

Response to Reviewers

Cover Letter

To the Editor,
[Journal Name]

Dear Editor,

We thank you and the reviewers for the opportunity to revise and resubmit our manuscript, “**Chains of Command: From Eichmann to the Drone Operator – Moral Distance and the Bureaucratization of Killing**” (Manuscript ID: [Please Insert]). We are grateful to the reviewers for their thoughtful, detailed, and constructive feedback, which has been invaluable in strengthening our work.

In this revision, we have undertaken substantial revisions to address the core methodological and conceptual concerns raised. The primary changes are as follows:

First, we have significantly restructured the paper to clearly separate the development of our theoretical framework from its illustrative application. The Palestinian case is now explicitly framed as one potential application of a more general analytical model, rather than its foundational evidence. We have introduced a dedicated **Methodological Framework** section (Section 3) that outlines our approach of conceptual genealogy combined with comparative institutional analysis, and we present a systematic typology of moral distancing mechanisms.

Second, we have engaged more directly with counterarguments and the ambivalent nature of bureaucratic systems, acknowledging their potential for both enabling accountability and facilitating moral distancing. We have also tempered our historical claims by explicitly acknowledging institutional and political differences between contexts while examining structural parallels in the operation of moral distancing mechanisms.

Third, we have clarified the scope and limitations of our philosophical methodology, emphasizing its normative and conceptual nature while addressing concerns about conceptual precision and historical overreach. We have revised the language throughout to enhance clarity and reduce polemical tone, focusing on analytical rigor.

We believe these revisions have substantially improved the manuscript’s scholarly rigor, balance, and methodological transparency. Our detailed point-by-point responses to the reviewers’ comments are provided below.

Response to Reviewers

Reviewer 1

Comment 1: Major Flaw: The paper must fundamentally restructure its argument. The theoretical framework on moral distancing and bureaucratization should be developed independently. The case of Palestine should then be presented as an application or test case of the theory, not as its foundational evidence. This would require rewriting large sections of the manuscript. **Response:** We thank the reviewer for this crucial observation. We have completely restructured the manuscript to decouple the

theoretical framework from its application. The Palestinian case is now explicitly positioned as one illustrative application of a more general analytical model. Key changes include:

- The **Abstract** now states the paper “employs a comparative methodological framework” and that the Palestinian case “serves as one illustrative example among potential applications” (Lines 7-10).
- The **Introduction** (Section 1) has been rewritten. It now frames the Palestinian case as “a particularly instructive instance” and “one illustrative example” used to demonstrate the operationalization of our theoretical framework (Lines 18-21). It explicitly states the purpose is “to analyze how speaking about genocide functions within a socio-linguistic field” as “a methodological case study” rather than to deliver a definitive political judgment (Lines 30-33).
- A new **Methodological Framework** section (Section 3) was added. It independently develops our analytical approach (conceptual genealogy and comparative analysis) and presents a typology of five moral distancing mechanisms (Linguistic Abstraction, Procedural Compliance, etc.) before mentioning the Palestinian case as an illustrative application (Lines 122-147).
- The **Discussion** (Section 4) now refers to the Palestinian case as demonstrating “how the analytical approach can be operationalized” (Line 232).

Comment 2: Major Flaw: Engage with Counterarguments: A serious scholarly work on this topic must engage with the robust counter-narratives and legal arguments... The paper currently presents a single, advocacy-oriented perspective as fact. **Response:** We agree and have integrated engagement with counterarguments throughout the manuscript.

- In the **Related Work** section (Section 2), we now explicitly state that our analysis “engages with scholarship that examines how bureaucratic systems can also enable accountability and ethical oversight,” citing scholars like James C. Scott and Michael Barnett (Lines 99-102). We note the “ambivalent nature of bureaucratic rationality—its capacity to both enable and constrain violence” (Lines 103-104).
- In the **Discussion** (Section 4), we added a paragraph directly addressing this point: “Our analysis also engages with counterarguments about bureaucratic accountability. While bureaucratic systems can enable oversight... our focus is on how these same structural features can facilitate moral distancing when ethical oversight is weak...” (Lines 185-190).

Comment 3: Major Flaw: Clarify Methodological Scope: The paper should explicitly state its limitations as a normative, philosophical argument rather than an empirical or legal one. **Response:** We have clarified the methodological scope and limitations in several key places.

- The new **Methodological Framework** section (Section 3) outlines our approach and its limitations, stating: “Methodological limitations include the primarily conceptual nature of the analysis, which relies on philosophical texts and discursive patterns rather than empirical data...” (Lines 148-150).
- The **Discussion** (Section 4) reiterates this: “Several limitations must be acknowledged... As a philosophical analysis, it relies on conceptual genealogy rather than empirical data...” (Lines 212-214).
- We removed the confusing header reference to “AI-Scholar Generated Preprint” as suggested.

Comment 4: Minor Flaw: The title contains a formatting error (“F ROM”). The prose... could be made more concise. **Response:** Thank you. We have corrected the title to “Chains of Command:

From Eichmann to the Drone Operator – Moral Distance and the Bureaucratization of Killing”. We have also edited the prose, particularly in the Discussion section, to improve conciseness and readability (e.g., streamlining sentences in Lines 160-180 of Section 4).

Comment 5: Suggestion: To strengthen the manuscript, the authors could conduct a more formal discourse analysis... to provide concrete evidence for their claims about "discursive erasure," rather than relying on generalized assertions. **Response:** We appreciate this suggestion. While a full formal discourse analysis is beyond the scope of this primarily philosophical paper, we have strengthened our analytical framework to provide clearer criteria for identifying discursive mechanisms. The new typology in Section 3 (Lines 128-137) offers specific, operationalizable categories (e.g., “Linguistic Abstraction”) that future empirical work could employ. We now frame our analysis as providing the conceptual tools for such studies (see Future Work, Section 5, Lines 272-275).

Reviewer 2

Comment 1: Major Flaw: Methodological Vagueness: "Conceptual genealogy" is poorly defined and implemented without systematic comparative analysis. **Response:** We have substantially clarified and systematized our methodology.

- The new **Methodological Framework** section (Section 3) explicitly defines our approach: “The conceptual genealogy method involves tracing the development and transformation of key concepts... across different philosophical traditions and historical contexts” (Lines 122-125). It details our “comparative analysis” of three contexts (Nazi bureaucracy, modern military, algorithmic warfare) (Lines 126-127).
- We introduce a systematic **typology of five moral distancing mechanisms** (Lines 128-137), providing the analytical precision requested.

Comment 2: Major Flaw: Historical Overreach: Equating Nazi bureaucracy with contemporary military systems without adequate attention to institutional and political differences. **Response:** We have carefully nuanced our historical comparisons to avoid false equivalence.

- The **Abstract** now states we examine “structural parallels across different historical contexts while acknowledging their specific institutional and political differences” (Lines 7-8).
- The **Related Work** section states we “acknowledge important institutional differences between Nazi bureaucracy and contemporary military systems while examining how similar mechanisms... operate across these contexts” (Lines 94-96).
- The **Methodological Framework** emphasizes our focus is on “structural parallels in how these mechanisms operate while acknowledging important historical and institutional differences” (Lines 126-127).
- The **Discussion** reiterates: “While acknowledging important institutional and political differences... our analysis identifies structural parallels in how moral distancing mechanisms operate” (Lines 168-170).

Comment 3: Major Flaw: Lack of Empirical Grounding: Heavy reliance on philosophical assertion rather than evidence. **Response:** We acknowledge this as a deliberate limitation of our philosophical methodology and have framed it as such. We now clearly state in Section 3 (Lines 148-150) and Section 4 (Lines 212-214) that our analysis is conceptual and genealogical, not empirical. We propose empirical studies as a key direction for **Future Work** (Line 267). Our contribution is to provide a refined conceptual framework to guide such future empirical research.

Comment 4: Major Flaw: Insufficient Engagement with Counterarguments: Fails to address how bureaucratic systems can also enable accountability and ethical oversight. **Response:** As detailed in our response to Reviewer 1 (Comment 2), we have added explicit engagement with this counterargument in the Related Work (Lines 99-104) and Discussion (Lines 185-190) sections.

Comment 5: Major Flaw: Conceptual Inflation: "Moral distancing" is applied so broadly it loses analytical precision. **Response:** We have addressed this by developing the precise, five-part typology of moral distancing mechanisms (Section 3, Lines 128-137). This typology (Linguistic Abstraction, Procedural Compliance, Technological Mediation, Institutional Delegation, Temporal Displacement) defines specific, distinct mechanisms that together constitute the broader concept, thereby restoring analytical precision.

Comment 6: Recommendation: Provide detailed analysis of institutional differences between Nazi bureaucracy and contemporary military systems. **Response:** While a full institutional history is beyond our paper's philosophical scope, we have integrated the spirit of this comment by consistently acknowledging these differences wherever comparisons are made (see our response to Comment 2 above). Our focus is on the *operation of specific mechanisms* (defined in our typology) that can be observed across different institutional settings, not on equating the settings themselves.

Closing Note

We again extend our sincere gratitude to both reviewers for their insightful and challenging critiques, which have pushed us to produce a significantly more rigorous, balanced, and methodologically sound manuscript. We believe the revisions have directly addressed the core concerns, strengthened the argument, and enhanced the paper's potential contribution to the fields of political philosophy, ethics, and critical security studies. We hope the revised manuscript now meets the journal's standards for publication.

Respectfully submitted,
The Authors