

A Roundtable on Joseph S. Nye, Jr. *Do Morals Matter?: Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump*

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Seth Jacobs, Vanessa Walker, and Joseph S. Nye, Jr.

Introductory Essay to the Roundtable Review of Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump*

Kelly M. McFarland

Joseph S. Nye, Jr.'s new book, *Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump*, and the process of reviewing it, takes on new relevance in today's world. For over three years now, President Donald J. Trump has moved the United States away from the international order that it had a leading role in creating and perpetuating. The current president has tossed aside allies, cozied up to authoritarians from Moscow, to Beijing, to Brazil, and has pushed (while also riding a wave of) nativist policies that Nye criticizes in his new work. The current COVID-19 pandemic and Trump's go-it-alone nationalist response is the starkest, and most troubling, recent example.

As I write this, protests over the murder of George Floyd have enveloped cities across America, and the world, putting issues of domestic morality front and center. As the Black Lives Matter movement and others gather momentum to fight for true justice and equality in the United States, and the president uses tear gas to disperse peaceful crowds of protestors so he can stage a photo op, I am both heartened and appalled. As a U.S. diplomatic historian, I also find myself immediately drawn to the connection between the domestic and the foreign policy arenas. Brutal and racist police tactics and the concomitant protests they have rightly engendered have once again placed America's centuries-long hypocrisy around equality, and especially racial equality, under the harsh light of reality. At the same time, geopolitical rivals such as Russia and China attempt to enflame the U.S. democratic system in partisan rancor and seek to offer a more reliable and "stable" system of governance to nations in the developing world and beyond.

We have already seen Russia, China, and Iran focus on the Trump administration's recent domestic policies in an attempt to try and exploit it for their purposes. According to Graphika, a private firm that studies social media, "China's primary goal appears to be to discredit U.S. criticism of China's crackdown on Hong Kong. Iran's primary goals appear to be to discredit U.S. criticism of Iran's human-rights record and to attack U.S. sanctions."¹ As historians of U.S. foreign relations have pointed out, this isn't anything new, as the Soviet Union regularly used the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 60s as propaganda against

the United States, especially in post-colonial Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.² While this book does not focus on presidential morals in domestic affairs, Nye points out the connected nature of morals at home and morals abroad. As Nye himself ends his work, "the future success of American foreign policy may be threatened more by the rise of nativist politics that narrow our moral vision at home than by the rise and decline of other powers abroad." (218)

Nye's book uses mini-case studies of each president from FDR to Trump to provide a grade for each president's moral decision-making, and more broadly to make the case for the role that morals play in foreign policy decision-making. Like the ethical scorecards that Nye uses, reviewers' scores of *Do Morals Matter?* run the gamut. In many ways, the differences between reviewers speak to the long-standing and ever-present difference between how political scientists and historians approach their craft. If you picked up Nye's newest offering looking for a historical tome steeped in primary source research that ponders all of the nuance and complexity of each presidential administration, then you'll have to look further. If you're looking for a rejoinder to realist theory, a book that questions those that find morals no more than presidential rhetorical tools justifying policies after that fact, and offers up arguments for bringing morals to bear upon future foreign policy decisions, than this is your book.

On the issue of realist theory, multiple reviewers applaud Nye's attempt to not only show the faults in realist theory, and any single theory for that matter, but to offer up a more nuanced approach that encompasses morals. Seth Jacobs highlights how Nye "argues that we must combine realism with two other 'mental maps of the world,' cosmopolitanism and liberalism, both to understand the challenges American presidents face when they venture abroad and to evaluate how successful they have been in meeting those challenges." Vanessa Walker, for her part, notes that Nye's work is "not just a championing of morals in international affairs, but a concerted effort to grapple with how values shape presidential thinking, and how we, as scholars and citizens, in turn assess presidential politics."

A major plus, and minus, depending on which reviewer you are reading, has to do with Nye's assessment of each president's performance. A unique, and useful, aspect of this book is the author's creation of a "scorecard" that can be used to judge a president's moral performance. The reviewers are markedly split on where they stand on the scorecards and the methodology used to score them. Jacobs

finds Nye's guidelines – weighing intentions, means, and consequences – “as both innovative and sound.” He is also drawn to the “complexity and flexibility” of Nye's scorecards. Jacobs points out correctly that Nye acknowledges the built-in biases in his assessments, but as the reviewer highlights, “what matters to Nye are the scorecards and how they help structure and discipline our thinking about ethics and foreign policy.” Others do not find the scorecards as useful. “Each moral scorecard is somewhat selective and markedly biased,” according to Lori Clune and Danielle Richman, “and that is the problem.” Wilson D. Miscamble calls the scorecards Nye's “vaguely-defined criteria,” and finds a lot to fault in the book overall.

One of the largest points of contention a number of reviewers had with *Do Morals Matter* has to do with the obvious issue of the book's scale and selectivity. A relatively small book such as this, that produces scorecards on morals for every president since FDR, is bound to be selective. Clune and Richman, for example, take the author to task for “omitting and mischaracterizing widely-accepted historical facts” in his analysis of the Eisenhower presidency, as well as what they view as the lack of complexity in his cases. Miscamble is blunter, noting that “Nye does not effectively till sufficient historical soil to harvest any yield of consequence regarding morality and foreign policy.” As multiple reviewers note, there are a few areas of sloppy history.

The author confronts these critiques head on, noting that while the historical and political science fields overlap, “they clearly differ,” which is apparent in the reviews. Nye defends his selectivity as a necessity in a short book, especially one whose major purpose was “an exercise in moral reasoning about international relations.” Nye uses his historical cases, selective as they may be, to prove his theory that one cannot begin and end with realist theory. With that done, he then “wanted to suggest a more careful approach to moral reasoning,” which he spends the latter portion of his book doing. It is here that Nye extends his historical cases to the future. The author spends the first half making a case that morals did matter in presidential decision-making since 1945, and he spends the latter half arguing for their continued use in the future, as the United States faces major challenges in the decline of the liberal order and a rising China.

The reviewers of Nye's newest endeavor are certainly up to the task in the reviews that follow. They are quick to highlight the book's positive contributions, and just as forthright in discussing its shortcomings. Morals do matter, that much Nye, and historians before him have made clear. They will be all the more important as the United States, and the world, tackles an ever more complicated world in the years to come. The author calls his work “applied history,” and if this is the case, in part “a robust questioning of the morality of Pax Americana,” as Vanessa Walker notes, “has the potential to check interventionism and superpower conceit and reshape U.S. power in the service of an interdependent global community.” Perhaps Clune and Richman sum the book up best: “Nye writes a somewhat imperfect historical analysis to support a completely valid argument in favor of a collaborative, liberal-leaning approach to international relations, stressing the use of soft power tactics in the face of extraordinary twenty-first century challenges.”

Notes:

1. Ken Dilanian, “China, Russia and Iran using state media to attack U.S. over George Floyd killing,” NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/china-russia-iran-using-state-media-attack-u-s-over-n1223591>
2. Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 2000).

Review of Joseph Nye Jr., *Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump*

Lori Clune & Danielle Richman

Joseph Nye Jr., a self-described “old practitioner” of American foreign policy and the scholar who coined the term “soft power,” asks, Do morals matter? His answer is yes, and he spends the subsequent two hundred pages evaluating the history of modern American foreign policy to provide examples of moral versus immoral decision-making. In this historical analysis, Nye outlines some of the most important and alarming conflicts confronting international relations in the twenty-first century, providing insight into how the United States should maneuver the foreign landscape. The book is a political science/history crossover volume that uses realism, cosmopolitanism, and liberalism as foundations for emphasizing and exploring the importance of morality in foreign policy decision-making.

Nye assesses immoral versus moral foreign policy strategy by creating “moral foreign policy scorecards” to compare the American presidents from the 1930s to the present, using Woodrow Wilson as a baseline “thought leader” (5). In his assessment, he balances a president's stated values and personal motives, evaluates the effectiveness and ethical means of his stated foreign policy agenda, and analyzes the domestic and international ramifications of his administration. Each president receives a scorecard summarizing their qualitative grades (good, mixed, or poor) in three categories: intentions, means, and consequences. The parameters of those categories are suggested via questions that encourage the reader to examine all dimensions of a president's actions (37).

Nye ultimately argues that it is only with a strong moral compass grounded in “an ‘open and rules-based’ world order”—and balancing hard and soft power—that future presidents will be able to tackle key twenty-first-century challenges to American foreign policymakers. In particular, he points to the rise of China and its Asiatic partners and to a power shift from state to non-state actors with the advent and rise of new technologies (203). In confronting these challenges to a moral foreign policy agenda, he urges future presidents to employ soft power tactics, to provide grand strategies and global public goods in cooperation with others, and to refrain from isolationism or protectionism (217).

The majority of Nye's book consists of concise foreign policy summaries of each president since Franklin D. Roosevelt, culminating at the end with a moral evaluation of some of the most notable decisions made by the president under consideration. Because of the sheer number of presidents Nye evaluates, however, it is difficult for him to give an equitable assessment of each president's foreign policy. Consequently, he approaches each presidential administration knowing that he will have to be selective. Moreover, he admits towards the end of his book that “even when there is broad agreement on the facts, different judges may weigh them differently” (185).

For example, in citing Michael Beschloss, Nye claims that Harry Truman “resisted the use of nuclear weapons after the war [in Korea] bogged down,” but several scholars (including Conrad Crane and John Gaddis) have argued that Truman seriously considered military plans that included the possible use of nuclear weapons (55). Historian Sean L. Malloy has emphasized that Truman indeed tried to find a nuclear response that could break the military stalemate, a nuance overlooked in Nye's analysis.

Nye does admit that Eisenhower “showed little respect for democracy” and demonstrated little restraint “when it came to overthrowing elected regimes,” yet he seems to give Ike a pass in ethics, claiming he was “good on nuclear” (63–

64, 67). Are we to accept that Eisenhower's use of the CIA was morally acceptable because he didn't drop a nuclear bomb anywhere? And does "a set of prudent judgments" that resulted in "avoiding" a land war in Vietnam let Eisenhower off the hook for years of American involvement that, according to Kathryn Statler, undermined the French and set a precedent of U.S. intervention in Vietnam (61)? These judgments oversimplify the complexity of eight years of foreign policy. Also problematic is Nye's reliance on Stephen Ambrose, who claimed that Eisenhower's handling of the Soviet downing of a U-2 spy plane in May 1960 was "a magnificent performance" (64). Omitting and mischaracterizing widely accepted historical facts tends to weaken Nye's portrayal of Eisenhower's presidency and, therefore, his overall argument concerning morality in foreign policy.

Setting individual administrations aside, Nye also overlooks some of the broad circumstances and consequences of U.S. diplomacy. For example, he groups Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and Dwight Eisenhower together as "the founders" of the American liberal international order—a well-respected and fair assessment. But this conventional approach to the foundational years of the Cold War overlooks the possibility that these presidents, particularly Truman and Eisenhower, should be held responsible for the U.S. contribution to the moral discontinuity surrounding the Cold War and decolonization, as scholar Heonik Kwon and others have argued. As a result of these presidents' policies, the United States constructed a global system that favored its own economic and territorial ambitions at the expense of the so-called Third World. Surely Nye sees this as morally problematic?

Even when there is a clear case of international condemnation, Nye appears to minimize the offense. For example, Nye notes that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled in 1986 that Ronald Reagan's actions in Nicaragua—including supporting the Contras and mining Nicaragua's harbors—were in violation of international law. He then adds that Reagan "ignored the verdict" (121). But should we? Nye scores Reagan as "mixed" in the means category on his ethical scorecard, but the ruling of the ICJ suggests he might deserve a more damning judgment.

Perhaps equally problematic is the evaluation of the presidencies of Barack Obama and Donald Trump. The story for both is incomplete. Document declassification—essential to the writing of the history of U.S. foreign relations—will continue to uncover the intricacies of the Obama administration for decades to come. And how can a scorecard for Trump be accurate and complete when his administration is ongoing? While we can perceive the short-term rewards or consequences of both presidents' actions, the effects of foreign policy often take years or decades to unravel.

Consequently, each moral scorecard is somewhat selective and markedly biased, and this is a problem. Is the author simply playing an academic parlor game? Is he encouraging readers to compare presidents by their own ethical scorecards, the way fans compare baseball players and their averages and RBIs? If Nye is using presidential history to bolster a case in favor of moral sentiment within the foreign realm, why wouldn't he take care to present more complete and accurate histories?

While the majority of his book reads like a historical analysis of American foreign policy, Nye ultimately seems to be providing a guide for future politicians and foreign diplomats. He devotes considerable time to explaining key international relations concepts, such as bipolarity throughout the Cold War, the U.S. ascension into global hegemony with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and U.S. leadership in creating the contemporary liberal economic order. He then devotes the last few chapters to assessing

future challenges in foreign policy and argues for the continued use of soft power tactics and international collaboration.

Yet, the bulk of Nye's book is devoted to recounting the morality of past presidents' foreign policy decisions. As a result, a key question emerges: Why did the author spend the majority of his short book assessing history when his premise in writing the book was to guide future American presidents on how to confront such dilemmas as climate change or global spikes in immigration? His historical analyses, which together make up a majority of the manuscript but are all exceedingly brief and subjective, detract from his arguments about diplomacy. While he has a firm grasp of international relations, his selectivity and narrowness in considering different aspects of American history detract from the purpose of the book, which is to determine whether morality matters in the foreign sphere.

The question about his emphasis on historical analyses leads us to yet another query: Who is Nye writing for? When he claims that "Reagan is often credited with ending the Cold War, but the story is more complex," he sounds more like a professor lecturing undergraduates than a scholar urging fellow scholars to widen their understanding of ethics and foreign policy (118). If his purpose is to provide a rudimentary guide to international relations, then he makes intelligible and grounded claims. Framed within his wealth of international relations experience, Nye's appeal for embracing a liberal world order, one that calls for international cooperation over isolationism, is perfectly valid.

For example, individual states that are attempting to employ their own unique policies to conquer climate change or address pandemics are proving ineffective and inefficient in the face of rising globalization. Nye successfully argues that the United States should work in collaboration with the international community to elevate and strengthen transnational organizations and the general rule of law. The United States can assume a leadership position in confronting such dilemmas as preventing regional polarity, correcting the consequences of global climate change, and mitigating the economic inequality that accompanies globalization. In this way, he provides the optimal platform for diplomatic experts to create foreign policy for future presidents.

In summary, this slender volume makes a thought-provoking contribution to the fields of international relations and the history of American foreign policy. It will certainly prompt conversation. As with any book, how readers choose to use it is up to them. Nye writes a somewhat imperfect historical analysis to support a completely valid argument in favor of a collaborative, liberal-leaning approach to international relations, stressing the use of soft power tactics in the face of extraordinary twenty-first-century challenges.

Review of Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump*

Wilson D. (Bill) Miscamble, C.S.C.

Joseph Nye is a renowned scholar of international relations who taught for decades at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard. In addition to publishing many books, he also served at a senior level in both the Carter and Clinton administrations and, most recently, advised the Obama administration. He is best known for coining the term "soft power" and for developing the notion that the United States should persuade other nations to follow its lead more by utilizing its culture, institutions and values than by resorting to force or coercion.

Nye's commitment to this approach is evident in *Do*

Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump. In this book Nye poses questions regarding the role of morals in the making of American foreign policy. Spoiler alert: he believes that morals do matter, and he seeks to demonstrate this by evaluating the foreign policy performance of each president from Franklin Roosevelt through to the current occupant of the White House. Sadly, his work provides little of intellectual substance or practical value on the important questions he poses.

The bulk of Nye's book consists of his evaluations of the presidents and his grading of each of them according to his own vaguely defined criteria. Surprisingly, given his long involvement in U.S. foreign policy as both practitioner and observer, Nye's cursory analyses fail to advance an understanding of the *way* in which morality influenced any of the presidents' foreign policies. He relies largely on familiar secondary sources, supplemented by some selective memoir literature.

Those who want more insightful overviews of presidential character and leadership styles might read the fair-minded portraits in Fred Greenstein's *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to Barack Obama* (3rd ed., 2012). Those who want quick introductions to the actual making of foreign policy by these presidents would benefit more from the lively portrayals in Stephen Sestanovich's *Maximalist: America in the World from Truman to Obama* (2014). Indeed, Nye himself borrows from both Greenstein and Sestanovich in shaping his presidential sketches, which have something of the quality of decent undergraduate lectures derived from a decidedly soft-power, liberal perspective. This point must be emphasized because Nye does not effectively till sufficient historical soil to harvest any yield of consequence regarding morality and foreign policy.

Missing from Nye's analyses is any serious discussion of either the moral framework out of which the presidents operated or how they utilized moral reasoning in making decisions. Nye provides well-known biographical information, but he offers no sense of the moral and intellectual formation that presidents brought with them to the Oval Office. There is little discussion of how any president determined right from wrong or who they turned to for guidance on such concerns. Nye largely fails to show how the ethical or religious outlooks of the presidents connected in any demonstrable way to the policy decisions they made. One wishes that he had examined the rich ground that Andrew Preston covers in his *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (2012), which does a good job of exploring the intertwining of religion and statecraft throughout American history.

Furthermore, Nye neglects to examine how each presidential administration engaged in debate and deliberation on those policy issues that had profound moral implications. He provides no entrée into the world of policymakers, with its inevitable compromises and constantly competing pressures (both foreign and domestic) that confuse and complicate policy vision. And he largely fails to relate deliberations on foreign policy to the broader moral debates that occurred contemporaneously. For example, there is no discussion here of how the Reagan administration sought to counter the morally based criticisms of its nuclear arms policy during its first term. Yet dealing with these matters occupied a number of senior administration policymakers and forced them to provide a moral defense of nuclear deterrence against the criticisms of those who favored a nuclear freeze or nuclear disarmament.

One could multiply such examples; the moral debates surrounding both the decision of George H. W. Bush to enter the Gulf War and that of his son to launch the war in Iraq are classic cases. Questions as to whether these wars met the criteria for just wars were canvassed in serious public

debates. Yet Nye pays no sustained attention to how each president engaged these debates. This seems a significant limitation in a book dedicated to the role of morality in the making of U.S. foreign policy.

Another limitation of Nye's approach is that it focuses so heavily on the presidents as individuals rather than on the administrations they led. Nye acknowledges that Truman's foreign policy emerged from the efforts of an able group of policymakers, but he provides nothing on the moral convictions that motivated them. There is nothing in this work on what reportedly made George Kennan describe the Christian realist theologian Reinhold Niebuhr as "the father of us all." Further, Nye evaluates both JFK and LBJ and gives them their "scores," but he doesn't step back to examine the mentality of the "best and the brightest" set who counseled these leaders. Men like Robert McNamara, to choose a representative figure, seemed to move beyond issues of right and wrong into the technocratic realm of number-crunching and determining what would work. What is one to make of such an approach to policymaking? Where do morals fit in here? Nye doesn't thoughtfully consider such questions.

In short, Nye's study does not provide an examination of how morality influenced foreign policy in the past seventy-five years. Rather, he delivers summary evaluations of each president, using criteria he constructs in his opening chapters. Here, he erects a rickety analytical framework that allows him to assess (if that be the term) each president's foreign policy with three criteria. Firstly, he advances intention, and he apportions this measurement between both moral vision and prudential judgment. Then come the means that presidents utilized, and this category is somehow divvied out into elements such as necessity, proportion, discrimination in the use of force and respect for international rules and institutions. Finally, Nye puts forward consequences, a category that includes overall impact on U.S. interests and the extent of damage to others. Each president is then assigned a score of good, mixed or poor in each area, based solely on Nye's judgment calls.

The lack of serious intellectual rigor in applying these criteria is notable and seems apparent to Nye himself. In a telling observation, he notes that "of course, judgments can differ when assessing presidents of the same period. Anyone who has engaged in student exams or watched Olympic figure skating or the Westminster Dog Show knows that judging is not a science. Even when there is broad agreement on the facts, different judges may weight them differently" (185). Nye's frank admission regarding the idiosyncratic nature of the judging process shows that the book is not a systematically grounded assessment of the role of morality. It merely presents Nye's verdict on the moral quality of each president's foreign policy.

Needless to say, his views are rather predictable. Appraised on the morality measures that Nye employs, the administrations in which he served—those of Carter, Clinton, and Obama—all do very well. Yet, Nye himself obviously worries about offering that list as his top group, given the noteworthy limitations of these presidents in overseeing U.S. foreign policy. So he pivots quickly and asserts that morality should be combined with "effectiveness" (183). This then allows him to come up with a very different ranking. When the two benchmarks are merged, Nye places FDR, Truman, Eisenhower, and Bush 41 in his top group. Then there is a middle cluster, consisting of Reagan, Kennedy, Ford, Carter, Clinton, and Obama. At the bottom are Johnson, Nixon, Bush 43, and Trump.

Would this list surprise anyone familiar with Nye's published writings as well as his general sympathies regarding the importance of soft power and international organizations for American foreign policy? Hardly. Suffice it to say that thoughtful historians could readily contest these rankings. Indeed, their subjective nature calls into

question the practice of presidential ranking so favored by certain political scientists.

Nye has a secondary purpose to his study. He can't resist turning it into a critique of the Trump administration's foreign policy and what he presents as Trump's dangerous turn away from a firm commitment to the Wilsonian-inspired liberal international order that, he argues, the United States constructed after World War II. The language of "America First" troubles Nye greatly. He can't concede that Trump's efforts to rebalance American trade and security commitments and to slow the pace on globalization might reflect domestic opinion.¹

Yet Nye's censuring of Trump is his departure point for looking ahead to review the challenges for a "future moral foreign policy" for the United States. Ironically, he draws very little on his evaluations of the previous presidents in charting a future course. There don't seem to be any significant specific lessons to be drawn from the past as to how morality might be applied effectively in the present, aside from a vague renewal of the American commitment to the liberal international order. Instead, in what reads like a typical *Foreign Affairs* essay, Nye focuses on two "global power shifts" that are already underway and to which the United States must respond. One is "horizontal," comprising the rise of Asia and especially China, and the other is "vertical," involving technological developments that empower non-state actors.

What is most striking about Nye's treatment of these challenges is how infrequently moral questions enter into his discussion of them. For example, in dealing with China, he shines no light on the vast number of Chinese human rights violations and the re-education camps that imprison over a million Uighurs. Rather, the moral issue is nebulously defined as "whether the United States and China will develop attitudes that allow them to cooperate in producing global public goods" (204). Given the recent history of Chinese deception and antagonism, prudence surely requires American policymakers to exercise caution in dealing with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Similarly, Nye's confidence in the value of international organizations might be tempered by a recognition that the CCP has managed to compromise some of these same institutions.

Obviously, there are challenging times ahead for the United States in dealing with Xi Jinping's China. The prudent and moral course for Americans is to determine how China relates to the liberal international order so favored by Nye. They must also determine how to go about promoting their support for democratic institutions, the rule of law, and political and religious freedom, as global public goods.

I am glad to report that Joseph Nye provides a generally favorable evaluation of Harry Truman's foreign policy in terms of both its morality and effectiveness. Yet he might have benefited from examining at greater depth the moral dilemmas Truman faced and the difficulty that decisions sometimes caused him.² Truman understood that decisions made in the confusing fog of heightened tensions or of war place policymakers in circumstances where they sometimes have neither a clear nor easy moral option. Some years after he left office, Truman gave a discourse on decision-making in which he observed that "sometimes you have a choice of evils, in which case you try to take the course that is likely to bring the least harm."³ It would have benefited Nye's book if he had grappled more with the difficulty of actually forging a moral foreign policy, about which he assuredly must know a great deal. Instead of the superficial exercise of tabulating a "score" for each president, he might then have offered more explicit guidance on how morals should be applied in pursuing a principled foreign policy that aims to secure America's national interests and purpose.

When reading Nye's book, I could not help but think

of the recent memoir by his Harvard colleague, Samantha Power, entitled *The Education of an Idealist*.⁴ It is in part a revealing case study of the difficulty of translating moral convictions to the actual making of foreign policy—and, interestingly, Nye does not draw upon it. Power found it challenging in her work at senior levels of the Obama administration to balance her ideals and her quest to foster human rights with the hesitant way in which Obama applied American power and pursued American interests. Her defensive explanations for the fiascoes in Libya and Syria are less than convincing, but they serve to illustrate that the task of resisting evil in the world and of working to fashion a more just and realistic foreign policy is not an easy one.

One hopes that the Kennedy School and other places that claim to train future foreign "policymakers" equip them to have both some grasp of American moral principles and how these should be integrated with the use of American power and the pursuit of the national interest. They will need, however, to go far beyond Joseph Nye's *Do Morals Matter?* to prepare their students well for this work. Might I suggest that policymakers—both present and future—could still benefit from engaging the Christian realism reflected in the thinking of Saint Augustine and given its best twentieth-century expression by the aforementioned Reinhold Niebuhr? Over twenty-five years ago, George Weigel identified the following elements as key to Niebuhr's moral outlook: "Understanding the inevitable irony, pathos, and tragedy of history, being alert to the problem of unintended consequences, maintaining a robust skepticism about all the schemes of human perfection (especially those in which politics is the instrument of salvation), cherishing democracy without worshipping it."⁵ These elements are surely still applicable, and the work of good historians can make this more clear.

Perhaps Nye's book might serve as a challenge to historians of American foreign relations to explain better how morals have and haven't mattered in the making of American foreign policy. Such studies of American statecraft could provide helpful guidance and perspective for those who would make American foreign policy more moral.

Notes:

1. For a more favorable evaluation of Trump's foreign policy see Henry Nau, "What Trump Gets Right About U.S. Foreign Policy," *National Interest*, April 30, 2020, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/what-trump-gets-right-about-us-foreign-policy-149526.2>.
2. I wrestled with the moral dimensions of Truman's most controversial decision in "Truman, Hiroshima, and the Morality of the Atomic Bomb," in *Nuclear Energy and the Legacy of Harry S. Truman*, ed. J. Samuel Walker (Kirksville, MO), 2016).
3. Harry S. Truman, *Mr. Citizen* (New York, 1960), 263.
4. Samantha Power, *The Education of an Idealist: A Memoir* (New York, 2019).
5. See Weigel's chapter "Beyond Moralism and Realpolitik: Notes Towards Redefining 'America's Purpose,'" in George Weigel, *Idealism Without Illusions: U.S. Foreign Policy in the 1990s* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1994), 91–107.

Review of Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump*

Seth Jacobs

As fate or luck would have it, Andy Johns invited me to review this book right after I had finished reading Stephen Walt's *The Hell of Good Intentions* and John Mearsheimer's *The Great Delusion*.¹ Walt and Mearsheimer were two of my favorite teachers in graduate school, the

best lecturers it has been my privilege to witness, absolutely convincing in their prescriptions for a realist foreign policy that eschews sentiment and recognizes the irrelevance of international institutions in an anarchic world. I invariably left their classes certain that I knew how to remedy the ills afflicting American geopolitics and frankly contemptuous of the naïve, idealistic boobs in the White House, State Department, and Pentagon who had made such a hash of things because they refused to face facts.

Since its debut, I have been an avid reader of Walt's weekly column in *Foreign Policy* magazine, and it never fails to register as a cold dose of common sense amid the noise and chatter that attends America's often maladroit blundering on the global stage. I found myself nodding in agreement when Walt pronounced in 2016, "Had realists been at the helm of U.S. foreign policy over the past twenty years, it is likely that a number of costly debacles would have been avoided."²

And yet there is a reason I became a historian rather than a political scientist. Unlike many of my grad-school classmates in the 1990s, I was never able to subscribe so unconditionally to an international-relations theory—realism, Marxism, constructivism, and the other usual suspects—that I could screen out or gloss over discordant information, evidence that simply did not fit the ism set forth by the sage behind the pulpit. The intellectual glow I felt after attending Walt's and Mearsheimer's lectures would wear off after a while as I thought about recent international developments and identified phenomena I was unable to squeeze into the realist Procrustean bed. For example, I had seen the United Nations functioning more or less as its framers intended when it orchestrated free and fair elections in Haiti. In addition, members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization had brought wars in Bosnia and Kosovo to a close and established that ethnic cleansing—at least in Europe—was a thing of the past.

These triumphs were only partial and qualified, but in a realist world they ought never to have occurred. "History has a way of escaping attempts to imprison it in patterns," Barbara Tuchman wisely noted over half a century ago, adding, "A historian cannot pick and choose his facts; he must deal with all the evidence."³ And dealing with all of the evidence means being comfortable with mess. Isms are orderly. History is messy. History goes its own way. Reading Walt's and Mearsheimer's latest efforts brought back to me the cerebral allure—but ultimate insufficiency—of realism and, indeed, of any prefabricated system purporting to cover all historical situations.

I was thus ideally prepared to appreciate Joseph Nye's terrific new book *Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump*. Nye, of course, is not a historian—he is one of our most eminent political scientists—but he has spent considerable time outside the ivory tower filling high offices in the Carter, Clinton, and Obama administrations and he understands the untidiness and contingency of policymaking. Although he draws upon several IR schools of thought in *Do Morals Matter?*, he is not their captive. "When [national] survival is in jeopardy," he observes, "realism is a necessary basis" for U.S. foreign policy (32). Yet that only applies to a limited number of circumstances: "Some foreign policy issues relate to our survival as a nation, but most do not." None of the wars America has fought since 1945 were essential for our survival, and many of the controversies present-day policymakers attempt to resolve—"human rights or climate change or Internet freedom"—do not require taking up arms at all (x). In other words, realism does not present an accurate picture of international politics.

Nye argues that we must combine realism with two other "mental maps of the world," cosmopolitanism and liberalism, both to understand the challenges American presidents face when they venture abroad and to evaluate

how successful they have been in meeting those challenges. Cosmopolitanism stresses the shared humanity of the global community and insists that human rights are universal. No respecter of borders, it affirms that we must sometimes violate another nation's sovereignty to preserve the rights of its citizens. Liberalism accepts the realist precept that the world is anarchic but argues that anarchy is not the same as chaos. Complicated financial interdependence, multinational corporations, and institutions such as the UN, NATO, the Organization of American States, the European Union, and the World Trade Organization ensure a degree of order and predictability in international affairs that allows presidents enough leeway to raise an issue that legendary realists like George Kennan and Hans Morgenthau maintained should never enter into statecraft: namely, whether or not a given policy is moral.

As anyone who has studied U.S. geopolitics knows, Americans tend to be highly moralistic in framing their foreign policy, or at least to use moralistic language in justifying that policy. This sententious bent has not stopped Americans from doing horrible things in the world (think Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Chile, Panama, Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador—and that is just the Western Hemisphere!), but they have generally been uncomfortable with admitting that, for example, they chose to engage in hostilities for the un-idealistic objective of keeping the price of oil down. When Woodrow Wilson went before Congress in 1917 to ask for a declaration of war against Germany, he did not proclaim that U.S. shipping in the Atlantic had to be protected against the menace of the submarine; rather, he declared, "The world must be made safe for democracy."⁴ When, thirty years later, Harry Truman requested \$400 million to fund the Truman Doctrine, he did not announce that the corrupt, inefficient Greek monarchy needed to be propped up because, whatever its faults, it was not communist; instead, he insisted that America must "help free peoples to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes."⁵

While such blood-and-thunder rhetoric may have appalled the realists in the audience, Wilson and Truman were aware that they would never be able to persuade the American people to support their policies unless they appealed to a well-established sense of moral purpose. As Nye notes, presidents have traditionally "expressed formal goals and values that were attractive to Americans. After all, that is how they got elected" (182).

This ethical framing has also had an impact beyond the American homefront, a point Nye stresses in his assessment of the Carter presidency. The "soft power of Carter's human rights policy," he observes, "contributed to the change that eventually culminated with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989" (112). After all, the wall did not come down because of American rockets and bombs; it was torn down by people disgusted with the communist system and drawn to the culture of the West. *Values* made up a big part of that culture: freedom of speech and assembly, the dignity of the individual, equality of all citizens before the law—these ultimately proved more important than ICBMS, NATO divisions, Green Berets, and Stinger missiles for the *mujahideen* in securing Western victory in the cold war. "Morals did matter," Nye concludes (182). That being the case, and assuming that such soft-power attraction can continue to work in America's favor in a post-Cold War world, are there any steps we ought to take to ensure that our foreign policy meets the requisite moral standards?

Nye believes there are, and his guidelines strike me as both innovative and sound. First, he contends that we should approach the task of policymaking from a three-dimensional perspective, weighing intentions, means, and consequences. As noted above, presidents typically express their intentions in noble terms. Lyndon Johnson

claimed to be sending hundreds of thousands of American troops to South Vietnam to save an ally from the evils of communism, while George W. Bush justified his invasion of Iraq by insisting that Saddam Hussein, along with possessing weapons of mass destruction, had subjected the Iraqi people to decades of tyrannical rule from which they deserved to be liberated into pro-American democracy.

The high-mindedness of those policies cannot obscure their inability to pass what Nye calls the “feasibility test” (15). LBJ’s and Bush’s goals proved unobtainable, at least with the means they chose—carpet bombing, napalm, Agent Orange, waterboarding, extraordinary rendition, Abu Ghraib—which were not only ineffective strategically but damaging to America’s global reputation. As for consequences, the unification of Vietnam under communism and the morass of present-day Iraq are such obvious U.S. failures that they speak for themselves.

By contrast, Harry Truman’s 1948-49 campaign to keep the citizens of West Berlin from starving in the face of a Soviet blockade was a masterful combination of altruistic intentions, pragmatic (and nonviolent) means, and positive consequences. American foreign-policy initiatives all fall somewhere along the continuum between the Berlin airlift and Vietnam/Iraq, with most, alas, tending to cluster toward the latter pole.

Do Morals Matter? employs what Nye terms a “3D scorecard” to assess the performance of presidents from Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Donald Trump, the men who presided over America’s period of greatest international power and influence. Which of the chief executives qualified as “a moral foreign policy leader,” and which fell short of that standard? In terms of intentions, did a president articulate “attractive values,” and did he have the “contextual intelligence” to understand the risks his policy entailed? With regard to means, did he apply a use of force proportional to the challenge faced? Finally, were the consequences of his policy beneficial to the United States in the long term, and did he “minimize unnecessary damage” to others? Did he “respect the truth and build credibility” while “broaden[ing] moral discourse at home and abroad” (37)?

What I like about this scorecard are its complexity and flexibility. Nye knows that it is not always possible for a president to check all the right boxes. Sometimes the leader needs to deceive the people in order to obtain an essential result, as was arguably the case when FDR lied about the so-called *Greer* incident to build popular support for aiding the Allies in World War II. Sometimes innocent parties have to be sacrificed for the greater good, as Truman rationalized in ordering the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Much of policymaking involves choosing between unattractive options, and the most we can expect of our presidents is that they hew as closely as possible to an ethical line as they navigate the shoals of an unpredictable and treacherous world.

So, who scores highest? It is a close contest, but Jimmy Carter seems to come out on top. Although Carter is consistently “ranked by historians in the middle of the pack” of chief executives and served only one term before suffering the worst defeat of any incumbent president ever (including Herbert Hoover in 1932), he beats out Dwight Eisenhower, Ronald Reagan, and even FDR in terms of the morality of his foreign policy (104).

Here Nye contributes to the growing—and glowing—revisionist scholarship on the Carter years, best represented by Stuart Eizenstat’s recent tome *President Carter*.⁶ However, he also revisits the question raised frequently when Carter was in office: “Can a man be too good to be a good president?” (105). Nye is right to note that Carter had “four major foreign policy accomplishments”: returning the Panama Canal to the Panamanians, orchestrating the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt, extending

full diplomatic recognition of the People’s Republic of China, and “raising the profile of human rights issues in American diplomacy” (106, 110). Still, we have to weigh these successes against such train wrecks as Carter’s overreaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and especially his mismanagement of the Iran hostage crisis. Carter’s actions during and public statements on this latter crisis, although motivated by compassion and rectitude, had the effect of immensely enhancing the value of the hostages to the Iranian government. A deeply religious man, he publicly prayed with their families, and he told journalists that his every waking moment was spent agonizing about them. Basically, he allowed the crisis to paralyze his foreign policy for over a year.

Would a more hardheaded and cynical president like Richard Nixon have put the fate of fifty-three Americans ahead of all other considerations? One doubts it. And, of course, there was Carter’s botched attempt to rescue the hostages, a poorly planned and executed military operation in which eight Americans were killed when two helicopters collided. This fiasco made the United States look impotent and pathetic and contributed to Reagan’s landslide victory in the 1980 election. In light of such events, it puzzles me that Nye rates Carter’s foreign-policy means as “good/mixed” rather than “poor” (113).

That brings me to another aspect of this book that I like: the author’s acknowledgement of bias. Scholars are people. People have biases. “I realize that my scorecards for Carter and Clinton may have been unwittingly affected by my participation in those administrations,” Nye notes, adding, “I respect my close friends who served in the [George W. Bush] administration . . . [and] told me that I scored him too low.” Nye further observes that “some realists rate Nixon’s foreign policy more highly than I did” because of the famous opening to China and the fact that Nixon ended the Vietnam War. (These people ignore Nixon’s pre-1972 opposition to a rapprochement with Beijing and the 21,000 American lives sacrificed in obtaining a “decent interval” between U.S. withdrawal and the fall of Saigon.) “Judging is not a science,” Nye writes. “Even when there is broad agreement on the facts, different judges may weight them differently” (185-86). What matters to Nye are the scorecards and how they help structure and discipline our thinking about ethics and foreign policy. They will not lead to perfect moral reasoning in every circumstance, he notes, but they constitute “modest steps in that direction” (xii). How refreshing such statements are when set against the smug pseudo-omniscience of Walt and Mearsheimer!

I do have some quibbles. Since every book by Nye is a scholarly event, I wish Oxford University Press had engaged a more conscientious copyeditor. There are occasional jarring errors of fact: “Nixon expanded the [Vietnam] War to Cambodia in May 1971 [*sic*]”; the “‘Christmas bombing’ campaign finally produced a peace deal at Paris in early January 1972 [*sic*]” (92). The final chapter, “Foreign Policy and Future Choices,” could, I think, be cut by half without losing anything essential. But these are minor considerations. In all, *Do Morals Matter?* displays in abundance the deep learning, subtlety, and imaginativeness we have come to expect from Joseph Nye, and it superbly fulfills Einstein’s (possibly apocryphal) injunction to make everything as simple as possible, but no simpler.

Notes:

1. Stephen M. Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America’s Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York, 2018); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven, 2019).
2. Stephen M. Walt, “What Would a Realist World Have Looked Like?” *Foreign Policy*, 8 January 2016.

3. Barbara W. Tuchman, "Is History a Guide to the Future?" in *Practicing History: Selected Essays* (New York, 2014), 272, 278.
4. "President Woodrow Wilson Asks Congress to Declare War Against Germany, 1917," *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations, Volume II: Since 1914*, 7th ed., ed. Dennis Merrill and Thomas G. Paterson (Boston, 2010), 33.
5. "The Truman Doctrine Calls for Aid to Greece and Turkey to Contain Communism, 1947," *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations, Volume II*, 201.
6. Stuart Eizenstat, *President Carter: The White House Years* (New York, 2018). See also Ross Douthat, "Was Jimmy Carter the Most Underrated President in History?" *New York Times*, 5 June 2018; Julian Zelizer, "Was Jimmy Carter the Most Successful One-Term President in History?" *Washington Post*, 18 May 2018.

Pax Americana and Presidential Morals

Vanessa Walker

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Donald Trump's approach to foreign policy thus far has been its rejection of an almost two-century-old premise of U.S. exceptionalism, that what is good for America is good for the rest of the world. Although this premise has often been self-serving and contradictory, it is also rooted in the belief that America's fortunes are tied up with the rest of the world, even if it is in a way that was often dictated by America's own interests. Since World War II, this idea's corollary has been that America's prosperity, security, and stability rests on a world order conducive to its interests and values. This assumption has led to some breathtaking lapses in moral and strategic judgment. Witness the fifteen-year war in Vietnam. It has also enabled a hubris that often ignored the interests and values of other nations. Yet it has also emphasized the ways that U.S. fortunes are connected to the global community and reinforced a sense of stewardship for the international system.

A robust questioning of the morality of Pax Americana has the potential to check interventionism and superpower conceit and reshape U.S. power in the service of an interdependent global community. Yet "what's good for the world is good for America" does not seem to be the inversion our current president has derived from his criticism of the liberal international order. Trump's "America First" logic—that "it is the right of all nations to put their own interests first"—instead seems to reject, rather than just reconsider, the role of American values and international ethics in the exercise of U.S. power (1).

So how should we understand the role of morals in foreign policy, and are they diametrically at odds with national interests? Joseph S. Nye's new work, *Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump*, seeks to transcend the tired debate between values and interests to explore where and how moral thinking has defined national interests in the past seven decades. Nye clearly takes issue with the simplistic nihilism of Trump's "America first" rhetoric, and he also challenges realists who assert that power, not values, shapes national interests. "It is tautological or at best trivial to say that all states try to act in their national interests," Nye writes in the preface to his book. "The important question is how leaders choose to define and pursue that national interest under different circumstances" (x).

Challenging the premise that moral arguments were simply window dressing to make hard-nosed national interests more palatable to an idealistic American public, Nye instead argues that the very construction of national interests is in itself a moral act (35). Certainly, national survival and security are the first moral and strategic imperatives of foreign policy. Yet international affairs, particularly for a powerful nation such as the United States in the twentieth century, is rarely reduced to strategies

for survival. Instead, it encompasses a diverse array of objectives and interests, defined substantially by a nation's values and identity, which must be balanced against one another.

Given Nye's groundbreaking work on soft power, it is not surprising that he would argue that "higher purpose" is a critical component of American power and influence in the international sphere. Yet this is not just a championing of morals in international affairs, but a concerted effort to grapple with how values shape presidential thinking, and how we, as scholars and citizens, in turn assess presidential policies. Looking at the state of politics today, it seems difficult to imagine that Americans could arrive at any sort of consensus on morals. Nye argues, however, that good moral reasoning has certain elements that transcend political and ideological proclivities and divides.

Nye lays out a three-dimensional rubric, explaining that a moral foreign policy "is not a matter of intentions versus consequences but must involve both as well as the means that were used" (xi). In assessing a president's choices, then, we must look at how they paired their intentions with the means used to realize them and balance that against the outcomes of these choices. In defining and evaluating ethical means, Nye draws heavily on Michael Walzer's work on just war theories, emphasizing the proportional and discriminate use of force. He pairs that analysis with philosopher John Rawls's work on liberal imperatives to limit intervention and minimize the impact on the sovereignty and rights of peoples beyond their own national borders (37). Nye is thus asking us to think about morality beyond a simple blind idealism, and rather to consider it a crucial factor in defining interests and, in pursuing those interests, "adjusting means and ends to each other" (189).

Do Morals Matter? is not a history of presidential decision-making, as Nye himself acknowledges, but rather "an exercise in normative thinking applied to the period since 1945 when the United States has been the most powerful country in the world" (xii). In many ways, Nye is not assessing the morality of all foreign policy, but rather, the morality of presidential choices operating within the Wilsonian liberal international order. This order—emphasizing collective security and economic interdependence, and promoting values like democracy and human rights—sought to structure an anarchic international system through the development of international norms, institutions, and laws. The importance of international institutions and reciprocal obligations at the center of this order is evident in Nye's emphasis on their maintenance as part of moral decision-making. "One of the most important moral skills of presidents is to design and maintain systems and institutions, not simply to make immediate decisions" (23). He argues that "by enhancing the long shadow of the future, international regimes and institutions encourage cooperation with moral consequences that go beyond any single transaction" (190). Unlike the imperial balance-of-power politics it supplanted, this system of institutional commitments and norms, as Nye presents it, brings not only stability but also shared values to the ordering of the international system. Thus, his assessment of individual presidents' records of moral decision-making resides within this framework, and he assesses the presidents on their ability to function within this system on their legacy of preserving and advancing it.

One of this work's most compelling contributions is its exploration of "nonactions" in evaluating the records of presidents. "Causation," he writes, "seems more immediate, visible, and calculable. Yet omission may have larger moral consequences for more people" (25). Nye notes that his metrics give both Carter and Ford, for example, good marks for their moral decision-making, yet conventional wisdom holds that both presidents' foreign policies were "weak" and ineffective (113). The bias towards action is perhaps

most clearly articulated by President Obama's advisor Ben Rhodes, who observed that "even as the Syria red line episode demonstrated that public opinion was skeptical of war, the political frame for national security debates remained the same: Doing more was tough, anything else was weak" (194).

Indeed, prudence in foreign affairs is often constructed in opposition to the hard choices necessary for securing national interests. Carter's efforts to reorient U.S. foreign policy in the 1970s have been criticized as naive at best and dangerous at worst. Realists equated Carter's emphasis on incorporating human rights and democratic values into foreign policy mechanisms with ineptitude, as though focusing on ethical frameworks was immoral in its disregard for global power politics. Yet Ford's and Carter's high marks from Nye come in part from the fact that both recognized the limits on American power in the 1970s and adjusted their means accordingly. If policymaking is the "art of the possible," as President Kennedy asserted, then Carter and Ford deserve credit for their prudence and foresight on the long-term consequences that aggressive actions might have (78).

Although being too cautious can also have moral implications, what was *not* done can be as important as what was. Perhaps the best example of this in Nye's work is his exploration of the so-called "nuclear taboo." Despite real moments of risk or earnest mobilization for their use, American leaders have demurred from actually using nuclear weapons since August 1945, when the United States detonated its two nuclear bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The staggering size of the United States' nuclear arsenal and the world's numerous brushes with nuclear war reinforce Nye's emphasis on prudence and non-action as part of the moral calculus of foreign policy leaders and underscore the impact of moral thinking on decision-making.

This book is not a history of Wilson's liberal international order or a categorical examination of the presidencies it contains, nor does it claim to be. Although a more rigorous examination of that liberal internationalist framework could have helped illuminate the moral dimensions of the choices each president faced in balancing the means and consequences of his policies, there are plenty of works out there already that do this. Moreover, the difficulty of assessing moral outcomes of policy choices is evidenced by his own chapters on each president. Do we ever know a president (or ourselves) well enough to definitively identify intentions in selecting particular policy paths? As any presidential scholar will note, leaders are a bundle of human inconsistencies and are motivated by any number of political, ideological, and emotional variables, and those inevitably inform their decision-making.

Undoubtedly, many historians would apply Nye's criteria very differently and challenge his presidential scorecards. Nye accepts that a "mixed verdict" on each presidency is likely. The process of historical revision means we will constantly revisit the meaning and morality of different decisions as we uncover new documents and as new priorities emerge to inform our inquiries. Of greater value is Nye's endeavor to account for moral factors in political decision-making, because, as he convincingly argues, "the history shows that, even though scoring can be contested, morals did matter" (186).

When exploring presidential morality in 2020, it is impossible to escape the specter of Donald Trump. The current U.S. president undoubtedly informed Nye's thinking throughout this work. As he writes in the preface, "the advent of the Trump administration has revived interest in what is a moral foreign policy and raised it from a theoretical question to front-page news" (x). Trump, ironically, is one of the few presidents to openly challenge assumptions about U.S. morality, famously commenting in

a 2017 interview with Bill O'Reilly that the United States isn't "so innocent" and that it has done "plenty of killing too."¹ But this admission has not marked a moment of self-reflection or atonement for moral lapses. Rather, it serves to justify a caricature of realist policy and to deflect demands for U.S. action on human rights violations, like the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

In his assessment of Trump's foreign policy, Nye demonstrates the very prudence and restraint he champions. When questioned in a recent interview about Trump's comments about America's history, Nye conceded that "for once, Trump is right. American exceptionalism has made us too sanctimonious about our past and about our intentions."² Nye, who is measured in his praise for and critiques of individual presidents throughout the work, does his best to dispassionately assess Trump's legacy thus far, with all the usual disclaimers about it being incomplete and the value of historical distance. Even so, he cannot escape the judgment that Trump's moral failures signify a rupture between his foreign policy and that of the thirteen presidents who preceded him. Trump's blatant and daily lies, his unapologetic association with autocrats, and his overt dismissal of liberal norms and international institutions all deeply trouble Nye, who sees the Wilsonian international liberal order as a source of much-needed stability in a chaotic world.

It is clear that the cynical exercise of power espoused by the current president alarms the author. This book, however, is not solely a rebuttal to Trump's unapologetic and self-justifying "America first" rhetoric. In foreign policy, as in many areas, Trump is the symptom as much as the cause of larger power shifts, and Nye's efforts to account for the importance of moral thinking is driven by his concerns about the decline of the liberal order more generally. Pointing to the rise of China and the "diffusion away from governments" driven by technological innovation, Nye notes that the era of Wilsonian liberalism is ending, "so we should learn to use moral reasoning better in constructing its successor" (xii).

While there is plenty to criticize about the world order propagated by Pax Americana, Nye maintains that its promise of an open and rules-based international order, in which U.S. presidents mobilize soft power to encourage cooperation with other states, holds promise for a stable, peaceful international system (218). Yet even as he looks to the changing international system beyond the current political moment, Nye cannot help but end with a final warning against the danger of Trumpian politics: "The future success of American foreign policy may be threatened more by the rise of nativist politics that narrow our moral vision at home than by the rise and decline of other powers abroad" (218). A moral foreign policy, it seems, begins at home.

Notes:

1. "Trump Tells O'Reilly He 'Respects' Putin in Super Bowl Interview," *Fox News Insider*, February 4, 2017, <https://insider.foxnews.com/2017/02/04/preview-bill-oreilly-donald-trump-super-bowl-interview>.
2. Henry Farrell, "So Do Morals Matter? I Ask an Expert," *The Washington Post*, April 24, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/04/24/so-do-morals-matter-us-foreign-policy-i-asked-expert/>.

Author's Response

Joseph S. Nye, Jr.

Every author should be grateful when a group of historians spends time reading and critiquing his or her work, particularly if he or she is a political scientist. While our fields overlap, they clearly differ, and it is interesting to note how these historians approached their task. As I say at the start of *Do*

Morals Matter?, “this book is not a history. I make no effort to be complete or to consult all sources in describing the ethical aspects of presidents’ foreign policies since World War II.” Yet Wilson Miscamble faults me for “relying on familiar secondary sources supplemented by some selective memoir literature,” and Lori Clune and Danielle Richman call the book a “political science/history crossover volume” that “approaches each presidential administration with selectivity and omission.” These are indeed sins for a historian, but as a political scientist, I approached my logical task quite differently, and selectivity was crucial for a short book.

To answer the question in the title, I needed only to prove an existence theorem, not to survey all cases. Moreover, the book is an exercise in moral reasoning about international relations, not a detailed examination of the ethical behavior of all significant actors in the fourteen administrations since 1945. Instead, I used selected historical examples to complexify the often simplistic treatment of morality by my political science colleagues and by international relations theorists. And to be fair, Clune and Richman admit that “if Nye’s purpose is to provide a rudimentary guide to international relations, then he makes intelligible and grounded claims.” As a political scientist, that was my purpose. Call it applied history. I did not pretend to make an original contribution to post-1945 history.

Seth Jacobs grasped this purpose, perhaps because, as he recounts, he escaped “the realist Procrustean bed” that was so seductive in the political science courses he took in graduate school. That experience, he says, made him “ideally prepared to appreciate Joseph Nye’s terrific new book,” which shows that while realism is a necessary basis for U.S. foreign policy, it “does not present an accurate picture of international politics.” That indeed is the purpose of my book. Conventional wisdom holds that national interests bake the cake and politicians sprinkle a little moral icing to make it look pretty. I wanted to show that when realists espouse this cynical view, in some important cases they will get the history wrong.

Having proven my existence theorem—that, in some cases, the moral views of the president were an important ingredient in the cake, not just rhetorical icing—I then wanted to suggest a more careful approach to moral reasoning about this difficult topic. The American traditions of moralism and idealism are not the antidote to shallow realism. As Vanessa Walker properly points out, the tradition of American exceptionalism has led to “some breathtaking lapses in moral and strategic judgment.” And she correctly describes my purpose: “Nye is thus asking us to think about morality beyond a simple blind idealism, and rather to consider it a crucial factor in defining interests and, in pursuing those interests, ‘adjusting means and ends to each other.’”

One of my favorite classical realists, the Swiss-American theorist Arnold Wolfers, argued that “a moral foreign policy means making the best choices that the circumstances admit.” Long before the 2016 election of Donald Trump, I often cited this statement in the course on foreign policy I taught at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. But while I agreed with Wolfers, I came to feel that his statement lacked the detail that students (and practitioners) needed when faced with hard choices. To add that detail, I developed a framework for examining three dimensions of intentions, means, and consequences that can help us to look more carefully into how presidents appraised “what circumstances permit” and the choices they made under the circumstances.

Miscamble refers to this framework as “rickety,” and, not surprisingly, he would have preferred that I use the Christian realism of Augustine and Niebuhr (whom I also admire). But he does not accurately describe the framework he condemns. As Walker correctly points out, “Nye draws heavily on Michael Walzer’s work on just war theories, emphasizing the proportional and discriminate use of force. He pairs that analysis with philosopher John Rawls’ work on liberal imperatives to limit intervention and minimize the impact on the sovereignty and rights of peoples beyond their national borders.”

The resulting scorecards are debatable, and designedly so. They oversimplify history as a way to encourage people to unpack the phrase “the best choices that the circumstances permit,” and to focus their comparisons. The scope of the scorecards is admittedly arbitrary. Lyndon Johnson does not get credit for the good he did on the domestic front when it comes to his foreign policy choices. And I argue that the brief tenures of Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, who had notably moral foreign policies in all three dimensions, illustrate that a moral foreign policy is not the same as an effective one. Conversely, Richard Nixon had an effective foreign policy in some dimensions, but not a particularly moral one.

Miscamble complains that my scorings are predictable. As a historian, I wonder whether he knows that I played a significant role in the effort in 1988 to defeat George H.W. Bush, whom I nonetheless put near the top of my rankings in the book. That surprised even me. But when he misreports that Nye “cannot concede any of Trump’s efforts to rebalance America’s trade and security commitments,” I wonder if he read the book as carefully as he might have. There are several such references. As Walker more accurately observes, “in his assessment of Trump’s foreign policy, Nye demonstrates the very prudence and restraint he champions.”

More important, I repeatedly say in the book that my personal rankings may be biased, and I may wish to change them in the future because of new information. It is important—far more important than my rating—that the scorecard encourage people to go beyond the exceptionalism of good intentions or the easy consequentialism of “it worked.” Historians (and others) should criticize my scoring, as many of these critics properly do. Nonetheless, I think Seth Jacobs summarizes accurately when he says “what I like about this scorecard is its complexity and flexibility. Nye knows that it is not always possible for a president to check all the right boxes. . . . Much of foreign policymaking involves choosing between unattractive options, and the best we can expect of our presidents is that they hew as closely as possible to an ethical line as they navigate the shoals of an unpredictable and treacherous world.”

In conclusion, let me thank all these critics for the attention they have given to my book. I may have to rethink some of my ratings and judgments. But I did not expect otherwise. What I wanted to do with the book was to get political scientists and practitioners to go beyond simplistic realism of modern international relations. As I say in the book, start with realism, but don’t stop where you start. I do not expect my framework for moral reasoning about foreign policy to be the last word on the subject. I just hope it provokes renewed debate on a topic that has been rather neglected in international relations analysis.