

CHAPTER 7

Challenges to Honor

Challenges, at least perceived ones, have often triggered international disputes. Before the War of 1812, the United States took England's impressment of its sailors as a symbolic denial of its sovereign status. Another instance was the 1979 seizure by Iranian students of the staff of the American embassy in Tehran. This chapter asks what challenges are and whether states really challenge each other's honor. The practical issues treated are the following: What makes a challenge compelling or weak, and how can the impact of another's challenge be weakened so as to avoid one's being forced into a fight?

The Form of Challenges to Honor

Challenges are a recurring element in honor-based societies.

(E8) Procedures often exist for making and responding to challenges; accepting a challenge incurs some cost or risk, and not accepting means a loss of honor.

Challenges can be separated according to whether they are substantial or not. A substantial challenge is one that does real harm to some interest that the receiver is honor bound to defend, such as his home or family members. The point of doing the harm is to convey a symbolic message. Internationally, this might involve injuring or killing another government's officials—Luard (1986, 115–16) lists some wars that started in this way. Nonsubstantial challenges are those that do not harm the individual's interests directly but can do reputational damage if they are not answered. They can be symbolic or conventional actions or explicit words of challenging. A symbolic/conventional challenge might be touching another's moustache (in Montenegro, Hasluck 1981, 145), pulling another's nose (in the antebellum American South, Greenberg 1990, 1996), or staring at a rival (in U.S. inner cities, Anderson 1994). A challenge in explicit verbal

form would be a statement like “I challenge you,” or in Renaissance Italy, “You lie in your throat,” or between children today, “I dare you.” Children, or adults in a bar, sometimes say, “I bet you won’t” do some action. This is a *performative*, a special sentence, typically in the first person, that in its utterance accomplishes the social task it is naming.

This chapter will concentrate on performatives like “I challenge you. . . .” The fact that this kind works suggests that harm is not a necessary component, nor is symbolism. Although symbolism is a focus of this book, at this point it is a complication. The linguistic challenges are full-fledged, and what they tell us can be applied to the others.

Purely verbal challenges are puzzling. Somehow, a recitation of words forces someone to do something that is risky or costly. One of the cleverest instances in literature appears in the medieval poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a story that will be used later in the chapter to show some of challenging’s finer points. The Green Knight, a giant and completely green, shows up at King Arthur’s Christmas feast and offers a bizarre, apparently suicidal game. He wants an exchange of blows, with both parties using his large green ax, and he stipulates that his opponent must go first. When no one accepts, he furrows his green brow and taunts the company,

What, is þis Arþureʒ hous, quof þe hæpel þenne
 þat al þe rouse rennes þurʒ ryalmes so mony?
 Where is now your sourquydrye and your conquestes
 Your gryndellayk and your greme and your grete wordes?
 Now is þe reuel and þe renoun of þe Rounde Table
 Ouerwalt wyth a worde of on wyʒes speche
 For al dares for drede withoute dynt schewed.

(309–15, from Tolkien and Gordon 1925)

“This is surely not Arthur’s house renowned through many kingdoms,” he is saying. “The Round Table’s pride and fierceness and bragging talk have vanished, its fame has been upset by one man’s speech, *by words alone*, for all are cowering without a blow being dealt.” He is raising a central question of this chapter: How can a mere verbal formula, with no factual evidence against the hearer’s honor, force the person to risk his life?

Do States Really Challenge Each Other’s Honor?

The relevant question is not whether the honor of states is challenged, but whether they see it as challenged. Some actions perceived as challenges might

not have been intended as such, but if they led to violence, the honor system may have been in operation, at least from the challengee's viewpoint.

Compared to theories of war causation that involve gross national product, alliance structure, or the degree of democracy, it is harder to measure directly the importance of challenges and honor. One must look at diverse evidence, such as the vocabulary used between the parties, the internal discussions of the event by policymakers, and the kinds of actions taken. The honor model is a guide to the relevant features, which include the existence of commitments, the superficiality of the challenge, the pressure to make a violent response, the challenger's construal of what the response is supposed to be showing, and various metaphors in the leaders' language that suggest the within-society prototypical scenario of a dispute over honor.

Sometimes a leader cites honor explicitly. During World War I, Germany's U-boat campaign led to the sinking of the *Lusitania*, and when President Wilson called on Congress to declare war, he explained why the enemy would be Germany alone, for the present (*Cong. Rec.*, 65th Congress, vol. 55, pt. 1, 1917, 118–20): "I have said nothing of the governments allied with the Imperial Government of Germany because they have not made war upon us or challenged us to defend our right and our honor." More often, concepts around honor are named, but not honor itself. On October 22, 1962, at the start of the Cuban missile crisis, President Kennedy went on the radio to explain his stance (U.S. Department of State 1961): "This secret, swift and extraordinary build-up of communist missiles . . . is a deliberately provocative and unjustified change in the status quo which cannot be accepted by this country if our courage and our commitments are ever to be trusted again by either friend or foe." When a commitment is based on honor, it can become the object of a challenge and have implications for the world's judgment of one's mettle.

Another event suggesting a challenge to honor was the August 1964 encounter between North Vietnamese torpedo boats and U.S. destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. The formality of declaring war had fallen out of use, but a rough equivalent in the United States was a congressional resolution granting the president the power to wage war. In the week following the incident, Lyndon Johnson used several forums to make his case for a wider war and frequently construed the North Vietnamese action as a challenge.¹ On August 5, he told an audience at Syracuse University that this was "the same challenge that we have faced with courage and we have met with strength in Greece and Turkey, in Berlin and Korea, in Lebanon and Cuba." Congress acceded, and on signing the

1. Historians have questioned Johnson's sincerity in describing the encounter, but that is another issue. Many in Congress believed him and his resolution passed almost unanimously.

resolution on August 10, he stated, "Our nation was faced by the challenge of deliberate and unprovoked acts of aggression in Southeast Asia." This fits the definition of a challenge to honor, that one's response will form part of a public history that others will use in their assessments.

Of course, the word *challenge* has a usage unconnected to honorable reputation; it is sometimes simply an impediment to a goal. However, that interpretation does not fit here. The attacks were not described as functional moves with objective consequences that had to be undone. Johnson constantly talked as if North Vietnam's actions were messages that the United States must answer. They required "a response," "a positive reply." "That reply is being given as I speak to you tonight" (Johnson 1965, Address to the Nation, August 4, 1964). "The attacks have been answered . . . aggression unchallenged is aggression unleashed. . . that is why we have answered this aggression with action," he told the Syracuse audience. In his phrasing, U.S. retaliation was meant to show something to a wide audience. A resolution in Congress would "affirm the national determination that all attacks will be met." Congress should act promptly "to give convincing evidence to the aggressive Communist nations, and to the world as a whole, that our policy in southeast Asia will be carried forward." The agenda was transmitting information to the world, not bringing about a military outcome. Johnson cited the U.S. commitment to South Vietnam as a reason for his response (Johnson 1964, Message to Congress, August 5, 1964): "America keeps her word. Here as elsewhere, we must and shall honor our commitments." This is consistent with the oath-taking feature of many honor systems, discussed in the next chapter. That a response was necessary even though no damage had been done to the U.S. ships fits the property that challenges can be nonsubstantial.²

Another piece of evidence that honor was involved was the U.S. administration's view of Hanoi's motive for its actions. Publicly, Washington avoided explanations, and at the United Nations Adlai Stevenson described the incident as just another example of Hanoi's violent ways (U.S. Department of State 1964, 273). Privately, however, on August 5, Walter Rostow wrote a memo to Secretary of State Dean Rusk (*Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 1, 639) suggesting that Hanoi had been hoping that "a US failure to react sharply to these attacks might have persuaded the Khanh government [of South Vietnam] that further reliance on the US was unprofitable and that Saigon should seek the best terms it could with Hanoi." Rusk seemed to accept this. Three days later, he tried to send a message to North Vietnam through a Canadian emissary. The North

2. Nisbett and Cohen (1996) argue that the culture of honor is stronger in the U.S. South, and present evidence that the positions of Southern politicians, like Johnson, tend to reflect it.

Vietnamese prime minister was to be told that the United States saw the incident as an attempt either to provoke it or to portray it as a “paper tiger” (651–53). Rusk was sending his interpretation of the action back to North Vietnam in order to clarify the meaning of the U.S. response. His understanding, that Hanoi sought to unmask the United States before its allies, is the typical motive for a challenge to honor.³

The vocabulary of challenging has become rarer, but the old mechanism seems to persist with new words. In the 1980s, the Reagan administration pushed for strong action against Nicaragua and sent military support to the rulers of El Salvador. The Salvadoran government had one of the worst human rights records and had been sponsoring death squads to eliminate its political opposition, so U.S. policy was hard to rationalize from democratic values. Except for Panama, Central America did not occupy a geographically strategic position, and it had no vital raw materials that gave the United States an objective reason to worry about its own security. How was the policy justified? Many administration supporters used a vocabulary suggesting honor. In the examples that follow, most taken from Schoultz (1987), each writer claims that strong action in Central America proves that America possesses a certain trait, which I have put in italics.

When engaged in a conflict for global stakes, what may appear as a marginal interest will be invested with a significance it would not otherwise have, for almost any challenge is likely to be seen by the challenger and by third parties as a test of one's *will*. . . . In Central America there are no vital raw materials or minerals whose loss might provide the basis for legitimate security concerns. Yet Central America bears geographic proximity to the United States, and historically it has long been regarded as falling within our sphere of influence. . . . [If] the Soviet Union observes our passivity to events in our own backyard that signal the loss of American control, what conclusions might it draw about our probable passivity in other, far more difficult areas? (Tucker 1981, 144–45, 176–77, 180)

The decline of U.S. pre-eminence in the region—an area traditionally in the U.S. sphere of influence—and of its ability to deny interference in the region by other powers, threatens to be interpreted as an indication of U.S. *weakness* in absolute terms. (Hayes 1980, 135)

3. Milliken (1996) gives other examples of prestige and credibility talk in the U.S. administration during the Vietnam War.

The United States cannot afford to wear blinders ignoring Cuban and Soviet efforts in the region. We must consider the serious consequences of any perception of *weakness* in an area acknowledged to be basic to US security and how our European allies in NATO might question *our resolve* in Europe if we appear indifferent to the spread of communism in our own backyard. (Dickens 1980, 210)

The crisis is on our doorstep. Beyond the issue of US security interests in the Central American–Caribbean region, our *credibility* world wide is engaged. The triumph of hostile forces in what the Soviets call the “strategic rear” of the United States would be read as a sign of US *impotence*. (*Report of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America* [Kissinger Commission 1984, 93])

An image of *weakness or incompetence*, or of an inability to effectively influence the course of events in an area so close, so traditionally dominated by Washington, and so weak in its own right should be avoided. (Millett 1982, 81)

If Central America were to fall, what would be the consequences for our position in Asia, Europe, and for alliances such as NATO? . . . Our *credibility* would collapse, our alliances would crumble, and the safety of our homeland would be put in jeopardy. (Ronald Reagan’s address to a joint session of Congress, April 1983. *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, May 2, 1983, 613–14)

This kind of talk is recurrent in U.S. foreign policy, and other examples can be garnered from debates over the MX missile, Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait, the intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe, and bombing raids in reprisals for terrorism.

The quotes show several features of honor behavior. Choosing an unimportant context to deliver an important demonstration fits with the nonsubstantial nature of challenges. As in a challenge to honor, the question is what others will think, not whether the event is intended as a challenge—by declaring Central America to be a test of American commitments, the U.S. administration is making it that. A goal of the demonstration is the trust and respect of the world to enhance the defense of oneself and one’s allies, as in societal honor. In line with the TERRITORY-AS-A-HOUSE metaphor, there is an emphasis on events in the U.S. “sphere of influence” and “backyard” and events “on our doorstep.” Some quotes hint that gender identity is also at stake, following the

second element of the last chapter. The reference to credibility recalls the link of honor to commitment making.

There is a notable variety of words for what a bold action will prove: *strength*, *will*, *credibility*, or other traits. Writers move from one to another so smoothly that the words seem synonymous. They appear to be manifestations of one unnamed central quality. Also, the character traits that the strong action is supposed to show seem elliptical. Writers worry about “reputation,” but reputation for what? America should show her “will” and “resolve,” but will and resolve to do what? If it is to act in Latin America, that is odd, given the area is a marginal interest as Tucker and others suggest. Is the goal to show willingness to act where U.S. interests are *not* at stake? If so, what is the limit of this kind of argument? The problem is that the speakers leave a blank after the key words. This is the same self-referential pattern as arose for honor, which is the desire to be seen as honorable, and the blanks would be filled in following this account of honor. Having “resolve” involves being ready to show others that one has resolve.

The oft-cited rationale of “credibility” is another one that leaves a blank. Some fact or assertion is to be believed, but which one is not specified. Perhaps the issue is “general credibility,” which in the speaker’s mental model is a broad attribute of a state. Following the COUNTRY-AS-AN-UNSPECIFIED-PERSON metaphor, there would be a “national personality,” where some nations are characteristically truthful and others are ready to lie. However, this account does not fit other aspects of U.S. foreign policy at the time. While the administration was trying to establish “credibility” in Latin America, it was lobbying Congress to allow it to violate the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Even if it did not see its plans as a treaty violation, most other nations did, so this threatened U.S. credibility, in the sense of a general trait. The Reagan administration treated credibility around the ABM Treaty and around Central America as unconnected. The U.S. administration’s position was not consistent with its belief in a national trait of honesty, but with the idea that certain commitments, those to defend certain kinds of interests, had to be kept. The historian Mervyn James (1986, 229) stated that English nobility would “lie, cheat, deceive, plot, treason, seduce, and commit adultery without incurring dishonor.” The U.S. concern for credibility focused just on the commitments that such a society would see as points of honor.

The Nature of Challenges to Honor

Philosophers and linguists concerned with speech acts have not paid much attention to challenges, but they have provided a set of concepts for an analysis.

These can be used to discuss how a challenge compares to other kinds of speech acts and to derive a definition.

What Challenges Are Not: Directives, Assertives, or Commitments

Superficially, a challenge seems like a *demand*. The challenger seems to be demanding a test or proof of some claim. Challenging an election outcome is calling for a recount, and challenging someone to a game of checkers is asking that the individual match his or her skill against yours. Accordingly, a challenge to someone's honor would be a demand to prove that quality. If challenges are really demands, then as speech acts they are in the category of directives (chap. 2), alongside urging, begging, asking, and so on. Partridge (1982) puts them there, and McCawley (1977) makes a point that supports this idea—that they share a grammatical feature with many directives in that they can appear in the imperative case:

“Send help, I urge you.”

“Ring that doorbell, I dare you.”

However, a challenge cannot be a demand in the normal sense. When I demand something, I am implying that I want it, but when a gentleman challenges another to a duel, he might be content to see the other decline. His challenge is not suggesting otherwise. Its point would be accomplished when the other declines—the challenge was not made to bring about a duel, just to test the validity of the other's reputation, perhaps reveal it as counterfeit. A directive that is refused is a failure, but a challenge that is declined achieves its purpose.

If challenges are not demands, are they *assertions*? What are they asserting? They cannot be saying that the other will lose the contest. When someone is challenged to a duel, it is not marksmanship that is at issue, but willingness to participate in the duel. Are challenges the same as assertions that the challenged party's reputation is false? This will not work either, since a valid response to an assertion would be an attempt to disprove it, but the appropriate response to an honor challenge is violence. In 1784, Benjamin Franklin wrote to Dr. Thomas Percival, “Formerly when duels were used to determine Law-suits from an opinion that Providence would in every instance favour truth and right with Victory they were more excusable. At present they decide nothing. A man says something which another tells him is a Lye they fight, but whichever is killed, the point in question remains unsettled.” Franklin was not arguing

that the man would be smarter to file a lawsuit; he was assailing the whole institution. He knew that a challenge could not be answered by counterevidence.

Perhaps challenges are *commitments* in which the challenger is promising to participate in the contest. They would then be commissive speech acts, which bind the speaker to a course of action, like offering, accepting offers, promising, surrendering, or saying “I do” at a wedding. McCawley (1977) puts them there, reasoning that they are like bets of the kind, “I bet you won’t have the guts to” do such and such. However, the usage of “bet” in this sense is an odd one in which the bettor is not really committing to making a payoff. Daring is like offering a bet only in those cases where “I bet you” is not a commissive.⁴

What Challenges Are, the Class of Provocatives

The essence of a performative is its *illocutionary point*, its characteristic purpose, and performatives with similar illocutionary points should be grouped together. The idea of illocutionary point can be understood by considering a promise, which is meant to obligate the speaker to a certain action to the benefit of the recipient. That is not its purpose on every occasion—someone might make a promise to show off or to relieve a silence in the conversation—but promising has a typical purpose, which is its illocutionary point.

For a challenge, the illocutionary point is to hold a public test of some proposition that the challenged person would like to have generally believed. For some kinds of challenges, like those that involve honor, the test is whether the challengee will engage in a costly or risky contest. Another variety is a *dare*, whose illocutionary point is to test whether the target is bold and fearless. Unlike a challenge, the action is usually performed only by the daree. *Defying* someone challenges that individual to assert authority and thereby tests whether the person has that authority. (Used in the context of a debate, defying has a somewhat different point: to induce the other to try to prove a claim and thereby show that the individual cannot.) Challenging, defying, daring, double daring and the like do not fit any current categorization. They belong in their own group. Naming it would underline this difference, and I will term it the class of *provocatives*, after the Latin *provocare*, to dare.⁵ The provocatives have a common illocutionary point: to test some proposition that the recipient wants believed by seeing whether the recipient will or can perform a certain action.

4. Fotion (1979) analyzes betting as a speech act.

5. “Challenge,” “defy,” and “dare” are sometimes not provocatives. To defy, for example, can be simply to declare one’s unwillingness to accept the other’s authority, not to call for a fight.

A Game of Challenging

This section will examine the provocative of challenging by first showing its function in social interactions and then by embedding it in a simple game. This will lead to a definition of a challenge to honor.

The game of figure 15 (*top*) adds a player to the basic game of honor of the last chapter. This player has only one move, to challenge, and is included only for exposition. Then the challenged player decides whether to bear the cost of a fight. Payoffs for the challenger are omitted, since that player makes no choices, but the player with the moves has payoffs like that of the basic game of honor. It is essentially the basic game, put in a fuller way, and there are two equilibria, as in the basic game. At the pooling equilibrium, the player does not pay the cost, and the audience does not change its view of the player's honor. At the threshold equilibrium, the player does or does not pay the cost depending on his degree of honor, and the audience revises its estimate of honor up or down accordingly. The pooling equilibrium corresponds to a culture where the particular form of challenging used does not work or perhaps where the whole institution of challenges is absent. The threshold equilibrium is one where the mode of challenging is valid and induces expectations all around that a sufficiently honorable person would bear the cost of accepting.

Even after all strategic factors and interests are considered, there are two equilibria, two possible different assemblages of beliefs and actions that are mutually consistent.⁶ In each of the equilibria, the player holds beliefs about the audience's beliefs, which influence his utility, and the audience holds beliefs about the player's beliefs and actions, which it uses to assess the player's honor. The existence of multiple equilibria explains the Green Knight's taunt that his mere words have overthrown the Round Table's reputation. Game-theoretical factors cannot determine which of the two equilibria will obtain, so this opens up a role for outside factors, even words. It also explains why challenges can be arbitrary and vary from culture to culture. As a male adult, I cannot effectively dare you to hold your breath for a minute, but in a barroom I can deliver certain formulaic epithets that start a fistfight. Again, the reason a particular form works in a society must lie outside the game, and it often involves symbolic messages or arbitrary conventions.

The Definition of a Challenge to Honor

The definition of a challenge will have three elements. First, it is a communicative act with a certain meaning. Chapter 3 distinguishes different kinds of com-

6. This argument corresponds to the second rationale for Nash equilibria in appendix B.

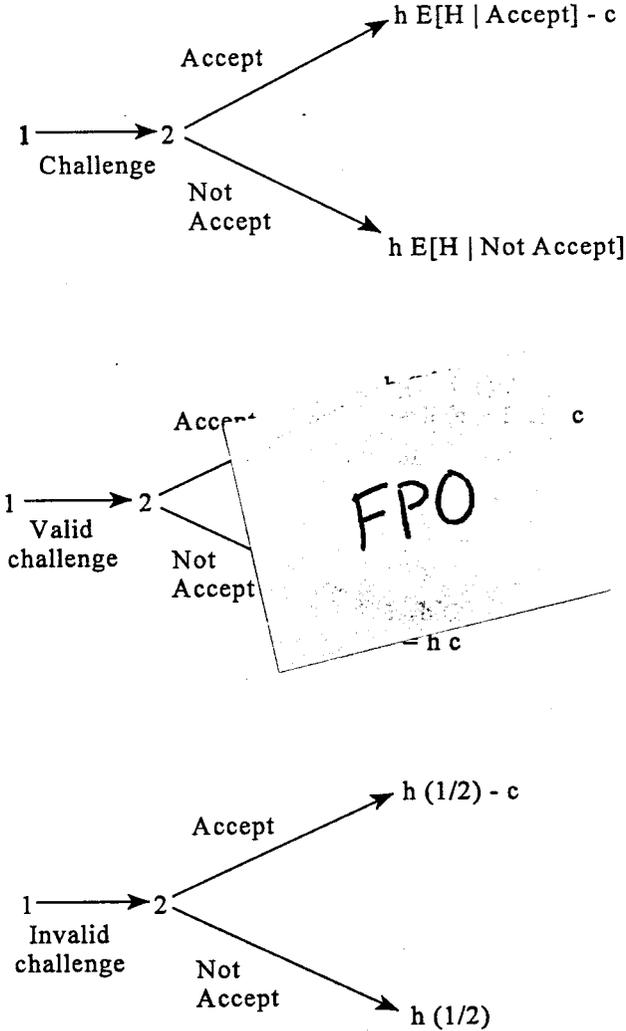


Fig. 15. The general payoffs for the challenge game (top) and for two equilibria, where social customs do and do not support, respectively, the particular form of the challenge.

municative acts by the belief or action they intend the receiver to adopt, and a challenge aims for a change of belief about the challengee's honor. It is unusual among assertive communicative acts in that the direction of belief change depends on whether the challengee accepts. The second element in the definition arises from Schiffer's thesis about performatives (1972, chap. 4) that a core feature that differentiates them is the particular reason they give the receiver to

change the belief or perform the action. For example, to “advise” someone to do something is to express one’s wish that the individual do it, for the reason that it is in his or her interest. To “order” someone to do something has the same point but it is based on a different reason on the receiver’s part: that the orderer has some power or institutional right to have the person do it and has called on the person to do it. The reason for complying when someone “begs” you to do something is your personal sympathy for the speaker. In the case of a challenge, the reason that the audience ought to change its beliefs about the person’s honor is that a challenge has been issued, one that is valid in the sense that it will provoke certain beliefs in the audience. With many performatives, the receiver’s reason for a new belief or action is brought into being by the performative act itself. This is not the case with advising, but it holds for some others, like ordering, promising, apologizing, and challenging.

Challenging has a third feature, an unusual one that the receiver is typically different from the person being challenged. The receiver, the party meant to adopt new beliefs, is the broader audience, the honor group.

DEFINITION: *X’s challenge to Y’s honor* to engage in a certain contest is a communicative act whose receiver is the honor group and whose meaning has two components: that X will engage in the contest if Y accepts and that the honor group should raise or lower its estimate of Y’s honor according to whether Y accepts or refuses. The reason for the honor group to change its estimate is that the challenge will cause Y to believe that the audience will change its estimate.

Semiforceful Challenges

A challenge takes a form specified by the culture. Examples are reciting a formulaic accusation of lying, or pulling a rival’s nose. A restriction is that the words or action be distinctive enough that it will not be missed, and there will be no false alarms.⁷ Sometimes, however, the challenge is at the edge of the form supported by the culture. If one twelve year old dares another to eat a worm, it will not work—it is too late. International challenges in particular are often of uncertain validity, since they cannot exploit a common culture. The challengee

7. Even within a culture there is ambiguity, and Boehm (1983, 145) describes how it can be exploited to enhance the challenger’s honor, “While offering insults was an expected mode of maintaining honor, [a Montenegrin male] also knew that his stronger provocations might get him killed. In the eyes of the tribe, this was exactly what made aggressive behavior commendable in many contexts. . . . if he offered insults that came close to requiring homicidal retaliation, then no one would doubt his courage.”

may not be sure whether a response is needed, and the audience may not be sure whether to revise its estimate of honor. For the goal of peace, this is bad news and good news. It means that relatively innocent events might be misperceived as challenges but also that a nation can ignore some intentional challenges. This section discusses why some challenges are only partially forceful.

Again, philosophers of language and linguists have not discussed challenges in this regard, but we can apply what they have written on the general issue of speech acts.⁸ Asking what makes a challenge compelling is like asking when a promise really commits its maker or when an order must be obeyed. It turns on three properties of a speech act: its force, strength, and success, which are discussed now.

Success, Force, and Strength: Can I Promise My Cat a Treat?

The *success* of a speech act is the degree to which it achieves its illocutionary point. A challenge succeeds if it gives information about the challengee's honor.⁹ Two determinants of success are force and strength. The *force* of a speech act is its innate ability on a given occasion to achieve its illocutionary point. Force is causal potential, and it relates to a speech act's success as mechanical force does to an object's motion. Some bodies have high inertia, and some situations make an illocutionary point much harder to accomplish, even when the speech act is well performed. *Strength* applies purely to the vocabulary used, not the occasion. Other things equal, a stronger performative will accomplish its illocutionary point more fully and more widely. Solemnly promising is stronger than promising in that the receiver is likely to be more convinced that the promise will be carried out. Granted, in some situations asking is more effective than demanding—perhaps the receiver will stiffen up if the sender is too assertive—but the fact that we must come up with an explanation shows our presupposition that demanding is generally more effective.

A traditional example illustrates the difference between force and strength.

8. The approach of Searle and Vanderveken (1985) and Vanderveken (1990) will be used. They propose that a speech act possesses features on six dimensions, the six "components of illocutionary force." They are its illocutionary point, the degree of strength of its illocutionary point, its mode of achievement, its propositional content conditions, its preparatory conditions, and its sincerity conditions. They showed that in a well-defined sense their scheme is complete: two performatives possessing identical features on the dimensions would be the same.

9. One could formalize the idea of success by measuring the uncertainty resolved by the challenge. The challenger would choose the cost of the challenge, the optimal cost being the one that maximally reduces uncertainty. In the model of the last chapter, where the prior distribution of honor H was uniform between 0 and 1, the challenger should choose cost $c = \frac{1}{4}$.

Suppose I promise my cat a treat. Is this promise valid? A philosopher assures me that I am not really bound by it, so I try to remedy this by a “solemn” promise to the cat. The philosopher is still leery. I pumped up the strength, but the problem is that the promise was made to a being that could not understand it. Force requires freedom from defects, not stronger words.

To summarize, strength is the general, acontextual ability of the word or phrase to accomplish its purpose; force is innate to the speech act as delivered on a given occasion; success is the achievement of the illocutionary point on the occasion and depends on force and the broader context, including what the speech act is trying to do.

As a Performative, Challenging is Single Strength

For many illocutionary points, the English language offers a sequence of speech acts of increasing strength. Suggesting is weak, asking is moderate, and demanding is strong. Verbal challenges have the unusual feature of having a single value of strength. I can “deeply apologize” or “thank you from the bottom of my heart,” but I cannot “strongly challenge you.”¹⁰ This could be related to the game of challenging (fig. 15), which has only one equilibrium involving a successful challenge. There is no series of equilibria requiring higher and higher degrees of honor for the individual to accept. Accordingly, the language does not include a sequence of performative words to select each equilibrium.¹¹

Another possible explanation for the single strength of verbal challenges is that different strengths are not needed. To separate people of different honors, one can vary the cost, since a more costly contest raises the minimum honor for accepting. Sometimes, however, the challenger has no choice in the cost, which is set by social customs. In some societies a challenge is appropriate only following an insult, and often the severity of the insult determines the cost of the contest. McAleer (1994) describes such a system in nineteenth-century Germany. A consideration against this, however, is that while verbal challenges are single strength, international ones often involve some token harm or symbolic

10. Daring seems to have the opposite property—there are daring, double daring, and, especially in the American South, further notions like double dog daring and upward (Cassidy 1991). However double daring is not the same as daring more strongly. One child cannot walk up to another and issue a double dare—it must be a rejoinder after a refusal to accept a dare. Still its existence points up a difference between challenges and dares, and just why children’s culture allows many strengths is an interesting issue.

11. It is possible to postulate a prior distribution on an individual’s honor H that yields several equilibria setting different thresholds of responding, but for a wide class of distributions, there is only one equilibrium that separates players by honor.

violation of the challengee's rights and their strength depends on the degree of injury. President Wilson stayed at peace after a single American died in a U-boat attack, but when 128 Americans drowned on the *Lusitania*, he declared war.

Challenges as Social Constructions

Since verbal challenges are single strength, strength is not the interesting variable here. It will be the force of challenges that is modeled. A speech act loses force by knowledge of its defects. Someone might impersonate my boss on the telephone, and get me to obey an order. The order is defective but it will succeed unless I know it is defective.

Some speech acts depend crucially on my knowledge of the objective event. If I learn that you are not my boss, your order becomes forceless. Challenges are different. Although a challenge generally has to be performed according to the culture's rules, its success does not turn on this. The objective event of challenging is just a trigger for certain beliefs about beliefs. If these beliefs come into place in some way, they will be self-sustaining and the challenge will be fully forceful. If I knew that the audience would charge me an honor cost for refusing to fight, and if the audience knew that I knew it, then any opinions we might hold about the challenge's objective details would be irrelevant. Conversely a challenge might be done appropriately, but that would not matter if the parties knew that neither would pay any attention to it.

Everyday language portrays a challenge as a physical entity. Making a challenge or accepting one sounds like the parties are dealing with an object, and even the philosophical vocabulary of force suggests that it has physical features. In fact, there is no important sense in which a challenge is real apart from the expectations of the audience and the challengee. A challenge is a *social construction*. The metaphor portrays such a shared social belief as an outside object. It also carries an attitudinal component, suggesting that society constructs a concept such as prostitution, illiteracy, or gender, and adopts an attitude to it. The term is an academic one, common especially in the study of social problems (Berger and Luckmann 1966), but it also arises in regular speech, as one is "loaded down" with responsibilities or "takes" credit or "possesses" honor or "acquires" prestige, and is related to a broader metaphor of an individual's beliefs as objects that he or she possesses (Abelson 1986).

The point of the phrase "social construction" in regard to its belief component is that sometimes a group's beliefs about beliefs form the same pattern that would arise if there really were an outside object. Imagine two people sitting across a table on which a candle is burning. There is the objective fact and also

the ladder of beliefs: both people know the candle is there, know they know it, and so on. For social constructions the mutual beliefs are in place but not necessarily because of a candle. The latter can be thought of as filled in by implication, constructed from the social perceptions. Talking this way is an easy code for the structure of mutual beliefs. Searle (1995) uses *social fact* or *self-referential* concept for a similar idea and suggests that most concepts around social institutions are these kinds of social facts. Money, his example, is not money because of its physical properties, but because people think of it as that, which means that they think others will think of it as money, and so on.

The next section presents a model of a social construction that goes beyond the metaphor in being “partly there” in people’s minds. It is stated for challenges but could be adapted for other such concepts.

A Model of Semiforceful Challenges

The social construction nature of challenges means that there is one approach the model should not take: it should not assign each challenged party and the audience a subjective probability that the challenge is a “valid” one, in some objective sense. The model represents a loss of force as doubt about others’ beliefs. This is formalized by the method of interactive belief structures (appendix B.)¹² For simplicity, the model assumes that each player can be of two types. The types of challengees are Ch_I and Ch_{II} , and the types of audience are Aud_I and Aud_{II} . A player’s type is not an objective attribute brought to the game. It can be thought of in this way: at the time of the challenge, the players have had different life experiences, which have led them to adopt beliefs about other players’ life experiences. The player’s type is this life experience. It is nothing more than what that player believes about the other player’s type. In conjunction with the strategic aspects of the current game, it determines what the player does in the game.

The joint likelihoods of each type are expressed in matrix 1. The types show probabilistic dependence, but it is not causal dependence. There is no implication that one player’s set of beliefs influences the other’s. The dependence is evidential—if I have had a certain life experience, I assess different likelihoods for what yours have been.¹³

12. The model in this chapter differs slightly from Aumann’s approach in that the type does not include the Challengee’s knowledge of h or the move made. It is a “partial” type. Since it is assumed in this model that beliefs about another’s beliefs are independent of h , it is easy to move to a player’s full type. A more standard form for a challenging model is in appendix B.

13. These probabilities do not refer to proportions of the audience holding each belief—a Challengee believes that the *whole* Audience is of one type or the other.

		Audience	
		Aud _I	Aud _{II}
Challenger	Ch _I	.45*	.05
	Ch _{II}	.05	.45

Matrix 1. Joint likelihoods of each pair of types, partial common knowledge case

Assume that the true situation is indicated by the asterisk (*). Types Ch_I and Aud_I are reality, and the other two are hypothetical, included only because each player entertains them as possibilities for the other player. It is assumed that the probability matrix is common knowledge, so each can use it to calculate a distribution over the other's type. The Challenger (who is in reality type Ch_I) believes the Audience is of type Aud_I with probability .9 [= .45/(.45 + .05)] and of type Aud_{II} with probability .1 [= .05/(.45 + .05)]. This situation can be contrasted with a fully forceful challenge, whose matrix implies that each knows with certainty what the other is thinking. In matrix 2, the players assign conditional probabilities to the other's type, given their own, of 0 or 1.¹⁴ A Challenger of type Ch_I holds probability 1 [= .6/(.6 + 0)] that an Audience is type Aud_I. Knowing the other's type constitutes knowing the other's beliefs about one's own type, so here types are more than each player's knowledge: they are their common knowledge.

Returning to the partial common knowledge case of matrix 1, one can calculate Challenger's probabilities for Audience's distribution over Challenger's types and, from this, Challenger's estimate of Audience's probability that Challenger is Ch_I rather than Ch_{II}, and on up. The Challenger holds probabilities .9 and .1 that A holds a .9 and .1 probability of Ch_I, respectively. Therefore Challenger's estimate of Audience's probability of Ch_I is .820 [= .9 (.9) + .1 (.1)]. Further, one can calculate Challenger's estimate of Audience's estimate of that estimate, and so on (appendix B). For matrix 1, the numbers are .820, .705, .631, .574, . . . , converging to .5. The limiting uncertainty .5 is the prior probability of Ch_I, not conditioned on knowledge of the current situation (*).¹⁵ So one's opinion about what the other is thinking dissolves into uncertainty as the level

14. The weighting of the nonzero cells with .6 and .4 is arbitrary—when each player reaches the game, the prior likelihood of other types becomes irrelevant.

15. This is always true (Samet 1996).

		Audience	
		Aud _I	Aud _{II}
Challenger	Ch _I	.6*	0
	Ch _{II}	0	.4

Matrix 2. Joint probabilities of each pair of types, full common knowledge case

of metabelief rises. This justifies calling matrix 1 partial common knowledge.¹⁶ (For full common knowledge, matrix 2, the series would be 1, 1, 1, . . .)

The full common knowledge game was solved in the preceding chapter—players have a threshold and a pooling equilibrium. What happens with partial common knowledge? The original two equilibria are still there, but a third one appears that depends on players’ types. The players believe that the different Challenger types will use different thresholds of personal honor for responding and that different Audience types will come to different conclusions about Challenger’s threshold. To add some details, let h , which is Challenger’s honor, be uniformly distributed on $[\frac{1}{2}, 1]$ and let the cost of accepting the challenge be .15. For matrix 1, one equilibrium is for Challenger not to respond and for Audience to exact no cost in honor—the original pooling equilibrium. Ignoring possibilities of arbitrary beliefs the Audience might adopt after an unexpected acceptance, it is as follows.

POOLING EQUILIBRIUM. The Challenger does not accept; the Audience maintains its estimate of h at .75.

A second equilibrium is identical to the threshold equilibrium for the full common knowledge case and can be calculated in the same way. The Audience alters its beliefs in response to an acceptance or a refusal, and the Challenger acts differently in response to his personal honor, but neither pays attention to type:

TYPE-INDEPENDENT THRESHOLD EQUILIBRIUM. The Challenger accepts if $h > .60$; the Audience estimates h at .55 or .80, depending on whether the Challenger does not or does accept.

The new equilibrium adds a dependence on types.

¹⁶ Monderer and Samet (1989) give a relevant definition for *degree of common belief*.

TYPE-DEPENDENT THRESHOLD EQUILIBRIUM. The Challengee accepts if $h > .705$ for type Ch_I , or if $h > .992$ for type Ch_{II} ; a type Aud_I audience estimates h at .677 or .867 if the Challengee does not or does respond, respectively; a type Aud_{II} estimates it at .732 or .982.¹⁷

It may seem odd that two Challengees with the same honor would behave differently, but analyzing this equilibrium shows why. A type Aud_I audience sees the challenge as more forceful and accordingly reacts more strongly. A Ch_I challengee is more ready to accept than a Ch_{II} , because this Challengee holds a greater belief that the audience is Aud_I .

Doubt about the other's beliefs does more than add diversity to the players. It weakens the challenge. One can calculate that a Ch_I challengee who does not respond holds an estimate of .6825 for Audience's view of Challengee's honor, and a Ch_{II} 's estimate is .7265, so neither expects much loss below Audience's prior estimate of .75. In the full common knowledge game, Challengee's revised estimate of the audience's estimate would show a far greater loss, down to .55. Assuming that the third equilibrium is in effect, a bit of mutual doubt about whether the challenge was forceful—a Challengee's probability of .1 instead of 0 that the other is of the tolerant type—has increased both Challengee types' motivation to decline. This is also reflected in their behavior. With full common knowledge, 20 percent of Challengees refuse the challenge at the threshold equilibrium, but with doubt, the numbers rise to 41 percent and 98 percent for Ch_I and Ch_{II} . A grain of doubt makes a challenge less effective as a test of honor; it saps its force and promotes peace.

The model gives an example of a mathematical representation of a social construction. The point behind the metaphor is that the entity is not objectively there but is implied by social behavior. Like all metaphors it has its limits, and the problem here is its suggestion that there is a one construction out there available for all to see. The difficulty is much like the one that Reddy (1979) saw in the INFORMATION-AS-A-CONDUIT metaphor. This pattern, discussed in chapter 3, talks as if conveying information is sending a copy of our thoughts to another person for their perusal. Reddy suggests that it produces a tendency to think that the receiver can see what we are thinking from the copy we send them. We do not need to put special effort into communicating, such as putting ourselves in the other's place to understand how our message is interpreted. The metaphor allows that our idea might sometimes get mangled in the trip, but in that case

17. The values are calculated as the Audience's estimates of types Ch_I and Ch_{II} 's honors, multiplied by the updated probability that the Challengee is of either type and summed, with the values conditioned on the Challengee's accepting or not accepting. The derivation is in appendix C.

the receiver would see that it has come through damaged, and be aware that he or she is not understanding us. We assume we are understood when we are not. If it becomes clear that we were misinterpreted, we blame the receiver for being stubborn or dense. In fact, he argues, receiving a message is more like detective work, with tests of hypotheses and inferences about what was in the sender's mind. The receiver does not immediately recognize distortion, but does as well as possible to decipher the sender's meaning from the evidence.

Like the conduit metaphor, the construction metaphor of a social belief turns it into an object. The belief is shared by the parties as if it were an external object "constructed" by them, there for all to see. The problem again is that it does not easily handle a partially shared social fact, like a semiforceful challenge. If the edifice is there, there is no reason why it should be perceived differently by the parties, at least within the metaphor. If it is only partly built, all should see that and should not act as if there were a shared understanding. However, groups do not always do this, any more than receivers recognize when a communication is distorted. This shortcoming of the metaphor is ironical because it is this kind of behavior that many writers who use it want to address. The present model gives an example of the situation described nonmetaphorically as an interactive belief system. Incompletely shared social constructions are represented as matrices of partial common knowledge.

For challenges in particular, the model shows the potential benefit of a small amount of cultural ambiguity. But three equilibria exist, and one of them is the same as the full common knowledge case, so this doubt is only potentially helpful. What might induce doubt, and what might point to one or the other will be dealt with next.

How Challenges Lose Force

What could sow a grain of doubt about mutual beliefs and weaken a challenge's force? *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* has a semiforceful challenge as its opening episode. The poem is carefully crafted—it "moves over an almost flawless structure as smoothly as supple skin moves over the bones of the hand," according to one critic (Loomis 1959, 528)—so one can expect that its representation of partial forcefulness is self-consistent and subtle. It illustrates a series of requirements for fully forceful challenging that will be detailed now. The dismal conclusion will be that modern international challenges do not seem bound by these requirements. Still a central requirement holds internationally and weakens the force of challenges. An earlier story, Sir Gawain's ancestor, is described to illustrate it.

Gawain starts with the Round Table celebrating the 15-day Christmas festival. As King Arthur's courtiers sit down to the feast, an awesome figure rides into the hall, a large man—perhaps a giant, the poet says—handsome, sturdy, finely dressed, and entirely green. He wears no armor but carries a holly bough in one hand and a battle-ax in the other. Even the metal of the ax is bright green. The stranger says he has come to propose a Christmas game. The fame of the Round Table is universal and he hopes that his request will be granted here. Arthur promises that if he wants single combat he will have it, but the Green Knight replies that he did not bring his weapons or armor, and in any case there is no one here who could match him; they are like beardless boys. His mission is different: to challenge anyone to an exchange of blows. Whoever accepts may use his ax to strike the first blow, and the Green Knight will not resist and will demand his turn only after a year and a day. When no one accepts, he taunts the company, declaring that he has exposed its reputation as counterfeit. Pricked by shame and anger, Arthur leaps forward to seize the ax. The Green Knight bares his neck, but before the king can strike, Gawain asks to stand in. The knight says that if he survives the blow, he will tell Gawain where to seek him, but if afterward he can reveal nothing, Gawain is free of obligation. The Green Knight again lifts his long hair to expose his neck. Gawain brings down the ax; it shears through flesh and through bone and the head rolls across the floor and into the crowd, but the body does not stagger or fall. It springs after the head and grabs it, mounts the horse, and holds the head up by the hair. The eyelids open, and the head commands Gawain to appear one year hence at the Green Chapel or be branded a coward. When the hoofbeats have receded into the distance, the company laugh somewhat nervously at the wonder they have seen. After this episode the narrative moves on to Gawain's journey to find the Green Knight, his stay at a castle and his encounter with the lady of his host and her tests of his chivalry, and the knight's final sparing his life.

The Green Knight puts Gawain in a quandary by deliberately making the challenge partially forceful. Why he wanted to do this is never explained, but a likely possibility is that it can be a more stringent test of honor, as the third equilibrium shows. It certainly adds to the drama for the reader. He weakens the force in several ways.

Force Is Weakened if the Challenger's Membership Is Doubtful

In most societies, only a member of the honor group can issue challenges. When a child dares another to swallow a slug, the speech act's success is based on their

common membership in children's culture. An adult could not dare another adult to do it, and an adult could not dare a child to do something—daring cannot help parents manage their children's behavior. One man challenges another by virtue of his social role, and challenges coming from below one's social class or from women can be ignored.

To the extent that the Green Knight is seen as a fellow knight, Gawain is bound to accept, but if he is clearly supernatural, the challenge has no force. To make the challenge seem partially forceful, the poet's characterization of the Green Knight hovers between the human and the supernatural. He is large, perhaps a half-giant, says the poet, surely the biggest of men, but in any case handsome. First, his shape and size are described, anchoring us in the impression that he is human, but after a dozen lines of such details, the poet announces that he is bright green. In the passage quoted earlier the Green Knight calls himself a *wyze* (315). The term usually denotes a person, but it could mean a living being of any kind (Borroff 1962, 112). In battle, the knight implies, he would defeat his adversary with his weapons, not by magic, and this sounds like a mortal man. When Arthur offers him a fight, he replies that he did not come for that, although at home he has a hauberk, a helmet, a shield, and a sharp shining spear. Cataloging his equipment lets the court know that he possesses the accoutrements of a knight (Burrow 1965) and so is a member of the group. His fine clothing, his articulate speech, his horse described as obedient to the rider's command reinforce this. However, the horse too is bright green. By manipulating the perception of his membership in the group, the knight is manipulating the force of his challenge.

Internationally, this requirement seems to be gone. Challenges are taken as bona fide even when the challenger has no group credentials or could be claimed to have none. In Lyndon Johnson's account, the attack in the Gulf of Tonkin was seen as a challenge even though the United States did not recognize North Vietnam. To support the bombing of Libya, Ronald Reagan spoke of the challenge of terrorists, whom he did not regard as members of the international system.

Force Is Weakened if the Contest Is Unfair

Most speech acts can be seen as accepting a proposition and performing a characteristic operation on it. The proposition that the milk is on the table, for example, could be put into a question, an assertion, a request, or a promise. For a forceful speech act, this proposition must satisfy certain requirements. I cannot promise some event in the past, for example, and I cannot apologize for the weather, since it is not something I did. The damage done to the speech act is a

matter of degree—it means something to thank someone “in advance” for something, although it is a good idea to thank the person again afterward.

The speech act “I challenge you to p” requires that p be a proposition describing a competitive activity, with some way of determining a winner.¹⁸ Traditionally a challenge presumes that the game in the proposition is superficially fair. A challenge to a duel where I use a rifle and you use a sword would lack force. The challenge has only to look fair. In nineteenth-century France, a skilled duelist could challenge someone who had no hope of winning (Nye 1993). Even if the Green Knight were human, his contest cannot possibly be fair: someone must go first and someone must go second, so he obscures this with details. He loads the agreement with symmetries: you strike at me, I strike at you; I offer no resistance, neither will you; I sought you out at your abode, you seek me out at mine and come at this same time next year. He would never provoke an unfair contest, he suggests—he would refuse to fight a battle against “berdles boys.” All this nods at the fairness requirement and partially saves the challenge’s force.

In modern international affairs, the issue of the symmetry of the contest is not raised. A small nonnuclear state can challenge a strong one, and the latter will still lose reputation. It may be that the requirement has survived but has been transformed. If North Vietnamese torpedo boats challenge U.S. ships, the challenge is not to a contest of navies but one of national wills and in this regard the countries are potentially equals. However, if in fact the requirement has been reinterpreted in this way, it puts no effective restrictions on international challenges and does not help the goal of peace.

Force Is Weakened by an Improper Motive for Challenging

Speech acts do many things, but in all of them the speaker asserts some belief. My apology implies that I really am sorry, and my promise implies that I really have a certain intention. A performative’s *sincerity conditions* require that the speaker be sincere in these assertions. Intentions are usually unobservable, of course, but sometimes evidence of insincerity is manifest, and then the performative loses force.

Sincerity requirements fall into two types: those involving intention and those involving motive. My daring you, for example, expresses my intention that I will watch whether you perform the action. If I dared you to stand on your head but intended to look away when you do it, my dare would be insincere. My

18. Another approach would have the propositional content be that the challengee accepts or declines the challenge. This makes provocatives close to yes/no questions whose propositional content can be taken as that the person answers them yes or no (Vanderveken 1990).

challenging you implies that I am willing to participate in the contest. If I announced that since you have accepted my illocutionary point has been achieved, and there is no reason to proceed—that would be insincere.

Provocatives also put requirements on the sender's *apparent motive*. If social customs supported a challenge by means of burglarizing someone's house and keeping that person's possessions, the purpose of the action would be obscured, and frivolous challenges would proliferate. One child cannot dare another to hand over \$5. A challenge with the consequence of simply killing Gawain would be ineffective, so the Green Knight supplies a reason for his proposal—it is a Christmas game or sport. The Round Table has drawn him here by its reputation, and it will lose that reputation, he says, if no one will play. This bolsters the challenge's apparent sincerity.

The distinction between the motives of testing reputation and accumulating gain disappears on the international scene. Judging by some of the examples given earlier, countries can make challenges that are manifestly designed to forward their national interests.

In Some Cultures, a Forceful Challenge Requires a Prior Insult

Speech acts generally involve certain *preparatory conditions*, presuppositions about the context, without which they would be defective. Double daring requires that the target has already been dared, and defying someone to prove a position requires that the person has already espoused it. In some cultures an insult is a preparatory condition for a challenge. In Renaissance Italy, one had to be insulted before one could “give the lie,” and in the U.S. South, a man who simply begins a fight in a bar loses respect—the fight must come from an affront, even if concocted. This institution serves to reduce pointless challenges. International challenges, however, seem to have no such restriction.

How to Stop a Challenge from Starting a Fight— *The Feast of Bricriu*

Overall, the international system has made challenging much easier by dropping various requirements for force: membership in the group, the fairness of the contest, the possible motives, and sometimes the need for a prior affront are gone. A reason may be that within a society, an individual is assumed honorable unless proven otherwise, but in the international system, “credibility” or “resolve” is not attributed automatically, and nations may be looking for opportu-

nities to enhance it. One way is to respond as if one was challenged even if one does not believe that was the other's intention. Societies want to restrict challenges, but states can have an interest in inventing them.

Assuming that the a state does not want to respond to a challenge, how can it achieve peace with honor? An effective way might be to use the ambiguity of international culture. What constitutes an international challenge is poorly defined, so the state might pretend that none has occurred. In terms of the model, a semiforceful challenge yielded one equilibrium where no doubt crept in and another where it did. One can send signals that one believes that the latter is in effect.

A bad example, a story of how not to deflect a challenge, comes from an earlier beheading tale, the Old Irish *Feast of Bricriu* (Meyer 1893; Henderson 1899; Thurneysen 1921; Buchanan 1932; O'Neill 1991b). It is an ancestor of *Gawain and the Green Knight*, and was first written down around the eighth century. It was almost as old when the Gawain poet wrote as the latter's work is now. A *bachlach*, a rough-looking giant, walks into the court of the Ulstermen. He says he has traveled the world in search of someone who will give him fair play. He proposes that he will take the first turn and wield his ax on someone's neck. (Note that this is the reverse of the Green Knight's challenge.) Munremar, one of the company, steps up and points out that this is unfair. He wants the order reversed. To Munremar's surprise, the giant accepts immediately. Munremar beheads the giant and the room is awash with blood, but when the giant comes the next night for his turn, Munremar is not to be found. This sequence happens twice more, until the fourth taker, Cuchulainn, keeps the bargain and is recognized as preeminent among the champions.

The story looks like Gawain's, but there is a strategic difference. The giant's motive, it turns out, is to prove Cuchulainn to be the worthy one. He must induce Munremar into accepting the game, even though Munremar lacks honor. He does this by reversing the order of play, inducing Munremar to propose the game that the giant really wants. Munremar does this, and he is trapped. He has endorsed the legitimacy of the challenge on the record, and so bolstered its force. In game terms, endorsing the challenge's legitimacy means increasing the degree of common belief that one is a type Ch_1 challengee.

Munremar's mistake has lessons for current leaders. When a state faces a questionable challenge and prefers to avoid war, it should say nothing that bolsters the challenge's force and especially should avoid recognizing it as a challenge. A government that labels an adversary's new missile program or troop deployment as a threat that must be answered is making it one. This is relevant to the potential recipient and also to the potential challenger. If one's action might

be taken as a challenge, it should be kept off the record to avoid common belief in a forceful challenge.¹⁹ In October 1950, China was ready to enter Korea, but first it renamed its army. What had been the “Northeastern Border Forces” became the “Chinese People’s Volunteer Army” (Yao 1985), and through the war Chinese soldiers fighting in Korea were “volunteers.” The suggestion may have been that the war was not a fully official act of the Chinese government. Mao’s worry, one that he had discussed with Stalin, was that the United States would attack China with nuclear weapons. The new name may have been meant to diminish the pressure on the United States for a stronger response. In this vein, Israel has possessed nuclear weapons for two decades, and although this fact is widely known, it has never been announced. Keeping its nuclear status off the record may lessen the pressure on surrounding countries to respond in kind. The adversaries are not fooled, of course—they know the objective facts—but whether a certain situation constitutes a forceful challenge is about something other than the objective facts.

19. This consideration is like chapter 5’s conclusion of avoiding public events that increase tension. “Off the record” is defined in chapter 9.