrangements of physical facts that constitute ‘justice.’ It follows that there may be greater explanatory power and utility in focusing on moral facts rather than the physical facts which underlie them. As David Brink explains,

racial oppression in South Africa consists in various particular social, economic, and legal restrictions present in South African society. Now, it seems better to cite racial oppression as a cause of political instability and social protest in South Africa than the particular social, economic, and political restrictions, precisely because there would still have been racial oppression and instability and protest under somewhat different social, economic, and legal restrictions, and the only thing this large set of alternate possible social, economic, and legal bases of oppression have in common is that they realize racial oppression (it is very unlikely that there is a natural - nonmoral - social category that corresponds to this set). (1989, 195)

There is one other noteworthy reply to the explanatory impotence argument. As David Enoch argues, objective normative standards play a necessary role in deliberating (i.e., are ‘deliberatively indispensable’) about what one should or should not do. If moral deliberation is necessary, if “we *cannot* avoid asking ourselves what to do, what to believe, how to reason, what to care about” and so on, then we are justified in believing in these concepts in the same way we are justified in believing in the existence of electrons (which we can only observe indirectly, through an inference to the best explanation of experimental data) (2011, 70; emphasis in original). Such a belief is epistemically basic and necessary in a way that cannot reasonably be ejected from our warranted beliefs. Phenomenologically, “we are trying to *discover*, not create” whenever we deliberate about what we ought to do (Enoch 2011, 71; emphasis in original).

Therefore, in the act of deliberating, “you *commit* yourself to their being (normative) reasons relevant to your deliberation” (Enoch 2011, 74, emphasis in original).

There are three prominent realist responses to the causal impotence argument. First, a realist could accept that moral facts are causally inert; this would not prove that moral facts do not exist (Shafer-Landau 2003, 110). The point of moral facts is to “serve as a basis for justifying the ascription of reasons,” not to provide causal explanations of physical phenomena (Shafer-Landau 2003, 112). The second approach argues moral facts do possess causal power derived from the physical facts which realize them. According to the “Causal Inheritance Principle,” moral facts inherit the causal powers of the physical facts on which moral facts supervene (Kim 1992, 1-26; Shafer-Landau 2003, 109-110). This kind of causal power is analogous to mental powers of causation—both supervene on physical facts (e.g., neurological facts) and both may exert causal power on the physical world. The third option is to show that stringent causal tests are self-defeating. Since all evaluative standards fail the causal test on a reductionist worldview, a reductionist cannot use evaluative concepts like justification and warrant to argue that one should believe reductionism to be true (Shafer-Landau 2003, 113).

A full explanation of the metaphysics of moral phenomena would take this literature review too far afield. To be clear, the Causal Inheritance Principle does not excuse the realist from providing reasons why a particular moral cause is efficacious in a specific situation. The realist must show that viewing a moral fact as causal improves the explanation in some important way. To return to Thucydides, an antirealist might attempt explain Athens’s decision to invade Sicily using an intersection of complex physical phenomena. Thucydides, or a like-minded realist under pressure, might note that Athens

sparing Mytilene and massacring Melos ten years later to highlight the role of changing national sentiment in an explanation of Athens's actions (TH 1996, 3.49- 5.116). Realists offer evidence of this kind to shift the explanatory burden back to reductionists.

The Truth-Maker of Moral Facts

Subjectivism and constructivism are two prominent antirealist alternatives to realism that hold that there are moral facts which are true or false depending on the perspective of some real or imagined entity. Though it has a hold on popular culture and the social sciences, descriptive relativism (introduced in the *Moral Leadership* vignette) stems from a determined skepticism that is curiously dogmatic in its unwillingness to accommodate commonsense moral beliefs. Subtler forms of subjectivism, called 'idealism' or 'constructivism,' seek to retain the objectivity of morality by binding the truth of moral claims to the agreements made between rational (even hypothetical) people under idealized conditions (e.g., John Rawls's famous 'veil of ignorance') or as the consequence of a process-oriented exercise of practical reason (see Korsgaard 1996; Scanlon 1998; Bagnoli 2020). The advantage of constructivism is that it explains what makes moral claims true or false; it offers an alluring blend of quasi-objectivity and a definitive answer to what goodness is, especially compared to realism's comparative silence on the truth-makers of moral claims. However, realists object that the conditions and processes constructivists invoke are either arbitrary or assume some objective (in the realist sense) standard that makes these conditions the correct ones (Shafer-Landau 2003, 42; Bagnoli 2020). This dilemma closely parallels Plato's famous *Euthyphro* dilemma, but with the twist that constructivist theories are "parasitic on independent moral values"

(Bagnoli 2020). In other words, constructivists use realist moral standards without acknowledging them as such.

Realists can also accommodate the most attractive aspects of constructivist positions, provided they are subordinated to realist metaphysics. As Shafer-Landau writes,

The realist could allow . . . that there is a strong conceptual connection between the responses of a suitably characterized ideal observer and the content of moral reality. But, for the realist, that would be because the ideal observer would never fail to see what was right and wrong anyway. The responses of an idealized observer would not be constitutive of moral truth, but merely bear a very close (perhaps perfect) correlation with a set of truths whose conditions may be fixed without any reference to such an observer. (2006, 16)

The question remains: what makes moral facts true or false? On this point, moral realism gestures to substantive ethical theory, insisting on the stipulation that moral facts remain belief-independent and irreducible to physical facts. Moral realism stops short of a full theory of ethics. This is handover point between metaethics and ethics. For our purposes, it is important to note that moral realism is pluralistic: many ethical systems are compatible with it, including most offered in military literature.

Subordinate Research Question 1: Summary

The preceding section covered the four main arguments against non-natural moral realism and offered the most prominent realist responses. Admittedly, a thorough discussion of moral realism and its critics would require a book-length study. This chapter avoided discussing moral motivation in depth, although this is a highly active topic in philosophy. The purpose of surveying the field is to provide a background context to SRQ1: is moral realism the best metaethical position for the JIA? This

literature review aims to have demonstrated only that moral realism is plausible; there are no decisive arguments against it. Chapter 4 returns to this question.

Subordinate Research Question 2: Moral Influences

Aristotelian Moral Influences

The last section indicated how moral causes, or ‘influences,’ fit in a plausible metaphysical system. Since it is beyond the scope of this essay to provide an exhaustive catalog of moral influences, this section offers Aristotle’s moral and political philosophy as an illustration of how austere questions about moral metaphysics manifest in our commonsense understanding of the world. If Aristotle is correct, the final move is to show that Aristotelian moral influences are operationally relevant. Even if Aristotle is mistaken, he provides a helpful illustration of moral causes compatible with (and made coherent by) moral realism. One may attempt a similar exercise with another substantive ethical theory compatible with realism. (Note there are both natural and non-natural realist interpretations of Aristotle. See Nussbaum 1995)

To be a case of moral causation in the sense described earlier, the fact alleged to have caused an effect must clear some hurdles. First, the moral dimension of the fact must be necessary to the explanation of the cause. For our purposes, this means non-moral terms, alone, are not enough to provide a satisfactory explanation of the effect in question. Secondly, the moral fact must be objective in the manner discussed above, otherwise it is not a moral fact in the sense meant by moral realism. The first is a simple attempt to clear Ockham’s Razor, the second ensures our example is relevant to moral realism (rather than a case that would equally apply to antirealism).

Aristotle held that happiness consists in virtuous living (Aristotle 2014, 1097b-1098a; Kraut 2018). Moral education, good parenting, wise legal and political structures, and other moral influences ‘habituate’ people to virtuous living (Aristotle 2014, 1179b-1180a). The virtuous come to see virtuous living as worth pursuing for itself, rather than for some other good, like public honors or wealth, as “such a person is in possession of first principles” (Aristotle 2014, 1095b). Hence, habituation to virtue both makes one virtuous by sheer force of habit and more likely to pursue virtue for its own sake. Habituation therefore plays a role in the daily activities, epistemic condition (i.e., what one knows to be good), and goals of the virtuous person (i.e., reasons for acting).

Aristotle provides a rough sense of what kinds of moral influences contribute to the character of a person. Parents who discipline their children will cause their children to possess discipline. Societies that pass laws encouraging virtue are likely to have virtuous citizens and leaders. Similarly, a culture or environment that habituates vice undermines virtue formation; its citizens are less likely to develop virtuous habits or attain happiness. Whatever entities are involved in habit-forming are moral influences in the sense that they contribute to an explanation of why a person is or is not virtuous; does or does not pursue virtue; judges moral situations rightly or wrongly; and so on.

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle highlights the importance of virtue formation to politics and laws. In *Politics*, Aristotle assesses the nature of the various regimes known to Athens in the 4th century (e.g., oligarchy, democracy, monarchy, etc.) and the causes that preserve or destroy them. As politics concerns the aim of not just living—but ‘living well’ as a community—the causes that preserve and destroy a regime generally have a moral dimension derived from justice, self-regulation (whether of citizens, slaves, or

leaders), and the wisdom of the laws (Aristotle 2013; 1252b, 1266b-1267a). Given Aristotle's position on virtue formation, it follows that unvirtuous leaders and bad laws increase factionalism through unmoderated self-interest, causing instability and revolution. Institutions that promote justice and virtue formation engender certain moral effects (as in the case of individuals). Bad laws, unjust institutions, meddlesome foreign powers, and other entities can cause serious damage to the regime. They are bad moral influences: broadly, they contribute to either the moral decay of citizens or the collapse of a just political order.

Moral causes exhibit a unique kind of reflexivity. Moral habituation informs both our activities and our reasons for these activities. We come to see virtuous living as desirable for itself, rather than for the sake of some other thing, precisely because moral causes provide us the experience to reason well about what happiness consists in. Unlike other psychological causes which may be reflexive (e.g., trauma), good moral causes reveal objective features of the natural law or virtue, for example, while bad moral causes obscure them. Hence, good moral influences share a natural directedness toward goodness, or virtuous living. Finally, moral influences are indirectly reason-giving. By revealing or concealing what goodness is, they support or decay one's rational capacity (rather than just dispositions) for behaving in a certain way. Thus, bad moral influences explain why, in Thucydides's telling, Athens made an irrational choice to invade Sicily.

The foregoing implies the definition of moral influences offered in the introduction to this paper: a moral influence is any person, institution, law, custom, or system that improves or worsens the moral behavior or moral competence of a person or group. Moral influences are reflexive on a person in the sense that they affect how virtue

is understood and received. Finally, moral influences have a necessary directness—they cannot be understood as ‘moral’ without reference to some realist horizon to which they refer. In Aristotle’s view, this horizon is virtuous living. This definition is consistent with Aristotle’s explanation of the diverse ways in which habituation to virtue or vice occurs and moral realism. It also aligns with common sense.

There is an interesting analogy between the ways moral influences affect moral competence and how scientific methodology affects scientific theories. Consider an explanation of scientific realism offered by Richard Boyd:

What the scientific method provides is a paradigm-dependent paradigm-modification strategy: a strategy for modifying or amending our existing theories in light of further research, which is such that its methodological principles at any given time will themselves depend upon the theoretical picture provided by the currently accepted theories . . . It is not possible to explain even the instrumental reliability of actual scientific practice without . . . adopting a realistic conception of scientific knowledge. (1988, 190)

Like moral influences, scientific methodology informs theory, which in turn shapes and improves scientific methodology (e.g., by revising experiment design based on new theoretical knowledge). Moral influences work in a similar way. The influencer shapes the way virtue is understood by the influenced, which in turn shapes the way the influenced understands the influencer. This is what Plato meant by dragging a cave-dweller into the clear light of day. A moral influence liberates the cave-dweller from ignorance by pushing them outside. After some time adjusting, the cave-dweller comes to understand the influence as having been good for him. Since there is an objective ‘good,’ it makes sense to speak of moral growth and decay.

Aristotle provides an example of how a realist ethical theory can offer an account of moral influences. One can extend this survey of moral influences to include those

which are also partly theological, cultural, medical, and so on. A good deal of contemporary research could fit into an Aristotelian framework, even if the authors do not conceive of their work this way. Aristotle is compelling because he offers a plausible and commonsense theory that applies at both an individual and collective level. Characterizing moral influences in the operational environment becomes a matter of judging their relative causal power and relevance to the mission.

Thucydides explained Athens's decision to invade Sicily in moral terms, but there are more recent examples of the importance of moral influences. The Iraqi Ba'ath party, although intrinsically unjust (especially under Saddam Hussein), included many subordinate institutions that performed key moral functions at the local level. De-Baathification removed all these moral influences, including the good ones; others took their place (Rubin 2015). In the modern security environment, Russian New Generation Warfare seeks "reflexive control," or to "locate the weak link in the [adversary's] system and exploit it through moral arguments, psychological tactics, or appeals to specific leaders' character" (Kowalewski 2017). The efficacy of the Russian approach has less to do with volume and more to do with how viciously it manipulates moral influences to dramatic effect.

Aristotle is just one example of a moral system that permits moral causation. Ancient and medieval philosophy generally took moral causes for granted in their respective theories of action and the good, whether by providing knowledge of moral facts an inherent reason giving power (actualized through the will), as is the case with Plato, or by associating morality with inherently motivating states of life, like happiness or virtuous living, as in Aristotle and Aquinas. There has been a resurgence of classical

perspectives in recent years, no doubt fueled by dissatisfaction with contemporary philosophy's antirealist leanings (see Nussbaum 1995; MacIntyre 2007; Finnis 2011).

Even contemporary moral philosophy has room for moral causes. By their very nature, moral facts supply reasons for action, even if we choose to ignore them. This is what it means for a fact to be normative. Therefore, moral facts are likely to exert some influence on the will of morally sensitive persons. This causal power can be great or small, depending on various facts about the individual in question.

Conscience

Conscience plays an important role in one's moral life. Ancient and medieval philosophers and theologians viewed conscience as a touchpoint between moral reasoning, actions, and psychology. The purpose of this section is to show that felt or anticipated pains of conscience are motivating influences that share the reflexive and reason-giving characteristics of Aristotelian moral causes.

Ancient Greek playwrights used the term *sunedenai*, roughly translated as 'to share knowledge with oneself,' to express the phenomenon of being made self-aware of a moral fault (Sorabji 2014, 12-3). The English word 'conscience' comes from the Latin word *conscientia*, or 'sharing knowledge with,' a literal translation of the Greek (Sorabji 2014, 14-5). Despite variations, most ancient and medieval thinkers held conscience to involve, at a minimum, a belief regarding the rightness or wrongness of what one has done or might do and a psychological feeling like guilt or shame.

Sorabji (2014) notes the loose and varied application of *sunedenai* and related terms in the pagan world. The standard sense involved an awareness of wrongdoing, often expressed through the metaphor of being a witness to oneself. In another sense,

Plato wrote of a *daimon*, literally a divine spirit, which would gainsay Socrates' actions in favor of the true or good. Unlike other ancient thinkers, Xenophon's Socrates believed his *daimon* was infallible (although Socrates remained fallible). Following this thought, some later Stoics understood conscience as an innate knowledge of the natural law. The Epicurean school held conscience to consist in an inner agony caused by anticipation of divine judgment (Sorabji 2014, 21-28). Despite these differences, pagan concepts of conscience clustered around an awareness of wrongdoing, self-disapprobation, and a feeling of guilt. Further, conscience had motivational force, whether as a reason-giving witness of moral demands or through negatively reinforcing pains of conscience.

The ancient Christian idea of conscience arrived much more determined, nearly all at once, in Paul's letters to the churches. Paul maintained that conscience responds to the "law written on men's hearts" and "bears witness . . . and accuse[s] or perhaps excuse[s]" one on the day of judgment before God (Sorabji 2014, 31). As Sorabji summarizes, "conscience reveals our possession of the law," but Paul is careful to note that conscience is different from the law, nor does it perfectly relate it (see 1 Cor. 4:4) (Sorabji 2014, 31). Unlike Plato's *daimon*, conscience is capable of error. As an authority in the Christian world, Paul's letters resolved many of the open questions in pagan conceptions of conscience and refocused Christian writers on the task of explaining the relationship between conscience and the law.

Medieval questions of conscience rehearsed ancient attempts to reconcile *akrasia* ('weakness of will') and moral failure with moral knowledge. This difficulty loosely parallels modern debates about moral disagreement (summarized above) and classical debates about moral knowledge. To Plato, all moral failure results from a lack of

knowledge; it is impossible to know the good and do evil. Aristotle rejected this view and argued that failure results from either lack of knowledge or inattention to knowledge given temptations and intervening demands (2014, 1145b-1146b). Christians sought to explain to what extent the ‘law’ was accessible by conscience or reason, and how, if conscience reflects the moral law, Christians could routinely fail to meet moral demands of which they were fully aware.

Thomas Aquinas combined Paul’s teaching on conscience with Aristotle’s concept of practical reason. Aquinas posed a distinction between *synderesis*, a rough Latinization of a Greek term meaning ‘the spark of conscience,’ and *conscientia* (Sorabji 2014, 62; Aquinas 1975, 1.73.12; Aquinas 1989, 123-4). Following Aquinas, *synderesis* is a natural tendency for principles of the natural law to manifest (albeit often implicitly) in our reasoning about what one should do, whereas *conscientia* is the “fallible act of applying *synderesis*” to a specific situation through practical judgment (Sorabji 2014, 64). Conscience can err on account of lack of attention, as per Aristotle, or by some error in the chain of reasoning to which *synderesis* belongs. The content provided by *synderesis* reports truthfully but is only available to us indirectly, through conscience, as a completed and possibly erroneous judgment. (This view is like Platts (1988), summarized above.) As a judgment, conscience is subject to the reflexivity of habituation and moral causes, in all the same ways as the outlined in the last section. In this way, conscience and psychological well-being are moral influences.

Conscience adds a visceral phenomenological layer to moral causes. What is abstract in moral theory is lived in conscience. For whatever philosophers have said about conscience, the basic phenomenology is familiar to everyone. No one wonders why

Raskolnikov feels pangs of conscience in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*; we expect murder to cause feelings of guilt in the murderer. Albert Camus's protagonist in *The Stranger* is strange precisely because he seems to have no conscience. Franz Kafka's *The Trial* explores the relationship between conscience and the human condition of Kafka's time.

Military service contributed to the development of conscience in Western thought. During the religious wars of the Enlightenment, philosophers and lawyers debated the moral and philosophical basis of conscientious objection (Sorabji 2014, 97-116). John Locke's *A Letter Concerning Toleration* developed a moral basis for conscientious objection that influenced the American Founding Fathers. Rather than merely restraining one from war, McPherson argues Union soldiers fought to deliver on the dictates of their conscience and moral beliefs (1994). Hence, an Ohio soldier eligible for medical discharge wrote to his wife: "if you esteem me with a true woman's love you will not ask me to disgrace myself by deserting the flag of our Union . . . twould be a disgrace to the whole American people if she had not noble sons enough who had the spirit of seventy six in their hearts" (McPherson 1994, 29). Similarly, German Romantic and military theorist Carl von Clausewitz underscores the role of 'moral forces' in his philosophy of war, although he likely includes non-moral psychological factors (Clausewitz 1976, 136). Finally, as referenced in the *Moral Leadership* vignette, crises of conscience are a source of moral injury (HQDA 2020; Shay 1994; Sherman 2015).

Conscience is significant to moral experience and the human condition. Conscience is not well represented in contemporary philosophy, but its impact on

psychological well-being and choice is difficult to overstate. At the very least, conscience is a venue in which moral influences interact with human psychology.

Subordinate Research Question 2: Summary

This section offered Aristotelian moral causes and conscience as two commonsense examples of moral causes that operate on the social (in the case of Aristotle) and individual (in the case of Aristotle and conscience) levels. It gestured to some features of moral causes that distinguish them from physical causes, specifically their directedness (toward the good) and reflexivity. This discussion helps illustrate moral causes per SRQ2 and sets the stage for the arguments presented in chapter 4.

Subordinate Research Question 3: Joint Doctrine

Joint Planning defines operational art as “the application of intuition and creative imagination by commanders and staffs . . . supported by their skill, knowledge, experience, creativity and judgement . . . to understand the operational environment, visualize and describe the desired end state, and employ assigned resources to achieve objectives” (JCS 2020, I-5). Through operational art, the joint force uses operational design to develop a “framework that underpins a campaign or operation” (JCS 2020, IV-1). Operational design frames the problem the joint force seeks to solve, “translating broad strategic and operational concepts,” applied to the operational environment, into specific missions arrayed in time and space (JCS 2020, IV-1).

For this study, the most relevant input to operational art and design is the commander’s visualization of the OE. The OE is the “composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences” that matter to the commander (JCS 2020, IV-10). It

consists of all warfighting domains; friendly, enemy, and neutral actors; the information environment; the psychology of enemy decision makers; political, cultural, and socioeconomic factors; and any other entity, force, or goings-on in the world that bears on the command's mission (JCS 2020, IV-12). If moral facts and causes are relevant to a commander's given mission, then these moral facts and causes are part of the OE.

Joint doctrine advances a "holistic" and systems-centric method for describing the OE (JCS 2009, I-2-3). By systems-centric, joint doctrine highlights how actors and capabilities relate to and influence one another. At the operational level, these interrelated systems are represented in overlapping categories of Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructural, and Informational (PMESII) links and nodes (see figure 3).

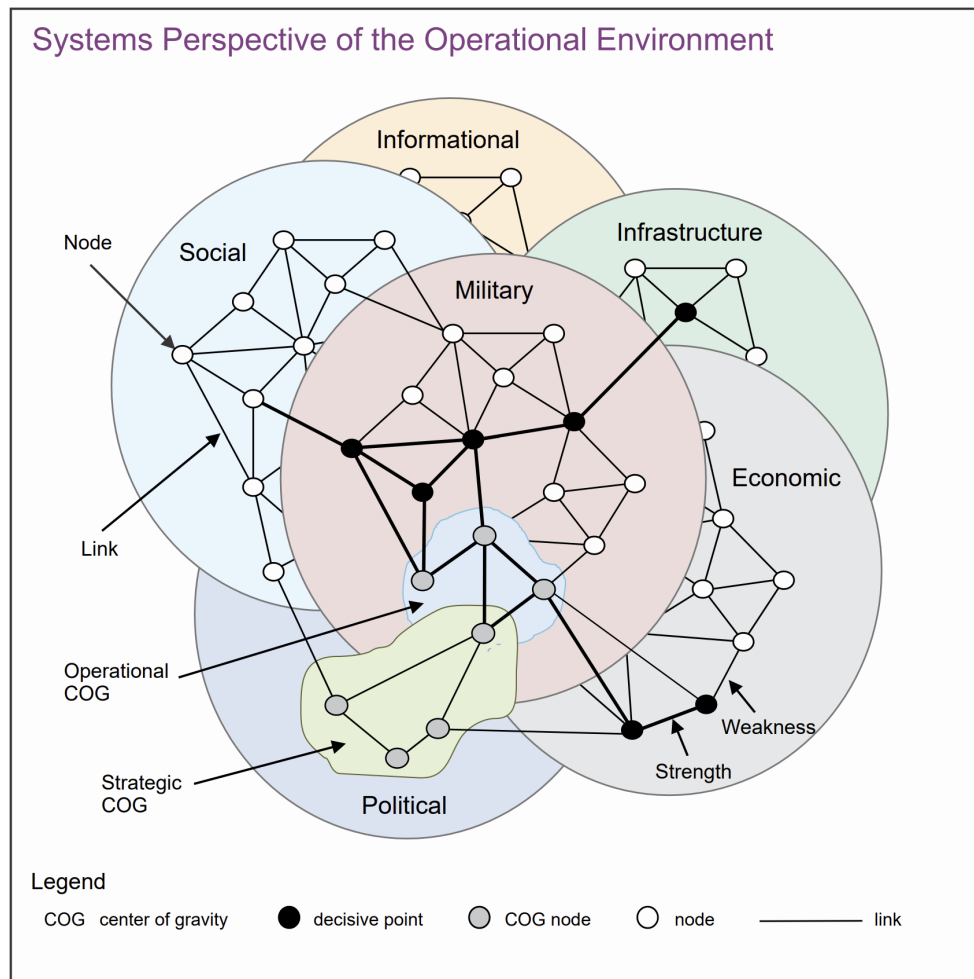


Figure 3. Systems Perspective of the OE

Source: JCS 2009, III-4.

Joint Planning introduces “tendencies and potentials” as a conceptual tool for explaining the “interactions and relationships” between actors and systems in the OE (JCS 2020, IV-10). Tendencies “reflect the inclination to think or behave in a certain manner” (JCS 2020, IV-10). *Joint Planning* does not provide an example of tendencies, but a likely example might be a host nation’s disposition toward military forces—whether the people are inclined to view the U.S. military as a threat or benefactor. Potential “is the

inherent ability or capacity for the growth or development of a specific interaction or relationship” (JCS 2020, IV-11). Whether Afghanistan can operate as a modern, rights-respecting nation-state is a question of its potential at a point in time. Though left vague in doctrine, potential seems intended to chart the spectrum of possibility. Tendencies and potentials change over time. Chapter 5 considers moral influences from the framework of tendencies and potentials.

The end state of an operation is a description of the OE as a system, including tendencies and potentials, at the successful conclusion of military operations (JCS 2020, IV-11). An analyst can compare the system as it appears at the start of the operation against the desired structure of the system after an operation. This comparison helps the commander and staff identify what aspects of the system to influence. For instance, a military partnership mission will likely seek to increase the operational potential, or capability to conduct effective combat operations, of a partner force. It may establish or reinforce links between the partner force and U.S. government entities and non-governmental organizations in the country.

Joint doctrine and other military thinkers offer various methods of determining which links and nodes are critical to an operation. The most common approach is called critical factor analysis or center-of-gravity analysis (JCS 2009, IV-10-14; Eikmeier 2007, 62-66). A critical node may exist in any PMESII system depending on how the overall system functions. Operational design is informed by an awareness of these critical factors.

Antirealism in Joint Doctrine

As mentioned in the discussion on *Moral Leadership*, there are many notes in joint and service-level doctrine that appear antirealist. Some of the most obvious are below:

1. *Information Operations* conflates moral facts and causes with accidents of the cognitive domain, as “individual and cultural beliefs, norms, vulnerabilities, motivations, emotions, experiences, morals, education, mental health, identities, and ideologies” (JCS 2014, I-3). Of these, all but education and mental health are entirely belief-dependent.
2. The “perception assessment matrix” of *Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment* specifically captures “moralities” (note the plural) as though just perceptions (JCS 2009, D-8). Other uses of ‘moral,’ in relation to center of gravity analysis, clearly mean ‘moral’ in the idiosyncratic Clausewitzian sense—as in ‘morale’ or ‘willpower’—and are best interpreted as psychological phenomena (JCS 2020, IV-23; Clausewitz 1976, 184-5).
3. Legitimacy, as a principle of joint operations, concerns “the actual and perceived legality, morality, and rightness of actions from the perspectives of interested audiences” (JCS 2020, III-5). While legitimacy is based in perspective, *Joint Planning* associates ‘actual’ morality with subjective perspective of groups. This way of speaking about morality broadly nest within the relativist and reductionist antirealist camps.

4. 2018's *Joint Concept for Operating in the Informational Environment* makes no distinction between moral influences and informational phenomena generally.

Generally, joint doctrine ignores the role of moral influences. When included, moral influences are treated as a subset of culture. If doctrine were realist, one would expect some mention of morality as a unique kind of influence on the operational environment. This silence speaks volumes in favor of an antirealist interpretation of doctrine.

There are some countervailing notes, although these are generally found outside of planning doctrine. Unfortunately, joint concepts of just war and professional military ethics are too vague to indicate either a realist or antirealist (especially constructivist) inclination. *Army Leadership and the Profession* notes “natural moral reason,” an idea associated with realism once, in a chart, without clarifying its meaning or providing context (HQDA 2019, 1-7). The Army’s recently published *Moral Leadership* offers moral objectivism and moral relativism as two possible positions to take on the environment, despite their mutual exclusivity (HQDA 2020, 21). The North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s *Comprehensive Operational Planning Directive* mentions the role of justice in a way that could be interpreted as realist or antirealist, but in the main it does not seriously address moral-*qua*-moral aspects of the operational environment (SHAPE 2013, 4-19, 4-20).

The weight of joint and service-level doctrine lends itself to an antirealist reading, even though this is probably not the intention of doctrine writers. Whatever the reason for this inclination, operational risk exists in the space between doctrine and reality. *Joint*

Planning defines risk “as the probability and consequence of an event causing harm to something valued” and operational risk as “the probability and consequence of failure to achieve mission objectives while protecting the force from unacceptable losses” (JCS 2020, I-20-1). If doctrine is an obstacle to a proper understanding of moral influences, then joint doctrine is a risk factor. It prevents the joint force from assessing the “probability and consequences” of operationally relevant influences in the OE. As the Thucydides example shows, moral facts and causes can be operationally relevant, even critical.

PMESII Variables and Reductionism

The PMESII framework is technically compatible with moral realism. A PMESII variable could have a unique moral property that characterizes how the node influences the system. Chapter 5 builds a model around this idea. However, the antirealist context of joint doctrine discourages this view and inclines analysts to think of moral influences as just another fact to be filed under one of the PMESII headings. This makes the antirealist tendency of joint doctrine more rather than less severe because it implies a reductionist approach to morality.

Reductionism either strips a rich concept of its salient features or forces phenomena into a category to which it does not belong. PMESII analysis completes the antirealism of joint doctrine by providing a venue in which both forms of this reductionism can occur. For instance, an analyst places *zakat*, the Muslim duty to almsgiving, within the ‘Culture’ system of the OE. On joint doctrine, the analyst conducted a PMESII analysis by reporting and classifying the fact. Ideally, the analyst showed how this fact is relevant to the operation. This is where the analysis ends,

however. The question ‘what is *zakat* and how does it influence the Muslim world?’ has been answered on antirealist terms, which is to say, it has nested a moral concept within a cultural one. Joint doctrine would go too far to insist that *zakat* is not a moral fact at all, since it is clearly believed to be one by those who practice it. In this way, PMESII analysis allows joint force to give lip service to moral influences.

Doctrine implies that morality fits within PMESII analysis as any other fact might. Consequently, the ‘normative’ character of moral beliefs, if realism is true, easily escapes notice. If reductionism is true, there is no loss of content. Chapter 4 expands on this concern.

Subordinate Research Question 3: Summary

This section explained the relationship between visualizing the operational environment, developing an operational design, and moral realism. The joint force uses a systems-centric model to depict facts and causes in the operational environment. Even though realism seems like an abstract philosophical concept, realism or antirealism must be assumed in any attempt to characterize the OE. Either moral facts matter, or they do not. Joint doctrine suggests the latter. However, if moral facts and causes are prominent in the OE, then the joint force incurs operational risk whenever it neglects to account for them.

Chapter Summary

This chapter laid the groundwork for each of this study’s subordinate research questions. It outlined arguments for and against moral realism (SRQ1) and provided an overview of how moral facts and causes may influence the OE (SRQ2). Finally, it

outlined major concepts in doctrine that will later comprise the superstructure of the model this paper seeks to provide (PRQ1, SRQ3). Several important issues in metaethics were glossed over, especially on the topic of moral motivation. If the argument that follows is correct, these oversights are not fatal to this project. As stated in the introduction, the purpose of providing these arguments is to show that moral realism is plausible. Chapter 4 will adjudicate SRQ1, SRQ2, and SRQ3 based on several practical considerations. Summary answers to SRQs are in table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Subordinate Research Questions	
SRQ1: Is objective moral realism the best metaethical position for the JIA?	Moral Realism is Plausible
SRQ2: How do moral facts influence the OE?	Moral influences improve or decay the moral capacities of actors in the OE.
SRQ3: What terms and concepts in doctrine are most amenable to moral facts and causes?	Systems analysis, tendencies and potentials, PMESII analysis

Source: Created by author.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter Introduction

The PRQ is: how should the JIA model moral, causal influences in the OE?

This study has both philosophical and practical components. For the philosophical portions of the argument, ‘philosophical analysis’ indicates a method of inquiry characterized by careful consideration of formal arguments and intuitions about test cases. When evaluating candidate models, this paper uses the ‘acceptable’ criterion from joint doctrine to discriminate between antirealist and realist models.

Methodology

Metaphilosophy, or the “philosophy of philosophy,” is the subdiscipline of philosophy that deals with the purpose and methods of philosophy (Williamson 2007, 1). The goal of this section is to identify what ‘philosophical analysis’ means for the purpose of this paper. Generally, this paper advances arguments using formal argument structure and evidence. It appeals to informed intuitions, when appropriate, as a defeasible source of evidence.

Conceptual analysis is an ancient method of doing philosophy. Classical conceptual analysis is “the search for precise definitions specifying necessary and sufficient conditions for abstract notions” (Ramsey 1998, 161; Graham and Horgan 1998, 271-292). Typically, philosophers posit a definition of a key term and subject the definition to our intuitions about test cases. For instance, Gettier (1963, 121-123) famously challenged the once-popular argument that knowledge is justified true belief by

providing a case in which, intuitively, philosophers found a justified true belief that was not plausibly a case of knowledge. His thought experiment upended epistemology and spurred a cottage industry of new positions in epistemology. However, recent research in psychology and experimental philosophy suggests abstract concepts may not have firm boundaries admitting of necessary and sufficient conditions that apply to all possible cases (this is related to the famous problem of ‘vagueness’ in philosophy) (Ramsey 1998, 161-177). Other studies question the general reliability of intuitions (Wisniewski 1998, 45-58). Some philosophers contend that classical conceptual analysis’ emphasis on definitions tends to confuse the *explanans* (e.g., concepts) for the *explanandum* (e.g., the phenomenon being described) (Williamson 2007, 18-20). These concerns raise questions about the status of classical conceptual analysis as an *a priori*, or ‘armchair,’ discipline.

For the present purpose, intuitions are relevant because of the content they contain. They are defeasible by arguments or evidence of other kinds, but count as evidence nonetheless, much like introspection and perception (Williamson 2007, 3). They may be *a priori* or *a posteori* (i.e., not informed by or informed by experience, respectively), depending on the nature of the claim. For the sake of precision, this study captures intuitions as propositions in valid arguments. A valid argument is one in which it is impossible for all the premises to be true and the conclusion false. Accordingly, this paper uses deductive arguments featuring clearly stated premises. Though communication depends on concepts and language, the primary interest of this study is reality. These commitments comprise ‘philosophical analysis’ in the sense of this research.

This paper uses the term ‘common sense’ as a stand-in for folk-intuitions about moral concepts and language. Common sense is not evidence for the truth of a philosophical claim, but it does indicate which side of a debate has a greater explanatory burden to clear. All things equal, commonsense explanations are preferable to complicated, esoteric explanations. A view that rejects common sense should also explain why the commonsense view is widely held. Whenever this paper uses ‘common sense,’ it should be understood in this limited sense.

Chapter 4 argues antirealism is ‘unacceptable’ on *Joint Planning*’s definition: “acceptable—must balance cost and risk with the advantage gained.” (III-41) Acceptability is a screening criterion for courses of action. An unacceptable worldview is one that courts overriding harms and risks to the joint force. If a model of moral influences is based on an unacceptable worldview, then the JIA cannot accept the model. Acceptability is used in this practical sense, as explained in chapter 4.

Threats to Soundness

This study attempts to move from the subjective perspective of the author to an objective claim about the nature of morality. Realism argues that this move is possible in principle; the inherent subjectivity of personal perspective is compatible with objective moral standards. (To make this ‘move,’ one provides strong evidence and arguments.) But even if realism is true, there is no guarantee that the author has made a sound argument for it. As chapter 2 showed, realists acknowledge that moral and philosophical reasoning is difficult. Biases inherited from cultural and religious traditions affect how people view issues. To be transparent, the author acknowledges the following biases: (1) the author conducts philosophy according to the methods and style of the Anglo-

American school of academic philosophy; (2) the author's religious views align with realism; and (3) the author found his specific encounters with antirealism in joint planning personally troubling. (These encounters are not provided as evidence in this study, however.) These biases and experiences influence the author's sense of what is plausible, true, and worthy of emphasis. For instance, the author devoted less attention to moral motivation than conscience, even though nearly all contemporary philosophers make the opposite choice. The author's biases may explain this decision, even though the author believes he has compelling, non-religious reasons for this approach (see chapters 2 and 4).

The author cannot escape bias, but he can mitigate it through precise and forthright argument. The Practical Argument Against Antirealism (chapter 4) depends on well-documented premises offered sequentially. The argument is presented formally to be as transparent as possible. An antirealist may reject the Practical Argument without consideration of the author's biases provided there are good reasons to believe the premises are false.

Ethical Assurances

This paper does not collect data from living persons. This research project relies entirely on published material. The author endeavors to include a wide variety of sources representing a variety of perspectives.

Chapter Summary

This section briefly outlined 'philosophical analysis' as a methodology and summarized key challenges with this method. The author discussed personal biases and

explained the argumentative techniques deployed against them. The argument presented in chapter 4 will use the joint doctrine definition of ‘acceptable.’

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

We were civilized people, after all. But I felt that the culture we boasted so much about is only a very thin lacquer which chips off at the very moment we come in contact with cruel things like real war.

—Stefan Westmann, Corporal, German 29th Division, World War I

Chapter Introduction: Overview of the Argument

To review, the purpose of this research is to provide the JIA with a way to model moral influences (PRQ: how should the JIA model moral, causal influences in the OE?). A model of moral influences must make assumptions about moral causation and whether morality is descriptive or normative. To model moral influences, one must select either realism or antirealism because these theories provide mutually exclusive answers to the fundamental questions on which the model depends. At most, only one of these positions can be correct. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a series of arguments that show why realism is the better choice for the JIA. Chapter 5 takes this conclusion and builds a model around it.

Philosophy seldom settles matters decisively. Skeptical positions like antirealism will never go away so long as radical criticisms of common sense are logically valid. (An argument must be valid and sound to be true.) The debate turns on what constitutes a better or worse theory—itself a controversial question. For this reason, the argument presented here does not depend on a decisive, philosophical refutation of antirealism. It will instead focus on conflicts between antirealism and the moral foundation of the profession of arms. This is a complicated but precise way of showing that antirealism is not feasible, acceptable, and suitable for the JIA. However, showing antirealism to be

unacceptable does not make realism acceptable by default. This chapter begins with a quick defense of moral realism as a plausible position in philosophy (Practical Premise). It then demonstrates why antirealism is incompatible with the moral foundation of the profession of arms (Vicious Profession Premise). Finally, it provides some practical arguments that illustrate the advantages of realism (Practical Premise). The ‘Practical Argument Against Antirealism’ depends most critically on the Vicious Profession Premise. To preview, the Practical Argument Against Antirealism (PAAA) is below:

1. The JIA must model moral influences in the operational environment.
(Necessity Assumption)
2. The JIA cannot compromise the moral foundation of the profession of arms.
(Acceptability Assumption)
3. The JIA cannot model moral influences on the operational environment on an antirealist worldview without compromising the moral foundation of the profession of arms. (Vicious Profession Premise)
4. Realism allows the JIA to model moral influences on the operational environment and maintain the moral foundation of the profession of arms.
(Practical Premise)

Therefore, the JIA must reject moral antirealism and accept moral realism.

Summary of the Philosophical Argument

As shown in chapter 2, realism is a well-defended position in contemporary metaethics. Several prominent philosophers advance some form of realism, and their numbers appear to be growing. When surveyed in 2014, 56.4 percent of philosophers supported moral realism and 27.7 percent supported antirealism (Bourget and Chalmers

2014, 465-500). As a sign of realism's growth in the last few decades, many of the most spirited debates in metaethics are now between natural and non-natural forms of realism.

Antirealism is by no means defeated, but it was more popular prior to the turn of the 21st century. The most widely held contemporary version of antirealism is constructivism (e.g., Scanlon 1998; Korsgaard 1996). As explained in chapter 2, constructivism achieves a measure of 'objectivism' that puts it at odds with most positions in antirealism. Constructivists have not surmounted the *Euthyphro* dilemma, and it remains unclear if constructivism can be understood independently of realist moral standards.

Antirealism is more common in the social sciences because they are methodologically suited to descriptive approaches to the natural world. In a similar vein, naturalist-leaning philosophers seek a picture of morality that accommodates a scientific understanding of it. Philosophical positivism, a view on which philosophy should follow scientific modes of investigation, is no longer seriously maintained, but its appeal lingers in naturalist forms of realism (buttressed by some developments in metaphysics, as discussed regarding 'supervenience' in chapter 2). Although this thesis defends non-natural moral realism, the conclusions presented in chapter 5 are compatible with natural moral realism as well.

If realism is gaining ground in philosophy, surveys of American popular culture reveal an opposite trend (Barna Group 2018). Generally, realist philosophers note that postmodern views of civic life characteristically subordinate moral questions to political or private interests—"that in moral argument the apparent assertion of principles functions as a mask for expressions of personal preference" (MacIntyre 2007, 19). The

cultural purchase of the problem of moral disagreement is hard to overstate. As

MacIntyre writes,

The scheme of moral decline which these remarks presuppose . . . [requires] the discrimination of three distinct stages; a first at which evaluative and more especially moral theory and practice embody genuine objective and impersonal standards which provide rational justification for particular policies, actions and judgements and which themselves . . . are susceptible of rational justification; a second stage at which there are unsuccessful attempts to maintain the objectivity and impersonality of moral judgments, but during which the project of providing rational justifications both by means of and for the standards continuously breaks down; and a third stage at which theories of an emotivist [antirealist] kind secure wide implicit acceptance because of a general implicit recognition in practice, though not in explicit theory, that claims to objectivity and impersonality cannot be made good. (2007, 18-19)

The next section will take up the story of how antirealist practices became embedded in culture to such a degree that they outpaced skepticism in philosophy. To preview, the U.S. military might have played and may still be playing a role.

Philosophers are not known for being moral optimists. Table 2 summarizes some of the theoretical advantages and disadvantages of moral realism from chapter 2. Generally, realists try to preserve common sense against technical objections in philosophy and the problem of moral disagreement (Sayre-McChord 2020).

Table 2. Advantages and Disadvantages of Moral Realism as a Theory	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Commonsense Appeal	Rejects Relativist Tendencies in Culture
Consistent with Language Use	Harder to Explain Moral Disagreement
Consistent with Human Behavior	Bucks Trends in Philosophy of Mind
Allows Study of Moral Influences	Posits a Greater Ontology
Explains Multiple-Realizability	Metaphysically Complex
Avoids <i>Euthyphro</i> Dilemma	
Deliberative Indispensability	

Source: Created by author.

One way to defeat skeptical positions in philosophy is to cut them off from skeptical methodologies. One such argument against antirealism shows its dependency on normativity. To argue in favor of a theory, there must be some standard that makes a theory better or worse than another theory. This standard is evaluative (i.e., normative). It is hard to see how antirealism can provide an argument for itself given how it systematically undermines normativity. On what standard is antirealism better than realism? The antirealist is in the uncomfortable position of appealing to a culturally independent evaluative standard while simultaneously denying such standards exist.

There are ways around this problem, but they typically require antirealists to embrace antirealism ‘all the way down.’ General theories of truth must take ‘truth’ on an antirealist sense, whether based on reflective equilibrium (i.e., public consensus formed over time) or some other social process. These positions have their own difficulties. Without going too far afield, suffice it to say that antirealist theories of truth and justification make moral antirealism more, rather than less, abstract—reality more, rather than less, subjective. Truth becomes a moving target, shaped dialectically over time. This is much stronger claim than asserting that social awareness of truth (or understanding of

moral concepts) improves over time as societies progress (a position realists could accept, since it is epistemological rather than metaphysical). Antirealists ask people undecided on these matters to reject common sense in more ways than one.

The general argument for deliberative indispensability is a strong positive argument for moral realism. Antirealism undermines the reasons we are interested in moral deliberation because it eliminates objective normativity. To reiterate Enoch's observation: "it is sufficient that [objective normativity] cannot be eliminated without defeating whatever reason we had to find that project attractive in the first place . . . the deliberative project loses much of its initial appeal . . . once normativity is viewed as dependent on our attitudes" (2011, 81). In the view of the author, this internal tension in antirealism is its most obvious weakness (see Nagel 1986, 149). It clashes against the phenomenology of deliberation, which is more central and obvious to the moral life than any of the theories discussed here.

A second pressing issue considers the naturalistic fallacy or Hume's Law. As explained in chapter 2, the naturalistic fallacy prevents one from drawing normative conclusions from arguments consisting of only descriptive premises. If Hume's Law is correct (it is at least very compelling), then all versions of descriptive antirealism will struggle to explain why a person believes a proposition is normative—from the perspective of that person—since a person's beliefs cannot be the product of a valid inference (without admitting of at least one normative premise). There is the sense in which antirealism is only plausible from outside of the person, as if considering them under a magnifying glass and white gloves. Within the person, the moral belief they hold is normative (to them) and will almost certainly continue to appear normative even after

they understand antirealism. The irony is that moral antirealism only makes sense from an ‘objective’ or impartial consideration of the person’s beliefs. In the words of David Wiggins, “[antirealism] cannot adopt the inner perspective because, according to the picture that the non-cognitivist paints of these things, the inner view has to be unaware of the outer one, and has to enjoy essentially illusory notions of objectivity, importance, and significance: whereas the outer view has to hold that is objectively meaningless” (1988, 136). By contrast, realism can always make sense of why a person believes their views are normative: they include normative premises that make claims (which may be true or false) about reality. (Though framed against noncognitivism, Wiggins’s point could be rephrased against relativism as well. The tension between how morality is viewed from within and outside of a person applies to all antirealisms except constructivism.)

Antirealism has not answered the problem of moral disagreement it so frequently raises. It has only mutated moral disagreement into a problem of why people are systemically irrational. If this is correct, the alleged explanatory advantage of antirealism disappears. There is one further irony. If the antirealist answer to the problem of moral disagreement is intended to respect the moral judgments of other people, it has surely failed. There is certainly no greater arrogance than to assert that people are mistaken about the very nature of their moral beliefs.

Again, there are ways around this objection that derive meaning and normativity from constructed sources. One way is to replace normativity with something like it, say Humean desires (see chapter 2, ‘The Queerness of Moral Facts’). This may explain motivation, but it would not explain why the belief is held to be normative. The other approach relies on constructivist attempts to show the commonsense view of morality is

not dependent on realism. As said before, the worry is that these attempts are “parasitic on independent moral values” and cannot escape the *Euthyphro* dilemma (Bagnoli 2020). These are tall burdens to clear, and it seems a weakness that many of these attempts must bypass metaphysical questions to do so. Tim Scanlon’s influential *What We Owe to Each Other* takes this approach (1998, 2-3). This strategy cannot explain metaphysical problems like moral causation. To be a complete position, it must abandon the constraint that protects it from objections of this kind (Enoch 2011, 122-7).

In the author’s view, the most compelling evidence against antirealism is baked into what it means to be human. When a person provides moral reasons for the decisions they make, they do not think of those reasons as a cultural artifact. An individual’s moral beliefs, to that individual, point to something real. The convictions we hold about reality move us to fill the streets in protest, compose strongly worded letters to the editor, remain in the blistering cold of Valley Forge, and so on. We live for these reasons, and we are often willing to die for them. Regardless of what we say about realism, we all (antirealists included) behave as realists. Only when we are asked to explain moral disagreement—specifically the moral views of people we disagree with—does antirealism suddenly seem compelling. This tendency is certainly suspicious. It suggests an unwillingness to engage with other people as moral agents. If one cannot engage them, one is unlikely ever to love or care for them except in a performative sense. The fruit of this philosophy does little to recommend it.

The foregoing will not convince a determined antirealist. The different arguments summarized here apply to each version of antirealism differently. (All prominent versions are addressed by at least one of these arguments, however.) This is an outline for why

realism ought to remain the default position. Common sense is defeasible by new evidence and better arguments, but this evidence is unlikely to arrive anytime soon. In summary, moral realism is a plausible position until shown to be otherwise, and there are several theoretical advantages to it. The Plausibility Premise is satisfied for now.

Summary of the Practical Argument

The following sections will defend the Vicious Profession Premise and the Practical Premise. This section provides some overall comments about the structure and meaning of the argument and defends it against the criticism that it begs the question. To recall, the Practical Argument Against Antirealism (PAAA) is below:

1. The JIA must model moral influences in the operational environment.
(Necessity Assumption)
2. The JIA cannot compromise the moral foundation of the profession of arms.
(Acceptability Assumption)
3. The JIA cannot model moral influences on the operational environment on an antirealist worldview without compromising the moral foundation of the profession of arms. (Vicious Profession Premise)
4. Realism allows the JIA to model moral influences on the operational environment and maintain the moral foundation of the profession of arms.
(Practical Premise)

Therefore, the JIA must reject moral antirealism and accept moral realism.

The Necessity Assumption holds the JIA must model moral influences in the operational environment. This premise is assumed, although one might object that it begs the question in favor of realism to stipulate that moral influences exist (some versions of

antirealism deny this). This objection is not correct, as some forms of antirealism can explain moral influences, but the Necessity Assumption may be reframed to allay this concern:

1. The JIA must take a position on whether moral influences exist.
2. If the JIA takes a position on whether moral influences exist, it must accept either realism or antirealism (but not both).

This version of the Necessity Premise is neutral to the existence of moral influences and meets the requirement for the PAAA. The shorter form will be referred to for brevity.

The Acceptability Assumption holds that the JIA cannot compromise the moral foundation of the profession of arms. Like the short form of the Necessity Assumption, one might object that the Acceptability Assumption begs the question by loading the term ‘moral foundation’ with a realist sense of ‘moral.’ This concern is correct, but not for philosophical reasons and not in a way that compromises the argument. The Acceptability Assumption must be unpacked:

1. The JIA cannot compromise the moral foundation of the profession of arms.
2. The moral foundation of the profession of arms includes the Oath of Office.

Since every officer serving in the profession of arms has made the Oath of Office, the entire U.S. profession of arms is committed to it in fact. As a later section will show, the Oath of Office (or Oath of Enlistment), through reference to the Constitution, presumes moral realism. Therefore, the profession is committed to moral realism (even if it does not yet appreciate this commitment). A philosopher might object that the Oath of Office, for whatever reason, should not be required of officers. An objection of this kind

has no purchase within the profession of arms since the profession consists of those who have already rejected the objection by (literally) swearing—“so help me God”—to the opposite. Although the PAAA emphasizes the significance of the Oath to the profession of arms, the argument applies (*mutatis mutandis*) across the JIA. All federal employees “elected or appointed to an office of honor or profit in the civil service or uniformed services” take the Oath (5 U.S. Code 1966, §3331). This level of agreement is as much as one can hope for in philosophy.

The Acceptability Assumption is not a philosophical premise in the usual sense. First and foremost, it is practical. It depends on an understanding of what would be feasible and acceptable for the JIA to do. Since the PAAA seeks a practical conclusion (i.e., a conclusion about what we—in the here and now—ought to believe and do), practical premises are licit.

A critic might suppose that the PAAA depends on antirealism to be true. Is it not antirealist to use a culturally derived standard—like *Joint Planning*’s evaluative terms like ‘feasibility’ and ‘acceptability’—to determine an approach to a metaethical question? Would not this standard be relative? If this critique hits the mark, the PAAA is self-defeating.

There are two responses to this. First, it could be the case that practical reasons are best understood in accordance with realism about reasons. This is not the approach taken here, although there are prominent philosophers who argue for it (see Scanlon 1998; for brevity, this position is not summarized in this study). Here we take the Acceptability Assumption as a short form of a longer argument about what should be done when a philosophical question is unresolved. Consider the following:

1. John must do A or B but cannot do both.
2. John has equally good philosophical evidence in favor of A and B.

(Or: John cannot decide whether there is better philosophical evidence for A or B.)

3. John judges A would be much easier to do than B.

In this case, most people would conclude that John has good reason to do A, even though this reason is not completely determined by the philosophical evidence in support of A. This is the situation the JIA is in (to be generous to antirealism). The Acceptability Assumption does not appeal to convention over philosophical evidence; it points to convention as a tiebreaker in cases where the philosophical evidence is indecisive (even though, in the author's opinion, the philosophical evidence favors realism). Not all valid reasons depend upon philosophical evidence. (The move from evidence-based reasons for action to practical reasons for action is analogous to Blaise Pascal's famous 'wager,' an often-misunderstood argument.)

A critical reader will notice that the PAAA crucially depends on the latter half of the Vicious Profession Premise:

1. The JIA cannot model moral influences on the operational environment on an antirealist worldview without compromising the moral foundation of the profession of arms.

This premise might seem superfluous given the Acceptability Assumption. Why not just argue that antirealism is unfeasible, on account of the Oath of Office, and leave it at that? This admittedly simpler approach suffers from one key disadvantage. First, the Acceptability Assumption could be compatible with some constructivist theories (e.g.,

Scanlon's 'contractualism,' inspired by social contract theory) since the Constitution and Oath of Office can be interpreted in a constructivist way. (As will be shown, such an interpretation is, at best, strained.) However, a theory of moral influences requires metaphysical commitments about causation. To the knowledge of the author, constructivist theories have not yet provided a robust explanation of moral causation of the kind the military seeks to characterize the operational environment. Yet this is something we must do (Necessity Assumption). Recall, Scanlon's contractualism specifically avoids the metaphysical commitments that would make a theory of moral causation possible. Therefore, the JIA cannot accept any form of antirealism because there is no version that is simultaneously (1) compatible with a plausible interpretation of the Constitution and (2) capable of providing an explanation of moral influences. The Vicious Profession Premise prevents constructivist objections for applying to this argument.

Chapter 2 provided the groundwork for the Practical Premise. A following section defends this premise by comparing the advantages of realism over antirealism regarding moral influences.

The Vicious Profession Premise: The Constitution

The Vicious Profession Premise (VPP) reads: 'the JIA cannot model moral influences on the operational environment on an antirealist worldview without compromising the moral foundation of the profession of arms.' The Oath of Office is the obvious starting point for the moral foundation of the profession of arms since it derives its moral force from both its nature (as an oath) and the fact that all officers swear it. By 'starting point,' we mean the first inquiry—the door nearest to us—in our investigation of

the moral basis of the profession of arms. Presumably, one could start with an analysis of violence under natural law, but this would beg the question in favor of realism. (A good just war theory ought to start there, however.) To avoid these difficulties, we begin with the fact of the Oath of Office, to which we can assume every member of the profession has freely assented. Consider the text of the Oath:

I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter: So help me God. (5 U.S. Code 1966, §3331)

The Oath of Office constitutes a moral commitment. An oath is a serious kind of promise; taking an oath binds one to whatever normative commitments are contained in it. Some philosophers have argued that promises uniquely bridge the gap between descriptive and evaluative facts (over the naturalistic fallacy and Hume's Law) (Searle 1964, 43-58). Regardless of whether they are correct, we should assume that those who take the Oath of Office do so in good faith, on the grounds that they believe it expresses a body of moral commitments worthy of governing their actions.

A cynic might argue that the Oath is moral only because it is an agreement, not because of the content (moral commitments) expressed within it. This objection draws an analogy between the Oath and standard contracts: the profession of arms is morally obligated to keep the Oath for the same reason a long-haul truck company is morally obligated to honor its contract to deliver lumber to Nantucket. The realist notes that the cynic has missed an important step. Even if the Oath is morally binding in part because it is agreed to, it is also binding because of what it represents and the reasons why the profession swears it. The Oath seeks to preserve a particular relationship between the

profession and the People, represented by a commitment to support and defend the Constitution. This state-of-affairs has moral, rather than just procedural, content. The important point is that the profession enters the Oath for reasons it takes to be moral above and beyond the contractual sense.

If the Oath implies a relationship with moral content, the next step is to examine this relationship. The Oath commits those who swear to it to “support and defend” the Constitution. Thus, a moral analysis of the Oath is a moral analysis of the Constitution. The first question must be: what is it about the Constitution that makes it worth supporting and defending? This section shall offer an antirealist and a realist interpretation of the Constitution. The antirealist interpretation fails on historical, moral, and practical grounds. For this reason, the JIA must choose a realist interpretation. Since the JIA cannot be realist about the Constitution and antirealist about everything else, the JIA is committed to realism on the Acceptability Assumption and the law of non-contradiction.

The version of antirealism that is most often associated with the Constitution, and law in general, is a particularly aggressive form of relativism which we will call ‘naïve legal positivism.’ As legal philosopher Hadley Arkes defines it, naïve legal positivism is the view that “by ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ . . . we mean that which has been accepted or rejected, by a majority” (1990, 15). In other words, morality is the positive law (i.e., laws that have been ‘posited’ and ratified by Congress). Therefore, morality is derived from procedurally consistent legislating—itself nothing more than a social fact.

Though universally rejected in philosophy, naïve legal positivism is a mainstream view in contemporary law schools (see Green and Adams 2019; Arkes 1990, 15-6).

Consider the following remarks by the late Chief Justice William Rehnquist:

The laws that emerge after a typical political struggle in which various individual value judgments are debated likewise take on a form of moral goodness because they have been enacted into positive law. It is the fact of their enactment that gives them whatever moral claim they have upon us as a society, however, and not any independent virtue they may have in any particular citizen's own scale of values. Beyond the Constitution and the laws in our society, there simply is no basis other than the individual conscience of the citizen that may serve as a platform for the launching of moral judgments. (2006, 413)

In the space of a few sentences, Rehnquist's legal positivism very quickly reveals itself to be a kind of radical skepticism. He shares this perspective with Thomas Hobbes, according to whom "the desires, and other passions of man are in themselves no sin... till they know a law that forbids them: which till laws be made they cannot know" (Hobbes 1998, 85). Outside of the law, there are only personal preferences, like Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes's "love [for] granite rocks and berberry bushes" (Rehnquist 2006, 413). (Holmes was an early proponent of naïve legal positivism.)

Rehnquist is not alone in this view. As Harry Jaffa (1959) argued, naïve legal positivism has a short history in the United States, most aptly represented by Stephen Douglas's "Don't Care" position in his debates against Abraham Lincoln. (A difference between Douglas's version and Rehnquist's will be explained later.) For Stephen Douglas, popular sovereignty, a way of expressing naïve legal positivism procedurally, is the primary fact conferring moral value.

Antirealist interpretations of the Constitution are committed to the view that the Constitution's moral status depends on the fact of its ratification. To reiterate Rehnquist's observation, "beyond the Constitution . . . there simply is no basis . . . for the launching

of moral judgments” (2006, 413). The realist responds to this characterization (1) by questioning its historicity; (2) showing it to be self-defeating; and (3) demonstrating how realism uniquely allows the profession of arms to take morality seriously.

Historicity Objection

There are two approaches to the historicity objection. The first is to show that the Founding Fathers were realists and understood the Constitution realistically, specifically as a bridge between the structure of the American government and what they would have called the ‘law of nature.’ The second is to argue that the Founding Fathers selected a representative form of government, over other possible forms, for reasons which required justification that could only be provided on realism. Since these reasons could not be drawn from the Constitution, they must refer to something outside of it. Therefore, Rehnquist’s assertion that there is nothing “beyond the Constitution” is implausible on historical grounds.

There is little doubt that the Founding Fathers were realists. Like John Locke, and against Hobbes, they asserted the primacy of natural law. To quote Locke:

It is certain there is such a law and that too, as intelligible and plain to a rational creature, and a studier of that law, as the positive laws of common-wealths; nay, possibly plainer; as much as reason is easier to be understood, then the fancies and intricate contrivances of men, following contrary and hidden interests put into words; for so truly are a great part of the municipal laws of countries, which are only so far right, as they are founded on the law of nature, by which they are to be regulated and interpreted. (1980, 12)

Whether Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* is internally consistent is a matter of continued debate. Regardless, Locke rejects the Hobbesian idea that there is no moral law outside of the positive law. For Locke, the natural law is the standard against which positive law can be judged right or wrong.

The Founding Fathers were broadly Lockean in this sense. Hence a young Alexander Hamilton wrote, full of vigor, that “good and wise men, in all ages . . . have supposed . . . an eternal and immutable law, which is, indispensably, obligatory upon all mankind, prior to any human institution whatsoever” (Hamilton 1775; Arkes 1990, 40). The influence of Locke on Thomas Jefferson is evident in the Declaration of Independence. Locke’s “*equality* of men by nature” (1980, 8) is Jefferson’s “all men are created equal” (1776); Locke’s “*consent of the people*” (1980, 55) is Jefferson’s “consent of the governed” (1776); and so on.

The Founding Fathers believed the Constitution was commendable according to a moral law that existed outside of both the Founding and American society. As Lincoln would put the matter a hundred years later, “[The Constitution] is not the result of an accident . . . it has a philosophical cause”—that is, a moral cause outside of the positive law (Lincoln 1953a, 168-9). Lincoln believed this moral law was represented in (but not constituted by) the Declaration of Independence: the “Declaration of Independence has proved an ‘apple of gold’ to us . . . the Constitution is the ‘picture of silver,’ subsequently framed around it” (Lincoln 1953a; Arkes 1990, 40). These principles of the Declaration were understood to be universal, even as they obviously violated the actual social conditions of the time. Thus, Lincoln would assail the *Dred Scott* decision, arguing that “three years ago there had never been a man, so far as I knew or believed, in the whole world, who had said that the Declaration of Independence did not include negroes in the term ‘all men’” (Lincoln 1953b, 301). The universal sense of the Declaration of Independence was shared by “Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Madison, Hamilton,

Franklin, Patrick Henry, and all others of their general philosophic persuasion” (Jaffa 1959, 314).

If the Declaration were meant to express a social fact (as antirealists presume), it would have been an absurd social fact to posit in 18th century America given the legality of slavery. Despite its many ironies, the Declaration is conscionable as a representation of a moral law outside of culture and the facts of any given society. If it were meant to represent the moral situation of a particular place and time, it could not have arisen, in the minds of serious men, as an expression of the colonies in 1776.

Consider one further example. Since there was no case law for the Marshall Court (1801-1835) to reference, it necessarily appealed to “general principles of jurisprudence” and the natural law, especially in *Chisholm vs. Georgia* (1793) and *Fletcher vs. Peck* (1810) (2 U.S. 419 1793; Arkes 1990, 21-31). In *Fletcher vs. Peck*, the Court held that the inadmissibility of *ex post facto* laws was, in the words of Justice Johnson, “a general principle, on the reason and nature of things: a principle which will impose laws even on the deity” (10 U.S. 87 1810). Justice Johnson felt it necessary to offer this reason despite it not being contained in the text of the Constitution (Arkes 1990, 28). The first Supreme Court proceeded on realism because they could not have attempted a new jurisprudence otherwise.

The second objection is a logical problem caused by historical context. Antirealism was not available to the Founding Fathers because they had to justify republicanism over other possible regimes (Arkes 1990, 40-57). Like the Marshall Court, the Founding Fathers were in a bind. One could not assert the Constitution to justify the Constitution, for it had not yet been ratified. One could not assert the Articles of

Confederation to justify the Constitution, since the Articles were incompatible with the federalist bent of the Constitution. Simply put, the Founding Fathers needed to provide reasons why the Constitution was worthy of the American people. (As the *Federalist Papers* show, they took this charge seriously.) These reasons could not have been, and in fact were not, drawn from social facts about America. These reasons required, as Lincoln said, “a philosophical cause.”

A realist interpretation of the Constitution accommodates these observations. The Founding Fathers were realist; the most cogent explanation of the Constitution’s moral authority should also be realist. Moreover, realism avoids the chicken-egg dilemma that would have made antirealist justifications of the Constitutional Convention strange.

A cynic may choose to dig their heels in on this point. Perhaps there is no justification for the Constitution. Perhaps the Constitution was framed in realist language to make it more palatable even though it remained, in fact, a document securing the interests of landed, white gentlemen. These criticisms could be true (and in many instances are true), but they would not change the nature of the Oath, which assumes the Constitution represents a moral commitment. The problem is: how do we make sense of this commitment? The antirealist reading fails to clear the historical burden. Moreover, criticisms like these often employ realism as a method. The claim that the Constitution protects the interests of landed gentry imports a moral sensibility found in the Declaration, not the Constitution. If a modern cultural sense of justice (which we can allow is objectively superior) motivates this objection, then the antirealist is in the strange position of deploying a modern perspective against an 18th century perspective. Both

would be true in the context of their times, outside of which no assessment is (on antirealism) possible.

There are other forms of antirealism that might attempt to provide a moral foundation of the Constitution. To apply them here would be anachronistic, but there are other reasons to exclude them. The most plausible candidates are constructivist theories. As mentioned earlier, constructivist theories are insufficiently robust to explain moral influences, since they generally avoid metaphysical commitments. For this reason, they cannot undermine the Vicious Profession Premise.

Self-Defeating Objection: Logic

The self-defeating objection is famously attributed to Lincoln's rebuttal of Stephen Douglas's "Don't Care" approach to the expansion of slavery. Douglas believed popular sovereignty was the most important source of moral authority to a democracy. Since the most important moral fact is (just) a social fact, Douglas's position is a form of antirealism. However, Lincoln demonstrated that even this principle turns on realism:

When Douglas says that whoever, or whatever community, wants slaves, they have a right to have them, he is perfectly logical if there is nothing wrong in the institution; but if you admit that it is wrong, he cannot logically say that anybody has a right to do a wrong. (Lincoln 1953b, 257-8)

As stated in the Constitution, the idea of having a right prefers itself to questions about what a right is. Douglas could not maintain rights and a 'Don't Care' preference for popular sovereignty, since the latter must have a place in the former. (Lincoln's critique parallels the *Euthyphro* objection to constructivism summarized in chapter 2.) To generalize the argument, any form of antirealism that posits moral facts as social facts must keep these facts logically independent of realist moral facts. However, this makes it

difficult to provide non-arbitrary reasons why one should accept the antirealist assertion of which social facts are moral.

Douglas is a prominent historical interlocutor for antirealism but perhaps not a particularly good one. Lincoln knew that Douglas was only a surface-level legal positivist. If Douglas had been a complete antirealist, his obvious reply would have been to accuse Lincoln of missing the point. This would have been a radical position for the time. Nevertheless, Lincoln's argument would not succeed against the totalizing antirealism of Rehnquist, who denied that morality is logical at all. For Rehnquist, moral facts are arbitrary preferences.

Before we consider Rehnquist's radical position, it is worth considering whether joint doctrine's view is closer to Douglas or Rehnquist's version. On the author's reading (see chapter 2), doctrine alone is too ambiguous to indicate which form antirealism is the status quo. However, the profession's commitment to the Oath seems, at first blush, to indicate some commitment to realism. If this is true, then the JIA is in a position logically like Douglas's, even if its claims are not identical. Lincoln's objection will apply wherever antirealism clings to some specific constitutive principle of goodness. Moreover, it is inconsistent to be realist about the Constitution and antirealist about moral influences elsewhere in the world.

Self-Defeating Objection: Moral, Psychological, and Political

If we assume joint doctrine is totally antirealist (i.e., Rehnquist's version), then we must consider a different sense in which antirealism is self-defeating. This sense is moral and psychological, and it applies more directly to radical antirealism. Recall a line from David Wiggins, quoted earlier: "[antirealism] cannot adopt the inner perspective

because, according to the picture that the non-cognitivist paints of these things, the inner view has to be unaware of the outer one, and has to enjoy essentially illusory notions of objectivity, importance, and significance: whereas the outer view has to hold that is objectively meaningless” (1988, 136). The rest of this section will focus on how difficult it would be to maintain both the inner perspective, which seeks value and meaning, and the outer perspective, which denies this kind of value and meaning, in one and the same person.

If morality is a social construction or an arbitrary preference, then it is doubtful that it can provide meaning in the standard way we take our beliefs to be meaningful. Pessimism about morality gives way to a pessimism about life. The existentialists writing about post-Great War European culture capture this feeling with provocative clarity. A crisis of meaning and morality inspired Albert Camus to write (as he would say, “without the aid of eternal values”) that “there is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide” (1955, 7-10). *The Myth of Sisyphus* transmutes philosophy’s oldest and most serious question—‘how should I live?’—into a brooding and desperate ‘why should I live?’ Divested of absolute value, Europe was, to Camus, a barren and isolated prison begetting a psycho-social malaise called the ‘Absurd.’

Writing after the Civil War, Stephen Crane seems to anticipate the problem and offers his own critical response:

In the desert
I saw a creature, naked, bestial,
Who, squatting upon the ground,
Held his heart in his hands,
And ate of it.
I said, “Is it good, friend?”
“It is bitter—bitter,” he answered;

“But I like it
“Because it is bitter,
“And because it is my heart.” (1984, 1299)

We can expand the analogy. This heart is good because it is mine. This morality is good because it is mine. This American way of life is good because we are American. This bayonet is good because it is affixed to an American rifle. This atomic weapon is good because it serves American interests. And so on. All the while we are consuming, or rather destroying, the heart—the very essence of what we believe (as antirealists) to be good.

If antirealism is true, the JIA supports and defends a Constitution whose ultimate authority stems from the accident of its ratification. To be an American at war is to represent the interests of the American tribe against all comers. Patriotism, flag-waving, and military parades provide spectacle and enchantment for what is really a means of distinguishing the American tribe, and its subjective moral standards, from others. What makes this culture worth celebrating is the fact that it belongs to us.

Readers will recognize this as a localized version of one of the arguments provided against antirealism earlier in this chapter. It is important to sharpen this argument here, and to show how it is especially problematic to the profession of arms.

The military might be the worst place to court a crisis of meaning, as it adds even more distress to an already morally difficult position. Every member of the military knows that he or she may be asked to kill or risk his or her life in combat. The bleak, arbitrary violence of the Great War is, for the antirealist, every war, every battle, every bullet. The profession can only offer self-referential reasons for its violent duties. By ‘self-referential,’ we mean reasons internal to the person and the society, since these are

the bases on which violence can be justified on antirealism. If we were made for violence, or ‘to fear a violent death,’ as Hobbes said, then killing in war should not be cause of moral injury. It would be the fulfillment of our nature. Yet the consistent observation of the profession is that killing and being the object of violence is the primary source of moral injury (HQDA 2020, 7).

These considerations turn on the importance of conscience to moral injury and moral experience. Conscience is the most ‘present’ layer of moral experience; the profession cannot overlook it. Yet antirealism places a special burden on conscience, on every conception of conscience considered in chapter 2:

1. Ancient: *sunedenai*, ‘to share knowledge with oneself,’ is in this context to reveal one’s violent nature to oneself. If violence does not characterize our nature—if we form communities based on goodwill (as Locke argued)—then the ‘knowledge’ the antirealist shares with himself is self-mutilating. If violence is natural, then the military must bear the full weight of this condition. (Indeed, the moral hazards here would be a brute fact, a tragedy of the human condition for which there is no further explanation.) The joint force must be certain antirealism is true before it places this burden on the profession. For reasons provided earlier, antirealism does not command this level of certitude.
2. Early Christian: antirealism denies the Pauline claim of the “law written on men’s hearts.” The ‘self-evident’ nature of this law, as the Declaration puts it, is an illusion.

3. Medieval: if conscience is a practical syllogism, where the first premise is supplied by *synderesis* (i.e., the spark of conscience), then one's other views, whether realist or antirealist—prudent or idealistic—complete the syllogism in favor of some action. An antirealist is unlikely to grant *synderesis* (given the problem of queerness, see chapter 2), but they must grant that antirealism is (to an antirealist) a premise in a practical syllogism (i.e., an argument about how to act). Therefore, antirealism is a moral influence on conscience. Is this influence positive or negative? If the antirealist basis of morality changes (e.g., the laws change on Rehnquist's model), does it follow that the moral status of an action has also changed? How is this change reconciled in one's conscience?

Conscience seems intrinsically individual, over and against culture. Antirealists might point to conscience as an incorrectly moralized interpretation of shame, as a way groups exert influence on the moral behavior of individuals. In *Shame and Necessity* (1993), Williams makes a distinction between guilt and shame, and, following Nietzsche, is skeptical of attempts to make sense of guilt in terms of universal moral standards. Realists can account for the necessary social component of shame. However, realists insist that an analysis of shame is insufficient to characterize moral phenomenology. Anyone who has felt guilt, despite being told not to, seems to be experiencing a phenomenon that pushes against culture. An antirealist may be able to explain why this is the case (perhaps we are mistaken, culture is more nuanced in some way, etc.), but the realist is in a position of advantage.

Research in moral injury is not normally framed in metaethical terms, but the available evidence lends itself to realism. Les Grossman's *On Killing* characterizes humankind's natural resistance to violence as "a powerful combination of instinctive, rational, environmental, hereditary, cultural, and social factors" (1996, 38). Only a realist account could explain the simultaneous presence of all these factors, especially if 'rational' is taken to mean 'normative.' (*On Killing* is included here because of how widely read it is, not as an endorsement of the author's conclusions, which are generally unhelpful.) Johnathan Shay's research into post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) indicates a relationship between a sense of doing wrong (which persists despite how superiors might frame the problem) and moral decay. Moral injury violates conscience, contributes to PTSD, and leaves soldiers concerned with little more than the safety of their closest companions (Shay 1994). Interestingly, Shay insists the research supports a realist "species-ethic"—based on an Aristotelian understanding of human flourishing—that is not dependent on culture (Shay 1994, 208). His view is a kind of naturalist realism (often called Neo-Aristotelianism). Even if we do not follow him all the way to this conclusion, the point stands that moral injury seems to be cross-cultural, caused by (widespread) recognition that one can do wrong despite whatever cultural license is offered for justification.

In fairness, there are situations in which antirealism is unlikely to cause a crisis of conscience. When the American tribe is threatened, the exigencies of self-defense satisfy conscience and the Constitution, but America has seldom been threatened in this way. (Indeed, it may be that this situation is morally unproblematic precisely because all realist theories of morality recognize it.) In all other cases, antirealism provides a thin basis for

risking one's life. Is it enough that the tribe wants something that one should risk one's life to take it? This may be enough for a mercenary force, but it is poison to a professional army.

We should note that antirealism empowers fascism and other degenerative political structures. If killing cannot have independent moral justification, then (on Rehnquist's antirealism) this justification must come from social facts about the societies waging war. If this were true (thankfully it is not), then it follows that the morally consistent way to inspire war is to trumpet the social facts that (are said to) justify the conflict. A society truly oriented on antirealism is likely to turn inward, finding within itself the 'violence' necessary to provide reasons for warfare, or any policy which it desires. This provides one way to frame the self-referentiality of Xi Jinping's "socialism with Chinese characteristics"—characteristics which are not socialist at all and not universalizable outside of China (and hence insulated from external criticism of China's policies) (Jinping 2017). Xi 'solves' the paradoxes of the post-Mao People's Republic of China by vacuously reasserting 'Chinese characteristics,' beyond which he offers no explanation. The same tendency is evident in Vladimir Putin's 'neo-Eurasianism.' Championed by Russian philosopher Alexandr Dugin (dubbed "Putin's Brain"), neo-Eurasianism is a brashly relativist value structure that informs Russian information operations against 'the West' (Barbashin and Thoburn 2014). As Putin remarked in March of 2021, "[the U.S.] may think that we are like them, but we are different, with a different genetic, cultural, and moral code" (Troianovski 2021, Putin 2021). The relativist nature of the Russian critique of American foreign and domestic policy is specifically

designed to erode trust in American society, which, we have argued, must be realist to be consistent with the Constitution.

One can be an antirealist without being a fascist. These observations do not amount to the claim that antirealism is sufficient for fascism. However, there is good evidence to suggest that America's adversaries are explicitly antirealist, and that this antirealism contributes to the nature of America's enduring disputes with them.

There is one further point to make on the practical harms of antirealism. The thinness of antirealist justifications for violence will be felt, in conscience, more acutely the nearer the profession is to achieving "moral expertise" (HQDA 2019, 1-4). There is an inverse relationship between moral expertise, which every branch of service seeks to instill in its members, and the viability of antirealism as a means of sustaining conscience in war. A well-formed conscience asks the questions a poorly formed conscience does not think to ask. Antirealism cannot answer these questions without asserting that the Constitution is where the buck stops.

This final point begs the question in favor of realism. Consider it is less of a philosophical argument than an illustration of how antirealism, when taken seriously, forces the military profession into a precarious crisis of conscience. The evidence for this observation is not a premise but the degree to which an average reader recognizes this story in their plain experience of life. We know, regardless of what we might say, that there must be good reasons for killing in war that do not depend on the standards wholly determined by our society. These reasons cannot be satisfied by taking the Constitution as constitutive of goodness, beyond which there is nothing. As the Necessity Assumption suggests, there can be non-evidential reasons for accepting or rejecting a view if the

matter is philosophically unresolved. If one is convinced of antirealism, then one should be an antirealist and learn to manage the consequences of that belief. This is a small population of philosophers; it is likely a smaller population of professional officers. Yet if anyone is uncertain about the reality of moral facts, then there are overwhelming psychological reasons why they should accept a realist understanding of the Constitution.

A Realist Interpretation of the Constitution

The realist interpretation of the Constitution is straightforward. The Constitution represents the structure (or ‘form,’ as Aristotle would say) of the American republic. This structure seeks to realize goodness, roughly according to the vision of a just society offered in the Declaration of Independence (the ‘ends,’ in Aristotelian terms). The Constitution derives its moral authority from the degree to which it facilitates moral political structures.

If realism is true, then the JIA supports and defends a Constitution that is, in principle, capable of realizing objective moral standards. At a minimum, these standards include those outlined in the Declaration of Independence and just war theory (to the extent a certain just war theory is correct). Patriotism is then a way of celebrating and reinforcing the authority of morality as it exists outside of and within American culture. The Constitution provides a mediating framework for sustaining the relationship between the profession of arms, American society, and the moral order. Realism makes it possible to draw a moral through line from the actions of a soldier on the battlefield to objective moral standards. This line passes through the Constitution, through the political order—without which violence cannot amount to a just war.

On realism, moral expertise can perform the function it is assigned. Conscience tracks morality: it provides reasons, in the psychology of the soldier, to the extent that they are justified by the beliefs the soldier holds. These beliefs are subject to moral influences which enlarge or diminish the soldier's grasp of objective moral standards. (This is one reason why the moral education of professionals is in the national interest.) The moral through line is tenuous in the right ways: it is sensitive to just war and professional military ethics. It sustains the will to persist in war when one is fighting for a just cause using just means. When there is not a just cause, or the war is unjustly executed, the conscience of the military professional ought to register dissonance. Conscience protects the republic in this way.

Conscience is important for two additional reasons. As the Civil War examples indicate (see chapter 2), conscience can deliver reasons to fight. But it can also provide reasons not to fight. Realistic moral standards will not yield the conclusion that every war we desire to begin is justified. Realism does not, as is often suggested, entail American exceptionalism-*cum*-imperialism. (One can be an American exceptionalist on either metaethical view and neither view entails it.) Realism does not commit one to the view that his or her judgments are always correct. As discussed in chapter 2, moral reasoning can be hard, especially in a world suffering from widespread disillusionment.

The view above is schematic to avoid specific commitments about substantive moral theory. Recall, the purpose here is to defend realism, not to conduct a total moral synthesis. Appendix A provides objections and replies from within the civil-military relations theory.

The Vicious Profession Premise: Moral Influences

The Vicious Profession Premise (VPP) is a conjunctive premise: it contains a practical requirement to explain moral influences and a requirement to preserve the moral foundation of the profession of arms. The last section dealt with the professional half of VPP. This section will show how antirealism struggles to provide an adequate explanation of moral influences.

Recall, antirealism indexes morality to the perspective of some subjective body, whether cultural, personal, enlightened self-interest, a deity, etc. We will exclude constructivist theories since these avoid causal claims. The task of this section is to explain how a subjectivist might attempt to make sense of moral influences. There are two main problems they must overcome. The first is Hume's Law, already discussed at length above. The second is a reflection on the many causal paradoxes created by antirealist explanations of moral influences. This section concludes with a discussion of realism's advantages and defends them against a common objection.

Three Antirealist Paradoxes

This section discusses paradoxes of subjectivist interpretations of moral influences. They are: (1) the problem of moral explanation, (2) the problem of moral change, and (3) the problem of relating to others.

The Problem of Moral Explanation

In overview, antirealists struggle to explain why a given belief is held to be moral rather than practical. In other words, antirealism encounters difficulties when differentiating the claim 'murder is wrong' from 'it is not in my interest to murder.'

The main problem for antirealism is Hume's Law. Again, we cannot arrive at a moral conclusion without supplying a moral premise. Since we know people believe 'murder is wrong' is a moral belief, we must explain how they arrived at this conclusion. Therefore, there must be some subjective claim in their moral reasoning that is moral. This belief cannot be descriptive (i.e., a social fact), it must be normative. But how can antirealism provide this fact without violating Hume's Law? It seems the answer is either to reject Hume's Law or to accept that moral beliefs are not valid inferences. This is a dilemma for antirealism.

We can use an example with a richer military context. JIA analysts seek to understand John, a key player in the OE. Using the antirealist PMESII model, joint analysts correctly determine that 'John believes might makes right.' To explain why John holds this belief—in keeping with descriptive antirealism—analysts appeal to the brute fact of John's culture. 'This is just the way John is,' they say. As an antirealist, the analyst cannot explain why John believes 'might makes right' is a true moral claim, because no number of descriptive claims (e.g., 'John believes x') entail that John's conclusion is a true moral claim. But this is exactly why John holds this claim (because he believes it is a true moral claim). At most, the analyst can say that John's belief is consistent with his other beliefs. If pressed for more, the analyst is in a dilemma: he must either conclude that John's belief is arbitrary (i.e., no explanation is possible) or that John is irrational (i.e., makes invalid arguments). Antirealism accepts these conclusions. The analyst cannot escape the naturalistic fallacy and make John's conclusion rational, regardless of whether it is correct, because the analyst has rejected realism.

Why should we be worried about this dilemma? We have no basis for differentiating between a moral claim and a practical claim if the premises of both are exclusively descriptive. Practical claims can follow from descriptive premises. We can say: John is motivated by power, therefore John is motivated to hold the belief ‘might makes right.’ But this does not seem like a moral claim at all. Instead, it seems like a claim about what course of action John believes will best realize his goals of being powerful.

The operational significance of this problem arises whenever we attempt to change John’s mind. If John believes his claim is moral, then we would expect it can be influenced by leveraging moral influences that enlarge his moral awareness. However, if John’s belief is practical, we should not expect moral arguments and influences to carry much weight. Instead, we should try to show John that his desire for power is either best realized by another course of action (say, cooperation within legal norms) or that it endangers some other desire John holds more dearly. Perhaps we would threaten John.

Realism does not guarantee that we will pick the right method of influencing John. John might be a vicious person, an amoralist, or some other problematic type of moral agent. Realism does allow us to make sense of the distinctions between these categories. On realism, we would say that John’s claim is moral regardless of whether he believes it is practical or moral. It is moral because it is a belief with objective moral content. For this reason, the realist will always attempt to leverage moral influences because moral influences, by definition, enlarge or dislodge moral capacity. The realist might also attempt coercion as part of this approach. In sum, the framework offered by

realism allows us to focus on the nature of the moral belief even if we do not know how John arrived at the belief.

The Problem of Moral Change

The problem of moral change is straightforward. If morality is a subjective, then it is hard to explain how we can describe moral progress. The realist asks: moral progress toward what moral standard? The antirealist insists that this standard is fixed by culture. But ‘moral culture’ is what is changing. Therefore, it is difficult to make meaningful judgments about moral progress on antirealism.

There are several different versions of relativism; we cannot respond to each of them here. One broad relativist strategy would be to insist that the realist has begged the question in favor of realism. Moral progress assumes a moral standard. The relativist has a point. However, it comes at a high cost of meaning: we can no longer provide moral narratives characterize moral change, progress, and decay. A relativist could argue that moral progress is relative to the underlying values of a society. Moral progress realizes these underlying values in a better way, whereas moral decay obscures them. We have reason to suspect this attempt, when pressed, ultimately yields to some realist claim about the common good.

The JIA could take a different approach, one that is altogether very tempting. We could assess the moral progress of others from the perspective of American values. This would certainly be ethnocentric, but it would be internally consistent. Moreover, the relativist is likely to accuse the realist of doing this anyway (although the realist denies this). The disadvantage of this view is that it seems to grant license to undermine the

main motivation behind antirealism, for we are no longer respecting disagreement but overcoming it by fiat.

If we cannot make sense of moral change on an antirealist model, then the role of moral influences is mysterious. Moral influences are neither good nor bad. To the extent that they are causally efficacious, they realize their content in culture. They make themselves good to the extent they cause change, because they change the relative standard on which they are assessed. A paradox immediately arises: the only bad moral influence is a weak one. This result is certainly counter-intuitive.

The Problem of Relating to Others

As stated earlier, the problem of moral explanation puts the antirealist in a dilemma. Either they reject Hume's Law or assume others are irrational. The practical consequence of the latter choice is that moral disagreement becomes intelligible insofar as intelligibility generally assumes rational discourse. Yet antirealists are motivated by a desire to explain moral disagreement, which they do not believe to be irrational.

We assume antirealism escapes this problem. Now the task for the antirealist is to explain how we interpret the moral views of cultures other than our own. By 'interpret,' we mean 'translate the meaning of.' This is a 'semantic' problem (i.e., a problem having to do with language use and meaning). The realist knows that his culture has made moral claims and that these claims are capable of being false. The same holds for the moral views of other cultures. They are 'about' the same moral properties, even if there is disagreement about which moral properties are about.

The antirealist does not have this recourse. As Donald Davidson puts the objection,

interpreting evaluative judgments rests on the same foundation as interpreting the evaluative attitudes: everything depends on our ability to find common ground. Given enough common ground, we can understand and explain differences; we can criticize, compare, and persuade. The central point is that finding the common ground is not subsequent to understanding, but a condition of it. (2004, 37)

The “key” to interpretation is a “policy of rational accommodation” (Davidson 2004, 35). This policy allows us to “fit our own propositions to the other person’s words and attitudes in such a way as to render their speech and other behavior intelligible” (Davidson 2004, 35). We must assume others are “more or less rational creatures mentally inhabiting a world much like our own” (Davidson 2004, 35). If other people’s concepts have a relative truth value, then one cannot tell the difference between disagreement (about the same concept) or a failure to translate. Interpretation assumes rationality and a presumption that “sentences, and the thoughts they may be used to express, are causally tied to what they are about” (Davidson 2004, 36).

If Davidson is right, then on subjectivist antirealism we either (1) cannot interpret the beliefs of groups we disagree with or (2) our interpretation is based in realist causal patterns that are to some degree common to everyone. The first option seems implausible: we generally believe we understand other people. The second option implies realism.

Davidson’s account is controversial, but it does seem to shift the burden to antirealists. First, it undermines the force of moral disagreement as motivation for antirealism. Second, the antirealist must find a way out of the dilemma presented above. If an antirealist attempts to escape by asserting that we are using different moral concepts, then the antirealist has not explained moral disagreement at all—they have made it disappear (Gowans 2021).

The difficulties with antirealism do not further the interests of the JIA in any practical way. We are trying to understand the OE, not mystify it. We want answers, not more questions. We understand why Thucydides believes Athens made an error, and his explanation makes sense to us two thousand years later. If subjectivist antirealism were true, our interpretive success is a happy accident.

The Practical Premise Defended

The Practical Premise holds that ‘realism allows the JIA to model moral influences on the operational environment and maintain the moral foundation of the profession of arms.’ After our discussion of VPP, it should be mostly clear how the preceding arguments warrant the Practical Premise. Important points are summarized below:

1. Realism is compatible with a sound historical and philosophical interpretation of the Constitution.
2. Realism takes conscience seriously.
3. Realism is compatible with an acceptable theory of civil-military relations.
(see appendix A)
4. Realism allows us to speak of moral influences. A moral influence is any person, law, institution, custom, norm, or physical fact that improves or worsens the moral capacities of an actor. (see chapter 2, ‘Aristotelian Moral Influences’)
5. Realism allows us to understand other cultures. These cultures are generally pursuing the same kind of moral knowledge that we seek. Moral reasoning is difficult. Error is always possible but so is success.

These observations inform the model offered in chapter 5. The rest of this section responds to the primary practical objections to moral realism.

The ‘So What?’ Objection

One might object that, even if realism is true, it has no practical significance to military operations. A skeptic might argue that Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructural, and Informational facts capture moral influences to the extent that they are operationally relevant. As this line of reasoning goes, actors in the OE are motivated based on what they believe to be true, good, or desirable, not by what is actually true, good, or desirable. Similarly, military planners should focus on what actors are motivated to do, not by what actors ought to be motivated to do.

If our summary of moral influences in chapter 2 is correct, then moral influences increase or degrade the moral capacities of agents in the OE. The richness of this observation is worth repeating. By ‘moral capacity,’ we mean both the content of an agent’s beliefs and the quality of their reasoning about these beliefs. Consider the following analogy: ‘a temperate person is to becoming drunk as a virtuous person is to seeking wealth, sex, power, etc.’ Moral influences shape beliefs, but they also shape what we find desirable. Desires and beliefs are inputs to practical reasoning. These desires and beliefs are recursive; as human agency involves a constant feedback loop of action, result, and sense-making. Moral education informs this loop and allows one to think through complex moral problems. Experience and continence (i.e., self-control) yield prudence. Prudence weighs the relative strength of various (and often conflicting) reasons in proper proportion.

The summary of human action provided above is schematic. We can disagree on the details—e.g., opt for Hume’s desires-based over the rationalist view offered here—but the point is that human agency is dynamic. We need a rich view of this process to understand it, and the ‘so what?’ objection is too reductionist to allow the JIA to understand and influence the cognitive domain. Moral beliefs are not static in the way implied by the ‘so what?’ objection.

Realism entails one more important claim that the ‘so what?’ objection denies. Moral influences have a natural directedness toward right or wrong. There are two senses of this directedness: (1) by definition, a good moral influence increases moral capacity (vice versa for bad moral influences), and (2) a good moral influence tends to cause predictable effects associated with moral capacity. The first is important because it allows us to classify moral influences in a way that relates to our objectives. For instance, if we are seeking to improve the legitimacy of a just government, then we should design good moral influences as part of our operational approach. Without this basic distinction between right and wrong, we cannot differentiate between moral influences that instantiate the effects we are seeking and those that work against these effects. The second claim is metaphysical. Moral influences produce patterns of effects that give them explanatory power. For example, good governance is causally related to perceptions of legitimacy. This is true even if the causal relationship is not perfect (i.e., is defeasible by other influences).

Thucydides’s Athens of 415 BCE highlights the explanatory power of this approach. Thucydides would insist that it is precisely a moral-*qua*-moral analysis that explains the state of Athens’s political and social institutions in 415 BCE, especially

since the Athenian Assembly, as an institution of direct democracy, necessarily aligns its political decisions to currents in the national character. The specific moral nature of Athens' failings (e.g., private interest and greed) allows us to make sense of the specific mistakes Athens made (e.g., pursuing wealth imprudently). Greed changed what Athens desired and likely also affected how it viewed its overall security situation. They did not scrutinize the information that led to their invasion (as implied in TH 1996, 6.6.1, 6.8.2). Negative moral influences increased the allure of greed and factionalism, lowering Athens's evidential threshold (i.e., justification of a belief or action) for going to war.

The 'so what?' objection cuts the analyst off from these powerful insights. 2018's *Joint Concept for Operations in the Information Environment* suffers from these limitations, even as it rejects the 'so what' objection. Details of this oversight are provided in appendix B.

The Trust-Breaking Objection

The 'trust-breaking' objection holds that the U.S. military cannot accept realism without breaking trust with the People. Even if realism is implied by the Constitution, popular culture is far from accepting it. Is it acceptable for the military to diverge from American culture? Does doing so break trust? Said formally:

1. If the military is to maintain trust, it must share the Values of the American People (VOAP). (Fiduciary Premise)
2. VOAP are antirealist. (Pop Culture Premise)
3. Either the military accepts VOAP or realism (but not both). (Exclusivity Premise)
4. The military accepts realism.

By *modus tollens*, the military will not maintain trust with the American people on realism.

This is the strongest practical objection to the recommendations offered in this study. The PAAA accepted acceptability as a standard and used it against antirealism (Acceptability Premise)—so it cannot be rejected here. Clearly, losing trust with the American people is an unacceptable consequence. As joint and service doctrine reiterates, with good reason, the connection between military service and American values must be robust. A divergence undermines the fiduciary basis of the professional ethic and may even threaten the republic itself. The objection is well-considered and reasonable. If correct, it is fatal to this project.

However, the Trust-Breaking objection overstates the visibility of the recommendations of this study. Metaethical questions are not resonant with the culture writ large, even if they ought to be. Perennial issues surrounding sexual assault, race, and gender carry much more weight as far as the Trust-Breaking objection is concerned. Success or failure in these areas is likely to have a greater impact on trust than a model of moral influences.

We will reject the Fiduciary Premise and the Pop Culture Premise for different reasons. This section considers each in turn and concludes with some positive arguments regarding the moral function of a military as part of a larger American society.

Fiduciary Premise

The Fiduciary Premise holds that the military must share the values of the American people to maintain trust. The Fiduciary Premise uses ‘share’ in an ambiguous way. There are a few senses in which values can be shared:

1. Participatory Sharing (Loose): For our purposes, participatory sharing occurs whenever two agents do not need a translator or special training to interpret and understand one another. Sense-making is shared within this group as meaning is achieved dialectically. Passionate disagreement is possible, but there is generally shared interest in achieving agreed upon ends.
2. Definitional Sharing (Strict): Definitional Sharing occurs whenever agents are using the same concepts with a nearly identical meaning. The agents agree on a general process for establishing the truth value of sentences using these terms. For example, doctrine provides the language and concepts for definitional sharing within the joint force.

If the Fiduciary Premise uses Participatory Sharing, then the burden is easier for realists to clear. Realists and antirealists have serious disagreements, but they probably agree on many substantive issues in ethics. The moral claims most people are interested in can be (and likely are) shared. The commitment to moral realism does not undermine Participatory Sharing so long as the military and popular culture share a wide body of agreement about substantive moral issues. Since these issues can be rendered in both antirealist and realist terms, disagreement on metaethical issues should not manifest into a crisis of trust.

If the Fiduciary Premise uses Definitional Sharing, then there will be a crisis of trust. However, Definitional Sharing seems inappropriate in this context. American society is pluralist, we seldom demand Definitional Sharing outside of inter-professional contexts and legal matters. There are also reasons to suspect that Definitional Sharing is highly implausible for philosophical issues. The problem of conceptual vagueness, well

known in philosophy, highlights how difficult it is to resolve firm distinctions between moral concepts. Vagueness can be a nearly intractable source of moral disagreement.

If interpreted strictly, the Fiduciary Premise proves too much. It makes the special moral standards that define professional ethics more difficult to reconcile within American society at large. Professional ethics are nested within the moral framework shared within a culture, but they are exceptions and duties over-and-above general moral rules (e.g., patient client confidentiality, Hippocratic oath, etc.) that are not always well understood in larger society. The mere presence of specific moral requirements does not mean Definitional Sharing is impossible, but it does strain the plausibility of this view. Following revelations of the sex abuse crisis in the American Roman Catholic Church in 2018, many politicians called to remove legal protections for the seal of confession (i.e., clerical confidentiality) (e.g., Hill 2019). This issue in this case is serious (with significant impacts on trust) but is unrelated to the broader moral argument for why the seal of confession is in place. As this example shows, Definitional Sharing implies a greater degree of understanding between professions and general society than it is reasonable to expect.

The Fiduciary Premise undervalues the dynamic relation of a professional military and its culture. The professions are a part of society, but they also exert significant influence on it, albeit in subtle and indirect ways. Though non-partisan, the military is the oldest, national political institution (i.e., oldest extant institution focused on the public good) in the United States. The military has anticipated moral progress in society, as in the case of racial integration (Truman 1948). Divergence between professional ethics and society may indicate an evolving dialectic, an issue in a state of development, rather than

permanent damage to trust. Therefore, the mere presence of disagreement is not a good enough reason for the military to forget its collaborative role in American culture. (For a related discussion, see appendix A.)

If we assume the profession is itself a moral influence on American society, then there is an obligation (limited and defeasible) to be a good moral influence. The real danger of the Fiduciary Premise is that it undermines this obligation. We will return to this idea later in this section.

The Pop-Culture Premise

According to national surveys conducted in 2002, 64 percent of Americans believe morality is relative to individual perspectives (Barna Group 2002). The Pop-Culture Premise takes these surveys at face value, whereas realists believe there are strong reasons for doubting them.

First, a note on the data. In normal surveys like the one above, Americans are likely to respond in favor of antirealism. However, research in experimental psychology shows that most people exhibit realist (i.e., objectivism) and antirealist (i.e., relativism) intuitions about different issues (Pözlner and Wright 2019, 3-4). Variables positively correlated with realist intuitions include the strength of a moral judgement, degree of consensus, degree of religious belief, sense of disgust, awareness of mortality, desire to punish, tendency to be argumentative, and ethical behavior (“the less likely people engage in unethical behavior . . . the more objectivist their intuitions”) (Pözlner and Wright 2019, 4-5). Tolerance and “disjunctive reasoning ability” (i.e., ability to imagine other moral perspectives) were negatively correlated to realist intuitions (Pözlner and Wright 2019, 5). In other words, the same respondents provided both realist and

antirealist intuitions to different questions exhibiting different variables. Folk intuitions about metaethics are more nuanced than a simple question can capture.

Is this enough to save realism from the Pop-Culture Premise? It depends. Incompatible philosophical positions can coexist in culture and within an individual person's belief system. The question is: how antirealist is pop-culture exactly and is this enough for the Pop-Culture Premise to motivate the Trust-Breaking Objection? The data is unclear. On what specific issues do the military and civilian populations differ? Likely many, but these differences tend to be on matters of substantive moral theory (not abstract metaethical questions). Are average respondents differentiating between epistemological warrant for belief (i.e., their sense that they have good reasons for a particular view) and the nature of the belief itself (i.e., whether it is objective or subjective)? Almost certainly not.

The realist sees more questions than answers in the data. If people share realist intuitions about some issues, then this common ground might be enough—a beach head of sorts—to keep the realist project in communion with greater American society.

The realist argues: Americans talk as if they are antirealist, but Americans are, by-and-large, realist about their own moral commitments. As we summarized earlier in this chapter, the deliberative process assumes realism about the objects of deliberation. Realists believe that this holds whenever an agent is really deliberating about a choice they must make. The challenge is to explain why moral intuitions are so divergent in one and the same person. Simply put, no one knows, because it is entirely possible that most people do not know enough about moral matters to render consistent judgments across different cases. A few sociological explanations for this divergence are below:

1. The problem of moral disagreement remains culturally persuasive, even though it is not a strong philosophical argument.
2. Realists have failed to demonstrate, to the broader public, that realism is compatible with humility, grace, and tolerance. This may be because realism is often associated with far-right religious groups, even though classical liberals (following Locke) may be realist.
3. The information environment may appear to vindicate antirealism, even if there are other causes at work. According to the National Intelligence Council (NIC), “communities are increasingly fractured as people seek security with like-minded groups based on established and newly prominent identities” (DNI 2021, 1). NIC assesses changing demographics, unequal human development, climate change, economic disruptions, and technological innovation are fragmenting cross-cultural social orders (DNI 2021, 4-5). These causes of unrest are less observable than social media baiting, politically skewed cable news programs, anti-pluralist movements, etc.
4. The modern information environment spotlights disagreement and overlooks wide areas of moral agreement within societies. Americans are bombarded with controversy, contributing to a diminished sense of social unity.
5. Antirealist slogans like ‘you do you and I’ll do me’ diffuse social conflicts that arise as social groups disintegrate. On an interpersonal level, antirealism provides a way to avoid interpersonal controversy.
6. As a pluralist society, Americans are used to tolerating antirealism in national dialogue. For instance, the Lost Cause interpretation of the Civil War is no

longer taken seriously by historians. It remains influential in modern debates about Confederate memorials. This pattern of toleration gives antirealism a larger bite of social dialogue than people are likely to notice.

7. Individualistic forms of antirealism (e.g., ‘greed is good’) undermine moral responsibility. Many named phenomena—e.g., late capitalism, neoliberalism, neo-conservatism, climate change denial, etc.—represent temptations to avoid responsibility. Antirealism may be a means to this end. If so, market forces support it.

These responses are speculative and schematic, but they point the way to realist explorations of VOAP. Even on the worst interpretation of the data, at least 1-in-3 Americans are avowedly realist, and many more are at least realist in some limited sense. This is enough to doubt the Pop-Culture Premise can do the work required of it.

The Military as a Moral Influence

This section concludes with a brief discussion of the importance of the military as a moral influence on society. The tradition of service above self and sacrifice is well-known. Less well-understood are the subtle influences of the profession of arms on society’s appreciation of moral standards. Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* (2011) interrogates this idea. This section adapts his sociological hypothesis. MacIntyre does not focus on the military or professions *per se*, but his observations apply straightforwardly.

MacIntyre uses the term ‘character’ to signify readily identifiable social groups that “[place] a certain kind of moral constraint on the personality of those who inhabit them” (2011, 27). Officers are characters in this sense; in public they present a uniform stoicism and an apolitical pragmatism. Further, characters are “moral representatives of

their culture . . . because of the way in which moral and metaphysical ideas and theories assume through then an embodied existence in the world” (MacIntyre 2011, 28). The military embodies service and honor, qualities that reinforce the value of American civil society (as worth sacrificing for). Characters “furnish [society] with a social and moral ideal” by virtue of their moral authority (MacIntyre 2011, 29). Since professionals are immediately recognizable, “they provide focal points for disagreement” (MacIntyre 2011, 31). The controversies surrounding them “provide a culture with its moral definitions.” (MacIntyre 2011, 31)

Bureaucratic processes and the moral authority of characters combine to advance ‘emotivism’—MacIntyre’s term for individualist subjectivism. Public professions, like military service, are bureaucratic. Bureaucracies compete for resources and justify management authority by “matching means to end economically and efficiently.” (MacIntyre 2011, 25) Bureaucracies demolish “distinction[s] between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations” in pursuit of maximum effectiveness (MacIntyre 2011, 23). When manipulative practices are combined with moral authority, the professions support emotivism:

The difference between a human relationship uninformed by morality and one so informed is precisely the difference between one in which each person treats the other primarily as a means to his or her ends and one in which each treats the other as an end. To treat someone else as an end is to offer them what I take to be good reasons for acting in one way or another, but to leave it to them to evaluate those reasons . . . If emotivism is true . . . I cannot appeal to impersonal criteria, for there are no impersonal criteria. (2011, 23-4)

We do not have to share MacIntyre’s pessimism to find his general idea plausible. (If the Global War on Terror is any indication, the moral authority associated with military service seems less dependent on ‘effectiveness’ than MacIntyre’s analysis would

suggest.) If there is a semblance between the practices of specific characters in society and emotivism, then these characters are implicitly influencing society in this way. Similarly, if the military influences American society, then the military contributes to how the ‘distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations’ is understood widely. It follows that the military ought to exemplify good moral behavior, even if these behaviors are not yet socially accepted, because they influence society positively. If the realist project contributes to this end, then so the better for realism. This gives us good reason to reject the Fiduciary Premise.

We may also use this framework to reconsider the Pop-Culture Premise. If the American military has been a moral influence, then perhaps the behavior of the American military has, at times, fueled the rise of relativist thought in American culture. Certainly, the use of atomic weapons against (almost exclusively) civilian targets at Hiroshima and Nagasaki (see Finnis et al 1987, 93) and the current ‘global competition model’ fit most naturally within the ‘manipulative-efficiency’ framework of bureaucratic justification. Each betrays an enlarging of American interests over-and-against realist moral standards (i.e., protections of noncombatants in the former; just use of military power in the latter).

Through the actions of the military, a moral framework can become embedded in culture. For instance, the American triumph in World War II, and all cultural weight associated with it, is bound up with justifications for Hiroshima and Nagasaki (JHN). Arguments against JHN are seen as arguments against one of America’s greatest national achievements, as a kind of insult to the ‘greatest generation.’ In this way, the moral framework behind JHN becomes a semi-permanent fixture in American culture.

One might wonder if this response is guilty of ‘having its cake and eating it too.’ An earlier argument showed the Trust-Breaking Objection overstated the importance of realism to trust. This argument seems to imply that realism is, in fact, especially important to the relationship between the military and American values. This tension is easy to resolve. The Trust-Breaking Objection depends on society recognizing a difference in views as an obstacle to trust. The realist denies that this difference is likely to be recognized, especially as a metaethical (rather than substantive ethical) issue. The realist believes moral influences are always operative, even if they are unlikely to be understood as such. It is therefore possible for realism to be important and completely overlooked.

Chapter Summary

This chapter answers SRQ1: what is the best metaethical position for the JIA? The arguments provided in this chapter satisfy SRQ1: realism is the best position for the JIA based on philosophical and practical arguments against antirealism. Antirealism implies a highly ahistorical and perverse rendering of the Oath of Office and the Constitution. Realism survives the objections brought against it. Although philosophical arguments were offered, the practical argument is sufficient for providing a baseline answer to the PRQ (how should the JIA model moral influences in the OE?). The JIA should model moral influences on realism. Chapter 5 provides specific recommendations consistent with this answer to the PRQ.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

New crises demand our attention. And in this moment of accelerating global challenges—from the pandemic to the climate crisis to nuclear proliferation to the fourth industrial revolution—one thing is certain: we will only succeed in advancing American interests and upholding our *universal* values by working in common cause with our closest allies and partners, and by renewing our own enduring sources of national strength.

—President Joseph R. Biden Jr., *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*

Chapter Introduction: Conclusions

All SRQs are answered: (1) realism is the best metaethical position for the JIA (chapter 4); (2) moral influences improve or degrade the moral capacities of agents (chapter 2); and (3) the doctrinal concepts of ‘tendencies’ and ‘potentials’ describe present behavior and future possibilities within a systems-centric framework (chapter 2). The long pole in the tent was SRQ1, the foundational philosophy behind this project. With the SRQs answered, the PRQ is now the primary focus. How should the JIA model moral influences in the OE?

The PRQ must harmonize the answers to the SRQs and demonstrate practical utility to the JIA. There are many possible solutions; this section offers a basic and advanced approach. The basic approach is better suited for joint doctrine. The advanced approach provides room for growth as doctrine develops. In both cases, the model will change or add as little to doctrine as possible to capture moral influences.

A Realist Model of Moral Influences: A Basic View

To review, joint planning consists of the following relevant concepts:

1. The OE is the “composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences” that are relevant to a mission (JCS 2020, IV-10).
2. Planners depict the operational environment as a system comprised of links and nodes. This systems-centric approach seeks to depict the interrelations of entities in the system. (see figure 3, chapter 2)
3. Analysts use the Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, and Infrastructure (PMESII) variables, also called the ‘operational variables,’ to classify entities and relations in the system.
4. Commanders develop an operational approach that uses the military instrument of national power to influence the OE (current system) to achieve the desired military end state (desired system). Foundational to this effort is an accurate description of the OE.
5. Tendencies “reflect the inclination to think or behave in a certain manner” (JCS 2020, IV-10). Tendencies are likelihoods—dispositions for actors to behave in certain ways—rooted in the present situation (system as-it-is).
6. Potential is “the inherent ability or capacity for the development of a specific interaction or relationship” (JCS 2020, IV-10). Potentials capture emergent possibilities. Potentials are likely ‘future states’ of the system.

For clarity, this section will refer to the above framework as the ‘Current System-Centric Model’ (CSCM). Realism is compatible with a systems-centric approach, but it is not compatible with the assertion (see chapter 2) that moral influences are merely social and cultural phenomena. Therefore, CSCM must be revised to render moral influences realistically, even as we preserve the overall framework. The key difference is that

‘right,’ ‘wrong,’ and any synonyms of these terms refer to fixed, culturally independent standards. The following reframes moral influences in terms of joint doctrine:

7. Moral influences are any characteristic of the OE (i.e., PMESII node or link) that improves or worsens the moral tendencies and potentials of an agent, group, or society.
8. All things equal, ‘good’ tendencies represent causal patterns instantiating good acts, relations, attitudes, etc. All things equal, bad tendencies represent causal patterns instantiating bad acts, relations, attitudes, etc.
9. All things equal, ‘good’ potentials are emergent possibilities for better acts, relations, attitudes, etc. than extant acts, relations, attitudes, etc. All things equal, ‘bad’ potentials are emergent possibilities for worse acts, relations, attitudes, etc. than extant acts, relations, possibilities, etc. It may help to think of good potentials as actors in the OE realizing that better futures are possible or desirable.
10. The following relations and attitudes are good (hf. ‘thin’ concept of good):

Table 3. 'Thin' Concept of Good	
Desires, beliefs, and understanding broadly conducive to . . .	
Human Dignity	the inherent worth of all people, respect for conscience, fair labor conditions
Truth	a desire for beliefs that correspond to reality
Justice	consistent application of standards of reward, punishment
Peace	non-violent relations between people based in justice and respect
Just War	morally permissible <i>just ad bello</i> , <i>jus in bello</i> , and <i>jus post bello</i>
Well-being	physical, psychological, and spiritual health
Friendship	expanding fellowship across social groups, based in mutual respect and cooperation
Temperance	self-control, strength of will aligned toward well-being
Willpower	a willingness to exert effort and risk personal well-being in pursuit of a greater good
. . . arranged in proper proportion by the virtue of prudence.	

Source: Created by author.

11. Obstacles or influences that counter the thin concept of good are either neutral or bad. Typically, these obstacles can be described in terms of tendencies or potentials.
12. Moral influences can belong to any of the PMESII variables; no variable completely encompasses moral matters. Sociological, philosophical, psychological, and anthropological theories (or hypotheses) may illuminate the causal patterns of moral influences.
13. There are countless moral influences active at any point in time. Moral influences should be understood broadly (e.g., a youth basketball coach can be an important moral influence). Not all moral influences are national in scope.

The above merges moral influences with the CSCM. This resultant is called the Revised System-Centric Model (RSCM). RSCM is CSCM with moral influences grafted onto it.

The ‘thin’ concept of the good summarized in table 3 is schematic but it has a few essential characteristics. First, the ‘good’ focuses on broad categories of moral concern, rather than political solutions to those problems. For instance, we include ‘justice’ and ‘respect for human dignity’ rather than ‘desire for a representative government styled on the U.S. Constitution’ to appreciate that the potential for specific forms of moral relations do not always exist. As said in *U.S. Army in the Iraq War*, “the haste with which the Coalition carried out that process—holding two parliamentary elections, drafting a constitution, and hosting a referendum on that constitution—heightened tension by raising the stakes and provided insufficient time for reconciliation” (Godfroy et al 2019, 619). Particular political arrangements require highly conditioned tendencies and potentials to be present in the OE. These are possible on some time horizon, but they are not always feasible (i.e., not practical ‘potentials’) in the here and now. We focus on basic moral concerns to allow for an organic and culturally informed development of moral progress in an area.

The goods in table 3 are broad, intuitive, capable of being realized in different political structures, and mostly uncontroversial (in the abstract). Every society recognizes some form of these goods in various states of being. For instance, human dignity and justice are served by *zakat* in Muslim countries and progressive tax structures in western European democracies. Each is a particular form of realizing human dignity and justice. (For this reason, our approach is different from American exceptionalism. It does not

assume the ‘form’ of moral solutions obtains across cultures—only the ‘ends.’ Realism is compatible with the claim that basic goods may manifest in culturally unique arrangements, so long as the moral standards, or goods, that establish the truth values of moral claims are objective. See Nussbaum 1993, 242-269.) Taken together, human dignity, truth, justice, peace, just war, well-being, friendship, and temperance cover most moral issues.

Goods are often mutually exclusive in specific situations, which is why actors rely on prudence to make good choices about how to live. Some readers may find it unsatisfying to give judgment such a place in a model, to ‘pass the buck’ as philosophers sometimes say, but there is no way around it. Moral reasoning will always require agents to hold goods in proper proportion. Prudence is improved by experience, education, and temperance. Called the ‘mother of all virtues,’ prudence allows actors (and the JIA) to balance competing interests.

The ‘thin’ concept of good is a starting point to illustrate how little is necessary to set the RSCM in the right direction. Perhaps a different ethical theory is superior. The only requirement for joint doctrine is to remain realist. (This is enough for the JIA to make great strides in this area.) For reference, the basic goods provided in table 3 have roots in natural law theory, a view that is culturally sensitive, realist, and (in the opinion of the author) promising (see Finnis 2011). Human dignity approaches may yield similar conclusions from more universally accepted premises. (see Berquist 2019) To keep from going too far afield, it is best to suggest, with Aristotle, that “anyone with a good outline can carry out and complete the details” (Aristotle 2014, 1098a; Nussbaum 1995, 123).

The next task is to figure out how moral influences should be visually depicted. To keep the model simple and intuitive, we will add a ‘moral valence,’ the property of being a good or bad moral influence, to link analysis diagrams. We can depict this as a ‘+’ or ‘-,’ respectively. If desired, the analyst can add a ‘P’ or a ‘T’ to note potentials and tendencies.

Assume the JIA must improve civil security in Country A. If one of the problems is corruption in Country A’s officer corps, the analyst should be able to describe the moral influences (or lack thereof) contributing to this condition. The analyst can depict these as shown in figure 4:

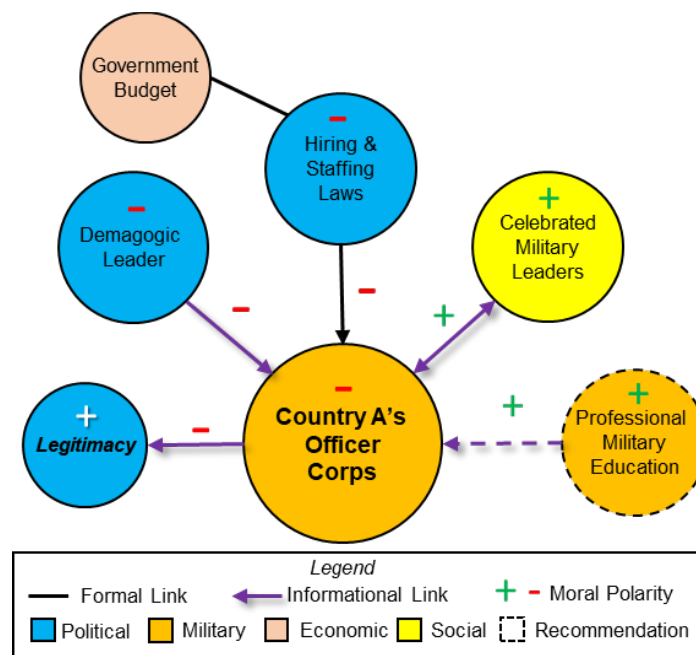


Figure 4. Revised System-Centric Model Example

Source: Created by author.

Figure 4 succinctly depicts the moral influences affecting Country A's officer corps. Negative influences include poor hiring and staffing laws (e.g., perhaps these laws, or lack thereof, facilitate nepotism) and a demagogic leader (who is hypocritical and corrupt himself). Overall, the officer corps is exerting negative influence on legitimacy. Given these problems, the analyst recommends adding a layer of professional military education to reinforce positive norms (e.g., thin concept of 'justice'). This recommendation reflects the analyst's assessment that professional military education would be good moral influence. The analyst might also recommend information operations that emphasize the virtues of Country A's celebrated military leaders (e.g., thin concept of 'temperance').

Figure 5 depicts the relationship between moral influences, moral potentials, and military objectives or end states. In figure 5, the sum total of moral influences is positive, represented by growing moral potential (abstractly depicted as a larger circle). When realized, this moral potential becomes a moral actual containing opportunities for new relationships to form. In this example, an individual's moral potential entails a potential for a new relation between him or her and an external moral potential (associated with the military end state).

Moral influences are any characteristic of the OE (i.e., PMESII node or link) that improves or worsens the moral tendencies and potentials of an agent, group, or society.

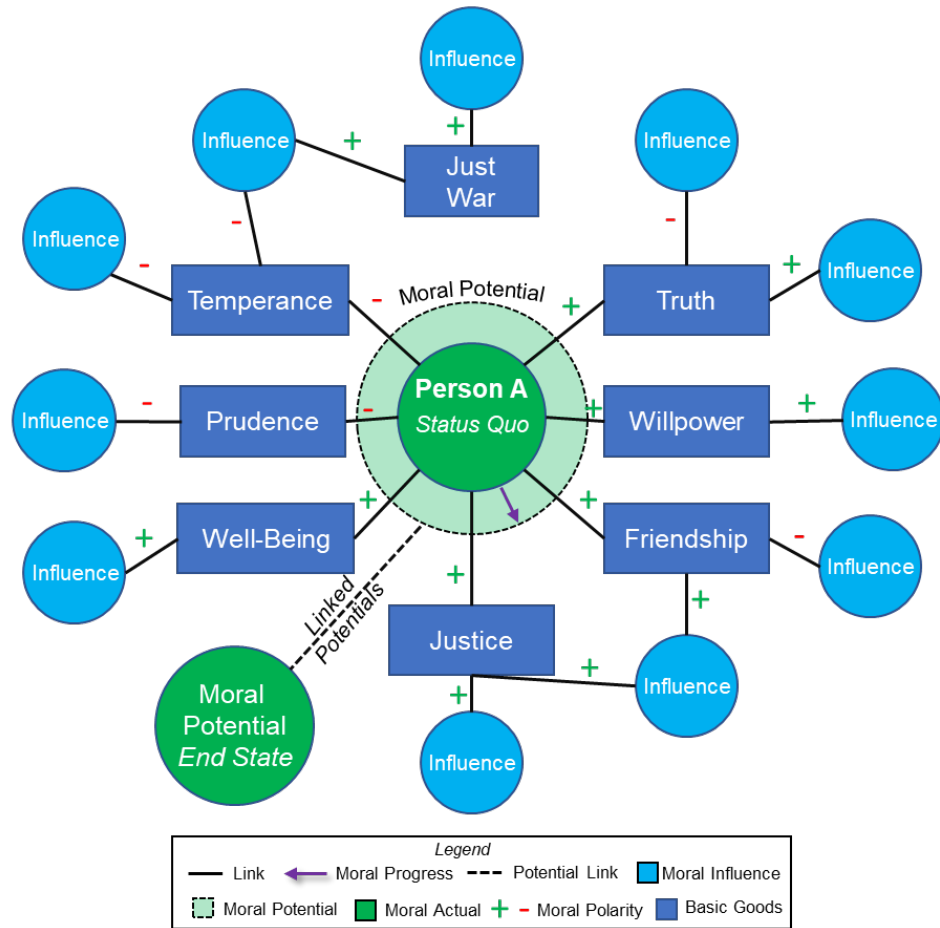


Figure 5. Conceptual Relationship between Moral Influences and Potentials

Source: Created by author.

The analyst should collect data to determine the relative strength of moral influences. Data collection for moral influences is roughly the same as data collection for any other causal phenomena. The only difference is that the analyst understands that answers correspond to a cultural perspective which may or may not align to objective moral standards. This is not a failure; it is precisely the kind of evidence for which she is looking. Moreover, she can develop measures of performance and measures of

effectiveness that assess the impact of operations seeking moral effects. She may discover that a friendly initiative is a good moral influence, but that this influence is overwhelmed by other systemic issues that must be addressed.

Analysts should not expect data collection to be straightforward. Human relations are complex; they are best probed and continually tested. Cultural differences will require some translation, but this will never entail the conclusion that the thin concept of the good does not apply in the OE. Analysts must remember that negative influences are likely to adapt and mutate. Positive influences may have no obvious political presence. Value structures are resilient. Change can take many years or a few days. Tendencies may be self-sustaining or require constant input from active moral influences. This is difficult work. A model cannot make it easy.

However, analysts can rely on well-established patterns of moral influences. For instance, corruption reduces legitimacy (justice). Prolonged exposure to violence encourages cruelty (just war). Misinformation degrades interest in truth (truth). Poor access to food, water, and other basic needs stunts human development (well-being). Discrimination insulates communities from the common good (friendship). Drug trafficking increases the likelihood of addiction (temperance). Tentative assessments rooted in a commonsense understanding of moral influences will suffice until data collection is possible.

A Realist Model of Moral Influences: An Advanced View

The advanced view of moral influences recognizes that a straightforward pursuit of good potentials may be counterproductive. For instance, a democratic Iraq is, objectively speaking, a better possible situation than one controlled by sectarian

coalitions. However, rapid democratization worsened the political situation and increased the causal power of negative moral influences (Godfroy et al 2019, 619). How do we understand the relationship between good potentials and operational art?

The shortest distance between the present system and a better future is not always a straight line. For a course of action to be feasible, it must account for how the system will transition from the actual state to the desired future state. Therefore, analysts should depict the current state of the system, the desired state of the system (good potential), and any necessary intermediate states. Consider the following observations from Iraq:

The Iraqi political process demonstrated one of the enduring problems with the American approach to [counterinsurgency]. Once a partner government feels that its survival is assured, the U.S. ability to influence it declines. This often means that the partner government will arrest reform and reconciliation programs before they are complete— especially programs that would threaten the political or economic elite . . . Overcoming such a deep challenge will require a counterintuitive application of U.S. national power. As security improves, the United States will likely have to increase its commitment of key elements of national power—especially within the economic and diplomatic realms—in order to maintain sufficient influence so as to build a lasting peace. (Godfroy et al 2019, 619)

In this example, the U.S. pursued a good potential at the expense of its own power as a moral influence. Paradoxically, U.S. efforts to instantiate a good potential worsened moral potential overall. We can use other concepts from joint doctrine to frame this problem:

14. “A direct approach attacks the enemy’s [center-of-gravity] or principal strength by applying combat power directly against it” (JCS 2020, IV-33).
15. “An indirect approach attacks the enemy’s [center-of-gravity] by applying combat power against critical vulnerabilities that lead to the defeat of the [center-of-gravity] while avoiding enemy strength” (JCS 2020, IV-33).

Direct and indirect approaches are not limited to centers of gravity (which we may set aside in this context). The JIA should approach moral potentials only after considering whether a direct or indirect approach is the most appropriate. Moreover, there may be several moral potentials that are compatible with the military end state. Figure 6 depicts direct and indirect approaches to moral potentials.

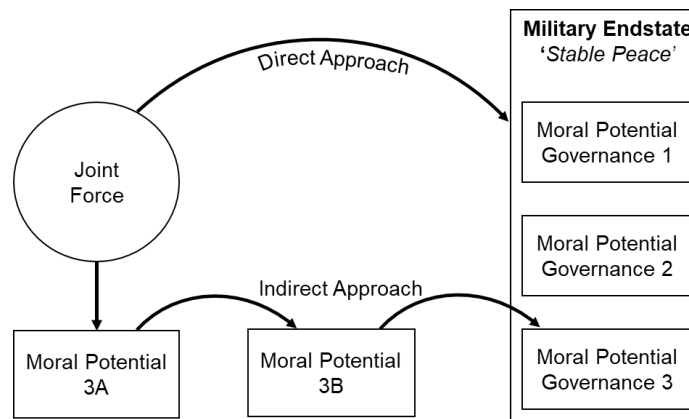


Figure 6. Direct and Indirect Approach to Moral Potentials

Source: Created by author as adapted from JCS 2020, IV-34.

Figure 6 highlights three important concepts. First, the military end state may be compatible with more than one moral potential. For example, the military end state in Country A may permit either a coalition of decentralized tribal governments or a centralized representative government. During operational design, the JIA should consider the challenges and opportunities of each feasible and acceptable moral potential (to the extent allowed by strategic guidance). Secondly, moral potentials and actors' moral capacities are related: an increase (or decrease) of moral capacities will affect moral potentials. Therefore, the JIA may need to increase moral capacities before a

desired potential is realizable (see 3A, 3B, and 3C in figure 6). Finally, an indirect approach may be more prudent than a direct approach. For instance, festivals and cultural events may contribute more to rebuilding a sense of political community than rebuilding infrastructure or hosting elections. Regardless of the approach, the JIA must account for the transition between the current and desired systems. Moral influences should be a part of this transition if the desired system requires specific moral characteristics to obtain.

The following are additional considerations bearing on moral influences:

16. Potentials are circumscribed by what is rational for agents to do, given what agents understand, desire, and believe (see appendix C).
17. The JIA must assess whether behaviors it desires from actors in the OE are good or bad tendencies. Value-neutral assessments of ‘desired behavior,’ as implied by the *Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment*, do not treat agents as rational, moral actors.
18. The JIA should consider the impact of operations on the balance of moral influences in an area.
19. Nearly all political arrangements depend on the moral judgment of actors to accept the arrangement or not. Therefore, political end states depend on moral influences.
20. Local moral influences may be more efficacious than national influences.
21. Moral philosophy, political philosophy, sociology, and anthropology may help characterize moral influences.

22. There are countless moral influences in the OE. Even if the JIA seeks a direct approach, there are likely several mutually reinforcing, indirect moral influences worth developing.

The basic and advanced views represent a significant evolution of joint doctrine.

Though not expressed in terms of COA comparison, it should be clear that the basic and advanced views offer significant advantages over the having no model at all or keeping the antirealist model. The latter fails for the reasons specified in chapter 4. Therefore, the basic model represents an overall improvement to joint doctrine.

Realism and Friendly Forces

The basic and advanced view are designed to facilitate descriptions of the OE. However, the JIA can apply the tools above to assess friendly moral potentials as well. The same principles apply. For all the reasons the JIA conducts friendly center of gravity analysis, it should also analyze moral influences operating on friendly forces.

Realism has a few specific implications for the JIA worth mentioning. As argued in chapter 4, moral excellence and conscience are positively related. A well-developed moral conscience is more sensitive to moral facts (by definition). It follows that moral expertise constrains military operations in one sense and broadens it in another. Since moral expertise is linked to prudence, it facilitates better operational art. But it also prohibits the JIA from seeking militarily expedient solutions of questionable moral quality. Similarly, the power of negative moral influences and moral expertise are negatively related. For instance, virtuous people habituated to truth-seeking behaviors are less susceptible to the effects of misinformation. Manipulative forms of information operations depend on ignorance and truth decay. Therefore, the JIA must be aware of the

relationship between friendly information operations and the moral capacities of actors.

‘Value-neutral’ assessments of ‘desired behaviors’ can introduce negative moral influences if they do not facilitate truth-seeking habits (see appendix B).

What we do to others, we do to ourselves. If we habituate violent tendencies, over-and-above a desire to cultivate good moral tendencies and potentials, our own moral standing will be affected. We will be more likely to see people as a means to an end, irrational actors, ‘the Other,’ or on the lines of any other antirealist temptation. This must be avoided. Our commitment to the Constitution is a commitment to a moral order which transcends both it and the American way of life.

Recommendations: Specific Amendments to Joint Doctrine

Joint doctrine can accommodate the RSCM with relatively few changes. We recommend adding the following definition to *Joint Planning*, *Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment* and the *Department of Defense Dictionary*:

Moral influence. A characteristic of the OE that improves or worsens the moral tendencies and potentials of actors in the OE.

We recommend adding the following to *Joint Planning*, chapter IV, section 3.c.4.c (IV-10), which begins with “the JIPOE process should provide the analysis that answers the following questions related to describing the current OE in terms of its information, physical, and human aspects:”

What moral influences are affecting actors in the OE?

We recommended amending chapter II, section 4.b (II-4) of *Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment* to include “What moral influences are affecting actors in the OE?” The “Cognitive Domain” section of chapter III (III-23)

should separate morality from culture and include the definition of moral influences provided above.

Finally, joint doctrine should include the following language wherever most appropriate:

Many factors influence moral beliefs. For example, culture, religion, media, political structures, and intergroup dynamics shape the moral beliefs actors hold. Moral beliefs undergo change over time. Rational actors adjust moral beliefs to account for new information and habits of thought and behavior.

Moral influences worsen or improve a person or group's investment in human dignity, truth, justice, peace, just war, well-being, friendship, temperance, and willpower. Actors balance these goods through rational deliberation. The moral outlook of a person or group affects how actors will assess the actions of the joint force, interagency partners, and local actors.

Antirealist notes in doctrine (see chapter 2) should be removed to prevent confusion and inconsistency. A summarized version of the basic model should be included in *Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment*.

Recommendations for Future Study

Researchers seeking to further this study should consider developing the following: (1) practical ethical frameworks (compatible with realism) for the JIA, (2) realist arguments based in just war theory, (3) critiques of constructivist attempts to answer the PRQ, and (4) realist views on moral motivation. First, joint doctrine must endorse some substantive ethical theory (or even a plurality of them). It is not helpful to

insist that objective moral truths exist without offering any account of them. This study presented the ‘thin’ concept of goods to complete the model and illustrate central concepts, but it would benefit from a more thorough analysis of realist-compatible ethical theories. Secondly, this study did not evaluate realist and antirealist conceptions of just war theory. We suspect just war is best interpreted realistically (the Nuremburg Trials are the most obvious instance of this) along the lines offered in Boyle, Finniss, and Grisez’s *Nuclear Deterrence, Morality, and Realism* (1989). If a sound just war theory depends on realism, then the argument presented in this paper is even stronger. (Of note, joint doctrine leans toward naïve legal positivism on this issue.) Thirdly, this study dismissed many constructivist versions of antirealism because they do not offer robust explanations of moral causation. This may have been too quick. Constructivist theories provide substantive ethical content and achieve (a degree of) objectivity. We explained the reasons for doubting whether constructivism is up to the task in chapters 2 and 4, but we did not assess any constructivist theory in detail. Finally, this study bypassed philosophical difficulties caused by realist views of moral motivation. Instead, it emphasized conscience to solve this problem. A more thorough study would address Humean motivation objections more directly.

This study focused on the impacts of realism on the operational art, but realism may help in other areas as well. As of this writing, the joint force struggles to address racism, extremism, and sexism in the ranks. Antirealism insulates those who hold these views from criticism. Realism breaks down these barriers and provides the space for the joint force to articulate a unifying vision of the good. Rejecting antirealism is the first

step. Exploring the moral horizons implied by the Declaration of Independence is the next. The services will benefit from philosophical analysis along these lines.

Final Thoughts

Plato identified four characters in the allegory of the cave. The bound cave-dweller is the most pathetic. He knows only the shadows projected on the wall. To him, the shadows are real. His reality is determined by the active manipulations of others. The second is the unbound cave-dweller. He is free to look around the cave. He realizes puppeteers make the shadows. His immediate cynicism is justified, at least at first, for what he once took for reality proved only a manipulation.

The bound and unbound cave-dwellers are the two main characters of joint doctrine. The bound are the ‘Others,’ those populations of the operational environment the joint force seeks to influence. The joint force is the unbound. It is wise enough to frame every problem through the lens of its doubts, but it is not wise enough to declare anything to be unimpeachably true.

But what of the puppeteer? Joint doctrine charts a path to his gradual inclusion. Inspired by the success of our adversaries, we seek to instantiate ‘desired behaviors’ in the bound. Surely it can be done. Grab a puppet. Put oneself between the fire and screen. The lot of the bound is tragic anyway; we cannot be held responsible for the rules of the cave.

The fourth character is absent from joint doctrine. The daylight dweller is outside of the cave, outside of doctrine as it stands. She has persisted up the steep path, endured the pain of living in the light of the sun. Her reward is to see the world as it really is. To her the cave is a folly; she returns to bring this news to others. Not everyone will make

the trip, so she leaves them with the right kinds of encouragements. She implores the puppeteers to make better shadows, not for the sake of her interests, but because her conscience will not let her do otherwise. The unbound do not see her. They cannot admit that there are daylight dwellers, for the existence of the sun is an unbearable critique of the cave the unbound seek to rule.

To Plato the analogy is metaphysical and moral. We should search for truth and goodness. Deny it to us, and our choices quickly lose meaning. We know the good pulls us up and out of the cave. Violence pulls goodness down and in, takes darkness for light, and makes ‘man the measure of all things.’ The ancients rejected this claim and so should we (Bonazzi 2020).

Antirealism is an undoing. It is anti-justice and anti-peace. It unravels. It binds. It does not build; its scaffolding is always on the inside. It has no place in joint doctrine. We cannot tolerate its threats to beliefs more precious and necessary than our operational aims. We cannot claim the philosophies our adversaries deploy against us for our own. It is a semblance we do not want.

This study is a minor contribution to the cause. Consider this a prediction. The joint force will abandon antirealism or it will succumb to it. The choice is a moral influence unto itself. Whatever may come of us, let it be known that we walked in the light of the sun. *Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem.*

APPENDIX A

OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

Objections to ‘A Realist Interpretation of the Constitution’

This section contains some likely objections to the realist interpretation of the Constitution offered in Chapter 4. These objections stem from popular antirealist positions in civil-military relations theory. They are included here because they cannot be dismissed, even though they are outside of the main line of argument provided in chapter 4.

Civil-Military Objections: Huntington, Feaver, and Dubik

There are likely to be more scandals in civil-military relations (CMR) the longer a country is at war, especially if the war seems to be going poorly. The case studies are well-known: MacArthur in Korea, Westmoreland in Vietnam, Rumsfeld in Iraq (2003), McChrystal in Afghanistan, and so on. The U.S. has been at war for 20 years, which means an entire generation of officers have been conditioned to think about moral issues by the CMR scandals that dominate the headlines. It is worth examining realism from this perspective.

The question is whether realism threatens CMR. The answer is that it does not. It undermines theories of CMR, but not the actual moral content of those relations.

The issue turns on where one starts. If analysis start with the political question—how do officers and civilians relate?—then it risks stretching American politics too thinly over moral questions. (In fairness, this is the question most civil-military theorists are primarily concerned with.) If analysis begin with just war theory, held as a realist moral

standard, then it risks arriving at a conclusion that is politically uncomfortable (perhaps impossible). The three theories discussed here privilege the ‘particular-political’ over the ‘universal-moral.’ We know from chapter 4 that one cannot justify this prioritization on antirealism without assuming a realist principle to backstop the explanation.

Antirealist civil-military theories are at a disadvantage at the outset, but they are too influential to be dismissed. These positions are Samuel Huntington’s objective civilian control theory, Peter Feaver’s agent theory, and LTG (Ret.) James Dubik’s ‘responsible’ use theory. This section considers each from the realist perspective, thus limiting our scope to those aspects of these theories that are incompatible with realism.

Samuel Huntington’s *The Soldier and the State* (1957) characterizes the natural tension between a free society (‘democratic imperative’) and its security needs (‘security imperative’). Wherever there is a standing army, republican governance is at some risk. Wherever there is no standing army, the survival of the state is at risk. Samuel Huntington proposes an equilibrium, called “objective civilian control” theory, which holds the military should have autonomy in military matters provided it does not become involved in politics (Huntington 1957, viii). Huntington recommends norms that respect the division between civilian authority and military expertise.

As a position in CMR theory, objective control theory is vulnerable to objections that arise from other theorists in that discipline. As Risa Brooks demonstrates, Huntington’s “norms contain intrinsic weaknesses and fundamental contradictions that have important behavioral implications” even if one subscribes to Huntington’s broader moral framework (2020, 9).

Those on Samuel Huntington's side might be concerned by realism's consequences for objective control's 'equilibrium.' Realism holds that military professionals possess a conscience conceptually non-subordinated to civilian political direction. The worry could be expressed this way: the military cannot be free-thinking in moral matters without being insubordinate or jeopardizing the American political process. This issue is addressed at the conclusion of this section. The antirealist foundation of Huntington's view must be considered first:

1. The existence of the military profession presupposes conflicting human interests and the use of violence to further those interests. Consequently, the military ethic views conflict as a universal pattern throughout nature and sees violence rooted in the permanent biological and psychological nature of men . . . The man of the military ethic is essentially the man of Hobbes.
2. The military man has no concern with the desirability or undesirability of political goals as such.
3. When the military man receives a legal order from an authorized superior, he does not argue, he does not hesitate, he does not substitute his own views; he obeys instantly [numbers added by author] (1957, 63, 68, 73).

Huntington offers civilian control as a counterweight to the "pessimistic, collectivist, historically inclined, power-oriented, nationalistic, militaristic, pacifist, and instrumentalist" military ethic (1957, 79). Huntington means 'ethic' in a sociological sense, as a characterization of military professional culture. This caveat does not matter for our present purposes, so long as Huntington proceeds from the assumption that the profession is Hobbesian antirealist. Chapter 4 showed that antirealism is not consistent with the profession's understanding of the Constitution. Thus Huntington's characterization cannot be motivated from within the view of the profession that the profession ought to hold. (*The Army Profession* references Huntington both explicitly and implicitly.)

Huntington's theory, for all its sociological and political observations, treads on moral ground better served by a philosophical mode of analysis. With respect to moral issues, Huntington has put the cart before the horse. If the claim is that the military ought to 'obey instantly,' then the nature of moral responsibility is central. A moral argument is necessary. Huntington does not develop an argument that can sustain the moral burden of segregating military and civilian spheres. To be fair, this is not his purpose. But even if he did attempt a moral argument, it would probably be subject to Lincoln's critique. 'Obey instantly' is Huntington's version of Douglas's "Don't Care." We have no right to do a wrong, even if the wrong is ordered by civilian authority.

Suppose civilian authority directs the military to undertake an obviously unjust war. Suppose this war takes place in space or some other domain where the legal questions are unsettled. It seems obvious that the military is now necessarily engaged in the political process, since it has 'no right to do a wrong,' as Lincoln would say. The line is suddenly blurred, exactly as it ought to be if the profession is to take morality seriously.

If this seems too fast, it is probably because it has bypassed Huntington's central concern about balancing security interests and republican interests. The equilibrium is a moral argument in a way. This concern will be addressed in response to Feaver and Dubik. For now, it is enough to note that the military can resist doing something evil without overthrowing the government, besieging the capitol, or going to the press. There are gradations to the alleged moral harms of a morally conscious profession of arms.

Feaver's agent theory is an extension of Huntington's objective control theory. Feaver explains civil-military dynamics using a principal-agent framework. Briefly, this

approach draws an analogy between civil-military relations and contracts. (See chapter 4, ‘Vicious Profession Premise,’ for an argument against the contract-view.) As with Huntington, Feaver’s primary interest is not moral, but his broader position has significant moral commitments. His “agency perspective begins with the premise that civilians have the right to be wrong” (Feaver 2003, 172). There is a limit to this right, as “the military has an obligation to shirk illegal orders” providing there is a “very strong presumption that an order from the national command authority is legal” (Feaver 2003, 301).

By “right to be wrong,” Feaver seems to mean ‘wrong’ in a moral (i.e., about just war) and practical (i.e., about which strategy or policy would be the most effective) sense. Practical matters certainly have a moral dimension in warfare, but the moral sense is our immediate concern. Lincoln’s response is again directly relevant: in no sense can it be right to do a wrong. Even if we set aside this worry, Feaver’s use of the term ‘right’ is misleading and exceedingly controversial. As a tagline, the ‘right to do wrong’ masks Feaver’s actual claim, which is that the civilian’s ‘right to do wrong’ generates an obligation according to which the military must do wrong as ordered. Feaver provides no argument to substantiate this commitment.

The ‘right to be wrong’ premise is unsound. If John promises to do whatever Jane says, and Jane asks John to do something immoral, then John is in a moral dilemma caused by his foolish promise to Jane. Feaver’s obligation implies the military is absolved of moral responsibilities arising from lawful orders. This assumes there is an identity relation between unlawful orders and gravely immoral orders. As the earlier thought experiment shows (and historical record bears out), there are no good grounds for

presuming this identity to hold, unless one is a thorough antirealist (and morality nothing more than the positive law).

Feaver might respond by insisting that the harms of disobeying an immoral order are so great that they, on balance, absolve the military of moral responsibility. To be universally true, Feaver must provide a non-contingent (i.e., universally true) moral principle that bears this out. Such a principle might be: ‘prefer the norm which is likely to do the least wrong in aggregate.’ (‘Aggregation’ is a notorious problem in utilitarian philosophy.) Generalized norms will fail to deliver the right moral outcome in many situations. Feaver would need to show why a blanket norm is preferable to a more granular approach. An attempt along these lines would probably be very pessimistic about the moral capacities of military professionals.

Feaver’s intention may be noble, but the ‘right to do a wrong’ dictum is plainly false. Like Huntington, Feaver wants to retain “very strong presumption” that civilian orders are lawful and moral. This is a good presumption to retain. Given our epistemic situation—our lack of direct and obvious moral knowledge—and the importance of preserving republican processes, we have every reason to prefer ‘norms of presumption.’ Can realism retain the ‘pro-civilian presumption’ without limiting the military to a legal positivist moral horizon?

This is where Dubik’s critique of Feaver begins. Dubik argues for a ‘reasonable’ use theory of civilian control which roughly translates to a ‘reasonable right to be wrong.’ There are a lot of advantages to this view. It does not suggest an identity relation between morality and laws. Depending on what is meant by ‘reason,’ it could even be realist. However, Dubik indicates that responsible use is procedurally determined. It requires

“that those involved in the process, collect, analyze, and present information . . . [so] a proper decision can be made” (Dubik 2020).

Like Huntington and Feaver, Dubik opts for a procedural basis for determining the ‘right to do wrong.’ For Huntington, the proper procedure is independence and autonomy. For Feaver, the proper procedure is deference within legal limits. For Dubik, the procedural justification is a fruitful and adaptive dialogue between civilian leaders and military professionals. This is not a bad norm to propose, but it cannot be the principle on which ‘a right to do wrong’ turns. Again, there is no identity relation between fostering a dialectic and rightness. Here Dubik betrays a highly controversial confidence in ‘reasonableness’ as a dialectical process.

The profession can do better on realism. Huntington, Feaver, and Dubik—to varying degrees—seek to preserve the moral-presumption without incurring unacceptable trade-offs to military effectiveness and republican political integrity. This is possible under realism. Consider the following norms:

1. The military must ‘support and defend’ the Constitution (interpreted on realism).
2. Swearing to ‘support and defend’ the Constitution (realistically understood) entails a respect for the integrity of the American political process and the moral vision of the Declaration of Independence.
3. The integrity of the American political process entails a moral presumption in favor of the decisions of civilian leadership.
4. No one has a right to do a wrong.

If these norms are consistent, compatible with the Constitution, and capable of being internalized by the profession of arms, then realism meets the requirements of a just and practical moral theory of civil-military relations. The moral presumption is defeasible by a high degree of certainty that the action one has been directed to take is wrong. Realists should seek good arguments about how to approach this defeasibility; a thorough account cannot be provided here. An analogy may help, however.

The Roman Catholic Church is hierarchically ordered and clerical. Priests have unique authority to dispense sacraments; laity do not. Laity believe these sacraments are necessary to a rich spiritual life. Even so, the Church has maintained that no person can go against his or her conscience, even if conscience contradicts the Church's moral teaching. To resolve this tension, the Church retains the primacy of conscience, but stipulates that Catholics must make every effort to understand the moral arguments of Church teaching before violating them. There is therefore a requirement for the laity to learn, in detail, the moral position of the Church on good faith. Following conscience requires a positive and active effort to overcome the presumption in favor of Church teaching.

There are many obvious differences between the Church and American society. (Interestingly, Catholics and professionals take similar oaths to adhere to the principles of their respective communities.) Yet we have good reason to think the analogy applies *a fortiori* to the profession of arms. The power dynamic is reversed; the military has overwhelming 'power to compel.' This power imbalance, paired with the Oath to 'support and defend' the Constitution, creates a powerful obligation to seek clarification and presume good faith on the part of civilian leadership.

One further clarification. Feaver meant ‘right to be wrong’ in both a moral and a practical sense. In matters of war, even practical errors can be moral, but the difference between a primarily moral and a primarily practical error can be identified conceptually. A practical disagreement is a disagreement about practical matters where both parties are driven by a good faith desire to prosecute a just war. A moral disagreement is a disagreement involving bad faith, fundamental objections to the application of the principles of just war, etc. The presumption in favor of civilian authority is stronger in practical disagreements. If the President directs, in good faith, an unwise operation that will cost American lives but is largely directed to a just cause, the general officer should try to find a way to comply (after offering counsel and advice). Here the President is, perhaps without realizing it, asking for a sacrifice. The general and the soldiers who make this sacrifice demonstrate some virtue in doing so. Primarily moral disagreements do not have this feature. If the President directs an evil act, there is no virtue in doing it. Here, the general’s virtue demands moral courage.

In the real world, moral and practical matters are too messy to admit of clear distinctions. Prudence is required; no procedural method can erase the role of judgment. A senior military leader is a politician because she is professionally invested in the good of the republic. She is a politician of a different kind. She has no party, but she has a People and moral horizon to which she is inexorably bound.

Notably, neither Huntington, Feaver, nor Dubik attend to the role of conscience in their view of civil-military relations. If anything, the ‘obey instantly’ dictum seeks to minimize it. This is a serious conceptual oversight. As discussed in chapter 2, the religious wars of the Enlightenment period caused crises of conscience that greatly

influenced Locke and the American Founding. A political analysis of the phenomenon should account for the role of conscience in the development of classical liberalism.

The moral hazard of this oversight is more concerning. It is foolish to habituate professionals to ignore conscience and yet hope for them to remain decent and virtuous. Vicious leaders are always a greater threat to the republic than well-meaning leaders who happen to disagree with civilian authority. Norms that generate good leaders are imperative and a central issue in CMR.

APPENDIX B

REALISM AND INFORMATION OPERATIONS

Joint doctrine nests morality within the cognitive domain. (JCS 2014, III-23) Many analysts assume this means moral influences are informational and that moral effects are best achieved by information operations. As discussed in chapter 2, many moral influences are not informational. (For instance, drug use degrades rational capacities for moral reasoning, but drugs are not—strictly speaking—an informational characteristic of the OE.) Information operations are often moral influences since they aim at changing the behavior of actors. 2018’s *Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment* (JCOIE) ignores the relationship between moral reasoning and information and sets the joint force on the wrong path.

JCOIE “focuses on leveraging the inherent informational aspects of military activities to affect the perceptions, attitudes, and other elements that drive desired behavior through the integration of physical and informational power.” (2018, 1) The “and other elements” clause is where the joint force leaves too much to imagination. A few significant oversights are below:

1. JCOIE brushes aside the role of reason in human action. It takes ‘desired behavior’ as a combination of “perceptions, attitudes, and other elements.” Presumably, reason is one of these ‘other elements,’ but this critical point is undeveloped in the document. JCOIE should explain that ‘desired behavior’ must be rational from the perspective of actors.
2. Realism implies that moral behavior is rational. (There are exceptions. Rationality and human action are difficult topics in philosophy.) ‘Good’

corresponds (roughly) to what one ‘ought to do,’ and ‘bad’ corresponds to what ‘should be avoided.’ Bad behavior can be minimally rational from the perspective of an agent, who may have disordered desires for any number of reasons. The difference is that ‘good’ behavior is rational with respect to objective moral standards.

3. JCOIE attempts to be value neutral about deliberative processes that are almost always moral (assuming non-trivial information effects). If the behavior we desire is good, then good moral influences may instantiate it. If it is bad, then bad moral influences will instantiate it. The value of the behavior is essential to selecting the means to influence it.
4. The success of information operations depends, to some extent, on the truth-value of the information claims (i.e., the truth of ‘message’ being sent) and the truth-seeking tendencies of the audience. All things equal, an audience with well-developed truth-seeking tendencies will not accept information claims that are false. All things equal, an audience with poorly developed truth-seeking tendencies is more likely to accept information claims that are false, provided they appeal to pre-existing beliefs the audience already possesses.
5. ‘Desired’ and ‘undesired’ behaviors are not identical to ‘good’ and ‘bad’ behaviors, respectively. Joint doctrine implies that the U.S. may desire bad behaviors so long as they are tactically efficacious. (This is not stated but is left open to interpretation.)
6. Moral reasoning and practical reasoning have different characteristics. For instance, the motivational force of practical reasons comes from our desires to

bring about an effect. For example, if one desires ice cream, then one is motivated to take steps to purchase ice cream. For moral matters, the role of desires in motivation is much less clear. (see chapter 2, ‘the queerness of moral facts’). If this distinction holds, then moral and practical reasons for action may respond to different kinds of information claims (i.e., normative claims for moral reasons and desires-based claims for practical reasons).

JCOIE is a bold statement of intent, but it does not have a strong basis in theories of human action. It also underestimates the importance of the moral content of information operations. This oversight is puzzling. People are not Plinko machines to be tilted one way or another. Volume and quantity matter, but they are not the only variables to consider, unless one is seeking to sow chaos (as the Russians do). If the joint force is unwilling to view information operations as a species of moral influence, then it is unlikely to achieve effects on the cognitive domain.

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