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## Moral Assessment of Individuals in Idealistic Enterprises: Clandestine Research in Weapons Development

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Title: Moral Assessment of Individuals in Idealistic Enterprises: Clandestine Research in Weapons Development

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**Abstract.** This article continues the IBPP series of research presented at the 1998 Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, August 14 - 18, 1997, San Francisco, CA. The article comprises the presentation "Moral Assessment of Individuals in Idealistic Institutional Enterprises" made by Jean Maria Arrigo. Ms. Arrigo is finishing up her PhD work in social psychology at the School of Behavioral and Organizational Sciences, Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, CA. Her dissertation, "Moral and Epistemological Dilemmas of Clandestine Scientific Research" includes a 200-page "Primer of the Epistemology of Intelligence for Scientists and Philosophers." She has also published articles on the false memory syndrome and multiple personality disorder.

The current presentation was made at the paper session "Peace and Moral Development" and addresses the moral psychology of politico-military activities that may be both idealistic and clandestine. The first of two installments follows with very minor editing by IBPP. Ms. Arrigo can be reached at [jmarrigo@pacbell.net](mailto:jmarrigo@pacbell.net).

Introduction.

I have been studying clandestine research in weapons development. For instance, you might know of the Manhattan Project's plutonium experiment on terminal hospital patients.

This morning I want to introduce two ideas. The first is that in an idealistic enterprise, a program may have a compelling moral rationale at the start, but as the program naturally evolves, a regular pattern of moral problems may arise. The second idea is that a new model of moral assessment may be appropriate for participants caught up in such programs.

I conducted extended interviews with five military or intelligence personnel involved in nuclear testing, one anti-nuclear activist, and, for international perspective, a Canadian, a West German, and two Ukrainian scientists. My oral history interviewees taught me about the evolution of clandestine research programs. Also, I took interview critiques from relevant experts on all oral history transcripts.

Principles of Evolution--Looking Backward.

Now first I want to say that clandestine research programs evolve certain patterns of moral problems. Let me mention two principles of evolution.

One principle is competitive innovation. The point of rapid and continual innovation is to overwhelm the capacity of the enemy to adapt. While the enemy is struggling to develop nuclear technology, you're on to something completely new. Former Secretary of Defense William Perry articulated competitive innovation as the key military strategy in the United States. "Severe constraints, such as international arms controls," his office said, "do not inhibit innovation but seem to be a critical factor in driving it"(1). If we can imagine a weapon, our enemy can imagine it. It would be foolhardy to suppose the enemy is

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less capable than we are. Therefore, we must develop the weapon in order to learn how to defend against it. Sooner or later, the enemy obtains the weapon through espionage or other means, and we are on to the next. The risks and damages from chemical, nuclear, and biological warfare have all been ratcheted up through competitive innovation.

A second major principle of evolution of clandestine research programs is operationalization. What does it take to make an idealistic program work? Now the Manhattan Project had to look after its bomb production workers. They were exposed to high levels of radioactive plutonium. The crucial question was how much plutonium did they metabolize? To test the workers might alarm people and jeopardize bomb production. So metabolic studies were run secretly on terminal hospital patients. But some of these patients survived for 30 years. All the while, their physicians continued to collect data and deceive them as they succumbed to radiation ailments. It was an expose of this plutonium experiment by the Albuquerque Tribune(2) that led to President Clinton's appointment of the Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments in 1994.

### Principles of Evolution--Looking Ahead

What would really be useful is not looking back on clandestine programs but looking ahead on proposals. So that's what I intend to do. With the Cold War over, terrorism has become the urgent threat to national security. The United States has carried out major simulations of nuclear(3) and biological(4) terrorist attack and has found the country unprepared.

A philosopher at New York University, Michael Levin, made a sophisticated ethical argument for the torture of terrorists during interrogation. In Levin's scenario, a nuclear time bomb has been planted in New York City, and one of the terrorists has been captured by authorities. For leverage on the terrorist, Levin also justified torture of the "terrorist's innocent wife and children should timely disclosure require such measures"(5).

I went back to some of my interviewees for evaluation of Levin's proposal. Ernest Garcia had been a covert actions operator in South America in the late 1940s. He reported that there he had participated in the abduction and torture interrogation of Nazis. Harold William Rood is a historian and retired intelligence analyst who served as expert reviewer of some oral history transcripts. Rood taught field interrogation at army intelligence schools for a decade.

Garcia, the covert actions operator, simply did not believe that Levin's program of torture interrogation would succeed in saving New York City:

"Various people have been trained from birth to be extremely resistant and they're just as stout as a frozen turnip. They will acclimate themselves to excruciating types of torture in anticipation of what they might be facing in the future. It's been my experience that these kinds of people have very, very little sentiment. I think they're already conditioned to sacrifice even their own family. It would be an extraordinary achievement if anybody could break these people"(6).

Rood, the intelligence analyst, considered strategy:

"It's a rather artificial situation that Levin's created, because the way terrorists operate isn't that way. If they're going to put a bomb in New York City, they're going to use it to exploit something. If they just want to say, 'Shit, why don't we blow up New York City?' then they blow up New York City. They don't

fool around so that some terrorist can be captured before it happens. On the other hand, if they're using this to extort something from the United States, then, of course, their terrorist will be captured. But he probably won't be the one who knows where anything is"(7).

Competitive innovation.

Rood and Garcia agreed that the terrorist organization would certainly collect information about the methods of torture, and they would train their agents accordingly. This is just what Palestinian terrorists do with Israeli torture interrogation(8). So here is the competitive innovation in torture technology that ratchets up risks and damages.

I inquired further of Garcia:

Arrigo: Let's suppose Levin said: "Well, Ernest Garcia, what we need is the cleanest, most honorable, most effective operation. Will you set this up for us? What could you do?"

Garcia: First of all, what you'd have to do is find a way to somehow penetrate what their method of operation was. And just get in there and circulate with them. You yourself become a terrorist, even planning or participating in the dry run.

Arrigo: So you might do some pretty horrible things along the way?

Garcia: Absolutely. You have to be ready to do that. You've got to find them in best faith. You can't do it while they're either angry or they're working in the field where they have expectations of the possibility of being caught. You have to do it in a very different type of setting. Once you've gained [their] confidence and you become one of them, then they start spitting information.... You start commercializing on that. I've done it with some of the worst that there is. And I reversed the process very, very adequately.

So now we need social science research for infiltration into terrorist organizations. [The final installment of this paper--including the operationalization of Levin's program and the consequences of analysis for moral assessment of participants in idealistic enterprises such as clandestine scientific research--will be in next week's IBPP Issue.]

(Author's Notes: (1): FitzSimonds, J. R. (1995). The revolution in military affairs: Challenges for defense intelligence. Washington, DC: Consortium for the Study of Intelligence. p. 20. [Perry's expression for "competitive innovation" was "revolution in military affairs."] (2) Welsome, Eileen. (1993). The plutonium experiment. Albuquerque, NM: The Albuquerque Tribune. [A special reprint of a three-day report published November 15-17, 1993 by The Albuquerque Tribune that is available from The Albuquerque Tribune, 7777 Jefferson N. E., Albuquerque, NM 87109.] (3) Beres, Louis Rene. (1998). Preventing the ultimate nightmare: Nuclear terrorism against the United States. *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 10(3), 333-342. [Beres is a political scientist.] (4) Mock attack reportedly shows U.S. to be unprepared for germ warfare. (1998, May 11-24). *The Stars and Stripes*, p. 3. (5) Levin, Michael. (1990). Torture and other extreme measures taken for the general good: Further reflections on a philosophical problem. In P. Suedfeld (Ed.), *Psychology and torture*. New York: Hemisphere. P. 89. [Levin dated his public advocacy of torture interrogation to his article, "The case for torture," in the June 17, 1982 Issue of *Newsweek*, p. 13.] (6) Garcia, Ernest. (1995, October 21 & 22). An OSS-CIA covert actions operator. Oral history interview conducted by Jean Maria Arrigo, Albuquerque,

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NM; (1997, March 1). Torture interrogation. Oral history interview, telephone supplement, conducted by Jean Maria Arrigo, from Claremont, CA, to Albuquerque, NM. (7) Rood, Harold William. (1997, February 14). Commentary on the transcript of the oral history of Hal Brody and on Levins defense of torture interrogation. Interview conducted by Jean Maria Arrigo at Claremont McKenna College, Claremont, CA. (8). A Palestinian in an Israeli prison said: We learned about all the types of ill-treatment and the techniques that the secret police use, and we learned to observe the behavior of enemy officers during our interrogation.--Qouta, Samir, Punamaki, Raija-Leena, & Sarraj, Eyad El. (1997). Prison experiences and coping styles among Palestinian men. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 3(1), 19-36. p.26.) (Keywords: Clandestine, Idealism, Moral, Organizations, Torture, Weapons.)