Research on Language and Social Interaction, 33(2), 179–211

Communication Codes of Rationality and Spirituality in the Discourse of and About Robert S. McNamara's *In Retrospect*

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This study explores the dynamics of 2 communication codes within 1 speech community. The case study is grounded in speech codes theory and oppositional codes theory, and centers on Robert S. McNamara's *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (1995a) and 210 media responses to his revelations about U.S. decision making during the Vietnam War. McNamara's (1995a) book reflects a code of rationality, with McNamara believing that communication could and should be forced. Although varying widely in their assessment of McNamara's book, responses to his comments reflect a code of spirituality, a code that honors morality. The study of McNamara's communication, both on its own terms and through the words of others, provides a more complex view of his code than would have been possible through a study of his words alone, and also provides an explanation of why his account was not comprehensible to many of his hearers.

This article is based on my dissertation (University of Washington, 1996). Previous versions were presented at the National Communication Association Convention, San Diego, November 1996, and the Western States Communication Association Convention, Vancouver, Canada, February 1999. I would like to thank Gerry Philipsen, Donal Carbaugh, and Susan L. Kline for providing comments on earlier drafts of this article. My appreciation goes as well to Karen Tracy and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive suggestions for improving the article.

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From January 20, 1961 to February 29, 1968, Robert S. McNamara, then the U.S. Secretary of Defense, played an important role in U.S. decisions regarding military involvement in the Vietnam War.[1] For much of his time in office, McNamara was a key participant in decisions that initiated, developed, sustained, and escalated the United States's military role in the war. As both he and others have noted, McNamara had, during the fall of 1967, ceased to believe that "the war could be won through bombing and escalation" (Schulzinger, 1995, p. 228). On February 29, 1968, with the war in Vietnam still raging and with no word to the public regarding his discontent about U.S. policy, McNamara left office.

Twenty years after the end of the Vietnam War, McNamara wrote and published a best-selling book (see "Best Sellers," 1995a; "Best Sellers," 1995b), *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (1995a), in which he provided an account of his and others' decisions during the war. McNamara stated that one of his purposes in writing *In Retrospect* was to help Americans understand the decisions of U.S. policymakers during Vietnam.[2] Although some people received his book favorably, some were neutral, and still others expressed dissatisfaction with the account McNamara provided of his and others' actions and mistakes. The mixed response suggests that McNamara's account was only partially successful in providing acceptable explanations of his and others' actions during the war.

The case of the Vietnam War has previously been studied as a site for investigating the arguments associated with various "communities of belief" (Schiff, 1994). According to Schiff, a community of belief is "a group differentiated from other groups in terms of its sharing and using taken-for-granted expectations and relevances" (p. 286), and possessing a "shared worldview" (p. 269). Schiff's study used discussion about the Vietnam War as a case for examining the struggle among competing political ways of thinking and arguing. In this study, I also use discussion about the Vietnam War as a case for examining struggle, but focus instead on the struggle among competing discourses *within* a community as a way to understand competing worldviews that coexist in one community.

One way to try to understand McNamara's discourse is through a study of speech or communication codes, that is, "*a system of socially constructed symbols and meanings, premises, and rules, pertaining to communicative conduct*" (Philipsen, 1997, p. 126). The notion that a "code" of some sort might be present in McNamara's discourse was supported explicitly by at least one prominent reviewer of his book. Christopher Lehmann-Haupt (1995), a senior staff book reviewer for *The New*

York Times, stated that "One begins to suspect the presence of a highly complex code in these passages, the deciphering of which would require the collaboration of scholars, cryptographers and psychoanalysts" (p. C16). Lehmann-Haupt asserted that there was a code operating in McNamara's text, a code that allowed McNamara to justify his role in Vietnam policy making despite his grave doubts.

McNamara's (1995a) book and his responses to critics were, in large part, explanations of his actions buttressed by the invocation of that code. Although Lehmann-Haupt's (1995) review does not, on its own, provide justification for the study of communication codes in McNamara's book, it does provide support for the argument that the study of communication codes is important not only in promoting scholarly understanding, but also in addressing pressing social and political questions. McNamara's book and the discourse generated about it provide a potentially rich case study that addresses scholarly, social, and political questions.

In explicating McNamara's communication code, I draw on several related theoretical and methodological traditions, namely speech codes theory (Philipsen, 1997) and oppositional codes theory (Huspek, 1993, 1994). Speech codes theory draws primarily "from Bernstein's [1971] concept of coding principle and Hymes's [1962, 1964, 1974] programmatic approach to the ethnography of communication" (Philipsen, 1997, p. 122). Although speech codes theory was developed mostly from studies of spoken discourse, it also has strong roots in written texts (Philipsen, 1992). Its usefulness as a theory extends to the study of all discursive forms and their reflections and constitution of self, society, and strategic action (Philipsen, 1992). In investigating McNamara's communication code, I examined his discourse to understand the meanings he attached to his acts, communicative and other, and the ways in which his code both reflects and constitutes a view of self, society, and strategic action. My goal is to understand the "ways that speech code elements are woven into speaking" (Philipsen, 1997, p. 142).

I also examined others' comments about McNamara's discourse, and the meanings they attached to his discourse, to gain a richer understanding of the code underlying McNamara's articulation of his and others' actions during the Vietnam War. Huspek's (1994) notion of oppositional codes underlies this move. Oppositional codes theory is framed largely as a theory that expands Bernstein's (1971) work by addressing criticisms of it. Specifically, Bernstein's work on communication codes situates codes and class as isolated from each other, whereas Huspek's

work focuses on the dynamic and mutually creating relationship between codes and class.

Some powerful premises underlie oppositional codes theory. One is that codes not only coexist with conflicting codes, but they become meaningful because of their association with each other. That is, one code gains at least part of its meanings from its association with other codes. Also, even more powerfully, conflicting codes are dependent on each other for their meanings. Finally, an examination of codes in relation to each other allows for the critical assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the codes (Huspek, 1994).

The oppositional codes discussed by Huspek (1993, 1994) are also alluded to as competing discourses by Coupland and Coupland (1997). In the case of McNamara, the competing discourses came from McNamara himself as a man of power and influence and from the media representations of response to his (1995a) book. The struggle over the value of his words acted as a site for the expression of worldviews held by the participants. An analysis focused on the complexity of McNamara's text on its own terms *and* in the context of the social discourse around it reveals the communication code that informs his explanations of U.S. decision making during the Vietnam War, and reveals the ways in which communication codes are enacted within contexts of coexisting and sometimes competing discourses.

It is important to articulate here some of the assumptions about speech codes and speech communities that I am making in framing the study of McNamara's discourse as a study of competing codes. According to Hymes (1972), a speech community is "a community sharing rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety" (p. 54). It is also an " 'organization of diversity' " (Hymes, 1974, p. 433). These two passages illustrate the importance of viewing a speech community both as a group of people that shares a common way of conducting and interpreting speech *and* that at the same time is diverse. Both Hymes (1972, 1974) and Huspek (1993, 1994) noted the dynamic nature of speech communities, particularly that there may be more than one code operating within one speech community, and that members may belong to more than one overlapping or intersecting speech community at the same time.

Hymes's (1972, 1974) and Huspek's (1993, 1994) notions about speech community are central to this study of McNamara's discourse. The speech community consists of McNamara, officials from the Kennedy and Johnson

administrations, and the American people in general. Although this is a large speech community, McNamara (1995a) clearly identified the people he wished to include in the discussion about U.S. decisions during Vietnam when he stated that one of the reasons he chose to write *In Retrospect* was "a wish to put before the American people why their government and its leaders behaved as they did and what we may learn from that experience" (p. xv). McNamara addressed a group—the American people—with whom he expected to be able to discuss his ideas in a reasonable way. The responses directly to McNamara and the conversation between respondents from a variety of different people in a variety of different media sources revealed that although McNamara was understood by his hearers, many of them did not believe he used the most appropriate code to discuss the issue of Vietnam. Although McNamara and his hearers shared one speech code, they each also endorsed distinctive speech codes to be used when discussing Vietnam.

Speech codes theory, as noted earlier, draws extensively from the ethnography of communication, including the notion that one culture does not equal one language. Speech codes theory extends this notion to explain speech codes in terms of a system rather than a culture. Philipsen (1997) stated that when he used the word "culture," "it is used in reference not to a group but to a code as a system" (p. 125). The focus is on the code as a system rather than on a code as used by a particular group of people.

Communication codes can become evident in a variety of ways, one of which is in the use of metacommunicative vocabularies in culturally distinctive forms (e.g., totemizing rituals, myths, and social dramas). Metacommunicative vocabularies, on their own, "thematize the means of communication and the meanings that these means have to those who use and experience them" (Philipsen, 1997, p. 143). However, when situated within the context of a culturally distinctive form, these metacommunicative vocabularies are deployed in ways that can serve to reveal the elements of and reinforce the legitimacy of a particular way of speaking. By understanding the communicative references used in these forms, we can better understand how those involved view communication and their world (Agar, 1994).

Code elements can be "expressed in the naming, interpreting, explaining, evaluating, and justifying of communicative acts" (Philipsen, 1997, p. 143). Examining the communicative references present in discourse is a powerful venue into speech codes:

> Rather than treating such expressions as ephemera or insignificant local details, the ethnography of speaking provides that such phenomena themselves be made the

> object of theoretical and practical interest. It is precisely such phenomena which can form the starting point of inquiries which reveal practical resources that are crucial to the lives of individuals and societies. Such phenomena are not only the starting point of inquiries—their discovery, description, and interpretation are as well the ends of investigation, that is, they are phenomena of interest in their own right. (Philipsen, 1997, p. 125)

In *In Retrospect,* McNamara (1995a) invoked metacommunicative terms to explain, justify, evaluate, name, and interpret communicative acts during and after the Vietnam War. Others, in turn, invoked metacommunicative terms to explain, justify, evaluate, name, and interpret McNamara's discourse. By examining these vocabularies, we gain insight into the communication codes guiding interlocutors' discourse. Additionally, in examining differences between linguistic choices, we gain insight not only into differences in language use but also into differences in communicative meaning (Agar, 1994).

One cultural form that is useful in examining McNamara's (1995a) book for elements of a speech code is "accounts." Broadly defined, an *account* is "a linguistic device employed whenever an action is subjected to valuative inquiry . . . [and] a statement made by a social actor to explain unanticipated or untoward behavior" (Scott & Lyman, 1968, p. 46). Accounts are offered in a community when there has been a tear in the fabric that holds the community together. An account is offered as a response to some sort of criticism, whether explicit or implicit. It is useful to examine the discourse in an accounting episode because speech codes are often explicitly revealed during an account sequence, especially when an account is rejected. Specifically, the moments of tension between interlocutors when an account is viewed as illegitimate or unreasonable often involve the explicit invocation of the rules and/or premises that were violated in the first place. By examining the rules and/or premises made explicit during these moments of tension, we can better understand the particular codes operating within a community, both on their own terms and from the perspective of competing codes. During these moments of disagreement within a speech community, speech codes are reinforced, negotiated, and, sometimes, transformed. Although many years had passed since McNamara was Secretary of Defense, and he was no longer being called explicitly to offer an account of his and others' actions during the Vietnam War, there was a history of protest, questioning, and criticism about U.S. involvement in the war that continued to demand implicitly some accounting of the government's decisions.

McNamara (1995a) offered such an account in the form of his book. As noted earlier, McNamara wrote *In Retrospect,* at least in part, to help Amer-

icans understand the decisions of U.S. policymakers regarding Vietnam. He viewed himself and the American public as one community and, in many ways, he shared premises and rules for communication with them. Because McNamara recognized that he and others were "terribly wrong" regarding the Vietnam War (p. xvi), but did not take all of the blame for the war, his book can be categorized as an "excuse," an account in which "one admits that the act in question is bad, wrong, or inappropriate but denies full responsibility" (Scott & Lyman, 1968, p. 47). Just because an account is offered does not mean that it will be accepted, and in many ways McNamara's account was challenged by his hearers.[3] As will become evident in the following pages, there was some disagreement over the most appropriate way for McNamara to make amends for the mistakes he and others made during the Vietnam War, an indicator that McNamara and his hearers may not have used the same code when discussing the war. I argue that the disagreement was rooted in a difference of codes within the same speech community—a difference between codes of rationality and spirituality. McNamara and his commentators disagreed about which code should be used in McNamara's accounting of his and others' actions during Vietnam, and McNamara's commentators called him to account for his use of an inappropriate code.

THE DISCOURSE OF AND ABOUT *IN RETROSPECT*

I drew on two bodies of material for this study: (a) Robert S. McNamara's (1995a) book, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* and nine interviews with and articles by McNamara, and (b) 210 responses to *In Retrospect* in a variety of popular media sources.

Discourse of *In Retrospect*

I examined 95 "retrospective evaluative" passages in *In Retrospect* (McNamara, 1995a) to address the question: "Is there a communication code revealed in McNamara's book and, if so, what is it?" After several readings of the text, I chose to examine the retrospective, evaluative commentary McNamara made throughout his text. These passages were the ones most rich in accounting discourse. Two criteria determined the inclu-

sion of particular passages in my corpus of "retrospective evaluative" passages. First, the passage had to be explicitly evaluative (either positively or negatively) about Vietnam policy making. This criterion yielded a potentially huge corpus of material. Second, the passage had to make an explicit reference to a change in (a) what McNamara said in 1995 that he *thought* about Vietnam policy making versus what he said he *thought* before or (b) what McNamara was *willing to say* in public in 1995 about Vietnam policy making versus what he was *willing to say* before. The change component of this criterion reflects the then–now spirit of the book. This criterion narrowed considerably the scope of materials I considered and allowed me to focus my analysis on the passages in which McNamara made his most powerful statements of accounting—passages in which he either added new information to explain a past decision or noted a change in his opinion about a past decision.

As a venue into McNamara's code, I analyzed the metapragmatic terms present in the retrospective evaluative passages (Philipsen, 1997), beginning with individual words prominent in McNamara's discourse (Varenne, 1977; Williams, 1976/1983), and analyzing the contexts in which each term occurred, whether the term was positively or negatively valued (Rosenthal, 1984), what terms clustered around it to bolster its value, what terms contrasted with it, what premises and rules were associated with it, and how it contributed to an understanding of McNamara's communication code. This approach is consistent with the notion that one way to understand a person's view of communication is to look at the words they use to name their communicative actions (see Abrahams & Bauman, 1971; Carbaugh, 1988–1989; Hymes, 1962; Katriel, 1993; Philipsen, 1997). In introducing his theory of speech codes, Philipsen (1997) used as examples three ethnographic studies, each of which reveals the "use of a term or notion about communicative conduct. . . . Such symbols and notions which interlocutors deploy to talk about talk are the elements of the systems I call speech codes" (pp. 120–121). My goal in analyzing the metapragmatic terms and their context of use in *In Retrospect* (1995a) was to locate and characterize salient themes in McNamara's discourse as a move toward understanding partially the speech code underlying his talk.

Analysis of the discourse of In Retrospect. A study of the metapragmatic terms present in *In Retrospect* (McNamara, 1995a) revealed a cluster of key terms around what I label a code of rationality. The core concept or symbol in McNamara's metapragmatic vocabulary is "debate," its prop-

erties, and the categories linked to it. Strauss and Corbin (1990) used the metaphor of the sun and planets to describe the story told through the examination of a core category: "The core category must be the sun, standing in orderly systematic relationships to its planets" (p. 124). My decision to start with "debate" as the "sun" was based on its standing as a prominent term (or symbol) in McNamara's discourse (see, e.g., Williams's discussion of keywords and Rosenthal's discussion of leading words). Williams (1976/1983) cited significance of terms in both activities and thought as the basis for their categorization as keywords. Rosenthal (1984) focused on "leading" words "as 'leading' in two senses: as being currently 'dominant' words, words in positions of power; and as 'directing' us, from this dominant position, to think and act in certain ways" (p. vii). "Debate" was a term that, in retrospect, McNamara thought should have been a more important part of the activity of decision making about Vietnam policy. Also, "debate" was a term that he, a person once in power, defined as powerful, and one that he believed should have been a more important term in influencing the way government and military officials conceptualized and acted on the problem in Vietnam. "Debate" fits the criteria of both Rosenthal's and Williams's notions of central terms. Thus, its position as a core category is a logical starting point in understanding McNamara's (1995a) code of rationality.

The theme of debate is prominent in McNamara's discourse. Not only is the term "debate" common, occurring 24 times in the 95 retrospective passages analyzed,[4] but McNamara detailed extensively what he meant by "debate." Although debate is obviously a word common in everyday conversation, McNamara's use of it to describe the communication that occurred during Vietnam decision making is distinctive. For example, McNamara (1995a) stated that

> Neither then nor at any later time did we carefully *debate* [italics added] how a neutral South Vietnam—if this could be achieved—might affect the United States geopolitically. This was because we assumed that South Vietnam would never be truly neutral, that it would be controlled by the North, and that this would, in effect, trigger the domino effect Eisenhower had envisioned. (p. 62)

"Debate," to McNamara, was something that should be "careful," and he reiterated this view in several other passages in his text (pp. 101, 107). In addition to "debate" being "careful," McNamara also believed that "debate" should be "full" (pp. 63, 176, 243, 311, and 322); "extensive" (p. 128); "thorough" (pp. 158, 264); "knock-down, drag-out" (p. 203); "prob-

ing" (p. 261); "candid" (p. 264); "open" (p. 311); "frank" (p. 322); and "systematic" (p. 332).

"Debate" was, to McNamara, a positive activity. McNamara's (1995a) view of "debate" as a positive activity that should have occurred more during Vietnam decision making can be seen in the following passage:

> Looking back [at meetings with Westmoreland and his staff], I clearly erred by not forcing—then or later, in either Saigon or Washington—a *knock-down, drag-out debate* [italics added] over the loose assumptions, unasked questions, and thin analyses underlying our military strategy in Vietnam. I had spent twenty years as a manager identifying problems and forcing organizations—often against their will—to think deeply and realistically about alternative courses of action and their consequences. I doubt I will ever fully understand why I did not do so here. (p. 203)

McNamara faults himself and others for failing to "force" difficult "debates" about issues that were central to the U.S.'s policy regarding military action in Vietnam.[5] He clearly sees "debate," done well, as an activity that may have allowed him and others to see problems in assumptions that they otherwise could—and did—overlook. Part of what was needed to be successful in Vietnam was more and better "debate." McNamara's characterization of "debate" brings to light a premise about the importance of a particular type of communicative interaction—a strong belief in "thorough," "extensive," "candid," "open," "frank," "systematic," "careful," "full," and "probing" talk. In addition, McNamara's views of "debate" point not only to a rule about the kind of communication that should occur during decision making (i.e., "debate"), but also to the way in which that communication should occur (i.e., by "force" if necessary).

There are many terms that co-occur with "debate" as formulated by McNamara: "force," "discussion," "examination," and many adjectival modifiers. If we take "debate" as the sun, these terms are the planets that revolve around it. "Force" was a particularly strong term that co-occurred with "debate." For example, McNamara (1995a) stated that the government "failed to confront the basic issues in Vietnam that ultimately led to his [Diem's] overthrow" (p. 70), stating that each major participant in the decision to authorize the coup against Diem made serious mistakes—his being that he "should have forced examination, *debate,* [italics added] and discussion on such basic questions" (p. 70). This notion of "forcing" communication in various forms appears throughout his text, most often in reference to "debate." For example, he noted that "although deeply divided, the military never fully *debated* [italics added] their differences in strate-

gic approach, or discussed them with me in any detail. As secretary of defense, I should have *forced* [italics added] them to do both" (p. 243). In a similar vein, McNamara stated that

> Looking back, I deeply regret that I did not *force a probing debate* [italics added] about whether it would ever be possible to forge a winning military effort on a foundation of political quicksand. It became clear then, and I believe it is clear today, that military force—especially when wielded by an outside power—just cannot bring order in a country that cannot govern itself. (p. 261)

Not only was "debate" something McNamara thought he and others in the Johnson administration *could* have "forced," his repeated use of negatively evaluative terms (e.g., "erred," "regret," "sadly") around not "forcing" "debate" implied that he and others *should* have "forced" "debate." For example, he highlighted his disappointment in himself for not pushing "debate" when he stated, "I deeply regret that I did not *force a probing debate* [italics added]" (p. 261). A premise and rule about communicative conduct become evident through an examination of the notion of "forcing" "debate." McNamara believed that "debate" was a positive activity, characterized as "full," "probing," and "systematic." He also believed "debate" could be "forced." Even more powerfully, he believed it *should* have been "forced" during discussions about Vietnam.

In addition to forcing "debate," McNamara (1995a) stated that he and his military and civilian colleagues should have forced "ourselves to confront such issues head-on" (p. 39), forced "an appraisal" of U.S. military strategy and objectives (p. 108), and forced "organizations—often against their will—to think deeply and realistically" (p. 203). The idea of being able (and obliged) to "force" communication sheds light on McNamara's view of how communication functions in the world. The idea that communication between people can and should be "forced" presents a picture of self, society, and strategic action that positions particular interlocutors, like McNamara, as powerful agents of control in interaction. Communication is not something that necessarily happens spontaneously, but rather can be made to happen when deemed important by particular individuals. To McNamara, good decisions are made through efficacious communication, communication that involves "careful," "thorough," "candid," "debate" about the facts involved in the problem. Where this kind of communication is not occurring, people in power, like McNamara, can and should "force" it to occur.

"Discussion" was another prominent term that co-occurred with "debate" and added to McNamara's code of rationality. In McNamara's

(1995a) terms, "discussion" could be "cursory" (p. 55); "full" (p. 50); "limited and shallow" (p. 107); "superficial" (p. 203); "full and frank" (p. 322); and "long, uninterrupted" (p. 332). Some of its forms were positively valued and some were negatively valued. The term itself seemed neutral, gaining its strongest positive and negative values from the descriptive terms used about it (Rosenthal, 1984). McNamara noted the importance of "discussion" when commenting on de Gaulle's proposal for neutralization in Vietnam by saying, "We *discussed* [italics added] the issue in only a cursory way. It remained unresolved" (p. 55). A lack of good "discussion" kept an important issue from being resolved in a productive way.

According to McNamara (1995a), however, "discussion" could be effective when done well. In proposing a retrospective solution to the problems encountered by top government officials, McNamara stated

> With the president, the secretaries of state and defense, the national security adviser, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and their associates dividing their attention over a host of complex and demanding issues, some of our shortcomings—in particular, our *failure to debate* [italics added] systematically the most fundamental issues—could have been predicted. To avoid these, we should have established a full-time team at the highest level—what Churchill called a War Cabinet—focused on Vietnam and nothing else. . . . It should have met weekly with the president at prescribed times for *long, uninterrupted discussions* [italics added]. (p. 332)

McNamara asserted that the implementation of a structure that included "long, uninterrupted discussions" may have helped top officials avoid their "*failure to debate* [italics added] systematically the most fundamental issues" (p. 332). In asserting that the implementation of weekly "discussions" of fundamental issues by high-ranking military and political people could have helped the United States make better decisions, McNamara asserted that "discussion," done well, could have helped the government avoid what seems to have been one of its biggest problems in Vietnam: failure to "debate." With this perspective, again we see the view of communication as something that can and should be structured and controlled to promote positive outcomes.

McNamara's reasons for problems. McNamara faulted himself and others in government for not forcing and/or participating in "debate," "discussion," "examination," and so on, about issues surrounding Vietnam policy making. The literature on accounts and aligning actions (see Benoit's

1995 review) is useful for understanding the reasons McNamara provided in *In Retrospect* (1995a) for why he and others failed to promote the kind of communication he thought would have changed the course of the war. As noted earlier, McNamara's account can most accurately be classified as an excuse. McNamara admitted that he was wrong in some of his actions regarding the Vietnam War. He also blamed his colleagues, the nature of life, and lack of focus, among other things, for the course of action followed by the United States in Vietnam.[6] Most of his excuses throughout the book contain appeals to defeasibility that were described by Scott and Lyman (1968) as appeals that take into account a person's knowledge of a situation and his or her will or intent. For example, McNamara claimed that because there were many important issues for top government officials to address, they could not focus fully on the problem in Vietnam, and therefore were not able to gather all of the information relevant to making the best decisions about U.S. involvement in Vietnam.[7] McNamara and his colleagues had good intentions, but they were unable to make good decisions due to the situation in which they found themselves.

McNamara (1995a) also employed classic appeals to defeasibility when he cited lack of knowledge about the Vietnam region as a reason for his and others' mistakes: "We knew very little about the region" (p. 39). Likewise, he claimed explicitly that "We lacked experience dealing with crises" (p. 39). Finally, he claimed ignorance when he stated that "I did not sense—nor was I made aware of—the important and revealing divisions" (p. 176) among senior army officers and field commanders and senior air commanders. All of these appeals fit squarely into Scott and Lyman's (1968) examples of appeals to defeasibility: "An individual might excuse himself from responsibility by claiming that certain information was not available to him, which, if it had been, would have altered his behavior" (p. 48).

Interviews with and articles by McNamara. After developing a sense of McNamara's (1995a) code of rationality, I examined nine interviews with and articles by McNamara in the media for the presence or absence of elements of a code of rationality, especially "debate" as a key term, as well as for any competing themes present in this set of discourse but not apparent in his book. The most common topic in these articles was McNamara's decision to remain silent for so long after his departure from the Department of Defense. None focused specifically on "debate" or any related term, although there was a brief mention of some of the secondary themes associated with "debate," specifically, failing to ask the right ques-

tions and the reasons for the failure.[8] Other topics covered in these articles included McNamara's purpose in writing the book, reaction to the book, McNamara as a problem solver, and misjudgments by decision makers.

Although "debate" and its associated code of rationality did not appear as themes in these articles, there is a possible explanation that suggests that the absence of "debate" as a theme does not invalidate the theorized presence of a code of rationality in McNamara's (1995a) book. In the media sources, other people guided the conversation, asking McNamara specific questions to which he responded appropriately ("Focus—In Retrospect," 1995; "Former Defense Secretary," 1995; "McNamara's War," 1995; "Robert McNamara Discusses," 1993; "Robert McNamara Reflects," 1993). In the one letter written by him (McNamara, 1995b), he responded to an editorial written by someone else about him (Sarris, 1995), so again he was answering a call in the media more than he was proffering what he considered most important. In his book, however, he was able to put forth what he considered to be the most important issue. Given what I show is a very different code of speaking reflected in responses to McNamara's book in the media, it is not surprising that "debate" doesn't appear as a major theme in McNamara's interaction with the popular press.

Summary of the code of rationality. The code of rationality implicates a particular view of self, society, and strategic action. McNamara (1995a), through his discourse, revealed his view of himself, society, and communication. He is a logical person who can understand problems with a detached, analytical perspective. Others, too, can analyze situations well, understanding the logical implications of various approaches to world problems. Society is comprised of people who should be involved in thorough "discussions" about important topics, but who often fail to do so. This communication problem, however, can be remedied by the "forcing" of communicative actions by those who hold power or responsibility. McNamara holds true to the notion that a rational approach to problem solving, characterized by communication that systematically "debates" the facts of the situation, results in good decisions and, if necessary, should be forced to occur.

McNamara's code of rationality is present overwhelmingly in his (1995a) book. He holds "debate" as a prominent symbol, with a constellation of meanings that implicate further his code. There is a right and wrong way to communicate about important issues in this code. Inter-

locutors should engage in "careful," "thorough," "full" "discussion" and "debate." Also, where participants see this not happening, efficacious (i.e., "full," "frank," "knock-down," "drag-out") communication should be "forced." These are not merely recommendations made by McNamara; they are rules for communicative conduct carefully supported by analysis of the misguided actions of those who failed to follow them.

Discourse About *In Retrospect*

What, then, can we learn about McNamara's code by examining it in light of responses to it that we could not learn by representing it solely on its own terms? In answer to this question I explicate part of the code reflected in people's responses to McNamara's book in selected media venues. The responses were offered in light of McNamara's account. McNamara accounted for wrongdoing surrounding U.S. involvement in Vietnam, in part, by invoking a code that valued positively "debate" and "discussion" of fundamental issues and assumptions about the war. Some responses to his text in the media, however, had a different focus, one that pointed to at least one area where McNamara's code may be partial or incomplete. Additionally, because it is partial or incomplete, his use of a code of rationality does not allow his account to be completely acceptable to many of his hearers.

I included in this study 210 stories about McNamara and his (1995a) book in conservative (*The Wall Street Journal, The Chicago Tribune, The Christian Science Monitor,* and *The National Review*) and liberal (*The New York Times, The MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour,* and National Public Radio) media outlets, all of which were published or presented within a year of the release of McNamara's book. These sources included letters to the editor, news highlights, interviews with former and present government officials, interviews with former Vietnam War protestors and supporters, book reviews, editorials, and articles about issues related to Vietnam that mentioned McNamara's book. These people, responding voluntarily to McNamara's comments, were part of the speech community to whom McNamara directed his book—the American people.

To focus my analysis on the stories most salient to McNamara's discourse in *In Retrospect* (1995a), I narrowed my materials to the 114 stories that were primarily about *In Retrospect,* including stories that made direct commentary about the text and responses to the commentary. I then

applied two criteria to the 114 stories. The two criteria parallel the criteria for inclusion I applied for retrospective evaluative passages occurring in McNamara's text. The first criterion was that the story contain some explicit criticism (positive or negative) about *In Retrospect.* The second was that the criticism be spoken or written by a contemporary of McNamara. I wanted, as much as possible, to be sure that I was including passages written by people who could relate to the experiences McNamara was reporting, and so decided to omit any articles written by people who were not cognizant of the Vietnam War when it was happening. These criteria narrowed my body of stories to 51.

I made two notable exceptions to the strict application of these criteria, bearing in mind that the goal of my sampling was to include a variety of perspectives and not to randomly select passages at the risk of excluding relevant viewpoints (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). First, I included all articles from *The National Review.* It was not clear whether three of the four articles that appeared in *The National Review* were written by McNamara's contemporaries, but I included them so that the representation of the magazine was not eliminated simply because the number of articles that appeared was so small. All four articles did meet the first criterion of containing explicit criticism of McNamara's (1995a) text. Second, there were 16 book reviews and editorials that were explicitly critical of McNamara's text even though it was either (a) unclear whether the author was a contemporary of McNamara or (b) the article was unsigned. I included all 16 of these articles because they were referenced often in other stories included and because they offered significant insight into popular opinion about McNamara's book. The total number of stories after the application of the criteria and the inclusion of the two other classes of articles was 71.

Finally, I read through each article and marked and numbered every instance of explicit critical commentary (positive or negative) on McNamara's (1995a) book. I marked each instance at this stage to ascertain how many possible items for analysis were present in the 71 articles. In all, there were 179 instances of critical commentary; I chose every other instance of critical commentary for analysis for a total of 89 passages, a number similar to the number of passages I analyzed from *In Retrospect.*

Analysis of the discourse about In Retrospect. Several themes emerged in the media sources, including a connection between speaking and living, imagery of wounds and healing, and a sense of balancing the books for those who died in the war. The most prominent theme, however,

clustered around what I label a code of spirituality. It is with this spirituality theme that I am most concerned in this article, using it as an example of the importance of examining codes in the context of coexisting or competing codes. What makes this theme compelling is that it occurred regardless of the politics of the media source, the type of person providing commentary, or the form of the commentary. It did not matter if someone had once supported or opposed the Vietnam War as a citizen, politician, or government official; the theme of spirituality transcended political and social differences among the interlocutors. I do not claim that the media made a conscious effort to infuse their responses to McNamara's book with spiritual imagery. Rather, I claim that the overwhelming presence of this theme in a variety of texts produced by contemporaries of McNamara points to the presence of a communication code that powerfully, although unconsciously, permeated the response to McNamara's account of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. It is important to note here that the use of this code did not function so much to refute McNamara's points, although some people did dispute McNamara's facts, as it did to attempt to reframe the tone or manner in which the discussion occurred.

Several critics did respond directly to factual comments McNamara (1995a) made in his book, some disagreeing sharply with either his stance toward the war or his interpretation of events. McNamara was, by his own account, a man interested in numbers and problem solving.[9] He stated in his book that he had to deal with the reality of "an imperfect, untidy world" (p. 323). MacNeal (1995) noted that McNamara was correct that he had made mistakes during the Vietnam War, but that he "fails to recognize that his oversights follow naturally from his logico-mathematical, goal-directed approach" (p. 267). Others recognized that McNamara's approach to the war was not necessarily atypical: "[Edward Kennedy's] focus on the plight of innocent women and children had a moral resonance that was sorely lacking in the geopolitical abstractions and optimism for winning the war that emanated from administration mouthpieces" (Palermo, 1998, p. 55). Nevertheless, McNamara's own fascination with numbers formed the basis for at least one aspect of his approach to the war, an approach that included the counting of bodies and equipment, an approach that earned the war a new name—*McNamara's War.*

McNamara (1995a) indicated that the United States failed to recognize the error of its ways during Vietnam, in part because there was a lack of alternative viewpoints. Pfaff (1995), in *The Chicago Tribune,* challenged McNamara's defeasibility appeal:

> Yet he and his associates were told as early as 1962, when the U.S. Military Assistance Command was created in South Vietnam, that every one of those assumptions was wrong. . . .
>
> The secretary of defense and his colleagues officially dismissed these objections as "naive" and described unquantifiable arguments from history and from political and social judgment and experience as "theology." They said they were in possession of "the numbers," and these told them the Communists could be defeated. They were, they claimed, the "tough-minded realists." (p. 17)

According to Pfaff, alternative perspectives were available, but McNamara and his colleagues opted to ignore them in favor of perspectives grounded in numerical evidence. Pfaff answered McNamara's rational arguments in a rational way. The code of rationality that McNamara seems to value is not idiosyncratic to him, but rather can be used by his commentators; it is simply not seen as the most appropriate code to use in discussing the Vietnam War. Pfaff engaged the logic of McNamara's account, but his comments also revealed that there is more to the discussion of Vietnam than facts when he pointed to a tension between "numbers" (code of rationality) and "theology" (code of spirituality). Perhaps what McNamara dismissed pejoratively as "theology" could have filled the gap left by the numbers.

Ernest May, a Harvard history professor who teaches a course about America's role in Vietnam, went even further than Pfaff in his shifting of the discussion toward a spiritually infused vocabulary. Butterfield (1995) of *The New York Times* quoted May about McNamara's book:

> "On the whole it is an extraordinarily useful and wise book. . . . The lessons are drawn. . . . I don't know of any other memoir that is so forthright in its *confession* [italics added] of error."
>
> Professor May had one reservation. "There is a *theology* [italics added] that is missing," he said, explaining that the book does not fully capture the anti-Communist imperative that drove policy makers in the cold war and led them into the Vietnam quagmire. It is like "a *crusader's* [italics added] memoir written by a man who can't quite recall why he wants to capture *Jerusalem*[italics added]," Professor May said. (p. A16)

Although May was generally positive about the book on a logical level because of its clear delineation of the lessons we can learn from Vietnam, he noted the lack of a "theology," characterized the text as a "confession of error," and likened McNamara to a "crusader." In the case of McNamara the "crusader," the holy land was Vietnam rather than Jerusalem, and the fight was between freedom and communism rather than between

Christians and Moslems. The preceding examples begin to provide a glimpse of the reframing of McNamara's comments in a spiritual light.

In addition to the examples just discussed, the domain that underlies the code of spirituality in response to McNamara's (1995a) book is broad, with many interconnected terms, including "faith," "moral," "mea culpa," "confession," "sin," "contrition," "crusader," "conversion," "Jerusalem," "penance," "pew," "temptations," "evil," "soul," "pulpit," "David and Goliath," "hell," "sacred cow," "forgive," "shame," "human fallibility," "pontificate," "redeem his soul," "condemnation," "revelation," "atoning," "innocent lambs," "doctrinal lessons," "preached," "spirit," "temptation," "Good Friday," "incense," "rosary beads," and "absolve." The spirituality domain present in the passages analyzed was not idiosyncratic to those passages. Rather, it permeated the wide variety of media venues included in this study. One or several of these terms on their own would not make a strong case for a spirituality domain. However, the constellation of terms, their recurrence, and their interconnection constitute a strong spiritual theme throughout the media responses. Also, close analysis of the domain provides the basis for the claim that a distinctive code was operating in the media responses, a code that carried a particular meaning for its users. Although some people did comment on the *facts* McNamara presented, I argue that a more pervasive concern with, and presence of, spiritual imagery points to a void in McNamara's work and communication code. Again, it is not that his commentators could not use a code of rationality in discussing McNamara's account. It was that they found a different code to be more appropriate when engaging in discussion about Vietnam. In the following pages, I detail some of the components of the code of spirituality present in the commentators' discourse.

A central tenet of spirituality is faith, and the spirituality thematized in the responses to McNamara's (1995a) book was no exception. Faith as it is thematized religiously often involves a blind trust in God. In the case of the Vietnam War, trust was placed not in God, but in government. Although there is a significant difference between faith in God and faith in government, the general issue of "faith" appeared in relation to Vietnam and McNamara's account of his and others' actions. What is important here is that faith was thematized in a distinctive way, one that was parallel to, but not the same as, faith as it is thematized in religion.

Misplaced "faith" is one way "faith" appeared in the discourse. For example, Page (1995) of *The Chicago Tribune* wrote, "I imagine it is those who put their *faith* [italics added] in McNamara and the rest, only to be let

down, who are angriest at him now. I lost no *faith* [italics added] since I had none to lose" (p. 3). Misplaced "faith" also applied to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and to McNamara himself. According to Frankel (1995) of *The New York Times,* McNamara "is hard on the Joint Chiefs of Staff for their misplaced optimism in the early years, their always excessive *faith* [italics added] in high-tech weapons and their later expectations that massive bombing and frontal battles could wear down the Vietnamese enemy" (p. 24). Also, according to George McGovern, McNamara's "faithful"-ness to the president, a faithfulness that kept him from speaking out against the war after he left his position in the Pentagon, was also misplaced as tens of thousands of Americans died in Vietnam long after McNamara believed the war was still justified ("Focus—Healing the Wounds?" 1995). The important issue here is not whether "faith" was good or bad as enacted, but that it was present, that part of the war's direction had to do with who had "faith" in whom, and any accurate conversation about the war needed to include commentary on this "faith."

In addition to the issue of "faith" surrounding McNamara's (1995a) book, there was also a concern with morality in the responses by many commentators. One writer, Veeder (1995), invoked morality in pointing to the difference between a practical and a spiritual approach to the war when he stated that "The majority of us who protested against the war did so not because we believed the war to be unwinnable, but because it was *immoral* [italics added]" (p. A22). The point for Veeder, and according to him, others to whom McNamara was writing, was not whether the war could be *won,* but whether the war was "*moral,*" whether the United States should have been intervening in Vietnam's politics.

In an editorial ("Mr. McNamara's War") in *The New York Times* on April 12, 1995, the editors remarked on McNamara's comments:

> As for testing their [Johnson and his Cabinet] public position that only a wider war would avail in the circumstances, "We never stopped to explore fully whether there were other routes to our destination."
>
> Such sentences break the heart while making clear that Mr. McNamara must not escape the lasting *moral* [italics added] condemnation of his countrymen. (p. A24)

Several letters to the editor commented on this opinion, engaging each other and McNamara in a discussion about the morality of his book. One response by Brown (1995) noted

> that it is a great and almost unprecedented *moral* [italics added] achievement for a man in public life to have offered such an honest accounting of how people like him

> self, with initially good intentions, became enmeshed in structures of their own creation from which it was finally impossible to escape. (p. A24)

Brown continued by stating that "We can at least learn what not to do next time, and that is a specific *moral* [italics added] gain" (p. A24). There was no consensus on the status of McNamara and his book as "moral" or "immoral," but there was some consensus that morality was an important issue to discuss. These writers did not engage with McNamara on the level of whether his arguments were right or wrong. They engaged with him and each other on the level of the morality of the war, and the morality of his revelations about the war. The presence of these examples and at least six others in the corpus analyzed point to the notion that McNamara's community of hearers believed that a discussion of the Vietnam War ought to include its morality, a rule about the way of speaking most appropriate to this particular topic.

McNamara's (1995a) book was not often characterized neutrally by his hearers, but rather was labeled a "confession." Various forms of the word "confess" permeated the discourse about McNamara's book, occurring eight times in the 89 passages analyzed. Page (1995) conceded that McNamara displayed some honesty in "*confessing* [italics added] the lies he and others told" (p. 3). Butterfield's (1995) reporting of May's comments included a quote about McNamara's " '*confession* [italics added] of error' " (p. A16). In addition to these instances, mention of "confession" appeared in several other sources. Schorr labeled McNamara's book a "grim *confessional* [italics added]" ("McNamara's Memoirs," 1995). Melloan (1995) of *The Wall Street Journal* noted that McNamara's "*confession* [italics added] has not won him benisons [i.e., blessings or benedictions] from those whose opinions he seems to value" (p. A13), that is, liberals. A book review by Bushkoff (1995) of *The Christian Science Monitor* had McNamara "*confessing* [italics added] the error of his ways" (p. 13). These commentators did not describe McNamara's act as a neutral telling of a story, but rather as an act laden with the weight of "confession." His hearers seemed not so concerned with *what* he confessed or whether his "confession" gained him what he desired, as with the fact that he confessed. These examples combined with the focus on "faith" and morality helped to build a new frame around McNamara's attempts to explain his deeds during Vietnam.

To "confess" or to proclaim "mea culpa," one must have committed some "sin." What, then, was McNamara's "sin?" According to Gigot (1995) in *The Wall Street Journal,* "An old maxim holds that when your

adversaries are tearing themselves apart, don't interfere. That's a little how I feel watching liberals devour Robert McNamara for the *sin* [italics added] of finally agreeing with them about the Vietnam War" (p. A12). Gigot noted McNamara's move toward the point of view held by many liberals during the war, and explained the liberals' reception of McNamara as a response to a "sin." In reviewing McNamara's (1995a) book, Frankel (1995) of *The New York Times* wrote of McNamara:

> In this pew, Mr. McNamara was himself a prominent *sinner* [italics added]. His can-do spirit found no mission impossible, even as Saigon's governments and armies crumbled. His domineering intellect and predilection for systems analysis made him a pathetic victim of erroneous and deceptive military audits of bodies counted, weapons captured, sorties flown, supply lines ruptured. (p. 24)

The "pew" Frankel referred to was the "pew" of people whose thinking about the war blindly escalated U.S. involvement in Vietnam. McNamara was one of many people, along with Kennedy and Johnson, who sat in this "pew" and sinfully led the United States into Vietnam. Frankel did not dispute McNamara's facts; he instead pointed to McNamara's sinful spirit. Finally, *The National Review* ("Vietnam and Memory," 1995) commented that McNamara "has shifted so far leftward under the strain of his burden that he now *confesses* [italics added] guilt for *sins* [italics added] of which neither he nor his country is guilty" (p. 20). Generally, the "sins" McNamara was "confessing" received much less attention than the fact that he was "confessing," and that, one way or another, he was a "sinner."

To receive "forgiveness," "sinners" must be contrite. The sense of "contrition" McNamara did or did not exude received some coverage in the media. Robert Scheer and George McGovern answered questions on *The MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour* ("Focus—Healing the Wounds?" 1995) about McNamara's sense of "contrition." Scheer stated that he found McNamara's (1995a) book interesting

> But I don't find any sense of *contrition* [italics added] in this book. I think it's cold blooded in its rhetoric. There's no real sense of the lives that were lost, the damage to this country, the people, the American military who were killed, or kept prisoner, the Vietnamese who died. . . . We don't really have an example of a man wrestling with his *soul* [italics added].

McGovern, on the other hand, felt he "saw more *contrition* [italics added] and regret than my friend, Bob Scheer, did" ("Focus—Healing the

Wounds?" 1995). Scheer and McGovern did not agree about whether McNamara was "contrite," but they did agree that McNamara's degree of "contrition" was an important aspect of his book.

Butterfield (1995), reporting on McNamara during his book tour, cited an example of McNamara interacting with the wife of a pilot who was shot down during the war. He noted that although McNamara was still tough in many ways, he "was also *contrite* [italics added]" (p. A16), apologizing to Dunn when she cited "classified documents that described a Cabinet meeting at which Mr. McNamara spoke against trying to rescue her husband" (p. A16). Although several people commented on McNamara's "contrition," there was not necessarily agreement on whether he was "contrite." Again, the important issue here for the code of spirituality is that "contrition" is something McNamara's hearers saw as salient in this discussion about Vietnam. It was not good enough that McNamara believed he was wrong; he also had to be "contrite."

Summary of the code of spirituality. The mixed reception of McNamara's account suggests the presence of more than one code operating in the interchange between McNamara and his respondents, the people to whom he wrote his (1995a) book. Although some people accepted his account to some extent, the majority of respondents were critical of his attempt to excuse his and others' behavior. The mistakes made by the U.S. government and military officials during the Vietnam War were viewed as greater than the array of reasons McNamara provided for his and others' failure to communicate and act appropriately. The one saving grace some found in McNamara's book was that he was trying to prevent the United States from making similar mistakes in the future. Regardless of their acceptance or rejection of McNamara's account, the commentators on his book had one thing in common: a way of speaking imbued with spiritual imagery. This spiritual vocabulary laid the foundation for a reframing of McNamara's discussion in a moral rather than rational light.

Commentators did not necessarily agree about how the spirituality domain played out in relation to McNamara's (1995a) book, but many were concerned that it play out somehow. They may have disagreed about McNamara's "sin," the value of his "confession," and the "moral" issues involved in the Vietnam War and McNamara's views, but they did not disagree about the importance of the presence of all of these elements in the assessment of both the war and McNamara's accounting of it. A picture of a man baring his "soul" through "confession" in an attempt to renew peo-

ple's "faith" emerged through an examination of just part of the spirituality domain. This may not have been the picture McNamara would have painted of himself, the numbers man, but it is one that others painted of him. Also, it is one that may have gained McNamara more forgiveness than his approach to explaining the Vietnam War, namely that he and others should have managed better (by "force," if necessary) the communication that occurred between government officials about key issues related to Vietnam. In many ways, McNamara's account was viewed as unreasonable because it was not grounded in the spiritual norms of his commentators (Scott & Lyman, 1968).

It is not simply that there were two codes operating on parallel lines in the discussion involving and surrounding McNamara's (1995a) book. McNamara's commentators called him to account not for his actions during the war, but for the way in which he discussed his actions, the approach he took to his explanations, the words he used. McNamara's words revealed what was important to him; his commentators' words revealed what was important to them. The commentators' words revealed a code whose underlying premise was that spirituality is an important aspect of war, and an overarching rule that talk about the Vietnam War should reflect this premise. Those who agreed with McNamara reframed his account to reflect this spirituality theme, congratulating him on his "moral" accomplishment. Those who disagreed with him criticized him for not addressing morality and for failing to confess his "sins" appropriately. Regardless of whether McNamara was right or wrong in his assessment of the war, the code of spirituality demanded that McNamara speak in a way that revealed its morality.

McNamara's Communication Code Revisited

Before a reasonable claim can be made about what the code of spirituality can tell us about the code of rationality, the question of whether each way of speaking is distinctive to either McNamara or the commentators on his text must be addressed. To answer this question, I revisited the entirety of McNamara's (1995a) book and the whole corpus of materials I gathered from the media sources (as opposed to the passages I gleaned from each). I carefully read each corpus for references to rational and spiritual imagery. In McNamara's text, I found that "debate" was mentioned at least 45 times, in addition to the times it was present in the passages I

analyzed. In the 210 stories about McNamara's book, there were only two references to "debate," one commenting about a quote from McNamara's book (Frankel, 1995) and the other criticizing McNamara's failure to "debate" "moral" issues even now (Rich, 1995). There were two other instances in these stories that referenced failure to consider or question assumptions and alternatives ("Focus—Healing the Wounds?" 1995; Frankel, 1995). Other than these four instances, I found little or no expression of interest in the media with McNamara's concern about the lack of "debate" in decisions about the war.

Similarly, I found at least 50 additional references to spiritual imagery in the media sources. There were several references to religion in McNamara's (1995a) book, but the vast majority of them were factual references. For instance, he described the Buddhists and Catholics in Vietnam, and used, once or twice each, words such as "confessed" (p. 101), "parochial" (p. 12), "absolved" (p. 141), "dogma" (p. 153), "prophetic" (p. 157), "faith" (p. 185), and "moral" (pp. 147, 160). The spiritual imagery in McNamara's book was scattered and did not carry the force it carried in the media sources. The presence of spiritual images was small, both in the number of terms and in each term's recurrence, and more important, their use was for factual rather than moral purposes. The code of spirituality that was so prominent in the media response to McNamara's text was not present prominently in his text; likewise, the code of rationality that was so prominent in McNamara's text was not present prominently in the media response. Each way of speaking is distinctive to a particular set of discourse.

Analysis of McNamara's (1995a) book, *In Retrospect,* revealed that there was a communication code governing his writing; that is, there was a system of discourse premises and rules operating to which McNamara adhered in his writing. A formulation of a prominent part of the code underlying his words shows a deep concern with efficacious forms of communication around important political and military issues. More specifically, McNamara held premises about communication that centered on valuing "debate" and "discussion" of the "fundamental" issues and questions surrounding Vietnam. He faulted a lack of such communication for many of the mistakes the U.S. government and military officials made during the Vietnam era. His way of speaking was one that valued a pragmatic, rational approach to problems, the absence of which could have dire consequences. This stance on communication implicates a rule about the nature of talk that should be involved in decisions; that is, people

involved in decision making should "force" "debate" and "discussion" of the fundamental issues involved in the decision.

People responding to McNamara had a wide variety of opinions regarding the merit of his book. They seemed to share, however, a code of spirituality. In particular, their central premise about communication involved a valuing of discourse of morality and their central rule of communication about Vietnam was that any such discussion should include talk of the morality of the war. The way of speaking concerned with spirituality differs markedly from the way of speaking concerned with debate followed by McNamara. McNamara, and those responding to his text, employed different frames of discourse that included different vocabularies as well as different rules for interaction (Agar, 1996), and in so doing, they revealed their different views of the world.

The analysis I have presented in this article suggests that, for McNamara, effectively managed communication is sufficient to arrive at good decisions. This effectively managed communication demands that decision makers talk with one another in a "thorough," "candid," "full" way about the facts involved in the decision. Done well—and forced if necessary—this process of "careful" "debate" and "discussion" of the facts of the case will result in good decisions. Here McNamara expresses his faith, as it were, in a rational process of deliberation in which it is not necessary to bring into the discussion issues of the "moral" kind implicated by his hearers.

This rational view of decision-making communication held by McNamara becomes especially evident when his words are juxtaposed to those of his commentators. In infusing into the discourse a cluster of spiritual and "moral" terms, the critics, wittingly or not, reveal what is absent in McNamara's vocabulary of "debate" and "discussion"—a belief that there is some language of morality and spirituality that transcends and informs the processes of "discussion" and "debate." In supplying an alternative way of speaking, one whose register is filled with spiritual terms, the critics implicated a view that decision-making communication can only be practically and morally efficacious if it includes proper attention to transcendent values.

An exchange in which the two codes are present and, more revealingly, are both made particularly evident by their juxtaposition, occurred between McNamara and "Maureen Dunn, the wife of a Navy pilot, Joseph P. Dunn, who was shot down over the Chinese island of Hainan" (Butterfield, 1995, p. A16). According to Maureen Dunn, in a meeting that occurred after her husband was shot down, McNamara "spoke against trying to rescue her husband. Mr. McNamara had wanted to avoid provoking

China" (p. A16). Although strategically McNamara's point of view may have made sense, he did not, as far as Dunn reported, take into consideration the life of her husband, the value of the life of one person involved in the war. Maureen Dunn was looking for an apology. In retrospect, "Mr. McNamara said he did not remember the meeting. 'But,' he added, 'If I said it I'm not sorry. I'm horrified" (p. A16). When confronted with the human reality of his rational approach to decisions, even McNamara seems to begin to see the gap in his code of rationality.

What we can learn, then, about McNamara's code by examining it in light of its reception in the larger social context of which it is a part, is that (a) there are some elements present and absent in his code that come into clear relief by examining his speech in relation to an alternative set, and (b) to some hearers McNamara's code is lacking in an important way because it lacks a vocabulary of spirituality. These are two separate, but interrelated, issues. The first deals with the articulation of McNamara's code itself; the second deals with the effectiveness of McNamara's code in helping him appeal to a community that holds some different values regarding discourse about the Vietnam War.

McNamara and the commentators were, essentially, talking about the same thing—McNamara's *account* of his and others' mistakes during the Vietnam War. At the same time, they were, essentially, talking about very different things—McNamara about the importance of understanding the absence of key communicative activities regarding Vietnam, and the commentators about the importance of addressing issues of morality in connection with Vietnam in an account of U.S. policymakers' actions. McNamara's (1995a) discourse was infused with a practical vocabulary focused on the lack of "debate" about key issues surrounding Vietnam. He stated himself that he and other members of the Johnson and Kennedy administrations made serious mistakes "not of values and intentions but of judgment and capabilities" (p. xvi). The commentators' discourse was infused with a spiritual vocabulary focused on the presence of "moral" issues surrounding Vietnam, exactly the type of value-related account that McNamara dismissed in the preface to his book. That McNamara and his commentators were talking about essentially the same thing—the Vietnam War—in essentially different ways is where the notion of examining one code in light of coexisting or competing codes becomes rich. A comparison of the two vocabularies and associated premises and rules highlights what is both present and absent in the discourse McNamara produces retrospectively about his involvement in Vietnam.

Although he was speaking the same language as those who responded, what McNamara valued as important communicatively differed significantly from what others viewed as important communicatively. What can be learned, then, about McNamara's code by examining it in light of others' responses is that there was as gap in it—a spiritual gap—that made it unintelligible to many of his hearers.

DISCUSSION

In this study of communication codes, I explored the theory of communication codes in a contemporary political and public case of a once-powerful man explaining his costly mistakes. I found the theory useful in understanding both McNamara's code and one of the codes reflected in the discourse about his (1995a) book. Further, I incorporated Huspek's (1993, 1994) theory of oppositional codes in hopes that studying coexisting codes as constitutive of each other might bring each into more clear relief. This combination of speech codes and oppositional codes theories allows for a more complex perspective on how people share, and at times negotiate, ways of speaking with one another.

The theoretical move of applying communication codes and oppositional codes theories to understand the discursive system of an individual or group is intimately tied to some related methodological issues. Methodologically, this study provides support for the value of understanding communication codes by placing them in dialectical opposition to each other, as well as understanding them on their own terms. Examining McNamara's code on its own terms allowed me to understand it from his perspective. However, when his code was juxtaposed to the code that emerged from an examination of the discourse surrounding his (1995a) book, a more complex view of McNamara's code emerged. In particular, the dialectical examination of McNamara's code and one of the codes present in the media responses pointed to an absence in McNamara's code—an absence that may help address the practical issues of this study. A speech codes analysis alone would not have revealed what was absent in McNamara's code. What was not present in his communication code only became apparent once it was juxtaposed to a competing code. In Huspek's (1994) terms, McNamara's code gained at least part of its meaning from its relationship and association with contrasting, and even conflicting, codes.

This methodological point could be useful in future studies interested in understanding communication codes. Rather than viewing speech codes as relatively static systems that are employed by groups of people, we can see the dynamic nature of codes by examining the ways in which they are created, maintained, and challenged in the context of competing codes. We can also come to understand more fully not only what a speech code allows its users to do communicatively, but also what it inhibits them from doing communicatively, by examining the moments of tension where speech codes are called into question.

Practically, I clarified McNamara's (1995a) *account* of his position, as well as how his account was received by others. Specifically, I addressed two practical issues. First, in analyzing McNamara's discourse, I formulated a partial explanation of why McNamara *thinks* the United States made the mistakes made during the Vietnam War. His explanation was based largely on communication failures recurring throughout the upper echelons of the U.S. government and military. Second, in analyzing McNamara's discourse in tension with the discourse *about* McNamara's text, I constructed a partial explanation of why there was such visceral reaction to McNamara's admission that he knew the Vietnam War was wrong decades ago and chose to remain silent. This explanation focused in particular on a spiritual void in McNamara's account of the war and his role in it. McNamara's account was unacceptable—or, at least, unsavory—to many of his hearers. The account I provide for this response is a difference in fundamental beliefs about what is important when discussing the Vietnam War. McNamara's discourse reflected an allegiance to a practical assessment of communication and organizational failure. Commentators' discourse reflected an allegiance to morality manifested in spiritual and moral imagery and language. In light of the differences in what McNamara and his commentators found to be the most appropriate way to discuss the Vietnam War, it would also be interesting to examine more generally the cultural acceptability of rationality and spirituality in public discourses about other contemporary world issues, including the ongoing conflict between the United States and Iraq, as well as the current situation in Kosovo.

Finally, this study illustrates that communication codes exist in the context of other communication codes within one speech community, and that understanding this coexistence and conflict sheds light on the meaning of each code. A study following Hymes's (1962) call for comparative work in the ethnography of communication could include an investigation of not only how ways of speaking are similar, but also how the differences

between ways of speaking highlight the unique characteristics and attributes of each individual way of speaking. More specifically, there is a large body of ethnographies of communication focused on the way of speaking most prominent in a speech community, but there is not an equally large body that examines the organization of diversity that Hymes (1974) used to characterize the nature of speech communities. By examining the multiplicity of codes present in interlocutors' discourse, we gain insight into both the diversity and the organization that Hymes (1962, 1974) called ethnographers to reveal in their studies of ways of speaking.

NOTES

1 See McNamara (1995a), pp. 39, 80, and 234.

2 See McNamara (1995a), p. xvii.

3 See, for example, Ayres (1995); "Focus—In Retrospect" (1995); Frankel (1995); "*Mea Culpa* Is at Hand" (1995); "Vietnam Book Ignites" (1995).

4 Throughout the analysis section of this article, I cite the frequency of occurrence of key metapragmatic terms. My purpose in including the number of occurrences of each term is to illustrate that the use of each term, in a particular context and with a particular meaning, was not simply an isolated or idiosyncratic instance, but rather part of a larger pattern of usage by McNamara, his commentators, or both. The frequencies are important because they add strength to my claim about premises and rules present in the two discourses.

5 See McNamara (1995a), p. 300.

6 See McNamara (1995a), p. 323.

7 See McNamara (1995a), pp. xvii, 39, 108, 277, and 323.

8 See "Focus—In Retrospect" (1995).

9 See McNamara (1995a), p. 6.

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