

EMPATHY FOR CARNIVORES

A Monograph

by

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2013-01

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 23-05-2013		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) Jul 2012 - Apr 2013
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Empathy for Carnivores		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
		5b. GRANT NUMBER		
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S) Cutright, Kevin, R.		5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
		5e. TASK NUMBER		
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD 100 Stimson Ave. Ft. Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) School of Advanced Military Studies 201 Reynolds Ave. Ft. Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) SAMS		
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.				
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES				
14. ABSTRACT Empathy is arguably a one-word summary of the rationale for Red Teams, Human Terrain Teams, and the U.S. military's vast attention to culture over the last decade. Once the military must co-opt others instead of coercing them, empathy becomes a professional mandate. Properly understood and applied, empathy improves critical and creative thinking, campaign design, and operational assessments. It is not merely a trait contributing to good character; it also benefits professional competence. Despite ties to military theory and doctrine, empathy remains an obscure concept largely disregarded in military culture. Leadership, counterinsurgency, and advising doctrine endorse it, but it remains absent from intelligence, information operations, and planning doctrine. It deserves more attention and a more central role in designing military operations, especially counterinsurgencies.				
15. SUBJECT TERMS Empathy, Operational Planning, Counterinsurgency, Culture, Critical Thinking, Logical Fallacies, Red Team				
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 64
a. REPORT Unclassified	b. ABSTRACT Unclassified	c. THIS PAGE Unclassified		
				19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)

MONOGRAPH APPROVAL PAGE

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

EMPATHY FOR CARNIVORES, by LTC Kevin R. Cutright, 64 pages.

Empathy is arguably a one-word summary of the rationale for Red Teams, Human Terrain Teams, and the U.S. military's vast attention to culture over the last decade. Once the military must co-opt others instead of coercing them, empathy becomes a professional mandate. Properly understood and applied, empathy improves critical and creative thinking, campaign design, and operational assessments. It is not merely a trait contributing to good character; it also benefits professional competence.

Empathy differs from sympathy or compassion. It is not a "feeling for" another but an "understanding of" another. Empathy may result in sympathy, but the two concepts are distinct. In understanding another's perspective, the process of empathy attempts to account for emotional as well as cognitive influences. Further, empathy involves only understanding another's perspective; it does not require agreeing with that perspective.

Despite ties to military theory and doctrine, empathy remains an obscure concept largely disregarded in military culture. Leadership, counterinsurgency, and advising doctrine endorse it, but it remains absent from intelligence, information operations, and planning doctrine. It deserves more attention and a more central role in designing military operations, especially counterinsurgencies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My monograph director, Dr. Christopher Marsh, deserves great credit for wise guidance and steadfast encouragement. Dr. Alice Butler-Smith helped launch the original idea in a fruitful direction. My seminar leader, Colonel Andy Shoffner, raised an eyebrow but not a red flag at the concept. SAMS classmates, especially Major Matt Castillo and Major James Blanton, helped the argument take shape by challenging my ideas and introducing new ones. Lieutenant Colonel Brian Imiola and Dr. Dan Zupan provided philosophical discussion and scrutiny on early drafts. Cousins Scott and Mark Hill provided long-range inspiration and feedback and friends Major Don Williamson, Esso Altuhafi, and Peter Fromm provided close support. I helped my wife practice empathy as she met the daily parenting needs of our boys while I was at the keyboard. My thanks to all.

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ACRONYMS

ADM	Army Design Methodology
ADP	Army Doctrinal Publication
ADRP	Army Doctrinal Reference Publication
FM	Field Manual
JP	Joint Publication

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this monograph is to establish empathy's contribution to military operational planning, especially counterinsurgencies. Empathy clearly benefits the individual character needed in the military profession. Its role in leadership, advising, and interpersonal communications seems sufficiently recognized (even if not always sufficiently employed). Its role in professional competence, however, seems largely overlooked. Therefore, the emphasis of this monograph is on empathy's contribution to competence over its improvement to character. In the end, this distinction between character and competence is artificial. Character informs competent behavior; competence is part of a military professional's duty. They are interdependent. Analytically separating them is helpful to clarify their meaning, but they should never be left dissected. If they are, traits commonly associated with character, like empathy, are often seen as a luxury, or even detrimental, to a military professional's proficiency. This monograph argues that empathy is essential for it.

Like a chemist who simulates the molecular structure of a precious gem and creates synthetic stones, so does a person simulate another's experience through the process of empathy. Some have actually labeled the products of empathy "cognitive prostheses," or virtual cognitions – ideas or conclusions stemming from another's experience instead of one's own.¹ This virtual experience is exactly the aim of historians examining the past. John Lewis Gaddis notes, "if we can widen the range of experience beyond what we as individuals have encountered, if we can draw upon the experiences of others who've had to confront comparable situations in the past, then...our chances of acting wisely should increase proportionately."² Historians attempt to

¹Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie, "Introduction," in *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), xiii.

²John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (New

simulate past circumstances in their studies, identifying not only the relevant facts but also the worldviews, values, and feelings of the persons involved. Empathy accounts for the latter in light of the former. It is most often associated with understanding others in the present; historians go one step farther and attempt an empathetic leap across time.

The relevance of vicarious experience acquired through empathy parallels the quality of a synthetic stone or an artificial limb: just as the stone or limb only demonstrates some of the traits of the original, empathetic knowledge only approximates the other's logic, opinions, and sentiments. Therefore, empathetic knowledge of another deserves scrutiny, just as any other source of knowledge. It becomes less reliable as the gap between empathizer and the other widens. The type of knowledge it provides, though, is so important that the risks are frequently outweighed. The last decade has shown the greater risks of ignoring empathy's insights.

Empathetic planners are better at designing campaigns to achieve strategic objectives. This is especially true in counterinsurgencies, which involve more overtly political dynamics down to the tactical level. Lawrence Freedman makes this factor the essential difference between "regular wars, in which combat is separated from civil society, [and] irregular wars, in which combat is integrated with civil society."³ While wars of all kinds obviously have a political dimension, Freedman's distinction reflects a scale ranging from regular wars requiring the least political effort by the armed forces to irregular wars requiring the most. Counterinsurgencies are difficult precisely because combat does not play the decisive role seen in conventional conflict. A victory in a counterinsurgency hinges on the cooperation of a populace and its political, economic, and social elites. Thus, experts emphasize the need to win hearts and minds.

York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 9.

³Lawrence Freedman, *The Transformation of Strategic Affairs* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 8.

Empathy's relevance stems from its unique contribution to understanding those hearts and minds with an eye to designing a campaign that influences them.

Freedman offers an important warning about hearts and minds: they may disagree.⁴ One's heartfelt convictions do not always match one's mental calculations. Furthermore, the weight given to either component varies across cultures and even more across individuals. Cultures foster different ways of reconciling this tension, which becomes a vital part of cultural knowledge for a counterinsurgent.⁵ This tension between hearts and minds makes empathy a uniquely valuable method of comprehension, given its synthesis of cognitive and affective influences. An empathetic understanding of a population will not only reveal what sways the hearts and minds of individuals, but also what pits their hearts and minds against each other or what harmonizes them.

This monograph proceeds by first defining the term "empathy" and addressing some of its implications. As demonstrated in the following section, empathy plays a vital role in critical thinking by accounting for other perspectives. It helps planners to avoid certain logical fallacies, even though it can make them more susceptible to others. The third section reviews the connections of empathy to theory. The concept relates in somewhat surprising ways to insights from systems theory and general military theory, and in more obvious ways to counterinsurgency theory. The fourth section reviews military doctrine's scant attention to empathy, isolated to leadership, advising, and counterinsurgency manuals. Doctrinal principles concerning intelligence, information operations, and planning readily connect with empathy, but it is left implicit. The fifth section is devoted specifically to empathy's relevance in the Army Design Methodology. Empathy greatly improves one's ability to understand the operational environment,

⁴Ibid., 84.

⁵In U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, "reasoning styles" is listed as one of many variations across cultures (Fort Benning: U.S. Army Infantry School, 2009), 1-19.

envision a desired end state, craft persuasive narratives, and develop meaningful assessments. Finally, the sixth section highlights various reasons that military culture is empathy-averse. Some of the culture's features, like an emphasis on uniformity, compliance, and short-term results, impede empathetic thinking. The features endure partly because they reflect the dominant organizational culture of American society. American military culture also tends to have an overly tactical and lethal focus that leaves little space for valuing empathy, let alone practicing it. The general confusion about the concept and its difficult application round out the explanation for its rare appearance.

Empathy: What It Is and What It Does

Professor Amy Coplan defines empathy as “a complex imaginative process in which an observer simulates another person's situated psychological states while maintaining clear self-other differentiation.”⁶ The words are carefully chosen. Coplan intends “complex” to indicate both the cognitive and emotive aspects of empathizing with another. It is neither merely an intellectual pursuit nor merely some emotional appeal. “Imaginative” refers to the creative work in taking on another's situation, accounting for immediate facts at the surface and deeper influences of culture, worldview, values, and commitments. Finally, “simulates” is key for two reasons. First, empathy is an attempt to recreate another's perspective, not injecting one's own. Second, “simulates” implies the limits of empathy – one person will be able to imagine being another person only so well.

Empathy differs from sympathy or compassion in that it is not a “feeling for” another, but an understanding of another. Coplan establishes three essential components of empathy: affective

⁶Amy Coplan, “Understanding Empathy: Its Features and Effects,” in *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, 5.

matching, other-oriented perspective taking, and self-other differentiation.⁷ The first component emphasizes matching the emotion of another, neither adopting it as one's own nor discarding it as irrelevant. For example, a psychologist may better understand a client if she imagines that client's difficult situation, including the emotional turmoil involved. However, the psychologist gains no understanding of the client if she exhibits the same emotions, which may actually hinder further understanding and therapeutic counsel. Affective matching warns against this "emotional contagion," keeping the emotions vicarious instead of personal.⁸ On the other hand, incorporating the affective state remains important to comprehend fully the client's situation; if the psychologist focused merely on the facts of the situation, she would remain blind to the significant effect of emotions on the client's experience and reasoning. Affective matching refers to striking this balance.

The second component, other-oriented perspective taking, addresses a problem with the common notion of empathy as "putting oneself in another's shoes." While this phrase gets the ball rolling, it also sets a slightly wrong path. Empathy does involve imagining another's circumstances; but imagining *oneself* in those circumstances may not accurately reflect the thoughts and convictions of the other person. Self-oriented perspective taking only approximates empathy when "there is a great deal of overlap between self and other or where the situation is the type that would lead to a fairly universal response."⁹ Putting oneself in another's shoes risks the error of self-oriented perspective taking when there is not sufficient overlap. Philosophers and psychologists refer to the more accurate process as other-oriented perspective taking. Neuroscientists have recently underscored this distinction by showing that different parts of the

⁷Coplan, "Understanding Empathy," 6.

⁸Peter Goldie, *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 195.

⁹Coplan, "Understanding Empathy," 9.

brain engage when taking on a self- vs. other-oriented perspective.¹⁰ The part of the brain associated with the latter is presumed to “quarantine our own preferences, values, and beliefs.”¹¹ Empathy thus involves suspending value judgments in order to secure the knowledge of the other’s perspective. It does not demand that the empathizer *agree* with the other, but only that the empathizer *understand* the other.

Many conflate these two terms. Among other things, this conflation lies at the heart of cultural tensions involving the conflict of different value sets. A person might neglect empathy because he assumes empathizing with another requires agreeing with that other’s opinions. It is an inaccurate concern. Empathy merely demands that the person understand the other’s position. Even this modest requirement challenges some because it grants the other an inconvenient level of rationality and respect; it is always easier to disregard the other’s position. This aspect of empathy becomes less difficult as one recognizes the possibility for different conclusions from the same facts, or differing priorities that are equally plausible.

Other-oriented perspective taking ensures the empathizer does not project his own worldview onto the other’s circumstances. The third component, self-other differentiation, guards against the opposite extreme of the empathizer adopting the other’s worldview as his own.¹² This error is similar to emotional contagion, but involves not just the other’s emotions but also his opinions, commitments, biases, and values. In the words of Leonard Wong and his co-authors, “Cross-cultural savvy implies that an officer can see perspectives outside his or her own

¹⁰Claus Lamm, C. Daniel Batson, and Jean Decety, “The Neural Substrate of Human Empathy: Effects of Perspective Taking and Cognitive Appraisal,” *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 19, no. 1: 42-58, http://www.researchgate.net/publication/6586056_The_neural_substrate_of_human_empathy_effects_of_perspective-taking_and_cognitive_appraisal/file/d912f5024f4eaf22dd.pdf (accessed 10 December 2012).

¹¹Coplan, “Understanding Empathy,” 15.

¹²Coplan, “Understanding Empathy,” 16.

boundaries. It does not imply, however, that the officer abandons the Army or U.S. culture in pursuit of a relativistic worldview.”¹³ Instead of rejecting an understanding of another because he thinks it requires agreement, a person attempting to empathize without self-other differentiation dashes past understanding and blindly embraces agreement. Many people struggle to acknowledge their own fallibility and limits of perspective; this feature of empathy warns that some struggle to recognize the other’s fallibility and limits.

As defined with these three components, empathy serves as another source of knowledge. This is its key benefit to the operational planner. Empathy may also foster influence or popularity, which contribute to the development and employment of soft power. As psychologist Dacher Keltner points out, “Years of research suggest that empathy and social intelligence are vastly more important to acquiring and exercising power than are force, deception, or terror.”¹⁴ For operational planning, however, empathy most directly serves as a tool for understanding various actors within the environment, especially their intangible motivations and their ideas about power, legitimacy, acceptable risk, time horizons, and ties to other actors.¹⁵

Besides knowledge of another, empathy helps improve self-knowledge. It “enables us to...understand ourselves as others experience us.”¹⁶ This view of oneself helps explain empathy’s role in good leadership or good rapport building; for this same reason, it also benefits

¹³Leonard Wong, Stephen Gerras, William Kidd, Robert Pricone, and Richard Swengros, “Strategic Leadership Competencies,” (Monograph, Strategic Studies Institute, September 2003), 7, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=382> (accessed 3 November 2012).

¹⁴Dacher Keltner, “The Power Paradox,” *Greater Good* 4, no. 3 (Winter 2007-08), http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/power_paradox/ (accessed 19 November 2012).

¹⁵This list reflects the five political dynamics identified by Alan C. Lamborn in “Theory and the Politics in World Politics,” *International Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (June 1997): 187-214.

¹⁶Coplan and Goldie, “Introduction,” xxxix.

operational planning. Planners who remain blind to how a population experiences American units in an area of operations cannot design an effective counterinsurgency campaign. Overcoming this blindness is often more difficult for a planner than for a leader with his troops or an advisor with his counterparts. The planner functions two or three levels removed from the population, but the leader or advisor engages subordinates or counterparts every day. The planner's empathetic imagination must make a greater leap than the leader or advisor.

Perhaps what makes empathy unique as a source of knowledge is that it risks changing the empathizer; it is not as "safe" as a hard science notion of merely collecting observations and drawing conclusions. Empathy risks something like the inverse of observer bias in science: instead of the observer changing the thing he is trying to observe, the observer may change as a consequence of the observation process. Because empathy has an emotional component, the empathizer may end up sympathizing with the other and changing his opinion on current goals or corresponding strategies. Alan Deutschman notes that humans most often change when compelled by emotion.¹⁷ Military personnel, in particular, are wary of dissent from higher goals or strategies, and therefore more cautious about potentially identifying with a local population. In the end, empathy may result in sympathy, but it is not automatic; nor is sympathy necessarily problematic for military personnel. It is just as possible for empathy to result in less sympathy, since one might be more instead of less critical after imagining the other's circumstances.

Regardless, empathy deserves greater attention for the insights it alone can provide. It offers knowledge "no third-person form of scientific understanding can: understanding of another person from the 'inside.'"¹⁸ Cultural anthropologists call this inside view an *emic* understanding, illuminating the affective state driving behavior. In contrast, anthropologists refer to the third-

¹⁷Alan Deutschman, "Change or Die," *Fast Company*, 1 May 2005, <http://www.fastcompany.com/52717/change-or-die> (accessed 14 November 2012).

¹⁸Coplan, "Understanding Empathy," 18.

person view as an *etic* understanding, which involves only observable behavior itself, since that is generally all that an outsider can access.¹⁹ The natural sciences aim solely for an *etic* understanding of their inanimate subjects; there is no sense in a chemist seeking an *emic* understanding of molecules.²⁰ Subjects of natural science lend themselves to explanation through causal relationships derived from observable behavior. When accurate, these explanations offer a great amount of certainty and predictive power. In the human sciences, on the other hand, such as psychology, anthropology, and history, practitioners seek greater understanding of “the meaning of actions,” the impetus behind decisions, which yields less certainty and predictability.²¹ Unlike the chemist, the psychologist and anthropologist study “molecules with minds of their own.”²² Empathy is inherent to the practice of the human sciences since they aim for this “inside” knowledge instead of the more ambitious goal of causal principles, which human nature persistently (almost spitefully) defies.

Military professionals have often approached war as natural scientists, treating their subject as inert and requiring only a sufficient level of *etic* understanding to achieve desired results. The most sensible theorists, however, account for war’s human dimension. As one example, Carl von Clausewitz states, the “essential difference is that war is not an exercise of the will directed at inanimate matter . . . [It] is clear that continual striving after laws analogous to those appropriate to the realm of inanimate matter was bound to lead to one mistake after

¹⁹Robert H. Lavenda and Emily A. Schultz, *Core Concepts in Cultural Anthropology*, 3rd ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2007), 43.

²⁰An exception in the natural sciences might be zoology, where an *emic* understanding of primates or other higher-functioning animals makes some sense.

²¹Coplan and Goldie, “Introduction,” xv-xvi.

²²Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*, 111.

another.”²³ An etic understanding of war is necessary since it does involve inanimate elements like terrain, weather, and weapon ranges; but this scientific understanding is insufficient by itself. Especially with a counterinsurgency, operational artists require an emic understanding to plan a successful campaign that accommodates the human element. Empathy provides that emic understanding, which prepares operational planners to avoid unreasonable assumptions and logical fallacies, more accurately anticipate reactions to events, and recommend policies more likely to gain traction with the local populace.

EMPATHY’S CONTRIBUTION TO CRITICAL THINKING

An analysis of context based solely on observable facts or data is likely to be misinterpreted, quite badly, by the onlooker.

– Everett Dolman, *Pure Strategy*

This section describes empathy’s role in everyday critical thinking, especially in accounting for another person’s affective state – his moods, feelings, and convictions. It identifies some logical fallacies that empathy helps to avoid, and it warns of other fallacies that empathy might encourage. It then shows how empathy helps to identify unknown assumptions.

A practical result of empathy is better critical thinking. One reason is the view that empathy provides “from the inside” of another person’s circumstances. If a person empathizes correctly – in other words, meets Coplan’s three components of empathy – he challenges his own perspective in the process of considering another’s. To the extent that the other perspective opposes his own, the empathetic person establishes a thesis and antithesis in his own mind, setting the conditions for a synthesis of perspectives. Thus, empathy promotes a dialectical thought process.

²³Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 149.

This consideration of another's viewpoint also helps make a person more conscious of his own reasoning. In his advice to intelligence analysts, Richards Heuer states that they "should think about *how* they make judgments and reach conclusions, not just about the judgments and conclusions themselves."²⁴ Gaining this perspective helps a person to unearth his own mental models that usually remain subconscious.²⁵ He can then decide if they are appropriate, or at least account for them in his analysis of information. The process of empathy is a powerful way to gain this perspective on one's own thought process.

Empathy helps critical thinking because it accounts for the affective influences of the other person – his moods, feelings, and convictions. These intangible elements shape most any human decision. Knowing another person's factual circumstances often gives very little indication of that person's future behavior. For example, if a person receives a gun as a gift, there is no way to predict if he will use it without knowing something about his preferences or values. The fact of his ownership is not enough. His affective state becomes even more important when trying to anticipate *how* he will use it. Perhaps he will save the weapon solely for self-defense because he is afraid of guns, in which case it may rust under his bed before ever being discharged. Perhaps he likes guns and wants to use it, but feels he can never justify time away from his young children to enjoy it. Perhaps his affective state, if fully known, would spark fear among others about how he might misuse it.

Often, when a person does not know the affective state of another, he simply defaults to his own. One person likes to hunt; therefore, he purchases a gun for his friend, assuming his

²⁴Richards J. Heuer, Jr., *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis* (Washington DC: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1999), 31, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/psychology-of-intelligence-analysis/index.html> (accessed 11 February 2013).

²⁵Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: the Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, rev. ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 166.

friend will enjoy the firearm. However, if this person approaches his friend empathetically, he will not jump to such conclusions. He will suspend judgment until he thinks through his friend's affective state. If he does not want to reveal his gift idea, he must imagine himself in his friend's circumstances; or more accurately, he will imagine being his *friend* in his friend's circumstances. (He may also approach other friends to get their input, but again, if the gift is to remain a surprise, those friends will have to attempt the same imaginative leap into the person's circumstances and mindset.) From that vantage point, the empathizer can make a reasonable decision about purchasing the gun. Empathy helps this person think more clearly about deciding on a gift. This example highlights how common and subconscious empathy can be.

Empathy is easier when attempted with a shared culture and the specific knowledge stemming from a friendship. The greater the cultural distance between two people, the more difficult empathy is. The empathizer's own worldview becomes less and less useful, requiring effort that is more conscious and imaginative to account for the differences. Factual knowledge of the other person's culture (an etic understanding) is a necessary precursor, but empathy must supplement it in order to ensure the decision about a gift – or a policy, or a cooperative project, or a limited resource – will be a good one. Factual knowledge, moreover, makes empathy possible. As Coplan points out, other-oriented perspective taking “requires at least some knowledge of the target.”²⁶ Taken together, factual knowledge and empathy result in better understanding of another and therefore better critical thinking.

Recent literature distinguishes between cultural awareness and cultural competence.²⁷ “Awareness” has begun to refer only to an etic understanding of a culture, the “pre-deployment

²⁶Coplan, “Understanding Empathy,” 13.

²⁷Brian Semelski, “Military Cross-Cultural Competence: Core Concepts and Individual Development,” U.S. Air Force Culture and Language Center, Contract Report 2007-01 (16 May 2007), <http://www.culture.af.mil/library/pdf/selmeskimay2007.pdf> (accessed 30 January 2013).

briefings, awareness training, and pocket references” that the military produces.²⁸ While a necessary starting point, this knowledge alone cannot make up for the culture gap between soldiers and a foreign population. Apart from simply being shallow, this cultural awareness still allows any ethnocentrism or other improper assumptions to remain, which leaks out in leader engagements and in campaign objectives, sparking the population’s suspicion and cynicism. Empathy removes such ethnocentrism, resulting in actual cultural competence, a genuine ability to “communicate with, relate to, and influence” someone of another culture.²⁹ Empathy is the key element that shifts one from merely being aware of another culture’s features to being “competent” in that culture.³⁰

Empathy Guards Against Some Fallacies

Empathy promotes the consideration of other perspectives and accounts for another’s affective state, which sharpens critical reasoning skills and increases the perception of one’s own thought processes. This self-knowledge can help guard against logical fallacies. Five fallacies are considered here: naïve realism, false consensus effect, mirror-imaging, confirmation bias, and the straw man fallacy.

Naïve realism is the error of assuming oneself has the singular objective stance on something. When discovering a different opinion, the naïve realist concludes that the other party is either responding to different information, is lazy or irrational, or is biased due to ideology or self-interest.³¹ In the case of simply different information, the naïve realist further anticipates

²⁸Ibid., 1.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Under “Advising Principles,” FM 3-24.2 makes this same point: “Empathy leads to Cultural Competence: truly understanding other human beings and where they come from allows honest relationships to develop” (8-21).

³¹Lee Ross and Andrew Ward, “Naïve Realism: Implications for Social Conflict and

reaching full agreement once the difference is sorted out. He does not recognize the possibility of competing conclusions from the same facts. He believes his approach to be the only one possible. In Coplan's words, "we don't just fail to understand others' subjective experiences; we often assume that we do understand them, which leads to a new set of problems."³² Empathy serves as an antidote to this illogical, sometimes arrogant, error. Not only does empathy foster consideration of alternative interpretations of facts, it promotes a respect for others that makes it harder to rashly accuse someone of ideological or selfish bias.

False consensus effect is a softer version of naïve realism. While a person may not insist others are wrongheaded like the naïve realist, he may incorrectly assume a consensus when group members are merely being silent. The leader may want consensus badly enough that he is too quick to claim it, overestimating the agreement of others.³³ An empathetic understanding of the group members helps in anticipating their objections. If no one offers some expected counterpoint, the leader can find out why instead of automatically taking the silence as agreement.

Mirror-imaging involves projecting one's own worldview, priorities, or preferences onto another.³⁴ This fallacy is another term for the error of self-oriented perspective taking described in the introduction above. It most often occurs when there is a gap of information concerning that person. It may be the easiest error to fall into, given how automatically one's own preferences can fill gaps during the reasoning process. It tends to be automatic because people generally consider

Misunderstanding," Stanford Center on Conflict and Negotiation, Working Paper No. 48 (May 1995), 110-111, <http://www.mediate.com/GeoffSharp/docs/Naive%20Realism.pdf> (accessed 7 August 2012).

³²Coplan, "Understanding Empathy," 11-12.

³³"False consensus effect," Psychology Glossary, <http://www.psychology-lexicon.com/cms/glossary/glossary-f/466-false-consensus-effect.html> (accessed 7 August 2012).

³⁴Heuer, *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, 70.

their preferences to be the right ones, shared among all reasonable thinkers. In addition, substituting one's own preferences is common when under pressure to arrive at conclusions to act on (perhaps the preeminent problem of a military planner). Empathy prevents mirror-imaging to the degree that the other's perspective reigns in the empathetic process. Simulating the other's perspective depends on appropriate knowledge of that perspective and the skill of the empathizer in imagining it.

Confirmation bias is the error of favoring evidence that supports a preferred hypothesis while ignoring contrary evidence.³⁵ It can occur in the collection or the interpretation of evidence. This fallacy is a greater risk the stronger a person prefers one outcome over another. Extreme confidence can also increase the risk, since the person will tend to ignore his own fallibility. John Stuart Mill has this overly confident person in mind when he warns:

[W]hile everyone well knows himself to be fallible, few think it necessary to take any precautions against their own fallibility, or admit the supposition that any opinion, of which they feel very certain, may be one of the examples of the error to which they acknowledge themselves to be liable.³⁶

Empathy helps a person operationalize Mill's advice, shifting the recognition of one's own fallibility from merely an ethereal concept to a practical, concrete reality. Empathizing with others invariably produces claims that contradict one's own; that same empathy forces the contrary claim to be carefully considered instead of hastily dismissed. An empathetic person can entertain contrary evidence to a hypothesis more readily than someone indifferent to other opinions, which makes him more objective with the evidence. He also can better imagine

³⁵Raymond Nickerson, "Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises," *Review of General Psychology* 2, no. 2 (1998): 175-220, <http://psy2.ucsd.edu/~mckenzie/nickersonConfirmationBias.pdf> (accessed 12 February 2013).

³⁶John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 2, <http://www.constitution.org/jsm/liberty.htm> (accessed 12 February 2013).

alternative interpretations of that evidence. He may remain susceptible to a degree of confirmation bias since he remains tethered to his own preferences, but the risk will be far less.

The straw man fallacy entails attacking a contrived and weak version of an argument instead of the actual version someone offers.³⁷ A person may target a weak version because of a misunderstanding of the real argument. On the other hand, he might choose a weak version precisely because it is easier to attack. If the relevant audience does not perceive the difference between the straw man and the original argument, the easier attack may win the debate, despite failing to address the merits of the original.

Empathy helps reduce both the accidental and purposeful occurrences of the straw man fallacy. Misunderstanding another's argument is harder to do if empathizing with him; the nature of empathy is simulating the other person's point of view. It is also harder to knowingly misrepresent the other's argument while empathizing with him. First, empathy "traps" a person into sensing the strength of the other's argument; again, this is empathy's essence. If the empathizer still does not *agree*, he must examine his own rationale because he at least *understands*. His only other option is blind stubbornness, which risks his self-respect and puts winning the debate at risk. Blind stubbornness rarely wins over the audience to a debate. Second, empathy makes a straw man fallacy less likely because of the respect it promotes for the other person. It is more difficult to cheat in a debate against an opponent one respects. Third, a person may recognize empathy's instrumental value in the debate. Empathy improves his own counterargument since it helps to ensure that he contends with the strongest form of the other's argument. Thus, he will avoid the straw man fallacy simply to offer the best argument possible, equipped with empathy.

³⁷University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies, *Red Team Handbook* (Fort Leavenworth: University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies, 2012), 207.

Empathy Encourages Some Fallacies

While empathy helps to avoid the five fallacies above (and probably others), it increases the risk of some fallacies, including over-identification, over-rapport, naïve fallibility, and hasty generalization. Except for over-rapport, these errors involve the empathizer neglecting a component of empathy: affective matching, other-oriented perspective taking, or self-other differentiation. Technically, then, it is not empathy itself that fosters these fallacies, but an incomplete attempt at the empathetic process. Nonetheless, empathy's effects on critical thinking include these possible missteps.

Over-identification is traditionally a concern of anthropologists or psychologists in which an observer immerses himself so much in the subject's experience that he cannot distinguish it from his own or cannot objectively evaluate it.³⁸ "Going native" is the colloquial label, though this may refer to identifying with another culture or worldview rather than a specific person. It might be considered an emic understanding unchecked by an etic understanding. The "inside" knowledge, especially of the subject's affective state, dominates the observer's view and causes a loss of analytical ability. In the empathetic process, over-identification becomes likely when affective matching is taken too far, resulting in the "emotional contagion" described earlier. Over-identification may also occur with too little self-other differentiation. While it is a professional concern of social scientists, it is a cognitive mistake to avoid in any instance of empathy with another.

A similar concern to over-identification is over-rapport, in which a "researcher may be so closely related to the observed that his investigations are impeded."³⁹ Unlike over-identification,

³⁸Kathleen DeWalt and Billie DeWalt, *Participant-Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, Maryland: AltaMira Press, 2011), 6, 22.

³⁹S.M. Miller, "The Participant-Observers and 'Over-Rapport,'" *American Sociological Review* 17, no. 1 (February 1952): 98.

the observer retains his objectivity, but his freedom of inquiry becomes restricted. The same rapport that granted him access to some aspects of the subject's circumstances or beliefs may also prevent him from questioning other aspects that are more sensitive or controversial. Rapport is a common byproduct of empathy; therefore, an empathizer should be aware of this odd possibility of having too much of it. The inability to foster rapport is a more common problem, but over-rapport also hinders one's ability to learn about an individual or a group.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the risk of over-rapport increases with the empathizer's success, contrary to these other fallacies that occur only when he is unsuccessful in one of the components.

Naïve fallibility is the opposite of naïve realism, discussed above. Instead of assuming oneself is singularly right, the naïve fallibilist assumes he always has the faulty opinion about something, deferring too much to the opinions of others.⁴¹ Empathy risks this error because the empathizer suspends judgment in order to understand another's perspective. Instead of reengaging his own judgment to see if he agrees with that perspective, he simply adopts the other's opinion as his own. It is a failure in self-other differentiation and is more likely if the empathizer lacks confidence. It can also stem from a strong desire to avoid conflict, accepting the other's opinion in order to maintain the peace.

Naïve fallibility can result in a kind of false consensus effect, but instead of the leader prematurely claiming consensus, the participants are at fault for remaining silent. Jerry Harvey

⁴⁰Ibid., 98.

⁴¹The term "naïve fallibility" is my own. The closest fallacy found in research is the worse-than-average effect, which is the tendency of some persons who are poor at a given task to underestimate their performance of that task in relation to others (despite being poor, they may yet perform the task better than others). Naïve fallibility refers to a more general predisposition toward another's superior reasoning, regardless of one's own reasoning ability. For the worse-than-average effect, see Don Moore, "Not so Above Average after All: When People Believe They are Worse than Average and its Implications for Theories of Bias in Social Comparison," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 102 (January 2007): 42-58.

illustrates this type of false consensus with the “Abilene Paradox.”⁴² In Harvey’s scenario, his father-in-law suggests they pause their game of dominoes and drive to Abilene an hour away for dinner. Harvey does not want to do it, but his wife’s quick “okay” makes him change his vote. His mother-in-law claims she has not been to Abilene in a long time, which completes the poll. It was a miserably hot summer drive (the vehicle had no air conditioning) for a disappointing meal. Upon their return, Harvey’s mother-in-law admits that she actually would have preferred to spend the evening at home. To their surprise, everyone shares the same sentiment – even the father-in-law, who had simply suggested the trip out of a concern that the others might be bored. Harvey summarizes, “Here we were, four reasonably sensible people who, of our own volition, had just taken a 106-mile trip across a godforsaken desert in a furnace-like temperature through a cloud-like dust storm to eat unpalatable food at a hole-in-the-wall cafeteria in Abilene, when none of us had really wanted to go.”⁴³ To the extent that empathy fosters naïve fallibility, the Abilene Paradox becomes more possible.

With the fallacy of a hasty generalization, the insights about one individual or subgroup are wrongly applied to the larger group.⁴⁴ Empathy does not automatically entail this error, but the empathizer may be quicker to fall into it after gaining an inside perspective of one portion of a group. Empathy can be difficult enough to accomplish that it is tempting to generalize instead of repeating the process with other members of a group. Essentially, this fallacy occurs when taking an other-oriented perspective with too few “others” of the same overall group. The empathizer may commit this error accidentally; he may not be aware of distinctions within the group.

⁴²The following is a summary of Harvey’s introductory story in “The Abilene Paradox: the Management of Agreement,” *Organizational Dynamics* (Summer 1988), 17-43, <http://www.xecu.net/schaller/management/abilene.pdf> (accessed 1 November 2012).

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ronald Munson and Andrew Black, *The Elements of Reasoning*, 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2007), 141.

Ironically, empathy itself may help prevent this error as well: empathizing with a group member can reveal those distinctions within the group that the observer originally did not see.

Empathy Reveals Assumptions

Assumptions are both vital and dangerous to critical thinking. Any reasoning that extends into the future, especially planning at the organizational level, requires them. They serve planning as pitons serve mountain climbing. A climber prefers naturally occurring footholds and handholds, but they are not always available. Just as the climber emplaces pitons to continue his progress up a cliff, any thinking human must periodically “emplace” assumptions to continue reasoning. These “mental pitons” may serve him well, but they become deceptive traps if not tested to ensure they remain firmly anchored. Arguments plummet if placed on faulty assumptions. Therefore, the “more in touch an individual is with his assumptions, the more effective a critical thinker he will be.”⁴⁵ Empathy makes assumptions more visible, and it proves a particularly useful tool when dealing with flawed but pervasive assumptions like ethnocentrism.

Empathy helps to reveal assumptions by simulating a view from “the outside” of one’s argument. Every time a person considers his audience – writing, speaking, filming, performing, or even planning for a group – he is attempting some degree of empathy. Among other things, the person is trying to identify his assumptions and anticipate how the audience will process them. If he empathizes well, he will sense when the “mental piton” is either shaky (doubted by the audience) or out of reach (beyond the audience’s knowledge base or reasoning skill).

The most dangerous assumptions are those that remain unknown. One reason is that both the empathizer and the audience may share the same deep assumptions, so the empathetic attempt reveals no gap between the material and the audience’s worldview. These large-scale assumptions

⁴⁵Stephen Gerras, “Thinking Critically about Critical Thinking: a Fundamental Guide for Strategic Leaders” (Monograph, U.S. Army War College, 2006), 10.

include social, economic, religious, and philosophical perspectives, and together they help form the cultures of nations, organizations, and other large groups. When faced with someone outside of a culture's influence, the instinctive reaction is not empathy and its consideration of the other perspective, but criticism. The culture's large-scale assumptions have often endured scrutiny. Leaders have endorsed them. Members of the culture consider them natural footholds and handholds rather than deeply embedded mental pitons. The outsider's confusion, stemming from a worldview with different mental pitons, is more readily attributed to a flaw of the outsider than differing assumptions. It takes a lot of empathy to overcome this culture gap and expose these assumptions.

The more common reaction is some form of ethnocentrism, "the universal human tendency to view one's own way of life as natural and as naturally better than other, different ways of life."⁴⁶ At its heart, ethnocentrism is a deeply engrained habit of assumption. Empathy helps to remove ethnocentric moments in reasoning and replace them with something more accurate. Simulating the other's perspective can highlight common ground between the differing worldviews, or at least clarify the difference to facilitate communication and perhaps compromise. As a practical matter, military planners in a counterinsurgency are often more susceptible to ethnocentric reasoning because their work does not always involve interactions with the population.⁴⁷ Without having to face the different culture, the ethnocentric assumptions may remain unchallenged.

Ethnocentrism becomes a bigger problem for a counterinsurgency when it persists despite such interaction. Brian Linn describes U.S. forces in the Philippines in 1900:

⁴⁶Lavenda and Schultz, *Core Concepts in Cultural Anthropology*, 21.

⁴⁷Steve Smith, interview by author, Information Operations Proponent Office, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 3 December 2012.

Lacking any empathy for indigenous traditions and customs, Americans interpreted all events in a narrow ethnocentric framework. Filipino devoutness was dismissed as superstitions, Filipino sports were banned as barbaric, Filipino emphasis on family connections was slighted in the interest of efficiency, and Filipino politeness and courtesy, manifest often in the desire to put information in the best possible light, was interpreted as dishonesty or shiftiness.⁴⁸

This passage highlights an enduring assumption of something being wrong just because it is different. Oddly, this counterinsurgency succeeded despite the friction with the local population; part of Linn's argument is that poor intelligence collection and analysis resulting from this ethnocentric bias greatly hindered the campaign. Furthermore, another historian notes "failure to trust the natives and the unwillingness to work with what [Major General] Otis called religious fanatics was the basic American problem."⁴⁹ In certain military districts, a more empathetic approach overcame these erroneous and hidden assumptions.⁵⁰ These successes combined with geographic isolation, strife among the insurgents, and American adaptation to shift the outcome in America's favor.⁵¹

From tactical command to operational art, critical thinking is obviously indispensable. What is less recognized is that empathy improves it. Too often, leaders and planners see empathy as a hindrance to an objective analysis because it involves emotions. They also misunderstand empathy as simply a synonym for sympathy. However, empathy actually promotes objective analysis through greater understanding of other actors and greater consideration of alternative

⁴⁸Brian M. Linn, "Intelligence and Low-intensity Conflict in the Philippine War, 1899–1902," *Intelligence and National Security* 6, no. 1 (January 1991): 94–95.

⁴⁹Robert Ramsey, *Savage Wars of Peace: Case Studies of Pacification in the Philippines, 1900-1902*, The Long War Series: Occasional Paper 24 (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2007), 119.

⁵⁰On a strategic level, a more empathetic approach may have resulted in no occupation of the Philippines at all, with the U.S. endorsing its independence.

⁵¹Ramsey, *Savage Wars of Peace*, 117-122.

perspectives, as explained in this section. It helps to identify and remove cognitive biases and unseen assumptions.

THEORETICAL TIES TO EMPATHY

We had been hopelessly labouring to plough waste lands; to make nationality grow in a place full of the certainty of God... Among the tribes our creed could be only like the desert grass – a beautiful swift seeming of spring; which, after a day's heat, fell dusty.
– T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*

This section traces empathy's ties through systems theory, classic military theory, and counterinsurgency theory. It is not a comprehensive review of any of these areas, but a brief look at empathy's relevance to each. Empathy promotes the holistic thinking of systems theory, underlies John Boyd's step of orientation in his famous OODA loop, connects with Clausewitz's appreciation of the human dimension of war, and operationalizes David Galula's advice on defeating an insurgency.

In systems theory, seeing the whole is what matters. The components of a system in isolation are not as important as their interactions.⁵² Peter Senge claims that the building blocks of systems thinking are reinforcing feedback, balancing feedback, and delays, which stem from “the reciprocal flow of influence” between system components.⁵³ When the components are human, the feedback depends on their choices. As Everett Dolman highlights, the “difference between mechanical and social feedback systems is, of course, the presence of human judgment in the ‘chain of feedback.’”⁵⁴ Empathy illuminates this human judgment. It helps to comprehend these human feedback loops and anticipate their strength. Effectively influencing a system requires accurately depicting feedback as balancing or reinforcing. This accuracy is not always easy,

⁵²Yaneer Bar-yam, *Making Things Work* (Cambridge, MA: Knowledge Press, 2004), 24.

⁵³Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 79, 74-75.

⁵⁴Everett Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Principle in the Space and Information Age* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 123-124.

especially with human systems. Furthermore, these feedback loops can sometimes switch between balance and reinforcement. Empathy offers a chance to predict what conditions might generate such changes in the system.

Empathy provides this insight because it is a synthetic mode of understanding, a view of another that combines his circumstances and his worldview. Attempting to examine only one or the other risks a reductionist error. A person cannot be understood by examining solely his situation or his psychological state. The person is a synthetic whole that is more than the sum of those parts. The synthesis of these components provides the only realistic attempt at gauging the human will.

Even more, a social group is greater than the sum of its members. In military circles, this reductionist error is most often seen in examining a group's circumstances but neglecting its mental and emotional influences, summarized as its culture. Instead of learning about the group's worldview, military planners tend to insert their own (the mirror-imaging fallacy). Using the war on terror as an example in applying systems theory, Senge argues that,

any real progress will surely hinge on much deeper insight into how people of the region themselves (including those who are potential recruits or support terrorism) perceive security and their own genuine aspirations for progress and development. Simply imposing an external view of progress, especially one promulgated by a party seen to be an aggressor in the conflict, cannot reduce perceived threats.⁵⁵

The error of looking at facts alone and inserting one's own cultural worldview is the main reason the Army has paid so much attention to culture in the last decade. Understanding the sociocultural system of the local populace in Iraq or Afghanistan does not come from merely tangible facts of the system. It also requires comprehending the intangible worldviews that motivate the behavior observed. "The culture is the cement that integrates the parts into a

⁵⁵Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 72-73.

cohesive whole.”⁵⁶ Only when the “molecules” of the system are recognized to have minds do the balancing and reinforcing feedback loops begin to make sense.⁵⁷ One accesses that intangible worldview through empathy. Empathy is the mechanism to employ the most sensitive measuring device – the mind – to the most complex subject: other minds comprising a sociocultural system.

The works of John Boyd offer an important bridge from systems theory to military theory. His OODA loop (Observation, Orientation, Decision, and Action) began as an appreciation of a pilot and aircraft acting as a single system in an aerial dogfight.⁵⁸ He expanded this view up to the level of grand strategy, examining nation-states as systems. Regardless of echelon, Boyd specified that orientation is the *schwerpunkt*, or the main focus, of the OODA construct. Orientation governs how one observes, decides, and acts.⁵⁹ Further, he lists “empathies” in a list of aspects of orientation, arguing that “we must be able to examine the world from a number of perspectives so that we can generate mental images or impressions that correspond to that world.”⁶⁰ Boyd makes empathy a required element for critical thinking: “Without a many-sided implicit cross-referencing process of projection, empathy, correlation, and rejection...we cannot even do analysis and synthesis.”⁶¹ For Boyd's orientation step, empathy is mandatory.

⁵⁶Jamshid Gharajedaghi, *Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity*, 2nd ed. (London: Elsevier, 2006), 13.

⁵⁷The molecule metaphor is from Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*, 111.

⁵⁸Osinga, Frans P.B. *Science, Strategy and War: The Strategic Theory of John Boyd* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 20.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 84.

⁶⁰John R. Boyd, “Strategic Game of ? and ?” ed. Chet Richards and Chuck Spinney, *Defense and the National Interest* (June 2006), http://www.dnipogo.org/boyd/strategic_game.pdf (accessed 28 February 2013).

⁶¹John R. Boyd, “The Essence of Winning and Losing,” ed. Chet Richards and Chuck Spinney, *Defense and the National Interest* (August 2010), <http://pogoarchives.org/m/dni/>

Empathy is strongly implied in other concepts Boyd developed. To achieve Boyd's "snowmobile" epiphany, for example, one must take on multiple perspectives to make better sense of a situation.⁶² In another presentation, Boyd prefers the terms "leadership and appreciation" over "command and control."⁶³ To appreciate a system, Boyd suggests that one must not interact or interfere with it, but only discern its nature.⁶⁴ To influence it would undermine the attempt at appreciation. In this sense, Boyd's concept of appreciation parallels the challenge of deciding on a surprise gift introduced above in the section on critical thinking. One must empathize to pick a gift that a friend views as valuable, if one does not want to simply interact with the friend to ask him. Discerning the nature of a system without interacting with it, at least a system consisting of human agents, requires the same empathetic process.⁶⁵

Lastly, empathy underlies Boyd's suggested grand strategy of drawing the "uncommitted" to one's philosophy.⁶⁶ Only an empathetic understanding reveals what might draw the "uncommitted." As the basis for this grand strategy, Boyd highlights the need to appreciate "the underlying self-interests, critical differences of opinion, internal contradictions, frictions, obsessions, etc., that we as well as the uncommitted and any potential or real

john_boyd_compendium/essence_of_winning_losing.pdf (accessed 28 February 2013).

⁶²Osinga, *Science, Strategy, and War*, 203. Boyd offered his audience a mental exercise imagining skis, handlebars, a motor, and treads from different contexts. Only after shedding the contexts is one able to discern that the parts compose a snowmobile.

⁶³John R. Boyd, "Organic Design of Command and Control," ed. Chet Richards and Chuck Spinney, *Defense and the National Interest* (February 2005), 32, http://www.dnipo.org/boyd/organic_design.pdf (accessed 1 March 2013).

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 34.

⁶⁵It may not be possible to appreciate systems absent some kind of interaction. This is the warning in anthropology, and even quantum physics, that the observer inherently affects the observed in some way. The point, though, is that Boyd's standard for noninterference requires empathy.

⁶⁶Osinga, *Science, Strategy, and War*, 183.

adversaries must contend with.”⁶⁷ Boyd focuses on appreciating the intangible cognitive and affective features in others. More remarkably, he underscores the need to recognize these features in oneself. Boyd presents a holistic approach to the complex systems of international relations, highlighting the intangible elements most resistant to scientific study, rather than neglecting them because they are difficult to gauge or predict.

Clausewitz’s enduring legacy contains the same insistence on treating the subject of war in its complex entirety. Like Boyd, Clausewitz considered the analysis of war’s parts worthwhile only as it served a synthesis concerning war as a whole phenomenon.⁶⁸ Clausewitz managed to avoid the Enlightenment groundswell toward analytical, reductionist thinking. As useful as this mode of thinking is for the subjects of natural science, Clausewitz recognized that it failed to account for the human agency at the heart of war. He portrayed war’s greater complexity with the help of two constructs: a trinity of three elements akin to magnets; and a mathematical equation involving means and will.⁶⁹

Clausewitz’s trinity consists of reason, passion, and chance. These elements are often conveyed more concretely as the government (deciding on policy), the people (providing zeal), and the military (employing means to make victory probable), but these are simply expressions of the fundamental trinity.⁷⁰ Clausewitz argued that any theory of war must maintain “a balance between these three tendencies, like an object suspended between three magnets.... A theory that ignores any one of them or seeks to fix an arbitrary relationship between them would conflict

⁶⁷John R. Boyd, “Patterns of Conflict,” ed. Chet Richards and Chuck Spinney, *Defense and the National Interest* (January 2007), 140, http://www.dnipogo.org/boyd/patterns_ppt.pdf (accessed 1 March 2013).

⁶⁸Clausewitz, *On War*, 75.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 89, 77.

⁷⁰Antulio Echevarria, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 69.

with reality to such an extent that for this reason alone it would be totally useless.”⁷¹ In other words, he emphasized a synthetic consideration of these three elements rather than an analytic approach that treats them independently, or worse, ignores one of them altogether.

Reason and passion correspond to cognitive and affective influences on the participants in war. Empathy is an attempt to understand another’s reason and passion. Empathy’s strength is in accommodating both, trying to grasp how they blend together for the person in question. To focus solely on reason is to settle for an overly mechanistic approach based on logic alone. The Enlightenment fueled this bias, and it is one way of summarizing the criticisms of Adam Heinrich Dietrich von Bulow’s overly prescriptive theory of war.⁷² At the same time, it is just as biased to focus solely on the passion that sparks war or sustains it. An army with superior military spirit cannot guarantee victory any more than one having superior logic. This bias towards passion is the biggest concern with military theorists in the line of Georg Heinrich von Berenhorst.⁷³ Both the science and the art of war matter.

Clausewitz recognized this fact, stating that the “effects of physical and psychological factors form an organic whole which, unlike a metal alloy, is inseparable by chemical processes.”⁷⁴ Clausewitz notes that means (the physical factors) are more easily measured than the will (the psychological factors), but also warns that disregarding moral values such as the will is “paltry philosophy.”⁷⁵ He expresses the relation between tangible means and intangible will as

⁷¹Ibid., 89.

⁷²Azar Gat, *A History of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 95.

⁷³Ibid., 155-156.

⁷⁴Clausewitz, *On War*, 184.

⁷⁵Clausewitz, *On War*, 77, 184. The term “moral values” refers to a variety of psychological variables and character traits, not the contemporary reference to ethics, as explained by Bernard Brodie in “A Guide to the Reading of *On War*,” *On War*, ed. Michael

a mathematical equation: one's power of resistance is the product of these "two inseparable factors."⁷⁶ The subscript "R" refers to resistance:

$$\text{Power}_R = \text{Means}_R \times \text{Will}_R$$

If the human will is a combination of the cognitive and affective influences on a person, then this equation could be changed to:

$$\text{Power}_R = \text{Means}_R \times (\text{Brain}_R \times \text{Heart}_R)$$

Or, another way of expressing these terms could be:

$$\text{Power}_R = \text{Means}_R \times (\text{Reason}_R \times \text{Passion}_R)$$

Therefore, one's power to resist is a function of one's means to resist, reason to resist, and passion to resist. Freedman's insight noted in the introduction is that one's reason and passion do not always agree.⁷⁷ This tension would reduce the overall power to resist, while their alignment would increase it. Examining an adversary, or even a population, requires evaluating both the means to resist and the will to employ those means. Empathy might be the best way to account for the intangible variable in Clausewitz's equation.

Like systems theory and classic military theory, empathy has much to contribute to counterinsurgency theory. Perhaps the biggest lesson for the U.S. Army over the last decade of counterinsurgency is the necessity of cultural understanding. It is a lesson already captured in the works of French counterinsurgency expert David Galula. However, empathy's role in achieving cultural understanding is not explicitly present.

The population is central to Galula's theory on counterinsurgency, for "in the final analysis, the exercise of political power depends on the tacit or explicit agreement of the

Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 658.

⁷⁶Clausewitz, *On War*, 77.

⁷⁷Freedman, *The Transformation of Strategic Affairs*, 84.

population or, at worst, on its submissiveness.”⁷⁸ After listing several “objective factors” worth knowing (the population’s size, demographics, etc.), Galula emphasizes that “above all, there are subjective factors.”⁷⁹ These consist of the population’s opinions of various actors, attitudes of different components of the population, and leverage that might exist due to tensions between these components. Galula’s distinction between objective and subjective factors parallels the difference between an etic and an emic understanding of a human subject. He stresses that this “political analysis is as important in counterinsurgency warfare as map study is in conventional warfare.”⁸⁰ A counterinsurgent planner will rarely be able to routinely interact with local civilians; instead, empathizing with that population becomes a way to validate this political analysis, or at the very least, to determine the weakest parts of it that most deserve confirmation.

Galula presents a strange challenge to counterinsurgency forces: “On the eve of embarking on a major effort, the counterinsurgent faces what is probably the most difficult problem of the war: He has to arm himself with a competing cause” to generate popular support.⁸¹ The insurgent usually begins with an advantage in this regard, since a rallying cause is most often what generates the insurgency in the first place. American military culture is so imbued with a strict civil-military split that this political problem is doubly difficult: the cause itself is tough to identify (especially concerning a foreign culture), but participating in such a political effort goes against the general tendency of the U.S. professional ethic. Furthermore, there is no way to identify a competing cause except through empathy. The counterinsurgent must imagine himself as a member of the population to select a cause that will appeal to that population. Without

⁷⁸David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006) 4.

⁷⁹Ibid., 70.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid., 71.

empathy, the counterinsurgent falls back on his own views of what is important, which may not match the population's interests at all.

Galula makes another point about this competing cause that connects with Clausewitz's trinity: "When looking for a countercause, the counterinsurgent is left with a narrow choice of secondary issues that appeal almost invariably to reason at a time when passion is the prime mover."⁸² Clausewitz warned that these three elements are "variable in their relation to one another."⁸³ Every situation might involve a different combination of reason, passion, and chance. When faced with circumstances where passion outweighs reason, an objectively logical agenda is useless if not buttressed with a subjectively meaningful justification. Empathetic counterinsurgents know what will be meaningful.

Even though Galula published his work in 1964, he shows an exceptional sense for the characteristics of complex sociocultural systems. Note the changing attitude of the population in this passage:

It has been asserted that a counterinsurgent confronted by a dynamic insurgent ideology is bound to meet defeat, that no amount of tactics and technique can compensate for his ideological handicap. This is not necessarily so because the population's attitude in the middle stage of the war is dictated not so much by the relative popularity and merits of the opponents as by the more primitive concern for safety. Which side gives the best protection, which one threatens the most, which one is likely to win, these are the criteria governing the population's stand.⁸⁴

The insurgent may begin violent conflict with popular ideological fervor on his side, but if the war is protracted, the population's passion can give way to more practical calculations about present and future protection. In terms of systems theory, Galula identifies that the population's feedback toward the insurgency might begin as reinforcing but over time, switch to

⁸²Ibid., 72.

⁸³Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.

⁸⁴Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 8.

balancing. Empathetic counterinsurgents can pinpoint the conditions that prompt this change, which will be some mix of logic and emotion. In Galula's passage, emotion initially reigned with the population, but this fervor eroded in the face of more reasoned concerns. An empathetic understanding of a population accounts for both motivations.

In counterinsurgencies, the power to coerce is balanced by the need to co-opt. As Galula warns, "so intricate is the interplay between the political and the military actions that they cannot be tidily separated; on the contrary, every military move has to be weighed with regard to its political effects, and vice versa."⁸⁵ Evaluating political effects requires empathy, a view from the population's perspective. While Galula never mentions empathy, it is implied by the goal of co-opting the population. With Clausewitz, empathy is particularly useful in evaluating the influence of reason and passion on human agents. Boyd explicitly identifies empathy as key to proper orientation. In systems theory, empathy helps gain a holistic view of a sociocultural system, examine feedback loops, and estimate what can change the system.

DOCTRINAL TREATMENT OF EMPATHY

Military operations are human endeavors, contests of wills characterized by continuous and mutual adaptation among all participants.

– ADRP 5-0, *The Operations Process*

Joint and Army doctrine haphazardly address empathy.⁸⁶ To be fair, successful operations already involve implicit moments of it. Furthermore, every time doctrine mentions cultural awareness, cultural understanding, cultural sensitivity, cultural competence, cultural capability, cultural acuity, or emotional intelligence, empathy is probably implied. The danger of leaving it implicit rather than explicit is in military professionals interpreting these references to mean only third-person, tangible facts of a culture instead of a first-person, simulated perspective that

⁸⁵Ibid., 5.

⁸⁶Research included only unclassified doctrine.

provides a sense of the powerful yet intangible influences on behavior. Another danger of leaving empathy implicit is simply dismissing it because it is misunderstood. Empathy deserves greater explanation to solidify and widen its application, especially in the empathetic understanding of a local population and adversaries.

As described below, only counterinsurgency, security force assistance, and leadership doctrine explicitly mention empathy. Intelligence manuals mention cultural understanding and critical thinking, both of which require empathy. Manuals on information operations insist on relevant narratives and influential messages, but neglect to mention the empathy needed to construct them. The next section will examine empathy's role in the planning doctrine, specifically the Army Design Methodology.

The counterinsurgency manuals address empathy's significance, though not with Coplan's sophisticated explanation of it. Joint Publication (JP) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, endorses empathy in all but name. It advocates the need to understand the insurgents' core grievances, to treat the population as "the critical dimension" in counterinsurgency, and to foster cultural awareness.⁸⁷ It even claims the counterinsurgent should "think like an insurgent to stay ahead of the actual insurgents' decisions and actions."⁸⁸ This effort of the imagination reflects an appreciation of empathy's potential to anticipate enemy actions and the "population's perception" of counterinsurgency operations.⁸⁹

Like JP 3-24, the Army's Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, promotes empathetic understanding, and even mentions the term: "Leaders feel the pulse of the local populace, understand their motivations, and care about what they want and need. Genuine

⁸⁷U.S. Armed Forces, Joint Publication (JP) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency Operations* (Washington, DC: Joint Staff, 2009), II-6, III-1.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, III-1.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*

compassion and empathy for the populace provide an effective weapon against insurgents.”⁹⁰ However, “compassion” and “empathy” appear so close that it might wrongly imply they are synonymous. The word “genuine” above is noteworthy. Many soldiers might fake the compassion and empathy for the sake of influencing the locals, but all too often, the locals see through the attempt.⁹¹ When soldiers settle for an etic understanding of a population and neglect an emic one, they risk this fake empathy. In a similar way, counterinsurgency planners might halfheartedly attempt an empathetic understanding of the populace when choosing campaign objectives. The insincerity invites a backlash of criticism from the people due to poor judgment with the objectives. Hollow empathy produces limited imaginations unequipped to choose meaningful objectives. Truly creative thinking requires genuine empathy.

After noting the imperative for cultural knowledge, FM 3-24 urges “commanders, planners, and small-unit leaders...to avoid imposing their ideals of normalcy on a foreign cultural problem.”⁹² The only way to act on this principle is through a process of empathy, accommodating “ideals of normalcy” as understood by the local population. This is easier if the planners can keep the requirement to *understand* the local norms distinct from some compulsion to *agree* with them. With planners in mind, Prisco Hernandez writes specifically about the norms of religion: “Even if you do not accept the tenets of a particular religion, they are real to believers. This means that a specific religion is a reality, even if not one’s own.”⁹³ Empathy captures this

⁹⁰U.S. Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Fort Leavenworth: Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate, 2006), 7-2.

⁹¹This focus on “genuine” stems from Celestino Perez, Jr., “The Embedded Morality in FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency,” *Military Review* (May-June 2009): 29. Perez states, “The manual directs Army leaders not to simply *exhibit* or *portray* compassion and empathy for people, but to *cultivate genuine* compassion and empathy for them.”

⁹²FM 3-24, 1-15.

⁹³Prisco Hernandez, “Dealing with Absolutes: Religion, the Operational Environment, and the Art of Design,” *Military Review* (November-December 2010): 31.

advice in its second and third components, other-oriented perspective taking and self-other differentiation. Like JP 3-24, the Army manual on counterinsurgency respects empathy's role, even though it only mentions it twice.⁹⁴

The Army's Field Manual 3-07.1, *Security Force Assistance*, underscores empathy's significance for the advisor of foreign security forces. Empathy is one of ten "Considerations of the Advisor" considered key to his success. The manual also lists empathy as one of many personality traits to consider when assigning military personnel as advisors. In its description of empathy, the manual acknowledges the difficulty of empathy as a concept, yet its vital role in building relationships.⁹⁵ Security force assistance is one area in which the Army has recognized empathy's relevance, largely because this individual trait has such a direct and visible effect on the advisor's success.

Leadership doctrine defines and incorporates empathy the most comprehensively. The Army's capstone leadership manual, Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 6-22, lists empathy as a character attribute.⁹⁶ Its supporting manual, Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-22, parallels Coplan's definition in describing empathy:

Army leaders show empathy when they genuinely relate to another person's situation, motives, and feelings. Empathy does not necessarily mean sympathy for another, but identification that leads to a deeper understanding. Empathy allows the leader to anticipate what others are experiencing and to try to envision how decisions or actions affect them. Leaders with a strong tendency for empathy can apply it to understand Army Civilians, Soldiers and their Families, local populations, and enemy combatants. The ability to see something from another person's point of view, to identify with, and enter

⁹⁴FM 3-24, 7-2, A-6.

⁹⁵U.S. Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-07.1, *Security Force Assistance* (Fort Leavenworth: Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate, 2009), 7-2 – 7-3.

⁹⁶U.S. Army, Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 6-22, *Army Leadership* (Fort Leavenworth: Center for Army Leadership, 2012), 5. It also briefly states on the same page, "Empathy is identifying and understanding what others think, feel and believe." ADRP 6-22 goes into more detail.

into another person's feelings and emotions, enables the Army leader to better interact with others.⁹⁷

Such a thorough explanation of empathy bodes well for the Army to better incorporate it into operations. This definition distinguishes between empathy and sympathy, and it includes local populations and enemy combatants in the list of appropriate audiences. Later in the section on empathy, ADRP 6-22 states, "Essentially, empathy produces better cultural understanding of people, missions, and operations and how they connect."⁹⁸

The earlier version of Army leadership doctrine, FM 6-22, contains a less precise concept of empathy that probably reflects the current understanding in the Army at large: "Within the larger operational environment, leader empathy may be helpful when dealing with local populations and prisoners of war. Providing the local population within an area of operations with the necessities of life often turns an initially hostile disposition into one of cooperation."⁹⁹ The only concern here is whether the term "empathy" really just refers to sympathy. There does not seem to be a focus on understanding the people, at least not beyond their basic needs to garner their cooperation. While respectable in itself and a beneficial short-term measure, this sympathy does not address long-term conditions required for the locals to resist an insurgents' influence and subsist without the counterinsurgent's provision. Sympathy's "feeling for" the vulnerable population might be a necessary first step, but empathy's "understanding of" the population's predicament, choices, and worldview enables long-term success. The expanded definition of empathy in ADRP 6-22 marks an important step forward.

⁹⁷U.S. Army, Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-22, *Army Leadership* (Fort Leavenworth: Center for Army Leadership, 2012), 3-17.

⁹⁸ADRP 6-22, 3-20.

⁹⁹U.S. Army, Field Manual (FM) 6-22: *Army Leadership* (Fort Leavenworth: Center for Army Leadership, 2006), 4-10.

Empathy's contribution to intelligence is large even though it is given little credit. JP 3-24's mandate to "think like an insurgent" clearly serves an intelligence function, as well as FM 3-24's call to understand a population's motivations. In discussing the unique intelligence requirements within counterinsurgency operations, both of these manuals underscore cultural understanding to grasp the variety of actors in the environment. Those same manuals do not explicitly mention empathy, perhaps because its role in cultural understanding remains unrecognized. Too many associate the term "cultural understanding" with only third-person knowledge absent a first-person perspective. Empathy, however, is the process that operationalizes the suggestion to "think like an insurgent." Empathy is how one puts on the appropriate cultural lenses to see what the enemy sees.

Doctrine concerning information operations may benefit the most from explicitly addressing empathy. JP 3-13, *Information Operations*, states the goal of the joint force commander is to integrate "his military actions, forces, and capabilities throughout the domains (air, land, sea, and space) of the operating environment in order to create and/or sustain desired and measurable effects on adversary leaders, forces (regular or irregular), information, information systems, and other audiences."¹⁰⁰ Creating and sustaining "measurable effects" hinges on understanding the audiences well enough to know what effects are achievable and what indicators will provide good measures of those effects. This goal of information operations is difficult because the effects are so often intangible – changing an audience's beliefs, ideas, or emotional states – yet the doctrine stresses tangible, or "measurable," effects. The best interpretation of this goal is to identify intangible effects that produce behavioral changes, and then monitor the behavior as an indication of those effects occurring. Even if indirect, it is the only realistic way to fulfill the requirement for the effects to be measurable. Choosing attainable

¹⁰⁰U.S. Armed Forces, Joint Publication (JP) 3-13: *Information Operations* (Washington DC: Joint Staff, 2006), I-1.

effects is much more likely with empathy because of the type of knowledge it imparts. Instead of peripheral third-person knowledge, empathy provides internal first-person knowledge, which is more suited to anticipate changes of beliefs, ideas, or emotions.

A second benefit of empathy to information operations is that it operationalizes strategic communication. While the term may have lost its official status, the goal it refers to remains relevant.¹⁰¹ Both JP 3-13 and FM 3-13, *Inform and Influence Activities*, define strategic communication as:

focused United States Government efforts to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of national interests, policies, and objectives by understanding and engaging key audiences through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power.¹⁰²

The key phrase of this long definition is simply “understanding and engaging key audiences,” which empathy improves through its insights of the audience’s perspective.

Essentially, strategic communication targets the fallacy of naïve realism in information operations. As the former Pentagon lead for strategic communication, Rosa Brooks, highlights, it is “less about what we have to say than it is about considering how others may interpret our words and actions.”¹⁰³ The implication is that there are alternative interpretations possible. Empathy reveals those alternatives; even more, empathy helps anticipate them. While empathy is not present in FM 3-13, the warning against naïve realism is appropriately included:

¹⁰¹In a memorandum to the combatant commands, the Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs explained “communication synchronization” will replace “strategic communication.” George Little, 28 November 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/files/fp_uploaded_documents/121206_brooksmemo.pdf (accessed 12 December 2012).

¹⁰²JP 3-13, II-5. U.S. Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-13: *Inform and Influence Activities* (Fort Leavenworth: Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate, 2013), 2-4.

¹⁰³Rosa Brooks, “Confessions of a Strategic Communicator,” *Foreign Policy* website (6 December 2012), http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/12/06/confessions_of_a_strategic_communicator (accessed 10 December 2012).

“Engagement characterized by an assumed superiority—a conviction that a message’s inherent rightness disqualifies it from audience scrutiny—fails to support the conditions necessary to discover and adopt effective communication approaches.”¹⁰⁴

Doctrine should explicitly underscore empathy in more than leadership and security force assistance. As the counterinsurgency manuals briefly state and the intelligence and information operations manuals imply, empathy is a trait that enhances operational planning. The next section explains how, especially in the conceptual planning of the Army Design Methodology.

EMPATHY’S CONTRIBUTION TO ARMY DESIGN METHODOLOGY

One might say that the physical [factors] seem little more than the wooden hilt, while the moral factors are the precious metal, the real weapon, the finely-honed blade.

– Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

The Army Design Methodology (ADM) is a means to apply “critical and creative thinking to understand, visualize, and describe unfamiliar problems and approaches to solving them.”¹⁰⁵ Military thinkers borrowed the concept of “design” from professions like architecture. The word describes an approach architects use to blend the art and science of constructing buildings into their plans. War, also, requires an artful application of its scientific aspects. As ADP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*, states, planning “is the art and science of understanding a situation, envisioning a desired future, and laying out effective ways of bringing about that future.”¹⁰⁶ Architectural design is a metaphor for military operational planners.

¹⁰⁴FM 3-13, 8-2.

¹⁰⁵U.S. Army, Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Fort Leavenworth: Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate, 2012), 7.

¹⁰⁶U.S. Army, Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Fort Leavenworth: Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate, 2011), 10.

Design has enjoyed a mixed reception in Army circles.¹⁰⁷ When properly understood, design greatly improves military planning. When misunderstood or misapplied, design interferes with crafting a suitable and timely plan. In the same way, the concept of empathy has great potential benefit and yet real risks if incorrectly applied. Like design, empathy is a way of thinking that is strange to many military professionals, but important nonetheless. It is most foreign to the conventional forces, though their missions in Iraq and Afghanistan have underscored the need for both empathetic and design-oriented thinking.

ADM is the Army's attempt to distill the insights and benefits of design into doctrine, making them readily understandable and actionable. Arguably, ADM increases in relevance as one moves from lethal to nonlethal tasks. It plays a role in appropriately applying hard power, but it plays a greater role in wielding soft power.¹⁰⁸ Imposing one's will onto an adversary requires less imagination, even if it still requires tactical innovation. These combat scenarios favor quick action; the motto is generally "don't just stand there – do something!" In contrast, the motto of ADM seems more akin to "don't just do something – stand there!" It emphasizes understanding the environment and "the perspective and world views of others," ensuring commanders and staffs have an adequate grasp of the context before acting.¹⁰⁹ Once the goal is co-opting instead of coercing an individual or group, ADM makes more sense given its focus on interactions between actors, the narratives influencing them, and the recurring need to reframe the problem at hand.

Empathy's role in planning increases with ADM's greater relevance. It contributes to most aspects of ADM, including critical thinking (explained in its own section above), creative

¹⁰⁷Wayne W. Grigsby, Jr., et al., "Integrated Planning: The Operations Process, Design, and the Military Decision Making Process," *Military Review* (January-February 2011): 28.

¹⁰⁸Joseph Nye, *The Future of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), 11.

¹⁰⁹ADRP 5-0, 2-5.

thinking, framing, narrative construction, developing an operational approach, and assessment.¹¹⁰

Empathy's connections with these areas are described below.

Creative Thinking

Creative thinking benefits from empathy's accommodation of alternative views. It mitigates the "unlimited deference" that can so easily grow on a military staff, where the commander's ideas receive favor merely because of his authority rather than their suitability to the problem.¹¹¹ If not checked, this deference can result in a tendency to go "through formal motions of 'analysis,' [in which] everyone then loses track of the fact that foregone conclusions driving recommendations were probably casual, unstudied."¹¹² The result is a list of options that are merely "shades of the anticipated."¹¹³ Empathy helps increase the number of options, their distinctiveness, and their quality by restraining automatic deference to the commander's initial impressions. It helps to prevent early assumptions from becoming "foregone conclusions." If the commander himself exercises empathy, he can prevent this unthinking deference by modeling criticism of his own ideas, by including contradictory options in his guidance for further study, and by embracing contrary opinions expressed by others.

Besides the authority of the commander, another possible impediment to creative thinking is a common worldview shared across military staffs. Creativity suffers with fewer perspectives on a problem. In recognition of this concern, the Army developed "red teams" as an additional staff element. Red teams help the commander to "explore alternative plans and

¹¹⁰ADRP 5-0, chapters 1, 2, and 5.

¹¹¹Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 2.

¹¹²Peter Fromm, Douglas Pryer, and Kevin Cutright, "The Lies We Soldiers Tell Ourselves (and the Harm these Lies Do)," unpublished essay, 13.

¹¹³*Ibid.*

operations...from the perspective of unified action partners, adversaries, and others.... They challenge assumptions and the analysis used to build the plan.”¹¹⁴ However, members of a red team generally come from the same culture as the rest of the staff. To provide any of these benefits, red teams must empathize with relevant actors to overcome their own cultural starting point. The strongest endorsement of empathy in Army planning doctrine resides in its explanation of red teams.

As implied earlier in the section on critical thinking, empathy acts as a mental red team, allowing an individual to question his own thought process by simulating another’s perspective. In this way, empathy prevents creative thinking from becoming wishful thinking, since it keeps the feasibility of one’s desires in check by accounting for other actors’ desires. Accommodating others’ preferences is less relevant when employing hard power. Perhaps the preferences of coalition partners will temper coercive tactics, but in the end, coercion inherently involves a zero-sum game where one’s preferences supersede the adversaries’ preferences. The nature of soft power, however, is aligning others’ preferences with one’s own.¹¹⁵ In other words, empathy is a “win-set aligner,” where win-sets refer to the range of acceptable outcomes of each actor.¹¹⁶ Empathy provides a commander and his staff with a better sense of the outcomes deemed acceptable by other actors in the operational environment. As Stephen Gerras notes, “The more the infantry battalion commander can put himself in the shoes of the town mayor, the greater the likelihood that his decisions will be successful from not only a U.S. standpoint, but from an Iraqi perspective as well. This congruence will enable long-term solutions and build respect and trust

¹¹⁴ADRP 5-0, 1-10.

¹¹⁵Nye, *The Future of Power*, 11.

¹¹⁶Robert D. Putnam, “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games,” *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 437.

that is absolutely critical in the contemporary operating environment.”¹¹⁷ In systems theory language, identifying overlapping win-sets helps establish an enduring new equilibrium for the system. If win-sets do not overlap, the sociocultural system will revert to either the previous undesirable equilibrium or some other unpredicted state.

In one sense, the planner uses empathy in a manner opposite of the historian. Instead of trying to address the cognitive and affective influences on decisions made in the past, a planner tries to imagine those influences applied to future circumstances. He attempts to gauge the satisfaction of future circumstances and their sustainability in light of the anticipated future system as a whole. In simulating his unit and other actors in future circumstances, he considers branches and sequels amidst possible continuities and contingencies.¹¹⁸

Successful planners already do some form of this empathetic prediction, even if subconsciously. They apply the three components of empathy to the future. Affective matching ensures the moods, feelings, and convictions are part of the imagined future in addition to tangible facts. For example, in a counternarcotic operation to reduce opium production, the point is not simply to forecast how much less opium is produced, but whether this reduction will meet the approval of leaders, spark a backlash from drug traffickers, or persuade local farmers to grow a different crop. These reactions hinge upon intangible, affective influences on those actors. Planners also attempt other-oriented perspective taking, incorporating actors’ preferences, relationships to other actors, and notions of legitimacy, acceptable risk, and time horizons, to avoid simply applying a mirror image of their own to the proposed future.¹¹⁹ Finally, self-other

¹¹⁷Gerras, “Thinking Critically about Critical Thinking,” 8.

¹¹⁸Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*, 30-31.

¹¹⁹Lamborn, “Theory and the Politics in World Politics,” 187-214.

differentiation keeps the simulated future as a separate entity for planners to objectively evaluate and present to the commander.

Empathizing into the future provides the planner a “feedforward” mechanism where he can evaluate inputs into a system “*before* output from the system occurs.”¹²⁰ Waiting for feedback can be costly in resources, missed opportunities, and unexpected impediments. Feedforward predicts output and enables adjustments to inputs before the full cost is born out. The only way to anticipate outputs in a sociocultural system is through empathy and its emic understanding of the humans in that system. Correctly anticipating human reactions is notoriously hard; only with empathy is it even feasible. Importantly, this notion of feedforward remains focused on outputs even as it prompts an adjustment to inputs. If a planner is not careful, he will fall into the trap of assessing the system only through the amount and quality of inputs instead of outputs. (Empathy’s role in avoiding such faulty assessments is further explained in the section on assessment below.)

Framing and Narratives

As defined in ADRP 5-0, framing is “the act of building mental models to help individuals understand situations and respond to events.”¹²¹ These models serve as references throughout the operations process of planning, preparation, execution, and assessment. A model consists of a description of the current operational environment, the desired environment, and the problem that stands in the way.¹²² Framing employs the vocabulary and principles of systems theory to examine the environment and actors as a complex, adaptive sociocultural system. Empathy provides insight into that human system. Specifically, empathy helps to reveal the

¹²⁰Dolman, *Pure Strategy*, 125.

¹²¹ADRP 5-0, 2-5.

¹²²*Ibid.*, 2-6.

system's tendencies, tensions, and potential. Tendencies "reflect the inclination to think or behave in a certain manner [and] identify the likely pattern of relationships between the actors without external influence." Tension is the "resistance or friction" between actors. Potential is the estimated ability for external influence on the system.¹²³ By simulating the situated psychological states of the actors, empathy helps to identify these system drivers and better understand "the root causes of conflict," which focuses the commander and staff on the fundamental problem rather than merely symptoms.¹²⁴

Framing establishes the context for military operations, and narratives help summarize the meaning that actors derive from that context. A narrative is a "story constructed to give meaning to things and events."¹²⁵ Approaching actors with empathy helps to understand their narratives. In fact, philosopher Peter Goldie provides an alternative definition for empathy anchored solely in narrative, calling it "a process or procedure by which a person centrally imagines the narrative (the thoughts, feelings, and emotions) of another person."¹²⁶ Equipped with this emic insight of actors' narratives, counterinsurgents are better able to craft compelling themes and messages as part of their own narrative, one that serves as an alternative to the insurgents' story.¹²⁷ Empathy improves one's skill in contesting another's narrative, since it ensures the strongest form of that narrative is considered, instead of merely some straw man

¹²³Ibid., 2-8, 2-9.

¹²⁴Ibid., 2-9.

¹²⁵Ibid., 2-5.

¹²⁶Goldie, *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration*, 195.

¹²⁷FM 3-24, A-7.

version of it (exactly parallel to empathy's role in avoiding the straw man fallacy in critical thinking).¹²⁸ In a battle for influence over a population, empathy takes a preeminent role.

Operational Approach

An operational approach is a set of “broad general actions” that can solve the problem of transforming the current operational environment to the desired end state.¹²⁹ It establishes the general boundaries for detailed courses of action under the Military Decision Making Process. Sometimes, a single operational approach becomes clear to the commander and staff if the framing of the environment and problem is thorough and accurate enough. However, the dynamic and complex nature of the sociocultural system often entails competing approaches with distinct risks, requiring careful consideration by the commander. Empathy helps to improve the development of these approaches, their evaluation and comparison, and the inclusion of the host nation in planning approaches.

In a counterinsurgency, the development of an operational approach benefits from commanders and staffs placing themselves in the circumstances of the population. As described earlier, empathy is a synthetic form of understanding, blending knowledge of others' circumstances (third-person knowledge) with knowledge of their psychological state (first-person knowledge). Empathy also synthesizes cognitive and affective influences to estimate that psychological state. It is vital to account for both the “head” and the “heart.” If only appreciating “head” matters, the counterinsurgent risks treating the population like an object influenced merely by physical or logical laws. This bias leads to a simplistic caricature of the population and overconfidence in anticipated effects. Conversely, if focused solely on “heart” matters, the

¹²⁸The idea of a contest of narratives comes from H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 175-192.

¹²⁹ADRP 5-0, 2-10.

counterinsurgent risks treating the population like an immature child, requiring only “a human face with a ready smile.”¹³⁰ Genuine empathy holistically accounts for both logic and emotion.

ADM’s emphasis on perspectives of all actors might challenge a third-country counterinsurgent to empathetically ask, “What would it take for me to cooperate with a foreign occupying force in my own country, patrolling my hometown? What behavior on their part would truly win my cooperation?” While this question risks the error of mirror-imaging since it involves self-oriented perspective taking, it hinges on value judgments that verge on being universal. As quoted in the introduction, Coplan points out that self-oriented perspective taking can be appropriate “when there is a great deal of overlap between self and other or where the situation is the type that would lead to a fairly universal response.”¹³¹ The moral benefit of this line of thinking is in the humanity that it bestows onto the local population. A counterinsurgent cannot ask this question without granting them the same humanity that he assumes about himself. The practical benefit, however, is just as important. In fact, it would be more accurate to say that the split between the moral benefit and the practical benefit fades once the counterinsurgent seeks to co-opt the population. As Michael Walzer argues, “In a war for ‘hearts and minds,’ rather than for land and resources, justice turns out to be a key to victory.”¹³² The moral insights from the empathetic thought experiment above fuels the practical insights about what to do.

Walzer’s comment also highlights the importance of legitimacy. Insurgents usually leverage concerns of legitimacy to undermine the standing government and rally public support; these concerns often form the defining core of the insurgency itself.¹³³ Perceptions of legitimacy

¹³⁰Freedman, *The Transformation of Strategic Affairs*, 84.

¹³¹Coplan, “Understanding Empathy,” 9.

¹³²Michael Walzer, *Arguing About War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 9.

¹³³FM 3-24, 1-26.

can push actors to abandon strict cost-benefit analyses of options, taking on greater risks and greater costs even with fewer benefits. Such moments may strike others as irrational and are therefore surprising. Empathy helps anticipate such moments since it helps to understand the actors' outlook on legitimacy.

Based on worldview, some actors may emphasize legitimacy of process while others pay more attention to legitimacy of outcomes.¹³⁴ This emphasis will directly affect an actor's reaction to a counterinsurgency campaign, and therefore, military planners should anticipate these reactions in developing an operational approach. An approach dominated by lethal or coercive action may achieve acceptable outcomes yet violate a population's concept of legitimate process. Alternatively, an approach focused on establishing transparent processes may neglect a population's greater concern for legitimate outcomes, regardless of how they are secured. JP 3-24 states, "In working to understand the problem, joint forces must determine what the population defines as effective, credible, and legitimate governance."¹³⁵ Empathetic commanders and staffs can better navigate this confusing political landscape when developing an operational approach.

Legitimacy partly determines whether an approach is both feasible and suitable. An approach failing to gain legitimacy will be increasingly hard to execute and less suitable to the insurgent problem. The population will most likely cooperate less and provide more recruits and resources to the insurgency. On the other hand, an approach that gains legitimacy will improve cooperation and isolate the insurgency. This impact of legitimacy is one more instance of the intertwining of moral and practical considerations.

In the long run, counterinsurgencies require host nation involvement and self-sufficiency. An operational approach neglecting the host nation will fail to gain legitimacy and will exceed

¹³⁴Lamborn, "Theory and the Politics of World Politics," 193.

¹³⁵JP 3-24, III-12.

U.S. domestic support for the effort.¹³⁶ Empathetic planning better incorporates the host nation by improving planning assumptions about host nation capabilities and commitments. It also encourages an assessment plan anchored to the development of host nation security forces. If possible, host nation leaders should participate in creating the operational approach and not merely remain part of the audience receiving it. As FM 3-24 states, “U.S. and HN [host nation] military commanders and the HN government together must devise the plan for attacking the insurgents’ strategy and focusing the collective effort to bolster or restore government legitimacy.”¹³⁷

To borrow a psychotherapy term, involving the host nation in constructing the operational approach will ideally result in “self-directed change”.¹³⁸ Such change may not match the priorities or methods of U.S. counterinsurgents, advisors, or political leaders. At that point, they must decide whether the host nation approach is simply different or truly detrimental. On the face of it, self-directed change, no matter what it is, meets the generic goal of host nation initiative.¹³⁹ It may, of course, contradict other criteria such as legitimacy, feasibility, or suitability, but empathetically considering the host nation’s ideas will ensure the counterinsurgents evaluate the self-directed change objectively.

If empathy results in sympathy or a degree of over-identification, there is a risk of impeding host nation involvement. A foreign counterinsurgent force may fall into the mistake of “doing for locals what they need to do for themselves,” full of good intentions but also a

¹³⁶FM 3-24, 1-27.

¹³⁷Ibid., 5-1.

¹³⁸Carl R. Rogers, “Empathic: An Unappreciated Way of Being,” *The Counseling Psychologist* 5 (1975): 2, <http://www.elementsuk.com/libraryofarticles/empathic.pdf> (accessed 5 February 2013).

¹³⁹FM 3-24, 1-26.

shortsighted perspective.¹⁴⁰ Ironically, this error can also stem from too little sympathy, in which case the foreign counterinsurgents may have no patience for fostering local expertise or initiative, especially if they wish to achieve significant progress within a short-term deployment. Regardless of the motivation, “the more prescriptive and pervasive the military contribution, the more stunted the growth of [host nation] autonomy.”¹⁴¹ A disciplined application of empathy helps to avoid this problem, since empathizing with the host nation will reveal their desire for autonomy or – just as significant – their lack of such a desire.

Assessment

Lastly, empathy improves the plan for assessment. Commanders and staffs must accurately assess progress to make further plans; furthermore, a lack of progress is one reason to reframe, which involves re-examining “design hypotheses, conclusions, and decisions that underpin the current operational approach.”¹⁴² Empathy makes assessments more outcome-based and more attuned to intangible elements of the desired outcomes, which are difficult to measure but just as important as tangible results.

Empathy keeps the focus on measures of effectiveness instead of solely on measures of performance.¹⁴³ In dealing with the confusion of the counterinsurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan, units have faced a constant temptation to assess their progress based exclusively on measures of performance. One leader of a provincial reconstruction team in Iraq reflected, “We measured the impact of our projects by their effect on us, not by their effect on the Iraqis. *Output* was the word

¹⁴⁰ Alice Butler-Smith, interview by author, 17 July 2012.

¹⁴¹ Kevin Cutright, “Soldierly Virtue: Edict is not Enough in Iraq,” *Contemporary Philosophy* 27, no. 3 (2006): 20.

¹⁴² ADRP 5-0, 2-11.

¹⁴³ ADRP 5-0, 5-2.

missing from the vocabulary of developing Iraq. Everything was measured only by what we put in - dollars spent, hours committed, people engaged...press releases written.”¹⁴⁴ An empathetic approach offers the population’s view of counterinsurgent efforts, which pushes the focus from input to output.

Another reason inputs or measures of performance can dominate assessments is their easy measurement. Gaddis criticized the “tendency to equate the importance of information with the ease of measuring it – an approach better suited to physics than to international relations.”¹⁴⁵ With the ever-present pressure of time, military planners can easily succumb to this error. A dose of empathy, however, will reduce this temptation toward easy measurement because, again, it emphasizes the local culture’s evaluation of counterinsurgency operations. An empathetic planner bases “the importance of information” on something more than “the ease of measuring it,” passing it through a filter of emic understanding.

Security force assistance is a common component of counterinsurgency operations that risks assessment by mere inputs instead of outputs. Not only are the inputs easier to measure, but they remain under the counterinsurgents’ control. The outputs of security force assistance – the measures of effectiveness – are inherently in the control of the security personnel. While their skill in providing security clearly marks the ultimate success of the counterinsurgents, it is also the estimate of progress that makes the counterinsurgents the most uncomfortable. Therefore, counterinsurgents naturally tend to assess progress by their inputs. However, when “you start to see the system from the viewpoint of people who are in very different parts of it, you become more responsible. You start to see that your prejudice, your attachment to your point of view, was

¹⁴⁴Peter Van Buren, *We Meant Well: How I Helped Lose the Battle for the Hearts and Minds of the Iraqi People* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2011), 144.

¹⁴⁵John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 82.

really a way of protecting yourself.”¹⁴⁶ Empathetic counterinsurgents move past their own discomfort and remain focused on the local population’s sense of security and attitude toward the local security forces.

In security force assistance, empathy helps to identify obstacles of will instead of merely deficiencies in skill. Military advisors can sometimes assume their counterparts share their commitment to professional conduct, and therefore focus all assessments and assistance toward improving the counterparts’ abilities. Empathetic advisors, however, can actually test this assumption and, consequently, better assess host nation forces. Empathy illuminates the will of counterparts with its view of cognitive and affective influences rather than simply observable behavior. While advisors must account for cultural differences in defining professional conduct, they can still adjust their plans and curriculum in light of this insight. The assistance provided to military personnel in Mali might be a recent example of the harm in focusing solely on skills. After a military coup in Mali, General Carter Ham admitted U.S. assistance focused almost entirely on “tactical and technical matters” without “the requisite time focusing on values, ethics and military ethos.”¹⁴⁷

As FM 3-24 notes, the overall design of the campaign “may very well be the most important aspect of countering an insurgency.”¹⁴⁸ Commanders and staffs informed by an empathetic, first-person knowledge of a local population can more effectively apply the Army Design Methodology and aim for cooperation from that populace instead of mere compliance. The emic understanding of the populace reveals their perspective on legitimacy and preferences;

¹⁴⁶Molly Baldwin, quoted in Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 310.

¹⁴⁷Tyrone C. Marshall, Jr., “AFRICOM Commander Addresses Concerns, Potential Solutions in Mali,” American Forces Press Service (24 January 2013), <http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Article/10234/general-ham-at-howard-university> (accessed 22 February 2013).

¹⁴⁸FM 3-24, 4-9.

improves creative thinking and framing the operational environment and desired end state; contributes to more persuasive narratives; helps ensure the operational approach is appropriate and a collaborative effort with the host nation; and keeps assessments focused on measures of effectiveness.

WHAT MAKES MILITARY CULTURE EMPATHY-AVERSE?

They cannot afford to choose between reason and intuition, or head and heart, any more than they would choose to walk on one leg or see with one eye.

– Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*

Despite empathy's many benefits, it does not sit well with military culture for four primary reasons. The "prevailing system of management" within the military does not tolerate empathy.¹⁴⁹ The Army emphasizes its role in coercion so much that it neglects traits contributing to its role in co-option. Military professionals misunderstand the nature of empathy. Finally, the empathetic process is difficult.

In studying organizations, Senge highlights the influence that the organization can have on the individual, not simply the individual's influence on the organization. People have often failed to implement change despite recognizing the need because "they had been socialized in ways of thinking and acting that were embedded in their most formative institutional experiences." Senge criticizes a "prevailing system of management" that inhibits change and introduces harmful biases. The eight elements of his critique clearly apply to the Army and help explain why empathy is often coolly received.¹⁵⁰

Senge's first element is "management by measurement," which focuses on short-term metrics and devalues intangibles. These features are reminiscent of the military's effects-based

¹⁴⁹Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, xiii.

¹⁵⁰The following eight components of the prevailing system of management come from Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, xiv-xv.

operations and its overly technical approach to operational planning.¹⁵¹ Contrary to such a “closed-system” and mechanistic planning construct, the military has somewhat recognized W.E. Deming’s insight that “you can only measure 3 percent of what matters.”¹⁵² To the extent that Deming’s point is ignored, empathy will remain irrelevant in the eyes of military leaders. Empathy’s preeminent benefit is an understanding of the psychological states of actors, which is inherently intangible.

Senge’s second element is “compliance-based cultures” that emphasize “pleasing the boss” who manages through fear. The military’s strict hierarchical structure serves important purposes, but it also sets the stage for compliance-based cultures. Among other things, this culture fosters unimaginative planning that seeks solidarity of opinion over important dialogue. It can become a breeding ground for naïve realism, false consensus effect, confirmation bias, and the straw man fallacy. Compliance-based cultures also contribute to the development of toxic leaders.¹⁵³ Incorporating empathy’s consideration of contrary opinions is an uphill battle in such cultures. Empathy promotes divergent perspectives, not compliance-friendly convergence.

Senge’s third element is “managing outcomes,” as opposed to managing people. Managers establish goals for which employees are responsible, but then become too rigidly focused on those goals “regardless of whether they are possible within [the] existing system and processes.”¹⁵⁴ Military leaders face this same potential error. Outcomes matter, but the relationships within the unit matter just as much over time – perhaps even more, if the unit’s

¹⁵¹See General Mattis’ memorandum for U.S. Joint Forces Command, “Assessment of Effects Based Operations” (14 August 2008), <http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/usjfbomemo.pdf> (accessed 26 February 2013).

¹⁵²Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, xiv.

¹⁵³George Reed, “Toxic Leadership,” *Military Review* (July-August 2004): 67-71.

¹⁵⁴Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, xiv.

long-term cohesiveness is taken into account. Leaders too focused on outcomes have no patience for empathy.

A strict focus on outcomes can also obstruct a healthy critique of them. They sometimes gain the status of unexamined assumptions. As explained in the earlier section on ADM, empathy contributes immensely to focusing assessment on measures of effectiveness instead of just measures of performance. This distinction becomes more significant when the outcomes are services instead of concrete products. Military outcomes are almost exclusively services: defeat of an enemy, security of a populace, building partner capacity. If this negative sense of “managing outcomes” reigns, there is no room for empathy’s high standard of examining those services from the perspective of the partners improved, the civilians secured, or even the enemy defeated. (The enemy’s will to resist may remain even if his means are reduced; empathy reveals this possibility and can even predict it.)

The fourth element of the prevailing system of management is a false dichotomy of “right answers vs. wrong answers.” When “technical problem-solving is emphasized,” the distinction between right and wrong tends to be deceptively clear.¹⁵⁵ Technical aspects lend themselves to static answers that managers can often establish in advance. However, the toughest management problems are rarely technical and always negate rigid, unanimous judgments of right and wrong. Usually, there is a range of answers with varying shades of sense to them, depending on priorities and specific context. Rejecting this frustrating reality for a simpler, technical approach causes managers to discount systemic problems. It makes them favor analytic solutions focused on pieces of the overall system. In contrast, empathy is a synthetic process that heightens complexity. By its nature, empathy accommodates different answers, not sweeping singular ones.

¹⁵⁵Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, xiv.

The fifth element is “uniformity,” or as Senge succinctly states, “diversity is a problem to be solved.”¹⁵⁶ Empathy is obviously at odds with this tendency, since it involves promoting diverse perspectives. Senge also states that in an organization suffering from this ailment of uniformity, “conflict is suppressed in favor of superficial agreement.” Empathy, meanwhile, invites conflict and delays agreement. (It presumably achieves something more genuine; “superficial agreement” sounds suspiciously like the false consensus effect.) Within the military, the processes of promotion and selection for key positions can sometimes foster over-confidence, such that these leaders value uniformity over alternative perspectives. “This egocentric leaning tends to insulate leaders with regard to their actual thinking processes and often presents a significant obstacle to empathizing with and considering the viewpoint of others.”¹⁵⁷ Unchecked empathy is a problem, but as Senge and Gerras point out, unchecked uniformity is more common.

Senge’s sixth element is “predictability and controllability.” Managers can achieve greater efficiency if they can predict their organization’s performance and if they can control components of the organization to streamline it. Making an organization predictable and highly controllable, however, can often make it bureaucratic. Empathy fails to take root either because the manager sacrifices alternative ideas for bureaucratic efficiency, or worse, because the bureaucracy spreads so well that there are no alternative ideas for the empathetic process to grasp. Empathy involves recognizing the agency of others and their ability to arrive at independent conclusions, but a high level of control suppresses such thinking.

The seventh reason Senge disapproves of the prevailing system of management is that it fosters “excessive competitiveness and distrust.” There is such a thing as healthy competition, but managers often push it to a detrimental extreme. Managers assume that only competition can

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

¹⁵⁷Gerras, “Thinking Critically about Critical Thinking,” 8.

spark strong performance and drive innovation. However, such an exclusive focus on competition sacrifices the benefits of cooperation and often subordinates the good of the organization to gaining a personal competitive edge. While the Army prides itself on a service mentality that rises above such attitudes, cutthroat climates still routinely occur. An empathetic understanding of others is considered irrelevant in such conditions.

The last element of Senge's critique is the "loss of the whole." Perhaps because of the cumulative effect of the other elements, managers take on a fragmented view of the organization. Systemic challenges go undetected, with members "in perpetual fire-fighting mode" against symptomatic problems instead of addressing the fundamental ones.¹⁵⁸ Successful innovations remain local, with no managers looking past their own fragment of the organization to either glean the innovative idea or share it.¹⁵⁹ Managers seeing the value of exchanging ideas would employ empathy, but when managers have fragmented perspectives, there is no perceived need to grasp others' perspectives and blend them into a coherent whole.

All eight of these elements contribute to an overall organizational culture that impedes the growth and application of empathy. These eight elements often reinforce each other. For example, "management by measurement" pushes managers toward "managing outcomes," since outcomes are often quantifiably measurable and a more convenient focus than intangible factors that, in the end, are more important. While the Army has begun numerous initiatives to alter this prevailing system of management over the years, they remain significant facets of the culture.¹⁶⁰ Part of the reason they endure is because, at their root, they represent reasonable concerns, even if

¹⁵⁸Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, xvi-xvii, 103.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*, xv.

¹⁶⁰Examples of these initiatives include the Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback program, increased culture awareness training, the recent Year of the Profession campaign, and adding Army Design Methodology to planning doctrine.

emphasized too much and too exclusively. They also reflect the “prevailing system of education” in society, the spring from which flows these predominant patterns of management.¹⁶¹

Outside of the military’s reflection of society, the basic tactical reality of killing is an impediment to empathy. When soldiers consider the lethal task of killing as their professional essence, something like empathy is far too tangential for them to embrace. Reconciling their lethal task with the common misconceptions of empathy results in a contradictory mandate to care for those they kill. In the words of an American major in Vietnam, “It became necessary to destroy the town to save it.”¹⁶² The answer is a more refined understanding of both the lethal task and empathy.

One attempt at this refined understanding could include modifying what the military profession considers its essential function. Instead of killing, the essence of the military profession could be national security. Killing would remain an essential task underneath this enduring purpose, but it would no longer be confused as the purpose itself.¹⁶³ This shift of emphasis allows greater space for empathy’s role in operational planning, especially for counterinsurgencies. It would also benefit attempts at building unity of effort with U.S. government agencies, partner nations, and other actors such as nongovernmental organizations. Killing as an essential – but subordinate – task of national security helps to keep it from dominating planning considerations. The operational reality is that the power to coerce cannot achieve all strategic objectives; the power to co-opt is required as well, which elevates the necessity of empathy.

¹⁶¹Deming, as cited by Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, xiii.

¹⁶²Peter Arnett, “Major Describes Move,” *New York Times*, 8 February 1968.

¹⁶³This confusion might be considered an example of the “loss of the whole,” Senge’s eighth element of the prevailing system of management, described above.

An analogy with surgery helps to illustrate this shift of the military profession's essential function. No one wants to be the patient of a surgeon obsessed with surgery, ignoring what would actually contribute to full health. As much as the surgeon's skill with a scalpel matters, his essential function remains the promotion of physical wellbeing. He should fully understand when wielding his scalpel would best contribute to that health. He should not attempt it just because he has the authority and the skill to do it. In the same way, military professionals must competently wield lethal force, but must also understand the strategic environment that the killing act is supposed to promote and be able to advise political leaders when lethal force may undermine it.

The third reason the military is unenthusiastic about empathy is that the concept is simply misunderstood. It is mistakenly considered a synonym for sympathy, pity, or compassion.¹⁶⁴ For some, it implies "excessive sensitivity" or an overly emotional response to another's circumstances.¹⁶⁵ As described in the introduction above, some regard it as requiring agreement with another's perspective instead of just understanding. The naïve realists among us fail to acknowledge the existence or the validity of alternative perspectives, casually substituting their own views for the genuine attempt at imagining another's. In all of these ways, misunderstanding empathy erodes its reception and perceived relevance.

Lastly, the military is empathy-averse because it is a difficult process, especially across cultures. Simulating another's emotions requires knowing which ones pertain to the circumstances and to what degree. Imagining another's worldview involves a complicated assessment of individual and sociocultural influences. Suspending judgment to gain insight tests one's patience and critical thinking. The empathetic process requires a sufficient understanding of the values, beliefs, attitudes, and other intangible elements comprising the other's culture. Just as

¹⁶⁴Harry Garner, "Empathy: a True Leadership Skill," *Military Review* (November-December 2009): 84.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*

important, the process requires sufficient self-knowledge to account for one's own culture and biases. Throughout the process, one must avoid the reasoning fallacies that empathy may trigger. One must also track any assumptions made during the process in order to validate them later, or at least remain aware of them as potential weaknesses in subsequent conclusions. All these aspects can make the empathetic leap across cultures arduous.

In summary, without a clear sense of what empathy is and what it produces, military leaders will rightly hesitate to endorse it as a key component of good planning. Senge's critique of reigning management principles illustrates the common organizational bias against empathy. An overly tactical perception of the military's role prevents many professionals from seeing empathy's relevance. This neglect is particularly true when they are confused about what empathy is in the first place. These factors combine to make the difficult empathetic process misunderstood and undervalued in the military profession.

CONCLUSION: EMPATHY FOR "CARNIVORES"

Empathy will become a weapon.

– Major General (Retired) Robert H. Scales, "Clausewitz and World War IV"

Empathy benefits a counterinsurgency effort in many ways. It shifts planners from the starting point of cultural awareness to the superior vantage point of cultural competence, understanding the intangible influences on behavior. Empathy helps to avoid logical fallacies, unwarranted assumptions, and the corresponding waste of time, lives, resources, and credibility. "Empathy is not a characteristic of 'soft leaders;' rather, it is a characteristic of smart, thoughtful, and reflective leaders."¹⁶⁶ It stimulates holistic thinking in human-centric, complex systems. Empathy promotes creative thinking, improving one's view of alternative perspectives, differing priorities, and competing narratives. Empathetic understanding bolsters information engagement,

¹⁶⁶Gerras, "Thinking Critically about Critical Thinking," 8.

increases unity of effort with partners, and refines efforts to influence a population. All of these advantages contribute to more competent military planning that avoids operational pitfalls and exploits opportunities. While empathy also raises the possibility of some logical fallacies and planning mistakes, the benefits greatly outweigh these risks, especially when empathy is properly understood and practiced.

One point of further research would be how one acquires the trait of empathy. Noted psychologist Carl Rogers comments that empathy is unrelated to intelligence.¹⁶⁷ He also cites studies that show experienced therapists demonstrating greater empathy than earlier in their careers.¹⁶⁸ This trend implies that empathy is a trait learned by doing. It is tacit knowledge learned through repeated attempts rather than explicit knowledge simply shared through communication.¹⁶⁹ If one is going to learn empathy, he must do it himself. The FBI Academy conducts role-playing scenarios as part of negotiations training, and empathy is one step of its Behavioral Change Stairway Model.¹⁷⁰ Role-playing enables the self-learning required to gain tacit knowledge. Harry Garner suggests ways to practice it, essentially shifting the self-learning from artificial scenarios to everyday interaction. His suggestions include empathetic listening, paying more attention to body language, and encouraging others to share their opinions.¹⁷¹ While any education in language, culture, negotiation, mediation, or critical thinking probably fosters empathy, it can only do so to the extent that the student recognizes and embraces it.

¹⁶⁷Rogers, "Empathic: An Unappreciated Way of Being," 5.

¹⁶⁸Ibid.

¹⁶⁹Donald A. Schon, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987), 86-87.

¹⁷⁰Gregory M. Vecchi, Vincent B. Van Hasselt, and Stephen J. Romano, "Crisis (Hostage) Negotiation: Current Strategies and Issues in High-Risk Conflict Resolution," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 10 (2004): 541-546.

¹⁷¹Garner, "Empathy: A True Leadership Skill," 91.

Whether or not empathy can be taught, a larger point is that, at some level, it does not need to be. Freedman refers to cultural awareness, but the following point applies just as readily to empathy:

When conducting counter-insurgency operations, heightened cultural awareness is not essential to realise that arbitrary arrests, displays of brute force, rudeness and disrespectful behaviour are likely to generate alienation and hostility. Reactions to being treated harshly and disdainfully for no good reason, especially by uninvited foreign troops, are not likely to vary greatly among otherwise diverse cultures.¹⁷²

The point is that an unusual amount of empathy was not required to anticipate some of the trouble facing the U.S. military over the last ten years. The error-prone step of self-oriented perspective taking would have worked. In this sense, emphasizing cultural gaps ends up being a rationalization for actions that deserve no such pardon.

William Saroyan wrote, “Remember that every man is a variation of yourself.”¹⁷³ This premise seems to contradict empathy’s component of other-oriented perspective taking, which insists on imagining the other’s worldview instead of applying one’s own to the circumstances. However, Saroyan’s point reveals the underlying common ground that makes other-oriented perspective taking even possible. One can only imagine the other’s worldview because all humans “have two minds: one that thinks and one that feels.”¹⁷⁴ Saroyan reveals why Freedman’s argument above makes so much sense.

The motto of the U.S. Army’s School of Advanced Military Studies is *Mens est Clavis Victoriae*. The Latin word *mens* actually refers to both cognitive and affective influences on the mind, the “two minds” above. It is not simply the logical mind, but can also figuratively refer to

¹⁷²Freedman, *The Transformation of Strategic Affairs*, 83.

¹⁷³William Saroyan, *The Time of Your Life* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2008).

¹⁷⁴Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (New York: Bantam, 2006), 8.

the emotional “disposition, feeling, character, heart, soul.”¹⁷⁵ In Clausewitz’s trinity, *mens* captures both reason and passion.

However, common usage seems to restrict *mens* to only the rational, the sensible, the logical, and the tangible – to merely a “kind of war by algebra.”¹⁷⁶ If this is all that is meant in the school’s motto, then it falls far short of the reality of war, which hinges on more than just scientific, third-person knowledge. This shortsighted view reflects Senge’s “prevailing system of management,” an etic understanding absent the emic, mechanistic analysis without holistic synthesis, and it results in prescriptive theories that fail as the context changes. Ultimately, this bias towards the cognitive steers military professionals to focus on the means of waging war while neglecting the human will that employs those means.

Therefore, perhaps the motto should be *Mens et Cor sunt Claves Victoriae*. The Latin word *cor* reflects the passions, emotions, intuition, creative thinking, audacity, and the unpredictability of human agency. Including both *mens* and *cor* also captures the recent emphasis for the school’s graduates to be strong team members and team builders rather than merely aloof and arrogant “big brains” on the staff. Team building requires emotional intelligence and traits such as empathy.

In the end, a new motto claiming “the mind and heart are the keys to victory” may strike some as too close to the counterinsurgency mantra of winning hearts and minds. The alternative is to keep the current motto but recognize *mens* as a combination of reason and passion instead of reason alone. As Richard Nesbitt notes, the “dichotomy ‘emotion-reason’ has obscured more than

¹⁷⁵Jeannette Marsh, email correspondence with the author, 28 February 2013. Dr. Marsh is director of the linguistics program at Baylor University, with a specialty in Old English and pre-medieval European languages.

¹⁷⁶Clausewitz, *On War*, 76.

it has revealed.”¹⁷⁷ In this broader interpretation, *mens* becomes a synonym for the human will, which is determined by both the heart and the mind.

Empathy is a tool to gauge the whole of the human will rather than just the logical component. Simulating an adversary’s “situated psychological states” helps account for his will rather than settle for a measurement of his means alone. Simulating a population’s perspective helps make plans to secure its cooperation in ways that endure beyond coercion or handouts. By drawing upon empathy, planners can identify objectives for a counterinsurgency campaign that will actually foster support rather than increase resistance. Whenever the military must employ the power to co-opt instead of coerce, empathy becomes a professional mandate.

¹⁷⁷Richard Nesbitt, *The Geography of Thought* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 154.

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