

Nuclear Weapons, Deterrence, and Disarmament

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The Morality of Deterrence

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One of the most outstanding characteristics of human beings is their adaptability. As we readily learn to take new conditions of life for granted, so we have learned to live with the bomb. For nearly forty years we have lived in the shadow of possible cataclysmic disaster brought about by human action; and we treat this unprecedented danger simply as a background, on which we focus only occasionally, to the common business of living. What else is possible, save persistent hysteria? But, as part of a mechanism for avoiding hys-

teria, we are in danger of rendering the topic unreal to ourselves even when we are explicitly considering it, by treating it as an *abstract* question. We use the concepts of first strike, retaliation, megadeaths, and so forth, which we apply in just the spirit of those discussing strategy for a board game, while averting our minds from what it is that we are actually talking about. Indeed, if our concern is purely strategic, this does no harm, since the question then involves something isomorphic to a problem in a conceivable board game. When our concern is a moral one, however, or, more generally, when it has to do with what is actually to happen to mankind, it is fatal to treat the question as an abstract one, for it is in just these respects that the isomorphism fails.

The idea that war can be permissible, if it is fought according to rules, is common both to chivalry and to the doctrine of the just war. This idea implies that though warfare is often wrong, it is not unconditionally wrong. Chivalry and the just war doctrine both prohibit the killing of those who are not attempting to kill you. Traditionally, the term 'murder' has not been understood so broadly as to include every act of killing a human being, but as comprising any act of killing the innocent; so understood, murder is conceived as falling under an absolute prohibition. 'Innocent' is here opposed, not to 'guilty,' but to 'harmful': you are required to refrain from killing, not those whose actions are inculpable, but those who are not willingly harming or attempting to harm you or those you are obliged to protect. According to this principle, you have the right to kill someone if that is the only feasible way of preventing him from killing you, and need not first enquire whether he is suffering from some insane delusion or rational misapprehension that renders his conduct free from blame; but you do not have the right to kill someone solely because he is doing or has done something wicked, if you do not need to do so to stop him or if what he is doing is not proportionately grave. A natural misunderstanding of the term 'innocent' as used here has played its part in breaking down our inhibitions against the killing of civilians in war. We think, with justice, that the enemy conscript is hardly to blame for what he is doing; the terrorist justifies his actions by saying, falsely, 'All are guilty'; but in neither case is innocence, in the sense of inculpability, the relevant consideration.

The rules of chivalry have as their purpose to render human what is intrinsically an inhuman way of acting towards others; the simple idea that lies behind its prohibition of killing unarmed people, as well as its code for combat between those who are armed, is that killer and killed must have been given an equal chance of coming out of the combat alive. The just war doctrine is a much more systematic attempt to answer moral questions; and we must first frame these questions aright. To ask after the grounds for pacifism is obviously a legitimate enquiry; but to embark on it risks putting the onus of proof in the wrong place. For any given action, the first question is whether one may legitimately justify it on the ground that no sufficient reason appears for prohibiting it, or whether, conversely, one must refrain from it unless there is sufficient positive justification for it. Since moral issues are usually far from clear, the correct placing of the onus of proof is of particular importance: the notion of the onus of proof comprises the core of truth in the theory of *prima facie* right propounded by Ross.

If we ask after the grounds for pacifism, we dispose ourselves to put the onus of proof on the pacifist; we are challenging him to produce sufficient grounds for not taking part in war. To him, this seems unfair; he sees it as both rational and morally necessary to refrain from war in the absence of any sufficient justification for taking part in it: a justification he has been unable to find. One does not have to be a pacifist to see the matter in this light; that is how the proponents of the just war doctrine saw it, too. They were not trying to answer the question: in what circumstances does waging war become morally unlawful? Their question was, rather: what could possibly justify conduct so contrary to what is ordinarily acceptable?

I think it possible to discuss the morality of nuclear deterrence without first opting for any of the variant ethical theories on offer, and, in particular, without rejecting consequentialism, even in its more radical, act-consequentialist, version. It was from a deontological and absolutist base that the moral theologians and jurists developed the doctrine of the just war; but it is not because of this base that they saw the onus of justification as lying on the one who would wage war rather than on the one who would refrain from it. Given that one may justly fight if certain conditions are satisfied,

it may also become one's duty to do so in some cases; but the moral principles on which such a judgement rests have still to be arrived at by answering the question, 'What could justify actions on the face of them so horrible?', and not the question, 'What positive reason could be found for refusing to act in this way?'

Subtle argument is an important ingredient in ethical enquiries; but an ability to recognise when it is out of place is of equal importance. It needs no argument, for example, to show that it is monstrously wicked to exterminate millions of people in gas chambers. If someone says that it is monstrously wicked, you do not have to ask on what ethical theory he bases his conclusion, or to examine the steps by which he arrived at it. No ethical theory can stand in judgement upon so fundamental a delivery of moral intuition; it stands in judgement upon the theory, for any theory that renders such as assessment doubtful is thereby shown to be erroneous.

To recognise that nuclear warfare is unconditionally wrong, we need to know only two things: that the same moral principles that govern the lives of all of us apply to governments and to what is done at the command of governments; and that moral principles are universal. If a moral principle is valid at all, it is valid for everyone, in all places, in all circumstances and at all times; war cannot suspend moral principles, though it provokes their violation. If the obliteration of whole cities, or whole populations, is not murder, there is no such thing as murder; if it is not wrong, then nothing is wrong.

Am I saying any more than that, if nuclear attacks can be reconciled with the moral law, then no type of action is *absolutely* wrong, that is, such that no conceivable instance of it could ever be justified? Must not a consequentialist, at least an act rather than a rule consequentialist, deny that any type of action is absolutely wrong in this sense, although he will recognise many individual acts as wrong? And am I not, therefore, merely presuming the falsity of act consequentialism, without having taken the trouble to argue it? So long as act consequentialism has not been ruled out as a possible basis for moral principles, my claim assumes that there could be no evil greater than nuclear warfare that engaging in nuclear warfare could conceivably avert: and how can I assume that without enquiry?

Well, what sort of evil might one seek in this manner to avert? What candidate have you for a greater evil? That seems easy to say: nothing could be much worse than many of the things that constantly happen and that we do nothing to avert. What could be more horrible than the mass public beatings and killings that followed the overthrow of Allende in Chile, succeeded by the tortures and the 'disappearances,' events paralleled in Argentina and other Latin American countries? What greater evil could exist than a regime under which the so-called security forces could torture a woman in the course of giving birth, as was reported to have happened in Argentina, or a man be systematically tortured for over a year as an experiment to see if his personality could be changed, as was reported in Chile? You may not believe these stories, though in my opinion you are deluding yourself if you do not. Their actual truth does not affect the present argument, however: just suppose them to be true for the sake of the example. And now suppose that these things could have been permanently ended by dropping nuclear bombs on New York and destroying it with all its inhabitants; suppose that, by doing so, one could be sure – at least surer than one can ever be about the result of victory in war – that the whole of Latin America would enjoy humane, pacific, law-abiding government. Or suppose that the long agony of the Lebanon, from the beginning of the civil war until now, could have been averted by wiping out Tel Aviv. You may object that I am assuming that the United States is wholly responsible for what has happened in Latin America, or Israel for what has happened in the Lebanon. Not at all: you cannot appeal to consequentialism one moment, and repudiate it the next. I am, for these examples, arguing on consequentialist principles, to meet a consequentialist challenge: from a consequentialist standpoint, the responsibility for a given evil of those killed in order to avert that evil, though possibly relevant, cannot be a necessary part of a justification for killing them. Or choose some other horror of our time, say the malnutrition to which the world economic system condemns millions and from which millions die, and suppose it eliminable by the destruction of any major city of your choice. Would anyone seriously suppose the obliteration of the city, in any of these cases, to be a justifiable act? You may explain this by saying that no one, in his heart, is a true consequentialist; or you may explain it by saying

that even consequentialism must distinguish between the evil of destruction by act of God – that of a city by an earthquake, say – and that of destruction by deliberate human agency. Consequentialism, if it remained true to its principles, could not make such a distinction merely by saying that something worse had happened in the one case than in the other, for then it would indeed be judging good and evil by the intrinsic nature of human acts, and would have surrendered to deontologism. It would have to say, rather, that the one was worse than the other because of further effects brought about, not by the deaths of millions and the obliteration of their habitation, but by the knowledge, concerning certain people, that they had done these things. I do not stop to discuss whether an adequate consequentialist explanation could be given of our certainty that those ends would not justify those means; it is enough for my purpose that we are certain of this. If there is any case about which we might become uncertain, it would be one in which the evil to be averted was one that was otherwise to come upon *us*; for instance, if it was *our* country that was to suffer the fate of Chile or of Cambodia, or to be reduced to the destitution of the poorest third world countries. That exactly proves my point. If you think that the aversion of such an evil from ourselves might justify the mass annihilation of others, though you would not think that the liberation of those who in fact suffer from it could sanction similar means, then you have indeed repudiated morality as such; you think that there is nothing one may not lawfully do in order to avert a sufficiently grave ill from oneself, though one would not do it, and should, or at least need, not do it to avert the same evil from others.

The world is as it now is precisely because the only time a nation has had an opportunity to use nuclear weapons against an enemy that could not retaliate, it did so. If it had refrained, all our expectations would be different. I do not think that, in such a case, the nuclear arms race would have started. Surely Soviet Russia would have been as anxious to obtain the secret, and would have done so, one way or the other; but we should surely also have had an anti-nuclear treaty, and probably, though suspicious of each other, would have observed it. Not only people died at Hiroshima and Nagasaki; hope and trust died, too, and we live in a world in which they have died. We live, as no one has ever lived before, with

the consciousness that it is quite possible that, in the comparatively near future, we shall wipe out our entire species, and possibly much other life as well; if those who first obtained the atomic bomb had been able to refrain from using it, we should not entertain that possibility. So far from refraining, they used it without a qualm. A distinguished and highly respected physicist who worked on the Manhattan project reported in a television interview that, when they heard of the obliteration of Hiroshima, they broke out the champagne. He also told us that, many years later, he was struck by the contrast between what he and his colleagues were doing that evening and what was happening at the same time in Hiroshima. He said this, not in a tone of remorse, but with the quiet pride of one claiming admiration for his sensitivity in ever having such a thought. It is our knowledge that such callousness is not only characteristic of those who run the world, but that it does not need to be concealed, because it does not produce universal disgust, but instead in no way weakens the respect in which they are held, that underlies the despair that lies deepest in the feelings of all of us.

The justification now offered for possessing nuclear weapons is, of course, that it serves to deter others from using them against us. To consider whether this justification is sound, one must first ask, as I have done, whether it would ever be right to use nuclear weapons; that is, to do what one is attempting to deter others from doing by threatening to do it oneself. If there would be nothing wrong in doing something in certain circumstances, there can be nothing wrong in threatening to do it in those circumstances; the argument about deterrence then simply does not arise. That is why I have so far discussed only the use of such weapons, not the threat to use them. When the morality of the deterrent is under discussion, however, it is well to know where the participants in the discussion stand on the morality of use. In the aftermath of the second world war, there was some debate – not lively, because there were few to take the unofficial side – about the morality of dropping atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The debate has now moved on to more topical questions; but, as far as I have noticed, those who defend possession of the deterrent are just those who once defended the wiping out of the two Japanese cities. Yet, if I am right about that, Professor Anscombe, one of a tiny handful who

opposed the granting by Oxford University of an honorary degree to President Truman, was fully justified in asking, in the pamphlet she wrote on the occasion, 'If you honour this man, what Cesare Borgia, what Genghis Khan, will you not honour?' The apologists of deterrence hasten to explain that they are not defending the *use* of nuclear weapons; they are defending only the possession of them to prevent their use. I notice, however, that they very seldom, if ever, pronounce on the rightness or wrongness of the only two actual uses of them that have so far been made in war, though this is crucial to the argument. If their opinion on this matter is what used to be the received opinion about it, namely that it was justified to drop the bombs on those two cities, then their disclaimer is hypocritical; they are not really arguing on the basis that it would be wicked for us to do what we threaten to do. There may, of course, be some who believe that the destruction of Hiroshima and of Nagasaki were terrible crimes, but yet think the deterrent justified; one who shares the former belief, but disputes the latter, can argue with such people on a common basis. He is strongly advised, however, first to ascertain that such a common basis exists, by challenging the others to declare their views on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the present silence about which strikes me as ominous.

The opponent of nuclear weapons may be invited to say what differentiates them from other weapons. Obviously there is no moral difference between the destruction of a city by a nuclear bomb and by obliteration bombing with ordinary high explosives, as Dresden was destroyed, or by the creation of a fire storm by means of incendiaries, as in the notorious fire raid on Tokyo; if one is wicked, the other is wicked, as I believe both to have been. Some would see the possibility of catastrophic long-term effects extending far beyond the country attacked as making a crucial moral difference between nuclear and 'conventional' weapons; but, in my view, it can affect only the degree of wickedness in using them, not whether it would be wicked or not, although, of course, it is an important cause of the terror that lurks deep within us all. Non-nuclear but unconventional means of warfare, such as biological ones, merit equal condemnation, though they receive far less publicity; I know no one who takes the position that every means of killing members of an enemy population is justified, save the use of nuclear weapons.

Some urge that there are nuclear weapons, such as depth-charges, that could be used against strictly military targets without even side-effects on civilians. The correct response to this is to deploy the notion of a 'fire-break.' The line between nuclear and conventional weapons is clearly marked and perceived; once any nuclear weapons have been used, there is no saying where either side will draw the line. In any case, the point, though important in itself, is inessential to the present argument; we are discussing, not nuclear weapons as such, but the nuclear deterrent, and the deterrent does not consist of depth-charges. In the repulsive jargon proper to this subject, the strategy of deterrence cannot be limited to counter-force, but must include 'counter-value' also, that is, the annihilation of civilian populations on a massive scale.

Given, then, that the use of nuclear weapons would constitute an appalling crime – at least, that use of them which is threatened on the strategy followed by the American and British governments and other members of the NATO alliance, and must be threatened on any deterrent strategy – the question becomes whether it can be right to threaten what it would be wrong to do. When this question is applied to individuals, the answer must be a cautious 'Yes'. Schoolmasters do it all the time, though they risk having their bluff called; in an extreme case, I might threaten to shoot someone who was making off with some treasured possession of mine, even though I should not be justified in shooting anybody just to protect my property. If a scrupulous moralist objected to this, he would have to do so on the ground of dishonesty, which would apply equally if I had a right to do what I threatened; in itself, my making the threat in no way partakes of the moral evil of what I am threatening to do. There are two conditions, however. The first is that I should have a firm intention not to act as I threaten, if my bluff is called; and the second is that I am, with good reason, certain that I shall not in fact so act in response to a sudden action by the person at whom my threat is directed. I shall have the best ground for such certainty if I know that I cannot carry out my threat; for instance, if I am pointing an unloaded revolver. I may also be certain if I know myself well enough, and know how I behave in a crisis; if I lose my head and fire, killing the thief, I show myself to have done wrong in ever attempting the threat.

The argument cannot be transferred from individuals to governments. An individual may know that his threat is idle; a government cannot make idle threats, both because the actual orders will soon be known to the other side's intelligence services and because no government will remain indefinitely in office. It may be said that the orders require an explicit command from the supreme authority – Prime Minister or President – before they can be implemented, and that that authority may have no intention of ever issuing that command. He, or she, might not have; but that is not enough. The individual in supreme authority has, first, to be sure how he will react in crisis; if, like the present President of the United States, he is disposed to talk of revenge when some 120 soldiers are killed in a terrorist attack, how he will react when millions of citizens are suddenly and horribly bottled out? He must, secondly, make arrangements for the contingency of his being killed himself, in an attack on the capital or by a co-ordinated shot from an assassin; indeed, for the death of his Cabinet ministers and other colleagues as well. There must therefore be an entire chain of succession. If the strategy of deterrence is to be justified on the ground that it is a threat that will never be executed, whoever is in supreme command must be sure that all those in the chain share his negative intentions. If this were done by estimation of personalities, it would be utterly fallible; if it were done by explicit instruction, it would still be fallible, and the likelihood of the secret's leaking would vitiate the entire bluff. The decisive point is, however, that no President and no Prime Minister remains in office for more than a few years. No such individual could therefore justify setting up a complex and murderous engine for massacring millions of people on the ground that he sincerely intended never to use it; he would be bequeathing it to his successors, whose identity he would not know, and of whose intentions he could not be sure if he did. By constructing the engine, he would be offering his successors the possibility of using it; by committing his country to the policy of deterrence, he would be making it hard for them to back away from it. A government with a nuclear deterrent is nothing like a householder with even a loaded revolver in his hand.

Thus even the supreme political authority could not justify pursuing a policy of deterrence on the ground that it was no more than

a bluff. Indeed, I think that it could not be a bluff, if it was to be expected to work; the policy demands an actual intention to retaliate by a nuclear attack to whatever action by the other side you are trying to deter them from, which, of course, in our case, need not itself be a nuclear attack. However this may be, the matter stands much worse with those who will have no power to make the vital decision, but have the option of supporting or opposing the policy of deterrence. These – the ordinary voters – cannot know what is in the mind of the Prime Minister or President; all they know is what the government says, which is of course that the deterrent will be used once it has failed to deter. To rely on its having a secret intention not to use it, whatever happens, is therefore to make an act of blind faith. What is needed to justify a threat to do something immoral is not blind faith but certainty; blind faith cannot come near to sufficing for a justification, at least in any grave matter; and what could be graver than this? This faith is utterly blind; everything tells against it. One thing I have already mentioned: the danger, of which the politicians will be aware, that, by forming the intention not to carry out the threat, they will make it ineffective. What sense does it make to trust politicians – any politicians – not to do what they say they will do? Politicians, in power or out of it, lie as a matter of course, a fact to which there are countless attestations. They cannot be trusted to do what they say they *will* do; how can they be trusted in this instance *not* to do what they say they will do? Someone may have the thought: *our* politicians would never do anything so appallingly wicked. If so, he is deluding himself. The only thing we can say for certain is that American and British politicians had no scruples, forty-one years ago, against dropping nuclear bombs on defenceless cities; and there is not the ghost of a reason to suppose any moral improvement in them in the interim. There is no ground whatever for believing that our deterrence policy is a bluff, or would remain one if it were now. Someone who would refuse to support such a policy unless it were a bluff should also refuse to support it if he thought there to be any genuine possibility, however small, that it was not a bluff. Having no ground whatever to believe it to be a bluff, he cannot support it. Advancing this argument for supporting it seems to me no more than self-deception. It is an attractive form of self-deception, for someone with decent

feelings, because it allows him to cling to the supposed security of the deterrent without in any degree compromising his conviction that murdering people by the million is morally abhorrent. But I think that it involves a denial of reality; and, if I may so put it, I do not think that on Judgement Day it will sound a very convincing plea to say, 'I never thought they really meant to.'

We have, therefore, to enquire, not about idle threats, but about conditional intentions. If doing something is wrong, is forming a conditional intention to do it – in circumstances in which it would still be wrong – itself wrong? Professor Bernard Williams has argued, in precisely the present connection, for a negative answer; but I find his argument amazingly weak. His argument was that such a conditional intention would not necessarily be wrong in a case in which one was certain that the condition would not be fulfilled.¹ This of course reflects the paradox of the strategy of deterrence; namely, that its purpose is, by forming and announcing a conditional intention to resort to a nuclear attack, to render the fulfillment of the condition highly unlikely. The argument succeeds, however, only if one is literally *certain* that the condition will remain unfulfilled. Just as a threat to do something wrong remains uninfected by the immorality of what is threatened if, but only if, the person who makes the threat is certain that he will not carry it out, so the formation of a conditional intention to do something wrong remains uninfected if, but only if, the person forming it is certain that the condition will never be satisfied. Whereas, however, it is easy to threaten to do what you know you will not do, it is dubious if you *can* form an intention to do something in circumstances which you are certain will never arise. Mrs. Thatcher might, for example, idly speculate on what she would do if she were Pope; but she can hardly form an intention to do it if she is elected Pope. If it be supposed that it is possible to be certain that the condition under which we are threatening a nuclear attack will not be realised, what we shall have is not a conditional intention at all, but a threat known

1 Bernard Williams, 'Morality, Scepticism and the Nuclear Arms Race,' in Nigel Blake and Kay Pole, eds., *Objections to Nuclear Defence: Philosophers on Deterrence* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1984), 99-114

to be idle; the only slightly bizarre circumstance is that it is the very making of the threat which renders it idle.

As we have seen, a genuinely idle threat to do something wrong may be excusable; but the person making it had better *know* that it is idle, rather than merely thinking so, let alone falsely thinking so. Professor Williams has himself written on the subject of moral luck: if I shoot someone by accident and he dies, I have done something much worse, not just in its effects, but morally, than if he sustains only a minor wound, even though my action, and the circumstances in which I did it, were the same in both cases. So here: someone who wrongly believed the deterrent to be an idle threat is to be judged, in respect of his responsibility for a consequent holocaust, not on the basis of his belief, but on that of what in fact resulted. In any case, Williams does not have a genuine case of a permissible conditional intention to do something wrong. Even if he had, he would seem, in so criticising those who have said you ought not to intend anything immoral, even conditionally, to have confused moral philosophy with mathematics; the point is not to point out some limiting case in which an alleged theorem fails, but to discuss the realities of our existence from a moral standpoint. The supposition that we would be *certain* that nuclear hostilities will not result from the present confrontation of two camps armed as heavily as they can afford is no less than preposterous. Apart from all the possibilities of accident that have been surveyed in great detail, a nuclear war needs only one false guess by one side about the other's intentions; one mistaken attempt to call what is wrongly thought to be bluff; one threat, made in the conviction that it would work, from which the side that made it cannot then climb down. Could one have been certain that there would be no nuclear war during the Cuban missile crisis, when the Soviet warships in fact turned back at the last moment? Can one be certain now that there will never be a renewed American attempt to invade Cuba, or that a retaliatory American strike against Syria will not bring Russia and the United States face to face in the Middle East, and that, if either of these things happens, it will not, by miscalculation, provoke a nuclear war? The United States is already paranoid about Russia; and the propaganda that justifies the expenditure on nuclear weaponry inflames that paranoia. The Soviet Union, constantly

reviled by Western politicians, openly spoken of as the enemy in strategic discussions, and forced for years to endure a ring of nuclear weapons in that proximity to its territory that Kennedy declared the United States unable to tolerate, would appear to have more reason for paranoia, although, as far as I can see, in fact is less subject to it. So we have two massive states, with their attendant satellites, armed with a vast arsenal, and each consumed by fear and loathing of each other; granted that neither wants to destroy the other if the price is its own destruction, who in his right mind can claim to be certain that they will not do so?

If it is wrong to do something, it must necessarily also be wrong to form the intention of doing it. If someone tells you what he intends to do, your saying, 'But that would be morally wrong,' is an objection to his having that intention; it does not admit the response, 'It will be time to tell me that only when I do it; at the moment I merely *intend* to do it, and there can be nothing wrong with an intention.' This is not a mere special case of the principle that one must not do anything that makes it significantly more likely that one will do something wrong. If I know that I am liable to lose my temper with someone, I ought to try to keep out of his way; but this obligation may be overridden by some strong reason to see him or to go where he is likely to be. The formation of an intention has, however, a more intimate connection with the act intended than that of rendering the performance of the act more probable; and it is important to state the relevant connection correctly. It is not merely that the point of forming the intention can only be whatever point there is in performing the act; it is, rather, that, by forming the intention, I give my will to the act. It is a universally acknowledged principle that no one is culpable for an act, however wrong objectively, to which he in no degree gave his will, and that the degree of his guilt depends jointly on the degree of the objective wrongness of the act and on the degree to which he gave his will to it; that is why premeditated murder is held to be worse than murder committed in unreflective response to provocation. Now the point of forming a conditional intention may well differ from that of performing the act conditionally intended; and that is illustrated by the strategy of deterrence. Here the point of forming and announcing the conditional intention is to prevent the condition from arising; if it does

arise, there will then be no point in performing the act (save to preserve one's credibility, if that were still of any importance). It is just this to which people appeal when they defend deterrence; they are forming the conditional intention with an eye, not to realising the consequent, but to falsifying the antecedent; and so there can be nothing wrong with it. This is, however, to seize on the wrong point. In forming a conditional intention, I am giving my will to the act intended just as in forming a categorical intention; the only difference in this respect is that I am giving my will to it only under the condition in question. If something would be wrong in all circumstances whatever, as indiscriminately obliterating vast numbers of people is wrong in all circumstances whatever, then it is wrong to form the intention to do it in any circumstances whatever, even if the aim is to render those circumstances unlikely, and however laudable such an aim.

I think that the only reason people shy away from the conclusion that I am urging is fear; they cannot see how we dare back down from the position we have assumed. It is not quite clear what it is that they fear: a Soviet occupation or a nuclear war. If the whole of the West renounced nuclear weapons, the use of nuclear weapons by the Soviet Union would become most unlikely; but their renunciation by the allies of the United States, but not by the United States itself, is thought to increase the chances of a nuclear war. Because nothing more hideous than a nuclear war can easily be conceived, people slip into thinking that anything is justified which might prevent it; but I should like to express, in secular terms, my agreement with the American Catholic bishop who said, like Tolstoy, that we should not regard the survival of the human race as an end to which everything should be subordinated: still less, I should add, some particular branch of it. I saw a fragment of a television broadcast about civil defense plans in Cornwall being made by some local committee. They may well have been deluding themselves about the conditions with which Cornish survivors of a nuclear war would have to cope; but there was general agreement that it would be necessary to 'cull' the old, the sick and the mentally abnormal, and I switched off in the middle of a wrangle about whether the doctor or someone else should decide who had to be killed for the sake of the rest. From where have we acquired the assumption that it

is better for some to survive, presumably to procreate further generations, even at the cost of doing violence to every decent human feeling, than for all to die with dignity and as much comfort as they can afford to give each other in the process? Why is it supposed to be of supreme importance that the human race itself, let alone a bunch of Cornishmen, should survive, if it has made itself utterly unlovely, and must make itself more unlovely still as the price of survival?

As a means of preventing a nuclear war, the policy of deterrence makes little sense, and can be explained only by saying that we are on a tightrope, and do not know how to get off: better an unstable equilibrium than no equilibrium at all. It is normally explained differently: as a way of preventing a conventional war which we should lose, or a Soviet threat to which we should be forced to surrender. It seems to me unlikely that the Soviet Union would want to add to its troubles by extending its domination to western Europe, even if we include Greece; they never attempted to bring Yugoslavia to heel, even though we should have treated it as being, like Hungary and Czechoslovakia, within their sphere of influence. I should think the greater danger would lie in American attempts to destabilise or wreck the economies of neutralist Western countries; but I do not pretend to know what would happen. Nor, I think, does anyone else, which reduces to futility justifications of deterrence by appeal to its consequences and the consequences of abandoning it. My argument is to the effect that the obliteration of whole cities or of an entire population is unconditionally wicked, and therefore not to be contemplated as a possible course of action, even only as a threat to deter others from doing what we do not want them to do. Suppose, however, that we were convinced that, if we were to abandon the deterrent, the Soviet Union would take over our country; could that be a sufficient reason for maintaining it? I have argued that it would not be, even if it were the worst thing in the world; but how can it be the worst thing in the world? What, in other words, makes *us* so special? We have in no case any right to seek to preserve *our own* liberties by threatening to bring about the deaths of millions.

Those who dare not abandon the policy of deterrence can do no more than hope that it will stave off a nuclear holocaust for – well, for how long? For another few decades? Do they dare to hope, for

as long as a century? What is supposed to happen then? We *have* to find a way of making war of any kind impossible: otherwise mankind either has very little future or will deserve none. Moral considerations aside, to continue as at present makes no sense save in the hope of quickly finding some other way to make at least nuclear war impossible. This is the way out proposed by the multilateralists, those who recognise that the balance of terror is not stable in more than the relatively short term, but who trust in a negotiated escape from it. How much longer will the present impasse continue before they recognise that to be impossible? The only course of action that either holds out any hope or accords with the most insistent demands of the moral law is to try to prevent our country from continuing to have anything to do with nuclear weapons.

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