‘Ethical Reflexivity’ as a Practice of International Politics

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Introduction: To ‘work on our limits’ through ‘permanent critique’

Moral certainties, and the causes and crusades mounted in their name, are dangerous things. The history of human moralizing is as grey and dismal, patchy and strained as any other part of human history.

Simon Blackburn *Ruling Passions*, 1998

The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.

Michel Foucault “What is Enlightenment?”, 1984

The conventional wisdom in the United States concerning September 11th, 2001 is that on this date everything changed. At home and abroad the world was exposed as a different place, a foreign place where enemies were numerous and people untrustworthy. The George W. Bush administration adopted a discourse marked by ‘moral certainty’ in articulating their policies and actions, guided by several neoconservatives who sought to combine American power with American values in the promotion of American security.

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And in the decision to go to war in Afghanistan and Iraq there was little consideration of what others might think, in particular Afghans and Iraqis themselves. The Bush administration painted a picture of enemies who sought to annihilate American lives and values and thus ‘God’, ‘history’ and ‘the right’ was on the side of the United States in its righteous “crusade”. There was little time and no need for debate. Individuals and other countries alike, in the words of President Bush were either “with us or against us”.

Yet, this moral certainty and disregard for non-Americans was not confined to the Bush administration. In the 2006 national elections the Democratic Party had rested much of its electoral case to the American public on ending the war in Iraq, and on November 7, 2006 Democratic Party candidates garnered enough votes to wrest control of both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate from the Republican Party. On this day and the days that followed Democrats, many activists, and commentators declared this election a “referendum” on the Iraq War. Many Democrats claimed that the American people had tasked them with “responsibly” and “swiftly” ending the war in Iraq. A public debate ensued about how to get out of Iraq and the Bush administration went on the defensive, trying to defend the war effort. Presumably, such a public debate would prominently feature notions of ethics, morality and responsibility. Additionally, one might imagine that for such a debate to be meaningful Iraqi voices, views and sentiments would be present. Yet much of the rhetoric featured in the debate neglected and even precluded such notions and the people whose future was being

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debated. For example, many Democrats, both leadership and rank-and-file, simply asserted that we were “babysitting a civil war” and that the Iraqis would “stand up” and therefore we should “stand down” rather than lose more U.S. troops to a lost cause.

Republicans who had also been critical of the war commonly described the conflict in terms of “ancient hatreds” and the lack of Iraqi “political will” to get along. The discourse of blaming Iraqis continued into the 2008 presidential primaries among many of the candidates, Democratic and Republican alike. Hillary Clinton, for example, in a campaign video explaining her stance on the Iraq War declared that if president she would “make it very clear to the Iraqis that unless they do the political work they are going to be on their own.” Framing her plan in terms of reward and punishment, she emphasized that she would “put tremendous pressure on the Iraqis” to “do the political work” or risk the United States’ “aid” and “support.” 6 Regardless of whether one supported ending the war or not, a problem with this discourse is that it placed blame on the Iraqis for the continued violence, as if they were stubbornly refusing our help, and thus closed off avenues for assessing U.S. responsibility for the situation, even the United States concluded that responsibility included withdrawal. The discourse instead implied a placing of blame and responsibility squarely on the Iraqis. These narratives carried the message that the United States is offering blood and money for which Iraqis could and should be thankful.

These political narratives neglect the moral status of the other, refuse deliberation and reflection, and assume moral certitude rather than modesty and fallibility. The United States is not an outlier in adopting such ethical practices. As the major case of this dissertation will demonstrate, these kinds of discourses can be found in the United

6 The video clip was accessed on www.hillaryclinton.com on January 10, 2008.
States before September 11, 2001 and outside of the United States among other countries, international organizations and non-governmental organizations. I examine the ethical practices of such actors with regard to the genocide and civil war that took place in Rwanda in 1994. In this case we also see many actors engaging in moral discourses that engage in moral certainty and neglect critical reflection.

On at least two notable occasions ideological and moral crusades have elicited from international relations scholars a backlash that featured a turn toward some kind of realism. Indeed, in the discipline of International Relations we see a renewed interest in realism after 9/11, inspired in particular by classical realism. It was E.H. Carr, after all, who rejected the arguments of the ‘utopians’ and advocated realism to expose the ways in which ‘interests’ can be cloaked in ‘morality’. Popular arguments against the Iraq War also turned to realist narratives (though not exclusively). Understandably, disastrous moral projects elicit a turning away from moral discourse altogether. Simon Blackburn dismally notes the record, “Moral certainties, and the causes and crusades mounted in their name, are dangerous things. The history of human moralizing is as grey and dismal, patchy and strained as any other part of human history.”

I am not ready to give up on normative projects, but like other critical theorists I argue that a sound ethics takes into account power relations and acknowledges their continued presence. Similarly, E.H. Carr contended that realism and idealism should be balanced. E.H. Carr’s conception of “sound” political thought, in his words, is based on elements of both utopia and reality. Where utopianism has become a hollow and intolerable sham, which serves merely as a disguise for the interests of the privileged, the realist performs an indispensable service in unmasking it. But

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8 Blackburn, 2.
pure realism can offer nothing but a naked struggle for power which makes any kind of international society impossible. Carr saw realism as a useful corrective for any moral vision of international society, to make international society possible (realistic) without stripping political thought of its ability to formulate and pursue worthy social goals, and to purge an existing international society of “self-interest and hypocrisy” that develops when a normative vision takes “concrete political form”. Realism, for Carr, is not a cohesive theory based on laws of state behavior or structural imperatives; rather, realism is an attitude of skepticism and a device for unearthing the motives of world actors in order that their intents might be made transparent so that a vision of international order may be worked toward that is not built on false hope, mistaken assumptions, or abuse of power. Furthermore, even theories of international relations that are associated with a positivist empiricism feature normative assumptions, as seen in the work of Hans Morgenthau (who was more explicit about the normative objectives of realism).

I also seek to present an alternative to the moral certainty of political projects that have turned so many theorists toward the examination of power and interests. Inspired by theorists in international relations, political theory and social theory who engage in critical thought, I propose an ethical practice that moves away from moral certainty and toward ethical reflexivity; away form faith and steadfastness in a particular morality and

9 ibid., 93.
10 ibid. Tim Dunne argues that, rather than a classical realist, E.H. Carr is more properly considered a co-founder of the English School. Indeed, like English School pluralists, Carr has hope for some kind of international society that will succeed, in part, by virtue of acknowledging the reality of power that can prompt the actors in international politics to cloak their revisionist interests in the language of morality, Timothy Dunne, Inventing International Society: A History of the English School (St. Martin’s Press, 1998).
11 Morgenthau argues that a state has a moral obligation to protect and provide for the flourishing of its own citizens. Only individuals can choose to sacrifice themselves for morality. This is the moral principle of national survival”. Hans Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978).
toward an approach that brings in, critically examines and revises the thought, values and beliefs that we usually associate with particular and objective moralities. I seek to bring ethical self-awareness back into the discourse of global politics and its institutions through the building up of a reflective and reflexive ethical agency suited for a world composed of different communities and realized through individuals’ interpretive powers. These individuals contend with, work within, and reproduce power relations. Through self-examination and a ‘project of the self’ they are better equipped to engage in ethical reasoning. In this regard, the practice that I propose, ‘ethical reflexivity’, springs from the historical context of my time as I think about how ethical practices have been unsatisfactory and neglected, and having grown up in a generation that has seen both liberal and realist projects fail. I undertake this project by building an ethical practice that, at its core, features reflexivity. Reflexivity generally refers to a process or mode of being that is self-referential or, as Morris Rosenberg puts it, “an entity acting back upon itself”.12 Judith Butler describes a “reflexive being” as “one who can and does take him or herself as an object of reflection”.13 And George Mead describes reflexivity as “individuals becom[ing] objects to themselves.” One’s response “becomes a part of his conduct, where he not only hears himself but responds to himself, talks and replies to himself.”14 Hannah Arendt, in several works, describes an internal dialogue between “me and myself” where one thinks about what one is doing and morally evaluates it.15 I

then investigate ethical practices to identify the ways in which reflexivity is already present and discuss how it might be magnified and leveraged.

The initiative I undertake is also meant to respond to a problem of ethics that extends beyond me and my generation, but that still besets theorizations and practices of ethics. Given a social world in which we do not have objective knowledge or we are unsure how to access this knowledge, how can we formulate an ethics for international and global politics? Though the stance I take is anti-foundationalist, even an epistemological skeptic or one who posits social complexity would be interested in the question of uncertainty and ethics. This is not a matter exclusive to post-structuralists and critical theorists. In his *Critique of Pure Reason* Immanuel Kant makes the epistemological critique. As Williams and Booth explain, Kant “believes that we cannot possibly know things as they would exist independently of our perception of them.”16 Our knowledge is based on limited human understanding through appearances and experiences (phenomenal rather than noumenal (or transcendent)).

Though Kant is arguably overly optimistic about the potential for reason to order the noumenal world (the moral ordering of our behavior) and to escape our “immaturity”, his epistemological skepticism and reflections on the ‘Enlightenment’ also inspired Foucault to entertain the question, “What is Enlightenment?” from a similar epistemological view. What Foucault found significant in Kant’s essay is that it critically reflects on the present and describes the Enlightenment as critique, and specifically, self-critique: “the moment when humanity is going to put its own reason to use, without

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subjecting itself to any authority”. Foucault finds in Kant ‘the critique’ as central to realizing the Enlightenment as an attitude because its role is to “define the conditions under which the use of reason is legitimate in order to determine what can be known, what must be done, and what may be hoped”. In this essay on the Enlightenment Foucault finds in Kant an exercise in reflexivity that opens up space for considering ‘modernity’ as an ‘attitude’.

And it is Foucault’s consideration of ‘modernity as an attitude’ as well as his later writings on ethics that have provided the fertile ground for my own consideration of a reflexive ethics for international politics. Foucault, I think, sees in Kant a particularly astute form of reflexivity, not just of Kant’s social position as a theorist, but also reflection on history and a relationship with ‘today’ that sets for a ‘people’ a task of working on the self through critique. Foucault’s development of this essay has strong parallels to his later work on ethics. Though Foucault is distinctly against ethics as the application of a universal morality (where, he thought, great dangers lie), for ethics Foucault imagined work on the self wherein we push up against the limits of acting and being. Though it is true that Foucault argues that power is pervasive, and disciplinary power in particular perniciously works on our ‘subjectivity’, it makes sense that Foucault would find promising in an ethical approach efforts to situate the self and

17 Foucault, 1984, 38.
18 ibid.
19 Foucault writes: “this little text is located in a sense at the crossroads of critical reflection on history. It is a reflection by Kant on the contemporary status of his own enterprise. No doubt it is not the first time that a philosopher has given his reasons for undertaking his work at a particular moment. But it seems to me that it is the first time that a philosopher has connected in this way, closely and from the inside, the significance of his work with respect to knowledge, a reflection on history and a particular analysis of the specific moment at which he is writing and because of which he is writing. It is in the reflection on ‘today’ as difference in history and as motive for a particular philosophical task that the novelty of this text appears to me to lie. And by looking at in this way, it seems to me we may recognize a point of departure: the outline of what one might call the attitude of modernity”, ibid., 38.
envision ‘becoming’. Indeed, he notes in this essay that though there has been growth in our capabilities there has not been commensurate growth in the autonomy of individuals. New technologies of power (disciplinary and normalizing) have been stealthily productive of the individual. Foucault seeks to answer the question, how can this growth in capabilities be “disconnected from the intensification of power relations”?  

Foucault gestures toward a possible answer in the form of an attitude of ‘modernity’ as critique. Foucault explains that an ‘attitude’ is a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself a task.

Foucault then proposes that we conceive of modernity as an attitude or a “philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era” or a “historico-critical attitude”. This approach rejects the Enlightenment “blackmail” of being either for it or against it as some type of cohesive whole. Foucault stresses that we can not capture the Enlightenment through a retrospective exercise of discovering what it was (e.g. uncovering the “essential kernel” of rationality as defined by Enlightenment philosophers). Rather, we should attempt to discover what is possible in constituting ourselves as “autonomous subjects”.

What we might embrace, instead, is a “limit-attitude”—being at the frontiers of what is possible and recognizing that what is possible is not restricted to what presently

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21 Foucault, 1984, 47-8.
22 ibid., 39.
23 ibid., 42.
24 ibid., 46. Foucault draws on Baudelaire who develops modernity as 1) a voluntary choice to seize what is ‘heroic’ about the present, 2) a desire to at once understand the world in which one lives (its reality) and to imagine it otherwise so that it can be transformed rather than destroyed, 3) and a relationship with oneself of asceticism achieved through self-production and reinvention. ibid., 39-42.
25 ibid., 43.
exists. Foucault identifies the Enlightenment attitude of critique as “practical critique” that seeks to identify what is historically arbitrary and contingent. This critical exercise is “archaeological” in that it “will seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do as so many historical events” and “genealogical” in that it “will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think.” Together, these tasks are the “undefined work of freedom” consisting of historico-critical analyses.26 Also, the attitude of modernity must be “experimental”. Experimentation is necessary to actually discover what is possible and desirable. Thus, we must be willing to embark on projects with uncertain outcomes and recognize that we can not ever possess “complete and definitive knowledge”.27

The homogenous domain of study for historico-critical analyses are “practical systems”—what we do and how we do it. This includes the technological aspect of the forms of rationality that organize ways of doing things and the strategic aspect that designates the realm of freedom of action (a realm where our action is circumscribed by rules and norms of reaction to others’ actions).28 These “practical systems” speak to how we are constituted from the perspective of three axes: of knowledge, power, and ethics. Thus the questions to be systematically asked of these “practical systems” are: “How are we constituted as subjects of our own knowledge? How are we constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations? How are we constituted as moral subjects of our own actions?”29

26 ibid., 45-6.
27 ibid., 46-7.
28 ibid., 48.
29 ibid., 48-9.
In sum, the core of the practice of ethics that I develop in this dissertation features the attitude Foucault describes as a “critical ontology of ourselves” wherein we seek to identify our limits of being and acting that are the product of our historical situation and at the same time “experiment with the possibility of going beyond them”.\(^\text{30}\) This “critical ontology of ourselves” allows us to interrogate our subjectivities and imagine and work for fundamental transformation of the self, and it is practical and permanent. Thus, I also seek to bring an ethics to bear that features a ‘critical rationality’ in our everyday acts of interpretation that make up the ‘outcomes’ of international politics. Here, I draw on Anthony Giddens and Aristotle, in addition to Foucault, to describe how a dialectic between thought and action can couple with an attitude of critical self-introspection to form an ethics of international politics. I argue for this ‘critical rationality’ as an alternative (analytic and normative) to the ‘instrumental rationality’ present in much of the scholarship in international relations.

In addition, the perplexing ethical problems of international politics require attention to the social fact of multiple communities at different levels, with different characteristics (identities, values, beliefs, etc.) and subject to different constraints. Drawing on Aristotle, Tzvetan Todorov and Richard Shapcott I specify how critical rationality can be practiced through deliberation and dialogue oriented toward understanding of others, while remaining open to and imagining alternative possibilities for political communities and the relationships between them.

An ethical practice for international politics must also deal with the dynamics of agency and structure and their manifested forms in modernity. I ask: How can we think of the relationship between agency and structure in a way that acknowledges the

\(^{30}\) ibid., 50.
importance of structural constraints in the form of societies and organizations but also leaves room for and, more importantly, cultivates ethical agency? Theorizations of structure and agency in international relations tend to neglect the ethical agency of the individual, portraying the individual as either overwhelmed by (constituted by) structure or as an exceptionally capable ‘norm entrepreneur’. While constructivists have adeptly challenged realists and liberals with an ideational explanation for how large-scale structural change is not just the product of material factors, constructivists have been less successful in theorizing agency and, as I discuss in chapter two, this lack of focus on agency has left many of them ill-equipped to deal with ethical practices that do not simply perpetuate the status quo or portray actors as homogenous. I build on the work of constructivists and bring in critical theory to examine the everyday acts of interpretation. I also identify variation among actors in their ethical practices and their self-awareness as capable ethical agents. Rather than assume that agents of change (such as Finnemore and Sikkink’s ‘norm entrepreneur’) randomly emerge or investigate the processes and content of discourses and arguments (as Crawford does)\textsuperscript{31}, I investigate how individuals are and can be capable agents who reflect upon and navigate the social world of international, national and non-governmental institutions.

A practice of ethics should also enable individuals situated in organizational contexts, as policymakers and civil servants, to be capable and ‘autonomous’ actors in the face of dysfunctions, disincentives and the pressures of the bureaucracy as a social form, and critically evaluate the dominant discursive narratives that inform their actions. Ethical reflexivity is well-suited to these challenges because it features ethical reasoning that is reflective, reflexive, self-critical and attentive to context. It helps individuals to

\textsuperscript{31} ibid.
understand how they are socially situated, how they are implicated in the production and reproduction of dominant narratives and how they might imagine and promote alternative narratives. By practicing ethical reflexivity individuals also consider notions of responsibility. They are less likely to have their ‘moral imaginations’ co-opted by the organization because, as complete moral persons, they are able to draw on external moral resources in addition to critically reflecting upon the principles and purposes of the organization. One implication of such a practice is that national, international or global identities, policies and decisions can be continuously interrogated and potentially re-crafted, not by reified ‘states’, ‘IOs’ and ‘NGOs’, but by the individuals who represent their institutions through the interpretation of meanings. They are most capable of building and exercising ethical agency.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

The first half of this dissertation conceptualizes ‘ethical reflexivity’ as a practice of international politics that attempts to accommodate the objectives I have just laid out. Through an examination of reflexivity and ethical reasoning in the writings of Aristotle, Michel Foucault and Anthony Giddens, I conceive of ‘ethical reflexivity’ as having two main features: 1) an attitude of critical self-introspection, and 2) a process of ‘critical rationality’ that features a dialectic modification of thought and action both within the self and through self-other dialogue. This process recognizes the affective faculties, as they are crucial for earnestly and creatively engaging ethical questions. Individuals who are ethically reflexive (‘global phronimos’ ) are aware of themselves as ethical agents who engage in a project of the self to understand how they are historically and
ideationally situated; they have self-knowledge and are self-critical. They are interlocutors with those who have been historically ‘othered’ or might be affected by their actions. The perspective of the *global phronimos* is diachronic – ethical reasoning examines past and future actions and their consequences and how they are normatively informed. Finally, the *global phronimos* self-consciously maintains a complete moral self who is able to draw on multiple ethical resources, habitually acts on the basis of ethical reasoning, and balances prudence and risk in a way that reflects a desire to have ethical relations with others.

In chapter one I explain how Aristotle’s practice of *phonesis* (variously known as ‘practical wisdom’, ‘practical reasoning’, ‘practical ethics’, etc.) can inform a practice of ethics for international politics. First, Aristotle conceives of ethics as *practical* and *pragmatic* in its orientation and shares insight on how this is so. For Aristotle, ethics should be useful through concern for everyday action and particular occasions for action. My account of ethical reflexivity for international politics is similarly motivated. Second, Aristotle’s practice of *phronesis* features a *critical rationality* that is important for interpreting thought and values in the context of action and action in the context of thought and values, and can thus be an agent of social and political change via the cultivation of the self as a virtuous being. Third, Aristotle’s *phronesis* facilitates and calls for deliberation, dialogue, empathy and friendship among those living together in a political relationship. Aristotle’s observations about how political communities live well together are illustrative for international politics where these qualities can be oriented toward an understanding of others. I also explain how Aristotle’s account of *phronesis* is not sufficient for an ethical practice of contemporary international politics and illustrate
how my account of ethical reflexivity features some important differences with Aristotle’s writing on ethics. Most fundamentally, Aristotle’s work assumes a certain metaphysics. I instead follow Michel Foucault in replacing a focus on metaphysics understood as an inquiry into being and how being is possible with a focus on becoming. Second, Aristotle’s account of phronesis prominently features the concept of ‘the good’ at which phronesis is directed. While Aristotle devotes a great deal of attention to discussing the ‘highest good’ of eudaimonia (happiness, living well, flourishing), he leaves the work of defining eudaimonia in a lived way to ethical agents. Nevertheless, my account of ethical reflexivity is not guided by the telos of achieving ‘the good’. Instead, it is directed at achieving ethical judgments that are reflective, reflexive and deeply scrutinized. ‘The good’ is neither assumed nor known beforehand and is always open to revision. Third, the distinction that Aristotle makes between the few and the many is unsustainable for today’s democratic societies, both domestic and international. Although it is the case that it is difficult to exercise phronesis well, societies benefit when ethical capacities are engendered and are widespread. Furthermore, the ethical demand of respect for identity and the benefit of efficacy with greater dialogue and deliberation favor decision-making by the many rather than the few. Fourth, Aristotle’s account of phronesis encounters difficulties in generating a practice of dialogue that attends to the identities and needs of those affected by the actions of any one society or organization. Finally, Aristotle’s elaboration of phronesis neglects attention to power and power relations and assumes a harmony among perceptions, such as sensation, pleasure, knowing and truth. An ethical practice for politics must deal with power and conflict.
In chapter two I explain how contemporary theorizing of International Relations tends to neglect reflexivity in international politics and I turn to critical social theory to further develop a practice of ethics for international politics. The practice that I propose, ‘ethical reflexivity’, is informed by critical theory’s focus on social change that is enabled through the nexus of theory and practice and a focus on ethical relations. Much of the ‘mainstream’ literature in International Relations has neglected reflexivity in international politics, I argue, through its view of rationality as an instrumental rationality, its conceptualization of agency and structure, and an emphasis on the individual as governed by psychological and cognitive processes that downplay the individuals’ interpretive capabilities. Next, I draw on the critical social theorists, Michel Foucault and Anthony Giddens, in addition to IR critical theorists, to articulate an account of reflexivity as a practice that reinstates the ethical agency of actors in international politics. Ethical reflexivity features an alternative rationality, a ‘critical rationality’ that neither assumes identity, values, beliefs and/or goals nor leaves them free from critical challenge, and features a self-conscious and self-critical form of agency. This form of rationality can facilitate a practice of interrogation of our self-understandings and actions and a practice of international politics that takes seriously critical theory’s insights on difference, power relations and ethics. I argue that to some degree ethical reflexivity’s critical rationality is already present in the practice of international politics but can be magnified if we make explicit the constitutive process and attitude of ethical reflexivity and develop it as a social practice.

In chapter three I am concerned with five tasks that develop ‘ethical reflexivity’ as an applied practice among global civil servants. First, I draw on work in international
political theory that establishes the multiplicity of agency and responsibility to
demonstrate the benefits of developing ‘ethical reflexivity’ among both global civil
servants and leaders and their organizations. Here, I provide an account of how both
institutions and individuals are at once moral agents. Although neither is entirely
responsible (in a causal sense) for the actions that are undertaken in the name of
organizations, individuals’ purposive agency and the ways in which institutions
influence, incentivize, socialize and authorize individuals make both responsible for
organizational decisions. Multiplicity of responsibility thus enables an understanding
of agency and structure that leverages opportunities for formulating and implementing
practices of ethics. Second, I discuss several impediments to ethical agency among
global civil servants that stem from the modern bureaucracy and from dominant policy
narratives. Third, I outline how the practice of ethical reflexivity enables ethical agency
given bureaucratic pressures that tend toward action that is neither reflective nor self-
critical. Fourth, I elaborate the virtues or characteristics of the ‘global phronimos’ that
give expression to the attitude and process of ethical reflexivity. Fifth, I sketch a portrait
of the ethically reflexive institution that would provide support to the ‘global phronimos’
and I work out the ways in which global civil service might ‘carry’ ethical reflexivity as a
valued practice and professional ethos and thus provide an external source of
socialization through which individual policymakers and bureaucrats could reform the
institutions in which they are embedded toward greater ethical reflexivity.

In the second half of the dissertation I consider more concretely the practice of
ethical reflexivity and its potential through a study of genocide and other violence in

32 Also see the contributors to Toni Erskine, ed., Can Institutions Have Responsibilities?: Collective Moral
Agency and International Relations (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
33 Frances Harbour, “Collective Moral Agency and the Political Process” In Erskine, 78.
Rwanda during the year 1994. The analysis of this chapter is focused on the Rwandan genocide as a ‘process’ rather than an ‘event’. This way of ‘seeing’ the Rwandan genocide is in contrast to popular and academic accounts which pose the genocide as a singular event or decision in which genocide happened and the UN and powerful countries such as the U.S. failed to respond despite commitments by the ‘international community’ to stop genocide. Most prominently remembered was the decision by the United Nations Security Council to drastically reduce the UN force (UNAMIR) that was already present in the country. A narrow focus on this particular decision as the ‘international response’, however, does not accurately reflect what happened and, I argue, is less useful. It is more useful to conceptualize the Rwandan genocide as a ‘process’ rather than an ‘event’ or an ‘outcome’ because the former provides a multi-faceted picture of what happened, what could have happened, and how different paths of action informed by ethical practices might have been forged.

Focusing on the Rwandan genocide as a process the analysis featured in this chapter allows one to parse out which ethical practices proved unsatisfactory and which, looking back, were more promising. I analyze primary documents and extensive interviews of individuals acting from within the United Nations, the United States government and the International Committee of the Red Cross to draw out how some individuals were ethically reflexive while others were not in responding to the genocide and how individuals later made sense of their actions in ways that were also more or less ethically reflexive. By unpacking what is commonly referred to as the ‘international response’ to the genocide I’m able to illustrate how a consciously crafted and widely shared practice of ethical reflexivity could build and sustain ethical agency in national
and global policy decisions. The cases also demonstrate that organizational cultures can
be more or less supportive of ethical reflexivity. In light of this I suggest ways in which
ethical reflexivity can become institutionalized and socialized among global and national
civil servants and policymakers.

More generally, we see that ethical practices depend on individual actions that at
once influence and are influenced by institutional procedures, institutional culture and
discursive narratives. States, international organizations and non-governmental
organizations feature bureaucrats and policymakers whose actions help to form the
‘decisions’ and ‘actions’ that we attribute to these institutions, but individual actions are
made in the context of an organization that structures their actions and identities qua
policymaker and bureaucrat and qua member of the United Nations, the United States
government or the International Committee of the Red Cross. This mutual influence is
not uniform, however, because it involves human agency and the availability of multiple
understandings. In other words, there is variation among individuals in their
interpretations and how they are influenced by social forces. Action is taken in the midst
of competing ontological and normative understandings. Some of the narratives that
articulate these understandings are more widely held than others, but individuals
nevertheless actively interpret their world to manipulate, create or duplicate particular
understandings as they act. In social settings, including organizations, these
understandings influence the social stuff (e.g., rules, norms, cultures) of institutions and,
at the very least, constitute the actions of institutions via individual action.

For example, the United Nations may be said to feature a norm that mandates a
firm international response to genocide (structure), but it is the actions of several
individuals (agents), both within the United Nations and within the powerful countries of the Security Council (and perhaps other countries as well), that in actuality interpret norms, rules, roles and ethics that have structural homes and that compose a ‘response’. Human agency, I argue, is at once subject to a structural web of constraints and yet not completely determined by them. Human beings are able to reflect upon their actions and maintain ontological understandings of them. Furthermore, they are able to challenge norms, rules, roles and ethics through changes in practice and through everyday decision-making. Reflexivity, then, can be leveraged and magnified as part of an ethical practice and can have profound social effects. Thus it is important to consider the actual and possible ethical practices among individuals and organizations in their interdependence.
PART I: THEORIZING REFLEXIVITY

In the first three chapters I locate the concept and practice of reflexivity in the work of Aristotle on ethics and the more recent body of work known broadly as ‘critical social theory’ to inform a practice of international politics that I term ‘ethical reflexivity’. From critical social theory I closely examine reflexivity as articulated by Michel Foucault and Anthony Giddens. From my discussion of these authors I conclude that reflexivity as an approach to ethics can be thought of as a dialectic process between thought and action, an attitude of self critique (a ‘critical ontology of ourselves’), undertaken in dialogue with others, in consideration of the unique particularities of situations, and as particularly useful in the historical context of modernity and its institutions. I then develop ethical reflexivity as a practice of ethics for the ‘global civil servant’ which includes individuals acting from within international, national and non-governmental organizations. This individual, the global phronimos, demonstrates certain characteristics that I detail in chapter three.
Chapter 1: Aristotelian Reflexivity

Noble and just things, with which politics is concerned, have so many differences and fluctuations that they are thought to exist only by custom and not by nature. Good things, too, have such fluctuations because harm has come from them to many individuals...So in discussing such matters and in using [premises] concerning them, we should be content to indicate the truth roughly and in outline.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

When [the hermeneutic interest is] linked to an emancipatory interest in freeing individuals and collectivities from unnecessary impositions and constraints, the Aristotelian search for the ‘best and most complete’ ‘good for man’ provides a classical instantiation of what Habermas calls the emancipatory knowledge interest. This...knowledge interest deeply informs the modern, the Enlightenment, and the critical traditions of social theorizing.

Hayward Alker, *Rediscoveries and Reformulations*, 1996

In this chapter I explain how Aristotle’s practice of *phonesis* (variously known as ‘practical wisdom’, ‘practical reasoning’, ‘practical ethics’, etc.) can inform a practice of ethics for international politics. Although my account of ethical reflexivity departs from Aristotle’s theorizing in non-trivial ways, his work can contribute to my account in

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several ways. First, Aristotle conceives of ethics as *practical* and *pragmatic* in its orientation. For Aristotle, ethics should be useful. It is thus concerned with practice and particular occasions for action. Through a practice of ethics we seek to address the challenges, problems and aims of contemporary society. My account of ethical reflexivity is similarly motivated. It is intended to navigate and better that social and political realm that we term the ‘international’ or ‘world’, a realm that is the purview of national governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and populations of various forms.

Second, Aristotle’s practice of *phronesis* features a *critical rationality* that is important for helping us to negotiate thought and values in the context of action and action in the context of thought and values, and can thus be an agent of social and political change. This dialectical movement between thought and action, using each to interrogate the other and emphasizing a critical approach to each, constitutes a critical rationality that enables political and social change that might not otherwise occur. Not all interpretations of Aristotle’s *phronesis* are consistent with the strong critical component I attribute to it. Still, at the very least, *phronesis* enables reflective, reflexive and purposeful change. And a phronetic ethics may be even more transformative if, as I argue, an Aristotelian-inspired practice of ethics is more open than other prevalent conceptions of ethics to deep and far-reaching change in ourselves—in our practices and the values and the institutions that shape and inform them. In this regard, Aristotle’s *phronesis* inspires an ethical reflexivity that is a technique of the self wherein identity is managed and crafted through critical introspection and engagement with ethical questions. Such a critical focus on the self is alluded to in Aristotle’s ethics with his
focus on the soul’s condition or our dispositions. The self, for Aristotle, is more than a prudential or instrumental self, and attending to ethical questions attends to the self as a potentially virtuous being.

Third, Aristotle’s *phronesis* facilitates and calls for deliberation, dialogue, empathy and friendship among those living together in a political relationship. Aristotle’s observations here about how political communities live well together are illustrative for international politics where these qualities can be oriented toward an understanding of others, a challenge for any ethical account that meaningfully speaks to a world that features communities with ‘foreign policies’ or ‘Self’ and ‘Other’.

Despite these strengths, Aristotle’s account of *phronesis* is not sufficient for an ethical practice of contemporary international politics and my account of ethical reflexivity features some important differences with Aristotle’s work that should be mentioned and elaborated. Perhaps most fundamentally, Aristotle’s work assumes a certain metaphysics. I follow Kant and Foucault in arguing that metaphysics can not ground knowledge. However, I reject the alternative foundation for knowledge that Kant and, later, Habermas offer—that a universal reason can produce objective judgments for action. In contrast to both, I follow Michel Foucault in replacing a focus on metaphysics understood as an inquiry into *being* and how being is possible with a focus on *becoming*. This difference with Aristotle, however, is not insurmountable. Because Aristotle focuses more on consequences and the cultivation of the self in his practice of ethics, and less on establishing a metaphysics for a practice of ethics, a metaphysical foundation is not necessary to borrow from his account. Whereas Kant turns to a rule-based and
deontological method of moral judgment, Foucault returns to a particularistic method—a practice—more akin to Aristotle but without a metaphysical foundation.

Second, Aristotle’s account of *phronesis* prominently features the concept of ‘the good’. *Phronesis* is directed at achieving the good, although it is unclear what, exactly, the good is for Aristotle. While Aristotle devotes a great deal of attention to discussing the ‘highest good’ of *eudaimonia* (happiness, living well, flourishing), we are left without much guidance on what *eudaimonia* might look like in a lived way. Nevertheless, my account of ethical reflexivity is not guided by the telos of achieving ‘the good’. Instead, it is directed at achieving ethical judgments that are reflective, reflexive and deeply scrutinized. ‘The good’ is neither assumed nor known beforehand and is always open to revision. Although this is a stance that is likely not Aristotle’s per se, it is not that far from his own and is inspired by his critical and searching approach to ethics and philosophy.

Third, the distinction that Aristotle makes between the few and the many is unsustainable for today’s democratic societies, both domestic and international. Although it is the case that it is difficult to exercise *phronesis* well, societies benefit when ethical capacities have been created and are widespread. Furthermore, the ethical demand of respect for identity and the benefit of efficacy with greater dialogue and deliberation lean toward decision-making by the many rather than the few. Fourth, Aristotle’s account of *phronesis* encounters difficulties in generating a practice of dialogue that attends to the identities and needs of those affected by the actions of any one society or organization. Finally, Aristotle’s elaboration of *phronesis* neglects attention to power and power relations and assumes a harmony among perceptions, such
as sensation, pleasure, knowing and truth. An ethical practice for politics must deal with power and conflict.

**Aristotle’s Phronesis**

Aristotle designates as ‘phronesis’ the practice of making and acting upon ethical judgments in the interest of acting virtuously and to achieve human flourishing (or ‘eudaimonia’), described by Aristotle as a kind of happiness, or living and acting well. The object of phronesis—good action—concerns both what is good for the individual (the ‘prudent man’) and for ‘other men’. Phronesis is sometimes translated as ‘practical wisdom’ or ‘prudence’ and is also identified by Aristotle as a ‘disposition’ to making ethical judgments or taking actions that concern what is good for men. Aristotle describes ‘prudence’ (phronesis) as “a disposition with true reason and ability for actions concerning human goods”. By ‘disposition’ Aristotle does not mean ‘inclination’, as

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3 Aristotle states that the “prudent man” deliberates well about “the kinds of things which are good and expedient for living well”. Very broadly, Aristotle believes that the good orienting our lives is that of eudemonia, Aristotle, *Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Grinnell, Iowa: Peripatetic Press, 1984), 104-5 (1140a). For more on eudemonia see: Aristotle, 1984, 3 [1095a], 1[1098b]. Aristotle posits eudemonia as the highest good because it is an end in itself. All other goods are pursued because we believe they will aid in our efforts to live well and to flourish. Thus, eudemonia is “complete” and is always chosen “for its own sake and never for the sake of something else”, Aristotle, 1984, 8 [1097a-1097b]. Because Aristotle posits eudemonia as the highest good scholars have been divided as to whether Aristotle thinks that phronesis involves deliberation about means and ends, or just means. Later in this chapter I drop Aristotle’s notion of ‘the good’ for the practice of ‘ethical reflexivity’. Nevertheless, I concur with David Wiggins’ position that a means-end paradigm for interpreting Aristotle’s discussion of the objects of deliberation is not sustainable. When Aristotle is referring to what is commonly translated as ‘means’ (pros to telos) he is not referring to means in the narrow sense of, for example, studying to get good grades. Rather, Aristotle is focused on how we specify ‘living well’ and what that looks like in practice. David Wiggins, “Deliberation and Practical Reason,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 76 (1975-1976), 38. Alasdair MacIntyre, in contrast, interprets phronesis as a deliberative search for the means to apply historical truths about the good for particular persons in particular situations. This position accords with his communitarian framework in which ‘truth’ is determined by tradition. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

4 ‘[Prudent men] are able to perceive what is good for themselves as well as for other men’, Aristotle, 1984, 105 [1140b].

5 Aristotle, 1984, 105 [1140b].
scientific knowledge and art are also referred to as ‘dispositions’. *Phronesis* can be more accurately described in our language as a ‘practice’.  

In articulating the idea of *phronesis*, Aristotle is concerned with how we act on a quotidian basis. For Aristotle, an account of ethics means little if it is not useful in addressing everyday problems and dilemmas and if it does not aim at improvements for life in the form of achieving the human good. As Martha Nussbaum explains, ethical arguments “must be *chrēsimoī*, ‘useful,’ [and] have an *ophelos*, ‘helpful contribution’”.

For Aristotle, whether or not conceptions of ethics are ‘useful’ or ‘helpful’ inevitably involves human judgment and, as Nussbaum concludes, in assessing the consequences of our action it is human judgment that makes conclusions about ‘ethical truth’.

Aristotle argues that, broadly, our ethical action is guided by the pursuit of ‘the good’. Aristotle posits that the ‘highest good’ is *eudaimonia* and this is an implication of humans’ unique status as reasoning creatures capable of improving our lives. This capacity distinguishes us from other species and thus it is the function of human beings. To perform this function well is to reason well over the course of one’s life. Aristotle concludes that this is happiness and human flourishing (*eudaimonia*). Virtue or excellence (*aretē*) is also essential to the ‘highest good’ of *eudaimonia*, as Kraut explains: “Doing anything well requires virtue or excellence, and therefore living well consists in activities caused by the rational soul in accordance with virtue or excellence”.

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6 Aristotle’s discussion of *phronesis* is primarily found in Book VI of *Nicomachean Ethics*. See Aristotle, 1984, 101-115.

7 The deliberation involved in *phronesis* is about things that may or may not be and about “actions concerning what is good or bad for man”. Aristotle, 1984, 105 [1140b].


9 ibid.

Achieving the ‘highest good’ is not a state of mind for Aristotle; rather, it is activity and it is activity done well: ‘virtuous’ activity or activity characterized by ‘excellence’.

Although Aristotle specifies what he thinks is the ‘highest good’ (eudaimonia), its pursuit leaves a great deal of interpretation of what form this activity takes in our daily lives. It is no small task to specify what this good is and how it can be realized in practice. Wiggins explains this challenge well:

In the non-technical case I shall characteristically have an extremely vague description of something I want—a good life, a satisfying profession, an interesting holiday, an amusing evening—and the problem is not to see what will be causally efficacious in bringing this about, but to see what really qualifies as an adequate and practically realizable specification of what would satisfy this want. Deliberation is still zêtēsis, a search, but it is not primarily a search for means. It is a search for the best specification…When this specification is reached, means-end deliberation can start, but difficulties send me back a finite number of times to end the problem of a better or more practicable specification of the end.¹¹

Thus, I argue in this chapter that what is possible, desirable and worthwhile with regard to ‘the good’ is not obvious and can change over time. Furthermore, there are additional goods that can attach to, magnify or produce different activities and experiences but are not ends in and of themselves, such as pleasure and justice.¹² Given this view of the nature of our choices, Aristotle believes that the realization of the good requires us to adroitly judge and act in concrete situations, in what Aristotle describes as ‘particulars’ and ‘universals,’ and develop our skills in doing so. This is the practice of phronesis. Phronesis not only asks us to make these judgments, but may also prove useful in drawing out possible answers to these questions with its critical rationality.

¹² Aristotle, 1984, 1153.
As we have seen, *phronesis* is concerned with praxis. In considering praxis Aristotle makes two noteworthy claims. First, action takes place in the context of a particular set of circumstances and these circumstances are likely to be uniquely particular. Even if we could broadly draw out similarities between situations (situations of various kinds), Nussbaum explains that choice, for Aristotle, is a “quality-based selection among goods that are plural and heterogeneous, each being chosen for its own distinctive value”.\(^{13}\) Second, through experience and reflection we constantly update and revise our judgments, thought and action. In view of these claims, John Beiner explains that Aristotle extols the benefits of a practice of ethics that is not simply the application of theory to practice, an appeal to universal values, or the application of a set of rules or codified principles.\(^{14}\) Aristotle instead elaborates an ethics in which we actively modify both theory and practice dialectically. Not only can theory inform practice, but “theory itself might be shaped by the demands of practice”.\(^{15}\)

This approach to theory and practice is perhaps most evident in the centrality of context to Aristotle’s elucidation of a practice of ethics. As Beiner explains, for Aristotle “Virtue is the exercise of ethical knowledge as elicited by particular situations of action, and to act on the basis of this knowledge as a matter of course is to possess *phronesis*”.\(^{16}\) The virtuous person, in other words, is able to consistently and competently navigate

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\(^{13}\) Nussbaum, 1990, 56f.
\(^{14}\) Ronald Beiner, *Political Judgment* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983), 73. Beiner cites John McDowell on this point and agrees that Aristotle is a form of ‘cognitivism’ which “holds that the rationality of virtue is ‘recognizable only from within the practice’, whereas non-cognitivism insists upon demonstration from ‘a neutral external standpoint’”, John McDowell, “Virtue and Reason,” *The Monist* 62:3 (1979), 345f.
\(^{15}\) Nussbaum, 1990, 48.
\(^{16}\) Beiner, 73.
particular ethical questions and dilemmas. In advocating the practice of *phronesis* for ethical decision-making Aristotle is keenly aware that ethics requires attentiveness to the particulars of the situation or the ethical landscape. Aristotle emphasizes that universal rules of uniform and obvious application to particular situations are not available (in contrast to utilitarian and natural law theories, for example), and there are things that vary (that may or may not be) and that are not so by necessity. *Phronesis* involves deliberating about things that vary and about things that can be realized. The phronetic actor (*phronimos*) decides on a course of action by considering both the particulars of the situation and proffered universals, identifying the ethical merits of possible responses in each case. Human betterment thus requires assessing concrete needs and desires and the norms and values that might be pertinent to a particular case and then acting on this judgment.

In addition to context, judgment is vital for *phronesis*. The crucial role of judgment in ethics is reflected in Aristotle’s character of the *phronimos*. Aristotle specifies that *phronesis* as performed well by one who has experience and has shown himself to judge well—the ‘*phronimos*’. The *phronimos* possesses several dispositions but of these prudence receives the most attention. The others include judgment, intelligence and intuition, and these qualities are all found in the *phronimos*:

Now all these dispositions are directed to the same things, and with good reason. For when we speak of *judgment* and intelligence and prudence and intuition, we regard the same men as having *judgment*, having intuition, being prudent, and

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17 *Aretê* is the word Aristotle uses and can be translated as ‘virtue’ or ‘excellence’. *Aretê* is important because “doing anything well requires virtue or excellence, and therefore living well consists in activities caused by the rational soul in accordance with virtue or excellence”. Kraut, 2009.

18 Aristotle, 1984, 107 [1141b].

19 Aristotle, 1984, 105 [[1140a].
Aristotle identifies prudence and the other dispositions as those “things by which the soul possesses truth” and sees these qualities as necessary for navigating between ultimates and particulars. In a way, prudence is the master virtue for Aristotle if it is a virtue for “when this one [virtue] exists, i.e., prudence, all the others are present also”. Perhaps this is because prudence is that disposition most directly related to action: “for prudence, whose role is to act, has a ruling and ordering function with respect to its objects”. Those who exercise prudence deliberate and judge well about the objects of human action: “the function of a prudent man is especially this, to deliberate well…and a man who deliberates well without qualification is one who, by judgment, can aim well at the things which are attainable by action and are best for man”. In other words, a prudent person aims at ends that are both good for us and within our reach.

Good decisions thus necessitate the exercise of prudence but they also require the experience and wisdom that comes with it. Aristotle argues that in evaluating the particulars of any situation experience is crucial: “prudence is concerned with particulars, which become familiar from experience”. Aristotle’s emphasis on the particulars of an ethical question does not mean that there is no guidance or direction from something like a ‘universal’ or a conception of the good. Rather, the phronimos moves dialectically between the particular and the theoretical. Each can modify the other and this is done

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20 Aristotle, 1984, 111 [1143a].
21 The others are art, scientific knowledge, wisdom and intuition. ibid., 103 [1139b].
22 ibid., 115 [1145a]. Also, see Beiner, 1983, 72: “Phronesis is not one virtue among others, but is the master virtue that encompasses and orders the various individual virtues”.
23 ibid., 113 [1143b].
24 ibid., 107 [1141b].
25 ibid., 109 [1142a].
through the exercise of judgment by one who has experience in doing so over time.

Beiner elaborates:

*Phronesis* moves back and forth, from universal to particular, and from particular to universal. It allows mastery of ethical predicaments without dependence upon a set of rules or codified principles to tell us when the particular is an instantiation of the universal (our conception of what is good in general), when it is an exception to the ethical norms we already live by, and when it calls for revision of our conception of the good.26

Experience enables one to be adept at making judgments in particular situations and is necessary for evaluating whether and how our conceptions of the good should be revised.27 Aristotle advises that “one should pay attention to the undemonstrated assertions and opinions of experienced and older and prudent men no less than to demonstrations; for they observe rightly because they gained an eye from experience”.28 Yet, it is not knowledge alone that experience bequeaths and that is required to exercise *phronesis* well. Aristotle also finds value in intuition (*nous*), described as a kind of ‘sensation’ of particulars, character (*ethos*), and emotion (*pathos*) for making ethical choices. All of these qualities inform our practical and ethical reasoning and are, in part, cultivated and constituted through experience.

In addition to having these qualities that mark one who is adept at this dialectical exercise between the particular and the universal, the phronetic person is committed to action. Judgments about human flourishing can not better human life unless they are acted upon. As Beiner explains, “*Phronesis* is the union of good judgment and the action which is the fitting embodiment of that judgment”.29 *Phronimos* seek to improve human

26 Beiner, 1983, 73.
27 See also: Wiggins 1975-1976.
28 Aristotle, 1984, 112 [1143b].
29 Beiner, 1983, 75.
lives in real and appreciable ways by acting on ethical judgments.\textsuperscript{30} In sum, \textit{phronesis} involves a \textit{process} of good deliberation about the relationship between thought and action, \textit{ability} and \textit{inclination} to be perceptive about what constitutes living well, and the \textit{will} to act upon these judgments.

It is important to emphasize that, for Aristotle, the \textit{phronimos} acts wisely and discriminates well in particular situations because he is virtuous and because he has immersed himself in ethical affairs. He possesses all of the virtues and is thus able to work toward achieving the highest human goods. The highest of these goods is happiness (eudemonia), or what Nussbaum translates as “human flourishing” and what Aristotle also describes as “living well and acting well”.\textsuperscript{31} It seems to be the human good that Aristotle has in mind when he argues that the \textit{phronimos} seeks improvement for human lives. This is also what orients politics. In \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, Aristotle posits and then argues that the end for politics is the highest good and “politics takes the greatest care in making the citizens of a certain quality, i.e., good and disposed to noble \textit{actions}”.\textsuperscript{32} Not just the individual \textit{phronimos}, but also the state, is charged with pursuing well-being and human flourishing through the practice of \textit{phronesis}. The state, specifically, is charged with cultivating individuals that will pursue the highest good through a practice of ethics. And, it is through political power that “the greatest amount of good for the community” can be done and thus “the grandest expression of ethical virtue requires great political power”.\textsuperscript{33}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[31] Aristotle, 1984, 3 [1095a], 11[1098b].
\item[32] Aristotle, 1984, 13 [1099b].
\item[33] Kraut (2009).
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\end{footnotesize}
Contributions of *Phronesis* to a Practice of International Ethics

My account of ethical (or moral) reflexivity draws on and benefits from Aristotle in three crucial respects. First, ethical reflexivity is, in part, inspired by Aristotle’s contextual approach to ethics and his emphasis on *phronesis* as a form of practical and ethical reasoning. *Phronesis* is practical and pragmatic, unlike much of contemporary political theory. Second, similar to Aristotle, ethical reflexivity features a critical rationality that derives a great deal of its power for insightful, reflective and purposeful action from dialectical movement between thought and action. In this way, both *phronesis* and ethical reflexivity are tools for social and political change. Third, Aristotle’s work, particularly that on rhetoric, is instructive for how dialogue, debate and deliberation contribute to better and more ethical decision-making, a consideration that is crucial for a practice of ethics in the realm of world politics. ‘Ethical reflexivity’ as an approach to ethical decision-making is inspired by an Aristotelian perspective on ethics in that making ethical decisions does not consist of formulating and learning general rules; rather, ethics on this account is a constant interrogation into what it means to live well in our various associations with each other and in specific situations and to act on these judgments.

Practical and Pragmatic

Some of the dissatisfaction with the subfield of political theory has its source in the complaint that political theory provides few useful tools for praxis, that it’s not directly relevant to pressing questions of action. Instead, much of the theorizing of political theory seeks to explicate normative justifications for already existing political institutions
and practices (e.g. private property or representative democracy), offers critiques of existing institutions and practices on the basis of either alternative or already-held principles and values (e.g. deliberative democracy), or argues for an ideal condition (e.g. justice) and sets out the general conditions that would constitute such a state of being or living in the form of universal laws or principles of morality. Although pragmatic and practical approaches to political philosophy are not new (e.g. Dewey, Mill, Aristotle), they are not prevalent in contemporary political theory, including international political theory.34

Aristotle would have seen ideal theorizing as problematic for informing an ethical practice. The philosopher does not issue rules or edicts based on abstract theorizing to those who practice politics and deal with ethical questions. Ethics is not a science and it is not entirely theoretical.35 In the words of Hayward Alker, ethics and politics for Aristotle instead belong to “the practically oriented branches of knowledge” and “these seek phronesis (intelligence), which is sometimes also interpreted as ‘right judgment’ about praxis (action), or deliberatively grounded practical intelligence about how to live a good life”.36 Ethics is not a science for Aristotle precisely because it does not concern “universal and necessary things” and it is not “demonstrable”. Rather, he says, it is similar to art (but it is not art) in that “art and prudence are about things which may or may not be”.37 The actions that we take in our quest to live well are not necessary and

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34 Exceptions include Richard Rorty, William Connolly, Molly Cochran, Stephen K. White, Don Herzog, and some Jurgen Habermas. These works do not necessarily belong to the school of thought termed “pragmatism”, but to varying degrees they are practical and pragmatic.

35 Martha Nussbaum explicitly addresses the question of whether practical reasoning can be scientific and presents Aristotle’s case for why it is not in chapter 2 of Love’s Knowledge, 54-105.


37 Because the “object of action may vary” prudence can not be “scientific knowledge”, and because the object of prudence, a good action, is an end itself, and not a product, prudence is not “art”. Aristotle
they are not beyond our control. Rather, they are the product of human agency. These actions also respond to particular situations and no situation is completely like another. Because of its abstract quality no theory can adequately take into account the complexities and contingencies of any particular situation. Theories that issue abstract and universal prescriptions do not do well with complexity and particularity and tend to be rigid. As Aristotle notes, because the context of action varies it elicits our deliberation and attention. Furthermore, it is through perception and deliberation that we identify the salient ethical features of the situation and, in addition to logic or reasoning (logos), character (éthos) and emotion (pathos) help us to draw out the various choices we might and do make. Thus, science and ideal theory are not workable approaches to ethics from an Aristotelian perspective.

The shortcomings of universally applying abstract theories, values, norms and beliefs can be illustrated with the discourse of our own age. When values and theories are invoked without considering context and emphasizing its importance for judgment and action, or when they are invoked as internally and already justified prior to praxis, the results can be dogmatic and even disastrous. For example, both theories of democracy and contemporary discourses of politics in the United States place ‘freedom’ in a preeminent position when it comes to thinking about and structuring our own institutions and public policies and in formulating foreign policies. Democratic theories emphasize the status of citizens as ‘free and equal’ and some international political

38 “[N]o one deliberates about things which cannot vary,” Aristotle, 1984, 105 [1140a].
theories, the work of John Rawls is a prominent example, posit ‘free societies’ as the path to justice and peace. One problem with this discourse is that the declaration of ‘freedom’ as the purpose or goal of an action is often invoked as if the action that emanates from this claim needs no further consideration or scrutiny. When something is declared a value, belief, or norm it is a claim of sacredness. The implication is that discussion and debate is not necessary (rather, faith is called for); the value, belief or norm can not be considered contingent; and the possibility is neglected of considering how context may lead a society to promote a different value, belief or norm in that particular case and in other cases. Thus, when former President George W. Bush declared that the Iraq War was necessary to extend ‘freedom’ to the people of the Middle East and would help advance a ‘democratic peace’ not many were willing to publicly criticize this argument. Instead, the public arguments presented against the war were primarily realist arguments that contended that the war would not advance the ‘national interests’ or ‘security’ of the United States or legal arguments that framed the war as illegal in light of both U.S. and international law. Remarkably absent were arguments that took on the ‘freedom’ discourse or that posited ethical or moral reasons for not invading Iraq.\(^{40}\)

In contrast to abstract and ideal theorizing in international politics, I seek to outline a practice of international ethics that is pragmatic and practical and indicate ways in which such a practice can be realized within the institutions of international politics and global civil society. To be pragmatic and practical, political theories should be useful

\(^{40}\) Laurie Brand’s presidential address to the Middle East Studies Association is one of the few academic protests. Specifically, Brand is critical of the relationship between scholars and the United States government, pointing out the ways in which empires seek to co-opt science and scholarship for political ends. Brand advocates that scholars make their dissent known in a variety of ways and that we are morally obligated to do so. See: Laurie Brand, “Scholarship in the Shadow of Empire,” Middle East Studies Association Bulletin (2004). http://fp.arizona.edu/mesassoc/bulletin/Pres%20Addresses/Brand.htm.
for and applicable to everyday or significant and perplexing problems in the world. In addition, values, beliefs and norms should be contextually applied and contingently held. It is not enough to simply make a claim that a society shares a certain value, belief or norm. Instead, it should make sense for the case at hand and withstand the scrutiny of debate and dialogue wherein alternatives are seriously considered.

Aristotle’s conceptualization of *phronesis* is practical in that it is concerned with the realm of *praxis* (action) and pragmatic in that it is meant to attend in a helpful or useful way to what we see as our ethical dilemmas. Note that for Aristotle we are concerned with ethics because we are seeking to live well, but we may also be concerned with ethical questions for the sake of being concerned with ethics. In other words, ethical questions are pressing for us precisely because we believe that normative matters and questions about what we should do are worthy of our attention.

*Phronesis*, then, is concerned with pressing questions that arise in practice and to satisfactorily answer these questions Aristotle stipulates that we must be concerned with particulars in addition to universals. Universals are things that are said of many things, but universals are not adequate for dealing with the variation in human affairs and with its complexity and specificity:

Now prudence is not limited to what is universal but must know also the particulars; for it is practical, and *action* is concerned with particulars. And it is in view of this that some men, without universal knowledge but with experience in other things, are more practical than those who have universal knowledge only.

Aristotle sees ‘practical knowledge’ as different from ‘universal knowledge’, and this distinction is critical when it comes to the realm of action. For Aristotle, what it means to

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42 Aristotle, 1984, 107-8 [1141b].
be practical is to be attentive to what is desirable for action in specific situations. And although Aristotle devotes a great deal of attention to virtue (or excellence) and identifying the virtues, Aristotle maintains, as Kraut summarizes, that “what must be done on any particular occasion by a virtuous agent depends on the circumstances, and these vary so much from one occasion to another that there is no possibility of stating a series of rules, however complicated, that collectively solve every practical problem”.

More specifically, *phronesis* entails using imagination to draw on universals and particulars for informing action in a dialectical fashion. It is not that something like rules or universals are never helpful in deciding on a course of action for Aristotle. Rather, they are not prior to ‘perception’. Rules can be, as Nussbaum notes, “summaries or rules of thumb, highly useful for a variety of purposes, but valid only to the extent to which they correctly describe good concrete judgments, and to be assessed, ultimately, against these”.

In confronting questions of what should be done in particular cases, the phronetic actor draws out the salient features of the situation through right reason and through emotion, asking what is ethically significant about the situation. The *phronimos* also looks to theories or ‘thought’ for direction, including proffered ‘universals’ in an investigation of both possible actions and the justification or reasons for taking particular actions. At the same time, I would like to offer, one assesses what the consequences of past actions have been in deciding whether theories and beliefs have been helpful and in what way they might be modified because, as Aristotle notes, “it is from particulars that

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43 Kraut
44 Nussbaum, 1990, 68.
we come to universals”. Thought is thus continually modified and sometimes contravened as we confront particular situations, deliberate, and make ethical choices.

Still, ‘concrete descriptions’ and ‘particular judgments’ have ethical priority to ‘general statements’ and ‘general rules’. As Aristotle states, “action is concerned with particulars, and statements must harmonize with these”. The process that Aristotle offers for praxis is dialectical in that action and thought are continually and concurrently modified. By moving back and forth between thought and action and by considering the particulars of the situation at hand phronesis draws on theoretical and experiential resources while holding a degree of dubiousness about the ability of theories, rules and universals to provide ethical direction. Martha Nussbaum’s reading of Aristotle in this regard rings true, in that for Aristotle “it is not possible for a formulation intended to cover many different particulars to achieve a high degree of correctness”. Arash Abizadeh, in a similar reading of Aristotle, also notes the ‘indeterminacy’ of laws and rules (written and unwritten nomos) when making ethical choices about concrete situations. Abizadeh summarizes the reasons that this is so:

In part, this inexactness arises from the fact that (1) abstract rules developed ex ante cannot cover every particular contingency that may arise in the future. (2) What is good unconditionally (haplóς) may not necessarily be good for me (or good for this or that person or people). (3) Abstract rules, sound as they may be in general, turn out sometimes to be inapplicable in particular cases…One might add to Aristotle’s reasons that (4) abstract rules cannot also determine the rules of their own application.

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45 Aristotle, 1984, 112 [1143b].
46 See Aristotle, 1984, [1137b12-30].
48 Aristotle, 1984, [1107a].
Future contingencies, the specifics of particular situations, variations in what is good for persons and peoples are all reasons that we can not rely on general and abstract rules and theories or universal values. In addition, as Abizadeh notes, even when we draw on rules they have to be interpreted in their application given their inherently general and non-specific status. Abizadeh explains that the consequence, for Aristotle, is to look more to experience, reasoning and emotion for registering and making ethical judgments. In other words, we must bring the ‘deliberating agent’ back in. Aristotle forcefully argues that “the agents themselves must in each case look to what suits the occasion”.

Thus far I have not devoted much attention to the role of emotion and character in phronesis yet they are inextricable from the practical reasoning that Aristotle describes and advocates, and understanding their role in our ethical choices illuminates how a formal decision-making process with abstract rules and prescriptions is inadequate for the practical and pragmatic. Specifically, I draw on the arguments of Arash Abizadeh and Martha Nussbaum to more fully elaborate phronesis. In opposition to ethical decision-making as logical demonstration (apodeixis), Aristotle posits that reasoning (logos), emotion (pathos) and character (ethos) ‘are constitutive features of the process of phronetic practical deliberation’. The deliberating agent, the phronimos, employs all of these faculties in phronesis as well as the rhetoric of deliberation that is found in phronesis.

Both Nussbaum and Abizadeh argue that emotions (or affect) aid in painting a picture of the ethical landscape of a particular situation as we see it and in drawing out the range of ethical options available to us given this picture. Abizadeh explicitly

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51 Aristotle, 1984, [1103b34].
52 Abizadeh, 267.
articulates this tight link between emotion, character and experience: “proper ethical
deliberation characterized by phronēsis is not just a matter of logical demonstration but is
further constituted by the proper étos and pathos of the phronimos”. Emotion and
color character play a prominent role in phronesis because they are an aid rather than a
hindrance to judgment. Abizadeh argues in this regard that “both the excellence in
deliberation and the excellence in perception—both of which are necessary to
phronēsis—are partly constituted by the proper étos and pathos”. 53

There are perhaps three ways in which emotions and character influence our
ethical judgments. First, they play a role in perception, in gathering ethically relevant
information about particular situations and in determining the possible avenues that one
might take in responding ethically to the situation. As Aristotle argues, the “passionate
element” of the human soul enables one to “deliberate in a finer fashion concerning
particulars”, though Aristotle is also concerned that some passions, such as anger, cloud
deliberation. 54 Abizadeh makes an explicit connection here with experience when he
argues that “the emotional makeup and character of the person can be said to be
something like a repository or memory of the wisdom of past experience (empeiria),
which the agent may consult during the course of practical deliberation”. 55 Nussbaum
characterizes emotions slightly different as “composites of belief and feeling”. 56
Emotion, on her account, “can play a cognitive role, and cognition, if it is to be properly
informed, must draw on the work of the emotive elements.” Still, beliefs and feelings do
not show up de novo. They arise and become cognitively embedded through experience

53 Abizadeh, 281.
55 Abizadeh, 287.
56 Nussbaum, 1990, 78.
(e.g., how we have responded emotionally to similar situations in the past). 57 Either way, Abizadeh’s conclusion seems to capture Aristotle’s view of emotion and character in phronesis, that “consulting ‘how I feel’ about taking a course of action may provide me with important insight about its ethical validity if my character and emotions are virtuously formed”. 58

Emotion is even more critical to practical reasoning in the ways in that it engages us in the first place in situations as ethical questions or dilemmas. Emotion helps to make us human beings who are concerned with acting ethically. Sharon Krause elaborates on this role of emotion when she explains that emotion motivates us to care about persons and causes and is inextricably bound up with our beliefs. 59 Our affective capacity enables us to care about and take an interest in normative projects such as justice and ethics. Aristotle alludes to such a role for emotions when he devotes attention to how good and effective rhetoric that occurs in the course of deliberation appeals to the emotions and when he refers to emotions as aids to the audience in making good judgments. Emotion (and character) plays a role both in the arguments that the speaker presents to the audience and in the arguments that the audience will find persuasive. Trust, the stirring of emotion, and the logic of the arguments as well as the emotional and experiential make-up of the audience all contribute to the course of ethical choices that

57 Interestingly, Nussbaum also brings a critical lens to emotion. She seeks to make the case that for Aristotle emotions assist in making judgments but emotions can also be changed upon reflection. In part, this changeability of emotions is important because “many, if not all, of the passions rest upon beliefs that do not spring up naturally (if any beliefs do this), but are formed by society. They are, in fact, part and parcel of the fabric of social convention: they should be criticized as the rest of that fabric is criticized.” ibid., 38f.
58 Abizadeh, 287.
come out of deliberation. In this way, \( \text{\textepsilon\texttheta\textos}\), \( \text{\textpathos}\) and \( \text{\textlogos}\) are all “means of persuasion through speech” (\( \text{\textpisteis}\)).

Finally (or thirdly), emotion is a faculty that, in addition to being a trigger for our engagement, can also be a means for imaginatively and creatively responding to ethical questions. Emotion, on this account, magnifies both our perception of the problem and our sense of the potential solutions. In advocating an Aristotelian ‘medical philosophy’ (a philosophy of ethics based on the analogy of the practice of medicine) that primarily draws on Aristotle’s conceptualization of \( \text{\textphronesis}\), Nussbaum explains that such a philosophy,

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\text{\textflushleft}{\text{\textwhile committed to logical reasoning, and to marks of good reasoning such as clarity, consistency, rigor, and breadth of scope, will often need to search for techniques that are more complicated and indirect, more psychologically engaging, than those of conventional deductive or dialectical argument. It must find ways to delve into the pupil’s inner world, using gripping examples, techniques of narrative, appeals to memory and imagination.}}\]
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Not only in dialogue but also in our inner deliberation those that practice \( \text{\textphronesis}\) well are in tune with and engage emotions in ways that illuminate the moral weight of the situation to resolve ethically perplexing situations. These appeals to the emotions engage the affective desires of its objects, and perhaps even help to constitute affect itself.

This draws us back to the role of imagination in our ability to ethically navigate the particulars of a situation and make ethical choices: “to defend the priority of particulars is to inform us that imagination can play a role in deliberation that cannot be altogether replaced by the functioning of abstract thought”. Nussbaum explicitly links emotion and imagination in their centrality to ethical responses in their particularity:

\[\text{\textflushleft}{\text{\text60 Abizadeh, 273.}}\]
\[\text{\textflushleft}{\text{\text61 Nussbaum, 1994, 35.}}\]
\[\text{\textflushleft}{\text{\text62 Nussbaum, 1990, 83.}}\]
Being responsibly committed to the world of value before her, the perceiving agent can be counted on to investigate and scrutinize the nature of each item and each situation, to respond to what is there before her with full sensitivity and imaginative vigor, not to fall short of what is there to be seen and felt because of evasiveness, scientific abstractness, or a love of simplification.63

Aristotle’s emphasis on situational appreciation and judgment is particularly evident in the emphasis Aristotle devotes to the figure of the *phronimos* who practices *phronesis* well. This figure has cultivated the skills, attributes and experience that mark good deliberation and judgment, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The importance of character and experience leads Aristotle to believe that older men are generally better at exercising *phronesis* than younger men with more theoretical knowledge. But ‘experience’ and other attributes are not the only indicators of *phronimos*. The *phronimos* needs to bring to bear relevant considerations and make helpful observations to the situation at hand.64 The concept of the *phronimos* is useful for articulating a pragmatic and practical approach to ethics because it encourages us to think about how we can train civil servants and create an institutional culture wherein experience and thought come together in productive and creative ways.

Too often thought and experience are posed as separate domains or one or the other is held static. Positivist academics, for example, tend not to get involved in academia as to not violate the subject-object distinction, and when they do get involved they might frame it to themselves as applying their tested and rigorous knowledge to technical problems in a problem-solving mode. Scholars also tend to view international civil servants as highly constrained actors, or actors with static preferences. International civil servants, on the other hand, generally tend to see values in the form of the mission

63 Nussbaum, 1990, 84.
64 Wiggins, 45.
as already set and not in need of interpretation or transformation. They may be unaware that they already interpret missions, principles, values, etc. They may also disdain theory as inferior to and ignorant of realities on the ground, thus privileging experience and institutional practices over theory, and action over reflection. In his Neo-Aristotelian articulation of ‘practical reason’ Wiggins captures well the challenge for bureaucracy that I intend to meet with the practice of ‘ethical reflexivity’: “In a bureaucracy, where action is not constantly referred back to what originally motivated it, the problem is to make room for this stepping back and re-evaluation”.65 Because Aristotle proposes that dialectic modification of thought and action is actively made by particular agents in the context of particular decisions it is important to cultivate a process and attitude among international civil servants and foreign policymakers that is critically self-reflective and attends to both thought (in the form of theories, values, beliefs and norms) and action.

Even those theories, traditions or practices that claim to be pragmatic and practical have often proved to be of little use in contemporary international politics because they are not appropriately sensitive to context and contingency.66 Indeed, it is difficult for such a practice to get traction given the historical context of ‘late modernity’ or ‘postmodernity’ in which “the Cartesian program for philosophy swept aside the ‘reasonable’ uncertainties and hesitations of 16th-century skeptics, in favor of new,

65 Wiggins, 44.
66 Stephen Toulmin and David Campbell articulate accounts of casuistry that might prove more satisfactory than the Just War discourse that has been embedded in a casuistic tradition; however, their accounts of casuistry have not enjoyed much prominence in the practice of international politics. Furthermore, at least Toulmin’s account of casuistry privileges existing ideas and traditions in its ethical reasoning. David Campbell, “Justice and International Order: The Case of Bosnia and Kosovo,” in Ethics and International Affairs: Extent and Limits ed. Jean-Marc Coicaud and Daniel Warner (New York: United Nations University Press, 2001); Stephen Toulmin, Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
mathematical kinds of ‘rational’ certainty and proof.”67  The Just War tradition, ironically, flourished in and was heavily influenced by this 16th century skepticism, yet it has lost the intellectually rigorous case-based methodology so strongly associated with it. The Just War tradition is still touted by many theorists and practitioners alike as pragmatic in its casuistic approach, an approach to ethics that eschews the search for “supranational principles” in favor of investigating “the contingencies involved in specific, historically situated encounters”.68  Like phronesis, casuistry seeks to take account of context in deciding on particular courses of action. Yet, many scholars and public intellectuals who have elucidated and touted the Just War tradition/theory as an adequate approach for answering the question of why and how war should be undertaken have approached contemporary moral and ethical questions in a way that is more akin to a process that might be associated with analytical philosophy.

In the contemporary Just War tradition its proponents often decree the injunctions of Just War theory in a list-like fashion without explicating why the principles from which they are derived are suitable to the particular context at hand.69  Abstract principles are assumed to apply uniformly to all situations. Thus, when Jean Elshtain used the Just War tradition to argue for the Bush administration’s ‘War on Terror’ and, especially, the 2003 War on Iraq (‘Operation Iraqi Freedom’),70 her analysis resembled the Bush administration’s narrative more than a reasoned consideration of the values, particularities and alternatives at hand. Elshtain, for example, was one of six academics

67 Toulmin, 75.
69 For a notable exception to this characterization see Neta Crawford’s assessment of the Just War tradition in light of the George W. Bush administration’s ‘War on Terror’: Neta Crawford, “Just War Theory and the U.S. Counterterror War,” Perspectives on Politics 1:1 (2003), 5-25.
who signed a statement entitled “What We’re Fighting For: A Letter From America” that elaborated a just war argument for war against Afghanistan.\(^7\) The letter frames certain American values as “universal values” and thus war on behalf of these values as benefiting all of humankind. As Maja Zehfuss agrees, arguing that the letter’s invocation of abstract principles as universal “fails to address the ethico-political question of war in Afghanistan”. It does not “struggle with what the ethical might be in the specificity of this situation”.\(^7\) Then, in her *Boston Globe* article of June 2002, Elshtain repeated and fortified dubious claims made by the Bush administration about Iraq by presenting them as unquestioned facts. The invocation of the Just War tradition by one of casuistry’s foremost adherents failed to promote meaningful public debate that could draw out and yet war as one alternative among others in these cases.\(^7\) Elshtain foreclosed dialogue with the American public, Afghans and Iraqis, despite the fact that these were the very people who would pay most of the costs (in treasure and blood) of war. When values, such as freedom and democracy, are invoked as universal, self-evident and not in competition with other values, and when possible unintended consequences are not drawn out and examined, one fails to “struggle with what the ethical might be in the specificity of [the] situation”.\(^7\)

The consequences of the ethical slight of hand performed by Elshtain in her analyses of the wars are breathtaking. The prominent political scientist and public

\(^7\) “What We’re Fighting For: A Letter from America” (New York: Institute for American Values, 2002).
\(^7\) Maja Zehfuss, “Remembering to Forgive? The ‘War on Terror’ in a ‘Dialogue’ between German and US Intellectuals,” *International Relations* 19:1 (2005), 100. In this article Zehfuss examines specifically the discourse of American and German intellectuals on the war in Afghanistan. She argues that although the German intellectuals sought to contest the American narrative of justification for the war, they also failed to engage in a meaningful ethical dialogue by not addressing the specificity of the question at hand.
\(^7\) Zehfuss, 100.
intelligent, Stanley Hoffmann, issued this observation, “The questionable moral character of a preemptive strike, an intervention and a unilateral action is compounded by a policy that involves all three.” Yet, Elshtain treats none of these actions as serious ethical dilemmas. Elshtain’s approach and others like it (e.g. Michael Ignatieff) failed to promote those things that phronesis identifies as important for good ethical reasoning, such as dialogue and debate, knowing the other in their particularity, drawing out alternative courses of action and their potential consequences, assessing the consequences of past actions, and using all of this information to reevaluate thought. Michael Ignatieff later admitted, that in the debate before the war, “We thought we were arguing about Iraq, but what might be best for 25 million Iraqis didn’t figure very much in the argument…The debate turned into a contest of ideologies masquerading as histories.”

While Ignatieff’s public writing was far more honest about what would be ethically and morally required of U.S. foreign policy in the event of an invasion of Iraq (e.g. resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and dialogue and diplomatic engagement with Iran, Turkey, Syria, the Kurds, and Saudi Arabia), neither Ignatieff or Elshtain considered the likelihood that the U.S. would do what is ethically necessary once the US public and legislators gave the green light for war. Such a consideration would have required, at the very least, an honest assessment of why the situation in the Middle East came about in the first place and America’s role in it. This dialogue is not possible, however, when public intellectuals seek to convince others through propaganda rather than through good ethical reasoning.

than engage in the critical assessment and open and honest dialogue that ethical reflexivity calls for.

This is not to say that all political scientists and political theorists have similarly contributed to a non-phronetic public discourse. As exemplified in the edited volume, *Making Political Science Matter*, several political scientists are elaborating and practicing a phronetic political science. To act phronetically in the context of a particular issue or question, they argue, is to clarify the values and interests at stake, build local knowledge, promote dialogue (including international and transnational dialogue), gauge the relations of power that are present, and illuminate “the possibilities in current political arrangements for change”. In other words, the phronetic scholar can add value to public debate and policymaking by making apparent our past trajectory and the trajectories before us, dispelling myths, pointing out problematic rhetoric, illuminating possible unforeseen and unintended consequences of policies, and articulating more useful ethical or moral narratives. In *Making Political Science Matter*, the contributors provide useful examples of how they have engaged phronetically in addressing public issues, including issues that have been particularly contentious or problematic. As they demonstrate, *phronesis* is a guide to decision-making as a practice, but it is not excessively simplifying. A phronetic practice makes explicit complexity. From within

79 Schram, Sanford F., “Return to Politics: Perestroika, Phronesis, and Post-Paradigmatic Political Science,” In Schram and Caterino, 28.
complexity we then make decisions with contingency, ready to revise them when they no longer withstand the rigors of applying critical rationality.  

Recognition of the Other through Deliberation and Dialogue

Aside from those international relations scholars who claim that international ethics is an oxymoron (which is increasingly few) the ‘Other’ has been a focal point for questions of international ethics. In a world where states, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and transnational actors (including sub-state actors such as cities) routinely act in ways that cross and transverse state borders, questions of how we should act as organized communities involve issues of obligation to and recognition of others. Even those who advocate ‘national interest’ as the only or primary guiding principle for state action hold a normative evaluation vis-à-vis others, that the welfare or survival of others does not trump the welfare and survival of the state to which one belongs (if one even so belongs).  

In view of the consideration of the Other, strength of phronetic practice for International Relations is the prominent place of the Other in ethical decision-making. In Aristotle’s phronetic practice deliberation, dialogue, empathy and friendship, inter alia, are important for reaching good decisions marked by reflexivity. Their importance for phronesis is indicative of how ethics features a place for the other as well as our consideration of others in their identities and in view of their desires and well-being.

81 The concept of ‘critical rationality’ will be more fully elaborated in the next chapter.
82 IR realists, especially classical realists, generally hold this position, whether explicitly or implicitly. For an explicit justification of this position see: Hans Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 1978). Morgenthau argues that states have moral obligations but these obligations should be hierarchically ordered. The state’s highest obligation is the “moral principle of national survival”. And it is when the state is properly attending to this obligation that we enact relations of respect with other states.
The modification of thought and action that constitutes and re-constitutes our identities is made, in part, in the presence of others and according to how we respond to them in their alterity.

How we view others, how we listen to others and the relationships we have with others create ethical selves and provide legitimacy to our actions. Ethics is practiced through judgment, but for judgments to be considered acceptably actionable to a society—in this case to an international society—they must resonate with a wide range of interpretations of those that constitute a society or have a social relationship. As Sharon Krause observes, only by unlikely coincidence will these interpretations be collectively shared. Thus, processes and attitudes that get us to shared interpretations play a crucial role in establishing the legitimacy of decisions. And legitimacy is part and parcel of an ethics of international politics. Theories and practices of ethics in world politics provide legitimacy for international law, international norms such as human rights, war/force (the perennial concern of international relations), and the authority of international organizations.

Broadly, Aristotle views relationships as integral to politics and ethics, distinguishing himself from Plato’s account of justice as an internal condition. Thus,

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83 Krause.
85 For example, Aristotle states, “justice alone of the virtues, by affecting others, is thought to be another’s good; for the just man acts for what is expedient for someone else, whether for a ruler or a member of the community. The worst man, then, is the one whose evil habit affects both himself and his friends, while the best man is one whose virtue is directed not to himself but to others, for this is a difficult task”. What underlies justice, for Aristotle, is a disposition, but when this disposition involves others it is justice, and when it does not it is a virtue. Aristotle, 1984, 80 [1130a], emphasis original.
how we engage with each other as citizens says a lot about whether we are good people who are acting ethically. If we are discussing ethical conditions such as justice, then, Aristotle posits our interactions with each other as fundamental, even as constitutive of ethics. More specifically, *phronesis* can be thought of as making moral or ethical judgments and acting upon them, but this judgment-making involves and is done in view of others.

In other words, *phronesis*, according to Aristotle, is not exercised by just one person and it is not merely internal reflection upon oneself. The *phronimos* is not just one who is wise and experienced, he also deliberates well with others.\(^6\) Though Aristotle views some as better than others at judging and acting well, these activities accord a substantial role for others, calling, at the very least, for considering the perspectives of others. As Gadamer explains, commenting on the relationship between understanding (*sunesis*) and prudence (*phronesis*), “the person with understanding does not know and judge as one who stands apart and unaffected; but rather, as one united by a specific bond with the other, he thinks with the other and undergoes the situation with him”.\(^7\) In addition to understanding, Aristotle posits other things as central to *phronesis*, and these include sympathy and forgiveness (*suggnome*), or “empathetic understanding and forbearance”.\(^8\) This sympathy, however, is an active sympathy. As Beiner explains, the English words, sympathy and empathy, that are derived from the Greek word, *suggnome*, have a passive root (*pathos*) that indicates a passive ‘suffering-with’, whereas the “Greek, *suggnome*, is related to a root that is active, namely judgment”, and *pathos* is

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\(^6\) Aristotle (1984), 107 [1141b].
\(^8\) Beiner, 75f.
the opposite of *praxis* (action).\(^8^9\) This leads Beiner to conclude, “All of this serves to underline the importance of sympathy being understood as an active judging-with, and not merely a passive suffering-with’.\(^9^0\)

Aristotle’s attention to friendship (*philia*) and forgiveness also underscores Aristotle’s concern with others and community in the realm of practical and ethical reasoning. Prioritizing the state of our relationships with each other, Aristotle asserts that it is a sign of a good and equitable man, for example, that he forgives. Being predisposed to forgive is a sign of “right *judgment* of an equitable man”.\(^9^1\) *Phronesis* also implicates a political friendship that features a bond among fellow citizens, and perhaps even among the “community of all humankind”.\(^9^2\) Aristotle holds friendship as a central component of living a good and fulfilling life and as a bond between each other. Our sociability is a defining feature of lives and our choices in friendship are as important as our reflections on ourselves.\(^9^3\) While Aristotle thinks it best to have fewer rather than many close, intimate friends as one cannot adequately ‘attend to’ many friends, political friendship can and should be shared among many: “It is possible, however, to be politically a friend to many and be not complaisant but a truly *good* man”.\(^9^4\) This implies that there is something about friendship that can extend to all of our political associations. This friendship is not of the same nature and quality as our interpersonal friendships that feature deep connections arising out of living together and loving each other, but it is a type of living together, nonetheless, that features affection and trust.

\(^8^9\) ibid., 76.  
\(^9^0\) ibid., 77.  
\(^9^1\) Aristotle, 1984, 111 [1143a].  
\(^9^3\) Aristotle, 1984, 180 [1171b, 1172a].  
\(^9^4\) ibid., 178 [1171a].
Although Aristotle is focused on the polis and the contribution of friendship to achieving the good within the polis, there are reasons to believe that Aristotle is also concerned with the individual and with humankind generally. As Chris Brown, Terry Nardin and Nicholas Rengger point out, Aristotle was concerned with many types of political communities. Of these various political communities (and political regimes) some were better suited to achieving the good and feature different relations and obligations among individuals, but all political communities have “a responsibility to act in accordance with the welfare of other humans, not just other citizens”. For example, Brown et al. state that Aristotle is
critical of the tendency of various communities…to glorify war and to praise domination and conquest. It is not, Aristotle thinks, appropriate to conquer and rule other regimes since it is effectively a denial of their freedom and their status as fellow humans.

Clearly, Aristotle is concerned with individuals, even those who are outside of one’s immediate political community. A “more speculative reading” of Aristotle that Brown et. al entertain, posits that Aristotle may even have imagined that there could be “a cosmopolis, a world community”. At the very least we know that Aristotle was significantly involved in international politics, was aware of difference between political communities and issued assessments of ethical conduct among them.

Importantly, and contrary to what one might think, friendship does not necessarily lead to actions that are entirely other-regarding and do not bring pleasure to the self. Aristotle seems to think that friendship bridges virtue and happiness. Lorraine Smith frames this bridging well:

\[\text{95 Brown et al., 26-27.}\]
\[\text{96 ibid., 27. Brown et al draw on Aristotle’s Politics for this characterization (1324b22, 1333b26-36).}\]
\[\text{97 Brown et al., 26.}\]
Acting for the sake of what is noble means having primary regard not for the beneficiary’s good but for one’s own virtue or the good of one’s soul, whereas acting for a friend seems to be self-forgetting. And yet spontaneous acts of friendship tend to be more pleasant than impersonal acts of virtue for the doer as well as for the recipient. Aristotle’s discussion of friendship, surrounded as it is by two discussions of pleasure, encourages the hope that in the realm of friendship, one may find all the nobility of virtuous action at its best without the ultimate sacrifice of happiness.\textsuperscript{98}

The ways that motivations are often framed, in the study of international relations and in contemporary society generally, pose a zero-sum relationship between self-regarding and other-regarding behavior—that one is either acting on behalf of oneself and thus advances one’s own utility or happiness, or one is acting to the benefit of others and thus disregards one’s own utility of happiness. In International Relations, this difference in motivations is often framed as a choice between self-interest and justice. Aristotle, on the other hand, can be interpreted as arguing for concord between noble action and happiness in the form of friendship.

In addition to openness to and pursuit of political friendship, a practice of ethics should prominently feature deliberation. Perhaps of all of the qualities that characterize \textit{phronesis}, Aristotle seems most concerned with deliberation and what good deliberation might look like. Deliberation is an active process whereby “he who deliberates inquires and makes estimates”.\textsuperscript{99} Deliberation, according to Aristotle, has concrete benefits for deciding on a course of action and what form the good takes in practice. Aristotle writes:

+ we deliberate about things (a) which are possible or occur for the most part, (b) whose outcome is not clear, and (c) in which there is something indeterminate; and we call in advisers on matters of importance when we are not convinced that we are adequately informed to make a good diagnosis.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{98} Lorraine Smith, \textit{Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship} (West Nyack, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 7.

\textsuperscript{99} Aristotle, 1984, 109-110 [1142b].

\textsuperscript{100} ibid., 41 [1112b].
Deliberation, then, helps us to better understand particular situations that can have different outcomes, and it occurs in consultation with others. These conditions apply to the objects of *phronesis* that, according to Aristotle, vary and can not be determined by the mere application of universal knowledge. In other words, these are situations where we have agency and where deliberating with others helps us to make good choices.

Because Aristotle posits deliberation as such an important part of *phronesis*, he also inquires into the conditions of good deliberation. For Aristotle “good deliberation” is “a kind of rightness of deliberation” and this is “rightness with respect to that which is beneficial as well as with respect to the proper object and the proper manner and the proper time”. It is rightness, then, for the particular situation in which deliberation features the use of *reason* to settle on a good end, an expedient means to achieve this end, and a means that is acceptable. Additionally, deliberating well requires taking time because it involves the exercise of reason about things which require non-obvious answers. Nevertheless, one should also act before it is too late. Aristotle emphasizes the importance of making time for the reflective process of deliberation while underscoring the need for timely action: “people say that we should *act* quickly on the conclusions of deliberation but we should deliberate slowly”. While Aristotle is clearly concerned that we act on our ethical and moral judgments, he also wants to emphasize the value in our considered judgments wherein we reflect and deliberate about our choices.

It is through deliberation that we draw out our perceptions of the particulars of a situation, the various avenues we might pursue through action and what these avenues represent as human beings pursuing a flourishing life together. Aristotle’s observations

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101 ibid., 110 [1142b].
102 ibid.
103 ibid.
on rhetoric are directly relevant here. In *On Rhetoric* Aristotle is attentive to the role of rhetoric in good deliberation.\(^{104}\) Like *phronesis*, the practice of rhetoric deals with particulars, probabilities, contingencies and complexity. He defines rhetoric as “an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion”.\(^{105}\) By drawing out ‘opposites’ rhetoric is useful for surveying the situation and available solutions, as well as publicly vetting the characterizations and solutions which others may put forth, lest these be unwise or false.\(^{106}\)

Specifically, the speaker’s persuasion depends on the validity of the message itself (*logos*), the credibility of the speaker to the audience (*ethos*), and the extent to which the speaker is able to appeal to the audience in a way that engages them affectively (*pathos*). These are means of persuasion (*pisteis*).\(^{107}\) What Aristotle calls ‘examples’ are also appropriate to rhetoric. Examples or analogies help to draw out experiences that are instructive for deciding on present courses of action.\(^{108}\) They contain a particular understanding of the situation that is made apparent through our considered ethical choices in other similar situations. They feature an argument (implied or explicit) that the situation at hand is like the experience being drawn upon. Thus, examples and analogies contain a prescription that is being considered and evaluated for the present situation. Again, Aristotle seems to imply that both the speaker and the audience have

\(^{104}\) Abizadeh makes a compelling case that there is “a structural parallel between the art of rhetoric and the virtue of *phronesis*”, 272. Abizadeh explains further this parallel: “Since for Aristotle the telos of the polis is *eudaimonia*, the legitimate political role that he assigns rhetoric implies a belief in at least the possibility that rhetoric can yield ethical judgments consistent with the right reason of a phronetic person (*phronimos*)”. Still, rhetoric must be judged as ethical by a standard external to itself. The point Abizadeh is making is that there is good reason to interpret Aristotle as believing that rhetoric “has a propensity to yield correct judgments”, 277-78. I am simply claiming that rhetoric can *aid* in yielding good judgments.

\(^{105}\) Aristotle, 1991, 36 [1355a].

\(^{106}\) ibid., 34 [1355a].

\(^{107}\) ibid., 37-39 [1356a].

\(^{108}\) Aristotle, 1991, [1368a].
responsibilities to judge whether these examples are apropos to the ethical question at hand. Rhetoric is a tool for making the most persuasive and compelling arguments for particular actions, and in doing so, the facts are laid out and the audience uses their capacities of reason and emotion to judge which argument is best.

Aristotle makes it clear that both the audience and the speaker have responsibilities if rhetoric is to be beneficial. The speaker has an obligation to “select the most appropriate language, style, and means of persuasion”, which “demand[s] tact, discrimination, sympathy, sensitivity, and all the other qualities of practical wisdom”.

The audience should take seriously their role as judge of the speaker and the arguments that are laid out, discriminating well among them.

Although Aristotle does not specifically advocate dialogue with others as central to deliberation or a practice of ethics, Aristotle’s argument for phronesis and his holistic perspective on ethics point to the importance of dialogue and this is especially the case when we are considering ethical choices in an inter-societal context. Because, on the Aristotelian perspective, ethical choices are made vis-à-vis particular situations, and judgments about virtue and value vary by time and space, the best ethical agent takes into account the specifics of the situation, including what others think. Thus, in the context of international politics, an Aristotelian approach to ethics at the very least should value dialogue that is necessary for gathering relevant information.

Aristotle writes of individuals who exercise and are skilled in phronesis, but the phronimos prominently figures others into this skill of practical reasoning. Phronesis is not a calculation and it does not concern technical questions. Rather, it concerns the complex and specific moral and ethical judgments and actions that political communities

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109 Beiner, 87.
constantly undertake and it considers others through dialogue, deliberation, sympathy and friendship. Beiner draws on Gadamer for explaining Aristotle in this regard:

What Gadamer helps us to appreciate is that the *hexis* (habit or settled ability) that is *phronesis*, in one of its most essential aspects, equips the virtuous and prudent man with a capacity to project himself into the genuine situation of another. It is this hermeneutic self-projection into the position occupied by another that lends to judgment its qualitative or ‘depth’ dimension, so that it cannot be captured in mere technical expertise.\(^{110}\)

*Phronesis*, then, provides us with the capacity to consider each other in our judgments and actions.

A more expansive or inclusive view of the degree to which others are figured into *phronesis* can be found in other interpretations of *phronesis* that emphasize what is required of our interaction with others in order to meet our moral and ethical responsibilities to others in their particularity. John Wall, for example, has sought to illustrate how *phronesis* entails continual transformation of the self, in part, because of our responsibility to the other in an effort to live “an ethically good life”.\(^{111}\) Wall terms this practice ‘poetic *phronesis*’ because of the creative element (of re-making the self) that is involved in *phronesis*. In articulating this account of *phronesis* that includes the Other, Wall draws primarily upon Paul Ricoeur’s ‘critical *phronesis*’ in which *phronesis* “destabilizes and decenters the self’s moral will and hence demands its ongoing self-transformation”.\(^{112}\) What motivates *phronesis* and this transformation of the self, for

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\(^{110}\) Beiner, 78f.


\(^{112}\) Wall, 322. Wall’s embellishment of Aristotle is likely to be controversial to those who argue that Aristotle posits a strict separation between *phronesis* and *poiesis* (art or production). Wall is suggesting that “phronesis or practical wisdom does in fact involve a necessary element of poetics, making, or creativity” and in this regard poetic phronesis is “beyond Aristotle”, 314.
Ricouer, is the Aristotelian “desire to live well with and for others in just institutions”\textsuperscript{113}. This desire captures our moral responsibility to others.

As Wall notes, for postmodernists and poststructuralists like Ricouer and Immanuel Levinas our obligation to do less violence to others attaches to the inescapable fact that our attempts to narrate others’ identities can never fully capture their identities and thus inevitably inflicts violence on them.\textsuperscript{114} Yet, our interaction and intertwinement makes self- and other-narration necessary. ‘Critical phronesis’ for Ricouer is thus “the human capability for negotiating this unstable cycle or tension between self-narration and responsibility toward others”.\textsuperscript{115} Judgment, on this view, “involves re-narrating one’s own teleological practices in new ways that are ever more radically nonviolent toward others”.\textsuperscript{116} This re-narration is never unproblematic though. In fact, it can be tragic as Wall explains:

The moral will is not just accidentally but inherently tragic because it can never fully escape its own narrative limitations…The tragedy of human moral life is that moral wisdom requires a self-critical awareness of an always inconclusive and self-excessive kind.\textsuperscript{117}

On this reading of self-other relations self-transformation through the re-narration of identity is a necessary implication of the ethical project.

Yet I would also agree with Wall that this view of otherness can sometimes paradoxically freeze our ethical projects because if we accept that to describe the other is to inevitably do violence to the other we may, as a consequence, “reduce otherness to an empty and blanket abstraction” rather than seek to know others in their concrete

\textsuperscript{114} Wall, 322.
\textsuperscript{115} ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} ibid., 323.
\textsuperscript{117} ibid., 324.
specificity and particularity. In the realization that we cannot truly know the other we neglect to address the ways in which self-other relations can become more (but not entirely) ethical. The ethical injunction that issues out of the belief that our self-narratives necessarily narrate others combined with the impossibility of knowing without violence to identity is the paradox at hand, especially for international politics that involves discursive claims of discrete we-ness and they-ness. In the next chapter I speak more to how we might engage in the project of understanding the other in order that we might enact rather than neglect the ethical project. For now, the important observation is that this paradox presents a difficult task for ethics generally, and for international ethics in particular. What phronesis offers in confronting this paradox is its attention to particularity. Both Martha Nussbaum and John Wall focus on, in Wall’s words, the “concreteness of others’ stories” in moving beyond this paradox. While Nussbaum finds the concreteness of others available to us through literature, Wall locates this concreteness in the type of attention to particularity found in the cultural material of literature and in a project of the self that involves continual re-narration of the self in an effort to be ever more inclusive of the other: “A genuinely self-transforming response to others involves the hard, creative work of careful perceptual attention to others’ subtle and singular narrative complexities”. Self-narration, in other words, can elide or give

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118 Wall, 327.
119 Drawing on the ways in which Aristotle and his contemporaries invoke stories and narratives, especially tragedies, Nussbaum argues that the literature of poiesis helps us to more acutely recognize ethical dilemmas and see them in their particularity, building our capacity for ‘moral attention’, Nussbaum, 1990, 162. Wall characterizes Nussbaum’s interpretation of phronesis thusly: “The chief purpose of practical wisdom is...to overcome individuals’ natural ‘moral obtuseness’ and simplification’ of one another’s actual lives through sharpened capabilities for ‘moral perception,’ moral imagination, and ‘moral sensibility’”, Wall, 320, citing Nussbaum, 1990, 154, 164, 183-5.
120 Wall, 327.
expression to the concreteness of the other, and it is the latter that contains the seeds of moral responsibility to the other.

Agent of Social and Political Change

Another way in which Aristotelian ethics can inform a practice of ethics for international politics is in its critical capacity and in its resulting potential for self-transformation. I would even argue that Aristotle envisions ethics as a practice of critique. In the previous section we saw how self-transformation can occur through *phronesis* when the ‘other’ and our obligations to others are considered. This is one way in which *phronesis* can be a source of change—reorienting and remaking ourselves and our relationships to others. In this section I consider the critical capacity of *phronesis* more broadly and note its implication for an ethical practice of international politics that features a ‘historico-critical’ attitude (using Foucault’s term) and openness to the self-transformation that can emerge from it. I further discuss two views on Aristotle that attribute to *phronesis* a critical capacity. Martha Nussbaum argues that Aristotle is oriented by skepticism of the goodness or rightness of the status quo and a desire to identify other possibilities for flourishing lives. Aristotle (along with other Hellenistic philosophers), Nussbaum argues, articulates a conception of philosophy which implies that “that we gravely mistrust society as it is, and would like to scrutinize the possibilities that lie outside of it, in search of norms of a flourishing life”.\(^\text{121}\) John Wall also sees in *phronesis* a ‘creative’, ‘inventive’ and searching dimension in which *phronesis* results in continuously new self-narratives that feature “cathartic self-transformation”.\(^\text{122}\) Furthermore, there is a modesty

\(^{121}\) Nussbaum, 31.
\(^{122}\) Wall, 328.
about knowledge claims that is consistently present in Aristotle’s writing and that leads him to articulate a practice of ethics that is thoroughgoing in drawing out alternatives for action and possible modifications of thought.

Aristotle is modest about knowledge claims in that he does not assume that we, as a society, already possess correct and desirable norms or that we would never find it desirable to modify societal norms that flesh out our notion of the ‘good’. Aristotle is attentive to the fallibility of human beings and the potential limits to our knowledge. In discussing the concept of ‘truth’ in the realm of ethics and politics, for example, Aristotle cautions that we should not be overconfident in identifying the truth:

Noble and just things, with which politics is concerned, have so many differences and fluctuations that they are thought to exist only by custom and not by nature. Good things, too, have such fluctuations because harm has come from them to many individuals…So in discussing such matters and in using [premises] concerning them, we should be content to indicate the truth roughly and in outline.123

This attitude of fallibility is not just present at a meta-level of theorizing about ethics; it is also present at the micro-level of formulating a practice of ethics (the level of praxis). In discussing the dialectic character of phronesis Aristotle indicates that he is keenly aware of the fallibility of knowledge, both of the particular and the universal: “error in deliberation may be either about the universal or about the particular”.124 This recognition of fallibility contributes to the critical and provisional character of Aristotle’s thinking on ethics as does the necessity to interpret ‘the good’. As I have noted earlier in the chapter, the necessity of interpretation and attention to particulars means that the ‘good’ as a lived aim is open to new interpretations and revision.

123 Aristotle, 1984, 2 [1094b].
124 Aristotle, 1984, 109 [1142a].
Martha Nussbaum suggests that Aristotle also believes that “ethical truth is constrained, and appropriately constrained, not only by what we can do and be, but also by our desires, what we will consider worthwhile and worthless”. Ethics is formational of the self in its pursuit of a flourishing life. The self reflects back upon itself in scrutinizing norms, values and actions. That which we think to be of value or to be true, as well as our identities, should be scrutinized and amended. Aristotle is participating in exactly this endeavor in writing and teaching about ethics and politics. He asks probing questions about who we think we are and critically engages these questions. Aristotle proposes the aforementioned dialectic process as a form of critical reasoning through which those in conversation might draw out the ‘appearances’ or “what people say, perceive, [and] believe”. In so doing, individuals and/or the society make apparent and consider revising their own views and identities or have these views and identities confirmed and validated. The dialectical movement between thought and action is one of interrogation and judgment. As Beiner notes, appearances disclose themselves as interpretations and “judgment discriminates among the appearances as they disclose themselves”. Rationality does not merely consist of aligning action with values. Rather, Aristotle’s is a critical rationality in which we always reflect upon on our interpretations and undertake purposeful change when it is warranted.

This dialectical reasoning is different than merely majoritarian decision-making about what is right and good. It is not an aggregation or tally of preferences. Rather, it is a process of deliberation and judgment and an attitude that rejects ethical complacency, oversimplification, and overconfidence in our ability to know and understand. Ethics is

125 Nussbaum, 62.
126 Nussbaum, 57f.
127 Beiner, 19.
not comparable to the realm of science in which things can be demonstrated and known, and yet it (the realm of ethics) is subject to our considered and critical reasoning that materializes in the form of a practice that features ethical virtue in the interest of identifying and pursuing that which is good. It is thus that we acquire the habit of virtue. Aristotle is careful to explain that “without prudence virtues cannot exist”. It is worth quoting Aristotle at length on this point:

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\text{[R]eason is right if it is in accordance with prudence. So it seems that all men somehow have a strong inner sense that such a habit is a virtue in accordance with prudence. But we must go a little further, for virtue is a habit not only according to right reason, but also with right reason; and right reason about such things is prudence...It is clear from what has been said, then, that a man cannot be good in the main sense without prudence, nor can he be prudent without ethical virtue.}\]

Phronesis, then, both enables and helps to constitute good and right action and good men. In this way, phronesis is the materialization of our search for the good life. It is often in navigating the dialectical process in concrete situations (phronesis) that revisions of the good life at the conceptual level occur. Wiggins explains that because there are no universally applicable rules available to guide action the “man of practical wisdom” has to “invent the answer to the problem. As often as not this, like the frequent accommodations he has to effect between the claims of competing values, may count as a modification or innovation or further determination in the evolution of his view of what a good life is”. Kraut echoes this claim about the revisability of the good, noting that because Aristotle gives a “reasoned defense of his conception of happiness as virtuous activity” he cannot mean that “there is no room for reasoning about our ultimate end”. Rather, when Aristotle speaks of reasoning or deliberating about the ‘means’ he likely

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128 Aristotle, 1984, 115 [1144b].
129 ibid.
130 Wiggins, 48.
has in mind that “deliberation typically proceeds from a goal that is far more specific than the goal of obtaining happiness by acting virtuously” and these goals are certainly open to revision through *phronesis*.\(^{131}\) Finally, the ethical situations we find ourselves in demand that we be attentive to how we might modify our conception of what virtue consists in as “the good agent may need not only to locate the virtuous action among strange new events, but also to deal with an evolving and situation-relative list of virtues”.\(^{132}\)

For *phronesis* to be realized as a form of critical reasoning we must not only understand and practice the process and open our identities, beliefs and values to the possibility of transformation; we must also have individuals within our institutions and active in the public sphere who have acquired the skills of the *phronimos*. The virtuous man is so by habitually making good decisions through the critical reasoning of *phronesis* and with the ethical virtues.\(^{133}\) Aristotle maintains that ethics should feature a cultivated sensibility and a practice of critique so that perspectives can be gathered, worked through and arrived at. After all, Nussbaum explains, “Appearances about ethics contain contradictions and ambiguities” that need to be worked through with argument and deliberation.\(^{134}\) Nussbaum contends that this requires the qualities of *active receptiveness*, *responsiveness* and *imagination*: “a person of practical wisdom must be prepared to encounter new cases, with responsiveness and imagination, using what she had learned from her study of the past, but cultivating as well the sort of flexibility and perceptiveness that will permit her, in Thucydides’ words, to ‘improvise what is

\(^{131}\) Kraut.
\(^{132}\) Nussbaum, 1990, 71.
\(^{133}\) “Ethical virtue is fully developed only when it is combined with practical wisdom,” Kraut. See, Aristotle, 1984, [1144b14-17].
\(^{134}\) Nussbaum, 1990, 64.
required”.

Indeed, Aristotle calls for creativity and imagination in tackling questions of ethics and, in doing so we pry open and illuminate potential trajectories that involve self-transformation.

This is not to say, however, that there is nothing valuable about ways of life, beliefs and values worth preserving. On the contrary, Aristotle views ethics as emphasizing and valuing, in Nussbaum’s words, our “deepest human beliefs and desires”. There is a kind of ground upon which ethics takes place and phronesis as well as ‘ethical reflexivity’ ask how and if this ground should be modified. Wall makes this point well in his articulation of ‘poetic phronesis’:

Like art and literature, phronesis begins with a diversity of always already constituted “materials”—personal, historical, and intersubjective—and rather than simply reordering these materials themselves, or reducing them to their abstract generalities, it creates on their basis something new and hitherto unimagined…Poetic phronesis so understood is a practical wisdom of unceasing but not ungrounded narrative self-creation.

We decide whether and how to formulate, articulate and revise our beliefs and desires through our critical capacities that are elicited by the practice of phronesis. This articulation and re-articulation are based on ethically-relevant materials and, in our creativity, imagination and reasoning, we might come to places we had not thought possible.

**Beyond Phronesis: Ethical Reflexivity**

Ethical reflexivity and phronesis posit a social world that is complex, uncertain, and revisable. Praxis in such a world should be attentive to the particulars of ethical

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135 Nussbaum, 67.
136 Nussbaum, 65.
137 Wall, 329-30.
judgments and should attend to the modification of thought in light of our experiences (action). It should also be attentive to our relationships and to cultivating the qualities that allow us to attend to them generously. Aristotle’s account of rhetoric stresses the importance of deliberation and dialogue in the formation of judgments that are necessary for exercising phronesis.

More broadly, critical theory itself is Aristotelian in terms of the ‘knowledge interests’ served by this intellectual tradition. Hayward Alker describes Aristotle’s writing on ethics as serving the ‘hermeneutic’ and ‘emancipatory’ knowledge interests and Hans-Georg Gadamer draws on Aristotle in making the case for and elaborating an account of hermeneutics in which we seek understanding of ourselves and others through interpretation.\(^{138}\) Alker describes the hermeneutic knowledge interest as “a practical human concern, habit, or striving for the reaching of understanding or agreement. In true Aristotelian fashion it points toward what might become a rational basis for some future collective action.”\(^{139}\) When the hermeneutic interest is linked to an emancipatory interest in freeing individuals and collectivities from unnecessary impositions and constraints, the Aristotelian search for the ‘best and most complete’ ‘good for man’ provides a classical instantiation of what Habermas calls the emancipatory knowledge interest. This…knowledge interest deeply informs the modern, the Enlightenment, and the critical traditions of social theorizing.\(^{140}\)

Thus, Aristotle and critical social theory can work in tandem to guide action in an ethically satisfactory way. I take up this task in the next chapter when I discuss how critical theory further informs the practice of ethical reflexivity that I propose.

\(^{138}\) Alker; Gadamer.
\(^{139}\) Alker, 97.
\(^{140}\) ibid.
However, Aristotle’s account of *phronesis* as a tool for informing ethical and moral judgments about action needs to be adapted for a practice of international politics that is set in a different historical context and is grounded in different assumptions about what is possible for ethics. As I noted at the beginning of this chapter Aristotle’s writings assume a certain metaphysics. In contrast, I follow Kant and Foucault in arguing that a metaphysics is no longer appropriate and necessary for modern thought. Not only is it difficult to ground our knowledge in something that is not seen or shared (e.g., a divine source or substances consisting of form and matter), those who study the social and political world are hard-pressed to provide stringent enough evidence for ‘objective knowledge’. In addition, as agents we have the ability to change the world(s) within which we live, making ‘timeless truths’ elusive. We must then ask where we go in light of the uncertainties and contingencies of a social world that lacks a metaphysical foundation for knowledge.

I disagree with Kant’s contention that an alternative foundation for knowledge is available by replacing metaphysics with a universal reason that produces objective moral judgments. Jürgen Habermas makes a similar move toward universal reason in his elaboration of a theory of communicative rationality. In contrast to both, I follow Michel Foucault in replacing a focus on metaphysics understood as an inquiry into *being* and how *being* is possible with a focus on *becoming*. In effect, this framing of ‘becoming’ widens the scope of available action by looking inward, into ourselves as historical beings. Historicizing ourselves helps to make apparent how we might then

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141 Aristotle views metaphysics as “the study of being qua being”. This is the study of beings in so far as they are beings. S. Marc Cohen, “Aristotle’s Metaphysics” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2009).


become. Thus, I elaborate ethical reflexivity in Foucauldian terms as a ‘critical ontology of ourselves’ (the state, international community, etc.). This difference with Aristotle, however, is not insurmountable. Because Aristotle focuses more on consequences in his practice of ethics (whether our lives are lived well) and less on establishing a metaphysics for a practice of ethics, a metaphysical foundation is not necessary to borrow from his account. Whereas Kant turns to a rule-based and deontological method of moral judgment, Foucault returns to a particularistic method—a practice—more akin to Aristotle but without a metaphysical foundation.

A second issue that should be addressed in adapting Aristotle’s *phronesis* for my account of ‘ethical reflexivity is the role of ‘the good’ in practical reasoning. Aristotle’s account of *phronesis* positions ‘the good’ as that at which *phronesis* is directed. Ethical reflexivity, on the other hand, is not guided by the telos of ‘the good’. It is instead directed at achieving ethical judgments that are reflective, reflexive and deeply scrutinized. The end ‘good’ is neither assumed nor known beforehand and is always open to revision. Yet, even if we accepted the notion of the ‘highest good’ as explicated by Aristotle this concept has to be conceptualized in our everyday lives. Aristotle seems to see this effort as an ongoing project and as one that we work through with *phronesis*. Furthermore, even Aristotle’s argument about the notion of ‘the good’ is contingently made. In beginning his discussion of the ‘highest good’ Aristotle observes that it may vary by the situation and by the individual.\textsuperscript{144} Context and individual interpretations thus matter. And Aristotle looks to prevailing and common thought to ascertain what the

\textsuperscript{144} Aristotle, 1984, 2 [1094b].
highest good might be and to defend its pursuit.\textsuperscript{145} Aristotle approaches this discussion as if we can not know the good with surety and whether it’s a worthwhile concept. Thus, ethical reflexivity is not necessarily at odds with Aristotle’s consideration of ‘the good’.

Another way in which ethical reflexivity departs from Aristotle’s practice of *phronesis* lies in the distinction that Aristotle makes between the few and the many. From Aristotle’s discussion of the *phronimos* as a virtuous person who has cultivated the skills and has the experience to make good decisions, it is clear that not everyone is proficient in making ethical choices—to see the available alternatives and judge well among them on a consistent basis. The virtuous person, according to Aristotle, is fit to make all sorts of important decisions about what is of value, including ‘the good’, pleasure, justice, etc. One could also invoke Aristotle’s views on desirable types of regimes and different lives that have distinct purposes to undergird the claim that fewer rather than more citizens are fit and should tasked to politically lead and confront the ethical questions involved in doing so. To some extent Aristotle’s observations have some validity here. Elected officials, governmental representatives and bureaucrats do bring experience to bear on tough ethical questions, are often those who are in positions to make these ethical calls, and decide to take actions in particular situations including presenting, framing and filtering information and issues.\textsuperscript{146} Nevertheless, there are compelling reasons, both external and internal to Aristotle, to modify his view that privileges political decision-making among the few over the many.

\textsuperscript{145} See, for example, Aristotle’s discussion of happiness (or “living well and acting well”), Aristotle, 1984, 3 [1095a].

\textsuperscript{146} Legislation and decisions made by organizational bodies are often too broad to determine action. Their interpretation and implementation is where many crucial decisions are made and thus necessitates ethically astute bureaucrats and ‘on-the-ground’ actors. Also, these persons often make influential calls about which information to pass on to decision-makers and how to frame the information and thus how they assess these situations is worth considering.
First, democratic decision-making and the values that attend to democracy such as transparency and equality are increasingly important and legitimizing in much of the world. And even those countries with less-than-stellar democratic records have sought to magnify the degree to which international institutions of all kinds are more representative. What ethical reflexivity intends is that a very wide swath of persons cultivate ethical skills and are supported in doing so by public cultures and institutions. Second, as Abizadeh notes, Aristotle’s conceptualization of rhetoric is structurally similar to the deliberation of phronesis such that rhetoric can play an important role in making ethical judgments, especially when the speaker and the audience strive to be virtuous and have an ‘ethical education’. Thus, a wider deliberative body might be possible for phronesis.147 Finally, Aristotle’s injunction to look to the particulars of a situation to make ethical choices easily translates to international politics as getting to know others in their particularity. Because of the limitations inherent in narrating others’ identities, as explained earlier, this seems to require letting others speak and listening to them, thus widening rather than narrowing the set of ethical deliberators.

In the interdependent and interactive context of today’s international politics an Aristotelian account of practical reasoning should be embellished with an account of deliberation and argumentation that features respect for identity and attention to the dynamic of ‘othering’ that characterizes international politics. The deliberation of ethical reflexivity should be more fully specified as dialogue that seeks ‘understanding’ of others. Many theories of ethical and moral decision-making posit role-taking as sufficient for taking into account the interests or perspectives of others, whether within or outside of a formally organized political community. I argue, following others, that it is

147 Abizadeh.
not enough to put ourselves in the place of another, or employ some other cognitive
device of achieving distance, in order to adequately take others’ identities and interests
into account. Putting ourselves in place of the other is perhaps both desirable and
necessary but this position can not be occupied well without information about who the
other is—their identities, values and desires. Furthermore, given the complexity and
contingency that characterizes translating values into action, it would be difficult if not
impossible to know what others desire or how they interpret the ethical demands of any
particular situation. As authors such as Immanuel Levinas, Tzvetan Todorov and Richard
Shapcott argue, a lack of effective communication often effects assimilation and thus
does violence to the others’ identities, or even worse, results in the justification of harm
to others. The similarities between self and other are overdrawn because the other is
never really considered. The strategy of projecting sameness is turned to at the limits of
our knowledge of the Other.

Rather than assume a fundamental likeness and thus knowledge of the other,
dialogue starts from the probability of difference. We must investigate through
communication, rather than assume, the possibilities for community. As I detail in later
chapters, ethical reflexivity is a publicly worked out process wherein interlocutors engage
in a discourse that lays out and interrogates understandings of experience and what they
mean for thought and subsequent action. Furthermore, successful modification of
thought and action to achieve an ethical relation with others requires a certain attitude
that I also more fully specify in subsequent chapters. Critical theory proves particularly
helpful in developing this account.
Finally, Aristotle’s account of *phronesis* does not include a sophisticated analysis or awareness of how discourse and knowledge are constitutive of power relations. For example, Aristotle assumes a harmony of perceptions such that pleasure, knowing and truth are harmonious.\(^{148}\) As Michel Foucault has elaborated with his work, knowledge and power are mutually (though not entirely) constitutive. Shane Mulligan explains, “In Foucault’s view, the epistemic and discursive regularities that take the form of truths are constitutive of the power relations that pervade our life.”\(^{149}\) While such a view means that the ‘truth’ does not win out when discourse and ideas flow freely as in a Habermasian ‘ideal speech’ situation, this view does not mean that every social discursive practice is fatally poisoned by power. In the next chapter I especially draw on Foucault to illustrate how an awareness of the power/knowledge nexus allows us to understand and refashion ourselves as subjects.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I sought to detail how Aristotle’s practice of *phronesis* might inform a practice of ethics for international politics. Although the fit is not perfect (as detailed in the last section), my account of ‘ethical reflexivity’ benefits from Aristotle’s elaboration of *phronesis* in crucial respects—in its practical and pragmatic orientation and its critical rationality that enables ethical action and self-transformation as we navigate what ethical responsibility entails in our relationships with others. In fact, Aristotle’s *phronesis* can be considered a form of ‘reflexivity’ because it’s a dialectical interrogation of thought.

\(^{148}\) A point Foucault makes about Aristotle. Foucault, however, is not dismissive of Aristotle. He finds both fault with and value in the work of Aristotle and the ‘Ancients’.

and action and an exploration of how our ethical assessments might warrant self-transformation. Still, to have a satisfactory account of ethical reflexivity for international politics we must move beyond *phronesis* as I have outlined in the last section of this chapter. Additionally, Aristotle remained vague with regard to what the process of *phronesis* looks like in concrete terms. The project of this dissertation is, in part, to outline more clearly a practice of ethics that features a critical rationality, is attentive to the particulars of practice and features an attitude of self-critique. This will be the task of the next chapter.
Even if morality supplies a set of norms that produce a subject in his or her intelligibility, it also remains a set of norms and rules that a subject must negotiate in a living and reflective way.


[The Western approach is ideological, not empirical](http://example.com)

Bilahari Kausikan, “Asia’s Different Standard,” 1993

In this chapter I explain how contemporary theorizing of International Relations neglects reflexivity in international and global politics and I turn to critical social theory to further develop a practice of ethics for international politics. The practice that I propose, ‘ethical reflexivity’, is informed by critical theory’s focus on social change and critique that is enabled through the nexus of theory and practice and a focus on ethical relations. Much of the ‘mainstream’ literature in International Relations has neglected reflexivity in international politics, I argue, through its view of rationality as an instrumental rationality, its conceptualization of agency and structure and an emphasis on the individual as governed by psychological and cognitive processes that downplay the individual’s interpretive capabilities.

I first establish how the dominant notion of rationality assumed by theories of international relations as well as conceptualizations of agency and structure tend to neglect the capability of actors for reflexivity. The model of rationality prominently

featured in the field of International Relations among neorealists, neoliberals and many
constructivists, and in the practice of international politics, is an instrumental rationality
that is focused on the strategic pursuit of preferences. In addition, the agency and
structure problematique downplays the interpretive powers of agents by analytically
focusing on structure or extraordinarily capable agents such as the ‘norm entrepreneur’.
In short, the ‘rationalist’ project and agency-structure in IR elides two important but
neglected projects: 1) investigating the role of agency in everyday decision-making
beyond what IR theorists document as the exceptional role of the ‘norm entrepreneur’,
and 2) elaborating ethical practices that leverage agency in favor of a reflective and
reflexive interrogation of identities, practices and actions. Not only do actors engage in
the ‘reflexive monitoring’ of their actions, their capacity for critical reflection can be
enhanced through a practice of ethical reflexivity that builds up agency. Next, I draw on
the critical social theorists, Michel Foucault and Anthony Giddens, in addition to IR
critical theorists to articulate an account of reflexivity as a practice that reinstates the
ethical agency of actors in international politics. The practice of ethical reflexivity that I
propose is informed by critical theory’s focus on social change that is enabled by the
nexus of theory and practice and by a nuanced understanding of agency and structure that
leverages opportunities for formulating and implementing practices of ethics. Ethical
reflexivity features an alternative rationality, a ‘critical rationality’ that neither assumes
identity, values, beliefs and/or goals nor leaves them free from critical challenge, and
features a self-conscious and self-critical form of agency. This form of rationality can
facilitate a practice of interrogation of our self-understandings and actions and a practice
of international politics that takes seriously critical theory’s insights on difference, power
relations and ethics. I argue that to some degree ethical reflexivity’s critical rationality is already present in the practice of international politics but can be magnified if we make explicit the constitutive process and attitude of ethical reflexivity and develop it as a social practice.

**Reflexivity and International Relations**

Reflexivity generally refers to a process that is self-referential or, as described by Morris Rosenberg, “an entity acting back upon itself”, and, according to Judith Butler, a “reflexive being” is “one who can and does take him or herself as an object of reflection”. George Mead describes reflexivity as “individuals becom[ing] objects to themselves.” One’s response “becomes a part of his conduct, where he not only hears himself but responds to himself, talks and replies to himself.” Finally, Hannah Arendt describes an internal dialogue between “me and myself” where one thinks about what one is doing and morally evaluates it. The reflexive academic, for example, reflects on how his or her work is generated within a certain historical and social context and against particular individual experiences, and how this work has and may inform the beliefs and actions of others. This reflection prompts questions about whether how scholars might re-fashion themselves and their work. In the study of international politics reflexivity has received little attention beyond the reflexive position of the scholar. I argue that

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reflexivity, in part, has been less present in the field of International Relations, relative to our more sociological cousins, because the model of rationality prominently featured in the field of International Relations and in the practice of international politics is an *instrumental rationality* that is focused on the strategic pursuit of preferences. This form of rationality is unreflexive and, given its pervasiveness in the field of IR as an empirical assumption, I begin this chapter by exploring an alternative form of rationality that recognizes the ways in which the actors of global politics exercise reflexivity and are capable of further developing themselves as reflexive actors. A ‘critical rationality,’ I argue, can form the basis for both the reflexive practice and study of international relations.

The alternative rationality featured in the practice of ‘ethical reflexivity’ also has the advantage of taking both ethics and power relations into account, rejecting the division of ‘empirical’ and ‘normative’ that dominates the field.8 It is a critical rationality that neither assumes identity, values or goals, nor leaves them free from critical challenge, and features a self-conscious and self-critical form of agency. This

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8 Often, this division is based on a sloppy reading of E.H. Carr, who more accurately advocated a dialectical movement between realism and utopianism, invoking each to correct the other. Thus, there is a distinct duality in Carr’s conception of “sound” political thought. It is “based on elements of both utopia and reality. Where utopianism has become a hollow and intolerable sham, which serves merely as a disguise for the interests of the privileged, the realist performs an indispensable service in unmasking it. But pure realism can offer nothing but a naked struggle for power which makes any kind of international society impossible”, E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939* (New York: Harper Collins, 1981), 93.
critical rationality can facilitate interrogation of our self-understandings and actions and a practice of international politics that takes seriously critical theory’s insights on difference. I argue that to some degree, ethical reflexivity’s critical rationality is already present in the practice of international politics but can be magnified if we make explicit the constitutive process and attitude of ethical reflexivity. To do this I draw on the work of Anthony Giddens and Michel Foucault, in addition to the previous chapter’s discussion of Aristotle’s insights on ethical reasoning.

The Need for a ‘Critical Rationality’ in International Relations

Increasingly, in the field of International Relations scholars have self-consciously identified their theorizing as ‘rationalist’ and have called for collaboration between theories based on this common ground. Neorealism and neoliberalism, for example, are commonly referred to as ‘rationalist’ theories. Ole Waever writes of a ‘neo-neo synthesis’ that is united by a positivist epistemology and the assumption that actors’ preferences are informed by a utilitarian and instrumental rationality (e.g., Andrew Moravcsik’s 1997 article in *International Organization*). Some strands of constructivism have joined in the rationalist trend by calling for research agendas that reconcile constructivism with rationalism (e.g., Jeffrey Checkel’s 1997 article in *EJIR*) or constructivism with rationalist-based theories such as realism and liberalism (e.g.,

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Samuel Barkin’s 2003 article in *ISR*). These accounts argue that constructivism can be a tool to understand how and why various actors have certain preferences. Instead of simply positing preferences as determined by maximizing power or material gain, as Nina Tannenwald argues, we might investigate how ‘ideas’ inform ‘preferences’ as “broad orientations for behavior and policy”.

What is distinctive about the type of rationality that ‘rationalist’ theories of IR posit is that it is used to describe the cognitive process that actors undergo when presented with a decision. Rationalist actors, under this framework, act in the context of structures (ideational, material, both, or otherwise) that constitute the preferences that these actors attempt to realize through strategic behavior. This conceptualization of rationality, however, is problematic because it posits actors as merely vessels for, carriers of, or respondent to forces and ideas. Agency and ethics are neglected. Even in much of constructivist theorizing actors are theorized out of the social process as they enact ‘roles’ and abide by ‘norms’ and ‘rules’. The social system or structure, for the most part,

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13 Keohane speculates that ‘rationalist’ and ‘reflectivist’ approaches can possibly be merged if empirical hypotheses are generated, 1988. Ten years later Katzenstein, Keohane and Krasner come together to write about the evolution of the sub-field of International Political Economy, concluding that rationalism and constructivism “are complementary on some crucial points” because they “share an interest in beliefs or knowledge” and constructivists “seek to understand how preferences are formed and knowledge is generated, prior to the exercise of instrumental rationality,” Peter J. Katzenstein, Robert O. Keohane and Stephen Krasner, “International Organization and the Study of World Politics,” *International Organization* 52:4 (1998): 645-685.

14 Tannenwald, Nina, “Ideas and Explanation: Advancing the Theoretical Agenda,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7:2 (2005): 13-42. Other IR theorists, however, have questioned the viability of a rationalist hegemony in the field of International Relations, arguing that constructivism is misrepresented in many of these proposals and that a rationalist hegemony is undesirable. See: Steele, 2007; Guzzini 2000.
operates “outside the actions and consciousness of its members”. These accounts of
rationality ignore and decultivate agency, freeze power relations, and don’t allow for or encourage the change that critique can enable and facilitate.

In short, the ‘rationalist’ project in IR elides two important but neglected projects: 1) investigating actors as capable agents who interpret the world around them and thus have agency in everyday decision-making, and 2) elaborating ethical practices that leverage agency in favor of a reflective and reflexive interrogation of identities, practices, beliefs and actions. Not only do actors engage in the ‘reflexive monitoring’ of their actions, I argue, their capacity for critical reflection can be enhanced through a practice of ethical reflexivity that builds up agency. Fleshing out a reflexive ‘critical rationality’ should be a central project of critical IR theorists precisely because social change requires not only critique of structures and practices, but action as well that is made possible by the interpretive powers of individuals to judge past beliefs and behavior and to articulate and pursue aspirations that arise out of and are enacted within particular social contexts.

Agency, Structure and Ethics in International Relations

While actors’ interpretive and agential powers in international politics should be recognized, I want to avoid committing the error of de-socializing individuals as I construct a practice of ethics for international politics. IR theorists who have sought to recognize the importance of both agency and structure have particularly focused on what is known as the ‘agency-structure problematique’, a debate that has been the topic of

much social constructivist work in International Relations. Rather than focusing entirely on one to the exclusion of the other, these scholars, generally self-identifying as constructivists, have sought to attend to their interdependency. This scholarship seeks an understanding of how agents act within the context of a structure that deeply influences identities and informs and constrains action while these very actions constitute or push up against structure. Agents’ actions make sense only when they are contextualized by an analysis of structure, but structure is not static or independent of agents. Some constructivists, such as Alexander Wendt, have borrowed from structuration theory, a sociological theory associated with Anthony Giddens, to theorize agency and structure. In structuration theory agency and structure are co-constituted. Structures change as agents change and agents’ identities are themselves constituted by the language, discourses and ideas that have become structurally embedded in human social interaction.

There are various accounts of how this structural change takes place. Among them, IR theorists have sought to show that social change is a matter of the spread of norms through norm entrepreneurs, demonstration effects, coercion, socialization, persuasion, and ‘norm cascades’ as a norm gains numerical momentum. IR scholars

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17 Certainly, not all social constructivists use the framing of agency and structure to elucidate a sociological account of international politics. ‘Critical’ or ‘radical’ social constructivists draw on post-modern and post-structural theorists such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida to theorize the importance of language, discourse, speech acts, texts and rules for constructing social reality. Examples of these IR theorists include Nicholas Onuf, Friedrich Kratochwil, James Der Derian, Richard Ashley, Jutta Weldes and Andrew Linklater. Some of this work will be further explored later in this chapter.

18 These scholars include Alexander Wendt, Martin Hollis, Steve Smith, and Martha Finnemore.


have increasingly turned to questions of agency and structure and, the more sociological among them, generally posit a dynamic relationship between the two.

Much of this work, particularly that which attempts to demonstrate the co-constitution of agency and structure through examples from international politics, features certain assumptions about the prospect of structural change, including the ability of actors to develop and act upon a reflexive self-consciousness, the endurance of social structures in the face of agential challenges, and the scale of structures in international politics. IR scholars who posit a dynamic relationship between agency and structure tend to see structures in large-scale terms that endure over long historical epochs, such as ‘international society’ and social orders of ‘anarchy’. They also tend to explore large-scale ideational shifts that result from ‘ethical arguments’, ‘persuasion’ and the efforts of ‘norm entrepreneurs’. Thus, they focus on specifying how the identities and preferences of agents are constituted by structures or the historical flash points (usually crises) that provide the occasion for agents to produce pervasive change.

These research projects on agency and structure have contributed to a more nuanced understanding of how agents and structures are mutually constituted, how agents are contextualized within particular structures, and how large-scale change in norms, institutions and international society have their source in agential action. Yet, agents and structures are still undertheorized in at least one crucial way—with regard to their capacity for reflexivity. While neorealists and neoliberals tend to overestimate and

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Other accounts, though fewer, posit that in order for these change to occur agents must develop a self-consciousness that their self-understandings are informed or constituted by social structures and that their actions and re-stylized self-understandings can effect deep societal change by altering the social structure that informs their actions and the actions of others, Berejikian and Dryzek.

rationalist liberals tend to underestimate the degree to which structure determines the preferences of agents, perhaps unexpectedly, many constructivists and post-structuralists also have problematic theorizations of agency and structure. Post-structuralists often see structures as so pervasive and entrenched in discourses, texts or language that agents often do not have the resources to challenge prevailing structures. Post-structuralists are good at showing who and what is left out in prevailing social structures, but offer little in the way of a positive program or a way forward. Constructivists, on the other hand, portray agency and structure as co-constituted, but when it comes to social change agents are portrayed either as naïve and homogenous consumers of socialization (responding to a ‘logic of appropriateness’) or extraordinarily self-aware and capable ‘norm entrepreneurs’. Aside from these atypical moments, structure is largely static. As Klotz and Lynch declare in a research handbook for constructivists: “For constructivists, stable meanings form structures.”22 This does not mean that constructivists find agency unimportant or believe that structures never change, but these authors’ characterization of when it is important as well as the examples they invoke reveal how agency takes a backseat to structure much of the time:

Most often these structures change at the margins, but occasionally they shift quite dramatically. The inherently contestable relationship between contending meanings opens up possibilities for innovation and reform, such as nuclear disarmament or the destruction of the Berlin Wall.23

In their chapter on agency, Klotz and Lynch ground the importance of agency in its ability to produce “new rules and procedures” that “may shift people’s worldviews”24,

23 ibid.
24 ibid., 44.
and agency’s “success” is assessed by whether an actor’s “frame becomes predominant.”^25

Part of the problem is analytical. In contrast to the theoretical dynamism posited by sociological IR scholars, empirical examination of structure and agency in IR tends to hold either agency or structure constant when assessing the other. Joining Jeffrey Checkel^26, Jeffrey Berejikian and John Dryzek argue that “constructivist analysis tends to emphasize the role of structures at the expense of agents.”^27 Alexander Wendt, for example, justifies this strategy for analytic purposes.^28 There is a sort of lag time as structures are affected by large-scale agential action and structures socialize and incentivize agents to adopt particular identities and beliefs. Research thus tends to focus on how structures change or agents are socialized, leaving out variation among actors.

As Berejikian and Dryzek point out, constructivists are also generally guilty of having a view of rationality that is an instrumental rationality: “it is generally the interpretations of a situation that govern how states will act within it.”^29 “Reflexive action”, on the other hand, “also recognizes the constitutive role of agency” so that actors ask questions not just about what their role or identity dictates, but also: “Does action X help constitute a world I find attractive?”^30 In sum, in much of the constructivist and post-structural literature (though certainly not all), agents’ capacity for reflexivity and their everyday interpretive acts that potentially have both reproductive and transformative effects are undertheorized.

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^25 ibid., 55.
^27 Berejikian and Dryzek, 204.
^29 Berejikian and Dryzek, 205.
^30 ibid.
Absent attention to interpretive and reflexive powers, the theorization and examination of ethical practices has been unsatisfactory. (Some post-structural and constructivist theorists, such as William Connolly, among others, prove to be exceptions and their work will be explored later in this chapter.) Several constructivists, such as Mervyn Frost and Neta Crawford, have pointed out that ethical considerations in international politics are in fact commonplace because the actors of international politics constantly strive to be in good standing by being good actors of a certain kind (e.g., states), and thus ethical action is often performed absent an awareness of the ethical status of these choices. According to Frost, it is only when it is unclear what the ethical course of action might be, or when prevalent standards of conduct are violated, that ethical questions become prominent.31 Constructivist theorists of international ethics, such as Mervyn Frost, do not posit or advocate a practice of reflexivity wherein self-aware and self-critical actors consider a range of ethical actions that may involve challenging prevalent identities and norms. Rather, agents use the existing norms of international society (such as sovereignty and human rights) as a baseline from which to tackle hard cases and make ethical judgments about others’ actions. As a consequence, this practice of ethics features the disadvantages of biasing in favor of the status quo, neglecting self-critique and internal examination, and assuming that dominant norms and ideologies are shared by all.

In sum, among the major theories of International Relations, theorizations of agency and structure are still problematic, and this is especially evident when we consider how ethical action and change are and might be undertaken within world politics. Not

only do these theories privilege either agency over structure or structure over agency, they also neglect agents’ status as reflexive actors and the potential to leverage even greater reflexivity through the cultivation of reflexivity as a social practice among agents and structures. Developed as a practice, reflexivity offers resources for ethical action to agents of various kinds and has the potential for endurance when valued and regularized at multiple social sites. Attention to reflexivity as a practice brings the theorization of agency and structure beyond the exceptional and occasional and promotes ethical agency, ethical relationships and self-transformation in everyday international politics.

The Individual Turn in International Relations: Psychological, Bureaucratic and Cognitive Approaches

There are, of course, other bodies of literature in International Relations that focus less on the state and the international system or society and more on individuals and how they make decisions, particularly in the study of foreign policy. These approaches specifically portray individuals that are more heterogeneous and need to be investigated in order to understand policy decisions and the outcomes of international politics. Some theories focus on organizational dynamics and, more specifically, the incentives of the modern bureaucracy, as explanations. On these accounts factors such as an individual’s place and power in the bureaucracy; political bargaining; rules and roles; organizational culture and scripts; and group dynamics provide powerful explanations for the actions of individuals. I discuss some of this literature as it is applied to international politics in chapter four. The main shortcoming of this literature when it comes to examining practices of ethics is that it leaves little room for variation among individuals. As I show

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in the case of the response to the Rwandan genocide, individuals vary in their interpretations of what roles, rules and organizational normative commitments require of them. Some even draw on ethical resources outside of the organization to make decisions. In other words, some individuals are more ethically reflexive than others, and this has implications for the ‘outcomes’ of international politics, including the possibility of greater ethical reflexivity.

Perhaps psychological theories of international relations have most explicitly sought to offer explanations of international politics at the individual level. These theories point to leadership styles, personality types, cognitive heuristics, cognitive biases and emotion as important factors for understanding policies and action, particularly in the study of foreign policy.33 This work challenges the ‘rationalist’ assumption at the core of realism, liberalism and their variations, that actors instrumentally seek to realize their preferences and undertake cost, benefit and probabilistic calculations. Drawing on theories of psychology and research in neuroscience, IR scholars have argued that individuals often react emotionally when making decisions and then seek to rationalize these emotional reactions, engage in shallow analogical reasoning, seek to maintain consistent beliefs even when presented with contradictory evidence, and make wildly inaccurate probabilistic estimates.34 Janice Gross Stein summarizes the implication of this research for foreign policy analysis, but this statement could be applied generally to rationalist theories of international relations: “The picture of reflective, deliberative,
rational decision-making that underlies so much of foreign policy analysis fits poorly with this cumulating body of evidence of how we as human being choose.”

Still, psychological theories are largely not able to move beyond the rationalist model. An instrumentally rational individual is often assumed to be ideal, where psychological biases and heuristics make this ideal impossible or are barriers to overcome in the rationalization of decision-making. This work seems to leave little room for agency, as do rationalist IR theories, if individuals are governed by emotional drives and cognitive tendencies, rather than self-governed. And because they seek to explain how actors deviate from an instrumental rationality in their exploration of the “limits of rationality”, psychological theories have not been able to offer an alternative model of decision-making. In addition, by focusing on tendencies such as ‘realms of loss’ and ‘realms of gain’, psychological theories leave out the interpretive and reflexive powers of individuals, both their existence and their potential.

Even so, there are important insights from this research that might lead one to question the desirability of the rationalist ideal. People, Gross Stein argues, are “hard-wired for altruism and trust” and “have a hypersensitive capacity to detect and react to betrayal”, enabling them to solve tough problems in international politics. The “provocative argument” that follows

is that in some cases and under some conditions, rational choice models that set norms for the calculation of expected utility may get in the way of more ‘enlightened’ foreign policy decision-making that makes space for emotional and moral reasoning.

35 ibid., 111.
36 ibid., 113.
37 ibid.
Decision-making habits can also be changed over time, as individuals re-train their cognitive and emotional responses, or “educate our brains”, for the next situation. More specifically, Gross Stein suggests that leaders can build in time for “reflection and analysis” in decision-making, seek out criticism and opposing views, and verify information. Berejikian and Dryzek observe that leaders and diplomats may engage in self-fulfilling prophecies by perceiving the potential for losses and thus spurring the adoption of this ‘social frame’, but there is also the possibility that agency could play instead a “constitutive role.” These suggestions for decision-making leave room for reflexivity and are intended to cultivate reflection and consideration of alternative interpretations. Psychological accounts of international relations should be kept in mind as we consider alternative rationalities, both descriptive and aspirational, such as the ‘critical rationality’ featured in ‘ethical reflexivity’.

Another shortcoming of this literature is that in bringing the individual as agent back in, psychological theories of international politics have neglected structure. Walter Carlsnaes writes: “The problem is that it is generally recognized that in real life, actors and structures do not exist in a zero-sum relationship but, rather, that human agents and social structures are in a fundamental sense dynamically interrelated entities, and hence we cannot account fully for the one without invoking the other.” But, as Carlsnaes laments, none of the mainstream theories have “resolved this problem, since each tends to privilege either actors or structures in their explanations, or treats them separately on

39 ibid., 114.
40 Berejikian and Dryzek.
different levels of analysis." Carlsnaes proposes that scholars not privilege any one explanation by, first, assessing the intention or goal of a decision or policy (interpretive) and then digging deeper to identify the disposition at work (psychological) and, lastly, specify the structural context. Yet, even Carlsnaes’ methodological solution, or ‘integrative framework’, still neglects the interpretive and reflexive powers of individuals that are possible even within particular social structures and psychological dispositions. This framework, Carlsnaes admits, privileges structure and does not solve the agency-structure problem.

Theorizations of Reflexivity in International Relations

In light of these criticisms of mainstream IR theories, I turn to recent work in International Relations and critical social theory that focuses more on theorizing reflexivity. Drawing on this work, I propose a conceptualization and practice of ethics that posits and cultivates individual and collective agency even as actors are socialized and embedded in structures and relations of power. Fleshing out a reflexive ‘critical rationality’ should especially be a central project of critical IR theorists because social change requires not only critique (which deconstruction and genealogy do well), but also intentional and considered action. In addition, critique itself requires reflection on ourselves, our relations with others, and a capacity to imagine ourselves otherwise. IR theory tends to neglect the reflexivity that actors already undertake and has done little to posit ways in which reflexivity might be magnified as a practice. Rather than assume that

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42 Carlsnaes, 97-8.
43 ibid., 98.
agents of change randomly emerge or investigate the processes and content of discourses and arguments, I investigate how individuals and organizations are and can be capable agents who reflect upon and navigate the social world of global, international and national institutions. Such an analysis of the dynamics of ethical agency is necessary to propose alternative ethical practices that cultivate ethical agency.

An emerging body of work within International Relations has devoted some attention to the notion and practice of reflexivity. A small number of IR scholars have used the term ‘ontological security’ to explore how identity concerns can change the behavior of world actors. Brent Steele, for example, employs Anthony Giddens’ structuration theory to show how actors’ capacity for reflexivity—their ability to maintain theoretical understandings for the basis of their actions—facilitates the alignment of action with identity when actors become ontologically insecure.44 This insecurity arises when the schism between actions and identity are made apparent. Thus, Steele is able to explain why Great Britain remained neutral during the American Civil War despite the incentives for intervention.45 It is the need of actors to maintain ‘continuity’ and ‘order’ in their identities combined with their capacity for reflexivity that enables this realignment between a discursively established identity and action.

Jeffrey Berejikian and John Dryzek also explore reflexivity in international politics which they interpret as “intelligent international action”. Actors have the capacity to “develop a reflexive awareness of the world they are helping to constitute, as

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45 ibid.
well as acting within”.46 Berejikian and Dryzek lament that the dominant theories of IR (for them, Realism and Liberalism) squash reflexivity by downplaying or denying agents’ contributions to the constitution of international politics. Rather than assume that actors are only capable of employing ‘instrumental reasoning’, scholars should consider how actors might self-consciously engage in ‘constitutive reasoning’ more effectively. Berejikian and Dryzek are interested in promoting reflexive thinking in which world actors consider how their actions could potentially affect the social structure.

While this Steele’s work on ‘ontological security’ and Berejikian and Dryzek’s work on ‘reflexive action’ help us to understand how reflexivity enables or even compels actors to recognize how they are constituted and how their self-identities may or may not align with their actions in world politics, this work does not offer an account of how reflexivity can be magnified among world actors in an enduring way and as a practice of ethics so that actors regularly and consistently engage in reflexivity on an everyday basis. These authors do, however, see a need for greater reflexivity. Steele writes, for example: “[W]hile no actors can adequately predict when and where ‘critical situations’ will occur, we must continue to develop our understanding of reflexive processes so that we know what actors must do to increase their ‘reflexive capabilities’”.47 Berejikian and Dryzek link their account of reflexive action to the project of ‘reflexive modernity’ among Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, which “is characterized by a self-conscious politics that is self-critical and has its own re-shaping perpetually in mind”.48 Such a project, I argue, requires not just the ‘constitutive reasoning’ that Berejikian and Dryzek promote, but also ‘critical reasoning’ that brings ethical concerns to everyday

46 Berejikian and Dryzek, 195.
47 Steele 2005, 539.
48 ibid., 213.
interpretations. Actors need to judge whether their actions and identities are ethically satisfactory. In this way the possibility of self-transformation and the ability to align actions with self-understandings and the values they entail becomes for something.

The practice I propose, ‘ethical reflexivity’, is more encompassing with its ‘critical rationality’ through which actors consider how they are constituted in their subjectivity, treat their identity and actions to critical self-examination, consider how actions align with their values and beliefs, and evaluate whether the past consequences of their actions have been desirable. I propose reflexivity as a practice of ethics. I also consider how this self-consciousness as an ‘ethical agent’ can be achieved as a celebrated practice and through structural encouragement. The ‘critical situations’ that Steele speaks of are not necessary for reflexive self-examination and ethical engagement if actors develop a sustained practice of ‘ethical reflexivity’ or, in other words, enhance their capabilities as ‘ethical agents.’ Reflexivity, then, for agents, is not just recognition of their status as constituted agents, but also a practice that is continually maintained. Importantly, reflexivity can be magnified and its practice even structurally embedded if it is viewed as a practice and not just a recognition or self-awareness of our socially constructed status.

Critical Theory and ‘Ethical Reflexivity’

What I call ‘ethical reflexivity’ is a practice of ethics that has a critical rationality because it features thought and action as objects of ethical reflection and potential sites of change. It is well-suited for modernity because it doesn’t assume fundamental truths about values or the make-up of human actors. Rather, subjectivities, thought, and actions
are continually interrogated. Through a process and attitude of critical self-introspection and self-other dialogue, avenues are opened for remaking ourselves. Furthermore, as the discussion of Foucault will elucidate, a practice of ethics for modernity does not consist of a search for our ‘true’ identity and a project to attain and possess it. Rather, ethics might be a project of ‘becoming’. Rather than applying morality to particular situations, ethics is proposed as a continuous process and orientation to action.

Modernity, ‘Truth’, and Reflexivity

For both Anthony Giddens and Michel Foucault reflexivity is a constitutive feature of modernity. Both see modernity as a social epoch in which a belief in fundamental truths and a foundational morality has been dispensed with. Modernity is a social order where there are ‘truths’ or ‘beliefs’ but these truths and beliefs are experiential, contingent and provisional. Though modernity is not universal, both Giddens and Foucault seek to develop coherent social practices and institutions appropriate for modernity. Giddens describes modernity as “an order which has ‘dispensed’ with tradition and ultimate truths, and promoted circumstances in which claims to ‘moral authority’ are held only ‘until further notice.’”49 Giddens argues for a modernity that rejects notions of fundamental truths, particularly moral truths, in favor of contingency, fallibilism and reflexivity. Foucault also articulates a project of reform for modernity. His reconceptualization of modernity features rationality, but it is a critical rationality built upon the notion of reflexivity. In his discussion of the Enlightenment,

Michel Foucault articulates a modernity that is an attitude of self-critique and a process wherein we assess what is possible and desirable.\textsuperscript{50} We imagine what might be otherwise by asking what is historically contingent about our current condition and seek to reinvent ourselves toward certain ends. We seek to understand how we are constituted as subjects by our actions, knowledge, and submission to power relations.

Modernity, as articulated by these two authors, rejects the ‘Cartesian anxiety’. It is a paradox of modernity that fundamental and foundational truths are highly suspect and yet there is anxiety that “should we prove unsuccessful in our search for the Archimedean point of indubitable knowledge that can serve as the foundation for human reason, then rationality must give way to irrationality, and reliable knowledge to madness”.\textsuperscript{51} This anxiety about truth manifests itself in the form of a search for scientific truths and secure and coherent moralities. In these accounts human beings are often assumed to be rational actors who exercise a universal reason in objectively arriving at universal truths (including among those who study ‘human behavior’). This epistemology of ‘truth’ characterizes realism, liberalism, a considerable portion of constructivism and a great deal of international political theory. Given this orientation, relatively little thought has been given to the question: What might an ethics look like that starts from the premise that there are no foundational truths? Might we still be able to articulate a practice of ethics that proves useful for the dilemmas that vex us? Referring to this absence of “transcendental guarantees” that forms part of a “Foucauldian ethical sensibility”, Connolly finds an “active cultivation of the capacity to subdue resentment against the absence of necessity in what you are and to affirm the ambiguity of life without


\textsuperscript{51} Neufeld, 16.
transcendental guarantees”. Ethical reflexivity, because it explores this ambiguity in a way that is productive of reflective action enables the pursuit of positive projects while not giving in to the temptation for ontological certainty.

Leveraging Reflexivity, Challenging Power

To some extent, reflexivity is already present among social actors. Anthony Giddens argues that human actors have “the capacity to understand what they do while they do it”.52 This is not to say that social structure is unimportant. After all, much of our understanding is tacit or part of what Giddens terms the ‘practical consciousness’ which operates between the unconscious and the discursive levels.53 Structure influences our behavior and informs our identities, but in everyday life we choose to act in ways that have repercussions for whether the social structure is reproduced, challenged or changed.54 Reflexivity “means that all social norms and routines are fragile”.55 People actively interpret the social situation and it is these interpretations and the actions that follow from them that contribute to a reconstitution of society. The role of reflexivity in Giddens’ structuration theory is indicative of the determinism/voluntarism dualism that Giddens wished to avoid. Our actions are informed by structure but reflexivity allows us to reflect upon why we do what we do and modify our actions and thought.

52 Giddens, 1984, xxii.
53 ibid., xxiii.
54 For Giddens, structure consists in routines and patterned social practices that are regularized in social institutions, Tucker, 60.
55 ibid., 57.
Giddens sees reflexivity as a type of rationality because actors are rationalizing their action when they draw upon or understand their action theoretically. They “maintain a continuing ‘theoretical understanding’ of the grounds of their activity” (5).\(^{56}\)

Giddens articulates a process of reflexivity is dialectic in that thought and action are each used to assess and potentially modify the other. Through reflexivity “thought and action are constantly refracted back upon one another…social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character.”\(^{57}\)

A central claim of this chapter is that reflexivity can be leveraged and magnified as a social practice. Thought and actions are brought to the level of ‘discursive consciousness’ where ‘collective knowledge’ can be elaborated and evaluated. In such a practice, thought and action are situated *dialectically*, using each to modify the other.

Thought and action might also be amended as unintended consequences and power flows are identified. This approach neither dismisses identities, values or norms, nor unjustifiably privileges them. As Judith Butler explains, “Even if morality supplies a set of norms that produce a subject in his or her intelligibility, it also remains a set of norms and rules that a subject must negotiate in a living and reflective way.”\(^{58}\) In other words, they must be actively interpreted and we can describe how this might be done in way that is indeed ‘reflective’, as Butler advocates.

Reflexivity is not merely a process of dialectic critique and interpretation, however. In elaborating this practice of ethical reflexivity I have especially drawn on Foucault’s call for an *attitude* of self-critique and an openness to being other than what

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\(^{56}\) Giddens, 1984, 5.


\(^{58}\) Butler, 2005, 10.
we are. In responding to Kant’s essay, “What is Enlightenment?”, Foucault explains that modernity can be an “attitude” or “philosophical ethos” of permanent self-critique, featuring a “critical ontology of ourselves” wherein we seek to identify our limits of being and acting that are the product of our historical situation and at the same time “experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.”\textsuperscript{59} We imagine what might be otherwise by asking what is historically contingent about our current condition and seek to reinvent ourselves in certain ways. We seek to understand how we are constituted as subjects by our actions, knowledge, and submission to and exercise of power. In sum, Foucault describes an attitude of modernity that is a form of self-reflexivity and is cultivated through a desire to explore and to refashion ourselves in ways that withstand self-scrutiny.\textsuperscript{60} Foucault’s attitude of critique as reflexivity highlights the transformative power of a reflexive ethics as a practice in that we seek to interrogate what is desirable and possible for our political and social lives. Although Foucault certainly does not see this power of reinvention as having no bounds, he does not posit individuals as having subjectivities that are entirely structurally determined, and he is looking into modernity for its potentiality.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{59} Foucault 1984, 50.
\textsuperscript{60} Similar to Foucault’s use of ‘attitude’, William Connolly articulates the transformative potential of invoking a different “mood”. Connolly specifically draws attention to how changing our “mood” can aid in the search for a satisfactory ethics in the face of difference: “The temptation to convert difference into heresy often flows from the effort to conceal uncertainties in one’s faith or identity, projecting them onto others as evils. These same difficulties and uncertainties processed through another mood, however, sometimes become materials through which a new conversion is set in motion,” William Connolly, \textit{Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), xxiii.
This elaboration of reflexivity epitomizes Foucault’s approach to ethics. Foucault refused to subscribe to any particular conception or code of morality. Rather, for Foucault, ethics consists in how we respond to our particular historical situation. It is “the considered form that freedom takes” when one embodies a “historico-critical attitude” of experimentation and identifies where change is possible and desirable. For example, in his historical studies of sexuality Foucault sought to “loosen the grip of our self-understandings as ‘subjects of desire’, so as to make possible a different relationship to our thought, ourselves and others, as well as to our pleasures”. Foucault points to Baudelaire’s figure of the ‘dandy’ who makes himself into a work of art. The subject takes on the responsibility of producing and fashioning himself such that a “critical ontology of ourselves” consists of working on ourselves in response to our time. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow argue that Foucault urges us to test what we think are our own limits because doing so makes apparent that there are “meaningful differences in the kinds of society we can have and there are ways of being human worth opposing and others worth strengthening.”

As other critical theorists have elucidated, criticism makes apparent who we have been and who we might be. Much or IR critical theory similarly seeks out possibilities for transformation, particularly of world orders, and has the aim of clarifying the “range

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63 ibid., xxviii.


of possible alternatives”. As Robert Cox explains, “Critical theory is theory of history in that sense of being concerned not just with the past but with a continuing process of historical change”. Foucault writes that criticism is “a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying” and through the work of criticism we make possible “no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think”. Here, I develop this project more explicitly as a practice of ethics. In this sense, the work of freedom, or ethics, is left undefined because it is left for us, as subjects and in our subjectivity, to work out.

This project is not completely undefined in practice, however, because we always act within a particular social and historical context that features power relations. This is particularly evident in ‘human rights discourse and politics’, as expressed by Judith Butler:

The necessity of keeping our notion of the human open to a future articulation is essential to the project of international human rights discourse and politics. We this time and again when the very notion of the human is presupposed; the human is defined in advance, in terms that are distinctively western, very often American, and, therefore, partial and parochial…How we move from the local to the international (conceived globally in such a way that it does not recirculate the presumption that all humans belong to established nation-states) is a major question for international politics.

Butler points out the historical power relation in which Western philosophical and cultural notions have trumped Eastern philosophical and cultural notions, yet Butler is not resigned in the ever present face of power. Neither was Foucault, even in his early

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67 Ibid., 209.
work. As Neve Gordon observes, Foucault posited in *Discipline and Power* that “discipline is dependent on indiscipline”, and in *History of Sexuality, Volume 1* that “power is dependent on resistance”. Indeed, the exercise of power in the form of discipline faces the challenge of the exercise of counter-power, according to Foucault: “It [discipline] must also master all the forces that are formed from the very constitution of an organized multiplicity; it must neutralize the effect of counter-power that spring from them and which form a resistance to the power that wishes to dominate it”. Dreyfus and Rabinow argue that Foucault’s “aim has never been to denounce power *per se* nor to propound truth but to use his analysis to shed light on the specific dangers that each specific type of power/knowledge produces”. The aim of ethical reflexivity is to interrogate and challenge knowledge and power and can thus be exercised as a form of counter-power, and it should be continuously employed. In Foucauldian terms, through an ethic that is focused on the ‘care of one’s self’ power can be challenged and subverted.

**‘Ethical Reflexivity’ as a Practice of International Politics**

Like Foucault and Giddens, Aristotle also attends to the self through a rationality that is critical and self-interrogating. In this regard, Aristotle’s *phronesis* inspires an ethical reflexivity that is a technique of the self wherein identity is managed and crafted through

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70 Of the shift in how Foucault views power and subjectivity in his work on ethics relative to his earlier work on subjects and power, Neve Gordon argues: “To be sure, it was a change in direction, a shift which inevitably became a self-critique of preceding work. Yet he did not abandon the notion of power, the idea that humans are always within a web of constraints, but rather strove to enrich and go beyond his earlier work in order to solve some of the problems arising from it” Neve Gordon, “Foucault’s Subject: An Ontological Reading,” *Polity* 31:3 (1999), 410.

71 ibid., 411. In this passage Foucault is referencing, in particular, *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*.


73 Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1986, 116
critical introspection and engagement with ethical questions. Such a critical focus on the
self is alluded to in Aristotle’s ethics with his focus on the soul’s condition or our
dispositions. The self, for Aristotle, is more than a prudential or instrumental self, and
attending to ethical questions attends to the self as a potentially virtuous being.

I have argued that reflexivity is a constitutive feature of modernity for Foucault
and Giddens and a foundational feature of Aristotle’s conceptualization of ethical
reasoning known as phronesis. Still, it is unclear from their accounts who or what
possesses reflexivity in the effort to reform modernity. Foucault’s elaboration of an
ethics of the self, in particular, faces problems when the ‘self’ we reflect upon and
refashion is a collective self. Is it society, organizations and/or individuals who exercise
reflexivity? Can a country or international organization be reflexive about its identity,
norms, values and practices? Can we engage in a practice of ethical reflexivity in
international politics? The modern bureaucracy and, as Finnemore and Barnett note, its
tendency to expand, is a hallmark of modernity and its attempt to organize and rationalize
social life.\footnote{Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, \textit{Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global}
\textit{Politics} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).} Modernity (as a body of ideas, practices, and institutions) is certainly guilty
of overconfidence in our ability to create institutions that can control and rationalize our
social world.\footnote{Stephen Toulmin, \textit{Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
1990).} Its proponents have generally minimized complexity, overvalued
cognitive rationality, and downplayed the potential for creative and transformative
agency. But for modernity to be reformed by reflexivity as Foucault and Giddens
envision, reflexive ethical agency is a crucial practice and must be fostered in our social
institutions. Reflexive agents can reform modernity toward responsibility by thinking
about ethics from a place of uncertainty and complexity. And although we might imbue agency to extra-individual actors such as states and organizations, I argue in the next chapter that individuals embedded in these structures ultimately exercise agency. Thus, reflexivity must be developed among individuals and self-consciously maintained by them---by the statesman, the diplomat, the bureaucrat, or the politician. Individual interpretations and challenges to common cultural and social understandings, practices, and institutions provide the grounds and discursive resources for raising and answering questions of ethics and for social change.

It is also the initiatives of individuals that will lead to the institutionalization and socialization of reflexivity in modernity’s social institutions and practices and who can stage interventions when institutions incentivize against reflexivity. Thus, achieving an attitude and process of ethical reflexivity in society and its institutions requires, at a minimum, that individuals value and seek to exercise reflexivity, especially those that face institutional cultures and dysfunctions that may thwart their (socially) purposive actions. Yet, as I will elaborate later in this dissertation, institutions (including states, international organizations and non-governmental organizations) can and should also exercise ethical reflexivity by establishing processes and norms of behavior that encourage and advance the exercise of ethical reflexivity among the individuals that fill organizational positions.

Broadly, there are three questions or challenges here in developing a practice of ethics for international relations. The first challenge is that of developing a practice of ethics absent a foundation for knowledge. This is a question both Kant and Foucault posed in their essays on the Enlightenment. It is the question of maturity: Can we deal
with the uncertainties and contingencies that accompany the absence of a foundation for knowledge? For the field of International Relations we must ask what this ‘maturity’ would look like as we consider praxis. I have attempted to sketch out a practice that directly takes up this task through a practice of reflexivity that allow for even encourages contingent and revisable beliefs and practices and dialogue and deliberation among and within various communities. I show through the case studies of later chapters that when we cash out ethical reflexivity for international politics we can formulate concrete judgments and develop tangible and feasible strategies for ethical action.

The second challenge is the practical challenge of transforming the self when the self in international or global politics is a country, international organization, non-governmental organization (NGO) or non-recognized population (e.g. non-sovereign communities, refugee populations). To respond to this challenge I draw on work in international political theory, international relations and organizational theory that elaborates an account of the multiplicity of agency and responsibility and that establishes the need for ethical reflexivity to be valued and embedded at multiple social sites.

Third, the practice of ethical reflexivity must respond to the primary ethical challenge in international politics, that of difference and ‘othering’. How do ethically reflexive actors deal with difference that is pervasive in international politics and that is often employed to define a self in opposition to others who are considered to be unequal or intrinsically less valuable? Here, I draw on critical theories of international relations that address ethical relations to work out how a practice of ethics can best deal with social difference and political divisions.
Inspired by Foucault, Giddens and Aristotle, I define “ethical reflexivity” as a *dialectical and dialogical process* and an *attitude of critical self-introspection* that together constitute a tool by which we can gain a better understanding of how we have acted in the world, what the consequences of our actions have been, and how we might wish to change our actions on moral and ethical grounds. The *process* of ethical reflexivity is dialectical in that thought and action are each used to assess and potentially modify the other. This dynamic can be broken down into two processes dialectically positioned vis-à-vis one another: an assessment of whether ‘thought’ is effectively translated into practice; and reflection on whether, in light of information about how thought has been translated into action, the content of thought is desirable or in need of modification. The latter process may consist of outright rejecting values, beliefs, and normative commitments embedded in our policies; deep structural changes in our institutions and practices; or, more likely, expressing other values or beliefs that we may hold but have not been prominent in our policies. From the former process we may decide that it is desirable for a value to have expression in a particular context but find that our actions are not consistent with it. Thought is generated within and influences politics, and it is normative in that it features judgments as to what is good and desirable. Ethical reflexivity calls for reflection and debate of these judgments as a way of acknowledging and sorting out which strands of thought are desirable and why. Beliefs and values can help guide our action and reflecting on the consequences of action can also be a tool to help us evaluate thought. It this dialectic movement between thought and action employing dialogue and self-critical reflection that constitutes the practice of ethical reflexivity.
Difference and Dialogue in Ethical Reflexivity

The process of ethical reflexivity features a dialogical component, making it a “dia-ethics”. World politics features many different types of actors who are non-discrete and whose actions have non-trivial consequences for others. Thus, questions of responsibility, obligation and recognition are prevalent for an ethics of international/global politics. In addition to Aristotle’s contribution and the work of philosopher John Wall in developing the neo-Aristotelian notion of ‘critical phronesis’ that attempts to navigate the tension between “self-narration” and “responsibility toward others”\(^76\), critical theorists in IR have also attended to the question of ethical relations.

Post-structuralism, for example, prominently features relations between self and other because the other is central to subjectivity. David Campbell explains: “the very origin of the subject is to be found in its subjection to the Other”\(^77\). Thus, he writes elsewhere, “post-structuralist conceptions of justice (and ethics generally) are concerned with the politics and production of subjectivity within the context of the unavoidable and inescapable relationship to the other…[J]ustice is the relationship to the other”\(^78\). A post-structuralist ethic is not a ‘theory of ethics’ in the analytical sense. Instead, it has a particular focus—“the ethical relation in which our responsibility to the other is the basis for reflection”\(^79\). This approach to ethics takes account of how the self is situated vis-à-vis the other in an inevitable relationship. We always have ideas about others that


\(^{78}\) Campbell, 2001, 104.

\(^{79}\) ibid., 107.
influence the way we interact with them even if we seek to avoid interaction. This type of relationship is what Tzvetan Todorov terms ‘coexistence’.\textsuperscript{80} He describes it as an attitude of toleration and neutrality to the other. Coexistence might be the state of international relations that John Rawls seeks once all states become liberal democracies.\textsuperscript{81} However, coexistence does not necessarily achieve justice nor does it necessarily constitute ethical action. Given our historical context, justice may not be possible without a proactive stance vis-à-vis the other. Emmanuel Levinas asks:

> My being-in-the-world or my “place in the sun,” my being at home, have these not also been the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man whom I have already oppressed or starved, or driven out into a third world; are they not acts of repulsing, excluding, exiling, stripping, killing?\textsuperscript{82}

Thus, it is not enough for decision-makers to put themselves in the place of others to have an ethical practice of international politics. Striving for ‘co-existence’ on the assumption that others are just like us ignores this history and dismisses the values, beliefs and normative projects of others before we even understand what they are and why they are valued by others. Dialogue with affected societies and parties should instead be oriented toward ‘understanding’ rather than ‘assimilation’\textsuperscript{83}, invite alternative information and perspectives that alert decision-makers to persuasive ethical and moral arguments, and investigate how notions of difference inform both our own policies and the policies of others.\textsuperscript{84} Ethical reflexivity as an attitude values self-critique of our moral and ethical

\textsuperscript{80} Tzvetan Todorov, \textit{The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other} (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).


\textsuperscript{84} See Crawford 2002 for an account of how argumentation can have deep transformative effects for world politics.
beliefs and practices, as well as pushing the limits of what is possible for relations between human beings, their institutions, and their societies.

It is also important to note that ethical reflexivity does not just align action with pre-existing or socially embedded values. In other words, ethical reflexivity is not a conservative process and attitude. Reflexivity draws attention to and problematizes the beliefs held by individuals, organizations and societies. Through the practice of reflexivity, routines\textsuperscript{85}, social practices and norms can be assessed and alternatives identified, debated and enacted. Reflexivity, then, is a type of agency through which individuals and societies can consciously renegotiate the more stable part of their world that helps to informs their actions and provides the context within which agency is exercised. According to Giddens, “social structures are both the condition and the outcome of people’s activities”\textsuperscript{86} and reflexivity’s transformative potential depends on the degree to which reflexivity is present and cultivated. Similarly, Foucault sees reflexivity exercised through agency but delimited by prevalent norms. Butler explains: “There is no making of oneself (\textit{poiesis}) outside of a mode of subjectivation (\textit{assujettisement}) and, hence, no self-making outside the norms that orchestrate the possible forms that a subject may take.”\textsuperscript{87}

This normative field of possibility, however, can be expanded through a practice of critique, like ethical reflexivity, that enables creative thinking about alternative ethical futures through a genealogical analysis of the past. To engage in a dialectic practice of ethics that results in self-transformation involves understanding past thought and action.

\textsuperscript{85} Routines, according to Anthony Giddens, are behind the “episodic character” of structures, Giddens 1984, 60. Routines are defined as “patterned social practices, which become regularized in institutions”, Tucker, 60.
\textsuperscript{86} ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{87} Butler, 2005, 17.
as only one possibility in a contingent social world. Foucault describes the aim of this
genealogical approach: “We have to dig deeply to show that things have been historically
contingent, for such and such a reason intelligible but not necessary. We must make the
intelligible appear against a background of emptiness, and deny its necessity. We must
think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces.”

Ethical reflexivity, then, is a self-referential and self-critical process wherein an
individual, organization or community engages in internal and external dialogue to assess
the desirability of actions and thought. One assesses practices in light of information
about their consequences and in light of a comparison of thought to the outcomes of these
practices (including unintended and unforeseen consequences). One also assesses what is
possible and how it can be achieved by investigating the contingency of the past and
creatively engaging in the possibilities of the future. The likely result is self-
transformation, ethically-conscious action and a modification of knowledge. Foucault
explains:

What is essential is that thought, both for itself and in the density of its workings,
should be both knowledge and a modification of what it knows, reflection and a
transformation of the mode of being of that on which it reflects.

In the next chapter I further develop the characteristics that attend to one who practices
ethical reflexivity in international politics.

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88 Michel Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” in Foucault Live ed. Sylvere Lotringer (New York:
Semiotexte, 1989), 208.
89 Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (New York: Vintage
Books, 1973), emphasis added.
Chapter 3: The *Global Phronimos*

The international/global civil servant that practices reflexivity, like Aristotle’s *phronimos*, can be said to have certain virtues or characteristics that give expression to the attitude and process of ‘ethical reflexivity’. In contrast to much of virtue theory literature, I ground the characteristics of the ethical individual specifically in a social practice—that of ethical reflexivity. In this chapter I am concerned with five tasks that develop ‘ethical reflexivity’ as an applied practice among global civil servants. First, I draw on work in international political theory that establishes the multiplicity of agency and responsibility to demonstrate the benefits of developing ‘ethical reflexivity’ among global civil servants, leaders, and their organizations. Second, I discuss several impediments to ethical agency among global civil servants that stem from the modern bureaucracy and from dominant policy narratives. Third, I outline how the practice of ethical reflexivity enables ethical agency in the face of bureaucratic pressures that tend toward action that is neither reflective nor self-critical. Fourth, I elaborate the virtues or characteristics that the ‘*global phronimos*’ needs to successfully practice ethical reflexivity. Fifth, I sketch the ethically reflexive institution that would provide support to the ‘*global phronimos*’ and I work out the ways in which global civil service might ‘carry’ ethical reflexivity as a valued practice and professional ethos and thus provide external means through which individual policymakers and bureaucrats could reform the institutions in which they are embedded toward greater ethical reflexivity.

**The Multiplicity of Agency and Responsibility in Modern Institutions**

To argue that an ethical practice should be embraced by both individuals and institutions
implies that both are, or can be, moral or ethical agents. Recent scholarship in international political theory has addressed this question of ‘moral agency’ in international politics, examining the issue in a variety of settings in global politics.\(^1\) This is an important social question because organizations are not themselves unitary actors with cognitive abilities, yet the actions of individuals are made from within an organizational or social structure that provides individuals with roles, rules and normative frameworks that contribute to an individual's identity formation and their ethical judgments. In addition, individuals may be thwarted in their ethical reasoning and purposive actions by dysfunctions that characterize the modern bureaucracy and by the dominant narratives and scripts that are in circulation within the institution. Even the organization’s efforts to achieve its mission and goals may fall prey to the very rules and rules that are supposed to enable purposive action. Still, while individuals learn what the organization values and how the organization 'does things', organizational actions are themselves the product of individual actions. It is thus important to evaluate whether and how ethical practices might be attended to and carried at both an individual and institutional level.

The language of agency and responsibility abounds in international politics. States, international organizations and even the amorphous ‘international community’ are blamed for perceived failures, including ‘moral failures’ in international politics, whether the issue area is human rights, norms of war, or security, among others. Yet, it is unclear who, exactly, is to be held to account and how, given the complex social organization of modernity. While accountability is often posed retrospectively, consideration of agency

\(^1\) See, for example, the contributors to: Toni Erskine, ed., *Can Institutions Have Responsibilities? Collective Moral Agency and International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
and responsibility is also important because of the social purposes that have been endowed to the actors of international politics and the autonomy and power these actors have to regulate and constitute global politics, including, as Barnett and Finnemore have illustrated, the bureaucrats of international organizations.²

In an edited volume on the question of whether international institutions have ‘moral responsibility’, Toni Erskine asks, “who, or what, can respond to proposed ethical imperatives in international relations?”³ Erskine argues that if we expect international institutions to be bound by ‘ethical imperatives’ then they must first have ‘moral agency’, which she defines thusly: “moral agency entails capacities for deliberating over possible courses of action and their consequences and acting on the basis of this deliberation”.⁴ The capacities to deliberate and understand the consequences of their actions “render [moral agents] vulnerable to the ascription of duties and the apportioning of moral praise and blame in the context of specific actions in a way that non-moral agents are not similarly vulnerable”.⁵ When it comes organizations, then, we might ask: Who is deliberating and acting? And, Who is capable of deliberating and acting? These questions may have different answers and are consequently important from a critical theory approach that seeks to illuminate possibilities not yet realized.

Because an institution is not any one person can we say that they have moral agency, responsibility, and an ability to adopt a practice of ethics? Many examinations of moral responsibility that involve institutions and the individuals that act from within them

⁴ ibid., 6.
⁵ ibid.
seek to determine whether individuals can be held responsible for actions that are performed on behalf of the institution and deemed unethical or morally wrong, or whether the linkage between individual action and outcome is so diffuse that no one person or persons can be held to account. This framing focuses on causality as the relevant criterion. An oft reached conclusion is that it is hard, if not impossible, to hold either institutions or individuals accountable when action is taken in an institutional context because a direct, and unambiguous causal relationship between an agent’s choice and outcome can not be made. It is this kind of logic that tends to see responsibility as ‘command responsibility’ in which those individuals charged with the care and maintenance of the organization (a political leader, executive, general, etc.), are able to see the ‘big picture’ (how the organization’s actions have consequences), and can do something about it (by redirecting the organization).

At the extreme end, we might argue that individuals acting from within organizations have no agency or responsibility because the organization constitutes the individual, providing an identity, rules, norms and policies that are to be followed, and organizational interests that even its leaders are charged with pursuing. This argument, however, does not carry much weight. Individuals within organizations still have external moral and ethical resources to draw upon; they are not blank slates for the organization to socialize. It is the individual who ultimately exercises choice and can make an ethical judgment about whether and how to carry out a particular decision.6

I would suggest that the useful question is not whether institutions and the individuals within them are directly and entirely responsible for action, but whether they

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6 Cornish and Harbour, “NATO and the Individual Soldier as Moral Agents with Reciprocal Duties: Imbalance in the Kosovo Campaign,” in Erskine, 120.
are purposive agents and thus responsible for the outcomes to which their actions contribute. Individuals and organizations can concurrently possess agency and responsibility, even if they do not, on their own, cause specific outcomes. Some scholars of international political theory have advanced this argument. The individual’s actions as a member of an organization are influenced and incentivized by the organization’s structure that is comprised of the organization’s culture, shared values, and decision-making process into which the individual is socialized. Frances Harbour notes that the individual embedded within the organization often acts as he or she does (or at least is in the position of making such a decision) because “the pattern of relationships, roles, legitimacy, and authority involved in participating in the organization sets the individuals within it in motion.” The organization reproduces a particular structure that shapes the individuals within it and in this way the institution is responsible for the outcomes.

Individuals, however, are also responsible moral agents: “Individuals retain ownership of their own actions and decisions, and thus individual moral responsibility overlaps with the collective agency of the organization as a whole.” Individuals ultimately make the decision and, arguably, their identity is multidimensional in character or source. In other words, their identity is not entirely informed by the organizational structure, but it is still an important factor. It is thus likely that both institutions and individuals are culpable for morally suspect decisions. Still, the argument of institutional responsibility is weaker than the argument of individual responsibility. Individuals are the ultimate agents (including those outside of an organization who have influence on it) because even the organization’s structure, mission, rules, and roles are created by, reproduced and

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8 ibid., 78.
potentially changed by individuals.

Thus, an alternative framing of agency and responsibility might focus more on the ethical reasoning of individuals even if one individual’s actions do not directly cause the outcome. Rather than ask whether, absent an individual’s choice, the outcome would have nevertheless occurred, we could focus on the potentiality of individuals, even those who act ‘on the ground’. For example, given an order that a soldier finds objectionable, he or she could refuse to comply, attempt to convince other soldiers to demonstrate solidarity with him or her in protesting the order, go around the chain-of-command and report the order to more senior leaders, leak the action to the media, or refer the matter to an ombudsperson or other ethics investigator. While leaders can dramatically take the organization in new directions, build in self-reflexive processes and cultivate an emphasis on ethical reasoning, individuals ‘on-the-ground’ still constantly interpret policies and decisions (even orders), giving them shape and acting as the ‘face’ of the organization to outsiders. Thus, the cultivation of ethical reasoning and self-awareness at all levels has potential. Even if individuals and institutions do not alone have the capability to deliberate and act, these capacities can be cultivated, individually and institutionally. Individuals can become actors who are self-aware of their status as ethical agents and critically engage ethical questions. Institutions can be crafted to encourage and incentivize its members to practice critical ethical reasoning. To the extent that this encouragement is organizationally embodied in processes and culture, the organization can be said to have the capacity of ethical agency (though its exercise ultimately requires individuals to enact this capacity). Institutions, then, through the reform of their practices and culture might also possess greater ethical or moral agency.
Inquiring into the potentiality of individuals and institutions shifts the focus of responsibility to include not just retrospective concerns (about who can be held responsible), but also prospective concerns about building ethical agency so that ethical questions are attended to and responsibilities are valued and carefully established and reflected upon. When it comes to questions of agency and responsibility, much of the IR literature and, indeed, much of the practice of international politics has had a retrospective orientation. Examples of such questions include: Who should be punished for genocide and other gross human rights violations and how? Was international law violated by the interrogation practices of the United States in the War on Terror and should anyone be held accountable? Thus, ad hoc tribunals and now the International Criminal Court have received a great deal of attention from the media and international organizations as constituting 'progress' in the development of international human rights. And President Obama’s decision to not prosecute individuals over the interrogation policies and practices during the administration of George W. Bush largely substituted for an ethical analysis of interrogation (though the legal analysis was prolific in the media).

While I do not seek to resolve the question here of whether retrospective measures should be pursued, I offer the argument that prospective ethical concerns should be prominent and should attend to building capable individual agents who recognize their own subjectivities (organizational and otherwise), who value normative projects for the organization to pursue but do not leave them free from critique and potential transformation, and who draw on the external moral resources necessary for engaging in ethical reasoning that entertains taking personal risks to challenge prevailing
norms, beliefs and opinions held by others in the organization. I also argue that ethical agency can be structurally enhanced through organizational measures that implement processes of reflection and critique and provide the space for individuals within the organization to question, criticize and express dissent from the policies, decisions and normative projects of the organization. There should also be an organizational culture that values the contributions of all members of the organization at all levels and values the attitude of ethical reflexivity that welcomes critique and the possibility of change.

Ethical Agency and the Challenges of the Modern Bureaucracy and Dominant Narratives

Impediments to Ethical Agency Posed by the Modern Bureaucracy

In addition to the problems of diffuse agency and responsibility as well as the blurring of organization and individual as discrete actors, impediments to ethical agency are found in the capacity or tendency of the modern bureaucracy to impede ethical action among individuals embedded in organizations. The very qualities that enable bureaucracies to achieve action can paradoxically thwart action and, in particular, considered action that is explicitly connected to the purposes and mission of the organization. In addition, these bureaucratic qualities can keep the organization in a place of stasis where the organization’s mission, rules and actions are not critically examined. Ethical reflexivity as a reform for international institutions is particularly appealing because it helps us to manage this paradox to the extent that it is possible. Ethical reflexivity is also relevant for all of international politics broadly because organizations, in the form of IOs, states and NGOs, are ubiquitous. As we will see in the
case of Rwandan genocide, organizations can vary in the extent to which they support the exercise of ethical reflexivity.

We might think of ethics as set on the stage of a tragedy, where often there are few choices that are clearly right or wrong or have unqualified positive outcomes. Instead, in the realm of ethics we find people struggling to choose among imperfect choices in the face of uncertainty. Modern bureaucracies can disguise this stage of tragedy with a simplified black and white view of the world and morality. In the singular pursuit of a mission, in the face of the need to mobilize individuals, and in light of the resulting organizational identity that unifies and motivates its members; complexity, critical reflection and openness to self-transformation are not written into the script of the bureaucrat. The consequence is that questions of ethical and moral responsibility are not often attended to and the organization finds itself, at times, involved in actions that it later finds abhorrent and comes to regret. This embarrassment can motivate organizations to further deflect criticism and thus preclude an important opportunity for self-examination and change. Ethical reflexivity, then, can be a type of reform that enables institutions to act responsibly by laying claim to their ethical agency and embracing the importance of self-examination.

To understand how ethical action may be stifled in an institutional setting we can look inside the organization to how individuals are embedded and act from within the organization. Individuals may, for example, be thwarted in their ethical decision-making by organizational socialization and dysfunctions. Thus, crucial aspects of reform include imbuing *individuals* with the reflexive capabilities to successfully confront these
impediments and creating an organizational culture that values reflexivity. Such a project not only recognizes that organizations may develop internal conditions that thwart ethically responsible action; it also recognizes that the ethical guidelines of organizations (found in rules of procedure and the organizational culture) can not anticipate all possible ethical dilemmas individuals might face in their organizational positions, that rules themselves can not be relied upon to produce ethical decisions given the moral complexity of specific ethical questions, and that the organization likely embraces conflicting values and beliefs that have to be reconciled in concrete situations. Thus, individuals need to develop the capability to make ethical choices absent, contrary to, or in the context of organizational rules (formal and informal), organizational pressures, and moral ambiguity. To use Samantha Power’s term, the goal is to enable individuals to act as ‘upstanders’ rather than bystanders. A useful step for fleshing out what these individuals might look like is to think about the virtues or characteristics of ethical bureaucrats and policymakers in Aristotelian fashion and consider how they might equip individuals to overcome the impediments to ethical action that modern bureaucracies often pose.

Much of what is considered ‘mainstream’ international relations theory does not give much weight, if any, to the social and cultural dynamics of the bureaucracy. Some constructivists, however, have turned their attention to the power of the bureaucracy, particularly Michael Barnett, Martha Finnemore and Lynn Eden. Dealing directly with

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9 The organization itself can be reformed—its rules, procedures, norms and practices of socialization must stress the importance of ethical reflexivity.
Neorealists’ claims that international organizations are epiphenomenal to states (as no more than and dependent on the interests of states with relatively greater power)\textsuperscript{12} and Neoliberals’ arguments that IOs are mainly convenient mechanisms for achieving cooperation in the face of uncertainty and the possibility of cheating, Barnett and Finnemore seek to demonstrate, through three case studies (of the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the United Nations), that international organizations have both power and autonomy.\textsuperscript{13} Arguing that international organizations (IOs) are poorly and wrongly understood in the field of International Relations, Barnett and Finnemore set out to further “a process not unlike the advent of research on the state”.\textsuperscript{14} Barnett and Finnemore argue from a social constructivist position that IOs are autonomous and “active agents of global change”.\textsuperscript{15}

While much of international organizations’ “undesirable and self-defeating” behavior can perhaps be attributed to the actions of states that direct and even thwart organizational activities (usually in the name of protecting or furthering the ‘national interest’) or whose actions may be necessary to carry out organizational decisions, Barnett and Finnemore highlight how dysfunctions are also derivative of bureaucracy’s constitutive features as a social form, or its social characteristics and “internal culture”.\textsuperscript{16} Bureaucratic impediments to ethical action include organizational dysfunctions and, more


\textsuperscript{14} ibid., ix.

\textsuperscript{15} ibid., 156.

\textsuperscript{16} ibid., 7-8. Even when an international organization makes a decision there are many times that state action is necessary for these decisions to be put into effect. For example, this is usually the case for UN decisions regarding humanitarian actions when states must offer military equipment and personnel for peacekeeping missions.
broadly, how bureaucracies constitute the identities of the individuals working within them and legitimize their actions.

Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore argue that to understand why bureaucracies are autonomous actors and why they exhibit dysfunctions and pathologies, a bureaucracy should be conceptualized as “a distinctive social form with its own internal logic that generates certain behavioral tendencies”.17 Bureaucracies have power and they exercise it “through their ability to make impersonal rules. They then use these rules not only to regulate but also to constitute and construct the social world”.18 The creation of rules and their interpretation by bureaucrats is shaped by the organization’s internal culture—“the solutions that are produced by groups of people to meet specific problems they face in common…[that] become institutionalized, remembered and passed on”.19 Those characteristics of bureaucracies that enable it to effectively pursue particular goals, such as a division of labor, specialization, standardized rules, and expert knowledge, can also be the source of unintended and undesirable outcomes, including outcomes that are counterproductive and unethical. In the most egregious cases, bureaucracies can produce outcomes that are contrary to the organization’s stated purposes, goals and values or that are judged as unethical or immoral in the context of a society’s (national or international) norms and values.

Barnett and Finnemore term ‘pathologies’ those dysfunctional outcomes “that are attributable to bureaucratic culture and internal bureaucratic processes that lead the IO to

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17 ibid., viii.
18 ibid., 3.
act in a manner that subverts its self-professed goals”.20 Apart from their work, the term *dysfunction* refers to “abnormal or impaired functioning” and the term *pathology* denotes “any deviation from a healthy or normal condition” or “the anatomic and physiological deviations from the normal that constitute disease or characterize a particular disease”.21 Although both words obviously have similar meanings in that they invoke abnormality or impairment, pathologies are more indicative of abnormality that is like disease, attacking the very existence of the (social) body. The internal culture of an organization can by analogy be disease-like if it threatens the very purpose, existence and legitimacy of the organization.

The power of the bureaucracy applies not only to international organizations, but also states and non-governmental organizations. Drawing on Barnett and Finnemore’s study of international organizations as well as literature in sociology and organizational theory I briefly describe several bureaucratic impediments to ethical agency. In the next section I discuss how ‘ethical reflexivity’ as a practice enables the actors of international politics to avoid the stifling effects of the bureaucracy. These dysfunctions include:

(i) *Rule-following as an end rather than a means*

One way in which bureaucracies can be self-defeating and inhibit ethical agency is through bureaucratic rules. These rules often become elevated over their purposes when bureaucrats routinely and habitually follow rules without a view toward their ends.22 The organization’s rules are privileged over the mission of the organization and moral and ethical considerations. One could also describe this condition as *trained and*
socialized unreflexivity because bureaucrats become accustomed to following rules without evaluating whether they can and do achieve the ends the organization purports to espouse. Because rules provide a behavioral guide for bureaucrats, even exceptions to the rules can be normalized so that they become a part of regular procedures. Barnett and Finnemore refer to this phenomenon as the “normalization of deviance”.23

Rule-following as the modus operandi of the modern bureaucracy has been historically consolidated through a philosophy of scientific management and professionalization, especially in the United States during the twentieth century, inculcating an ethos that emphasizes economy, efficiency and the technical tasks of bureaucracies. As Reynolds explains: “These norms elevated organizational survival and task performance to preeminent places” in bureaucracies and have “predisposed…the public sector…to favor a rule-driven, or rule-based, approach to ethics”.24 The result is that it is difficult for bureaucrats to engage in independent ethical reasoning to identify and confront “moral errors”.25 Gary Zajac and Louise Comfort argue that this “legalistic approach” found in the modern bureaucracy “promotes ethics tunnel vision, wherein public servants and organizations are concerned only with what they cannot do, giving little attention to the development of critical moral reflection”.26

(ii) Depersonalization

23 ibid., 39-40.
25 ibid., 126.
Bureaucracies can also depersonalize the bureaucrat’s actions, enabling the individual to make decisions that would otherwise be morally uncomfortable or unacceptable. Bureaucracies, through their rules, division of labor, and ability to impress on individuals organizational imperatives manifested in the form of routines, distance the individual from the outcomes of his or her actions. The outcome the bureaucrat has in view may not be: ‘Who is affected by my decision and how’? Rather, the bureaucrat may reason: ‘If I do this I am following the rules’. Or, ‘I’m fulfilling my role (job description)’. Soldiers, for example, may justify an unethical action, *ex post facto*, by recalling ‘I was just doing my job’ or ‘following orders’. This sort of narrative was found in the justifications offered by interrogators and prison guards involved in the prisoner abuse scandal at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq during the occupation of that country by the United States.

Bureaucrats are further distanced from outcomes because their part in *determining* outcomes appears small and insignificant, and thus their ability to efficaciously change the outcome also seems miniscule. Additionally, bureaucrats are usually able to avoid seeing the outcome of their decisions and actions. Samantha Power argues that this ability to deny by averting one’s gaze enables persons to stand by when genocide is being committed.27 Zygmunt Bauman observes that: “People are not *made* cruel by modernity; but modernity invented ‘a way in which cruel things could be done by non-cruel people’ by removing them from face-to-face confrontations with the consequences of their

actions.” This ability to avert one’s gaze is perhaps made easier by technology that both allows individuals to make decisions that affect others in places far removed from the bureaucrat and technology that enables one to avoid seeing the consequences. Drone strikes in Afghanistan and Pakistan during the War on Terror, for example, enable this bureaucratic strategy for avoiding ethical examination.

(iii) Reorientation of shame and guilt

Bureaucrats’ sense of shame and guilt that they bring to the institution can serve as a check on their actions as a bureaucrat, but can also be reoriented when individuals internalize the dominant categories of the institution as their own. To describe this tendency Larry May employs Habermas’ concept of the “colonization of the lifeworld” wherein “ideas or categories from an institution pervade an individual’s conception of his or her life so that the individual conceives of his or her life in terms of the dominant categories of the institution”. May argues that bureaucracies specifically colonize individuals’ conceptions of shame and guilt, reorienting them to the organization. The bureaucrat becomes concerned that he or she will be disgraced and dishonored in the eyes of his or her organizational colleagues if he or she fails to act according to the expectations of this audience, rather than society, family, or even one’s self. It is a mistake to encourage depersonalization, May cautions, because “our feelings of shame

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30 ibid.
31 ibid., 81-83.
and guilt are often important sources of moral understanding”\textsuperscript{32}. Often these sources of shame and guilt are tied to societal norms and beliefs; however, even if the organization embodies these norms and beliefs as informing its social purpose, the organization or members within it may stray from them, and the rules and routines of the organization may become disconnected from them. If the individual’s feelings of shame and guilt are tied most to his or her fellow bureaucrats then these external moral resources are no longer available to help and influence the organization or counter organizational factions.

\textit{(iv) Anthropomorphizing organizations}

Bureaucrats can distance themselves from their own actions and inactions when they attribute to organizations human attributes, such as a ‘will’, ‘desire’ and ‘(in)tolerance’. Without having to come to terms with their own actions as persons who represent and enact organizational decisions, individual bureaucrats minimize their own ethical agency when they attribute action, motive and intent to institutions. In the case of the Rwandan genocide, for example, we see many individuals refer to the ‘international community’ as not caring or not having the will to respond. Thus, they were able to discursively avoid having to account for their own individual actions.

\textit{(iv) Insulation from information}

Bureaucrats can become insulated from incoming information and different perspectives when the internal culture of the bureaucracy de-emphasizes collecting feedback on performance and actions, or when it is difficult to measure the organization’s

\textsuperscript{32} ibid., 84.
performance and reception. This lack of feedback and criticism from the outside can provide an illusion of legitimacy and effectiveness. In spite of the difficulties, organizations have attempted to measure how well they function through various indicators such as client satisfaction, efficiency, reducing costs and quantifying successful outcomes. The danger of such strategies is that they can leave out important information, fail to capture fully performance and effectiveness, leave out affected populations, and divert attention away from the ethical status of actions. Left out are criteria that acknowledge the normative aspects and qualitative dimensions of the organization that are less quantifiable and require critical engagement.

(v) Micro-management

Even where there is an attempt to instill ethical awareness and morality in bureaucracies, hierarchy—another characteristic of the modern bureaucracy—often translates into a top-down highly controlled organization which precludes the flexibility often needed for ethical decision-making. Paul Cornish and Frances Harbour, for example, explain how ‘micro-management’ can thwart organizations’ efforts to exercise moral agency. Micro-management occurs when core leaders determine “key aspects of even day-to-day tactical decisions without understanding the consequences”. In such instances, leaders ignore the expertise and moral acumen of individuals within the organization, eroding the institution’s capacity to engage in ethical reasoning. To demonstrate how micro-management can hamper an organization’s efforts and ability to fulfill their responsibilities as moral agents Cornish and Harbour invoke the example of

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34 Cornish and Harbour, 124.
35 ibid.
NATO’s operation in Kosovo, arguing that micro-management of operations and tactics by NATO leaders resulted in harm to the very individuals NATO sought to protect—the Kosovars.

(vi) Hyper-rationalization of decision-making

Even neutrally-applied impersonal rules are not sufficient for moral and ethical decision-making, whether or not individuals at the ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ of the organization participate. Individuals interpret incoming information; its meaning is not self-evident. And interpretation (or judgment) involves both cognition and affect working in tandem. Aristotle, William Connolly and Sharon Krause, among others, attempt explanations of how cognition and affect are at work when we make ethical and moral judgments.36 Their accounts call for due attention to the role of affect to achieve a satisfactory and useful ethical approach. An emotional response registers our concern and care in particular situations and should thus not be swept aside in decision-making as an ‘irrational’ factor. For example, when individuals come across evidence of genocide they may find the prospect of genocide so emotionally troubling as to be unimaginable, thus making it easier to ignore or discount signs of genocide or label it as something else (e.g., civil war) when enabled by the emphasis on rationality found in bureaucracies and society. Attempts to theorize ethical decision-making will not be adequate without taking into account and valuing the affective or emotional aspect of decision-making.

The Challenge of Dominant Policy Narratives for Ethical Agency


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Recognizing and leveraging opportunities for ethical agency also depends upon an individual’s ability to evaluate critically the dominant narratives and imagine and articulate alternative narratives. This step is particularly crucial because, as we will see in the case of the Rwandan genocide, certain narratives are given force and strengthened even by individuals who do not subscribe to their veracity. If, as critical theory advances, praxis involves imagining the social world otherwise, individuals must first recognize that it could be so. In this section I draw on theorizations of social discourse to establish the force of dominant narratives in a socially constructed world. The subsequent section considers how cultivating the practice of ‘ethical reflexivity’ enables individuals to engage in critical ethical reasoning in the face of organizational dysfunctions and dominant narratives that tend toward unreflective conformity and non-purposeful action.

Though a case can be made for ethical reflexivity from a philosophically realist position that rests upon the epistemological uncertainty involved in the attempt to access knowledge of an objective and material world, I go further in taking the position that, ontologically, the most important features of the social world are ideational in the form of language and discourse and, epistemologically, that we seek to access these understandings through interpretation. This view does not deny the existence or importance of material things, but posits that how they are important stems from how they are interpreted.37 Our understandings of the world are thus changeable and this changeability has implications for considering practices of ethics. A positivist model of social change seeks to identify the objective, universal laws that govern the world and

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37 On community see, for example: Andrew Linklater, The Transformation of Political Community: Ethical Foundations of the Post-Westphalian Era (Polity, 1998). Furthermore, poststructuralism alerts us to the ways in which we seek to render “the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar” and thus “there is always an ineluctable debt to interpretation such that there is nothing outside of discourse,” David Campbell, Politics Without Principle: Sovereignty, Ethics and the Narratives of the Gulf War (Lynne Reinner, 1993), 4.
align our actions with these laws in a ‘problem-solving’ mode.\textsuperscript{38} Critical theory, in contrast, seeks to explore the ways in which we might live otherwise, with different understandings, beliefs, and values, and potentially in different forms of social and political community.\textsuperscript{39} Thus, social identities, practices and institutions can be self-consciously navigated and transformed.

To interpret the social world critically, inquire into the possibilities for change, and act reflectively, the individual confronts dominant discourse or narratives that, in some sense, are collectively held, are held by many individuals, and/or are legitimated through their institutionalization in the form of rules, culture and norms. It is also important to underscore the importance of perception to account for how an individual interprets dominant narratives, including what the dominant narratives are and the implications that they have for structuring the individual’s perceived set of possible actions. These perceived dominant narratives are important, Lene Hansen explains, because they construct problems, objects and subjects, and articulate policies to address them.\textsuperscript{40}

The challenge, then, for ethically reflexive action is for individuals to first recognize how dominant discourses can work to construct identity, problems and policy solutions, and, second, to identify and articulate discourses that could oppose the dominant discourse. Building ethical agency, I argue, enacts this awareness and capacity.

\textsuperscript{39} Rather than smoothing out the wrinkles of a particular ‘historic bloc’ that features certain arrangements of power and domination (ibid.), critical theories of justice and ethics seek to fundamentally challenge the existing order by revealing power relations and how we constitute the world, as well as illuminating alternatives.
\textsuperscript{40} Lene Hansen, Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War (London: Routledge, 2006), 21.
Citing Michel Foucault, Lene Hansen similarly expresses this need: “Language’s structured yet inherently unstable nature brings to the fore the importance of political agency and the political production and reproduction of discourses and the identities constructed within them”. On this view, identity and policy are intimately linked. Hansen explains:

The conceptualization of foreign policy as a discursive practice implies that policy and identity are seen as ontologically interlinked: it is only through the discursive enactment of foreign policy, or in Judith Butler’s terms ‘performances,’ that identity comes into being, but this identity is at the same time constructed as the legitimization for the policy proposed.

Dominant discourses, then, have considerable consequences, both for policies and for the ways in which we fundamentally see ourselves. Yet, our ability to articulate and recognize opposing discourses means that a “hegemonic” construction is susceptible to a “politically constructed” articulation of identity and policy goals.

In the next section I give an account of how the cultivation of ‘ethical reflexivity’ as a practice of international politics enables individuals to overcome the challenges of dominant policy narratives and bureaucratic dysfunctions in their efforts to identify and articulate more alternatives and adjudicate among them.

**The Global Phronimos: How Ethical Reflexivity Empowers Individuals to Act in the Face of Social and Organizational Challenges**

Ethical reflexivity can assist in ameliorating bureaucratic decision-making that results in ethically troubling outcomes by enabling individuals embedded in organizations, and the

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43 Hansen, 19.
organization as a whole, to build character and institutional practices oriented toward ethical reflection and action rather than indiscriminate rule-following.\textsuperscript{44} To recap, ethical reflexivity is a \textit{self-referential} and \textit{self-critical} process and attitude wherein one conducts an internal and external dialogue that evaluates thought and action, comparing and employing each in the modification of the other and in consideration of context and ethical relations. Particular attention is paid to the outcomes or consequences of one’s actions given values and beliefs, and which ethical arguments are persuasive. Values and beliefs neither theoretically nor contextually co-exist unproblematically. Ethical reflexivity as a process involves evaluating whether the means are efficaciously and ethically connected to the ends and whether the ends are desirable. Ethical reflexivity as an attitude implies an ethical sensibility wherein one empathetically cares for others and the self and is open to the self-transformation that emerges from a critical ontology of ourselves. In the case of the bureaucrat or policymaker he or she should view the normative orientation of the organization and its rules as \textit{contingent} and \textit{dynamic}, not intrinsically ‘good’.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{44} See Reynolds for the idea of character-driven versus rule-driven morality. The type of character proposed here is a self-reflexive one.

\textsuperscript{45} The ethical connection between means and ends does not, however, rule out violence (or any strategy) as a means, e.g., humanitarian intervention. The reason for such a position is apparent when we see ethics as taking place in a “specific and situated context.” David Campbell explains: “No one wants violence for the sake of violence, but the naïve belief that when faced with the abhorrent we can avoid harm \textit{per se} is quite breathtaking. And completely debilitating, for doing nothing is not an option, as it always implicitly involves doing something, such as standing by and doing nothing while others carry out the violence, thereby in effect aiding the aggressor who fails to heed the directive to do nothing.” David Campbell, “Justice and international order: The case of Bosnia and Kosovo,” in \textit{Ethics and international affairs: Extent and limits}, ed. Jean-Marc Coicaud and Daniel Warner (New York: United Nations Press, 2001), 122-3. I would add a cautionary note: Like any other means, the use of violence should not be undertaken without serious consideration of how and by whom it has been used in the past, and how it might be interpreted by relevant audiences. Ethical reflexivity requires this contextual introspection. Additionally, the alternative to military intervention is not necessarily inaction. Nonviolent strategies for combating violence may be just as, if not more, effective than violent strategies. See, for example: Gene Sharp, \textit{The Politics of Nonviolent Action}. (Boston: Porter Sargent Publishers, 1973); Yeshua Moser-Puangsuwanet, and Thomas Weber, \textit{Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders: A Recurrent Vision} (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2000); and Mary Wallace, “Confronting Wrongs and Humanizing Enemies: An
Ethical reflexivity draws attention to the status and usefulness of rules given the dynamism between action and thought. Rules are not always determinate of bureaucrats’ actions. Bureaucrats have, for example, come up with creative solutions when the rules don’t seem to apply appropriately or when it is unclear which rules apply in a particular situation. The aspirations of reflexivity in this regard are four-fold: 1) to encourage bureaucrats to question whether the rules are applicable, appropriate or interpreted in a helpful way; 2) to spur bureaucrats to seek changes in the rules when they are morally or ethically pernicious and do not aid (or even impede) realization of the organization’s objectives (mission) and the values they embody; 3) to seek changes in the mission of the organization when, upon critical reflection, it is ethically inadequate or problematic; and 4) to take a flexible approach to the interpretation of rules that allows for contextual considerations and that may even result in acting outside of the rules. As Barnett and Finnemore state, “bureaucracies create rules that shape future action, but action, in turn, shapes the evolution and content of rules”.46 And, by taking on the perspectives of self and other, including dialogue with those affected by the organization’s policies, the bureaucrat helps to guard against action that does harm to others, whether in the form of violence or assimilation. At a more fundamental level, bureaucrats should be capable of identifying and pointing out problematic practices, institutions, and values. If enough bureaucrats do so, deeper structural change becomes a possibility or, at least, is not so heavily resisted by bureaucrats who feel ‘married’ to the institution’s way of doing things. The bureaucrat can not ignore the outcomes of bureaucratic choice if he or she is self-reflexive.

Investigation into the Potential of Nonviolent Action in Situations of Severe Injustice or Political Violence” (PhD diss., Brown University, 2010).

The idea of instilling ethical reflexivity among individual bureaucrats as a means of promoting institutional responsibility strongly rejects micro-management as a style of organizational management. Ethical reflexivity is necessary for those at the ‘bottom’ of the organization to usefully contribute to ethical decision-making. In the case of soldiers, Cornish and Harbour argue that “the extent to which war can be made moral – or less immoral – must be a direct function of the involvement in the processes of reflection and decision by the educated, morally aware soldier”.47 To make good choices the organization must recognize that both leaders at the top and individuals on the ground have information and capabilities crucial for making ethical choices. Focusing exclusively on the institution as moral agent ignores the individual’s role in the decision-making process. Cornish and Harbour invoke the example of NATO and the soldier:

[I]f NATO as a decision-making institution cuts itself off from the experience and expertise of its active military personnel at any level, it will be less able to make informed moral choices. If it officially discourages its agents from considering the moral implications of their individual behavior, and from passing on advice based on their moral and military competence, the organization as a whole will be more likely to act collectively in ways that do not stand up to moral scrutiny.48

The soldier needs the room to make these decisions and the organization must ensure that the individual has “this freedom of judgment, decision, and action”.49

Ethical reflexivity asks even more though—that the institution be crafted to encourage ethical reflection and that the bureaucrat be conceptualized as having a moral and ethical burden, thereby closing the space between the bureaucrat and decisional outcomes rather than widening it (as bureaucracies too often do). Ethical reflexivity, in this account, is a tool and an attitude that individuals employ to make sense of the

47 Cornish and Harbour, 128.
48 ibid., 120.
49 ibid., 127.
particular situation and to leverage their ethical sensibilities in making everyday choices. Leadership is thus crucial for encouraging ethical reflexivity in everyday decision-making at all levels of the organization. As Janice Gross Stein notes, the social and psychological factors that contribute to conformity in group decision-making can be mitigated by leadership that encourages ‘alternative representations’ and signals toleration of dissent. Ethical reflexivity is a philosophy of decision-making that carries such messages and can be institutionalized in the organization’s culture and in leadership styles. While leaders should signal that dissent and the articulation of opposing narratives is welcome, the ethically reflexive individual can have an impact even in an environment that is not particularly supportive of ethical agency. Such an individual has self-awareness as an ethical agent, the ability to recognize the ways in which organizational dynamics and dominant narratives guide action and identity, and exercises critical rationality in decision-making.

Ethical reflexivity also seeks to counteract the over-rationalization of decision-making. It both acknowledges and encourages affect in reasoning. Trudy Mills and Sherryl Kleinman extol the benefits of affect as clues to interpret and understand incoming information (e.g., anger, empathy, sadness, etc.). A sensitivity to affect is particularly important given the type of professionalization typical of ‘rational bureaucracy’ and a scientific society. Mills and Kleinman observe that “much of

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50 By emphasizing the individual’s ability to employ self-reflexivity to make moral decisions the organization also sends a message to its members that they are accountable for their actions as moral agents, ibid., 120.
professional socialization…teaches individuals to get rid of feelings deemed inappropriate in professional situations.” Such a prescription, however, might be dangerous if emotions can help us to respond to a situation in a morally and ethically satisfactory way, as Aristotle details.

Finally, ethical reflexivity draws attention to the ethical relationship to be attended to as individuals act from within organizations. Cultivating self-reflexivity along these lines asks the bureaucrat to consider actors other than their fellow bureaucrats, potentially bringing shame and guilt to bear when their decisions negatively affect others. One is also desirous of ethical relations with others oriented toward respect and understanding. In sum, ethical reflexivity is a practice for individuals that features a process and an attitude that enables them to be “moral agents par excellence” given the ethical complexities that they face ‘on-the-ground’ and on a case-by-case basis.

Virtues of the global phronimos
The international/global civil servant who practices ethical reflexivity, like Aristotle’s phronimos, can be said to have certain virtues or characteristics that give expression to the attitude and process of ethical reflexivity. Because individuals and societies are left to work out ethical questions it is instructive to think about which personal qualities give rise to or assist in reflexive thought and action. The concept of the phronimos is useful for articulating a pragmatic and practical approach to ethics because it encourages us to think about the specific traits that might be developed as global civil servants are trained and in thinking about a professional ethos for the global civil servant. We can also use

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53 ibid., 1022.
54 Cornish and Harbour, 133.
this ‘ideal-type’ of the global phronimos to inform the creation of an institutional culture wherein experience and thought come together in productive and creative ways.

In this section I return to the ways in which I have drawn on Aristotle to develop a practice of ethics for international politics. Aristotle argued that ethical action is guided by the pursuit of the ‘highest good’, and this practice of ethics known as phronesis is most adeptly pursued by the phronimos. The phronimos pursues the highest good with excellence. In other words, the phronimos practices ethical reasoning well. In chapter one I sketched a portrait of the phronimos as one who critically navigates universals and particulars through dialogue, debate and deliberation; pursues valued ends that are attainable; and has experience in ethical reasoning. This kind of ethical reasoning is decidedly not rule-based. As Richard Kraut notes of Aristotle, because what is best for man varies from situation to situation, “there is no possibility of stating a series of rules, however complicated, that collectively solve every practical problem.”55

In place of a rule-based ethics Aristotle proposes an alternative conception of ethics. As I have illustrated in chapter one, Aristotle focuses his efforts on the need for an ethics that is responsive to context, considers what the human good is in particular situations and with others, and then acts on these judgments. Aristotle offers up a typology of virtues that might enable one to engage in ethical reasoning well (phronesis). It is in this spirit that I similarly offer up a typology of qualities or characteristics that position the global actor to be a person who engages in ethical reflexivity.56

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56 It should be noted that this section does not rely on an exegesis of Aristotle. Rather, I borrow the concept of phronimos from Aristotle to similarly sketch out a picture of one who engages in a particular kind of ethical reasoning that is, in this case, ‘ethical reflexivity’ rather than phronesis.
(i) Ethical Self-Awareness

In order to engage in a process of critique that has the self and the self’s relations to others as its object, the *global phronimos* must first be aware of their status as an ethical agent and an awareness of how their actions have ethical implications. The *global phronimos* has cultivated self-knowledge, is self-aware, and is self-critical. They engage in the project of the self—how we are historically and ideationally situated as subjects and agents, and how we can be open to self-transformation.

(ii) Situational Appreciation

In their ethical reasoning the *global phronimos* considers the particulars of the case showing an awareness, sensitivity and responsiveness to context which includes identification of and engagement with the relevant actors and their beliefs and desires, as well as the beliefs and desires of the self that emerge through the process of self-examination in a particular context.

(iii) Interlocutor

The *global phronimos* makes ethical judgments that are preceded by and consider those who have historically been ‘othered’ and those who might potentially be victims of considered actions. This consideration includes dialogue that is oriented toward understanding and respect of their identities. This does not mean that others’ ‘preferences’ are accommodated for their preferences may be judged ‘harmful’ or ‘wrong’, but ethical judgments ought not deny the moral agency of the relevant actors.
(iv) **Diachronic Perspective**

The *global phronimos* has a chronologically expansive view that considers past actions and the practices they’re informed by (that give them meaning) and considers past normative judgments along with the consequences of these judgments and actions. This expansive chronological view also extends into the future (futurist) as ethical agents consider the possible consequences of their actions and the alternatives that are available to them.

(v) **Critical Rationality**

The *global phronimos* exercises critical rationality that features a dialectic between thought and action and employs the affective faculties, enabling us to care about normative projects and engage in ethical questions earnestly and creatively.

(vi) **Complete ethical self**

The *global phronimos* can marshal moral resources from outside of the organization and has an ability to carry the moral purpose of the organization without being ethically inflexible when it is found wanting (either in general or for the situation at hand). These moral resources are engaged by questions that draw out ethical judgments, such as: ‘How will I feel when my actions are later judged by a wider audience?’ ‘Are the rules and practices (ways of doing things) that I encounter applicable to the ethical question or dilemma at hand?’

(vii) **Balances prudence and risk**
The global phronimos is willing to take risk that inherently accompanies action but balances risk-taking with the prudence that reflects a desire to have an ethical relation with others. In other words, the risk that the global phronimos takes is in consideration of others. Often this risk is the form of personal risk and may include outcomes where some personal cost is incurred if the individual’s action is unpopular or in the minority.

(viii) Experienced

The global phronimos routinely acts on the basis of ethical reasoning. In Aristotelian terms this is what constitutes ‘experience’. The circumstances in which the global phronimos engages in ethical reflexivity are not extraordinary, but common, and experience doing so over time increases the ethical skill of the individual. From Aristotle I take the idea that “moral knowledge” is “practical and not merely theoretical”.57

With this typology, or ideal-type, of the global phronimos I next consider the ways in which the characteristics of the global phronimos, and the practice of ethical reflexivity itself, can be cultivated in international politics.

Ethically Reflexive Institutions and Ethical Reflexivity as a Professional Ethos of Global Civil Society

Thus far I have developed a practice of ethics at the level of the individual who exercises ethical agency in spite of the ways that the modern bureaucracy and dominant social narratives work against reflective deliberation in ethical reasoning, but in this dissertation

I also want to think about the ways in which ethical reflexivity can be engendered within social structures so that questions of ethics can be attended to at the collective and structural level. ‘Ethical agency’ can be cultivated both at the site of the agent and the site of social structure. Through a re-structuring of social structures the practice of reflexivity can become valued and embedded within the culture and procedures of institutions, broadly defined. The capacity for ‘ethical agency,’ then, would not be entirely dependent on agents coincidentally realizing their status as contextualized and socially constituted agents coupled with a belief that they can successfully challenge an institutional culture that values rule-following and uniformity. Rather, sites of institutionalized reflection and institutional and professional cultures that feature an attitude of self-critique and the practice of critical rationality can give some endurance to reflexivity and thus to capable ethical agency.

Theorizations of purposeful social change and ethics have paid little attention to the complexities of structure. At the risk of oversimplification and in service of illustrating the ways in which ethical reflexivity has different suppositions about the sources of ethical action than much of the normative theorizing of political theory and international political theory, two views of ethical action in political theory can be sketched. One involves the undervaluation of structure and the other involves the overvaluation of structure. In the first conception initiatives of change and ethical action have their source entirely, or almost entirely, in the agent. The agent’s preferences (whether an individual or unitary actor such as the state) are established independent of structure or social context. This independence enables actors to have autonomy in their choice of political projects and ethical judgments. Jeremy Waldron, for example, holds
that normative issues can only and should only be resolved through majority decision-making given the conflict between individual preferences.\(^{58}\)

A second conception features agents that are entirely, or almost entirely, the product of structure. Agents’ identities are constituted by structures or their choices are so highly constrained by structures that agents are essentially homogenous and uniform in their preferences or available choices. Structures, in these accounts, are often portrayed as dominating and pernicious, if for no other reason than agents who are so deeply constructed do not have meaningful choices and can not create or re-fashion their own identities without great difficulty. Thus, social change and ethical action is unlikely and, when undertaken, should challenge social structures. In political theory this view is rare. Perhaps Rousseau qualifies with his depiction of the pre-social individual to illustrate the ways in which majoritarian democracy does not necessarily arrive at the good.\(^{59}\) To the extent that ethical action is possible, both of these views portray it as issuing from the site of the agent. Either the agent is independent to begin with and can pursue his or her preferences and projects or the agent must recognize his or her status as structurally constituted and bring others to the same realization in a political project of structural transformation.

In contrast to these two conceptualizations of ethical action, ethical reflexivity posits a view of ethical action that issues both from agency and structure. Yet, in considering the structural embodiment of ethics, it is important to note that the institutionalization of reflexivity does not ensure its effective practice. Individuals must


always maintain the capacity to be critical of institutions, broadly defined. After all, reflexivity embraces contingency and calls for consideration of deep change which may include radical institutional change (that may even result in the death of an organization, if not its fundamental normative transformation). In addition, action is ultimately in the hands of individuals, whether politicians, statesmen or bureaucrats, and thus reflexivity can and should concurrently take the form of institutional and individual practice. It is the initiatives of individuals that lead to the institutionalization and socialization of reflexivity in modernity’s social institutions and practices, who can stage interventions when institutions incentivize against reflexivity, and who enact ethical reflexivity from within organizations on an everyday basis through their interpretive powers.

Nevertheless, to the extent that reflexivity can be expressed through institutional procedures and culture, it is easier for individuals to be these capable ‘reflexive actors.’ Reflexivity can be enhanced if we think about ways in which reflexivity can be given some endurance. Reflexivity can then become a practice that actors subscribe to, as well as a practice that is cultivated and reproduced through its institutionalization. The goal is to move reflexivity beyond its occasional and intermittent exercise.

Various avenues can be identified for cultivating and propagating ethical reflexivity. I propose three broad measures here: 1) organizational processes and fora that regularly provide space and occasions for critical thinking, 2) organizational socialization practices and training that encourage new and existing members to value reflexivity, and 3) the professionalization of international, national and global civil servants via ‘epistemic communities’ and a professional ethos. The latter helps to guard against institutions falling into socialization patterns that neglect to develop ethical
agency in its members and the co-optation of ethical reflexivity by institutions that might work to work to minimize its radically transformative effects. Professionals will have internalized ethical reflexivity as part of their socialization into an epistemic community and this epistemic community can carry the process and attitude of ethical reflexivity into institutional settings through a professional ethos.

Organizational Processes and Socialization

The organization can itself be a source of socialization in ethical reflexivity. Reflexivity can be magnified by developing ‘moments’ and ‘occasions’ of reflection within international society; more specifically, within state governments, international organizations, and NGOs. While organizational dysfunctions, such as rule-following as an end rather than a means, insulation from information, and group think, are prevalent in the modern bureaucracy, the very characteristics of bureaucracy that entrench counter-productive habits into the ‘sticky’ culture and structure of institutions and societies can be leveraged on behalf of habits that sustain the practice of reflexivity. As Zajac and Comfort advocate, “Organizational ethics codes, training manuals, and practice should reflect what it means to be an ethical organization.”

Organizations can institute and regularize fora within which bureaucrats assess the consequences (intended and unintended) of past and current actions and practices and engage in dialogue with those who may be affected by the organizations’ activities.

Ethical reflexivity can be exercised at different levels, and within institutions, most individuals will likely seek to align action with thought rather than evaluate thought itself. ‘Deeper’ moral reflexivity could be regularly undertaken through institutionalized

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60 Zajac and Comfort, 561.
practices that take a bigger picture of thought and action, such as ‘lessons learned’
exercises, and by those who engage in planning and assessment of organizational
pursuits. As we will see in the case of the United Nations and the generation of ‘lessons
learned’ after the Rwandan genocide, it is also important that these processes and
occasions include individuals external to the organization who are more likely to
introduce critical views of the organization and different interpretations of the ‘the facts’.
Still, significant change within an organization does not necessarily have to be external or
exogenous. As Lynn Eden demonstrates in the case of the U.S. government’s damage
assessment of nuclear weapons, change was the result of “an internal incubator of
innovation”.  

Organizations can also promote ethical reflexivity through socialization. May
argues that although “socialization practices in professional contexts have made it hard
for individuals to do what is right…changes in socialization could make it much
easier.” Just as organizations regularly and prominently refer to an organization’s
‘mission’, organizations might similarly stress the importance of valuing and engaging in
ethical reflexivity as way to address the ways in which ethical issues are always present
in the organization’s activities. And, socialization within an organization might provide
the seed for planting the norm of reflexivity within an epistemic community. If the
United Nations, for example, promoted ethical reflexivity among its members (both staff
and member states), the norm could spread among international civil servants and to
other international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that
regularly deal with and participate in the United Nations.

61 Lynn Eden, Whole World on Fire: Organizations, Knowledge, and Nuclear Weapons Devastation
62 May, 65.
Professional Ethos

Ethical reflexivity could also be propagated in institutions that train diplomats, statesmen and other professionals of international politics (e.g., university graduate programs). Ethical reflexivity can be, in part, taught to individuals through moral training in the question/issue of institutional responsibility. These individuals can then carry into organizational settings the skills of introspection and self-critique. They can employ a sense of responsibility for outcomes and an intimate familiarity with the inner workings of the organization to bring about a more satisfactory organizational response.

Ethical reflexivity might also be introduced into an organization through its spread among those who make a professional or ‘epistemic’ community. The literature on epistemic communities provides insight into how ethical reflexivity can become internalized in international organizations. Emanuel Adler and Peter Haas explain how new policy ideas can be adopted by an epistemic community and spread to others nationally, transnationally, and/or internationally through a process of socialization (or learning).63 An institutional home assists in the spread of an epistemic community’s norms and even in the creation of an epistemic community and its norms, helping to “inform with [the institution’s] preferred world vision.” Epistemic communities “diffuse their policy advice transnationally through communication with their colleagues in scientific bodies and other international organizations, during conferences, and via

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publications and other methods of exchanging lessons and information” (“policy diffusion”).

**Conclusion**

Though Aristotle, and perhaps even Foucault and Giddens, situated reflexivity as a rare occurrence, I have sought in this chapter to elaborate the ways in which reflexivity as ‘ethical reflexivity’ might be widened as a practice of international politics. To this end I have described the challenges to ethical agency posed by bureaucratic dysfunctions and dominant narratives and discussed the ways in which ethical reflexivity, as detailed in chapter two, enacts the ethical agency necessary to confront these challenges. I then created a typology of the *global phronimos* who practices ethical reflexivity and, turning my attention to the possibilities for ethical reflexivity’s structural embodiment, I worked out some ways in which ethical reflexivity might find structural endurance in the institutions of international politics. The structural embodiment of reflexivity enables actors to be more efficacious in their efforts to make ethical choices, to achieve widespread and considered social change, and to effect deep and meaningful re-making of the self. Recognizing the potential for institutions to co-opt ethical reflexivity and thus undermine its radical potential, I also proposed ethical reflexivity as a professional ethos for the global civil servant so that, as a practice, ethical reflexivity could be carried and advanced at social sites that are, at least to some extent, removed from the organizational site.

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64 ibid., 378.
In part one I developed ‘ethical reflexivity’ as a practice of ethics in international politics and described the ‘virtues’ (or characteristics) of the global actor who exercises ethical reflexivity (the ‘global phronimos’). The practice of ethical reflexivity features an attitude of critical self-introspection and a dialectic process of reflecting on the nexus between thought and action so that each may be consciously and actively modified in consideration of the other through dialogue and deliberation. In international politics this practice has ultimate expression through the actions of individuals but is ‘carried’ by both individuals and institutions. The analysis of the following three chapters demonstrates that although the decisions of the United Nations and other major actors during the Rwandan genocide of 1994 lacked ‘ethical reflexivity’ overall, there were ‘moments’ of ‘ethical reflexivity’. I find that some individuals were ethically reflexive and many were not as they acted from within the United Nations (UN), the United States (U.S.) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (as key actors in this case). I find that despite the speed with which the genocide was carried out, the relevant actors had both the time and informational self-awareness to be ethically reflexive, yet only some individuals were. In this chapter I also interpret how ethical agency presents opportunities to leverage ethical reflexivity on a wider-scale: among individuals; within international organizations, states and non-governmental organizations; and throughout a global civil service. As an examination of the Rwandan genocide demonstrates, organizational cultures differ in how well they foster and support ethical reasoning that is reflective, reflexive, self-critical and attentive to context. Here, I show how the
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was more supportive and responsive to the ethical leadership shown by their delegate on the ground (Philippe Gaillard) than the United Nations was to General Dallaire’s ethical leadership. These findings serve to highlight the benefits of ‘ethical reflexivity’ as a practice of international politics and illuminate potential avenues for cultivating reflexivity among both ‘global civil servants’ and the national, international and non-governmental institutions in which they are embedded. I delineate why ethical reflexivity is a more satisfactory practice of international politics and concretely illustrate what ethical reflexivity might look like by discursively analyzing statements and interviews of the actors involved in international reactions to the genocide in Rwanda.
BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY: THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE OF 1994

I now turn to the case of genocide in Rwanda in 1994 in which the United Nations decided not to intervene in the genocide and other violence that unfolded until it was much too late to attempt to prevent hundreds of thousands of deaths and, with the United States and France, ineffectively addressed the enormous internal and external refugee crisis.¹ The genocidal efforts and the ensuing violence took place in a historical context that featured violence between Rwandan Hutus and Tutsis as well as the influence of a colonial power—Belgium—that contributed to the animosity by favoring Tutsis for positions of political power. The genocide in 1994 unfolded in the midst of the implementation of a power-sharing agreement reached earlier between Rwanda’s Hutus

¹ Allan Stam and Christian Davenport challenge the consensus that the killings in Rwanda during the year of 1994 can be accurately characterized as a campaign of genocide (See their press release, Christian Davenport and Allan Stam, “Rwanda 1994: More than Genocide,” http://web.mac.com/christiandavenport/iWeb/Site%207/GenoDynamics_files/maryland.htm, and www.genodynamics.com). Instead, they argue these killings were part of a decades-long civil war and that the killings themselves constituted politicide or politicide in addition to genocide. They conclude that there was perhaps over a million deaths during this period in 1994 and thus the majority who died were Hutu rather than Tutsis (no distinction is made in this study between so-called ‘moderate’ and ‘extremist’ Hutus, a distinction that is used to mark Hutu affiliation with particular political and/or militia groups). It’s difficult to determine whether Stam and Davenport are correct in their assessment, but I don’t find this argument to be particularly persuasive. Even if the genocide unfolded in the context of conflict that is akin to or is actually civil war, the political narrative that guided the killings (e.g., the radio broadcasts and the political messages that were communicated to the Hutu killers and articulated by the Interahamwe) indicates that these killings were targeted at a particular group with the intent of eliminating, in whole or in part, that group (Tutsis) along with their sympathizers and the violence that followed from these messages constitutes genocide. That Hutus who were seen as collaborating with or sympathetic to the Tutsis were killed or that Hutus were killed as a result of the consequences of setting into action large-scale killing wherein individuals can use and direct violence to settle ‘political scores’ doesn’t seem material to determining whether there was genocide or not. There are also first-hand accounts of Hutus without identity cards being killed at roadblocks in speculation that they were actually Tutsis. See, for example, Romeo Dallaire, Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2003). Furthermore, even if we considered these killings a civil war or a politicide the question remains, how could states, non-state organizations and the United Nations have responded with ‘ethical reflexivity’? Under international law the United Nations is required to take action when genocide occurs, but the UN can also take action when international peace and security is threatened. Thus, either way, whether genocide, genocide plus politicide or just politicide, the UN had the same array of options available to it. Furthermore, ‘ethical reflexivity’ is a practice of international politics that is particularly well-suited to dealing with the ethical particulars of each situation (particulars that Stam and Davenport point allude to) as well as the normative context in which it takes place. Also see an interview with Philip Gourevitch for an explanation of the relationship between genocide and civil war in Rwanda in 1994 (for Frontline’s ‘Triumph of Evil’): http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil/interviews/gourevitch.html
and Tutsis (the Arusha Accords). UN peacekeepers, making up the force UNAMIR (United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda), were deployed to Rwanda to provide assistance to implement the Arusha Accords. However, it seems that many Hutu leaders did not intend to follow through with the agreement, and in the context of increasing violence in the country throughout 1994 the president’s plane (a moderate Hutu) was shot down. The incident served as a pretext for a political campaign that would implement massive planned genocide of Tutsis and more moderate Hutus.\footnote{It is unclear who was responsible for shooting down the plane.} The UN Security Council subsequently drew down the size of its peacekeeping mission after 10 Belgian peacekeepers were killed and the genocide began to unfold. A group of Hutu leaders continued to implement their genocidal plans over a period of months, successfully involving much of the local population of Hutus in killing their neighbors. In addition, there is evidence that other kinds of violence took place, including killings of revenge, political killings, random killings and killings of Hutus by Tutsis.

In addition to the challenges to ethical agency that I elaborated earlier (bureaucratic impediments, organizational culture and dominant policy narratives), time and opportunity have also been posed as impediments for affecting outcomes in the case of the Rwandan genocide. In providing explanations for their actions policymakers and bureaucrats stressed the short amount of time in which the genocide unfolded and the belief that important decisions had already been made about how the United Nations and the United States would respond to the genocide. Yet, as interviews, documents and events will demonstrate, individuals had both the time and opportunity to act reflexively. In this chapter I profile two individuals, Philipe Gaillard and Romeo Dallaire, who acted in ways that were ethically reflexive as the genocide was carried out and consider their
organizational context. I also highlight other individuals (though less space is devoted to them), some of whom did not exercise ethical reflexivity and thus were not able to overcome organizational challenges and dysfunctions and some of whom, like Dallaire and Gaillard, successfully practiced at least some degree of ethical reflexivity.

Research that addresses the “what ifs” in the case of Rwandan genocide tends to focus on the question of whether the UN and several powerful countries (including the US) were aware of compelling evidence of the impending genocide. The research and analysis here agrees that several actors had this knowledge but, more importantly, demonstrates that even among actors who had little to no knowledge of the impending genocide some individuals found and created the mental and chronological space to reflect critically upon thought and action, consider context and engage in a dialogue with ‘others’ oriented toward understanding as they considered the events in Rwanda. They practiced ethical reflexivity, and as a result of the actions of these individuals (as global phronimos), thousands of lives were saved. The profiles also showcase when and how organizational culture and bureaucratic impediments affect individuals’ actions. These organizational factors pose obstacles for individuals in the recognition and exercise of ethical reflexivity, yet they do not fully explain individual action and they are not insurmountable. Whereas Michael Barnett focuses on the organizational culture of the United Nations to explain the organization’s actions (to not intervene in the genocide) I

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3 See, for example, the exhaustive research in Linda Melvern’s *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000).

4 Of course, the successful exercise of ethical reflexivity is not necessarily the saving of lives. After all, as Barnett points out, there were different ethical grounds for action within the UN, including protecting the lives of UN officials and peacekeepers and protecting the future of peacekeeping. Michael Barnett, *Eyewitness to a Genocide* (Cornell: Cornell University, 2002). Yet, it is the case that individuals in the UN, the US and the ICRC who practiced ethical reflexivity connected their action to the moral end of saving lives and the commitment of the international community to respond to genocide. They also tended to engage in self-introspection that considered their personal and not just organizational responsibilities, opening up avenues of self-transformation, both within themselves and within their organizations.
highlight individual agency to explore the ways in which ethical reasoning enables individuals to act contrary to the organizational culture. Many of the individuals considered here faced an organizational culture that was unsupportive of ethical reflexivity and yet some found ways to be ethically reflexive. In contrast, Philippe Gaillard of the ICRC acted from within an organization whose culture was more supportive of ethical reflexivity. As a result, Gaillard’s actions were more efficacious than many of his colleagues in the UN and other NGOs, and the ICRC, as an organization, engaged in transformation of the moral self that is possible through ‘second-order’ ethical reflexivity. In other words, these profiles illustrate that institutional processes and cultures can incentivize for and against the practice of ethical reflexivity but certain individual characteristics and practices can enable individuals to overcome institutional barriers to ethical reflexivity.
Chapter 4: The United Nations and the Rwandan Genocide

General Romeo Dallaire possessed the attributes of the *global phronimos*, but was situated in an organization with a culture and leadership that was not supportive of ethical reflexivity. Dallaire was also surrounded by several individuals in the UN who, with regard to Rwanda, did not view their personal and institutional ethical agency as expansively as Dallaire did. These individuals tended to uncritically accept the dominant ethical and policy narratives in interpreting the grounds of their action and were not as successful as Dallaire in confronting an institutional culture that did not value the practice and posture of ethical reflexivity. In this section I will describe how Dallaire acted as a *global phronimos* in the context of an organization in which many individuals’ interpretations downplayed ethical agency and engaged and acquiesced to institutional dysfunctions and disincentives.

**General Romeo Dallaire, Force Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission to Rwanda (UNAMIR)**

The events of the Rwandan mission left Dallaire frustrated and feeling as though he failed at times as the UN Force Commander of UNAMIR. Although Dallaire undoubtedly made some decisions as a commander that were not reflective of the kind of judgment he wished to have it is more accurate to say that Dallaire, through his phrnetic capacities, expansively conceptualized his ethical agency and the ethical agency of UNAMIR to enable nontrivial outcomes that were widely judged by Dallaire and others to be morally satisfactory, though much of the widespread praise for Dallaire occurred after the
genocide had happened. Although Dallaire was unable to convince others in the United Nations (especially the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, DPKO) and key states (mainly the United States, France and Belgium) to interpret the UNAMIR mandate as he did and to fully support the UNAMIR presence in Rwanda, Dallaire personified the *global phronimos* in ways that had profound consequences for the lives of Rwandans and UN staff and peacekeepers. While ten Belgian peacekeepers were killed, thousands of Rwandans were protected and UN peacekeepers demonstrated that they could act in situations of extreme violence because Dallaire was responsive to changing conditions as he employed a critical rationality, continually maintained a sense of ethical self-awareness, and engaged in dialogue with Rwandans.

When genocide and then civil war broke out Dallaire firmly pushed to maintain a UN presence in Rwanda and focused on resolving the political impasses in Rwanda while taking measures to provide civilian protection and shift to humanitarian activities as they became increasingly necessary. The UNAMIR mission mounted rescue missions of Rwandans and non-Rwandans; maintained safe havens and protected the Rwandans within them at Amahoro stadium, the Milles Collins hotel and UNAMIR headquarters; transferred civilians to places where they would be safer (usually behind RPF or RGF lines); kept the airport open and out of the hands of the RPF or RGF so that humanitarian aid and potential UN reinforcements could reach Rwanda; and coordinated media efforts and provided security and information to the media so that the genocide could be reported to the world.

While undertaking these efforts Dallaire also continued to advocate and arrange for ceasefire negotiations and, generally, maintained communication with the belligerents
in order to advocate for the Arusha process and respect for humanitarian activities. As the genocide progressed and the refugee situation became acute, Dallaire, unlike other actors (e.g. the United States), recognized when it was more appropriate and beneficial to the Rwandan people to shift the focus from political entreaties to protective measures and aid. Dallaire was able to accomplish all of this even though he was initially not granted the larger UN force he judged necessary for these tasks, had his staff reduced to a skeletal presence in the weeks following the outbreak of genocide, and did not receive cooperation from the UN, the US, and France when UNAMIR 2 was authorized and France undertook Operation Turquoise (under UN Chapter 7 mandate and against Dallaire’s advice).  

Dallaire’s experience with Rwanda began when, amidst a long and distinguished career in the Canadian military, he was asked to lead the United Nations Observer Mission in Uganda and Rwanda (UNOMUR). UNOMUR was to be a very small mission of unarmed observers who would be located on the Ugandan side of the Ugandan-Rwandan border. The mission would be charged with ensuring that soldiers and weapons not cross the border into Rwandan and into the hands of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), a rebel force that was negotiating with other Rwandan groups and parties to form a peace agreement that would result in a power-sharing arrangement and end a civil war. This mission would be a “confidence-building” exercise for the negotiating parties as it would work to abate the preparations for continuing the war. As Dallaire and his small team reviewed UN and external documents about the political situation and history of

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1 Particularly when UNAMIR 2 was in the conceptualization and early-planning process Dallaire strongly recommended and designed the plan of operations to focus on the humanitarian crisis (especially, over 2 million internally displaced Rwandans) beginning, most notably, with his comments on a “non-paper” drafted by DPKÖ in early May followed by drafts of the UNAMIR 2 mandate, Dallaire, 2003, 358-60.
Rwanda (including materials from two UN reconnaissance missions) and waited for Uganda to sign the status of mission agreement (SOMA), the RPF and the Rwandan government announced a peace agreement that included a call for a peacekeeping force. Dallaire turned his attention to preparing for a third reconnaissance mission to Rwanda authorized by DPKO to explore and formulate a plan for a new UN peacekeeping mission.

After interviewing major political and military figures as well as NGO representatives on the ground in Rwanda, Dallaire and his staff set to work on a proposal for a UN peacekeeping mission to Rwanda. At the conclusion of this ‘technical mission’ Dallaire was certain that Rwanda would benefit from a peacekeeping force but he also had concerns. Foremost, Dallaire had misgivings about the prospect of having to undershoot his request to make it palatable to the Security Council and resource-contributing countries per the strong advice of the head of the military division of DPKO (General Maurice Baril). Dallaire was also concerned that some of the political actors in Rwanda had ulterior motives despite their agreement to a peace accord and a peacekeeping force. And Dallaire was suspicious of the small but significant French and Belgian presence in the country given their history of interference in the politics of an independent Rwanda. Still, Dallaire strongly believed that Rwanda would “benefit from a classic chapter-six peacekeeping mission” but only if it could be invested with a “sense of urgency” and if the rules of engagement (ROE) included the ability to use force to respond to “ethnic killings” and “banditry” by demobilized soldiers. Borrowing language from the rules of engagement (ROE) of the Cambodia mission, Dallaire

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3 ibid.
included a provision that would allow force “up to and including the use of deadly force to prevent ‘crimes against humanity’”.\textsuperscript{4} The peacekeeping force would consist of armed troops and unarmed observers who would be placed at various points throughout the country including in and around the demilitarized zone between Uganda and Rwanda in the north, the capital of Kigali and a small presence in southern Rwanda.\textsuperscript{5}

In early September of 1993 Dallaire submitted a plan for “The United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda” (UNAMIR) to Kofi Annan’s office (the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations) where it would be reviewed and potentially modified by the secretary-general’s office (within the Secretariat) and considered for decision by the Security Council. The report’s consideration by the Secretariat was sped along by a visit to New York from a Rwandan delegation that included government and RPF representatives and by Dallaire’s personal lobbying of UN officials and country representatives in the halls of the UN for support and commitments of troops and material. Dallaire continued to be frustrated by the process as he encountered restricted access to officials from the US and the UK, resistance among the more ‘developed’ countries to consider troop and material commitments, slow mandate approval from the Security Council, and revisions to the proposal made without input from Dallaire by the Secretariat prior to consideration by the Security Council. After being repeatedly warned that anything but the smallest of missions would not be received well by the Security Council Dallaire proposed a small force of 2,600 soldiers (a little under half of what he considered necessary), including a mobile reserve equipped with

\textsuperscript{4} Dallaire 2003, 72.
\textsuperscript{5} Interestingly, Dallaire notes in his book that the proposal for UNAMIR was “breaking new ground” in what would later become known as “Chapter six and a half” peacekeeping but they didn’t realize this at the time, ibid., 72.
armored personnel carriers and helicopters and unarmed military observers (MILOBs). Dallaire compromised on many other elements of the mission, including engineer and logistics companies and headquarters support staff and communications. Later, Dallaire would question whether he had compromised too much on the mission request in order to get a mission approved. Dallaire, appointed force commander of UNAMIR, immediately flew from Uganda to the Kigali, Rwanda to get the mission off the ground.

In the months to come Dallaire would continue to struggle with contributing countries and UN bureaucrats to get troops, equipment and materials on the ground. Dallaire was also faced with disruptions and changed conditions that compelled him to reevaluate and adjust mission parameters and force placement including a coup d’état in neighboring Burundi that put the stability of the entire southern part of Rwanda in doubt and required a redistribution of already thin troops and unarmed military observers. Dallaire ran into a great deal of communications problems. His requests, proposals and reports sent to DPKO were often never replied to and his communications support and equipment were lacking. Appallingly, the contingents of UN peacekeepers weren’t even supplied with radios that were compatible and secure. These challenges made it very difficult for Dallaire to successfully lead his staff officers and peacekeeping force in the face of a break down in the Arusha process and, eventually, civil war and genocide.

Despite these difficult and frustrating circumstances, among others, in his role as the UN Force Commander of UNAMIR Dallaire engaged in critical rationality, sought to balance prudence and risk in the actions he took and ordered, had an awareness of himself as a ‘complete moral actor’ and engaged in dialogue with Rwandans as well as

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7 Dallaire, 2003, 82; Romeo Dallaire, Interview by Frontline in the fall of 2003 for the episode, “Ghosts of Rwanda”. 

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other stakeholders in the peacemaking and peacekeeping process. However, (as I will show later in the chapter) Dallaire did not have the same high level of ‘situational appreciation’ as Philippe Gaillard, the head of the ICRC’s Rwandan delegation, and was hampered by the organizational culture and dysfunctions of the UN. In the paragraphs below I detail each of these qualities displayed by Dallaire and their implications.

*Situational Appreciation*

When Romeo Dallaire was tasked with leading UNOMUR he had not yet had any experience leading UN missions, although he had spent a significant amount of the previous two years (1991-1993) training soldiers to be Canadian peacekeepers as commander of the 5ième Group Brigade Mechanisé du Canada at Valcartier. Dallaire was keenly aware of the challenges to ‘classic peacekeeping’ that the UN missions of the 1990s posed. These operations, Dallaire later wrote, were more complex and challenged the peacekeeping principles of impartiality, neutrality and consent.  

8 When Dallaire was contacted by the UN, the mission to Rwanda was billed as a ‘classic peacekeeping’ operation that would be a simple and easy success for the UN. Despite this optimistic assessment Dallaire immediately shifted his focus to Rwanda and worked at a furious place to gather as much information as possible not about the strategic and tactical challenges he might face in Rwanda as well as the political and social context and Rwanda’s historical trajectory.  

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9 The initial mission (UNOMUR) was tasked with monitoring the Ugandan-Rwandan border to ensure that arms and soldiers were not sent into Rwanda from Uganda to the RPF as the Rwandan government and the rebel force negotiated a peace agreement. It continued to operate after UNAMIR began but did not fully implement its mandate and was closed on September 21, 1994.
Despite Dallaire’s pace of preparation he was left with very little time and resources to acquire the intimate knowledge of the political and social aspects of Rwanda that he viewed necessary. In part, this was the product of the political situation in Rwanda and the window of opportunity for a peacekeeping mission. The ceasefire negotiations were still underway when the spectre of UN involvement was raised and Dallaire was initially contacted. In addition, Rwandan leaders wanted a UN peacekeeping force on the ground as quick as possible. The lack of opportunity for acquiring particular and contextual knowledge also had to do with the institution of the United Nations and, in the words of Dallaire, its lack of “political and cultural savvy”.\textsuperscript{10} In a resource-strapped organization little priority was given to acquiring the social and political knowledge and engaging in dialogue with Rwandans that would be useful in better directing the organization’s efforts and the ethical questions that attended these efforts.\textsuperscript{11} Also, Dallaire was not adequately introduced to the resources that were potentially available to him. There was little institutional memory in DPKO with regard to peacekeeping activities. For example, Dallaire was unaware that there was a UN military observer on the ground who was tasked with following the Arusha process\textsuperscript{12} and Dallaire found it difficult to obtain information about how previous peacekeeping missions were formulated and administered. In his account of his experience Dallaire lamented the lack of “formal education and training” for the job of force commander in preparation for the complex political and social conditions of peacekeeping missions. Still, Dallaire’s efforts and leadership translated into getting a team together quickly.

\textsuperscript{10} Dallaire, 2003, 514.
\textsuperscript{11} Much of the UN’s self-assessments and ‘lessons learned’ focus on this ‘lack of resources’ as a major factor in contributing to its failures. While this may be so, little attention has been devoted to how resources might be more efficaciously distributed.
\textsuperscript{12} Dallaire, 2003, 54.
before UNAMIR was ultimately approved and the successful execution of an information gathering mission to Rwanda.

Dallaire felt relatively well-prepared as he embarked on the UNAMIR mission. Although there were tremendous logistical challenges early because supplies and troops did not arrive in a timely fashion, Dallaire was surrounded by several capable staff, had made contact with Rwandan figures from several parties to the conflict and was beginning to meet mission benchmarks. Yet, as the peace process began to break down and warning signs of violence emerged Dallaire found that he lacked key pieces of information about the political and social context and found himself playing catch-up in gathering information with a lack of staff, a force presence that was thinly stretched and largely confined to Kigali, and a Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the United Nations (SRSG), Jacques-Roger Booh-Booh, who Dallaire found to be uninformed, largely uninterested and uncommunicative. Dallaire also fought a constant battle with DPKO to get basic supplies, including desks, chairs, paper and pens. Despite Dallaire’s best efforts to make political interventions behind the scenes with Rwandan politicians and officials, he faced organizational and logistical obstacles. The effectiveness of Dallaire’s political and military interventions also suffered because he lacked an adequate understanding of Rwanda’s social and political dynamics as the political process to install the interim government broke down and the genocide infolded.

Dallaire knew that his lack of situational knowledge was problematic and he tried to compensate by drawing on his experience as part of the French minority in Canada.

I was in unchartered waters—the geography, the culture, the politics, the brutality, the extremism, the depths of deception practised almost as a Rwandan art form—all were new to me. However, I knew about the sensitivities of minorities, of the weight of being different in style and attitude; by nature I was a moderate and a
conciliator, and I burned with the desire to help fulfill the Arusha Peace Agreement—this best chance at a new social contract for the people of Rwanda.  

This minority struggle was part of a generational struggle for Dallaire. His generation was caught up in a struggle for ‘equal recognition’ of French-Canadian rights. Dallaire’s experience brought this struggle into relief as he was a part of the French-Canadian community and subject to the disdain of the military community for his identity as a ‘Quebecker’. Dallaire took up the fight for French-Canadian rights in the military despite this hostile environment and his career trajectory culminated in the command of a specially created French-Canadian unit. In this command capacity Dallaire sought to prove that his unit was as capable as other units despite the fewer resources and respect allocated to his unit. It was from this experience with social conflict that Dallaire attempted to understand Rwandans.

Dialogue

This minority identity firmed Dallaire’s resolve to assist the peoples of Rwanda and to make do with a very thin organizational capacity and a UN bureaucracy that seemed indifferent, at best, to UNAMIR. It was also likely instrumental in Dallaire’s eagerness to talk to as many Rwandans and relevant actors as possible. Dallaire sought to understand and respect Rwandans in their various identities. In fact, dialogue, encouragement and pleading on behalf of the peace process and humanitarian needs ranked among his primary activities. Much of the mission was spent traveling to meet with various individuals and groups involved in the peace process, providing security for activities that were important for forming the transitional government, and reaching out

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to the local population by attending and holding town meetings. When Dallaire realized the scale of popular misunderstanding of UNAMIR and detected the opportunity for more popular support (with the initial success of UNAMIR’s presence at town meetings) he tasked his staff with organizing and conducting more town meetings. Dallaire requested from the UN the authorization to use their radio equipment to start a UN radio station to communicate with the populace, though this request was denied.

When the Rwandan president’s plane was shot down Dallaire immediately began talking to the political powerbrokers, seeking to ensure that power was legally transferred to Prime Minister Agathe. When she was killed Dallaire continued to meet with politicians including the RPF, the RGF, the army, and the interim government to encourage the various parties to talk to each other and negotiate an end to the violence in order to get the Arusha process back on track. While this dialogue ultimately was not able to salvage the peace process Dallaire’s dialogic efforts throughout the mission were aimed at addressing the issues that had led to the disintegration of the peace process rather than mere admonitions to respect the Accords dispensed by various UN and US officials. The UN mission’s efforts to connect and converse with the public may have contributed to many Rwandans seeking out UN sites for protection as the killing began.

The dialogic efforts of the UN were extraordinarily expansive, even extending to the genocidaires themselves when Dallaire initiated a meeting with militia leaders who were organizing and directing much of the genocide. All of these efforts were aimed at

14 ibid.
15 The creation of a UN radio station in Rwanda would have challenged the discourse of the RTLM radio station that was widely followed and vilified UN peacekeepers (especially the Belgians), Tutsis and moderate Hutus.
16 This was the approach taken by the US diplomatic arm. When the genocide broke out the primary US response consisted of Prudence Bushnell of the State Department calling political leaders to exhort them to stop the genocide and comply with the Arusha Accords as Bushnell recalls, Prudence Bushnell, Interview by Frontline on September 30, 2003 for the episode, “Ghosts of Rwanda”.

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assessing and pursuing the needs of Rwandans as the leaders of UNAMIR sought to take practical steps in an effort to achieve tangible results in a situation that felt impossible.

*Ethical Self-Awareness*

Another key quality of the *global phronimos* is self-awareness as an ethical actor. A review of Dallaire’s autobiographical reflections on his experience, interviews given after the genocide, and public statements made during the genocide portray a man who consciously engaged and struggled with difficult and perplexing ethical questions, could identify and articulate ethical issues, and continually maintained a skepticism of his ethical reasoning that helped ensure that he would not adopt a certitude that could cloud his ability to be self-critical in the exercise of ethical deliberation and judgment. Dallaire’s ethical awareness was engaged even before he agreed to command UNAMIR. Having proposed a mission with a weaker mandate and fewer troops and resources than he thought necessary and thus increasing the potential risks to his peacekeeping troops, Dallaire wondered whether it was “right” and “ethical” to go forward with the mission and the command.17 He ultimately answered in the affirmative, but throughout the mission he often revisited the on-the-ground decisions he made, and entertained the question of whether the mission itself should continue. Throughout the mission Dallaire wrestled with the ethicality of the risks that his men took, especially considering the small number of people they were saving given the scale of the slaughter and the possibility that a token UN forced allowed the international community to say that it was ‘doing something’ without actually having to address the situation.18 “Why stay?”

17 Dallaire, Frontline.
18 Dallaire, 2003, 414.
Dallaire recalled that every time he asked himself this question he answered: “it was a moral duty to stay and help, even if the impact of our actions was small”.\(^\text{19}\)

Perhaps the most ethically difficult decision he made during the course of the mission was meeting with the leaders of the Interahamwe (arranged for Dallaire by the interim government at his request). In order to make safe civilian transfers as part of UNAMIR’s humanitarian efforts Dallaire needed to ensure that the militia would let this happen, otherwise the lives of those transferred could be in danger. Dallaire met with militia leaders and left the meeting with what he felt was a credible commitment to respect the transfers. He also gained evidence of strong linkages between the militia, army and interim government during the course of the meeting. Yet, Dallaire was concerned about granting recognition and legitimacy to the Interahamwe by meeting with them. These individuals, after all, were orchestrating and carrying out the genocide. Dallaire was reminded of this by the particularly macabre dried splatters of blood on the shirt and arm of one of the men, leaving him with the feeling that he had “shaken hands with the devil”.\(^\text{20}\) Dallaire struggled both before and after the meeting with whether it was the “right thing” to do, demonstrating his ethical self-awareness and the sort of dialectical movement between thought and action typical of the \textit{global phronimos}.

The ethical self-awareness of the \textit{global phronimos}, along with a nuanced view of responsibility, enables an expansive view of the possibilities for individual ethical agency, as seen with Dallaire. Rather than being overwhelmed by bureaucratic and organizational roadblocks or absorbed with the rules of military strategy and tactics, Dallaire directed his ethical concern toward the human beings who were the victims of

\(^{19}\) ibid., 419.
\(^{20}\) ibid., 347.
violence on an almost unimaginable scale and sought the help and cooperation of those
who could do something about it. What seems to stick with him the most is less the
bureaucratic and organizational shortcomings of UNAMIR and his own failures; rather,
he was more appalled with the actions of others who downplayed the ethical status of the
Rwandans, pronounced on the situation an absence of any strategic interest and too much
risk, and bore some responsibility for the violence.

I know intimately the cost in human lives of the inflexible UN Security Council
mandate, the penny-pinching financial management of the mission, the UN red
tape, the political manipulations and my own personal limitations. What I have
come to realize as the root of it all, however, is the fundamental indifference of
the world community to the plight of seven to eight million black Africans in a
tiny country that had no strategic or resource value to any world
power…Engraved still in my brain is the judgment of a small group of
bureaucrats who came to ‘assess’ the situation in the first weeks of the genocide:
‘We will recommend to our government not to intervene as the risks are high and
all that is here are humans’ (Dallaire, 6).

Dallaire was similarly critical of the individual Rwandans who committed these acts and
whose actions allowed the genocide to continue. In popular attributions of responsibility
for the genocide the focus is almost exclusively on the Interahamwe (a group of militias)
and their leaders, but other individuals bear responsibility in their acts of omission and
commission. Dallaire assigns a significant amount of responsibility to Paul Kagame,
leader of the RPF. Kagame contributed to the deaths of thousands of Tutsis, Dallaire
contends, because he “did not speed up his [military] campaign when the scale of the
genocide became clear”. Kagame “talked candidly” with Dallaire “at several points
about the price his fellow Tutsis might have to pay for the cause”.

21 There is also
evidence that Kagame’s forces, in an effort to keep the UN from getting in the way of the
RPF’s interests thwarted the UN’s efforts to rescue persons, visit protected sites and

21 ibid., 515.
move about in their tasks of promoting a cease-fire and talks. Again, the RPF’s actions in this regard created the conditions in which more Tutsis were killed. The RPF also may have worsened the refugee crisis and ensured future conflict by not entering into negotiations with the interim government and with the RGF for a ceasefire instead of pushing the RGF and hundreds of thousands of Rwandans into Zaire without an NGO capacity to help them. Finally, the RPF itself engaged in (militarily) some unnecessary killing and summary executions likely motivated by revenge for the mass killing of Tutsis by the militias.\(^2\)

Dallaire, in contrast to many other actors, evinced a more nuanced understanding of responsibility characteristic of the *global phronimos* that interprets responsibility as overlapping, diffuse and existing at multiple sites. This understanding of responsibility illuminates sites of agency where action creates the possibility of effecting an outcome even if that outcome is also dependent on the actions of others.

*Critical Rationality*

Perhaps Dallaire’s most notable phronetic quality was his ability to engage in critical rationality. Dallaire flexibly responded to changing circumstances and possessed an acute ethical sensibility that he employed in his critical analyses of situations in which he reflected on both thought and action. Dallaire carefully avoided the bureaucratic dysfunction of narrowly and literally focusing on the established rules of the mission (the mandate) and instead saw the mandate as a flexible and living document that must be made to respond to the conditions on the ground—whether political, social, strategic, or tactical—and ethical reasoning. In his stewardship of the UNAMIR mandate Dallaire

\(^2\) See Dallaire, 2003 for accounts of this evidence.
looked to it for guidance on the ground but also critically examined and recrafted it when conditions on the ground changed and upon ethical reflection. Although DPKO often ignored Dallaire’s communications about the mandate or rejected mandate changes altogether, Dallaire continued to attend to the document as a moral resource in consultation with his staff.

Early on, Dallaire sought mandate changes to account for the slow arrival of troops, transport and other materials, and the Burundi coup. Dallaire found himself attempting to balance trade-offs in operational success with the risk to his troops.23 Dallaire continued to devote a great deal of thought to the mandate as a continuing guide for action and as a document that must be responsive to the needs of the peace process. At several points he communicated with DPKO about his interpretation of the mandate. Dallaire fashioned a UNAMIR presence that would provide security mostly in Kigali and monitoring in Kigali and in other areas of the country (mainly through non-military observers) to facilitate the goals of the Arusha Accords beginning, most importantly, with the establishment of a transitional government. When humanitarian activities became increasingly necessary, Dallaire again turned to the mandate and emphasized its authorization “to assist in the coordination of humanitarian assistance activities in conjunction with relief operations.”24

This flexibility was in contrast to DPKO’s approach to UNAMIR’s mission. Though both Dallaire and DPKO understood the mandate similarly when the mission

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23 Dallaire adjusted the mandate so that the troops that were to patrol the demilitarized zone would be redistributed to other areas and tasked with implementing the peace agreement for the entire country. Dallaire took on some additional risk to his staff by adjusting the mandate, but he also judged that the parties to the peace agreement as well as DPKO needed an indication that the mission was capably off the ground and into the phase of ‘operational risk’ and the Rwandan population needed to see that the UN was an actual and friendly presence in the country, Dallaire, 2003, 102.

began as authorizing UNAMIR to help the parties implement the Arusha Accords beginning with the installation of a ‘transitional’ government, when we examine the specific actions that UNAMIR sought to take different interpretations are evident.

Dallaire viewed the mandate as authorizing UNAMIR actions that DPKO later found to be outside the mandate, but these different interpretations, in part, were based on different views of the mandate. DPKO generally resisted rethinking the mandate and interpreted the mandate in a very particular and narrow way that was focused on avoiding failure rather than achieving success. This stance was especially evident in DPKO’s reaction to requests made by Dallaire in response to the Burundi coup d’état and in response to information about arms caches provided by an informant. Perhaps the most critical decision was made about the latter. DPKO’s interpretation of the mandate with regard to this incident just days into the mission entrenched a particular view of the mandate that DPKO subsequently and repeatedly returned to and never reexamined. In the context of a political impasse in the installation of the provisional government, increasing evidence of an unknown ‘third force’ of militias25, and increasingly hateful radio broadcasts that referred to Tutsis as ‘cockroaches’ (*Inyenzi*), UNAMIR was put in touch with an informant by a high level politician. This informant, referred to as Jean-Pierre by UNAMIR, told UNAMIR officials that he had formerly been in the Presidential Guard, worked for the Interahamwe training men in Rwandan villages to prepare to potentially fight the RPF and reported to the president of the MRND party. He became concerned and disillusioned with the Interahamwe and the MRND when he was told to order his militia cells to make lists of the Tutsis in their community for extermination. Dallaire recalled that Jean-Pierre ‘claimed that the army had recently transferred four large

25 The other two forces were the army and the Gendarmerie (police).
shipments of AK-47s, ammunition and grenades to the militia’ and were being kept in four arm caches in Kigali (more specifically, in a part of Kigali covered by the Kigali Weapons Secure Area agreement) to be distributed and used against Tutsis and against Belgian soldiers in the hopes of collapsing the UN mission in Rwanda.26 After providing information to attest to his credibility, Dallaire and his military assistant, Major Brent Beardsley, planned to act on this information by raiding the arms caches. Because these weapons caches violated the Kigali Weapons Secure Area agreement, were a threat to his force, and were being planned for use to perpetrate ‘crimes against humanity’ Dallaire found their use of force to secure the weapons to be well within his mandate and the rules of engagement (ROE). This action was consistent with how Dallaire had recently interpreted the mandate, as authorizing the seizure of weapons at roadblocks and the confiscation of weapons from illegal militias.27

Dallaire sent a coded cable to DPKO describing his planned course of action, stating his intention to inform the SRSNG (Booh Booh) in the morning to get his buy-in, and asking for permission to protect the informant and his family. As the title of the cable indicates (“REQUEST FOR PROTECTION OF INFORMANT”)28 it was in regard to the last matter that Dallaire sought the help the permission and the advice of DPKO (specifically, Maurice Baril), but contrary to Dallaire’s interpretation, three officials at DPKO (making up what Dallaire termed “the triumvirate”—Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Iqbal Riza, head of DPKO’s Military Division Maurice Baril and Head of the Africa Section in the Political Division of DPKO Hedi Annabi) in a cable titled

26 Dallaire, 2003, 142-44.
28 A copy of the coded cable can be found at: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil/warning/cable.html
“Contacts with Informant” responded with instructions to cease all plans to raid the arms caches and to inform President Habyarimana of the informant’s allegations. The cable to Dallaire and Booh-Booh firmly stated: “We have carefully reviewed the situation in the light of your MIR-79. We cannot agree to the operation contemplated in paragraph 7 of your cable, as it clearly goes beyond the mandate entrusted to UNAMIR under resolution 872 (1993).”29 The interpretation of these three individuals at DPKO, however, was not at all ‘clear’ to Dallaire as reflected by his coded cable which did not ask for approval of the arms cache raid, and instead asked for advice on how to proceed with providing security for his informant.

At issue was an interpretation of UNAMIR’s mandate to “contribute to the security of the city of Kigali inter alia within a weapons-secure area established by the parties in and around the city”30 What kind of action did this provision permit UNAMIR to take? The text itself is not particularly instructive as UNAMIR could potentially “contribute” in many different ways to the security of Kigali, and the mandate authorizes, among other things, a weapons-secure area and UNAMIR’s assistance in establishing and maintaining it. I agree with Barnett that this decision by DPKO touches both on their concerns that Dallaire was acting in ways that threatened the mission in light of ‘Somalia’ and in light of the principles of impartiality and consent.31 It was because DPKO officials did not critically examine the policy narratives present in the halls of the UN (I review these dominant policy narratives in the next section) and because they were not attentive to how rules and guidelines are interpreted in light of the context that they

29 A copy of the response cable can be found at: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil/warning/unresponse.html
reactively dismissed Dallaire’s more contextual and fluid interpretation of the mandate. DPKO continued to narrow the interpretation of UNAMIR’s mandate. Iqbal Riza later stated, “We were cautious in interpreting our mandate and in giving guidance…We could not risk another Somalia…We did not want this mission to collapse.” DPKO thus settled on an interpretation of the mandate that attempted to guard against mission failure. Specifically, they advised Dallaire to avoid the use of force and to discharge weapons only if peacekeepers were attacked or directly threatened. This narrow and uncritical view was also reflected in various comments by DPKO officials, including Riza in an interview with Frontline, that mark a clear distinction between Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 operations and that fail to address Dallaire’s contention that this distinction broke down in the case of Rwanda, making it a ‘Chapter 6 and a half’ operation. Dallaire later declared, “The November massacres, the presence of heavily armed militias, a rabid extremist press screaming about Tutsi Inyenzi and demanding that blood be shed, the political impasse and the resultant tension—all were signs that we were no longer in a classic chapter-six peacekeeping situation.” DPKO was unwilling to entertain this kind of nuanced view.

It was likely, I argue, the absence of critical rationality in DPKO’s decision-making practices that led them to firmly reject Dallaire’s interpretation of UNAMIR’s mandate. As a result, DPKO was not able to question the dominant policy narrative of ‘No More Somalias’ and was not able to entertain the notion of appropriate risk or allow for the contextual knowledge of those on the ground in Rwanda. This interpretation by

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32 Iqbal Riza, Interview by Frontline for the episode, “the triumph of evil”.
33 See DPKO’s response to Dallaire’s coded cable: (http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil/warning/unresponse.html) and Barnett (2002), 91.
34 Dallaire, 2003, 146.
DPKO blinded them to the flexibilities and multiple interpretations of the mandate and kept them from reflecting on the spirit and purpose of the mandate. More generally, they were not able to critically navigate thought and action and emotionally engage with the questions they were faced with, in contrast to Dallaire.

Diachronic Perspective

Dallaire also possessed a ‘diachronic perspective’ characteristic of the *global phronimos* in which one looks both to the past and to the future, considering past actions and the practices they’re informed by as well as future alternatives as one engages in ethical reasoning and decision-making. This perspective was particularly instrumental in the formulation of UNAMIR 2. UNAMIR 2 has often been characterized as a mission to stop the genocide that was too late and thus an exercise in futility. While it is the case that Dallaire and others lobbied for UNAMIR 2 in order to intervene in the ongoing genocide, by the time the mission was authorized it was less likely to make an appreciable difference in the pace and scale of the genocide primarily because the RPF was closing in on complete territorial and political control of the country. Thus, in addition to providing security that would help to abate the remaining violence, Dallaire perceptively looked to the future, inquiring into the consequences of mass genocidal violence and large-scale population movements as well as what he learned about the historical dynamics between and among the Hutus and Tutsis.

In consultation with others on his team and from DPKO Dallaire personally lobbied the Secretariat with his plan for UNAMIR 2, dubbed ‘Homeward Bound’, that was ‘designed to support the swift return of the more than 2 million refugees hunkered
down in camps within kilometers of the Rwandan border, as well as to move 1.7 million internally displaced persons in the HPZ toward their homes.’ If the refugees settled into the camps, Dallaire argued, genocidaires would escape detention and punishment, disease and death would continue to spread throughout the camps, and the refugees would be ‘the fuel that could ignite the entire Great Lakes region of central Africa into an even larger catastrophe than the Rwandan genocide’.

Yet, this plan was not accepted by a meeting of ‘troop-contributing nations’ and was squashed, Dallaire reported, by the United States and France. The U.S. was focused on an aid mission to the refugees in Goma. This effort, however, was a short-term solution to the refugee crisis created by the genocide and to the political future of the region, in contrast to the chronologically-expansive perspective of Dallaire’s plan for UNAMIR 2. The failure of the UN and its member nations to address the massive population movements and the regional aspects of the conflict and violence had tremendous consequences. Though qualitatively different from the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, millions of people have since died in the Great Lakes region from violence, disease and hunger and ethnic conflict continues.

The Dominant Narratives and Bureaucratic Dysfunctions within the United Nations

Perhaps the most exhaustive work on how organizational dynamics at the United Nations played a role in understandings of violence in Rwanda by UN actors is Michael Barnett’s book *Eyewitness to a Genocide.* Though powerful countries (including those on the Security Council), the media, NGOs and others bear some responsibility for the failure to respond to the genocide in Rwanda Barnett argues that it is instructive to look inside the

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United Nations to determine whether responsibility lies there as well. Barnett answers in the affirmative and, specifically, argues that to understand why an organization that so strongly professes a belief and in human rights and a commitment to protecting human rights in the event of genocide would not intervene at low cost to prevent much of the killing we need to look to organizational culture. Barnett writes:

> The culture within the UN generated an understanding of the organization’s unique contribution to world politics. It produced rules that signaled when peacekeeping was “the right tool for the job.” It contained orienting concepts such as neutrality, impartiality, and consent, which governed how peacekeepers were supposed to operate in the field. It shaped how the UN came to know countries like Rwanda that were attempting to move from civil war to civil society.\(^{37}\)

These concepts and values enabled action by those who occupy positions within the United Nations that were, in part, responsible for the inadequate and misguided response of the UN, yet the judgments and decisions by those in the UN were not devoid of ethical purposes but informed by them. Barnett concludes that “the UN’s actions were guided by situated responsibilities and grounded in ethical considerations” so that withdrawal was considered “ethical and proper”.\(^{38}\) Specifically, the bureaucrats of the United Nations were largely of the opinion that minimizing risks in Rwanda was in the interest of peacekeeping and the UN’s role in humanitarian activities. The United Nations, Barnett documents, felt that in the face of the disaster in Somalia there could be no more major failures defined by harm to UN peacekeepers that could cause a mission and even peacekeeping as a practice to fail.

In my research I found that these concerns about protecting peacekeeping were indeed part of the dominant ethical narrative. The UN mission in Rwanda was viewed as

\(^{37}\) ibid., xi.
\(^{38}\) ibid., 4.
a sure success for the UN at a time when it saw itself as sorely needing more
peacekeeping success stories and no peacekeeping failures. For many individuals at the
UN, peacekeeping itself was on the line and the greater moral good was to protect it.
Yet, in reconstructing the “moral architecture of the historical period” Barnett tends to
elide how individual interpretations constructed multiple architectures, some of which
offered alternative moral interpretations to the dominant one. Furthermore, Barnett tends
to conflate bureaucratic culture with individual understandings. For example, Barnett
writes:

In brief, those working at the UN approached Rwanda not as individuals but
rather as members of bureaucracies. They occupied roles that organizationally
situated and defined their knowledge and informed what they cared about, what
behavior they considered appropriate and inappropriate, how they distinguished
acceptable from unacceptable consequences, and how they determined right from
wrong.

Instead, I show that while bureaucratic roles mattered, some individuals were able to gain
perspective on the influence of their bureaucratic position and apply a critical lens to their
thought and actions and to the dominant policy narratives. Indeed, the attitude and
process of ‘ethical reflexivity’ enabled some individuals, like Romeo Dallaire, to take
action informed less by bureaucratic culture and dysfunction and more by a reflective and
self-referential practice in which they interrogated context and values beyond merely the
organizational as complete moral selves with a strong sense of ethical agency. What this
chapter adds to Barnett’s analysis is a focus on the interpretive and agential powers of the
individual while also considering the sociological dynamics of modern organizations.

An investigation of the discourse among individuals acting from within the UN
both during and after the Rwandan genocide reveals three dominant policy narratives that

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39 ibid., 5.
40 ibid., xi.
were articulated and consumed by many individuals as they considered action with regard to Rwanda which I shorthand as: 1) “Africa Neglect”, 2) “No More Somalias”, 3) “Neutrality, Impartiality and Consent”, and 4) “No Political Will”. I offer a brief description of how these narratives were articulated and adopted as grounds for action by particular individuals and as ways of retrospectively making sense of their actions. Individuals in the UN gave force to these narratives by articulating, accepting and repeating them. In addition to these policy narratives individuals in the UN who did not practice ethical reflexivity were hampered by viewing rules as ends rather than means and orienting their shame and guilt to the moral audience of the UN rather than additional moral audiences such as Rwandans, the international community, etc. Finally, unlike the *global phronimos*, these individuals neglected or minimized the moral authority and agency available to them, were inattentive to context, and were unwilling to take risks.

These four narratives were often invoked together or were articulated by individuals at different times. Some individuals made efforts to coherently weave the narratives together, though these efforts were not always successful. Other individuals articulated these narratives in a list-like fashion as multiple reasons for a particular course of action, framing the outcome as pre- and over-determined. Alternatively, the narratives were invoked at different times and for different audiences. The key decisions informed and justified by these narratives include: narrowly interpreting UNAMIR’s mandate, filtering information (particularly to the Security Council), a general lack of support to UNAMIR in the form of resources and technical assistance, and reducing the size of the UNAMIR contingent in the face of extreme violence. In addition, these narratives acted
as discursive tools for locating responsibility with others and minimizing the potential moral authority and power of their offices.

“Africa Neglect”

Perhaps Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali most strongly articulated the narrative of “Africa Neglect” with regard to the Rwandan genocide. In an interview several years after the genocide Boutros-Ghali invoked the narrative of “Africa Neglect” in response to a question that probed why Boutros-Ghali was not as forceful as he could have been with the Security Council and why his office was not more solicitous of information from the peacekeeping and humanitarian offices. Boutros-Ghali explained that the world, and especially the United States, had little patience for “Africa’s problems” and the United Nations was dominated by the preference of the United States to avoid becoming enmeshed in such a troublesome and hopeless region. Boutros-Ghali asserted that Africa was unimportant to members of the Security Council, especially the United States, because Africa was viewed as “hopeless”—a poor continent unable to solve its problems. This is, Boutros-Ghali opined, a “kind of basic discrimination” that affected the likeliness of UN intervention in the case of genocide: “A genocide in Africa has not received the same attention that genocide in Europe or genocide in Turkey or genocide in [an]other part of the world.”41 As a result, the UN was given little resources and authority to assist African countries in addressing their problems, and the Security Council was very unlikely to support a UN initiative that would put the lives of their

41 Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Interview by Frontline on January 21, 2004 for the episode “Ghosts of Rwanda”.
troops in danger, such as the proposal to increase the number of troops in Rwanda after
the Belgian troops were killed and large-scale violence broke out.42

In the UN, Africa was, in Boutros-Ghali’s words, “marginalized”43 and the United States was virtually all-powerful in their ability to strike down efforts to assist Africa. Boutros-Ghali repeated throughout the interview, that the United States could impose its will in the Security Council and even in the DPKO. He stated:

I believe that the DPKO at this time was very much involved with American administration and was acting, taking on consideration the demand or the recommendation of the American administration. American administration was very powerful. They have a control on DPKO. They have a control on the Security Council, so they can obtain what they want to obtain through different ways, and they have information which we do not.

Boutros-Ghali reported that he was surprised to find that after the Cold War, the United States began a unilateral policy to impose its will on the United Nations, using the international organization to further its own national interests. This was contrary to the direction in which Boutros-Ghali felt licensed to lead the UN. He recalled that the states of the United Nations, including the most powerful states, responded favorably to his Agenda for Peace that laid a new and more aggressive approach for peacekeeping operations.44 It became subsequently apparent to Boutros-Ghali that the United States exerted tremendous influence in the United Nations, did not find the well-being of African countries to be in its interest, and used the United Nations as a scapegoat both internationally and domestically.45

42 Boutros-Ghali did not think that this reluctance was due to cost (an excuse that the United States regularly offered) because the cost of peacekeeping support in Rwanda and elsewhere in Africa (e.g., Liberia and Sierra Leone) was trivial compared to the amount of money then being spent by the United States on missions in Bosnia. Boutros-Ghali, Frontline.
43 “The whole problem was a marginalization of any event happening in Africa,” Boutros-Ghali, Frontline.
44 ibid.
While this narrative is perhaps influenced by the acrimonious relationship Boutros-Ghali had with many Clinton administration officials who, he felt, were attempting to micro-manage him and impose their will on the United Nations, Boutros-Ghali shared with others in the UN (and even in the US government) the belief that Africa was of little interest to the most powerful states, and he invoked this narrative to explain why the UN did not respond to the genocide in Rwanda. Africa was simply not of geopolitical interest to them. Kofi Annan, head of peacekeeping operations at the time, also articulated this narrative when he argued that, even if he and others at the UN had better understood what was happening in Rwanda, there was a strong sense as the mission to Somalia came to an end that the US and others were “not going to get involved in Africa again.”

While it is the case that the United States is a very powerful country within the United Nations, Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali’s assessment all too conveniently dismisses any responsibility and accountability for the UN’s response to the violence in Rwanda. He paints a picture of himself as an almost naïve Secretary-General who wrongly believed the countries of the Security-Council when they tasked him managing the post-Cold War world and strengthening peacekeeping. While the United States has certainly had little strategic interest in Africa, Boutros-Ghali renders the United Nations impotent in the face of the distribution of strategic interests and racial attitudes. He then uses this narrative to justify his inattention to Rwanda. His office did not reach out for information from DPKO, he recalled, because DPKO was dominated by the United States and he neglected to use the moral authority that has long attended the office of Secretary-

46 ibid. Boutros-Ghali’s book begins with stinging criticism of the US for blocking his re-election as secretary-general of the United Nations (the only secretary-general to not be granted a second term).
47 Kofi Annan, Interview by Frontline on February 17, 2004 for the episode, “Ghosts of Rwanda”.

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General. In effect, Boutros-Ghali used the narrative of “African Neglect” (as well as the narrative of “Somalia”) to renounce his ethical agency.

Clearly, Boutros-Ghali has regrets about Rwanda as evident in his statement at the conclusion of the interview: “It is one of my greatest failures. I failed Rwanda.” But even in this admission of failure he displaces the blame. He continued, “It is a failure that I was not able to convince the members of the Security Council to intervene, and it is another failure that I was not able to understand from the beginning the importance of what was going on. So we have a double failure…It took me weeks before suddenly we discovered it was a genocide.”48 Yet, Boutros-Ghali had spent most of the interview arguing that the United States acted as the gatekeeper, determining which information Boutros-Ghali would receive, not just from US intelligence but also from DPKO and the Security Council. Though Boutros-Ghali takes on some personal responsibility at times in the interview he closely couples those statements with others that attribute blame to the United States or to the United Nations as a whole and, not surprisingly, he sees the United Nations as, in effect, consisting only of the “member states”. The contradictions in Boutros-Ghali’s responses to the interviewer’s questions seems to reveal an uneasiness with his abdication of ethical agency with regard to the genocide in Rwanda and a desire to explain his actions as mostly attributable to external actors and forces. This led Boutros-Ghali and others to anticipate the response of key actors and minimize possibilities for ethical agency and leadership of the U.N.

“No More Somalias”

48 Boutros-Ghali, Frontline.
The narrative of “Africa Neglect” was supplemented by the narrative of “No More Somalias”. This narrative was carried by many individuals in the UN, both in the Secretary-General’s office and DPKO, who perceived an unmoving United States and a general hesitancy among others countries (as well as among each other) for peacekeeping in light of the failures of the UN mission to Somalia (UNOSOM) culminating in the deaths of Pakistani and US soldiers in Somalia. This narrative surfaced at several points and at many different levels during the UNAMIR deployment and Rwandan genocide, but it was most frequently heard after the major genocidal violence had ended and individuals sought to explain and justify their actions and the actions of those around them.

In an interview ten years after the genocide, the former head of UN peacekeeping (and future Secretary-General), Kofi Annan, summarized the narrative of ‘Somalia’ in the context of Rwandan genocide, “[T]o some extent, Rwanda became a victim of the Somalia experience”. The Somalia narrative and the ‘African Neglect’ narrative overlap for Annan. The ‘lesson’ as understood by Annan was that the killing of American or non-African troops in Africa threatens UN peacekeeping missions because when these countries withdraw their troops and support the mission can no longer sustain itself. This recoil from casualties combined with the fact that they occur within an African country where there is little interest and many misperceptions (such as ‘ancient ethnic hatreds’) marginalize Africa when it comes to UN assistance efforts. The influence of the experience in Somalia in October of 1993 thus had far reaching effects, according to Annan, on the UN’s mission in Rwanda the next year. He noted ten years after the UN mission to Somalia: “[I]t took us several years to get non-African troops to

49 Annan, Frontline.
come back into peacekeeping operations in Africa. Now some of them are back, but it has taken that long.”50 In the context of the UNAMIR mission, Annan explained, Somalia meant that the UN peacekeepers could not take any action on the ground that threatened the lives of troops; otherwise, UNAMIR would be pulled and could not offer any assistance whatsoever.

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali identified the repercussions of the UN’s experience in Somalia as the “Somalia Syndrome”. For Boutros-Ghali the UN mission in Somalia marked a distinct change in UN peacekeeping (a change that he was instrumental in making). In his words, he later described this change as moving from keeping the peace through the symbolic presence of blue helmets to “an operation where there was no peace”, where there was a broken cease-fire, and where the UN became involved in protecting food distribution, refugees and NGOs. Because the mission in Somalia failed in such a traumatic way for both the UN and troop-contributing countries, there was a lot of hesitancy, Boutros-Ghali implied, to do anything that risked repeating a Somalia-like mission. Thus, the mission in Rwanda was to be firmly confined to a Chapter Six operation in which the troops were purely “symbolic”.51

The narrative of “No More Somalias” also appeared at the operational level in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Though General Dallaire rejected the Somalia narrative in his leadership of UNAMIR, officials at DPKO pushed back, employing a framing that underscored the limits of UN peacekeeping operations in light of their understanding of the Somalia experience. For example, DPKO’s instructions on the rules

50 ibid.
51 Boutros-Ghali, Frontline.
of engagement allowed UNAMIR to engage in the use of force only if fired upon. Kofi Annan recalls that DPKO wanted to ensure that UNAMIR did not take actions that posed the risk of troop deaths because of ‘Somalia’:

We were concerned, one, that Dallaire and his force didn’t have the capacity to take on that sort of responsibility; that if they attempted to do it and any of the peacekeepers were killed, we may see a repeat of Somalia. We may not even be able to offer any assistance to the Rwandans or even have any eyes and ears of the international community down there. So we had to be very careful to make sure that his force doesn’t suffer the same fate as Somalia and be unable [to] offer any assistance.

The ethical calculation Annan made was that it was most important to ensure that, at the very least, the ‘international community’ could witness atrocities. It was not possible for the UN, given how others felt about what happened in Somalia, to take action that risked troop deaths. In defending this judgment in the course of the interview Annan did not consider and evaluate the ethical implications of low risk decision-making. Iqbal Riza of DPKO also invoked the “Somalia Syndrome” when explaining why the Security Council drew down UNAMIR and why the Secretariat was powerless to affect this outcome. He stated, “[W]e knew what the atmosphere was.” For the Security Council “Casualties were not acceptable. Casualties appeared on television screens…you will recall when the American soldiers were killed and that was simply not acceptable, and so those risks were not to be taken again.”

This framing of what was both possible and desirable for UNAMIR given ‘Somalia’ was also evident in DPKO’s response (the relevant individuals here where

52 Though Annan seemed to agree with this characterization of the rules of engagement in his interview with Frontline, it’s important to note that Riza denied that the rules of engagement in Rwanda were so narrow: “They did not need instructions from New York. They have their weapons, those weapons are loaded, and…while lives are threatened, in self-protection or to prevent loss of other life, they could have opened fire. This is the broad rules of engagement that apply to all peacekeeping operations”. Riza, Frontline.
53 Annan, Frontline.
54 Riza, Frontline.
Iqbal Riza (Maurice Baril and Kofi Annan) to the news that General Dallaire was planning to raid a weapons cache and, more generally, in DPKO’s interpretation of UNAMIR’s mandate. Iqbal Riza, then Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping, later stated that he intervened to stop Dallaire from conducting the weapons raid because of the spectre of Somalia. When asked what his first reaction was to Dallaire’s plans for a weapons raid Riza responded: “We said, ‘Not Somalia, again.’” He then states: “We have to go by the mandate that we are given by the Security Council. It's not up to the secretary-general or the Secretariat to decide whether they're going to run off in other directions.” The interviewer then asks: “You thought this could be another Somalia.” Riza answered: “Oh yes, Somalia was always there in any operations that involved risk.” The interviewer then paraphrases, “So don’t have another Somalia.” Riza then curiously states “Unless it’s within your mandate. And it was not.” Here, Riza’s worry about the risk of a Somalia seems to frame his interpretation of the mandate.

In this exchange and the rest of the interview around this particular incident Riza clearly has a hard time coherently explaining DPKO’s decision though ‘Somalia’ is invoked several times and in the passive tense so that no one person is responsible for articulating the narrative. For example, Riza states that there “was the Somalia Syndrome”. Riza never indicates that discussion of Dallaire’s cable within DPKO critically engaged the relevance of Somalia for the situation in Rwanda, touched upon the moral purpose of the mandate, asked how conditions on the ground may have changed and entertained what action UNAMIR might take to address the particulars of the situation in Rwanda.

55 ibid.
This discursive material provides strong evidence of the presence of a particular lesson of Somalia among individuals in the UN—that UN action that threatens the lives of peacekeepers potentially threatens UN peacekeeping missions and a significant role for the UN in a post-Cold War world. While the importance of Somalia, among other notable factors, was not a figment of these men’s minds, the lesson taken from Somalia was not the only possible narrative. Boutros-Ghali, Annan and Riza, in their peacekeeping leadership positions, could have challenged this narrative and articulated an alternative narrative. As part of a process of ethical reasoning they could have asked whether and how the UN’s experience in Somalia was relevant for the situation in Rwanda and then articulate a narrative that asserted its relevance or irrelevance. Other narratives were possible that could draw comparisons between the UN’s potential in Rwanda to successful UN peacekeeping experiences. Even a cursory review of the UN’s experience in Rwanda reveals striking differences in what UNOSOM was attempting relative to what UNAMIR was attempting (or wanted to attempt under Dallaire). Yet these differences and similarities were not explored.

In other words, the resulting action (or inaction, as it were) that came out of this decision-making in the Secretariat and that proved formative for the rest of the mission was not simply determined by the dominant interpretation of Somalia present in the UN and many Western governments. After all, Dallaire was also exposed to the narrative of the ‘shadow of Somalia’ as was his military assistant, Brent Beardsley, who assisted in formulating the Canadian Forces peacekeeping manual. Dallaire believed in peacekeeping, trained Canadian soldiers for peacekeeping, and was likely just as invested in the success of the UN as an institution and a provider of peacekeeping missions as the
individuals in DPKO. But Dallaire did not accept the dominant narrative that Somalia meant extraordinary caution. Like Dallaire and his team, the DPKO triumvirate attended to this matter with consideration of the mandate. Riza, Baril and Annabi met in an emergency meeting within 24 hours of receiving Dallaire’s cable. Yet, unlike Dallaire’s team, their interpretation of the mandate was not made in consideration of how UNAMIR could uniquely assist the Rwandans. The decision instead focused on assessing whether measures proposed by Dallaire risked another ‘Somalia.’ Despite the unusual level of violence indicated by the militia’s plans and thus the risk of failure if action was not taken in addition to the specific threat to the Belgian peacekeepers reported by the informant, DPKO failed to interrogate thought and action beyond the prism of ‘Somalia’. Here, I am drawing attention to the various practices of decision-making evident. Rather than saying that the occurrence of Somalia just prior to Rwandan genocide resulted in a timid and cautious UN (Somalia → DPKO’s interpretation), I am arguing that practices of decision-making mattered for whether the dominant narrative of Somalia was internalized and reproduced by individuals within the UN, including Dallaire and DPKO (e.g., Somalia → Decision-making practice → DPKO’s interpretation). By failing to engage in a practice of critical reflection DPKO not only let the meaning of ‘Somalia’ for ‘Rwanda’ go uncontested; they also reproduced and gave the narrative of ‘Somalia’ added force. Even if some individuals did not believe this narrative, they helped to construct and spread it.

“Impartiality, Neutrality and Consent”
The principles of impartiality, neutrality and consent are well-ingrained in the UN bureaucracy as principles that direct peacekeeping. They have been invoked to determine when peacekeeping missions under Chapter Six begin and end and how they should be conducted. In their interpretations of what is allowed and desirable UN leaders and bureaucrats rely on these principles, but these principles themselves must be interpreted for specific contexts and thus there is variability in their implications. At the time of the UN peacekeeping mission in Rwanda these principles were turned to as UN bureaucrats were challenged with making sense of what was happening in Rwanda and how the UN should proceed. The discourse of impartiality, neutrality and consent was often coupled with the discourse of ‘civil war’ and ‘Somalia’. These principles were framed as guiding the UN in its assistance to parties to intra-national conflict seeking peace. In the case of Rwanda, these principles were manifested as genocidal violence broke out through discourse that stressed the importance of installing a transitional government, getting the Arusha Accords process back on track and resuming a cease-fire between the belligerents. Sticking to these principles, it was thought, would avoid another Somalia that could occur through ‘mission creep’. Because the UN so heavily relied on these principles they understood the violence as stemming from a political conflict between belligerents and their actions stressed the importance of returning to the peace process through a political solution on the ground. The violence indicated ‘civil war’ rather than ‘genocide’. When the Security Council then took up the issue of whether to withdraw UNAMIR after the Belgian peacekeepers were killed the UN peacekeeping criteria that the Secretariat had emphasized, as well as the discourse of ‘civil war’, were also turned to by Security Council members as reasons for withdrawal.
As reviewed above, what DPKO understood as the ‘lesson of Somalia’ affected not only their emphasis of the principles of impartiality, neutrality and consent but also how they interpreted these principles. Specifically, DPKO ruled out specific security operations such as weapons confiscation as not consented to in the mandate because of the risk to the mission and the UN that the failure of such actions might pose. This led them to require of Dallaire that he keep the Rwandan government and the RPF fully informed and obtain their consent for operations despite indications that these weapons were to be distributed by the military for the purpose of mass killings. When asked why the UN would inform a party to the violent plans Iqbal Riza responded that the president has signed the Arusha Accords and thus could not be kept “in the dark”. An arms raid, DPKO stressed, would require a joint maneuver with Rwandan security forces. This was the kind of activity that characterized a situation in which former belligerents cooperate to establish a new government to tackle political problems. DPKO and the Secretary-General continued to focus on abating the continuing violence through a return to negotiations and the installation of the transitional government. Iqbal Riza later explained how DPKO viewed the unraveling situation:

As events unfolded, what I recall the scene to be is that everyone involved was preoccupied with a political solution. A transitional government should have been stabled by the 31st of December. Here we were going through January, February and March, without this government. This was the first priority, and, clearly, when I looked though the cables last night, it comes out very clearly that the conviction was that if they had a political solution, then the violence would subside. In other words, the violence was not connected to a planning of a genocide, nobody saw it like that. It was seen as a result of a political deadlock.

Boutros-Ghali also emphasized the UN’s role as one of assisting the political process.

The UN peacekeeping troops, Boutros-Ghali maintained, were entirely “symbolic” and

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56 Riza, Frontline.
57 ibid.
thus the principles of impartiality, neutrality and consent were to be emphasized. Given this framing of the events in Rwanda Boutros-Ghali’s declaration that he “was not able to understand from the beginning the importance of what was going on” makes more sense.58

“No Political Will”

The narrative of “No Political Will” was employed by various individuals within the UN as another explanation for their actions. This narrative rhetorically located responsibility and accountability with others and away from its authors. According to this narrative the powerful actors in the United Nations, such as the ‘Security Council’ or the ‘United States’, or amorphous collective actors such as the ‘international community’ or ‘Rwandans’, did not possess the ‘political will’ to fully support the UN mission in Rwanda and the actions that General Dallaire wished to take, or they were either directly responsible for the genocide or responsible for failing to respond to the genocide.

Anticipating other actors’ preferences of taking little risk and committing few resources on behalf of peacekeeping in Rwanda directed the Rwandan mission from the beginning. The mission was itself undertaken as an easy and sure success at a time when the UN civil service thought that the United States and the Security Council would severely curtail peacekeeping in the future if there was another major peacekeeping failure. Dallaire was advised by Iqbal Riza and his colleagues in DPKO to draft a peacekeeping mission proposal that featured a slim troop presence with the audience of the Security Council in mind. And from the start of the mission Dallaire was given few resources by DPKO because it was thought that a bigger and more robust force would

58 Boutros-Ghali, Frontline.
elicit concern from the major powers. Later addressing Dallaire’s complaint that DPKO had questioned his credibility and was unresponsive to his requests for resources and equipment, Annan explained:

Romeo was a very conscientious officer, very energetic, a great leader of his men. … I wouldn’t say that his judgment was questioned. But he sometimes made requests or demands for additional resources. Those of us at headquarters who knew the situation in the council and the possibility of whether he will get it or not sometimes were the ones who had to tell him that “You are not going to get this.” But that was not challenging his judgment. It was indicating what he is likely to get, what was possible and what was not.59

Annan, along with others, believed that he wisely assessed the political situation in the Security Council and instead of lobbying for their mission commander and Rwandan victims or bringing Dallaire’s requests to light they anticipated the Security Council’s response. Preempting the interviewer Annan then addressed the question of whether he and others at headquarters were wrong in their judgments of what the political situation would allow: “I don’t think, in the end, we were proven wrong. Not only weren’t we proven wrong, but even when the killing really started and everybody knew, [Dallaire] didn’t get reinforcements. Planes were leaving, soldiers went in—not to support him, but to withdraw their nationals.”60 Annan characterizes his experience and the experience of others in the UN as one of prognostication—that they predicted what would and would not be allowed by others and, on the whole, got it right. Yet, Annan neglects here the question of whether he or others at ‘headquarters’ could have done anything to influence or change others’ preferences or better support Dallaire. They were not mere observers. Did they have the responsibility to try? Could they have explored the limits of their

59 Annan, Frontline.
60 ibid.
agency? In other words, was the absence of ‘political will’, in part, an absence of political will among UN leaders and civil servants?

The narrative of ‘political will’ was also present in decisions about rules of engagement and was cited by DPKO officials as a reason from micromanaging UNAMIR’s presence on the ground. For example, when explaining DPKO’s decision to halt Dallaire’s planned weapons cache raid Kofi Annan explained that the only option they had politically was to tell the Rwandan government that the UN knew what they were up to. Monitoring as a deterrent was settled on by DPKO as the response because, Annan believed, they had no other option given the “mood in the council” which would not tolerate a request to rush in with reinforcements if the raid went wrong.\textsuperscript{61}

Finally, individuals within the UN both explained their failure to advocate for maintaining or increasing the strength of UNAMIR as genocide widely broke out in April and inflated their efforts to do so, citing the absence of ‘political will’. Kofi Annan reported that “The secretary-general indicated his preference was to boost the force up to 5,500. But the will wasn’t there.” When pressed by the interviewer with the question, “Where wasn’t the will?” Annan responded, “The member states did not have the will.” Annan then pointed out that US government representatives had their ‘instructions’ and that the UN couldn’t find enough troops. Still Annan acknowledges that he and others in the UN have a ‘role’: “Without that will, there is very little you can do, whether it’s in Srebrenica or in Rwanda. But that doesn’t mean that those of us in the Secretariat, the secretary-general, the senior officials, do not have a role, because we need to be able to press governments to do as much as we can.” Annan then recalled approaching ’80

\textsuperscript{61} ibid..
governments’ for troops and making a public comment lamenting the lack of troop contributions.62

Iqbal Riza also deferred blame by referring to an absence of ‘political will’ in the Security Council: “If the political will had been there, it should have been to strengthen the mission, give it a stronger mandate and try to stop these killings. Instead, the strongest contingent was immediately withdrawn and the Security Council put the decision to reduce this mission to less than ten percent of its size.” Riza’s comments reveal the inevitability that individuals in DPKO must have felt when he remarked to the interviewer, “I have been in this business a bit longer and we knew what the atmosphere was.” Riza concluded the interview sympathetically blaming the Security Council, “It is understandable that after what had happened just a few months before in Somalia, there was no will to take on another such risk and have more casualties.”63

These individuals within the Secretariat consistently framed the UN’s response to genocide in Rwanda as explainable by the absence of ‘political will’ in the Security Council while neglecting to acknowledge possibilities for their own ethical agency. As Michael Barnett documents, the Secretariat was both ‘remarkably quiet’ as the Security Council intensely debated what to do about Rwanda and painted an astonishingly different picture of the violence in Rwanda than the picture presented to the Secretariat by General Dallaire. Barnett characterizes the “Secretariat’s formal statements and informal presentations to the council” as “brief, vague, and indecisive”. These reports featured accounts of “unfolding chaos” and “renewed civil war between the RPF and the interim Rwandan government” as well as the “increasing risks to a UNAMIR that was

62 ibid.
63 Riza, Frontline.
consumed by a self-protection stance” while Dallaire’s reports to the Secretariat “provided meticulous and graphic accounts of the violence, a diagnosis of the source of the violence, and a prescription for ending the violence.”  

This violence, Dallaire relayed, was organized, widespread and effective ethnic cleansing. Dallaire sought reinforcements to demonstrate the resolve of the international community to stand against such egregious human rights abuses, cited humanitarian successes in the field, and had a detailed plan for these reinforcement troops that he presented to DPKO. Yet, the Secretariat focused on portraying the violence as chaotic, a political solution as unlikely, and UNAMIR as completely impotent.  

Though the Security Council had certainly shied away from humanitarian peacekeeping, the Secretariat made little to no effort to provide information to those states who were advocating for troop increases in the Security Council or to employ its own ‘moral authority’ both inside and outside of the Security Council. The Secretariat was very late in releasing its formal report on Rwanda (April 20th) and when this report was released it only affirmed the Security Council decision that was all but formally made to reduce the size of UNAMIR to 270 peacekeepers.

In addition to Kofi Annan’s qualified declaration that individuals in the UN have some responsibility to “press governments to do as much as we can” but the ‘political

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65 Alison des Forges also testifies that “the information [the Secretariat] presented and interpreted was very ambiguous, very unclear, and in no way gave the sense of a genocide. They talked about the disastrous events as if it were a natural catastrophe, a hurricane, or a volcano exploding. They gave no sense of political direction, and they talked about the killing as if it were happening on an equal basis between two belligerents, with no sense that civilians were being actively targeted and exterminated.” des Forges believes that this lack of accurate information flowing to the Security Council meant that sympathetic states on the Council, especially the non-permanent members, did not have the informational resources and institutional support to advocate for stronger action in Rwanda. On April 15th, about one week before the vote to reduce the size of UNAMIR and after countries withdrew their nationals from Rwanda, the Czech representative contacted Human Rights Watch to request more information after seeing a letter by HRW published in the New York Times. Alison des Forges, Interview by Frontline on October 1, 2003 for the episode “Ghosts of Rwanda”.
will’ wasn’t there, Iqbal Riza also offers a qualified notion of responsibility. While admitting “mistakes” he ends his interview by declaring that though there was a lack of power within the UN to do anything about the violence in Rwanda, responsibility ultimately lie with Rwandans:

> We were all horrified by what was going on the ground. We felt impotent to stop it. We were deeply distressed, yes, but again I must insist that what you are saying is that we should have saved Rwanda from itself, in the words of the secretary-general—it was Rwandese who planned the genocide, it was Rwandese who sadly, were the victims. We happened to be there on a peacekeeping mandate. Our mandate was not to anticipate and prevent genocide.66

Reference to the responsibility of Rwandans to not kill in the first place was yet another distraction from the question of what responsibilities individuals within the UN have to assess and act on behalf of the moral purposes of the institution which, in this case, included human rights abuses, genocide and humanitarian needs. As detailed above Riza also argued that DPKO was only accountable to the countries that authorized the mandate through the Security Council and the countries who contributed troops for this particular mandate. Noticeably absent in the remarks of UN civil servants and leaders is discussion of the ethical obligations that the UN might hold to Rwandans, to the international community and to international law, especially in light of the UN presence in Rwanda. Instead, ‘political will’, ‘mood’ and ‘atmosphere’ discursively erased notions of agency, responsibility and the potential to initiate changes in the preferences and behavior of others.67

66 Of the Security Council Riza also states, “It is understandable that after what had happened just a few months before in Somalia, there was no will to take on another such risk and have more casualties”, Riza, Frontline.
67 Barnett argues that the Secretariat sought, above all, to protect the U.N. as an institution, Barnett. 2002, 124.
This narrative of ‘political will’ was at once a declaration by individuals within the UN that they did not have ethical agency and an abdication of ethical agency. Yet, as many scholars have suggested, UN bureaucrats and leaders, especially, but not only, the Secretary-General, have power that is independent of states, including the power to interpret and the power of moral authority. Yet these powers were not exercised and were downplayed by many within the UN. As evident in these narratives one way in which agency can be forsaken is through a denial of responsibility or a narrow view of responsibility that does not allow for its multiplicity (the notion that there can be multiple nodes of responsibility for the same outcome). By emphasizing only the responsibility of Rwandans and declaring the impotence of the UN Riza and others contributed to the production of narratives that refused ethical agency and ensured the impotence of the UN.

**Evaluation of Dominant U.N. Policy Narratives**

Individuals in the UN bureaucracy abdicated their ethical agency during the Rwandan genocide by failing to critically evaluate or challenge the dominant narratives for understanding the situation and framing action. They tended to downplay the ethical agency available to them, did not critically reflect on U.N. principles and draw on other sources for ethical judgment, saw themselves as hampered by ‘bureaucracy’ and offered this view to others, and articulated and repeated narratives that placed responsibility elsewhere. Despite the availability of alternative narratives the members of the Secretariat did not draw them out and were overcome by bureaucratic impediments and

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dysfunctions. Their approaches to ethical decision-making contrast with the ethically reflexive approaches of Romeo Dallaire and Philip Gaillard. By downplaying ethical agency, including their moral authority and their formal powers, individuals such as Iqbal Riza, Kofi Annan and Boutros Boutros-Ghali strengthened the dominant narratives that circulated the halls of the United Nations instead of critically evaluating them and searching for alternative narratives. Their moral purpose—to save peacekeeping—depended on certain interpretations of what ‘Somalia’ meant; what impartiality, consent and neutrality meant; what political will was available and how much attention the international community was willing to give to Africa. Because individuals in the United Nations did not articulate alternative interpretations, other moral purposes that were deeply valued within the institution, such as providing humanitarian assistance and responding to genocide, were not entertained.

Many studies of the UN and the Rwandan genocide focus on what the UN could have done to advocate for meaningful action to address the genocide in Rwanda, but such action would have first required members of the Secretariat and Department of Peacekeeping Operations to critically engage with the dominant policy narratives as persons who are aware of their status as capable ethical agents and who place value on context, engage in dialogue with the objects of their action and balance prudence and risk in making ethical judgments.

These individuals held the formal and moral authority to challenge the meaning of ‘Somalia’ for Rwanda and for UN peacekeeping in general, to provide information and arguments that might cultivate ‘political will’ in the Security Council, to take actions that were more supportive of the UNAMIR mission on the ground, and to interpret the
relevance, applicability and meaning of principles and values such as impartiality, neutrality, consent and human rights for the situation in Rwanda. As the Secretary-General and the under secretary-general in charge of UN Peacekeeping, Boutros-Ghali and Annan, respectively, held the most important leadership positions within the UN with respect to the UN’s involvement in Rwanda. In concert with those in charge of the mission in DPKO, Annan was in a position to interpret UNAMIR’s mandate and make key decisions about the day-to-day activities that UNAMIR could take. He was also the most direct informational link to the office of the Secretary-General. As chief administrative officer of the UN and the head of the Secretariat, the office of the Secretary-General can be portrayed as somewhat limited in its formal powers, which include staffing and budgetary responsibilities, preparing papers and reports, and bringing matters that threaten the peace to the attention of the Security Council.69 The latter power, authorized by article 99 of the UN charter, has not often been officially invoked, but as Kent Kille notes, its implications are significant for the Secretary-General:

[T]he secretary-general may interpret article 99 in an expansive manner well beyond the mechanism of making a request of the Security Council. Related activities can include collecting and monitoring facts regarding conflicts, whether through a personal visit or an intermediary, and independently initiating efforts to resolve breaches of the peace.70

In addition, article 100 specifies that the secretary-general, as well as the secretariat, have an “exclusively international character” and are “responsible only to the Organization”. This article thus stresses their independence from states and their considerations and the need to represent the United Nations. Perhaps more important than these formal powers,

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70 ibid.
the secretary-general can lay claim to a well-established tradition of moral power and authority. As the leader of an international organization that “can be seen as a ‘moral power’ working on behalf of the peoples of the world and as an organization uniquely suited to tackle issues related to international ethics”71, the secretary-general can and has laid claim to this moral power to advance the moral objectives and purposes of the United Nations charter. In an edited volume entitled, *The UN Secretary-General and Moral Authority*, various authors provide studies of how previous secretary-generals, including Boutros-Ghali, have claimed and advanced the moral authority of this office. In addition, as Kille argues, this moral responsibility and power can be said to extend to international civil servants who represent the “international community” and, especially, the heads of agencies.72

Certainly, this view is debated by those, particularly realists, who view the United Nations in its objectives and functioning to be nothing more than the interests of sovereign states. And developing countries and former colonies, in particular, have been jealous of their sovereignty in light of the greater power that some countries enjoy as members of the Security Council and by virtue of the resources they have to distribute or withhold from particular UN activities. Others contend that there ought to be a balance for the secretary-general between these two roles and, perhaps most importantly, the secretary-general should maintain the integrity of the office by holding himself to ethical standards which might include avoiding partiality with respect to particular states’ interests and making decisions based on the particulars of the situation.73

71 ibid., 10.
72 ibid.
73 ibid., 12.
This moral leadership was lacking in the case of Rwanda as members of the Secretariat claimed themselves powerless in light of the preferences and beliefs of certain powerful states. There are few clues in interviews and primary documents that the members of the Secretariat possessed ethical self-awareness and introspectively reflected on what it meant to hold a position of leadership in the United Nations while genocide was unfolding. Excessive reliance on rules and oft-repeated principles also served to sap individuals within the UN of their ethical powers because they did not think actively about the ethical terrain and test whether their assumptions about the situation in Rwanda were valid. Finally, although it can be said of these individuals, as Barnett aptly shows, that they considered the moral end of saving peacekeeping, the lack of a chronologically expansive ethical horizon precluded critical analysis that might have drawn out the moral weight of genocide and considered how non-response might have affected the moral legitimacy of the organization. UN bureaucrats were unable to see how the outcome they feared was enabled by their very actions to avoid it.

**Institutional Assessments: Ethical Reflexivity at Last?**

In the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide and the widely-held perception that the lack of a response was a failure rather than the result of uncontrollable and unforeseeable circumstances, the United Nations undertook an effort to investigate responsibility for the international community’s response to the genocide and what could be done in the future to prevent and respond to genocide. Three documents, in particular, were commissioned or supported by the United Nations as part of this effort. In 1996 the Lessons Learned Unit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations conducted a study of the UNAMIR
mission and released a report in December of 1996 entitled *Comprehensive Report on Lessons Learned from United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) October 1993-April 1996* (hereafter referred to as the *Report*). The report sought to “draw lessons from the experience (UNAMIR) for the improved functioning of ongoing operations and better conduct of future ones.” In addition, the Unit asked, “With the benefit of hindsight, how could the international community have improved its response to the situation in Rwanda?” The report was based on the examination of relevant documents and reports; interviews of Rwandese officials and members of the Secretariat, UN agencies, permanent missions to the UN of troop-contributing countries, the Security Council and UNAMIR; a meeting of external experts; an internal consultation within the UN; and a ‘Comprehensive Seminar on Lessons Learned from UNAMIR’ for various UN and NGO actors.

Also in 1996, the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda released a series of four studies entitled *The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwanda Experience*. Two of the studies are cited here: *Study 1: Historical Perspective: Some Explanatory Factors* and *Study 2: Early Warning and Conflict Management* (hereafter referred to as the *Evaluation*). These studies sought to draw lessons from the Rwandan genocide for “future complex emergencies.” This was a

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75 Lessons Learned Unit, 2.
76 ibid., 1.
“multinational, multidonor evaluation effort, with the formation of a Steering Committee at a consultative meeting of international agencies and NGOs held in Copenhagen in November 1994.” The committee was “composed of representatives from 19 OECD member bilateral donor agencies, plus the European Union and the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD; nine multilateral agencies and UN units; the two components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (ICRC and IFRC); and five international NGO organizations,” and was also sponsored by 18 states including, initially, France.78

Then, in March of 1999, Secretary-General Kofi Annan requested approval from the Security Council to appoint “an independent inquiry into the actions of the United Nations during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda”.79 This inquiry produced the Report of the Independent Inquiry into the actions of the United Nations during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda that was released in December of 1999 (hereafter referred to as the Inquiry). This report sought to “establish the truth about the role of the United Nations during the genocide”, “contribute to building renewed trust between Rwanda and the United Nations”, “help efforts of reconciliation among the people of Rwanda”, and “contribute to preventing similar tragedies from occurring ever again”.80 The inquiry was conducted by Ingvar Carlsson (former prime minister of Sweden), Han Sung-Joo (former Foreign Minister of the Republic of Korea) and Rufus M. Kupolati (a retired lieutenant-general from Nigeria) with assistance from two Special Advisers (Elibor Hammarskjold and Lee Shin-wha). This team interviewed persons both within and outside the United Nations,

78 Joint Evaluation, Study 2, 1-2.
80 ibid., 3.
analyzed UN documents, and reviewed material made available to the team by
governments and non-governmental organizations.

The individual interviews and primary documents that I previously examined
revealed that individuals within the UN lacked ethical reflexivity and invoked a uni-
dimensional view of responsibility to minimize their own ethical failings. In this section
I seek to assess whether individuals in the UN engaged in ethical reflexivity in the
context of institutional assessments. I review documents of “lessons learned”
commissioned by or supported by the UN. Closely examining documents that the UN
had a hand in instigating and undertaking provides individual and collective self-
understandings of what went wrong. The primary question I ask in this section is
whether these understandings (in particular, the study from DPKO) evince any
recognition of a lack of ethical reflexivity as a missing and potentially important factor in
the decision-making process within the UN bureaucracy regarding what to do about
genocide in Rwanda and, after the failure, evaluation of the values, beliefs and narratives
of understanding that were invoked in dealing with the situation and the consequences
that followed.\footnote{Modern bureaucracies feature a technology of writing. They collect, collate and constitute a body of
knowledge that both reflects and animates the functioning of the institution. The reports examined here are
one such example. While these reports evince an institutional self-understanding, the danger of
commissioned studies and a general focus on the technology of writing is that the exercise of writing and
reporting may substitute for substantive reform in institutional practices. Too often institutional
commissions constitute technologies of delay rather than reform, Ann Laura Stoler, \textit{Along the Archival
And bureaucratic reform efforts falter in translating prescription into practice. Ethical reflexivity seeks to
bridge this gap between the reform of thought and the reform of action.} Part of the process of ethical reflexivity is investigating the
consequences of past actions to assess whether values and beliefs were translated into
action and engaging in a context-informed critique of beliefs, values and ethical practices.
In these documents I also look for internal recognition that the United Nations and its
leaders and bureaucrats possess the status of ethical agent and the powers of ethical agency.

These reports are themselves a form of ethical reflexivity if they compare thought and action, point out problematic ethical practices and advocate that individuals in the UN engage in the process of ethical reflexivity. It is important to stress that while “lessons learned” might be thought of as a form of “learning” by looking back at experiences, they are not necessarily the type of learning implied by ethical reflexivity. Learning can be a myopic reaction to the exigencies of recent experience, such as the kind of learning militaries engage in when they “fight the last war.” Ethical reflexivity, in contrast, seeks a more comprehensive and nuanced learning. Rather than reacting to the political imperatives of the most recent experience in an effort to minimize “political costs” or “political risks,” actors engage dialectically with the relationship between thought and action (how each might be modified by the other). Actors specifically reflect on how their moral identity has been translated into action and the implications of these experiences. Ethical reflexivity’s systematic and deliberative characteristics make it a better measure of how our moral judgments might be more sufficiently translated into action and provide the occasion for reassessing whether our moral judgments are deficient or undesirable.

The least ethically reflexive of these documents is the Comprehensive Report on Lessons Learned from United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) October 1993-April 1996 issued by DPKO’s Lessons Learned Unit. In contrast to the Inquiry and Evaluation, the Report lacks a self-critical focus, does not portray the United Nations and its component parts as having the status of an ethical agent, and partakes in
the dominant narratives that framed UN action during the genocide in Rwanda. Where the Report does place blame it focuses on the Security Council or member states, rather than, or in addition to, members of the Secretariat or UN agencies and departments, and its recommendations that are particular to the latter are ‘technical’ or administrative measures that build in new bureaucratic processes. The emphasis is on creating new ‘systems’ and ‘comprehensive plans’, rather than better ethical practices and more capable ethical agents.

The Report reflects a Department of Peacekeeping Operations that does not see itself as an ethical agent at least partially responsible for the failure to foresee and respond to the genocide in Rwanda. Partaking in the narrative of ‘civil conflict’ and ‘civil war’, the report rarely mentions ‘genocide’ in reference to its own actions. It emphasizes that UNAMIR was neither given the mandate nor the resources to respond to the ‘civil conflict’ and protect civilians.82 When evidence that ‘politically motivated assassinations’ and ‘human rights violations’ surfaced, the Report observes, they were ignored by the Security Council and the international community.83 The Report notes that “there was a certain reluctance among Council members to acknowledge that the problem in Rwanda was one of genocide.”84 And, “further events demonstrated the lack of political will by the international community to provide protection in cases of such gross violations of human rights and sadly led to the withdrawal of most UNAMIR troops while genocide was being committed.”85

82 Lessons Learned Unit, 3, 23.
83 ibid., 3.
84 ibid., 24.
85 ibid., 32.
The Report seems to preempt criticism that DPKO did not do enough with UNAMIR’s mandate, portraying itself as handicapped by the mandate. While the identification of the interlocutors referred to in this section of the report is vague, the Report finds it noteworthy that:

Some people have advanced the argument that UNAMIR could have resorted to its rules of engagement, one paragraph of which was interpreted as authorizing the operation to take any necessary action, including the use of force, to protect civilians at risk. Other participants at the Comprehensive Seminar warned against any such attempt to usurp the powers of the Security Council, which, under the Charter of the United Nations, is the only body authorized to decide on mandates of peacekeeping operations. Senior military officials of UNAMIR stated that, during that period, even if they had wanted to invoke that paragraph of the rules of engagement, they did not have the physical means to do so.  

It is not mentioned in the Report that the Force Commander of UNAMIR, General Romeo Dallaire, frequently came in to conflict with DPKO in his efforts to invoke this paragraph of the ROE while DPKO resisted this interpretation and did not bring Dallaire’s requests to the attention of the Security Council. Instead, the Report implies that Dallaire acted inappropriately when the report validates DPKO’s actions vis-à-vis the Force Commander:

The discussion that occurred between UNAMIR and the Secretariat on the issue of searching for and confiscating weapons in early 1994 elucidates the relationship that exists between a peacekeeping mission and Headquarters. Interviews revealed that, on the one hand it is the role of Headquarters to prod reluctant mission leaders to take action in conformity with the mission’s mandate. Yet, on the other hand, it must temper the enthusiasm of mission leaders who may either wish to stretch the mandate or believe that they have the means to carry out ambitious plans, although within the mandate, but not practical within existing means.

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86 ibid., 23.
87 ibid., 32.
The report recommends a robust ‘public information programme’ which, among other things, could have communicated to Rwandans that UNAMIR was not there to stop the genocide given its limited mandate and resources.88

The Report also fails to critically reflect on the principles and moral purposes of UN peacekeeping. Instead, familiar principles and codes of conduct are reasserted without critical analysis. It was ‘suggested’ to the Lessons Learned Unit that “the issue of impartiality of a peacekeeping operation is bound to be a problem when it is deployed in the context of a civil conflict”.89 This observation was made in light of complaints from the Rwandan government that UNAMIR was engaged in discussions with both the government and the RPF and this “seemed to compromise the impartiality of UNAMIR”.90 The Lessons Learned Unit then recommended from this discussion that:

A peacekeeping mission should strive to maintain impartiality in both perception and reality. A correct ‘peacekeeping’ attitude by personnel at all levels is of crucial importance when it comes to the building of local trust, as is dialogue between mission personnel and local authorities at all levels. It is essential that the United Nations deals impartially with all parties and authorities concerned and does not act in the interests of any one of the parties.91

While this statement attempts to clarify why impartiality is important, it does not ask what impartiality might have looked like in the context of genocide and whether acting on other values and principles might have implications for attempts at impartiality on-the-ground.

There are two passages of the Report where DPKO engages in self-critical analysis. In response to the failure of ‘the United Nations system’ to respond to early

88 ibid., 42.
89 ibid., 51.
90 ibid.
91 ibid., 16-17.
warnings of disturbing human rights violations by the Commission on Human Rights, the

*Report* notes that:

> it was suggested at the Internal Consultation and at the Comprehensive Seminar that all relevant departments—the Centre for Human Rights, DPA, DPKO, DHA—could have given prominence to the issue. Relevant proposals could have been made to the Security Council which the peacekeeping operation and others could then have pursued.

The *Report* declares that “there must be a concerted effort to share information within the Secretariat.”*92* The *Report* also notes that Council members present at the Seminar “recommended that the Secretariat must find ways to ensure that the Security Council is fully briefed on all aspects of a critical situation being discussed.”*93* More broadly, the *Report* states that: “Overall, the international community, including the humanitarian actors, failed to recognize the deepening humanitarian crisis in Rwanda, and was relatively unprepared for the events that followed and the intervention that was required.”*94* While these passages evince self-recognition of internal failures, the focus is mainly on the ‘humanitarian crisis’ that resulted from the genocide rather than the genocide itself, and, yet again, the solution is bureaucratic rather than ethical: “A successful political and humanitarian early-warning system requires the targeting of warnings to appropriate political actors.”*95* And response to genocide has more to do with timely information flows rather than individuals’ ethical reasoning.

With regard to genocide the *Report* consistently shows an absence of ethical self-awareness and denies that DPKO and other Secretariat actors had much, if any, ethical agency. There is a glimmer of ethical reflexivity, however, in the attention that the report

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*92* ibid., 49.
*93* ibid., 24.
*94* ibid., 45-46.
*95* ibid., 14, 45-46.
devotes to ‘context’ and the need to communicate with ‘local populations’. The Report calls for designing missions based on context and providing cultural training to UN employees to respect local staff and populations.96

In contrast to the Report, the Inquiry and the Evaluation evince greater ethical reflexivity. These reports were investigated and drafted by actors with more independence from the UN than the Lessons Learned Unit of DPKO and thus they offer less of a collective and institutional self-understanding, but they remain important because they offer criticism of the United Nations that UN actors are exposed to and that NGOs and members states can invoke to admonish and reform practices of the institution and the individuals within it. Consequently, the Inquiry and Evaluation compete with the Report for understanding past actions and informing future actions.

The Inquiry and Evaluation argue that several mistakes were made by the UN in its efforts to prevent and respond to the genocide. Specifically, the reports observe that the UN as a whole failed to recognize its mandated moral responsibilities.97 Second, the UN neglected and discounted early warning signs of human rights abuses. The reports document that various actors within the UN ignored early UN and NGO reports that exposed severe human rights abuses indicative of the genocide of Tutsis by Hutus (before UNAMIR was deployed and the exact mandate decided).98 Third, the reports recognize that the actors that make up the various parts of the UN failed to communicate important information to each other. Most notably, the Secretariat failed to share information on severe human rights abuses that could constitute genocide to the Security Council.99

96 ibid., 12, 41, 46.
97 United Nations, 3.
98 Joint Evaluation, Study 1, 33.
99 Joint Evaluation, Study 2, 39.
Finally, the reports spill much ink documenting how various UN actors simply did not fully utilize the range of tools available to them. The Secretariat conservatively interpreted the UNAMIR mandate and did not re-examine the rules of engagement as requested by the Force Commander in the field, General Romeo Dallaire. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) continually rejected Dallaire’s requests for additional equipment and a proactive interpretation of the UNAMIR mandate. The Secretary-General failed to lobby the Security Council for intervention, effectively use the UN’s institutional leverage to shape the particulars of the UNAMIR deployment, and report critical and new information about the situation on the ground. More generally, the Secretary-General neglected to employ the moral authority of the office in an effort to force action among the other UN actors and the Rwandan government. For the crucial period of April 7-13, 1994—the period between the beginning of the genocide coupled with a coup d’état and Belgium’s decision to withdraw from UNAMIR—the Secretary-General and the Secretariat did not provide options to the Security Council other than withdrawal or Chapter VII enforcement action (reminiscent of Somalia), despite the alternative actions that were available and lobbied for in the field and despite the criticism from Security Council members unhappy with the narrow dichotomy presented by the Secretariat.

The Inquiry and the Evaluation also document the failings of the Security Council to exploit available tools. The Council was quick to pull UNAMIR and slow to deploy and fund UNAMIR II (the redeployment and strengthening of UNAMIR). The Evaluation reports:

\[100\text{ ibid.}\]
\[101\text{ ibid., 39.}\]
\[102\text{ ibid., 41-42.}\]
For all but one of the major powers on the Security Council, Rwanda was of peripheral interest. This meant that UNAMIR lacked a powerful patron in the Council to help cut through the bureaucratic-political morass that governed normal procedures for UN peacekeeping.\textsuperscript{103}

The reports are unequivocal with regard to the consequences:

> The withdrawal of the bulk of the UN forces and failure of the Security Council to reinforce them and acknowledge that genocide was taking place cost thousands of lives and will be recorded as one of the most culpable and tragic of the UN’s many mistakes on intervention’.\textsuperscript{104}

While the \textit{Inquiry} and the \textit{Evaluation} do not explicitly refer to reflexivity with regard to these failings they indirectly and sparsely hint at its absence. Separately and cumulatively, and at times tentatively, they acknowledge that the UN neglected to reflect on and thus act according to its basic moral responsibilities throughout the UN’s engagement with Rwanda, starting even before the deployment of UNAMIR. The \textit{Evaluation} states: “The UN…had a formal mandate to monitor and pronounce upon human rights violations in member states. This it did in Rwanda, but in a very limited fashion compared to the vigorous and thorough monitoring carried out by NGOs”.\textsuperscript{105}

The \textit{Evaluation} even suggests that the UN, relative to other states and regional organizations (such as the Organization of African Unity), is in a better position to act as a moral agent. They note that others may be more influenced by partisan interests in their interpretation of evidence and that the UN has been recognized as the appropriate moral agent: The Secretary-General “has had a mandate to engage in preventive diplomacy and peacekeeping even in intra-state conflicts…and to engage in early warning. That

\textsuperscript{103} ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{105} Joint Evaluation, \textit{Study 2}, 33.
mandate can be easily extended to cover the analysis required for preventive diplomacy and effective peacekeeping.”

These reports see UN actors as moral agents who have failed to recognize their moral responsibilities, including the Security Council. Ethical self-awareness was missing. The Inquiry states that “the members of the Security Council have a particular responsibility, morally if not explicitly under the [Genocide] Convention, to react against a situation of genocide” as well as “gross violations of human rights.” However, the buck does not stop with the Security Council. The reports recognize that there was a general lack of recognition of the moral salience of the situation within the UN and in their relations with the “so-called Interim Government” (the government that took control in the coup d’état that marked the beginning of the genocide). This neglect was often enabled by a focus on goals that were made obsolete by the new situation on-the-ground:

The Inquiry finds it disturbing that records of meetings between the members of the Secretariat, including the Secretary-General, with officials of the so-called Interim Government, show a continued emphasis on a cease-fire, more than the moral outrage against the massacres, which was growing in the international community.

The Evaluation joins in declaring that the UN must have the moral fortitude to identify and confront the “perpetrators of violence.” In addition to a lack of ethical self-awareness, UN actors did not dialectically navigate thought and action through which individuals might recognize an ethical disjuncture. Absent reflective and reflexive ethical interrogation, UN bureaucrats, leaders and state representatives resorted to familiar narratives and routines.

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106 ibid., 67.
107 United Nations, 38.
108 ibid., 41.
109 Joint Evaluation, Study 2, 82.
Detecting the narrative of ‘political will’, the two reports found that UN departments were responsive to short-term political imperatives. During the Rwandan genocide they were subservient and sensitive to the political pressures of the major powers on the Security Council, effectively anticipating these countries’ political contexts and acting according to them rather than what the reports saw as the moral imperative:

[T]he DPKO [Department of Peacekeeping Operations] at a critical juncture seemed to be too subservient to the concerns of the major powers. In this case [Rwanda], the DPKO proposed only ‘what the traffic would bear’ in the Security Council, as they put it, not what the situation on the ground demanded.110

There was little internal evaluation of whether DPKO’s principles and processes were connected to moral and ethical rather than political ends. DPKO instead acted for the audience of the Security Council countries rather than Rwandans or the global public. DPKO replaced its moral compass with what it thought (correctly or not) was the political compass of the Security Council.

The reports, however, did not specifically attribute this politicization to a lack of ethical reflexivity. The Evaluation suggests, for example, that the political orientation of UN actors may, in part, be attributable to general issues of “professionalism,” noting that there is perhaps an absence of a professional ethos in the UN Secretariat, particularly in the DPKO, where analysis and options in a critical phase were based less on the dictates of information and an analysis of options for action than on the willingness or, more correctly, unwillingness of Great Powers to endorse such actions.111

110 ibid., 68.
111 ibid, 81-82.
The solution offered is equally unspecific: “Officials should be trained as international civil servants and assessed in terms of such professionalism.”¹¹² This professionalism is thought to be the product of “the recruiting and promotion system” and the “insecure financial base of UN peacekeeping” rather than the content of the professional ethos, one that might emphasize engaging in reflexivity about values and action.¹¹³

The *Evaluation* explicitly argued that micro-management of those in the field contributed to the ethical failure in Rwanda, precluding important information and perspectives from being heard: “Sound principles warn against micro-managing a military or political operation in the field. In the Rwanda case, the peacekeeping mission operated within much too narrow limits of discretionary power.”¹¹⁴ Thus, the *Evaluation* recommends that: “Field officers, both political and military, must be given terms of engagement sufficiently broad to permit them to respond to changing circumstances with innovation and dispatch.”¹¹⁵ The *Inquiry*, on the other hand, recognizes that the peacekeepers still bear responsibility despite their circumscribed mandate: The peacekeepers, “by not resisting the threat to the persons they were protecting…, as would have been covered by their Rules of Engagement, showed a lack of resolve to fulfill their mission.”¹¹⁶ To the extent that ethical reflexivity depends on the airing and vetting of information and perspectives to determine the appropriateness of bureaucratic rules and practices, the reports recognized a crucial ingredient of ethical reflexivity as missing in the case of Rwanda.

¹¹² ibid., 82.
¹¹³ ibid., 82.
¹¹⁴ ibid., 82.
¹¹⁵ ibid., 82.
¹¹⁶ United Nations, 45.
Another factor contributing to this moral failure makes apparent the cumulative effect that a lack of reflexivity can have in dulling the ability to gather information about the consequences of actions and how these consequences are contrary to thought (or values). This factor is termed “desensitization” by the *Evaluation*, referring specifically to the recent massacres in Burundi of 50,000 to 100,000 people and the subsequent lack of international response to genocide in Rwanda. Because there was no recognition of UN moral responsibility in the Burundi massacres, it was easier for the UN to engage in the next non-reflexive situation as the information of so many dead in Rwanda was not consciously seen as inconsistent given the UN’s past actions and thus a couple hundred thousand deaths seemed, crudely-enough, morally acceptable.

The reports took note, however, of notable exceptions to the lack of reflexivity that characterized the case of Rwanda. Most notably, the Force Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), General Romeo Dallaire, recognized at the beginning of UNAMIR’s deployment that the situation could require action on moral grounds. The *Inquiry* quoted Dallaire from his draft set of Rules of Engagement for UNAMIR that Dallaire sent to the UN Headquarters. Dallaire declared: “There may also be ethnically or politically motivated criminal acts committed during this mandate which will *morally* and legally require UNAMIR to use *all available means* to halt them.” The *Evaluation* found it significant that when the Belgian withdrawal was announced General Dallaire recognized the moral imperative of the situation and

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117 Joint Evaluation, *Study 2*, 70.
118 Quotation taken from United Nations, 9.
advocated that the mission “carry on as long as possible.” Dallaire later explained: “My decision to remain was a matter of moral concern.”  

Both the Inquiry and the Evaluation stressed the appropriateness of moral judgment and the inappropriateness of resorting to familiar principles such as neutrality and impartiality without seeing the larger moral picture that included genocide and international peace and security. The Inquiry stated: “[T]here can be no neutrality in the face of genocide, no impartiality in the face of a campaign to exterminate part of a population.” The Inquiry also hinted at a lack of reflexivity when it stated that:

the onslaught of the genocide should have led decision-makers in the United Nations – from the Secretary-General and the Security Council to Secretariat officials and the leadership of UNAMIR – to realize that the original mandate, and indeed the neutral mediating role of the United Nations, was no longer adequate and required a different, more assertive response, combined with the means necessary to take such action.

In other words, these actors did not make the connection between the inappropriateness of their actions (and the rules of neutrality and impartiality that guided them) relative to the underpinning moral principles of the UN embodied in the Genocide Convention and other relevant human rights legislation. They failed to “realize” because they failed to engage in an ethically self-reflexive process.

**Recommendations**

All three reports assessed the factors that contributed to United Nations failures in Rwanda and made recommendations that they deemed would enable the UN to prevent
and respond to genocide in the future. The Inquiry and the Evaluation were more attentive to addressing the genocide specifically and to identifying the ethical failures of UN actors beyond the Security Council. To this extent these documents (the three reports) are themselves ethnically reflexive; they were undertaken in light of recognition that the UN had experienced a major ethical failure and are part of an effort to identify strategies for avoiding similar outcomes in the future. However, these documents are a very limited form of ethical reflexivity in two crucial respects. First, the “lessons learned” generally and explicitly failed to recognize a lack of ethical reflexivity among UN actors as contributing to the moral failure. Some implicit recognition of a lack of ethical reflexivity has been detailed here—that many UN actors failed to execute their moral responsibilities—but there was little attention to what might have led to responsible action and, specifically, how ethical reflexivity might be necessary and institutionalized as a strategy of ethical reform. For reflexivity to be reformative it must be valued, actualized and regularized as a practice among individuals who recognize themselves as moral agents. Instead, the recommendations of the reports focused on bureaucratic systems and processes that would seek to ensure success by taking the agency and ethical reasoning out of decision-making. The Evaluation, the Inquiry, and the Report call for greater focus on the development of the UN’s capacity to detect early warning signs of impending crises and to effectively and quickly respond. This early warning system would utilize “a world network of specialists in various state agencies, academic institutions, rights monitoring groups, etc.” coupled with “specialized units in the field.” The UN should itself be at the center of this network with “a specialized unit without any operational responsibilities.” This unit would “collect and analyze

123 United Nations, 42; Joint Evaluation 1996, Study 2, 80; Lessons Learned, 14.
information available in the international system and translate that into strategic options” and would “have access to the highest levels of decision-making within the UN and in the various parts of the network.”124 In addition, a non-state body is needed that can avoid the temptation to act according to competing national interests. The Evaluation suggests that “The World Court or another independent international tribunal should be assigned the task of holding emergency hearings in order to determine whether a prima facie case of genocide is under way, thus justifying international intervention.”125 The Inquiry also suggests an early warning system that would create a “capacity to analyse and react to information”.126 While these systems and processes would likely benefit the United Nations in its ability to recognize and respond to humanitarian crises, the recommendations miss a crucial piece of the puzzle by neglecting the ethical capabilities of the individuals who are tasked with making ethical decisions.

Second, the ethical reflexivity implicitly hinted at is incomplete. When they engaged in discussion of moral and ethical responsibilities the reports only considered whether values embodied in the UN had been effectively translated into action and not whether values and beliefs (or ‘thought’) should themselves be interrogated and reconsidered. For example, the reports at times mentioned the conflict between the values of neutrality, impartiality, and human rights, but this discussion was superficial, only declaring that they do not apply in the face of genocide. Little attention was devoted to sorting out complicated questions that would bring values and principles under the scrutiny of ethical reasoning. The moral imagination of the reports is a linear one that assumes an existing moral imperative that either is or is not met.

124 Joint Evaluation, Study 2, 80.
125 ibid., 81.
126 United Nations, 50-57.
More recently, how the United Nations represents and recounts the events in Rwanda through their public presentation is another indication of whether the UN has exercised ethical reflexivity through a self-critical stance that reaches back to acknowledge responsibility. ‘Lessons learned’ through the dialectic navigation of thought and action and recommendations from ‘independent inquiries’ mean little if they are not actively maintained through collective memory and presentation of self (the UN). An institution’s internet presence is one site of collective memory and public presentation. For the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, the General Assembly of the United Nations decreed April 7, 2004 “the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda” and created an internet page hosted on the UN website for its observance. To commemorate this day Secretary-General Kofi Annan called for “a message of remorse for the past” and “resolve to prevent such tragedy from ever happening again”. Yet, the story narrated by the UN for the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda portrays a United Nations that tried to act but was thwarted by ‘Member States’ and the Security Council. Though the website claims that, “Since 1994, the United Nations has launched a process of critical self-examination to understand what went wrong” in Rwanda and Bosnia, only one sentence taken from the Independent Inquiry acknowledges internal failings and responsibility. The remainder of the text emphasizes the responsibility of states and, especially, the Security Council, and inflates the efforts of the UN bureaucracy and leadership. The website notes that “instead of reinforcing the troops” on the ground in Rwanda, “the

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127 See: http://www.un.org/events/rwanda/backgrounder.html
United Nations withdrew them, a decision made by Member States in the Security Council.” The UN declared on this page that UNAMIR “did not have the capacity within its mandate to prevent the genocide.” And, “Even before the start of the massacres, the United Nations tried to raise awareness of the possibility of mass killings among a group of key Member States. The massacres were brought to the attention of the Security Council, which voted in favour of scaling back UNAMIR.” The UN bureaucracy portrays itself as continually struggling to do something about the genocide. They state, for example, that “some Governments refused to allow UN documents to use the word ‘genocide’ to describe the killings taking place in Rwanda.” The website text also blames troop-contributing countries who called their troops home “when they sustained casualties.” Even for this day of “reflection and recommitment” the United Nations told the story of Rwanda on their website in a way that did not acknowledge their actions, express remorse or claim responsibility. The civil servants within the United Nations were unable to break out of a frame of interpretation focused on institutional protection.

**Conclusion**

Individuals in the UN bureaucracy during the Rwandan genocide largely failed to critically evaluate or challenge the dominant narratives for understanding the situation in Rwanda. They tended to downplay the ethical agency available to them (including their moral authority and formal powers), did not critically reflect on UN principles, did not draw on other sources for ethical judgment, saw themselves as hampered by ‘bureaucracy’ and attempted to impose this view on others, and articulated and repeated narratives that placed responsibility elsewhere. Despite the availability of alternative
narratives, the members of the Secretariat and Department of Peacekeeping Operations did not draw them out and were overcome by bureaucratic impediments and dysfunctions. Their moral purpose—to save peacekeeping—depended on certain interpretations of what ‘Somalia’ meant; what impartiality, consent and neutrality meant; what political will was available; and how much attention the international community was willing to give to Africa. Because individuals in the United Nations did not articulate alternative interpretations, other moral purposes that were deeply valued within the institution, such as providing humanitarian assistance and responding to genocide, were not advanced. Their approaches to ethical decision-making contrast with the ethically reflexive approach of General Romeo Dallaire, Force Commander of UNAMIR, who was aware of his status as a capable ethical agent, critically engaged thought and action while recognizing the importance of context, engaged in dialogue with others, and balanced prudence and risk in making ethical judgments. Though approximately one million Rwandans died during the genocide and civil war, thousands of Rwandans were protected by a slim UN peacekeeping force that made do with little support and few resources from UN headquarters. I have also shown in this chapter that the United Nations has been fairly unsuccessful in taking lessons from Rwanda that acknowledge its failures and build among its members the characteristics of the *global phronimos*. In the following chapter, we will see how the International Committee of the Red Cross has been much more successful in this regard.
Chapter 5: The International Committee of the Red Cross and the Rwandan Genocide

“We must always act as men of thought and think as men of action.”


I had with me A Season in Hell by [Rimbaud]. It was a sort of ritual act, before having dinner every evening around seven o’clock instead of praying, which I don’t really believe in. I read one poem of A Season in Hell to, I don’t know, 20, 25 colleagues. It was incredibly silent, and they were not people especially sensible to poetry, but these poems in this context took much more strength. Every word meant something.

Philippe Gaillard, International Committee of the Red Cross, 2003

As other individual profiles have and will illustrate, when confronted with ethical and moral questions individuals often turn to familiar and dominant narratives that help to simplify the situation and direct action. In the case of the genocide and violence in Rwanda, this cognitive strategy obscured possible interpretations that drew out the complexity of the situation and its ethical terrain. These individuals acted without interrogating thought and action (critical rationality) and without attending to the self and other. This is not to say that a moral narrative was absent, but this moral narrative was not critically and contextually interrogated. The global phronimos, on the other hand, seeks out the contours of complexity and employs ‘critical rationality’ to dialectically navigate thought and action in their social relations. In this chapter I explore how

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2 Philippe Gaillard, Interview by Frontline on September 12, 2003 for the episode “Ghosts of Rwanda”.

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individuals from within the International Committee of the Red Cross ethically navigated the situation of genocide and civil war in Rwanda during 1994. Philippe Gaillard, head of the Rwanda ICRC delegation, stands out as one who embodies the characteristics of the global phronimos. Critically engaging thought and action, attentive to others through dialogue, willing to take on risk and aware of the particularities of the situation, Gaillard’s leadership resulted in many successes for a humanitarian organization.

Though Gaillard’s actions challenged some dominant narratives within the ICRC and conceptions of the ICRC delegate, Gaillard was able to articulate narratives that featured moral arguments that resonated with others in the ICRC, leaving Gaillard more supported by his organization than General Dallaire of the United Nations.

Philippe Gaillard, Rwanda delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross

In contrast to the evacuation of all United States embassy staff in Rwanda, the initial proposal by Belgium (with support from the US and others) to completely withdraw the United Nations force (UNAMIR), and the flight of expatriate staff of many of the most prominent NGOs, the ICRC kept its delegation in Rwanda for the duration of the genocide and the aftermath of humanitarian crisis and re-supplied the delegation throughout with considerable medical equipment and humanitarian supplies. Gaillard’s leadership of the ICRC’s mission in Rwanda helped the organization to be unusually outspoken and active in the midst of genocide even though many of the actions taken by the ICRC Rwanda mission challenged the core organizational principles of neutrality and impartiality. Gaillard estimated that the ICRC’s actions prevented the deaths of between

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3 With the exception of ‘non-essential’ expatriate staff—‘key staff, doctors, logistics’ that numbered six.
60,000 to 70,000 Rwandans and helped to ensure that the mission’s Rwandan staff (numbering 120) was not endangered. As the signs of impending violence unfolded and genocidal violence broke out Gaillard organized his staff to evacuate the wounded (those ‘not finished off’) to an ‘improvised field hospital’ in Kigali, spoke with the press about the violence, and set up other field hospitals throughout Rwanda.4 ‘Surgical operations’ were performed in ambulances and 2,500 people were being treated in the Kigali hospital at the end of the genocide.5 Gaillard later recalled that:

The ICRC contributed to this media coverage and reporting like it maybe never had done in its almost 130 years of existence at that time. On 28 April 1994, some three weeks after the beginning of the genocide, the ICRC called on the governments concerned including all members of the Security Council to take all possible measures to put an end to the massacres.

Yet, as I will detail, Gaillard also endeavored to protect the ICRC’s operations that the principles of the ICRC are designed to advance—to offer protection and assistance to those most in need in circumstances of extreme violence. Taking on a degree of risk, Gaillard critically navigated the ethical terrain that he and the ICRC encountered.

Situational Appreciation

Although Philippe Gaillard’s most recent professional experience prior to arriving in Rwanda (just before the Arusha peace accords) had been in Latin America where he had worked for over ten years, in Rwanda Gaillard exhibited a high level of ‘situational appreciation’. When interviewed about the genocide almost a decade later Gaillard attributed misperceptions of the domestic situation by international actors to a failure to

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appreciate local context. In contrast to UNAMIR and U.S. embassy staff, Gaillard had a better understanding of the political and social context and its importance, including the various political actors and their beliefs and desires. Much of this knowledge came from Gaillard’s frequent contact with these actors including those who were responsible for coordinating and supporting the genocidal efforts, an organizational presence that extended outside of Kigali, and frequent communication with local staff. Gaillard had not spent significantly much more time in Rwanda than other individuals representing the UN and the US, but Gaillard’s attention to political and social relations better prepared him to deal with the ethical and logistical questions in the face of large-scale violence. Gaillard was consequently less surprised by the genocide, more attune to the ethical status of the ‘other’ (Rwandans), and better able to judge how the ICRC might act efficaciously in the context of violence. Although Gaillard had no illusions about preventing or stopping the genocide, the ICRC staff took several actions that, as Gaillard recalled, brought “a millimeter of humanity in kilometers of horror”. In one incident Gaillard and a colleague were stopped at a roadblock guarded by soldiers who were very inebriated and threatening. Gaillard recalled:

I coolly told our drunken soldier that I lived in the same neighbourhood as Augustin Bizimana, the Minister of Defence, and Colonel Téoneste Bagasora, his chief of staff, and that I would not fail to inform them of their troops’ unruly behaviour. The soldier seemed to be moved by my acquaintance with is superiors and allowed us to pass. I could not get over it; two minutes earlier he had been aiming his sub-machine gun at my stomach.

6 “People take decisions without knowing the context, being far away from the context, not smelling things”, Philippe Gaillard, Frontline.
7 Gaillard explained that the ICRC had “knowledge of the context…mainly through the local employees. We saved most if not all our local employees, but they also saved us. I was in consultation with them all the time. This was something the U.N. mission didn’t have. We knew everyone in Kigali…”, ibid.
9 ibid.
In this interaction as well as many others, Gaillard was able to appeal to the motivations and desires of Rwandans participating in and working for the genocidaires and identify those who were sympathetic to assisting the ICRC’s humanitarian efforts.

*Interlocutor*

Gaillard was able to astutely navigate the violent situation in Rwanda in part because of his sustained efforts to talk to and understand Rwandans not just as victims but also as perpetrators. This dialogue, in conjunction with persistent and determined efforts to do their work, enabled the ICRC to convince perpetrators to assist ICRC efforts, convinced them to respect Red Cross vehicles and even changed the minds of some Rwandan officials who had supported genocidal efforts. Gaillard declared: “We went, entered and stood our ground, instead of clearing out. We spread out, instead of locking ourselves in. We conversed and, in the hell that was Rwanda, we spoke to all the devils”.

As an interlocutor Gaillard possessed a clear understanding of the merit of dialogue:

> Dialogue makes a far better cornerstone for security than armoured vehicles or bullet-proof vests. Dialogue is a sign of openness and trust…Dialogue is the expression of a calm strength which sometimes recharges the batteries of the person you are talking to.\(^\text{11}\)

Gaillard believed that engaging in a dialogue with enemy and friend alike was more important than material means of security. This meant “first and foremost listening to the other side” and “grasping how the other person understands your words”.\(^\text{12}\) It was this empathic and dialogic approach that enabled Gaillard to get a commitment from the rebel

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\(^{10}\) ibid.

\(^{11}\) ibid.

\(^{12}\) ibid.
group RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) to “respect international humanitarian law” and “the ICRC mandate and the delegates’ activities”, to prevail upon government officials and leaders of the armed forces to facilitate the ICRC’s travel even when the ICRC was transporting Tutsis who were targets of the violence, and to cross the ‘front lines’ and move through Rwanda to talk with government authorities even when General Dallaire and UNAMIR no longer were. Although ICRC staff and operations were themselves victims of the violence around them and were continuously challenged in their operations, Gaillard and his staff engaged in a discursive campaign to successfully change some of the actions and understandings of the belligerents.

Gaillard’s efforts to talk to and persuade individuals to change their attitudes and behavior or to take action that better matched their disapproving assessments of the violence were exhaustive. Gaillard explained:

I went from Kigali to Kabgayi several times. I held discussions with the government and religious authorities. I took ministers and military officers with me in order to make them realize the scale of the disaster and the inhumane conditions in which their people were living, regardless of the ethnic group to which they belonged. They got the point, but they were so disorganized and apathetic that they were incapable of ending the murderous folly and systematic slaughter that at least some of them had helped to organize.

Yet there were also “moderate open-minded officers who were ready to talk and who were driven to despair by the suicidal, murderous behavior of some of their colleagues”, and these individuals worked with Gaillard to protect civilians (including 300 children whose parents had been murdered near Gisenyi and 600 orphans in Butare).

Risk and Prudence

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13 ibid.
14 ibid.
15 ibid.
In addition to his effectiveness as an interlocutor who attended to the identities of self and other as well as his situational appreciation, Gaillard was willing to take calculated risks in a reflective way and with critical rationality. Several days after the genocide started a Rwandan Red Cross ambulance was stopped, the wounded Tutsi pulled out of the ambulance and killed on the side of the road. In consultation with the ICRC headquarters in Geneva Gaillard decided to make public this incident. While this move could have endangered the lives of ICRC and Rwandan Red Cross workers and could have been dismissed as a possibility by the ICRC itself as violating the principle of neutrality and the method of confidentiality,16 Gaillard and the ICRC staff weighed the risk of making themselves targets against the potential benefit of safe passage for Red Cross vehicles. After a short press release that was widely broadcast the government undertook a public awareness campaign about the role of Red Cross and safe passage became the norm.17 The calculated risk paid off and benefited the overall efficacity of the ICRC’s operations in Rwanda.

Despite this incident and other threats to ICRC staff and the bombing of the Kigali field hospital, the ICRC remained in Rwanda and took on an average of 100 wounded people a day at the Kigali hospital. The ICRC also erected a makeshift hospital near Gitarama that accommodated 35,000 people and fed 20,000 displaced persons in northern Rwanda. After hearing that thousands of Tutsis had been brought to a football

16 If, for example, making the incident public was interpreted by the Rwandan government as taking the side of the RPF. As I will discuss later in this chapter, ‘confidentiality’ is not a ‘fundamental principle’ of the ICRC but has been tied to neutrality and seems to have lately taken on the status of a principle.

17 Gaillard 2002; Gaillard, Frontline.
(soccer) stadium in Gisuma the ICRC boldly traveled to the area to speak to the local authorities and were able to save 9,000 people.\(^\text{18}\)

Perhaps the most critical decision was to simply stay in Rwanda. While concerned for the safety of his staff, Gaillard was also concerned about the ICRC’s Rwandan staff who had brought their families to the ICRC delegation site.\(^\text{19}\) Gaillard felt the weight of the ethical relation. Recalling the decision to stay and the decisions of other global and national actors to leave, Gaillard asked, “What would become of [our Rwandan colleagues and their families] if we left? Hundreds of thousands of people were fleeing Kigali and the countryside as the RPF gained ground. Should they be left to starve to death by the roadside?\(^\text{20}\)” While the US, the UN and other NGOs immediately began to talk of evacuation and implement evacuation plans despite the pleas of their Rwandan staff for protection, the ICRC decided against evacuation.

**Critical Rationality**

For individuals in the ICRC the Rwandan genocide challenged the organizational principles of ‘neutrality’ and ‘impartiality’ and the method of ‘confidentiality’, and resonated with the organizational principle of ‘humanity’ along with other external sources of morality. In the midst of armed conflict between states with militaries neutrality, impartiality and confidentiality have served the ICRC well. All victims of warfare and internal violence, civilians and combatants alike, are attended to. Assistance is based only on individuals’ needs and suffering. And the ICRC has, for the most part,

\(^{18}\) Gaillard 1994.

\(^{19}\) “I think the main reason why we decide to stay was because of our local staff”, Gaillard, Frontline.

found the method of confidentiality to be satisfactory for relaying its complaints about violations of humanitarian law.\(^{21}\)

Altogether, seven ‘fundamental principles’ have been espoused by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.\(^{22}\) Of these, the principle of ‘humanity’ is the broadest and could even be characterized as a ‘meta-principle’ while the principles of impartiality and neutrality are more operational as reflected by the frequency with which they are invoked during on-the-ground operations. The principle of *humanity* is stated as follows:

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst peoples.\(^{23}\)

In an elaboration of the principles in an ICRC publication we can detect its centrality to the mission of the ICRC: “To hear one’s fellow man, to recognize his suffering, is to feel the call to service. Therein lies the Movement’s sense of purpose.”\(^{24}\) In a 1979 ICRC publication, Jean Pictet refers to ‘humanity’ as “the essential principle” and as hierarchically more important than the other principles, though it was not among the first of the principles to be articulated.\(^{25}\) The principle of humanity also informs how the ICRC prioritizes its goals and activities: “Their [the Movement’s] priority is to act in


\(^{22}\) These ‘fundamental principles’ were adopted unanimously by the 20\(^{th}\) International Conference of the Red Cross in 1965. The ‘Movement’ encompasses the ICRC and Red Cross national societies.


\(^{24}\) ibid., 2.

\(^{25}\) Jean Pictet.
situations where no one else can or will.”26 Especially important to this principle, the 1996 publication notes, is “protection” which includes sheltering a person from, *inter alia*, “attack” or “ill-treatment”, “frustrat[ing] efforts to destroy him or make him disappear”, and “meet[ing] his need for security to help him survive, to act in his defence”.27 Acknowledging the importance of context, protection may take on different forms, “depending on the situation of the victims”.28

The principle of *impartiality* states:

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.29

Initially, the point of the principle of impartiality was designed to declare that the Movement would assist both sides of a conflict and was thus confined to non-discrimination on the basis of nationality. In 1949 the other categories of non-discrimination were added. This principle declares that the ICRC will give aid to all individuals, no matter their identity or side in a conflict, and that this aid will be dispensed first to those most in need. Though this principle refers to *how* the ICRC carries out its activities, rather than its normative inspirations and aspirations, the principle is still crucial for achieving the purpose of the ICRC:

In the context of humanitarian ethics, non-discrimination requires that all objective distinctions among individuals be ignored, so that the aid given transcends the most virulent antagonisms; in time of armed conflict or internal disturbances, friend and foe with be assisted in the same way; likewise, those in need will be succoured at all times, whoever they may be.30

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27 ibid.
28 ibid.
29 ibid., 5.
30 ibid.
Additionally, ICRC publications specifically state that impartiality is non-discrimination of all kinds, even with regard to ‘subjective distinctions’ such as friendship or emotionally identifying with one side to a conflict over the other.\(^{31}\) In this regard, it is an ideal that is difficult to achieve but should always be strived for.

The principle of *neutrality* declares: “In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.”\(^ {32}\) There are, according to the 1996 ICRC publication, two different types of neutrality. “Military neutrality” refers to “not acting in a way that could facilitate the conduct of hostilities by any of the parties involved.”\(^ {33}\) Examples of military necessity given in this publication are fairly non-controversial, such as “surrounding a military objective with medical units so that it will not be targeted” and “hiding weapons in a hospital”. The result of such actions might include weakening the protection of international humanitarian law, disrupting humanitarian activities and creating mistrust among the relevant parties.\(^ {34}\) ‘Ideological neutrality’, on the other hand, “implies standing apart at all times from political, religious or any other controversies in which the Red Cross or Red Crescent, were it to take a position, would lose the trust of one segment of the population and thus be unable to continue its activities.” This form of neutrality is more of a “state of mind” and thus is more difficult to apply.\(^ {35}\) And, indeed, the author of this publication has trouble giving examples and decreeing the ‘right’ action. The difficulty is explicitly noted: “It is admittedly not always an easy task to apply the principle of neutrality, not

\(^{31}\) ibid., 6.  
\(^{32}\) ibid., 7.  
\(^{33}\) ibid., 6.  
\(^{34}\) ibid., 7.  
\(^{35}\) ibid., 8.
least because everyone has personal convictions. When tension mounts and passions are aroused, every member of the Red Cross or Red Crescent is called upon to exercise great self-control and refrain from expressing his opinions in the discharge of his duties.”

The point of neutrality is, in part, to retain the ‘trust’ of all of the parties, yet the ICRC publication goes on to detail the numerous ways in which neutrality itself is interpreted as taking sides, such as providing food and medical supplies that are seen as facilitating the other side’s objectives and efforts.

The publication also struggles with detailing “which controversies the Red Cross and Red Crescent must avoid” and notes the “ethical problems” involved. Yet, there is the expectation that these vexing ethical questions will be addressed through applying the ICRC’s fundamental principles and mission. The publication becomes almost dogmatic about neutrality, declaring:

It is only by consistently applying the principle of neutrality in spite of all the difficulties involved, that the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement will continue to enjoy widespread confidence…To make matters more difficult, the spokesmen of other charities do not hesitate to take militant positions or to denounce publicly those responsible for injustices or inhumane acts.

The last example associates ‘confidentiality’ with neutrality and implies that Gaillard’s action was not consistent with the greater moral purpose of the ICRC. In a press article seven years later (2003), Marion Harroff-Tavel, ICRC’s Deputy Director for International Law and Cooperation within the Movement, cautioned that, “Neutrality should not be confused with confidentiality.” Neutrality aims at gaining trust of the belligerents while confidentiality is a “working method, a means of persuasion that is the ICRC’s preferred

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36 ibid.
37 ibid., 9.
approach.”38 The author of the 1996 article notes that in very rare circumstances exceptions might be made to neutrality (though Harroff-Tavel would see the exception as made to the method of confidentiality), particularly in cases of “grave and repeated breaches of international humanitarian law” and only as the last option for changing this pattern of behavior.39

Along with the principles of independence, autonomy, and voluntary service, impartiality and neutrality all emphasize the importance of unqualified action to help the victims. Yet, the ICRC found itself in a difficult ethical situation in Rwanda (and the Holocaust) for which the application of its principles proved problematic. The ICRC issues moral judgments on belligerents when they violate the Geneva Conventions (as the “guardian” of those conventions), but in the case of genocide, the genocidaires were not necessarily combatants, they efficiently targeted civilians (making ‘unbiased’ action toward them potentially harmful to a very large number of Rwandans) and they were unlikely to respond to confidential reproaches. In addition, the Genocide Convention, its applicability and its spirit of responding to and alleviating suffering, weighed on and resonated with the ICRC. The violence was thus qualitatively different and the usefulness of neutrality, impartiality and confidentiality questionable, particularly in consideration of the principle of humanity. In the actions of the ICRC delegation in Rwanda the prevailing notion of their core principles were thus challenged, and these individuals redefined, reframed, narrowed and even rejected the scope of neutrality and impartiality while drawing on other moral resources. They emphasized the principle of humanity as well as the moral importance of other relevant international law (the

38 Mario Harroff-Tavel, “Principles under fire: does it make sense to be neutral?” (December 31, 2003), press article, accessed, http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/5vueea?opendocument
Genocide Conventions) in ways that were responsive to critical analysis and contextual interpretation.

Philippe Gaillard led the way. He found it absurd that one could be entirely “neutral in the face of genocide” and this is why he assertively and with conviction relayed the nature and scale of the violence to the media vociferously and on numerous occasions, even naming individuals and ‘sides’, and publicly appealed to the Security Council to take political measures that would actively address the violence. Yet, Gaillard also attributed value to the principles of neutrality and impartiality. This value was, in part, connected to the mission of the ICRC as an organization that operates in violent situations and relies on being seen as neutral for its legitimacy among the belligerents and its ability to assist civilians and those who “come out of combat”. And although the ICRC did not traditionally operate during genocide Gaillard was able to connect the moral purpose of the ICRC to this unfamiliar context. He felt an imperative to act even in the face of genocide as a daily ‘fact’ and to act in ways that clearly set out how and when the ICRC might be ‘neutral’ and what the ICRC expected from those committing most of the violence. His method was sometimes confidential, but also involved public shaming, both of the Rwandan government and the international community for failing to respond to the genocide. This pragmatic approach to addressing genocide is not unlike the pragmatic mission of the ICRC. It was to find a “millimeter of humanity in kilometers of horror” as Gaillard envisioned the ICRC as doing more broadly. In sum, Gaillard was able to interpret the principles of neutrality, impartiality and humanity in ways that were helpful while recognizing that the principles could not illuminate for him.
a clear path of action and confidentiality, for the most part, was an ineffective method in this context.

“Humanitarian neutrality”, as Gaillard articulated it, meant “first to be on the side of the victims, of ALL the victims”. This could only be a guide for Gaillard as adhering tightly to this definition would have been problematic. He found that “when the victims belong to the same category, then their executioners start to look at you with suspicion”. For example, after giving an interview to the Rwandan National Radio Gaillard found himself a political enemy when the Radio-Television libre des Mille Collines announced that Gaillard was a “Belgian national” which was, Gaillard noted, akin to a “death sentence”. Gaillard stood by his decision to give the interview despite the perception that he was taking sides and, instead of passively accepting these actions, Gaillard prevailed upon government authorities in Gitarama to correct this story. Gaillard then found himself in yet another difficult position vis-à-vis neutrality just a couple of days later when the same media outlet was targeted by the RPF. Gaillard concluded that in this situation that neutrality was appropriate and meant that the ICRC should provide medical assistance to the media outlet’s personnel despite their indirect (and perhaps direct) role in the genocide and despite the threats on his life that resulted from this media outlet’s false reports.

Gaillard actively interpreted what neutrality meant on an ongoing basis and found its limits when the new Prime Minister requested that the ICRC remove tens of thousands of bodies from the streets of Kigali. On the one hand, the dead bodies posed a public health risk but, on the other hand, moving the bodies would potentially be of assistance to the genocidaires and it make it easier for them to efficiently kill. Once again, it was not

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40 Gaillard 2002
at all clear what the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality required Gaillard to do. Instead of applying a principle to a particular situation the global phronimos interprets the principle (or principles) and evaluates whether they’re useful or appropriate for the particular situation and what they might mean. This is an example of the dialectic movement between thought and action that characterizes critical rationality. Here, the principle of neutrality regarded as not favoring one actor(s) over the other, the principle of humanity, and Gaillard’s strong moral conviction that he should do whatever he could in the face of genocide were all in play. He found community health to be in conflict with the lives of victims of genocide. Removing the bodies would lessen the likelihood of disease for the remaining population but it would also make it easier for the genocidaires and others committing violence to continue to kill. Both were ‘humanitarian’ concerns but they were at odds for Gaillard.

Gaillard’s response was nuanced and evinced an ongoing critical engagement with thought and action. Gaillard refused to move the bodies out and requested that the Rwandan government first stop the killings. But later, when the Rwandan government decided to use their common law prisoners to evacuate the bodies, the ICRC agreed to give them the fuel. Gaillard had made his point and decided to relent only when the Rwandan government sought to abuse their free labor. The ICRC also provided the government with chlorine and aluminum sulfate to allow the central pumping station to stay operational, preventing further large-scale suffering and death. Gaillard attempted to strike a balance in his navigation of conflicting values and principles and in his assessment of what would be strategically advantageous to the ICRC’s efforts. Gaillard’s experience demonstrated that genocide provided a context in which the ICRC might find
it difficult to argue that its principles are never in tension and always serve “respect for the human being” and, contrary to the ICRC’s claims in a key publication, are ‘complementary’.  

Ethical Self-Awareness

Although the ICRC was supportive of Gaillard in the field and this support (or lack of objection) was critical for his ability to coordinate a relief effort that often challenged core principles of the organization and pushed the ICRC to act beyond its organizational comfort zone, Gaillard’s success also had something to do with the formation of his ‘moral self’. Gaillard, born in Switzerland, had been employed by the ICRC since 1982 and involved in ICRC missions in the Middle East and Latin America before heading the mission in Rwanda. In addition to his extensive field experience, Gaillard spent over a year working at ICRC headquarters in Geneva. Gaillard developed from these various assignments, as a global phronimos would, a well-formed understanding of the value of field experience and an awareness of how field and headquarter perceptions can differ. This organizational wisdom served Gaillard well in Rwanda. He was attentive to whether field and headquarter assessments were similar and how he could use analysis of the situation on the ground to marshal organizational imprimatur and support for the initiatives Gaillard undertook in Rwanda despite the extraordinary circumstance of genocidal violence.

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41 “The values underlying the Movement’s Fundamental Principles are simple: they are all founded on respect for the human being. That is why they can be universally recognized and accepted…The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent form a coherent whole. While the scope of each must be specified, it is essential to read them – and to respect them! – as a whole, since it is from this whole that the unique nature of the International Movement is derived and continues to prevail.” “The Fundamental Values”, 1996, 17, 19.
Gaillard’s ethical agency and moral wisdom was particularly evident in his manifest self-understanding as an individual who was a complete moral self—aware of the multiplicity and complexity of ethical questions and able to draw both on organizational and external moral resources in critically examining these questions. This sense of ethical wholeness was important for Gaillard’s status as a global phronimos—as one who leads with ethical expertise and with the contextual knowledge that enables informed calculated risks. This phronetic wisdom, for Gaillard, appears to have much of its source in his training in literature which he studied at the universities of Geneva, Freiburg-in-Breisgau and Salamanca. Gaillard was inspired to turn to and drew strength from passages of poetry and literature that served as external moral resources and he articulated them for himself and his staff in the field while in Rwanda. In an interview Gaillard recalled:

I had with me A Season in Hell by [Rimbaud]. It was a sort of ritual act, before having dinner every evening around seven o’clock instead of praying, which I don’t really believe in. I read one poem of A Season in Hell to, I don’t know, 20, 25 colleagues. It was incredibly silent, and they were not people especially sensible to poetry, but these poems in this context took much more strength. Every word meant something."42

This ritual act that Gaillard and much of the ICRC participated in seemed to remind them of the possibility of ethics, even within organizational and situational pressures and exigencies, including genocide. It also served as a regularized period of reflection in which individuals navigated that space between thought and action that is central to the moral reasoning of ethical reflexivity.

Literature also served as a way that Gaillard, looking back on the Rwandan genocide, made sense of his experience in Rwanda as he engaged in a continuing ‘project

\[^{42}\text{Gaillard, Frontline.}\]
of the self’ that ethical self-awareness enables. It is remarkable how Gaillard, in interviews and occasional talks in the years after the genocide, wove literary references in with the brute facts of genocide and the desperate efforts of ICRC and UNAMIR staff to create a narrative of how individuals handled the ethical and organizational challenges of responding to large-scale inter-human violence and what these experiences meant for individual and organizational identities. For Gaillard these experiences represented a tragic setting—“a real *Season in Hell*, the unpublished version”—in which the humanity of overwhelming beauty managed to make brief appearances. Gaillard drew on Keats in this regard: “A thing of beauty is joy forever.” Gaillard imagined his agency as directed toward a particular aesthetic purpose defined in humanistic terms: “this is our job, to find beauty, create beauty in the very core of horror”, and “even in the depths of the most unfathomable horror, I encountered courageous men and women who were exceptionally clear-thinking and lucid enough to do another human being a good turn in the midst of what they knew to be a veritable genocide.”

Yet, Gaillard maintained an awareness of the tragic setting and the potentially tragic consequences of his ‘project of the self’. Like Rimbaud’s *voyant* (and Rimbaud himself who sought to challenge conventional poetry as part of a ‘vanguard’), Gaillard undertook a self-reflexive stance that pushed the self’s experiences, senses and limits with the risk of exhaustion and self-destruction. Gaillard’s project of the self featured a stance of ‘ethics in the moment’. Indeed, like Rimbaud’s abandonment of poetry early in his life Gaillard distanced himself from both the horror and beauty of Rwanda not long after the humanitarian crisis of 1994 was over and largely abandoned that self’s struggles

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44 See Arthur Rimbaud’s ‘Lettre du voyant’. A letter written to his friend Paul Demeny on May 15, 1871.
to the Rwandan genocide. Unlike Dallaire who took Rwanda with him to Canada and returned to confront the ‘ghosts of Rwanda’, Gaillard declared that he would not go back to Rwanda. From a distance, physically and emotionally, he occasionally articulated his account of the Rwandan genocide, the ICRC’s efforts, and his journey of the self. In Rwanda Gaillard had engaged in a process of self-interrogation, of his organizational self and his personal self (holistically), in a way that leveraged ethical agency and ethical reasoning to pursue objectives of action that were critically considered and evaluated. Yet, indicative of the extraordinary effort required of the *global phronimos*, the emotional toll was so heavy that Gaillard (at least temporarily) retreated from pushing against the limits of the self’s agential and emotional capacities with regard to Rwanda. Ten years later, Gaillard recalled, “In 1994, before, during and after the genocide…I gave hundreds of interviews, reports, conferences to all kind [sic] of audiences, newspapers, TV, radios and the general public. And afterwards I think this was not only the right action to take but also the right therapy.” Noting his decision to not talk anymore, given his personality and his role as an ICRC delegate, Gaillard again found himself ethically responsive. He was revisiting the events of the Rwandan genocide because he still had “some kind of duty towards all those who died in Rwanda in 1994 and who were given so little attention later on that some of think that the Rwandan genocide can be considered as a ‘case study’”.45

**The ICRC and Ethical Reflexivity**

Philippe Gaillard felt that his ethical judgments were supported by his organization and he stressed how this support was in contrast to that received by General Dallaire from the

United Nations. Noting the difficulty that Dallaire had in leading the UN force in Rwanda and his personal turmoil after leaving Rwanda, Gaillard said of Dallaire: “He did what he could; he could not do much…He was abandoned by his own organization. This is terrible, to be abandoned by his own organization. I was always supported. It’s a big difference, a huge difference.”46 Gaillard was aware that he was pushing the ICRC in directions that were ‘unusual’ for the organization yet the ICRC was responsive to Gaillard’s prodding.47 He felt that the ICRC would affirm his ethical agency but if it proved hostile he was prepared to assert his ethical judgments at personal and professional risk. Gaillard spoke out about the genocide, challenging the US description of ‘civil war’. And Gaillard felt a more general “responsibility to speak out”. He explained: “[I]f my organization, which is usually not outspoken would have told me, ‘Please Philippe, don’t talk so much’, I would have left the organization. You cannot be silent, no. And they never told me to shut up.”48

Under Gaillard’s leadership and the support of other ICRC headquarters staff, for the first time in the twentieth century the ICRC worked in the midst of a genocide and, contrary to usual practice, prominently used the media to call for specific actors to change their behavior. Mindful of the organization’s failure to speak out during the Holocaust, Gaillard and the ICRC seemed to take special pride in the ability of the ICRC to fulfill their mission “to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and provide them with assistance” in the midst of the

46 Gaillard, Frontline.
47 Of the UN effort in Rwanda Gaillard characterized it as “a complete failure” “despite some exceptional individual behaviors”, Gaillard, Frontline.
48 Gaillard, Frontline.
challenging situation in Rwanda. In this, there was continuity in the moral purpose of the ICRC in the unfamiliar context of genocide. In constant contact with the ICRC headquarters, Gaillard was able to secure resources and more specialized staff in a matter of days and translate these resources into action that supported the organization’s mission and the ethical judgments of ICRC staff on the ground.

Perhaps the ICRC was more amenable to Gaillard’s leadership that emphasized context and critical ethical reasoning and even ‘speaking out’ because the organization itself had a historical memory to draw upon in which these characteristics have been important but also regretfully neglected. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) began as a movement, as a call to action in the midst of abhorrent state practices that produced suffering. Henry Dunant, a Swiss businessman, after witnessing soldiers left to die on the battlefield during the Battle of Solferino organized the locals to assist the injured men and then later wrote a book to record his experience and call for the establishment of societies to assist the wounded and an international convention to assure assistance for the wounded and respect for those who sought to assist them. By 1863 the International Committee of the Red Cross had been formed and the first Red Cross societies established. The following year the first of the Geneva Conventions was adopted at a diplomatic conference. The ICRC, though intended to be a temporary organization, became a “neutral intermediary between the national societies of warring countries, and then between the governments themselves, in order to facilitate the action of national societies and implement the Geneva Convention.”

49 http://www.irc.org
51 ibid., 92.
Early in its organizational history the ICRC denounced practices that were “particularly inhumane” such as poisonous gas and expanded its mandate to include internal conflict. During World War II the ICRC visited and cared for prisoners of war held by the Germans and aided civilian populations affected by the war, including assistance to Greece when it experienced famine. In November of 1944 the organization received a Noble Peace Prize. Still, World War II also brought criticism and regret. The ICRC did not assist partisans, resistance fighters and Soviet prisoners of war and failed to denounce Nazi concentration camps and genocide.

As an ICRC employee, this regret may have been in the mind of Gaillard, or at least informed the organization’s thinking around genocidal violence. This historical memory may have been a factor in the lack of a negative reaction from headquarters to Gaillard’s actions that were out of character for the organization and challenged some of its key principles. The organization had very publicly opened itself up for scrutiny in the half decade after the Holocaust, allowing Jean-Claude Favez unlimited access to its archives to inform an independent study of the ICRC’s actions during the Holocaust. In an official statement adopted by the ICRC Assembly on April 27, 2006, the Assembly declared:

This failure is also that of the Red Cross as a whole, but it weights most heavily on the ICRC given the organization’s specific mission and its position within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement…This failure is aggravated by the fact that the ICRC did not do everything in its power to put an end to persecutions and help the victims. The organization remained a prisoner of its

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52 ibid., 92-93.
traditional procedures and of the overly narrow legal framework in which it
operated.  

It appears that, in part, the ICRC historically feared jeopardizing the limited initiatives
that it could undertake to save lives and felt hopeless about their ability to effect change
through public appeal. Even the confidential appeals that were made during the
Holocaust were performed by ICRC delegates and not by ICRC leaders. Francois
Bugnion, the ICRC’s Director for International Law and Cooperation within the
Movement, reflected on the failure of the ICRC to take appropriate action, stating: “the
failure was, above all, that of the ICRC’s inability – or unwillingness – to fully recognize
the extent of the tragedy that was unfolding, and to confront it by reversing its priorities
and taking risks that the situation demanded.”

The regret of the Holocaust influenced the ICRC, and Max Huber and Jean Pictet
in particular, to promulgate and elaborate the “Fundamental Principles”. Ironically, these
very principles may have worked against a robust ICRC response to the genocide in
Rwanda fifty years later. It appears, though, that other lessons were learned that made
many in the ICRC more capable ethical agents so that they were able to more critically
evaluate the usefulness of the principles and make them responsive to particular
situations. At the very least, the ICRC became more attuned to the moral weight of
suffering and, especially, suffering on a large-scale. In the 2006 declaration, the
Assembly stated that their failures during the Holocaust

54 “The Nazi genocide and other persecutions,” Document adopted by the ICRC Assembly on 27 April
2006, accessed, http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/holocaust-position-
27042006?opendocument
55 Francois Bugnion, “Dialogue with the past: the ICRC and the Nazi death camps” (November 5, 2002).
Address delivered at the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum, November 4, 2002, accessed,
http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/6ayg86
56 ibid.
will remain forever engraved in the organization’s memory, as will the brave acts undertaken by many of its delegates at the time. While history cannot be rewritten, the ICRC intends to honour the victims of Nazi persecution by fighting for a world in which the dignity of every man, woman and child is respected in all circumstances.57

The ICRC also came away from the Holocaust with the idea that sometimes ‘speaking out’ is appropriate. The moral metric, from their point of view, was how to best alleviate suffering. The ‘legal’ metric and ‘traditional procedures’ (the rules) had instead become the focus.

Throughout ICRC documents one also finds a tension between the universality of the Movement’s moral purpose and its desire to recognize human diversity in ways of living and beliefs. Jean Pictet, who held many different positions in the ICRC from 1937 to 1979 had perhaps the most influence in elaborating the Fundamental Principles and was influential in the preparation and advancement of some of the Geneva Conventions. Reminiscent of discourse at the United Nations, Jean Pictet proclaimed in 1979 with religious-like fervor that, “The doctrine of the Red Cross is permanent…It outlived those who created it and this lasting character is perhaps a sign of its superiority over everything that happens here on earth.” Yet, just a few sentences later he is careful to clarify that “we no longer believe that there is only one valid civilization…[W]e now acknowledge the pluralism of cultures and the need to become acquainted with them and study them deeply.” These cultures, Pictet states, feature “doctrines” that “can lead to the great law of the Red Cross, but each one by its own pathway, in accordance with the convictions and characters of the various peoples.” In working toward this ‘unity’ the Red Cross is “to proclaim norms which have universal validity, because they are in full

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57 “The Nazi genocide’’
accord with human nature.” These principles, Pictet argued, are realized wisely when they are interpreted with a degree of flexibility and take into account the “particular circumstances” of action. Though this type of ‘getting to know’ the other is more like assimilation and less like understanding, it reveals one of the great difficulties of moral action in the global sphere and acknowledges the need for flexibility and recognition of difference in the context of international action with a morally informed aim. In addition, Pictet is also attune in 1979 to the importance of the dynamic relationship between thought and action: “The morality of the Red Cross is therefore valid to the extent that it expresses itself in concrete realities. As Bergson said – and this applies especially to the Red Cross – We must always act as men of thought and think as men of action.”

The ICRC after Rwanda

Philippe Gaillard’s statements after the genocide remain, perhaps, the strongest evidence of ethical reflexivity in the ICRC, yet it is also apparent that the experience of the ICRC in Rwanda has had an organizational impact. For one, though Gaillard’s statements challenge certain interpretations of ICRC principles, they are prominently featured on the ICRC website and form a significant portion of the material available on the ICRC’s experience in Rwanda. Because the organization can be proud of its actions in Rwanda, the organization’s leadership seems to have taken confidence in speaking about genocide and continues to confront its ‘failures and omissions’ during the Holocaust.

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58 Pictet.
59 ibid.
60 ibid.
61 “The Nazi Genocide”
Stockholm International Forum of January 2004 the ICRC president, Jakob Kellenberger, gave a talk entitled, “Preventing Genocide: threats and responsibilities”. Speaking to the international community, Kellenberger notes that, “The ICRC was pretty alone staying and working in Rwanda between April and July 1994.” Kellenberger then speaks to the lessons the international community can learn from past genocides, giving particular attention to inquiring into how to prevent genocide in the first place; the importance of listening and being willing to listen; looking back at past experiences and looking forward to imminent problems so that moral distance is not created; recognizing responsibility; holding human beings as equal; promoting ‘real dialogue’ with the ‘other’; recognizing the ways in which “words and concepts can prepare realities; and monitoring the consequences of decisions. These very ‘steps’ for preventing and responding to genocide bear strong similarities to the process and attitude of ethical reflexivity and the portrait of the *global phronimos*.

It is also evident from examining ICRC documents that individuals within the ICRC are aware of how some of their fundamental principles that declare their independence, neutrality, and impartiality have been questioned and come under fire. One ICRC employee asks: Can an organization truly embody these principles during humanitarian emergencies? Is neutrality naïve and indicative of a lack of courage? Does neutrality make one complicit in human rights abuses and the violation of international humanitarian law? This individual recognizes how neutrality serves the legitimacy of the Red Cross and its activities, allowing it safe passage in zones of conflict to aid those in

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need on all sides. Yet, neutrality as a guiding principle, as we have seen, can also be interpreted in ways that undermine legitimacy. This publication and other ICRC publications and conferences after 9/11 seem particularly concerned about their legitimacy in a global context in which various actors, particularly the United States, have called for others to be “with” or “against” them. The previous author attempts to avoid this call to take sides and yet resolve the complexity of neutrality on-the-ground raised especially by Rwanda by connecting some action to confidentiality rather than a ‘right’ or ‘moral’ purpose. When one or more parties participate in “serious and repeated violations of humanitarian law” and are not responsive to the persuasion of the Red Cross, they lose the confidentiality of the Red Cross. In such cases the Red Cross has the prerogative to engage in “public denunciation”. The implication is that legitimacy can be lost even when abstract principles such as ‘neutrality’ and ‘confidentiality’ serve as guides to action.

What is missing in many contemporary ICRC publications, however, is emphasis on the principle of humanity. Indeed, much of the discussion of ‘fundamental values’ within the ICRC (judging from website publications) focuses on ‘neutrality’ and does not include much discussion of the other principles. Perhaps because ‘humanity’ as a principle is difficult to conceptualize in action and is less concrete than neutrality and impartiality, it tends to be neglected as a guide for action. Instead, as seen in the ICRC

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64 “Principles under fire: does it still make sense to be neutral?” (December 31, 2003), Press article of the International Committee of the Red Cross, accessed, http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/5vueea?opendocument
65 “Humanitarian action is increasingly at the risk of being rejected by some radical groups as associated with the West and its allies...Humanitarian actors are also at risk when states assume that humanitarian action can be used as part of a military campaign,” “Operational challenges in carrying out humanitarian activities in a changing environment” (December 2-6, 2003), Workshop 11 of the 28th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, Geneva.
66 See also, Aline Mukamabano, “Many former detainees speak of a moral debt to the ICRC...” (May 25, 2005), accessed, http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/rwanda-testimony-250505
publication just discussed, other concrete principles are invoked to deal with problems of legitimacy that provide a tangible cloak to sneak humanity back in. This inattention to humanity for those ICRC employees who act on the ground and who articulate policies and practices needs further attention, particularly in light of how the policies of the War on Terror have affected and been interpreted by NGOs and IOs. Though the organization was important for supporting Gaillard’s leadership, these organizational documents written by individuals also underscore that it is the individual who ultimately interprets morality and ethics, thus Gaillard was not entirely a product of the organizational structure. His agency mattered.

The excessive focus on neutrality has also resulted in some contradictions within the ICRC. For example, while employees are encouraged to take into account factors that make some individuals more vulnerable than others and in greater need than others, the ICRC website also states in the section ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ that “Neutrality means making no judgement about the merits of one person’s need as against another’s.”67 And, with the recent focus on international justice and the ICRC’s relation to international judicial proceedings, there is a renewed emphasis on the need for the ICRC to protect its methods of ‘discreet diplomacy’ and only using public denunciation and being outspoken as a last resort.68

Still, it seems that the ICRC as an organization at least attempts to instill in its members some of the qualities of the global phronimos. For example, in a November

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68 Public denunciation is given explicit consideration in the following document: “Action by the International Committee of the Red Cross in the event of violations of international humanitarian law or of other fundamental rules protecting persons in situations of violence,” International Review of the Red Cross 87:858 (June 2005), 393-400.
2009 photo publication entitled “Professional standards for better protection work – in pictures” ICRC employees are encouraged in various ways to exhibit certain characteristics. Explanations of professional standards, with accompanying pictures to engage the employee, emphasize the importance of context and critical thinking. “Protection actors” are to apply humanity and remain focused on the individual at risk; recognize particular factors of vulnerability as they deal with individuals; think about the consequences of their actions and connect these actions to their purposes so that unintended harm is avoided; continuously evaluate the consequences of their actions and adjust their approach; and be aware of the relevant legal frameworks. In another publication on professional codes of conduct the humanity and dignity of victims is especially emphasized. Notably absent, however, is the uncomfortable organizational conversation about how external normative sources can assist individuals in their ethical reasoning by helping to form a ‘complete moral self’ with a strong sense of ethical agency, as seen in Gaillard.

Other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Ethical Reflexivity

The actions of Philippe Gaillard and the ICRC staff in Rwanda and at their headquarters evinced the process and attitude of ethical reflexivity. The phronetic qualities of these individuals, to a significant degree, were not inhibited by the organization’s culture, though Philippe Gaillard demonstrated leadership in moving the organization in a

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direction that it was inclined toward but hesitant to embrace. Yet, not all NGOs acted phronetically in Rwanda. Rather than engaging critical rationality that dialectically navigates thought and action, many NGOs in Rwanda narrowly focused on organizational principles without considering ethical questions that probed how they were implemented and whether those consequences were desirable. As a result, NGOs were not as effective as they could have been in Rwanda and, in some cases, harmed the very people they sought to assist.

NGOs that came to Rwanda clung onto the principle of ‘neutrality’ as a guide to their actions even though this ethical reference point proved ill-suited to their stated humanitarian aims. As an example of this kind of self-defeating thinking General Dallaire cites an instance in which an inundated NGO aid station refused help from a Canadian medical team with Red Cross arm bands for the dying people waiting for treatment because they thought the help would threaten their neutrality.\footnote{Dallaire, 2003, 493.} International or transnational civil servants who practiced ethical reflexivity instead negotiated principles in context, evaluating which principles best served as ethical guides and how they translated into action given the particularities of the situation.

The principle of neutrality also gave rise to NGO concerns about being too involved with UNAMIR because they could not be associated with “the military”, yet UNAMIR provided the security that they needed for their operations as well as the most accurate picture of humanitarian needs in and around Rwandan, including where, exactly, the NGOs could be most helpful. The stress on neutrality by NGOs thus threatened their avowed purpose at times—to provide humanitarian assistance to the victims of violence.
and dislocation. Many NGOs also fell into the organizational pitfall of unreflectively interpreting what a principle means (the action it implies) by relying on rules of thumb for action.

Western NGOs, especially, have a history of interpreting human rights and humanitarianism in a way that emphasizes universality, abstract concepts and absolutist interpretations. Bilahari Kausikan summarizes this tendency:

The Western media, NGOs, and human rights activists, especially in the United States, tend to press the human rights dialogue beyond the legitimate insistence on human standards of behavior by calling for the summary implementation of abstract concepts without regard for a country’s unique cultural, social, economic, and political circumstances.

Western NGOs are also guilty, even if unwittingly, of engaging in what Makau Matua terms a ‘savage-victims-savior-saviors’ metaphor that poses Western humanitarians as benevolently saving non-Western victims from their aggressive and tyrannical states. This narrative reconstructs gains in ‘human rights’ to be Euro-centric and effects an “‘othering’ process that imagines the creation of inferior clones, in effect dumb copies of the original.” Matua’s argument illuminates, for our purposes, how ethical reflexivity becomes less realizable when individuals are framed as ‘victims’ and their culture in need of conversion. Human rights discourse can strip away individuals’ status as capable agents and potential interlocutors. Even in the midst of genocide NGOs need to seek understanding of the populations they serve, continuously navigate the values that give

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72 ibid., 447.
73 See, for example: Bilahari Kausikan, “Asia’s Different Standard,” Foreign Policy 92 (1993), 33.
75 ibid., 2.
life to their moral purposes in conjunction with those in whose names they act, and inquire into the consequences of their action.\textsuperscript{76}

**Conclusion**

Philippe Gaillard of the International Committee of the Red Cross proved to be an exemplar of the *global phronimos* as the situation in Rwanda exploded. Gaillard critically evaluated the principles embraced by the ICRC and what they might mean relative to the context and drew on moral resources external to the ICRC and its culture as he conducted and led ICRC operations in Rwanda during the genocide and civil war. In this chapter I have detailed the ways in which Gaillard was able to act as a *global phronimos* and how his experience and organizational setting facilitated this reflexive ethical reasoning. While the organizational culture and training of the ICRC did not determine Gaillard’s actions, Gaillard’s extraordinary leadership that challenged prevalent interpretations of some ICRC principles resonated with other ICRC principles and with the contextual flexibility and morally-driven action that the ICRC promotes. Gaillard was thus able to reframe whether and how neutrality, impartiality and confidentiality should apply to the genocide in Rwanda and emphasize the principle of humanity.

\textsuperscript{76} Matua issues a call: “[This article] asks that human rights advocates be more self-critical and come to terms with the troubling rhetoric and history that shape, in part, the human rights movement,” 1.
While I examine the actions and discursive narratives of individuals within the United States and the organizational characteristics of the US administration in this chapter, other governments are equally worthy of examination with regard to their involvement in Rwanda. The decisions of the French, for example, had enormous repercussions for the situation in Rwanda, leading up to and during the violence. Their relationship with the RGF and their decision to undertake a chapter 7 UN intervention (in the form of Operation Turquoise authorized by UN Security Council Resolution 929\(^1\)), instead of strengthening and offering support to UNAMIR’s efforts, are two areas in which ethical practices might be investigated.\(^2\) Belgium is also of interest. Their foreign minister lobbied for strengthening UNAMIR’s presence and mandate when the presidential plane went down and large-scale violence was foreshadowed, but once the ten Belgium peacekeepers were killed members of the Belgium government sought instead to persuade other troop-contributing countries and members of the Security Council to advocate for complete withdrawal. This pivotal reversal is also worthy of examination at the individual and organizational levels. The United Kingdom should also be scrutinized. Its representative on the UN Security Council, Sir David Hannay, called early on for the

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\(^1\) The French intervention was limited by the Security Council to 60 days and with the stipulation that the UN Secretariat concentrate on getting UNAMIR 2 fully deployed during those two months. United Nations Security Council Resolution 929, S/RES/929 (22 June 1994).

\(^2\) Dallaire believes that the announcement of intervention by the French outside of the command of UNAMIR had the effect of increasing the violence as the genocidaires and the RGF believed that the French were coming to defend them and assist them in retaining territorial control of at least a portion of Rwanda. Dallaire recalled that “Their renewed hope and confidence had the side effect of reviving their hunt for genocide survivors, which put in further jeopardy those who remained in refuges in the few churches and public buildings that had been left untouched,” Dallaire, 2003, 426.
withdrawal of UNAMIR from Rwanda and “insisted in the Council that the word genocide should not be used in an official UN document”.

The Clinton Administration on Human Rights and the Genocide in Rwanda

The historical context against which the United States and its representatives acted with regard to the genocide in Rwanda featured a checkered past in its support for human rights. Although the Cold War provided the impetus for less attention to multilateral and bilateral human rights initiatives and, in many cases, U.S. support for governments that flagrantly committed human rights violations, the United States Congress also took the unprecedented step in 1975 of requiring that human rights practices be considered in the distribution of U.S. foreign aid, and in the 1980s, despite President Reagan’s public opposition to human rights policies, bipartisan Congressional support for international human rights was more forthcoming. In addition, the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs in the State Department was institutionally strengthened and mainstreamed. With the end of the Cold War and, especially, Bill Clinton’s presidency, the United States re-engaged further with human rights, both bilaterally and multilaterally. More broadly, the administration employed a rhetoric of foreign policy that was internationalist in tone.

Despite the ideological proclivity of the Clinton administration toward internationalism and employing American power for “good”, Rwanda was not on the

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4 Michael Ignatieff offers several different factors that contribute to this ‘paradox’ in American actions with regard to human rights. These factors align more or less with different theories of International Relations including realism, liberalism and constructivism. See: Michael Ignatieff, *American Exceptionalism and Human Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
radar of an administration that was dealing with many other international and domestic issues. Inattention did not morph into attention with the warning signs and onset of genocide in Rwanda, I argue, because the actions of individuals in the U.S. government in concert with UN bureaucrats’ forecasts of US preferences reinforced the proclivity of President Bill Clinton and his top advisors to ignore and even deny genocide in Rwanda. U.S. bureaucrats failed to advocate specifically for more attention to Rwanda and more generally for altering the U.S. position on peacekeeping that was unfolding. In describing the response of the United States to the genocide in Rwanda, Samantha Power issued this damning list of United States actions and inactions:

The United States did almost nothing to try to stop [the genocide]. Ahead of the April 6 plane crash, the United States ignored extensive early warnings about imminent mass violence. It denied Belgian requests to reinforce the peacekeeping mission. When the massacres started, not only did the Clinton administration not send troops to Rwanda to contest the slaughter, but it refused countless other options. President Clinton did not convene a single meeting of his senior foreign policy advisers to discuss U.S. options for Rwanda. His top aides rarely condemned the slaughter. The United States did not deploy its technical assets to jam Rwandan hate radio, and it did not lobby to have the genocidal Rwandan government’s ambassador expelled from the United Nations. Those steps that the United States did take had deadly repercussions. Washington demanded the withdrawal of UN peacekeepers from Rwanda and then refused to authorize the deployment of UN reinforcements.  

Inspection of the discursive evidence suggests that the United States’ reaction to the genocide in Rwanda was made possible by four narratives articulated and reinforced by individuals in the administration. These narratives were: 1) the ‘Lesson of Somalia’, 2) ‘National Interest’, 3) ‘Political Constraints’ and 4) ‘Lack of Understanding’. Individuals in the US government did not possess the sense of ethical agency and the self-reflective posture and tools of ethical reflexivity to question these dominant narratives, articulate

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alternative narratives, and confront cultural and bureaucrat impediments. Thus, even though many individuals felt that it was ethically proper to more directly address the genocide in Rwanda they did not take the action that would have assisted in the realization of other initiatives. Furthermore, the restraints that were articulated by individuals in the U.S. government were perhaps discursively magnified and fleshed out more fully as they attempted to give meaning to their actions and justify them retrospectively.

The Narrative of the ‘Lesson of Somalia’

Frequently, individuals draw on and articulate historical analogies in their cognitive efforts to make sense of a situation when making decisions or policies, but historical analogies are also employed to later justify actions that actors feel uncomfortable with. Perhaps both of these framing mechanisms were at work within the U.S. government as no historical analogy was more prominent among decision-makers in both the U.S. and the U.N. during and after the Rwandan genocide than ‘Somalia’. Particular understandings of U.S. and U.N. involvement in Somalia were invoked by individuals within the U.S. government most often to explain others’ behavior and less often to explain their own behavior. In addition, the narrative of Somalia in circulation within the U.S. government can not be neatly separated from narratives that invoke the theme of ‘political constraints’ and ‘national interest’. It was because of Somalia and the need to tie peacekeeping to U.S. national interests, individuals reasoned, that certain avenues of action with regard to Rwanda were not politically feasible.
‘Somalia’ is perhaps the most prominent theme in a series of interviews with U.S. officials that were conducted for two different Frontline documentaries on the genocide in Rwanda. Among the many different individuals in the government dealing with Rwanda the sentiment was shared that in the aftermath of ‘Somalia’ Congress had become very critical of peacekeeping and would not be supportive of the kind of mandate that would be needed if the UN were to stay in Rwanda in the midst of genocide. Whereas the U.N. force commander, General Dallaire, had interpreted the UNAMIR mandate to be inclusive of a wide range of protective activities, individuals in the U.S. government felt that the mandate no longer covered the situation on the ground and that ‘Congress’ and the ‘White House’ would be strongly opposed to a continued or more robust U.N. mission. Individuals tended to conclude that ‘Somalia’ meant that neither the administration or Congress would agree to keeping UNAMIR on the ground and so their efforts on behalf of Rwanda would be in vain.

John Shattuck, U.S. assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor, and involved in daily meetings in which Rwanda was a topic, offered ‘Somalia’ as a strong factor in the U.S. decision to pursue withdrawal of UNAMIR from Rwanda. Shattuck reported hearing “a number of administration officials…particularly people in the White House” tell him that “our principal focus has to be ‘No more Somalias’”.7 ‘Somalia’ was a “traumatic experience for the new Clinton administration”, in Shattuck’s words, and this meant, he thought, that Congress and the administration “became resistant to maintaining the kind of aggressive peacekeeping that clearly was required in Rwanda”. This sentiment was also heard from Tony Marley, Political Military Advisor for the State Department and a participant in inter-agency conferences on Rwanda. He

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7 John Shattuck, Interview by Frontline on December 16, 2003 for the episode “Ghosts of Rwanda”.
believed that within the administration, “There was no interest whatever [sic] to be involved in an African conflict – again, a result of the Somali syndrome.”

‘Somalia’ was explicitly invoked in interviews as a primary reason for U.S. actions with regard to Rwanda. Shattuck again points to Somalia as having tremendous weight in the daily meeting of assistant secretaries of state and the deputy secretary of state on April 11th when the news broke that 10 Belgian peacekeepers had been killed. Shattuck recalled that the news “evoked the image of Somalia”. Those at the meeting, according to Shattuck, felt increasing pressure to withdraw the UN force, especially from the Pentagon and, more indirectly, from Congress. Shattuck stated, “Since the U.S., following Somalia, was in the process of reviewing its role in peacekeeping operations under considerable pressure from the [U.S.] Congress, the view that the U.N. force ought to be withdrawn gathered strength pretty quickly.” Shattuck also reported that he and others presented and advocated alternative courses of action, including strengthening the U.N. force, but their arguments were not persuasive. Indeed, subsequent to this meeting, George Moose, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, recommended to his superiors that the Belgian request to withdraw not be opposed.

‘Somalia’ was invoked at higher levels as well. Madeleine Albright, United States Ambassador to the United Nations, reported that “people would have thought I was crazy” for pushing for a “large humanitarian intervention” because of the “Somalia issue”. She elaborated: “Somalia, and watching Americans be dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, was a searing event…I think it was a very troubling time, in terms

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8 Tony Marley, Interview by Frontline for the episode, “Triumph of Evil”.
9 It’s unclear from the evidence, how thoroughly these alternatives were articulated or how aggressively they were pursued.
of decision making generally.” Albright’s aide, Michael Sheehan, echoed this sentiment, noting the importance of the timing of the Rwandan genocide:

Rwanda unfolded at the time we were leaving Mogadishu…The memory of the tragedy of the U.N. peacekeeping experience [there] for the U.S. was still burning on the minds of policy-makers within the administration. And certainly the critics from the Republican side of the House were very critical of the administration’s policy in Somalia. Certainly no one was clamoring for a re-intervention into the heart of Africa.

Anthony Lake, National Security Adviser at the time, later offered the explanation that the administration failed to deal directly with Rwanda and instead focused on “the edges of the problem”. When asked why this was so, Lake responded: “I think [Rwanda] didn’t arise for us because it was almost literally inconceivable that American troops would go to Rwanda…I would think, especially in the wake of Somalia, that there was no chance that the Congress would ever have authorized funds to send American troops into Rwanda.”

Individuals also expressed the sentiment that the U.S. had mistakenly placed confidence in the United Nations to competently carry out peacekeeping missions, as evidenced by the experience in Somalia. Albright remarked: “We had lost Americans in Somalia as a result of having had faith in the functioning of a U.N. peacekeeping operation.” This attitude that the U.N. was bound to fail and the U.S. must be prepared to intervene attended the process of formulating and interpreting Presidential Decision Directive 25 for many individuals in the U.S. government, including Michael Sheehan. Others interpreted ‘Somalia’ as having raised the stakes for U.N. peacekeeping missions.

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10 Madeleine Albright, Interview by Frontline on February 25, 2004 for the episode “Ghosts of Rwanda”.
11 Michael Sheehan, Interview by Frontline on September 30 and October 1, 2003 for the episode “Ghosts of Rwanda”.
12 ibid.
13 Albright, Frontline.
The political cost of a failed peacekeeping mission was thus magnified. Prudence Bushnell, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, recalled:

[A]t the time, the U.S. was paying 33 percent of any peacekeeping operation. So there was a feeling on this side that we really needed to pay attention to where we were putting out, where we were putting money. After the Somalia debacle, we didn’t want to put money in something that was not going to be a success, both politically for President Clinton, and for the United States and the U.N. as a whole.14

George Moose recalled that before the genocide broke out there was some hesitancy to approve even an ‘easy’ peacekeeping mission, as UNAMIR was billed: “There was a lot going on, and there were concerns—certainly not only in the administration, but in the Congress—about when and where was it all going to end. Why were we obliged to be involved in or supportive of all these missions?”15

Much of the framing of decisions about Rwanda attributes the ‘lesson of Somalia’ to others, as explanations for their actions. Individuals in the U.S. government tended to see ‘Somalia’ as restricting their options through its influence on others (e.g., ‘Congress’ and ‘the administration’). Anthony Lake explicitly denies that Somalia came up for him when deciding what to do in Rwanda. In a familiar theme, it was others who were influenced by Somalia, contributing to the restrictive political atmosphere. Lake stated, “I do not recall ever saying to myself, ‘We must not go into Rwanda because of Somalia’”.16 George Moose was in the minority when he owned his own perception that Rwanda evoked Somalia, particularly when the 10 Belgian peacekeepers were killed. Moose later explained:

14 Prudence Bushnell, Interview by Frontline on September 30, 2003 for the episode “Ghosts of Rwanda”.
15 George Moose, Interview by Frontline on November 21, 2003 for the episode “Ghosts of Rwanda”.
16 Indeed, as Lake points out, he advocated staying in Somalia longer than the U.S. stayed. Still, it is not evident that this position meant that the experience in Somalia did not influence his decisions and political calculations as he intimated earlier in the interview. Anthony Lake, Interview by Frontline on December 15, 2003 for the episode “Ghosts of Rwanda”.

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If you think back a few months about what happened to our troops in Mogadishu, I certainly was not one to argue that the Belgians should be pressed or obliged to stay in Kigali and Rwanda in a situation that they just frankly had not signed up for...[Q]uite clearly the Belgians wanted to have a cover of having others leave as well, and we yielded to that request. In retrospect, I wonder if that was the right thing to do.17

As I detail later, Lake and Moose were the only individuals interviewed who questioned the Somalia narrative and their decisions with regard to Rwanda with any degree of ethical reflexivity.

The Narrative of ‘National Interest’

The narrative of ‘national interest’ consisted of the argument and belief that it was not in the interest of the United States to become involved in Rwanda, specifically, and in United Nations peacekeeping missions, generally. Individuals in the U.S. government pointed to the unimportance of much of Africa to U.S. strategic interests, the overreliance of the United Nations on the resources of the United States, and Presidential Decision Directive 25 as an indication that the administration would require that peacekeeping missions be directly tied to U.S. interests. Individuals rarely claimed to hold these beliefs themselves. Instead, they pointed to the prevalence of these beliefs among others in the U.S. government as an explanation for the failure of the U.S. to pursue options other than withdrawal of support for UNAMIR and for the slowness with which the U.S. fulfilled its commitments to the redeployment of UNAMIR (as UNAMIR II).

Mid-level individuals in the Department of State and the Pentagon found Africa of peripheral strategic interest well before the Rwandan genocide began. In the Department of State, George Moose, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, and

17 Moose.
Prudence Bushnell, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, identified Rwanda as a low priority. Moose reported that Rwanda was a “third tier” concern and both Moose and Bushnell recalled that within Africa other countries, such as Liberia and Burundi, were of much more concern than Rwanda. Bushnell noted a U.S. ‘historical interest’ in Liberia that was absent with Rwanda. James Woods, Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs at the Department of Defense, recalled being instructed to take Rwanda-Burundi off a list of potential serious crises that the incoming Clinton administration might face because there was not a national interest at stake in that region (spring of 1993). John Shattuck, U.S. assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor, also saw Rwanda as having little priority in the administration given the multiple other crises that were occurring in Bosnia and Haiti and the question of China’s “most favored nation” status. There was “no breathing room” for individuals in the bureaucracy to take up and “champion” the issue of the Rwandan genocide, Shattuck noted. Michael Sheehan, aide to U.N. ambassador Madeleine Albright, recalled that “Rwanda was one of about fifteen or sixteen peacekeeping operations [and] was probably down in the lower tier in terms of attention from senior policy makers.”

Individuals also pointed to the policy review of peacekeeping that was underway as the Rwandan genocide unfolded as contributing to U.S. actions with regard to Rwanda. This process resulted in Presidential Decision Directive 25 (PDD 25). Several individuals attributed the policies outlined in PDD 25 to Somalia and to an incompetent U.N. that, in the post-Cold War world, dragged the U.S. into hazardous military

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18 Moose; Bushnell.
19 Bushnell; James Wood, Interview by Frontline for the episode “Triumph of Evil”.
20 Shattuck.
21 Sheehan.
adventures. It was the UN’s fault, according to this narrative, that Somalia was disastrous and the U.S. was going to protect itself from UN missteps in the future. Here, it was the reputation of the U.S., military resources, and soldiers’ lives that were at stake. James Woods later explained that Somalia was the proximate factor for a review of criteria that peacekeeping would have to meet for U.S. involvement and even approval of UN peacekeeping operations. Woods understood this document as “establishing a formalized doctrine” to ensure that a ‘Somalia’ would not happen again by tying U.S. decisions on peacekeeping to a “strong identifiable national interest”. PDD 25, in Woods’ view, “crystallized a growing body of resistance to these types of potentially dangerous humanitarian interventions, which was widespread in our own military and, for that matter, on Capitol Hill”.22

John Shattuck also pointed to the peacekeeping review process as a factor for Rwanda. It was, in part, because of this process that the “view that the U.N. force ought to be withdrawn gathered strength pretty quickly” after the Belgian peacekeepers were killed. PDD 25, according to Shattuck, sent a “bureaucratic signal” that the administration was not interested in Rwanda. When PDD 25 was announced on May 3rd Shattuck was in the midst of meetings with African leaders to gauge interest in a regional peacekeeping mission. Shattuck felt that “the timing could not have been more horrendous” and resulted in a “bureaucratic clampdown on any prospect of U.S. support for that regional peacekeeping operation that I thought I might be able to sell when I came back from Rwanda.”23

22 Woods.
23 Shattuck.
Others specifically stressed that the process that culminated in PDD 25 started before the Somalia debacle happened. Michael Sheehan, for example, noted that PDD 25 was the result of the United Nations relying too heavily on the resources and the will of the United States to offer help in crisis situations. Peacekeeping operations ballooned after the end of the Cold War and the Security Council, Sheehan described, passed “empty resolutions” without the commitments and “force” to fulfill the authorized mandates. Sheehan, having worked on the promulgation of PDD 25 and then acting as an assistant to U.N. ambassador Albright, believed that U.S. actions in the Security Council in April of 1994 with regard to Rwanda (the instructions given to him and Albright) were guided by the desire to “keep the Security Council on track in terms of how it was going to manage this crisis, to make sure that it could respond appropriately and not just pass empty resolutions…[W]e were very aware of that as the situation unfolded in the middle of April.” He later explained:

PDD-25 is released right before this situation unfolds. It was a very careful document that laid out the ground rules for how the U.S. would get involved in peacekeeping. [It] basically said only when the national interest is at stake, which would include a gross humanitarian situation, or other interests that you would match mandates with resources and will and you wouldn’t throw troops into willy-nilly situations.  

Inaction on Rwanda, Sheehan opined, was the result of this larger pattern of behavior in the United Nations Security Council compounded by Somalia and the lack of political will among the administration and Congress that followed.

In another manifestation of ‘national interest’, individuals in the U.S. government unapologetically and singularly focused their efforts on getting American nationals out of Rwanda, including embassy and other government staff, when the genocide broke out.

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24 Sheehan.
Describing the aftermath of the downing of the Rwandan presidential plane and outbreaks of fighting, assassinations and the killing of civilians, Prudence Bushnell noted that in this context, “Our greatest concern was the safety of Americans”. ²⁵ In response to the interviewer’s question inquiring how the decision to evacuate all Americans from Rwanda came about Moose replied: “My sense is that it was understood the first thing we were going to have to do was get folks out of there.” ²⁶ Despite the requests from the U.S. embassy in Rwanda by David Rawson and Laura Lane to stay in Rwanda and potentially provide safe havens for Rwandans, Moose was concerned that American lives were at risk because of the killing of 10 Belgian peacekeepers. There was no concern expressed about whether Rwandans might be at risk and no discussion of whether the American embassy staff should accept some risk. When David Rawson protested the evacuation decision Prudence Bushnell replied to Rawson, “Not your call” and failed to raise this issue to superiors. Bushnell later passionately defended the decision to evacuate: “We in the Department of State and the Foreign Service feel very, very strongly about our charge to look after our fellow citizens, and by God, that was the issue, and no one was going to argue anything else with us. I frankly felt as strongly about that as anyone else at more senior levels”. ²⁷

In contrast to the concern for American lives there was little attention to the safety of Rwandans working for the American embassy. There was no discussion of whether or not to evacuate them despite evidence indicating that they would likely be killed. Calls were only later made, well after the evacuation, to UNAMIR command requesting that the U.N. try to track them down. When asked by the interviewer about Rwandans on the

²⁵ Bushnell.
²⁶ Moose.
²⁷ Bushnell.
U.S. embassy staff, Bushnell replied: “most of our American missions are staffed by very loyal, very dedicated Foreign Service nationals, and in times of crisis, we say goodbye…It is not something I apologize for; it is a reality that is part of the searing and wrenching aspect of being a Foreign Service officer…[W]hen a situation becomes dangerous, we look after our own.” After the evacuation was complete the task force on Rwanda headed by Bushnell actually disbanded for a time.

The Narrative of ‘Political Constraints’

The third discursive theme dominant among individuals within the U.S. government in explaining U.S. actions vis-à-vis the Rwandan genocide was that of ‘political constraints’. According to this narrative U.S. policymakers’ hands were tied by the political climate. Individuals pointed to the preferences of other actors such as ‘Congress’, the ‘administration’ and the ‘American public’. U.S. government officials felt that there wasn’t much they could do unless the preferences or priorities of these actors changed. Furthermore, there were other issues that drowned out Rwanda, according to several individuals, making Rwandans twice victimized—to genocide and to the contingencies of history.

John Shattuck reported that upon his return from various African capitals to investigate the potential for a regional peacekeeping force he discovered that “the system was on overload”. He elaborated:

[Warren] Christopher was totally preoccupied with both China and the Middle East. About 10 days later, President Clinton had to make his decision on the most favored nation status for China and the human rights issues, and I was of course going to be riding on all that, too. [We were] deeply involved in changing [the] Haiti policy and making it much more robust. One of the untold stories about

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28 ibid.
Rwanda is the terrible tragedy of the timing of Rwanda. I believe, had the Rwanda genocide occurred a year or a year and a half later, the response might well have been different.\textsuperscript{29}

With all of this happening Shattuck characterized the mood in the state department as “grim” and “resigned” to little significant U.S. action in Rwanda. Prudence Bushnell also saw limited options for action on Rwanda because of the political climate and thus she curbed her expectations from the beginning of her involvement in Rwanda policy. The focus, she recalled, was thus on the peace process: “We had put hope in the Arusha peace process. That was our winning horse...because again, of a great amount of thinking in Washington before we were going to put resources behind much of anything in Africa that had to do with peace.”\textsuperscript{30}

Even Anthony Lake, among the most powerful individuals in making U.S. foreign policy on Rwanda, painted a picture of political constraint. Though he admitted that for an issue like Rwandan genocide to have gotten attention it would have taken someone at the highest levels to champion the cause, he pointed to Congress as an impediment (they never would have approved) and stressed, “There’s no question in my mind that, in the end, the president would have had to push it.” Lake also acknowledged that during a meeting with human rights activists (including Alison des Forges of Human Rights Watch and a Rwandan human rights activist who escaped the genocide as it was happening), a couple of weeks after the initiation of large-scale violence against civilians, he told them that his hands were tied unless they “made more noise”.\textsuperscript{31} Even though Anthony Lake was one of a few most relevant officials for making and influencing the

\textsuperscript{29} Shattuck.  
\textsuperscript{30} Bushnell.  
\textsuperscript{31} Lake.
policy decisions with regard to Rwanda he shifted the onus of doing something for Rwanda onto the public and onto human rights activists.\textsuperscript{32}

\textit{‘Lack of Understanding’}

A fourth narrative at work among individuals in the U.S. government can be described as a ‘lack of understanding’. According to this narrative the United States did not know enough about the genocide soon enough to take meaningful and effective action, and their misinterpretation of Rwanda meant that the efforts the U.S. did take were at least somewhat misguided.

This narrative emerged quite strongly in an interview Madeleine Albright gave for the Frontline documentary “Ghosts of Rwanda”. Albright, then United States Ambassador to the United Nations, recalled:

\begin{quote}
[T]his was an almost volcanic explosion of killing and terror and horror that had been clearly planned in some way without much knowledge of the international community, and without it really being brought to the attention of the international community at high enough levels to do something about—It was secretly planned genocide…and then a volcanic explosion of this horror. This is my firm belief; that even if we had been able to get anybody there, it could not have been stopped, because it was just so—Volcanic is the only word.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

When asked about the lessons of Rwanda and the sentiment, “Never again” Albright reiterated how ignorance was bound up with lack of opportunity for meaningful action: “I think ‘Never again’ definitely applies, but at the same time—I have to make so clear to you that, at the time, people just did not have the sense that this was happening in the

\textsuperscript{32} According to des Forges, individuals dealing with international organizations in the National Security Council (e.g., Susan Rice and Joseph Wilson) were also concerned about how a humanitarian debacle in Rwanda could harm U.N. peacekeeping writ large because of intense clamoring within Congress by some Republican representatives about the follies of peacekeeping and the dangers of U.S. involvement in the U.N. Alison des Forges, Interview by Frontline on October 1, 2003.

\textsuperscript{33} Albright.
proportions that it was. By the time that it happened, you couldn’t do anything about it.” 34 Although Albright points mostly to the nature of the genocide itself in much of the interview, she also alludes to failings of others, particularly in the United Nations: “there was very little information about Rwanda brought to the Security Council…It didn’t show up very often in intelligence summaries. There were not very frequent reports about it.” 35

Others in the U.S. government also invoked this narrative of misunderstanding and the consequences it had for the United States’ position on the violence in Rwanda. This misunderstanding began even before the genocide broke out. David Rawson, U.S. ambassador to Rwanda stated: “we didn’t fully understand what was going on; we didn’t fully appreciate the situation…Certainly we were focused very much on the culture of peace, trying to make [it] happen, and [we] weren’t – from what I’ve seen up to this point, at least – not all that aware of the darker side that revealed itself in the genocide.” 36 Prudence Bushnell noted: “I think that what was happening in Rwanda was very complicated, and certainly beyond my understanding.” 37 George Moose connected a fundamental misunderstanding of the situation in Rwanda to an inordinate amount of energy and emphasis by the U.S. on the peace process: “Where we erred seriously was not understanding better the dynamic that was taking place inside of Rwanda, and the motives and the intentions of the Hutu extremist groups.” When the Belgian peacekeepers were killed this misunderstanding became apparent to Moose: “It, more than anything else, brought home the fact that this was not the situation that we thought

34 ibid.
35 ibid.
36 David Rawson, Interview by Frontline on October 5, 2003 for the episode “Ghosts of Rwanda”.
37 Bushnell.
we were going to be dealing with. We thought this whole thing was premised on a political agreement [and] a commitment on both sides to respect that agreement…What folks signed up [for] was a peacekeeping operation in a ‘permissive environment,’ where you had parties who were committed to working with you to maintain that peace”.

Severely undercutting his own agency Moose also stated: “I think frankly that our major mistakes were the mistakes we made before it started. Had we recognized better, had we understood better, had we analyzed more correctly what was going on beforehand, we might have been able to make a difference. By April 6, I think we were severely limited in what we could have done to actually preventing this from going the way it went.”38

**Evaluation of Dominant U.S. Narratives**

Despite expressions of abhorrence and condemnation of the violence and genocide in Rwanda, individuals in the U.S. government failed to marshal ethical agency to critically evaluate the dominant narratives in circulation and push the limits of possible action, as a global phronimos would do. Though many of the individuals featured in this analysis had a desire to do more they tended to place responsibility for acting elsewhere (Congress, the White House, the American people, the United Nations, or the ‘international community’) and did not take risks or assume leadership in advocating and supporting alternative courses of action.

Those who were motivated by the future of peacekeeping made an ethical judgment (peacekeeping as a practice is more important than any one peacekeeping mission) but by failing to engage in the critical rationality of ethical reflexivity they failed to see and entertain several other ethical possibilities: 1) that failure to intervene in the

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38 Moose.
face of genocide might do more to harm to the practice of peacekeeping, 2) that critical
reflection on the ethical landscape of the situation in Rwanda might call for action with
risk, and 3) that leadership and creative action could challenge the salience of the
dominant narratives they perceived, thus creating the conditions for mounting efforts to
respond to the genocide. Instead, by repeating the dominant narratives that explained
their perceived lack of ethical agency, the narratives were given greater force. These
narratives were so effective that several individuals successfully reinterpreted a policy
document—PDD 25—to align with their broader understanding of the political situation.

Though the executive policy review began well before the killing of Americans in
Somalia, many individuals in the U.S. government attributed the formulation of PDD 25
to Somalia and thus were able to interpret PDD 25 as having the aim of preventing the
type of humanitarian intervention that might be entertained for Rwanda.

The absence of ethical reflexivity among individuals in the United States government
left them without the sense of ethical agency along with other ethical resources needed to
critically evaluate the narratives in circulation and overcome the challenges of acting
from within a bureaucracy. Instead, these individuals employed the scripts and framings
typical of the social form of bureaucracy and its dysfunctions.

Individuals repeatedly resorted to emphasizing the bureaucratic rules and roles as
constraints on their agency, even at the highest levels, and parsed out and discarded the

39 In addition to statements reviewed in the previous section, U.S. government officials referred activists
who met with them to others in the government, claiming that they could not change U.S. policy. As the
genocide broke out Alison des Forges of Human Rights Watch recalled visiting several individuals in the
State Department, including Prudence Bushnell and Madeleine Albright. Though des Forges and her
colleagues received a sympathetic response, they were repeatedly informed that they needed to visit others
further up the organizational hierarchy. Specifically, Albright advised des Forges to visit the National
Security Council. Though des Forges was able to secure meetings with several individuals at the National
Security Council including Donald Steinberg, Susan Rice, Joseph Wilson and National Security Adviser
Anthony Lake, very little came of these meetings. Human Rights Watch was only able to secure agreement
need to make ethical judgments by discursively separating the ‘personal’ from the
‘professional’. David Rawson, for example, stated:

There’s kind of two different levels. One is, of course, great personal sorrow at
friends that we knew, and when we came back and learned of their deaths and so
forth… At another level, I was there as an official of the United States government,
trying to carry out the policies that were given to me. There had to be a very close
focus on what it is we’re supposed to do today in order to do what we had been
instructed to do. So our preoccupation was often in carrying out instructions, even as
we were being personally really ripped apart by what was happening around us.40

Prudence Bushnell’s response to the unfolding genocide at multiple points in the
formulation of U.S. policy on this matter also exemplifies the discourse of bureaucratic
rules and roles. Bushnell repeatedly justified inaction on her part through reference to
how decisions are made in a bureaucracy. In her words, the decisions were already made,
or were made by someone other than her; and, having been already made, could not be
challenged or changed. Despite the strong emotional salience the violence in Rwanda
struck with Bushnell as evidenced in a meeting with human rights activists, conversations
with Rwandan leaders and an interview conducted ten years after the genocide, in all of
these interactions Bushnell’s remarks evince that she could not envision ethically-based
action that would challenge or stretch what she understood to be her role and the rules of
the bureaucracy. Furthermore, Bushnell very narrowly interpreted her role and the rules
in a way that deflated her agency in responding to the events in Rwanda. Roles and rules
are always interpreted and this regard Bushnell’s interpretation denied the agency that she
might have had in this situation. The result was that Bushnell characterized her role in
the unfolding of the events passively, as a bystander.

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40 Rawson.
In her interview with Frontline, Bushnell continuously refers to decisions as already made, including the decision to evacuate, the decision to leave behind foreign nationals who worked for the American embassy, the decision to withdraw the entire UNAMIR force, the revised decision to leave a small number of UNAMIR peacekeepers on the ground, and decisions and tactics in other parts of the government that delayed assistance to Rwanda. Not only did Bushnell view decisions in this way, but she seems to have expected solicitation of her opinion rather than taking the initiative to make her voice heard. For example, when the interviewer asks whether the inter-agency task force on Rwanda that Bushnell headed had “any input” into the decision to withdraw the UNAMIR force, Bushnell replied: “No. Never asked. To this day, I have no idea who participated in that conversation.” Yet, General Dallaire protested this decision and Ambassador Albright, after listening to Security Council debate, balked at supporting a Security Council resolution of full withdrawal. Bushnell’s response, on the other hand, worked to silence some of the potential protest from the African Affairs specialists. When asked of her reaction to the decision to withdraw Bushnell replied: “I think I felt, what they say—the wrenching of the gut…Then it was only reinforced when I saw the expression on the faces of my colleagues who really understood what was going on in Rwanda. They started to push back on me, and I said, ‘It’s too late. That train has left the station.’” It was not a done deal, though, as the protests of Dallaire and Albright were effective in at least keeping some peacekeepers on the ground. To be sure, the inter-agency task force and individuals in the State Department supported this decision and worked on its logistics, but it was not a compromise that they had raised and they did

41 Bushnell.
42 ibid.
mount a serious effort to advocate keeping all UNAMIR forces on the ground. Had the voices of the State Department staff in African Affairs been louder, more assertive and more creative in getting the attention of the ‘higher-ups’ a different outcome may have been possible. Instead there was contentedness to predict failure. As Bushnell stated, they “were implementing a policy of non-intervention”.43

Rule-following became an end rather than a means as bureaucrats such as Bushnell focused on implementing policies handed down rather than evaluating policies on an ethical basis. Bushnell sat day after day in inter-agency meetings investigating options like getting African states to commit peacekeepers, jamming the radio of the hate station in Rwanda, and securing APCs that the U.S. committed to UNAMIR II. Bushnell personally called leaders of the Rwandan government and the RPF to tell them to “stop the killing” and declare a cease-fire as the first step to renewing the peace process. Yet, during all of this Bushnell did little to change the policy “parameters” that she felt bound by. Other potential actions that would require “U.S. government resources or policy commitment required senior-level approval” and when asked by the Frontline interviewer whether Bushnell had ever called the Secretary of State she replied, “It never occurred to me. I certainly went with George Moose and briefed the secretary, but we are a very hierarchical organization…Somebody of a deputy assistant secretary level doesn’t get on the telephone to [give] her opinion to the secretary of state or the director of the NSC, especially since we knew they were getting the information”.44 Yet, Bushnell knew that ‘informational memos’, like the one she sent to Secretary Christopher (as acting assistant secretary for African affairs) expressing concern that there might be large-scale killings,

43 ibid.
44 ibid.
often get ignored in a pile of paper on the Secretary’s desk and need follow-up to get noticed. Bushnell, Moose and other bureaucrats focused their energy on working “within the parameters”. By building a routine that featured phone calls to Rwandan leaders, frequent interagency meetings and bureaucratic procedures, they were not attune to the creative and bold ways in which they could take risks to enact the principles and values of the organization (the State Department, the United States) and their own judgments of right and good action.45

Glimpses of Ethical Reflexivity within the United States?

Thus far in the analysis of this chapter, individual actions, bureaucratic dysfunctions and dominant narratives in the United States government about what Rwandan meant all point in the direction of inaction and even an ethical narrative that made reflexivity unlikely. Yet, showcasing the power of individual interpretation, even in the US government some individuals broke with this narrative and were forthcoming with assistance, including an NCO (non-commissioned officer) in the Pentagon who expedited a long-lingering APC request.46 Two U.S. senators, Paul Simon and Jim Jeffords, actively challenged the dominant narratives about Rwanda, most notably in a letter to President Clinton. In a letter dated May 13, 1994 these two senators cited their dialogue with Rwandan refugees, General Dallaire and others as informing their recommendation

45 Even those U.S. officials with more power tended to minimize their agency with reference to their ‘roles’. Madeleine Albright, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. stated: “There’s no way to describe exactly that the role of the U.N. ambassador is not the same as—While you are a cabinet member and a member of the principals committee, it’s not quite the same as being secretary of state or national security adviser. So I think they are very hard roles,” Albright. Albright mentioned several times in the Frontline interview that she was not the Secretary of State, but she did not make an effort to talk to the Secretary of State or to the National Security Advisor. Though she regretted not speaking up, she didn’t believe that it would have made a difference. Albright saw herself as a powerless actor in the U.S. government machinery.
46 Dallaire, 2003, 331-32. Dallaire wrote, “We got more and faster support from one sergeant than from the rest of the United States government and armed forces combined”.

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for greater U.S. efforts to address the slaughter in Rwanda. Anticipating the continued U.S. strategy of delay, the senators urged timely action to implement their recommended measures which included withholding future assistance to Rwanda, discouraging arms imports, contributing money and resources to UNAMIR, and pressing the UN Security Council to approve an increase in the number of peacekeeping troops by at least 5,000 to “stop the massacres”, protect civilians, and deliver humanitarian aid. Rebuffing the rhetoric of ‘national interest’ and the claim that the US was overextended internationally, these two senators stressed the importance of “a foreign policy of leadership” at a time when “human life is at stake”.

In another act of ethical reflexivity John Shattuck, after seeing from the air thousands of bodies floating down the Kagera river into Lake Victoria and thousands of refugees flowing out of Rwanda used the phrase “acts of genocide” in a press conference during a stop in Geneva. Though he was instructed before his trip to not use this term Shattuck felt that there was a “legal obligation” for the U.S. to take action. He justified this decision by referring to the ‘Genocide Convention’. He had “read the Genocide Convention, which the U.S. was a party to” and it “require[d] the parties who have signed that convention to do what they can to prevent genocide”. Not only did Shattuck draw a connection between formalized value commitments and U.S. policy decisions, he also examined his own actions as a government official and took the risk of disapproval and rebuke to try to bring about a change in policy. In his ethical reasoning, Shattuck

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47 Notably, this letter was printed on the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations letterhead. It can be found at: http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB117/RW48.pdf.
48 Shattuck.
49 In contrast, George Moose remarked at one point in his interview with Frontline: “I understand the concerns and many of us are not lawyers. We don’t walk around with copies of the Genocide Convention in our pockets, and most of us were coming to it for the very firth time.” Moose felt it was shameful that individuals in the U.S. government didn’t come together sooner to make the determination that genocide
looked to an ethical source beyond the dominant narratives in circulation within his institutional context and was thus able to draw upon and articulate a morality that could potentially resonate with others in the U.S. government.

Still, even when the U.S. government finally admitted that genocide was occurring in Rwanda and backed the deployment of a stronger UNAMIR force (known as UNAMIR 2), the lack of ethical reflexivity among individuals in the U.S. government continued. U.S. proposals and efforts for UNAMIR 2 were made without much consideration of how Rwandans could best be assisted and without taking into account context. Instead, concerns focused on keeping US troops outside of UN command, minimizing risk of harm to US troops and keeping the mandate for UNAMIR 2 weak. As a result, the authorization process for UNAMIR 2 was protracted while General Dallaire and his peacekeepers attempted to buy time and keep the refugee crisis from exploding into a regional conflagration that would be difficult to repair. The US initially proposed that UNAMIR 2 not set up “safe sites” in areas with large concentrations of displaced Rwandans but instead establish a “large safe zone” in Rwanda’s periphery to make the troops safer. Dallaire argued that, contrary to Kurdistan, this would not work because Rwandans would not be able to make it past the militias to the safe zone.

Among the critical matters for the US was the issue of whether UNAMIR 2 would be authorized to ‘ensure’ or ‘promote’ stability in Rwanda. Madeleine Albright lobbied the Security Council for the language of ‘promotion’. But while this might minimize the obligation of the US to involvement in Rwanda it weakened the very mission they sought to support and left those on the ground, including General Dallaire, unclear about what was occurring in Rwanda, yet with this remark he also dismisses the notion that he and others (unless they were lawyers) had any responsibility to engage in a process of ethical reasoning over genocide.
their mandate authorized them to do.50 This is a classic case of micro-management that threatened to make ineffective the UN and the US troops that were to be deployed. On June 2, 1994 when UNAMIR was scheduled to have 4,600 peacekeepers deployed it only had 503 and its deployment was not completed until December of 1994 when the genocide and civil war had been over for six months.

Consequently, much of the aid was distributed by air and the refugees in Goma, Zaire (which included many of the genocidaires) were assisted to the neglect of displaced Rwandans in the HPZ. The United States and NGOs created a situation of ‘over-aid’, as Dallaire described it, in Goma, while Rwandans still in Rwanda were still in dire need of aid.51 While the U.S. mission was being billed by the U.S. media as an effort “to set up a relief network to encourage Rwandan refugees to return home from their horrific camps in Zaire” that would consist of relief stations from Zaire to Kigali, it appears that U.S. officials in the State Department and Clinton administration officials became nervous about potential U.S. military casualties and opted instead for airdrops of food and aid.52 US troops were based mainly in Goma and Entebbe and those who were in Kigali were confined to the airport. The Americans spurned requests from General Dallaire for assistance including emergency casualty evacuation to Kigali hospitals and lending bulk-water carrying trucks to alleviate a major water shortage among the Rwandan population.53

50 For Dallaire’s perspective on this issue see Dallaire, 2003, 505-6.
51 ibid., 477-78.
52 See Dallaire, 2003, chapter 15. Dallaire cites U.S. media coverage in the Washington Post that was sent to him from DPKO in preparation for the U.S. mission. Later DPKO cautioned Dallaire that the UN’s plan was encountering some resistance from Washington, ibid., 2003, 487-89.
53 ibid., 497-98. Dallaire summarized the US effort Rwanda thusly: “the Americans, with all their resources, sat inside the perimeter of the Kigali airport, and though they helped us bring our troops in and out, they did little else.” The Americans’ refusal to operate in Rwanda was not likely a consideration of
Not only were officials in the US government continuing to imagine and invoke U.S. casualties in Somalia, there were other bureaucratic impediments that contributed to the largely ineffective U.S. mission. The State Department, for example, was focused on its concerns that a presence in Kigali could be interpreted as imprimatur for the new Rwandan government before a determination could be made about whether the government was protecting human rights.\textsuperscript{54} The absurdity of this reasoning is all too apparent—foregoing humanitarian efforts that would benefit millions of Rwandans and potentially stem future conflict because the new government may or may not have a good human rights record in the future. Yet, U.S. officials were not able to effectively confront the impetus to fall back on bureaucratic rules and procedures to recognize the paradoxes of their actions. Ethical reflexivity, with its emphasis on navigating back and forth between thought and action could provide a compass for drawing out and evaluating alternatives for action that extend farther into the future than short-term calculations.

In March of 1998 President Clinton visited Rwanda and gave a speech that many interpreted as an apology. In it, Clinton stated: “We come here today partly in recognition of the fact that we in the United States and the world community did not do as much as we could have and should have done to try to limit what occurred in Rwanda.” Clinton went on to list the mistakes that the U.S. had made, including not acting quickly enough, mismanaging the refugee camps and refusing to name the violence ‘genocide’. Yet, in many ways, Clinton’s apology reenacted the dominant policy narratives that allowed inaction in the first place and exhibited a distinct lack of ethical reflexivity. Clinton stated to Rwandans: “It may seem strange to you here, cost since they paid ten times the amount for their Goma efforts ($300 million) as they would have for UNAMIR 2 ($30 million).

\textsuperscript{54}ibid., 489.
especially the many of you who lost members of your family, but all over the world there were people like me sitting in offices, day after day after day, who did not fully appreciate the depth and the speed with which you were being engulfed by this unimaginable terror.” The themes of a ‘lack of understanding’ and a political incapacity to respond make meaning of the United States’ failure to respond, rather than notions of responsibility and ethical agency.

Though Clinton was unable to publicly recognize the ways in which the United States had downplayed their ethical agency, failed to recognize the multiplicity of responsibility and neglected to critically engage the nexus of thought and action, the Rwanda experience likely had a significant effect on U.S. foreign policy under Clinton. John Shattuck, who had accompanied President Clinton to Rwanda and helped draft the apology speech (with Sandy Berger, national security adviser and secretary of state, and others), also perceived a ‘hollowness’ to the trip that he attributed to “the enormous gap between what had actually happened and this apology that came four years later, which of course could not restore the 800,000 people who were killed.” Still, Shattuck continued, he believed that the Clinton administration had found a lesson from Rwanda that then informed human rights policy for the remainder of his term:

I think Clinton and others in the administration came a long way from the days when Rwanda did seem to be a distant place that really we just couldn’t do anything about – to actively and aggressively engaging with other countries to stop human rights abuses and killings in places like Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo and East Timor. So in that sense, the apology was not hollow. It actually symbolized a fundamental change in the thinking of the president himself, and certainly many others.55

55 Shattuck.
Yet, we must also ask how a fuller recognition and practice of ethical reflexivity might have enabled U.S. officials to more aptly deal with the ethical issues that came up in responding to these humanitarian crises.

Finally, several years later, Anthony Lake, President Clinton’s National Security Advisor during the Rwandan genocide, retrospectively exercised a degree of ethical reflexivity. In a 2003 interview Lake was questioned for a Frontline documentary on the Rwanda genocide. Though Lake notes the failures of others to take the Rwandan genocide seriously, at several points during the interview he readily recognizes his own responsibility, particularly in light of his professional capacity and that of the U.S. to do more for Rwandans during the genocide and to potentially intervene even with U.S. forces. Noting that PDD 25 and lack of support made it seem “impossible to contemplate American intervention” Lake then stated:

My great regret is, again, that we and I did not say, “Let’s test the limits of this possibility. Too many people are dying. We cannot accept that this is inconceivable. I want to see a more rigorous analysis of the answers to the questions in PDD 25.” I was in more of a position to do it, but I didn’t do it, any more than editorial writers and NGOs, other governments, the U.N., Secretariat, anybody.56

Even though Lake qualifies his regrets by emphasizing the responsibilities of others for the outcome in Rwanda, he does recognize the multiplicity of responsibility and that his responsibility was among the greatest given his ability. He was also able to envision alternative courses of action and his potential agency in bringing them to fruition. George Moose also later recognized his unique responsibility to Rwanda given his capacities as a U.S. official and the possibility for a different outcome: “Rwanda is different. It’s different because of the scale and the magnitude of the disaster. It’s

56 Lake.
different because we were there; we were involved. We did have the possibility of seeing things and understanding things in a different way, and had we done so, it is conceivable that we might have been able to do something different.”

Lake even questioned fundamental discursive concepts and interrogated their meaning in 2003 when he stated a lesson he had learned from Rwanda: “to remember that the substance of foreign policy is not only abstract national interest, but in the end, the reality of what you are working with is human lives. And this was a disaster in those terms.” And, unlike many other U.S. officials interviewed about Rwanda, Lake did not continue to accept the bounds of possibility that were envisioned in 1994, asking why he and others did not question and push against the boundaries of the possible. Retrospectively, Lake and Moose articulated a conception of agency that characterized the *global phronimos*.

**Conclusion**

Curiously, though many individuals both in the United Nations and in the United States attributed to the U.S. an unwillingness to act because of how they felt about the recent events in Somalia and because of the importance of ‘national interest’, examination of the discursive evidence seems to demonstrate that not many individuals actually *believed* that Somalia should matter for Rwanda or that ‘national interest’ was an appropriate metric for decision-making, at least for Rwanda. This demonstrates the power of discourse—when a certain narrative is repeated, even if it is not genuinely subscribed to by the speaker, it takes on more power than it otherwise would. Recognizing this discursive power is a necessary step for individuals to be able to articulate alternative narratives. If
their interpretation is picked up and subscribed to by others it begins to retain its own power and can challenge dominant narratives. In addition, we have seen in the case of the United States and the Rwandan genocide that ethical self-awareness, critical rationality and dialogue with others were sorely lacking.

While many individuals within the U.S. government wanted to do something about the genocide in Rwanda they felt powerless, noting that their position and voice did not matter and they could do little in the face of others’ preferences. Individuals did not consider alternative actions such as going around the chain of command, leaks, or resigning. Instead of taking leadership and creative measures to challenge dominant narratives, they repeated the narratives that did not resonate with them, paradoxically giving them greater force. They also built bureaucratic routines that enabled them to achieve distance from the events of Rwanda and that ordered their actions and gave them meaning. These individuals lacked ‘ethical self-awareness’ and were not ‘complete moral selves’, separating the ‘personal’ from the ‘professional’ to understand their duties, obligations and responsibilities.

As I have detailed, there were just a few individuals who exercised reflexivity in the U.S. government. In one of these cases, the individual, John Shattuck (U.S. assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor) drew on the external resource of the Genocide Convention, which he read, to determine that genocide was happening in Rwanda and first used the term “acts of genocide” in a press conference in Geneva after flying over Rwanda. Others were later genuinely apologetic (Anthony Lake and George Moose) and were able to look back at times to acknowledge their shortcomings. Others were not. Though the U.S. eventually recognized the genocide in Rwanda and helped
redeploy UNAMIR 2, I have shown how individuals continued to lack ethical reflexivity with a lack of contextual awareness and little consideration of Rwandans’ actual needs. Even during President Clinton’s later ‘apology’ during a trip to Rwanda, dominant narratives were repeated including a ‘lack of understanding’ and political incapacity to respond (due to the speed of the genocide). Individuals within the U.S. government seemed unable to recognize the ways in which they had downplayed their ethical agency and that there might be multiple points of responsibility rather than a unitary ‘international community’ with a single will.
Conclusion: Authorial Reflexivity

The Proposal: The Promise of ‘Ethical Reflexivity’ as a Practice of International Politics

The practice proposed here, that of ‘ethical reflexivity’, might be seen as part of the ‘practice turn’ in international relations. It would be audacious to attempt some kind of authoritative definition of ‘practice’ given the diversity of its conceptualization within this literature.1 I will, however, note some key similarities and differences with specific works. First, ‘ethical reflexivity’ as a ‘practice’ is, in its very formulation, subversive of practices that feature ‘rules’ and that are based on tacit knowledge or what Pouliot refers to as “inarticulate know-how that makes what is to be done self-evident or commonsensical”.2 While ‘ethical reflexivity’ features a process and an ‘attitude’, both are directed toward interrogation that potentially alters and makes less stable rules and tacit knowledge. Lene Hansen’s description of ‘practice’ as inter-textual discourse wherein there are always contradictions and slippages is not far from the fissures and inconsistencies between thought and action that are identified and examined through ethical reflexivity. Yet Hansen also characterizes change in practices as difficult to achieve: “to argue policies that radically break with these constructions is not impossible, but it is a daunting task, in particular when political opposition can mobilize these

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historically (re)produced constructions”.

Ethical reflexivity attempts to create the conditions under which such change is more rather than less likely.

Rather than the literature on ‘practices’ in international relations, I would identify my dissertation as closer to the scholarship of the late 1980s and the 1990s in international relations that challenged the scientific and rationalist assumptions of structural realism and behavioralist approaches by bringing attention to the importance of language and agency for studying international politics in what is known as the “rhetorical or linguistic turn”.

It is important to note, however, that a great deal of constructivist work in international relations over the last twenty years has focused on agency and structure in a way that analytically (and sometimes theoretically) privileges structure over agency, as documented in chapter two. As François Debrix argues, “the importance of agency to new meanings and the discovery of new possibilities for politics cannot be dissociated from the rediscovery of language as an investigative and transformative tool”.

Even though the more structuralist variants of constructivism frequently draw on Anthony Giddens’ structuration theory, I turn to a more neglected aspect of Anthony Giddens’ theorizing in developing the practice of ethical reflexivity. Giddens emphasized the importance of rules and the tacit understandings of ‘practical consciousness’ but portrayed the quotidian constitution of agency and structure as complicated by reflexivity. Reflexivity, for Giddens, means that ‘social norms and routines are fragile’ because of the active interpretations of individuals who are capable

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4 Such authors include James Der Derian, Michael Shapiro, Nicholas Onuf and Friedrich Kratochwil.
of understanding “what they do while they do it”. 6 Yet, even Giddens found these occasions of reflexivity to be somewhat exceptional in their actual occurrence. This is because actors often feel compelled to do something about the mismatch between thought and action when their disjuncture is made apparent as deeply disturbing to their identity, in moments of ‘ontological crisis’. Giddens’ work and the IR scholarship that has drawn on it is particularly compelling for my proposal of ‘ethical reflexivity’ because it demonstrates that actors can engage questions that address the relationship between thought and action. 7 In fact, Giddens argued for a modernity that rejects notions of fundamental truths, particularly moral truths, in favor of contingency, fallibilism and reflexivity.

The central endeavor of this dissertation has been to develop a practice of ethics that has promise for achieving ethical action in the context of a world that lacks objective and universal moral precepts or a world in which these precepts can not be known; these dilemmas of the modern age are, respectively, ontological and epistemological. My ethical exploration of international politics in this dissertation worked from this premise. As Donald Puchala explains:

Because we must conceptually construct our own reality, which in human affairs may be the only reality there is, and because we can never validate these conceptual constructions objectively since neither our language nor our confinement within epistemic fields will permit this, our conceptualizing can yield heuristics only, and our knowledge must take the form of beliefs, not truths. 8

In rejecting the possibility of objective and universal truths, however, we do not necessarily reject the possibility of ethics. As E.H. Carr reminds us, pure realism can

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7 See, Brent J. Steele, Ontological Security in International Relations (Routledge, 2008).
8 Donald Puchala, Theory and History in International Relations (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 49.
offer nothing but a naked struggle for power which makes any kind of international society impossible.9

To show how a practice of ethics that leverages reflexivity can be conceived I draw on Aristotle’s writing on ethical reasoning (*phronesis*), rhetoric and friendship and on Michel Foucault’s work, particularly on ethics and modernity. In elaborating this practice of ethical reflexivity in chapter two, I have discussed Foucault’s call for an *attitude* of self-critique and an openness to being other than what we are. In responding to Kant’s essay “What is Enlightenment?” Foucault explained that modernity can be an “attitude” or “philosophical ethos” of *permanent self-critique*, featuring a “critical ontology of ourselves” wherein we seek to identify our limits of being and acting that are the product of our historical situation and at the same time “experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.”10 We imagine what might be otherwise by asking what is historically contingent about our current condition and seek to reinvent ourselves in certain ways. We seek to understand how we are constituted as subjects by our actions, knowledge, and submission to and exercise of power. In sum, Foucault describes an attitude of modernity that is a form of self-reflexivity—a “critical ontology of ourselves” that is cultivated through a desire to explore and to refashion ourselves. Foucault’s attitude of critique reflexivity highlights the transformative power of a reflexive ethics as a practice in that we seek to interrogate what is desirable and possible for our political and social lives by articulating imminent possibilities for change.

Aristotle’s conceptualization of *phronesis* is useful for the important contribution it can make to a practice of ethics that takes account of the social context of thought and

action by applying a critical rationality. Because action is taken in the context of a particular set of unique circumstances, because the goods that we seek in particular situations have their own ‘distinctive value’ and because we are constantly revising our judgments, Aristotle favored an ethics in which individuals engage dialectically with thought and action that takes account of the particularities of the situation. In opposition to ethical decision-making as logical demonstration (apodeixis), Aristotle promotes an ethics that features reasoning (logos), emotion (pathos), intuition (nous) and character (éthos) as important for drawing out alternatives and making a satisfactory choice. As David Wiggins puts it, to make apparent the moral demands of a situation “may require a high order of situational appreciation, or as Aristotle would say perception (aisthēsis)” and this ‘situational appreciation’ will “prompt the imagination to play upon the question and let it activate in reflection and thought-experiment”.11

In confronting questions of what should be done in particular cases, the phronetic actor draws out the salient features of the situation, asking what is ethically significant about it. The phronimos also looks to theories or ‘thought’ for direction, including proffered ‘universals’ in an investigation of both possible actions and the justification or reasons for taking particular actions. At the same time, the phronimos assesses the consequences of past actions in deciding whether theories and beliefs have been helpful and in what way they might be modified because, as Aristotle notes, “it is from particulars that we come to universals”.12 Thought is thus continually modified as we

confront particular situations, deliberate, and make ethical choices.\textsuperscript{13} Aristotle focuses on the development of the self as a virtuous being who engages in ethical reasoning well, and I explained in chapter one how Aristotle’s *phronesis* has contributed to my articulation of ‘ethical reflexivity’ as a practice of international politics that involves the cultivation of a self who self-consciously engages ethical questions in a way that has far-reaching implications for the identity of the self.

Together, consideration of Aristotle, Foucault and Giddens has informed the practice of ‘ethical reflexivity’ and has allowed me to sketch a portrait of the *global phronimos* – one who practices ethical reflexivity consistently and well. Such a project is particularly apt for the type of social organization that characterizes modernity given its hierarchical organization, complexity and rationalization. In a bureaucracy action tends to become disconnected from thought with undesirable consequences and thus the challenge is to “make room for this stepping back and re-evaluation”.\textsuperscript{14}

**The Findings: The Rwandan Genocide and Ethical Reflexivity in the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United States**

During the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, individuals’ interpretations of the limits and possibilities for ethical agency mattered. To the extent that individuals in the United Nations, the United States and the International Committee of the Red Cross possessed awareness of themselves as ethical actors, engaged in a critical and dialectic analysis of thought and action, demonstrated a sensitivity to the context of their action, undertook dialogue with those affected by their actions with the aim of understanding and respect, and were willing to take on some personal risk, these individuals were able to take action

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{13} ibid., [1137b12-30].}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{14} Wiggins, 44.}
\end{footnotesize}
that had non-trivial outcomes for the lives of Rwandans. Without this ethical reflexivity, individuals were hampered in their efforts to respond to the genocide, even though many had the desire to. Though dominant policy narratives and evidence of bureaucratic dysfunctions were evident in how individuals made sense of their actions, variation in ethical practices at the level of the individual across the organizational cultures considered here suggests that bureaucracy and dominant discourse does not fully determine the formulation of policy and its interpretation.

While this dissertation has sought to illuminate the possibilities for ethical agency in international politics, I have not neglected structure. More specifically, I have examined individuals in their organizational and societal context and found that organizations can be more or less supportive of the practice of ethical reflexivity. When organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, value and promote among their members situational appreciation and flexible approaches to realizing the organization’s goals and principles, in addition to being open to critique and self-transformation, individuals feel more supported and can be more successful as *global phronimos*. Yet, even in such a supportive environment, individuals still need to cultivate the capacities of the *global phronimos* (such as critical rationality) and must be willing to take personal risks when their actions and the ethical reasoning that informs them are unpopular. Also, as we saw with the ICRC, even self-reflexive organizations are not likely to promote the practice of bringing external moral resources to bear in decision-making. Though the ICRC acquiesced to, and maybe even embraced, Gaillard’s unusually outspoken leadership that, in some ways, challenged norms of behavior and principles within the ICRC, subsequently, several of its official documents stressed
fidelity to and reliance on organizational principles as sufficient for good and desirable behavior among its members.

In contrast to the ICRC, the United Nations was much less supportive of critical thinking and critical self-analysis, and less open to self-transformation. The UN culture does not stress the importance of context or dialogue with the other. Though the United Nations features processes that generate a plethora of ‘lessons learned’ documents, these exercises in ‘looking back’ are preoccupied with portraying the UN in the best light possible and thus are not genuine opportunities for reform. Considering the harsh criticism the UN receives from its largest financial backer (the United States), among others, this resistance to confronting possible shortcomings and ethical failures is hardly surprising.

I have also devoted considerable space in this dissertation to discussing and assessing the dysfunctions and disincentives to a reflective and reflexive ethical practice found in the modern bureaucracy. I hypothesized that individuals who had developed the virtues of the *global phronimos* and regularly practiced ethical reflexivity would be less likely to be thwarted in their actions by bureaucratic dysfunctions and disincentives. The story turned out to be more complicated. I found evidence that bureaucratic dysfunctions, of the kind that Barnett and Finnemore discuss, might be retrospectively inflated. While bureaucratic dysfunctions might have been in play when individuals within the United Nations and United States confronted ethical questions in the case of Rwandan genocide, the narrative of ‘bureaucratic dysfunctions’ also served to minimize responsibility and accountability for their actions. In a sense, this is a demonstration of a kind of reflexivity (though not the practice of ‘ethical reflexivity’). As Anthony Giddens
argued, individuals are capable of maintaining theoretical understandings of the basis of their actions. Taking in narratives of bureaucratic dysfunction and bureaucratic politics, perhaps these ‘bureaucrats’ deployed these same narratives to explain (and thus excuse) their lack of ethical agency. Discourses of ‘ethical agency’ and ‘multiplicity of responsibility’ might thus serve as counter-discourses to raise the possibility that individuals acting from within organizations can and should engage in ethical reasoning that potentially challenges ‘bureaucratic interests’ and ‘bureaucratic dysfunctions’. We might think of these ‘discourses of agency’ as similar to Anthony Lang’s “narration of agency”. These are “the stories that agents tell about themselves and their actions”. Ethical reflexivity features a discourse or “narration of agency” wherein individuals are responsible for claiming and exercising their agency to make decisions informed by critical rationality, appreciative of context and in dialogue with others.

**How might we know ethical reflexivity?**

As I close the dissertation I also want to briefly consider the kinds of questions that ethical reflexivity might elicit. The *global phronimos* will ask themselves various questions in the course of ethical reasoning which may include the following. Though many of these questions appear to be ‘common-sense’, I have shown that they are widely neglected in policy-making and decision-making and thus need to be actively attended to.

1) In considering the current policy or proposed actions the *global phronimos* should ask: What values/principles/beliefs support and conflict with the policy?

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2) Why might the policy be attractive and unattractive and are these reasons convincing?

3) What are the possible motivations of those proposing the various alternatives and how do these motivations potentially speak to how a policy or decision might be interpreted and carried out by others?

4) To historicize the policy/decision one should inquired into the policy’s historical trajectory (how it came about) and identify the consequences of the policy/decision. Were these consequences desirable? How were they understood by others? Answering these questions will require one to engage in dialogue with others that has understanding as its goal and respect as its metric. What does this tell us about the desirability of our past actions? Is change desirable? Are there alternatives that are not being proposed?

5) Finally, one should consider the possible consequences of the various alternatives and draw out best- and worst-case scenarios. These consequences should be assessed in light of the principles/beliefs/values that were previously identified and this occasion might also be used to ask which principles/beliefs/values are most ethically relevant and how, and whether the principles/beliefs/values themselves are desirable.

In addition, I offer some concrete mechanisms and indicators of ethical reflexivity:

1) Regularized channels within organizations to air alternatives and solicit feedback from others in and outside of the organization, including the public and experts.
2) The presence of devil’s advocate roles in the bureaucracy who are selected by bodies outside of the organization.

3) ‘Lessons learned’ generated by a group that includes at least some members external to the organization, if not all.

4) Engagement with the other in dialogue to achieve understanding through a proliferation of communication channels.

5) Ethics training for leaders/politicians, diplomats, bureaucrats and journalists.

6) Public debates of issues in international politics where many alternatives are presented and evaluated and new ideas are elicited and valued.

7) Terms and concepts are not used as unqualified goods. Others ask and explore what they mean.

8) The ability to criticize and dissent without fear of losing one’s job or being destroyed in the media.

**Challenges and Potential Drawbacks to Ethical Reflexivity**

Perhaps the strongest argument against ‘ethical reflexivity’ as a practice has to do with its feasibility. One might protest that ethical reflexivity requires too much of an individual. In discussing modernity as an attitude Foucault invokes Baudelaire’s conceptualization of modernity that features a voluntary choice to seize what is ‘heroic’ about the present. This choice risks social rebuke and it risks failure. And, indeed, it seems that engaging in ethical reflexivity puts one in the position of seizing what is heroic about the present and taking risk. When interviewed about the Rwandan genocide, for example, Madeleine Albright confessed:
There were a lot of questions as to whether it—I mean, this is why I go back and forth on this a lot, because I wish that I had pushed for a large humanitarian intervention. As I write in my book, people would have thought I was crazy. It would have never have happened. But I would have felt better about my own role in this.\textsuperscript{16}

Though Albright protested the plan to withdraw UNAMIR completely after listening to others speak during a UN Security Council session, she did not push for the option that she felt ethically inclined toward, and she seems to hint that her decision hinged on what others would think. Albright was not willing to take the ‘heroic’ risk associated with the global phronimos, and she obviously later struggles with this decision. Nevertheless, there are a couple of reasons that ‘ethical reflexivity’ is still promising.

First, to be successful perhaps only a small number of global phronimos may be required. As we have seen throughout the War on Terror, and despite the culture of loyalty and secrecy that characterized the George W. Bush administration, even occasional public dissent and questioning garnered attention and critical societal discussion (though the quality of that discussion was not always high). In the lead up to the Iraq War and as the war continued not just politicians, but also diplomats, soldiers and retired generals spoke out publicly. Examples include Ambassador Joseph Wilson’s resignation from the Foreign Service in protest against the impending Iraq War and, later, his \textit{New York Times} editorial that cast doubt on the Bush administration’s claim that Iraq had sought uranium from Niger;\textsuperscript{17} the resignation of several diplomats (Mary Wright, John H. Brown and John Brady Kiesling); the editorial of Brent Scowcroft who served as National Security Adviser to President George H. W. Bush; the public dissent of several retired generals (General William Odom, General Joseph P. Hoar, General Anthony

\textsuperscript{16} Madeleine Albright, Interview by Frontline on February 25, 2004 for the episode “Ghosts of Rwanda”.

the criticism of Richard Clarke who was the former chief counter-terrorism adviser on the National Security Council; and General Ricardo Sanchez who publicly criticized the Bush administration for its ‘surge’ policy. Though the Bush administration often launched smear campaigns on these individuals and ignored public protest and public opinion, opposition to the war and discussion of its ethical aspects was considerably enhanced by these individual actions. These actions may have also set the stage for the leaks that exposed interrogation practices at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and the refusal of several soldiers and marines to deploy or redeploy to Iraq.

Second, if ‘ethical reflexivity’ becomes a socially valued practice it matters less what one’s organizational peers think of ‘speaking out’ or challenging dominant interpretations and ways of doing things. Several individuals within the United Nations noted during interviews that the UN lacks a ‘culture of speaking out’. To the extent that ‘speaking out’ is valued in a broader sense, individuals might feel more emboldened to appeal to the ethical sensibilities of others outside of the organization in questioning a policy or decision. In this regard, there is considerable work to be done, particularly when the individuals doing the questioning are engaging questions of ‘security’. As recently seen with the leak of a video that shows Iraqi civilians and reporters being killed by U.S. forces and the leak of the ‘Afghan War Diary’ (over 90,000 documents relevant to the War in Afghanistan) through an organization called ‘WikiLeaks’ that facilitates anonymous leaks, the reception has not been warm. PFC Bradley Manning was arrested for the ‘Collateral Murder’ video and President Obama attempted to manage the WikiLeaks ‘Afghan War Diary’ incident by simultaneously claiming that it contained no new information that could have informed the public debate about the war and that the
leak “could potentially jeopardize individuals or operations”. Regardless of the merits of the leaks, both these incidents demonstrate the level of risk that individuals potentially undertake when they go outside of ‘official channels’ to give force to their ethical concerns. These incidents also illuminate the responsibilities that individuals have in making such decisions. A question that remains to be answered is whether the source of the leak or WikiLeaks should have done more to filter the release of the documents in consideration of their effects.

In her discussion of ethical experts in the field of bio-ethics, Corinna Delkeskamp-Hayes warns that, “Insofar as ethics experts guide the use of political power in concrete situations, their service…turns out to legitimize the use of force against the non-consenting”.\(^{18}\) Another danger of articulating and promoting a practice of ‘ethical reflexivity’ as a satisfactory ethics is its potential for legitimizing the ensuing actions and policies of governments and organizations in international politics. Such a scenario is problematic given the possibility that actors may not genuinely undertake or be particularly adept at ethical reflexivity, organizations may co-opt ethical reflexivity in an effort to undercut its more radical potential, and because ethical reflexivity itself may turn out to be an unsatisfactory ethics or produce policies and decisions that non-decisionmakers find neither ‘right’ nor ‘good’. While to some degree these are dangers that I accept, ethical reflexivity is perhaps less risky in these regards than other systems of ethics with its focus on genuinely including and engaging with others and its emphasis on our fallibility, on the need to consider the unique aspects of situations, and its constant

scrutiny of the basis for action. Because actors are always judging outcomes even ‘ethical reflexivity’ as a practice could be revised or rejected.

We must also consider intentionality and manipulation of discourse. In a sense, all use of language is manipulation in that the speaker (or writer) draws upon speech or texts in ways that were likely not intended by those who spoke or wrote them. Thus, even though the *global phronimos* may articulate and promote a certain narrative, this narrative and its understanding may be manipulated by others. There is power in the manipulation of language. James Der Derian, on more than one occasion, has recalled an exchange between a reporter, Ron Suskind, and a ‘senior adviser’ to President George W. Bush that took place after Suskind had written an article critical of Bush’s communications director Karen Hughes that the White House was unhappy about. The aide, Suskind reported, said

> that guys like me were “in what we call the reality-based community,” which he defined as people who “believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.” I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. “That’s not the way the world really works anymore,” he continued. “We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors…and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.”

This quotation helps us to understand how the language used to express and reproduce ideas can be manipulated through purposeful speech acts to create a social reality, and how self-awareness of one’s creative powers can be unleashed to inform actions and create a social reality that might be judged worse (at least by some) than a less reflective reproduction of reigning norms and tacit knowledge. Foucault demonstrated similar

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concern, stating his preference for greater freedom over the danger of radical programs when he wrote:

I prefer the very specific transformations that have proved to be possible in the last twenty years in a certain number of areas that concern our ways of being and thinking, relations to authority, relations between the sexes, the way in which we perceive insanity of illness…to the programs for a new man that the worst political systems have repeated throughout the twentieth century (47).

Indeed, the Bush administration’s program (or ‘crusade’, as Bush declared) appears to have produced widespread dissatisfaction and disastrous results. Still, Foucault’s statement is remarkable given the fact that Foucault’s life work has been to expose how many different ‘ways of being and thinking’ (even those that seem ostensibly ‘good’) have resulted in the coercion, discipline, subjugation and exploitation of the individual. The powerful import of this essay of Foucault’s for situating our own normative projects is that he demonstrates how a philosophical ethos that has existed alongside power relations that feature discipline and coercion can actually be the well-spring of their own reform.

I think we would be hard pressed to argue, then, that the aforementioned danger of manipulation implies the undesirability of ‘ethical reflexivity’. Instead, it sets the challenge for the global phronimos. The global phronimos must be aware of how the articulation of narratives can be deployed by others. In addition to articulating alternative narratives they must advocate for them while assessing and evaluating the results of their actions. And they should maintain the modesty of being open to other arguments, to reconsideration of ethical judgments through reflexive ethical reasoning, and to the transformation of the self.
Looking Forward

Finally, I would like to draw attention to the potential intervention in contemporary moral and ethical discourses that ‘ethical reflexivity’ might make. At many different organizational sites (international, national and non-governmental) ‘legal discourses’ often substitute for ‘moral discourses’. Here, the ethicality of action is judged by whether it is legal or not and the public and organizational debate revolves around the interpretation of law. In considering the War on Terror, for example, the decision to go to war, both in the U.S. and in the UN, centered on its legality. Even opponents of the war offered the argument that the war was illegal under national and international law. In addition, much of the debate around interrogation methods during the War on Terror was in legalistic terms. The bulk of the Bush administration’s efforts to promote and defend more aggressive interrogation policies have been legalistic, challenging U.S. law and the applicability of the Geneva Conventions. Likewise, criticism of the Bush administration’s new interrogation policies have been legalistic and, in criticisms of the role of Department of Justice lawyers, in terms of professional ethics standards.\(^\text{20}\) In part, a metric of legality for determining whether certain actions are acceptable is problematic because it is not sufficient.

An answer to the question of what constitutes torture and whether torture is moral or ethical can not be answered solely through a legal analysis. A legal analysis can not draw out all of the salient ethical questions about torture, such as whether it is consistent with values, norms and beliefs. Nor does it inquire into the consequences of torture. Though the subsequent Obama administration released relevant documents that were

\(^{20}\) See, for example, the testimony given before the Senate Judiciary Committee during the hearing, “What Went Wrong: Torture and the Office of Legal Counsel in the Bush Administration”.
formerly classified, once President Obama had decided against prosecution the public
debate was undercut, ethical issues went unexplored and opportunities for significant
change lost. In sum, ethical reflexivity is not only desirable because it involves
multifaceted interrogation of the self and a critical analysis of thought and action; it is
also particularly well-suited to a social context in which ethical reasoning has been
largely replaced by legal reasoning.