# Reciprocal Relations

## Framework

#### I Affirm, there is no singe mind independent moral truth—instead each person creates their own conception of the good

J.L Mackie, Australian Philosopher, The subjectivity of values, 1977, ///AHS PB

[First] The Argument from Relativity The argument from relativity has as its premiss the wellknown variation in moral codes from one society to another and from one period to another, and also the differences in moral beliefs between different groups and classes within a complex community. Such variation is in itself merely a truth of descriptive morality, a fact of anthropology which entails neither first order nor second order ethical views. Yet it may indirectly support second order subjectivism: radical differences between first order moral judgements make it difficult to treat those judgements as apprehensions of objective truths. But it is not the mere occurrence of disagreements that tells against the objectivity of values. Disagreement on questions in history or biology or cosmology does not show that there are no objective issues in these fields for investigators to disagree about. But such scientific disagreement results from speculative inferences or explanatory hypotheses based on inadequate evidence, and it is hardly plausible to interpret moral disagreement in the same way. Disagreement about moral codes seems to reflect people ’ s adherence to and participation in different ways of life. The causal connection seems to be mainly that way round: it is that people approve of monogamy because they participate in a monogamous way of life rather than that they participate in a monogamous way of life because they approve of monogamy. Of course, the standards may be an idealization of the way of life from which they arise: the monogamy in which people participate may be less complete, less rigid, than that of which it leads them to approve. This is not to say that moral judgements are purely conventional. Of course there have been and are moral heretics and moral reformers, people who have turned against the established rules and practices of their own communities for moral reasons, and often for moral reasons that we would endorse. But this can usually be understood as the extension, in ways which, though new and unconventional, seemed to them to be required for consistency, of rules to which they already adhered as arising out of an existing way of life. In short, the argument from relativity has some force simply because the actual variations in the moral codes are more readily explained by the hypothesis that they reflect ways of life than by the hypothesis that they express perceptions, most of them seriously inadequate and badly distorted, of objective values. But there is a well-known counter to this argument from relativity, namely to say that the items for which objective validity is in the first place to be claimed are not specific moral rules or codes but very general basic principles which are recognized at least implicitly to some extent in all society – such principles as provide the foundations of what Sidgwick has called different methods of ethics: the principle of universalizability, perhaps, or the rule that one ought to conform to the specific rules of any way of life in which one takes part, from which one profits, and on which one relies, or some utilitarian principle of doing what tends, or seems likely, to promote the general happiness. It is easy to show that such general principles, married with differing concrete circumstances, different existing social patterns or different preferences, will beget different specific moral rules; and there is some plausibility in the claim that the specific rules thus generated will vary from community to community or from group to group in close agreement with the actual variations in accepted codes. The argument from relativity can be only partly countered in this way. To take this line the moral objectivist has to stay that it is only in these principles that the objective moral character attaches immediately to its descriptively specified ground or subject: other moral judgements are objectively valid or true, but only derivatively and contingently – if things had been otherwise, quite different sorts of actions would have been right. And despite the prominence in recent philosophical ethics of universalization, utilitarian principles, and the like, these are very far from constituting the whole of what is actually affirmed as basic in ordinary moral thought. Much of this is concerned rather with what Hare calls “ideals” or, less kindly, ‘fanaticism’. That is, people judge that some things are good or right, and others are bad or wrong, not because – or at any rate not only because – they exemplify some general principle for which widespread implicit acceptance could be claimed, but because something about those things arouses certain responses immediately in them, though they would arouse radically and irresolvably different responses in others. ‘Moral sense’ or ‘intuition’ is an initially more plausible description of what supplies many of our basic moral judgements than ‘reason’. With regard to all these starting points of moral thinking the argument from relativity remains in full force. [Second] The Argument from Queerness Even more important, however, and certainly more generally applicable, is the argument from queerness. This has two parts, one metaphysical, the other epistemological. If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe. Correspondingly, if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else. These points were recognized by Moore when he spoke of nonnatural qualities, and by the intuitionists in their talk about a ‘faculty of moral intuition’. Intuitionism has long been out of favour, and it is indeed easy to point out its implausibilities. What is not so often stressed, but is more important, is that the central thesis of intuitionism is one to which any objectivist view of values is in the end committed: intuitionism merely makes unpalatably plain what other forms of objectivism wrap up. Of course the suggestion that moral judgements are made or moral problems solved by just sitting down and having an ethical intuition is a travesty of actual moral thinking. But, however complex the real process, it will require (if it is to yield authoritatively prescriptive conclusions) some input of this distinctive sort, either premisses or forms of argument or both. When we ask the awkward question, how we can be aware of this authoritative prescriptivity, of the truth of these distinctively ethical premisses or of the cogency of this distinctively ethical pattern of reasoning, none of our ordinary accounts of sensory perception or introspection or the framing and confirming of explanatory hypotheses or inference or logical construction or conceptual analysis, or any combination of these, will provide a satisfactory answer; ‘a special sort of intuition’ is a lame answer, but it is the one to which the clearheaded objectivist is compelled to resort. Indeed, the best move for the moral objectivist is not to evade this issue, but to look for companions in guilt. For example, Richard Price argues that it is not moral knowledge alone that such an empiricism as those of Locke and Hume is unable to account for, but also our knowledge and even our ideas of essence, number, identity, diversity, solidity, inertia, substance, the necessary existence and infinite extension of time and space, necessity and possibility in general, power, and causation. If the understanding, which Price defines as the faculty within us that discerns truth, is also a source of new simple ideas of so many other sorts, may it not also be a power of immediately perceiving right and wrong, which yet are real characters of actions? This is an important counter to the argument from queerness. The only adequate reply to it would be to show how, on empiricist foundations, we can construct an account of the ideas and beliefs and knowledge that we have of all these matters. I cannot even begin to do that here, though I have undertaken some parts of the task elsewhere. I can only state my belief that satisfactory accounts of most of these can be given in empirical terms. If some supposed metaphysical necessities or essences resist such treatment, then they too should be included, along with objective values, among the targets of the argument from queerness. This queerness does not consist simply in the fact that ethical statements are ‘unverifiable’. Although logical positivism with its verifiability theory of descriptive meaning gave an impetus to non-cognitive accounts of ethics, it is not only logical positivists but also empiricists of a much more liberal sort who should find objective values hard to accommodate. Indeed, I would not only reject the verifiability principle but also deny the conclusion commonly drawn from it, that moral judgements lack descriptive meaning. The assertion that there are objective values or intrinsically prescriptive entities or features of some kind, which ordinary moral judgements presuppose, is, I hold, not meaningless but false. Plato ’ s Forms give a dramatic picture of what objective values would have to be. The Form of the Good is such that knowledge of it provides the knower with both a direction and an overriding motive; something ’ s being good both tells the person who knows this to pursue it and makes him pursue it. An objective good would be sought by anyone who was acquainted with it, not because of any contingent fact that this person, or every person, is so constituted that he desires this end, but just because the end has to-be-pursuedness somehow built into it. Similarly, if there were objective principles of right and wrong, any wrong (possible) course of action would have not-to-be-doneness somehow built into it. Or we should have something like Clarke ’ s necessary relations of fitness between situations and actions, so that a situation would have a demand for such- andsuch an action somehow built into it. The need for an argument of this sort can be brought out by reflection on Hume ’ s argument that ‘reason’ – in which at this stage he includes all sorts of knowing as well as reasoning – can never be an ‘influencing motive of the will’. Someone might object that Hume has argued unfairly from the lack of influencing power (not contingent upon desires) in ordinary objects of knowledge and ordinary reasoning, and might maintain that values differ from natural objects precisely in their power, when known, automatically to influence the will. To this Hume could, and would need to, reply that this objection involves the postulating of value-entities or value-features of quite a different order from anything else with which we are acquainted, and of a corresponding faculty with which to detect them. That is, he would have to supplement his explicit argument with what I have called the argument from queerness. Another way of bringing out this queerness is to ask, about anything that is supposed to have some objective moral quality, how this is linked with its natural features. What is the connection between the natural fact that an action is a piece of deliberate cruelty – say, causing pain just for fun – and the moral fact that it is wrong? It cannot be an entailment, a logical or semantic necessity. Yet it is not merely that the two features occur together. The wrongness must somehow be ‘consequential’ or ‘supervenient’; it is wrong because it is a piece of deliberate cruelty. But just what in the world is signified by this ‘because’? And how do we know the relation that it signifies, if this is something more than such actions being socially condemned, and condemned by us too, perhaps through our having absorbed attitudes from our social environment? It is not even sufficient to postulate a faculty which ‘sees’ the wrongness: something must be postulated which can see at once the natural features that constitute the cruelty, and the wrongness, and the mysterious consequential link between the two. Alternatively, the intuition required might be the perception that wrongness is a higher order property belonging to certain natural properties; but what is this belonging of properties to other properties, and how can we discern it? How much simpler and more comprehensible the situation would be if we could replace the moral quality with some sort of subjective response which could be causally related to the detection of the natural features on which the supposed quality is said to be consequential.

#### Instead the subject is created through an encounter with the other and determines what is by reflecting on what it is not. This mutual recognition constructs concepts of good and bad from the social and cultural standpoint the meeting occurs in.

Sevilla A.L. (2017) Relationality vs. Singularity: Between Care Ethics and Poststructuralism. In: Watsuji Tetsurô’s Global Ethics of Emptiness. Global Political Thinkers. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-58353-2_2> ///AHS PB

Thinking, questioning, are often taken as a demonstration of the indubitable existence of the ego (as in Descartes’ famous methodic doubt). Sometimes this is even developed into a solipsist position (I can be sure that I exist because I am thinking, but I don’t know if anyone else exists). However, Watsuji reads these acts in the complete opposite way: questioning shows how our individuality is fundamentally connected to others through shared language and concerns.1 He writes: “No matter how much we concern ourselves with the consciousness of I, this concern itself implies our going beyond the consciousness of I and being connected with others.”2 What we see here is a completely different starting point: We take our departure not from the intentional consciousness of “I” but from “betweenness.” The essential feature of betweenness lies in this, that the intentionality of the I is from the outset prescribed by its counterpart, which is also conversely prescribed by the former.3 This betweenness as a starting point applies not only to asking ethical questions but also to all our acts as human beings. For example, right now, I am writing. But my writing is always determined by possible readers—what kind of people would read my book? What parts might they find unclear? In the same way, the reader is perhaps at this point wondering what I am thinking, and what ideas I am trying to convey. The author is always determined by readers, and a reader is always determined by authors in a reciprocal determination and mutual dependency. Therefore, Watsuji does not even start with an independent author and an independent reader, who then have a relationship. Rather, “This relationship is constructed through and through in the betweenness between an author and his readers. Neither can exist prior to and independent of the other. They exist only by depending on one another.”4

#### Thus any account of ethics presupposes a coherent relationship with the Other: A] Endpoints: The Only thing that distinguishes an immoral action like punching a person, from a morally neutral action like punching a statue is that an Other is being acted upon, since the it has the goal of effecting an agent. B] Performativity: Responding to my framework concedes its authority since language presupposes multiple parties who mutually assign words meaning C] Actor Spec: States are made up of Others, which means that any theory of good that only relates to the individual cannot motivate collective action, since Others couldn’t access it.

#### All relationships require reciprocal recognition, where the I and the Other treat each other with mutual respect and both recognize each other in a non-totalizing fashion. Such reciprocity is impeded by skewed power dynamics in the encounter and is key to any conception of linguistic and moral truth.

Emmanuel Levinas, Jewish-Lithuanian Philosopher, Summarizes, "Martin Buber and the, Theory of Knowledge, 1967 ,///AHS PB

Verbundenheit characterizes the reciprocity of the I-Thou relation and of the dialogue where I commit myself to the Thou just because it is absolutely other. The essence of the 'word' does not initially consist in its objective meaning or descriptive possibilities, but in the response that it elicits. The assertion is not true because the thought that it expresses corresponds to the thing or because it is revelatory of being. It is true only when it derives from the I-Thou relation identical with the ontological process itself. The assertion is true when it realizes the reciprocity of the relation by eliciting a response and singling out an individual who alone is capable of responding. This conception of the truth has nothing in common with the static notion of truth as an expressible content. But it is not to be assumed that a Heraclitian or Bergsonian becoming, also inexpressible because the word is necessarily a changeless entity and cannot apply to what is always changing, is the sole reality that may be opposed to immutable being. For Buber describes a sphere of being which cannot be told because it is a living dialogue between individuals who are not related as objective contents to one another: one individual has nothing to say about the other. The sensitivity of the I-Thou relation lies in its completely formal nature. To apprehend the other as a content is tantamount to relating oneself to him as an object and is to enter into an I-It relation instead. The notion of truth (with respect to which Buber's language is insufficiently didactic) is determinated by the I-Thou relation construed as the fundamental relation to being. We must distinguish Truth possessed, Truth as an impersonal result, called also objective Truth (283) from the Truth as a "way of being," a manner of truly being which denotes God. But truth also signifies a "concrete attitude towards being," "Realverhältnis zum Seienden" (198-199) and the living test which verifies it (BewAhrung). "To know signifies for the creature to fulfill a relation with being, for everyone in his own particular way, sincerely (wahrhaft) and with complete responsibility, accepting it on faith in all its various manifestations and therefore open to its real possibilities, integrating these experiences according to its own nature. It is only in this way that the living truth emerges and can be preserved." (283)

#### Non-Reciprocal relationships prevent mutual ethics: A] Framing: When the I and the Other don’t view each other reciprocally, they reduce are reduced to ideas of what they are like instead of their real selves. B] Epistemology: nonreciprocal relationships always benefit one party more than the other, which means that any ethical norms agreed too will be corrupted by the influence of those with power. C] Normativity: nobody would agree to engage in an ethical relationship that arbitrarily discriminated against them, so reciprocal relations are key because both parties enter with the expectation of equal treatment.

#### Thus the standard is preserving reciprocal relationships with the other. Even if your framework is the correct moral system, we cant access it without reciprocal relations, so my offense comes first as a side constraint. Prefer:

#### [1] Ethics must motivate consensus—its impossible to disprove an others viewpoint through an external standard.

**Joyce 02[[1]](#footnote-1):**

This distinction between what is accepted from within an institution, and “stepping out” of that institution and appraising it from an exterior perspective, is close to Carnap’s distinction between internal and external questions. 15 Certain“linguistic frameworks” (as Carnap calls them) bringwith themnewterms andways of talking: accepting the language of “things” licenses making assertions like “The shirt is in the cupboard”;accepting mathematics allows one to say “There is a prime number greater than one hundred”; accepting the language of propositions permits saying “Chicago is large is a true proposition,” etc. Internal to the framework in question, confirming or disconfirming the truth of these propositions is a trivial matter. But traditionallyphilosophers have interested themselves inthe external question –the issue of the adequacy of the framework itself**:** “Do objects exist?”, “Does the world exist?”, “Are there numbers?”, “Are the propositions?”, etc. Carnap’s argument is that theexternalquestion**,** as it has been typically construed,does not make sense. From a perspective that accepts mathematics, the answer to the question “Do numbers exist?” is justtrivially“Yes.”From a perspective which has not accepted mathematics, Carnap thinks, the only sensible way of construing the question is not as a theoretical question, but as a practical one: “Shall I accept the framework of mathematics?”, and this pragmatic question is to be answered by consideration of the efficiency, the fruitfulness, the usefulness,etc., of the adoption. But the (traditional)philosopher’s questions – “But is mathematics true?”, “Are there really numbers?” – are pseudo-questions**.** By turning traditional philosophical questions into practical questions of the form “Shall I adopt...?”, Carnap is offering a noncognitive analysis of metaphysics. Since I am claiming that we can critically inspect morality from an external perspective – that we can ask whether there are any non-institutional reasons accompanying moral injunctions – and that such questioning would not amount to a “Shall we adopt...?” query, Carnap’s position represents a threat. What arguments does Carnap offer to his conclusion? He starts with the example of the “thing language,” which involves reference to objects that exist in time and space.Tostep out of the thing language andask “But does the world exist?” is a mistake, Carnap thinks, because the very notion of “existence” is a term which belongs to the thing language, and can be understood only within that framework, “hence this concept cannot be meaningfully applied to the system itself.” 16 Moving on to the external question “Do numbers exist?” Carnap cannot use the same argument – he cannot say that “existence” is internal to the number language and thus cannot be applied to the system as a whole. Instead he says that philosophers who ask the question do not mean material existence, but have no clear understanding of what other kind of existence might be involved, thus such questions have no cognitive content. It appears that this is the form of argument which he is willing to generalize to all further cases: persons who disputewhether propositions exist, whether properties exist**,** etc., do not know what they are arguing over, thus theyare not arguing over the truth of a proposition, but over the practical value of their respective positions**.** Carnap adds that this is so because there is nothing that both parties would possibly count as evidence that would sway the debate one way or the other.

#### [2] The negative must concede the affirmative framework. A] Strat Scew: New framing forces a 1ar restart, but the 2N can dump for 6 minutes, framing out all my substantive offense B] Reciprocity: Contention level debate is 1 to 1 reciprocal, but without AFC the neg can prove either the framework or the contention false giving you a 2-1 advantage C] Topic ED: AFC forces you to actually engage the topic instead of just going for preclusive framing every round, uniquely true with my aff since international contracts are a key issue in nuclear ethics. D] Reading theory on why the particular framework chosen is bad, checks against arguments that auto affirm E] Switch Side Debate solves back all of your offense since 1] you can discuss what you want when you affirm and 2] We both affirm 3 rounds so an unbeatable aff is 100% fair.

#### [3] Judge Actions based on consistency with a procedural standard, not foreseen consequences: A] Attempting to aggregate Other’s is not reciprocal since it views the I as an superior being who can assign value to lives B] Consequences trigger more consequences so we don’t know which ones to hold people culpable for C] Induction fails since every observation is based on a previous one D] Consequentialism can never call things like murder intrinsically bad since moral value is contingent upon the individual ends E] Hedonism cant motivate obligations since the empirical fact we feel pain, does not produce a normative obligation to care about others pain F] Pain and pleasure are individual experiences and thus not additive—just like two headaches don’t equal a migraine.

#### [4] Ideal theory is key: A] Failure to abstract away from our subject position means agents are fully aware of their self-interest and will coopt your movement. B] only ideal theory can say things like racism are always wrong because we have universal standard to hold people too, not just an individual perspective C] Ideal theory prevents epistemic bias since by abstracting away from our identities and factors that cloud or judgement we can see what is universally good for everyone not just us.

## Offense

#### I affirm that states ought to eliminate their nuclear arsenals.

#### [1] Nuclear weapons require that the I views the other as a impersonal number instead of an individual being, which prevents the foundation of a reciprocal relationship

Howard Caygill, Professor of Modern European Philosophy at Kingston University, Levinas And The Political, First published 2002, ////AHS PB

Levinas’s most explicit reflections on the significance of the Cold War were published in Esprit and continue the line of inquiry opened in the ‘Reflections on Hitlerism’ published in the same journal in 1934. The 1956 essay on ‘The Spirit of Geneva’ uses the meeting of the superpowers in Geneva as an occasion to reflect on the philosophical underpinning of the Cold War geo-political.21 The continuity with the ‘Reflections on Hitlerism’ is evident in the critique of paganism that characterises both essays, but in 1956 paganism is linked to the technology of nuclear warfare. The definition of paganism in terms of subjection to expansionary natural forces proposed in the ‘Reflections on Hitlerism’ is re-adopted in the ‘Spirit of Geneva’, except that now Levinas substitutes physical, nuclear forces of atomic weaponry for the biological forces that defined race and race war in the earlier essay. The inhuman biological race war that characterised the National Socialist political has now become the inhuman nuclear war between the superpowers. The powers released by nuclear technology no longer possess any human significance beyond their potential to destroy human life. The apparent struggle between the capitalist and socialist systems for world domination is regarded by Levinas as a war of shadows that exemplifies an historical predicament in which ‘human conflict has lost all meaning without the struggle having come to an end’ (IH, 161). The development of atomic technology is understood by Levinas to mark the end of human history: ‘the release of atomic energy has precisely taken the control of the real away from human will. This is exactly what is meant by the arrest of history’ (IH, 161). Not only does human struggle no longer possess any meaning or direction, but its lack of orientation signifies a fundamental transformation of the political. It is a transformation that, at this stage in his thought, Levinas takes to mark the end of a certain human history and he beginning of an inhuman history. Levinas extends the line of thought opened in the ‘Reflections on Hitlerism’ by regarding the inhuman in terms of a regression to the animal. Later, in the audacious essay of 1961 ‘Heidegger, Gagarin and Us’, the inhuman character of technology is understood in terms of the divine inhuman, or the promise of a universality that closes a human history based on territory and place while opening the possibility of a new human history organised around the nudity of the face of the other. In 1956 Levinas describes the link between the arrest of history and the transformation of the political by means of the concept of the ‘third’. While the ‘third’ usually signifies for Levinas the political as opposed to the ‘second’ or other of ethics, the ‘third’ serving as shorthand for the impersonal institutions of legal and political judgement, here it denotes precisely the inhuman. Levinas writes of the summit negotiations that ‘The third partner here is not the third man. It does not assume human form, they are forces without faces. Strange return of the natural powers…’ (IH, 161). The ‘forces without faces’ will return again in the 1960 Esprit article ‘Principles and Faces’; in both cases they signify the same forces of fatality that drove the racial struggle described in the Hitlerism essay. In 1934, human struggle was overshadowed by a struggle between the inhuman biological forces of race; here human struggle is overshadowed by the inhuman scale of the destructive forces released by nuclear energy. By locating the moment of the political in the inhuman, Levinas is forced to redefine the political. At this point in his work he proposes a contrast between a ‘human’ and a ‘cosmo’ political, regarding the latter as a technologically advanced return to prehistory. Under the reign of the human political, when the ‘third’ was the ‘third man’, the inhuman was already present but not all-encompassing: From the inhuman, so prodigious in those centuries, still came the human. The human relations that made up the social order and the forces that guided that order, exceeded in power, efficacy and in being those of the forces of nature. The elements borrow from us through society and the state onto which they add their own meaning. (IH, 162) In this phase of history the encounter of the human and the inhuman was governed by the third of the human social order. In it the humanised ‘world’ was the condition for meaningful human action, even for deadly conflict; the human remained the horizon of history, and even in conflict there persisted, however occluded, the sentiment of responsibility for the other human. In this phase of history, the human horizon of events offered ‘an invitation to work for a better world, to believe the world transformable and human’ (IH, 163). In the ‘Spirit of Geneva’ Levinas comes close to acknowledging that the moment for such a politics has now passed. In the epoch of inhuman history, For the first time social problems and the struggles between humans do not reveal the ultimate meaning of the real. This end of the world would lack its last judgement. The elements exceed the states that until now contained them. Reason no longer appears in political wisdom, but in the historically unconditioned truths announcing cosmic dangers. For politics is substituted a cosmo-politics that is a physics. (IH, 164) The reduction of human politics to an inhuman physics or cosmopolitics is accompanied by an abdication ‘on both sides of the iron curtain’ of responsibility in favour of achieving a balance of uncontrollable forces. Both National Socialist bio-politics and Cold War cosmo-politics surrender a political situated within a human horizon for a calculus of implacable inhuman forces before which humans are deprived of their wisdom, agency and ultimately their responsibility.

#### [2] Nuclear politics represent a nonreciprocal relationship between states as they are based on unequal power dynamics and coercion.

[PAUL Bracken](https://warontherocks.com/author/paul-bracken/), Professor of political science and business at Yale University, BLACKMAIL UNDER A NUCLEAR UMBRELLA FEBRUARY 7, 2017 ,<https://warontherocks.com/2017/02/blackmail-under-a-nuclear-umbrella/> ///AHS PB

Still, it is a good time to analyze blackmail once again in the present. Many things have changed since the Cold War. When it comes to nuclear strategy, multipolarity is the order of the day in the [second nuclear age](https://www.amazon.com/Second-Nuclear-Age-Strategy-Politics/dp/1250037352/ref%3Dsr_1_fkmr0_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1486412811&sr=1-1-fkmr0&keywords=bracken+second+nuclear+age+holt). A nuclear context now blankets many more parts of the world, in East Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. Whether or not nuclear blackmail is attempted, the nuclear context of any kind of blackmail surely does. Today [nine countries have the bomb](http://www.icanw.org/the-facts/nuclear-arsenals/), so the opportunity for blackmail is greater for this reason alone. Further, the risk-avoiding behavior of the Cold War might not apply in a second nuclear age. The early strategists who worried about nuclear blackmail did not have the “curse of knowledge” of Cold War history. The cautious behavior of the first nuclear age may well repeat itself in the second. But then again, it might just be a historical relic. We simply do not know. There is an important distinction that is needed to analyze the blackmail issue today between nuclear blackmail and blackmail in a nuclear context. The two are quite different. The latter — blackmail in a nuclear context — illuminates important issues that go unseen and unanalyzed when our framework focuses on straight out nuclear blackmail. Nuclear blackmail is the threat to use atomic weapons to compel someone to take an action they do not wish to take. It contrasts with nuclear deterrence — the threat to retaliate to prevent an unwanted action. Let’s illustrate this with an imaginary example from the United States in the Vietnam War: Washington tells North Vietnam to get its armies out of South Vietnam or Hanoi will be leveled with a nuclear strike. This is nuclear blackmail. It would also be nuclear blackmail if the United States told Russia to vacate Ukraine in 30 days or suffer a military offensive using tactical nuclear weapons. Blackmail in a nuclear context is different. It tries to compel someone to do something when one or more parties involved possess nuclear arms but when there’s no specific threat to use atomic weapons. Here’s another imaginary example: North Korea says that, if the United States continues to increase strategic pressure (with draconian sanctions, a blockade, roll up of overseas assets, jailing of all overseas North Korean officials, shutting down air space) to compel the Kim family regime to abandon its nuclear weapon program, Pyongyang will respond in ways that could easily lead to large scale war and that no options are off the table. The consequences, North Korean officials insist, will spill over to China, South Korea, and Japan. Here, both countries use blackmail threats. But neither the U.S. threat or the North Korean counter-threat is specific or explicit. Neither country says exactly what action will be taken, nor do they say that atomic weapons will be fired. Both sides will likely attempt to avoid looking like a calculating game theory strategist, using cynical power advantage to get what they want. Yet blackmail is still present on both sides. Washington threatens Pyongyang to give up its program, and Pyongyang threatens Washington to back off. Or consider another example: Suppose China puts tactical nuclear weapons on its man-made islands in the South China Sea. Presumably this is to get the United States to back off from intrusive, provocative probes of the air and sea space around them. Suppose China says nothing, but the placement of weapons is purposefully leaked. Is this nuclear blackmail? Absent a specific demand from Beijing to Washington referencing their nuclear weapons, it is not. Yet, clearly, the nuclear context matters a lot in all of these examples because all parties are likely to think about “where things might go” if the crisis intensifies. The distinction between “nuclear blackmail” and “blackmail in a nuclear context” is not some academic difference without a meaning. North Korea knows well that the United States has nuclear arms, and the United States knows the same about North Korea. Even if the United States has no plan or strategic intent, or even thought, about firing nuclear weapons, Pyongyang is likely to calculate that it does or at least that it might. Washington may well know that it is not going to fire these weapons, but it has a hard time convincing North Korea of this. The reverse holds too. Regardless of North Korean or Chinese strategies, plans, intent, or thinking, the United States will worry about a crisis in a different way because of nuclear weapons. An important conclusion follows from this discussion: The mere existence of nuclear weapons changes the context, regardless of plans, strategic culture, or psychology. It may well be that narrow nuclear blackmail (“Give up Kashmir immediately or we’ll attack Mumbai with atomic weapons”) is not very likely anymore. But, the opportunities for blackmail in a nuclear context are greatly increased today.

1. Joyce, Richard. Myth of Morality. Port Chester, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2002. p 45-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)