The Morality of Nuclear Deterrence

The Fate of the Earth. By Jonathan Schell. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982).

Objections to Nuclear Defence: Philosophers on Deterrence. Edited by Nigel Blake and Kay Pole. (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).

The policy of nuclear deterrence appears intellectually uninteresting. 'Don't attack me. For if you do, my counterattack will destroy you.' This is unsubtle. Fine shades of meaning and nice distinctions, the intellect's delight, do not figure largely here. Intellectuals demonstrate the crudeness of nuclear deterrence in their own way; they write volumes about it, obscuring its simplicity from their own view, if from no one else's. Perhaps nuclear deterrence offends the intellectuals *as intellectuals*. It is something important that even the very stupid can understand. Only intellectuals were likely to invent nuclear weapons, but now that the weapons exist, they make further intellection appear irrevelant. Small wonder that intellectuals try to blot out the policy in an ocean of ink.

But perhaps intellect still has something to do. Nuclear weapons can be said to embody modernity. Modernity, based upon a certain conception of science, has empowered human beings to a degree barely imagined in the premodern centuries. This human power to build and destroy accrued because modern philosophers urged men to it and showed them the way. Like the threat of hanging at dawn, nuclear weapons can concentrate the mind—this time on the modern enterprise itself. To consider the morality of nuclear deterrence is to consider fundamental moral questions raised by modernity, but obscured by the success of modernity. A great philosopher need not view the prospect of modernity's failure in order to see the problematic character of modernity. If Minerva's owl were a philosopher, it would be one of those species that fly both day and night. But Minerva's owl as described by Hegel is merely an intellectual, needing darkness to search for its food. The shadows cast by nuclear weapons may rouse intellectuals from our dogmatic slumber, enabling us to see matters only philosophers see in the course of humanity's ordinary diurnal life.

The books considered here represent intellectuals' attempts to understand the moral implications of nuclear deterrence. Most of the arguments the authors make, fail. These failures are instructive, therefore valuable. These are valuable books.

Means, Ends, and "The Fate of the Earth"

Modernity Against Itself

The Fate of the Earth provides a theoretical impetus for nuclear disarmament.[1] To say "theoretical *impetus*" suggests that Jonathan Schell views theory in the modern way—not so much as a foundation for thoughts as an inspiration for acts.[2] Schell does not claim that he has provided sufficient impetus to sustain the acts he desires. A "full-scale re-examination of the foundations of political thought . . . must be undertaken if the world's political institutions are to be made consonant with the global reality in which they operate or to work out the practical steps by which mankind, acting for the first time in history as a single entity, can reorganize its political life." (219) Although he does not present such a re-examination, Schell does point clearly to where he believes one should go. Calling the threat of nuclear war "the most important reality of our time," (8) he expects our thoughts and acts in regard to nuclear weapons to determine not merely the future of a military technology but "the future of mankind" and, of course, "the fate of the earth."[3]

The difficult relations between theory and practice, particularly between political theory and practice, may be said to have a long

1. Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982, and Avon Books, New York, 1982). All references here will be to the Avon edition.
2. See Francis Bacon, *The Proficience and Advancement of Learning*, Book I. See also Howard B. White, *Peace Among the Willows: The Political Philosophy of Francis Bacon* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), 14-21.
3. Karl Jaspers anticipates several of Schell's formulations. See *The Future of Mankind*, translated by E.B. Ashton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961). See especially p. 327: "The first step today is to increase the fear—though perhaps not among the political leaders, who know it, and live in it, if they are responsible. What needs increasing is the fear of the people; this should grow to overpowering force, not blind submissiveness, but of a bright, transforming ethos that will bring forth appropriate statesmen and support their actions." Despite his weakness for this sort of rhetoric, Jaspers is a man of considerably greater philosophic sophistication than Schell, who may be said to vulgarize Jaspers. Jaspers in turn may be said to derive from, perhaps vulgarize, Immanuel Kant. In the United States, Schell has had many intellectual predecessors, the most celebrated of whom is Woodrow Wilson.

history. Schell contributes an incident to that history. One easily sees the problematic character of his contribution near the end of his book. There he describes two schools of "political thinking," the 'realistic' and the 'idealistic.' The 'realistic' school teaches that "men, on the whole, pursue their own interests and act according to a law of fear"; (224) the 'idealistic' school teaches "what Gandhi called the law of love." (224) Insofar as they think logically, members of both schools must agree that "It is no more realistic than it is idealistic to destroy the world." (225) On the following page, however, Schell asserts that "the task" for mankind today "is nothing less than to reinvent politics: to reinvent the world." (226) This may or may not be the most-quoted of Schell's sentences; it is surely the most-derided.[4] In the course of only two pages, Schell apparently veers from a reasonable conclusion drawn from theory to the most dubious practical advice.

I shall argue that in recognizing the dubiousness of Schell's practical advice, one does not merely add another example to the list of 'intellectuals' whose gowns get torn in town. His advice accurately reflects a botched theoretical argument.[5] In *The Fate of the Earth* Schell offers almost no sound guidance, in theory or in practice, to those seeking world peace.

Theory

According to Schell, "we have thus far failed to fashion or to discover within ourselves, an emotional or intellectual response" to

4. See, for example, Albert Carnesdale, Paul Doty, Stanley Hoffmann, Samuel P. Huntington, Joseph S. Nye, Jr., and Scott D. Sagan, *Living With Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Bantam Books, 1983), 19: "It would be a tragedy if opportunities for practical progress toward nuclear peace were missed because our goals were set too high, beyond the reach of what is possible." Schell's " 'solution' is precisely such an impossible goal . . . . In reality . . . neither politics nor the world were invented by men, nor can either politics or the world be reinvented." The 'utopian' character of Schell's thought provoked the New York *Times* editorialist to write, "Mr. Schell can't be bothered with policy. Having confirmed, at numbing length, that nukes are dangerous, he airily departs for higher ground. The planet must be purged of nuclear weapons and the way to do that is to invent a higher allegiance than the war-making sovereign states . . . . [H]e's too worked up to dwell on details." (New York *Times*, April 11, 1982) For a gentler but nonetheless skeptical assessment, see John Maddox, *Nature*, Vol. 297 (June 10, 1982), 519.

5. For the opposite view see a review by the distinguished physicist Jerome B. Weisner, who calls Schell's argument "powerfully logical" (*Washington Post Book World*, April 18, 1982), 4.

nuclear weapons. (4) Schell can only mean that we have failed to "fashion" or "discover" responses acceptable to him; he himself later criticizes the well-known "response" of every United States president since Truman, namely, "deterrence of Soviet expansion in defense of liberal democracy."[6]

Schell does not try to minimize the difficulty of arriving at an appropriate response to nuclear weapons. He admits at the outset that we cannot know the extent of the destruction a nuclear war would cause. However, extrapolating from small-scale tests, "one must conclude that a full-scale nuclear holocaust could lead to the extinction of mankind." (93) Therefore, he contends, "we have no right to gamble, because if we lose, the game will be over . . . ." (95) Although "scientifically" we distinguish between extinction's certainty and its mere possibility, "morally they are the same." (95) Schell fails to explain why he believes that risking something is morally identical to choosing it. He never attempts such an explanation.

Instead he tries a different argument. He begins with a discussion of science. Schell sees that scientific knowledge does not itself cause "our plight." (109) Rather, we are endangered by the availability of this knowledge to the unwise. He deplores "the lopsided development of human abilities" whereby mankind's knowledge has exceeded its moral virtues. (103) Schell believes that scientists, insofar as they are 'pure' scientists dedicated to theoretical research, should not be blamed for this. As scientists, they "do not aim at social ends"; (104) for example, Einstein's pacifist intentions met the profoundest disappointment at the hands of the very 'applied' science he made possible. 'Pure' science, Schell writes, "is a process of submission in which the mind does not dictate to nature but seeks out and then bows to nature's laws, letting its conclusions be guided by that which *is*, independent of our will." (105) This description overlooks the difference between traditional philosophy, of which the 'old,' predominantly Aristotelian science constituted one part, and modern science, anticipated by Machiavelli and elaborated by Bacon. Modern science aims at activity, not thought. Schell nearly admits this when he writes that "it is the very nature of knowledge, apparently, to increase our might rather than to diminish it"

6. The formulation is Patrick Glynn's, from his critique of Schell titled "Nuclear Polemics," *Journal of Contemporary Studies* (Vol. 5, No. 3, Summer 1982), 61-71. Glynn anticipates several of the main points I shall make in this paper.

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(106)—a formula echoing Bacon's celebrated aphorism that we can conquer nature by obeying it.[7] Twentieth-century physics could not exist without the scientific and mathematical impetus of this revolutionized, and revolutionizing, new relation between man and nature. Schell's mistake has implications more serious than some mere historical confusion. By failing to see the utopian character of modern scientific *theory*, he can regard the most striking instance of its practice as a kind of aberration. He can overlook the fact that modern science tends toward the spread of knowledge to the unwise; that is, modern science tends toward 'Enlightenment.' He can thus underestimate the discrepancy between theory and practice *even as he sees and deplores it.*

Schell wants us to "learn to live politically in the world in which we already live scientifically." (108) In his opinion, survival of the human species "has now become the principal obligation of politics." (109) All other things said to be political goods—liberty, justice, equality, and the rest—are secondary. The first argument Schell advances on behalf of this opinion partakes of the atheism of modern science. Obviously, to make human survival on this earth the principal obligation of politics assumes that there is no 'life after death' and no superior Being or beings to worship, to put *before* man. But even if we grant this assumption 'for the sake of argument,' Schell must see that the destruction of mankind by nuclear weapons, even the destruction of the earth, would not destroy the nature that (in the absence of divinity) evidently produced the earth and mankind. For the sake of coherence, Schell would have to deny this possibility; the most he can do is to write that we do not know whether or not nature would reproduce mankind. We may be unique, for all we know. Roughly halfway through his book, then, Schell's argument reduces to the following: If nuclear weapons threaten the destruction of mankind, and if mankind is irreplaceable, then human survival is the principal obligation of politics.

One can still grant these premises and notice that the argument fails. Mere uniqueness or irreplaceability does not entail worth. That something is 'one of a kind' does not mean it is worth preserving. Among Germans, Hitler was unique but hardly worth preserving, much less cherishing. Nor would Hitler be worthy of preserva-

7. Schell could reply by saying that this apparent mightiness, unchecked, will lead to the most radical weakness, the destruction of the mighty.

tion if he were unique among human things. If mankind is unique, it may be uniquely good, uniquely good and bad, or uniquely 'neutral.' Schell has established no rational basis for his nuclear pacifism.

Schell argues that mankind's apparent uniqueness has a radical moral implication. He observes that we describe our moral categories—good and bad, right and wrong—by the means of language. "And standing behind language is that of which language is expressive—our reason, our psyche, our will, and our spirit." (120) Schell leaves these terms undefined, but he does write that "the foundation of the common world"—that is, the world language makes, wherein human beings can understand one another—"is an exclusively human achievement." (120) Again, this assumes that atheism is true; it also again overlooks what "stands behind" human reason, psyche, will, and spirit, those generators of language. Schell's argument would hold only if nuclear weapons could destroy nature itself or, at least, render it incapable of reproducing mankind. To say that "mankind is not itself good or evil but the source of both," merely evades this problem. (125)

As an example, Schell asserts that "anyone who loves justice assumes the existence of a society whose parts can be brought into relationships that are just." (124) This is where one sees how Schell's misapprehension of the relation between theory and practice in modern science, and his consequent underestimation of the discrepancy between theory and practice, prevent him from seeing the logical mistake at the heart of his moral/political teaching. To love justice does of course presuppose the existence of political order. One need not therefore presuppose the existence or potential existence of a *particular* political order that can be formed or reformed into a just political order. A lover of justice may desire that any particular political order be made as nearly just as possible, but precisely because he is a lover of justice he should take care not to demand more than that particular political order can bear. Political prudence consists in large part of the ability to make this very judgment. Schell underestimates the difficulty of modern science's attempt to overcome the discrepancy and pronounces it unjust, a thing to be overcome. This in turn causes him to love mere life too much, for the most part ignoring the basis of life on the one hand and the purposes of human life on the other. Or, as he puts it, man "stand[s] prior to all means and ends, shaping and defining them according to his nature and his will." (125) But whether it is God or nature that

produces man, whatever produces man must be logically prior to man. Further, without the means and ends of man, his very essence, his *humanitas*, exists only potentially. Or, as Schell's most discerning critic observes, while it may be true that "principle without life is not possible," it is surely true that "life without principle is no longer human."[8] If the modern science that may threaten the destruction of mankind also threatens its perpetual enslavement, then our potential for fully-developed humanity could be perpetually de-formed.

A Theologico-Political Foray

It may seem that Schell would debase man, make him a creature whose principal aim as a species is mere survival at any cost. But as with modern political philosophy itself, what begins as unjustified debasement moves to (equally unjustified) glorification. "Human beings have a worth—a worth that is sacred." (127) Schell's atheism or, perhaps, agnosticism, makes this statement puzzling; he seems to want the odor of sanctity without the incense. Yet Schell does offer us a god of sorts. Mankind is

> the inexhaustible source of all the possible forms of worth, which has no existence or meaning without human life. Mankind is not, in the ancient phrase, the measure of all things; he is the measurer, and is himself measureless. (129)

The measureless measurer: mankind is the only god Schell knows.

This 'god' is not really "inexhaustible," as other gods are said to be, else warnings against doom would be irrelevant to it. Nor is it an especially wise god: "Only a generation that believed itself to be in possession of final, absolute truth could ever conclude that it had reason to put an end to human life," (129) and such a belief would be arrogant, according to Schell. Schell's worshipfulness here tends not toward a belief in mankind's divine authority but in its all-too-human fallibility. Schell cannot decide if mankind is a collection of beasts whose function is self-preservation or a god upon whose very existence meaning itself depends. His predicament reminds one of Aristotle's well-remembered aphorism: "he who is without a *polis*, by reason of his own nature and not of some accident, is either a poor sort of being, or a being higher than man . . . ."[9] By consider-

8. Glynn, *op. cit.*
9. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a, 9.

ing human beings collectively, as 'mankind,' Schell takes them out of the *polis*, with precisely the result Aristotle describes.

But Schell's abstraction of 'mankind' from political life has a political purpose. We begin to see this when he argues that although "there can be no justification for extinguishing mankind, and therefore no justification for any nation ever to push the world into nuclear hostilities," it nonetheless "does not follow that any action is permitted as long as it serves the end of preventing human extinction." (130) This is most peculiar, given his previous argument. Schell clearly puts mankind's survival before all else and yet refuses to recommend certain acts that could serve the end of survival. Schell fears that governments will use his argument as "justification for abusing every human right," (135) and he recalls recent history as a warning. "In the period of detente, the first, tentative steps were taken toward nuclear-arms control . . . but the totalitarian murk around the world thickened noticeably." (136) Both Brezhnev and Nixon excused human rights abuses in the name of peace. If Schell means "justification" as synonymous with 'rationalization' or even 'pretext,' there is no difficulty here.[10] But he means more than that; he means to attack the existing political order itself.

The nation-states claim "that one or more countries have the right to jeopardize all countries and their descendents in the name of certain beliefs." (132) Human rights are universal; "national beliefs" are not. Schell fails to seriously consider if certain "national beliefs" may coincide with human rights. Consequently, he fails to consider how he could defend human rights in this world if those rights are threatened by those brandishing nuclear weapons. For example, if a United States President Jonathan Schell were confronted by Mr. Gorbachev and offered the choice of surrendering to Soviet tyranny or witnessing the extinction of the species, in the end President Schell would have to surrender.[11] If he followed his own principles, he would have to sacrifice all other human rights to a reputed right to life, a life made subhuman by tyranny.

Such embarrassing possibilities can only be avoided if Schell blames not his own argument but the world itself. This he proceeds to do. He insists that we choose between extinction (now abandon-

10. If so, he should use language more consistently, having said only five pages earlier that there is "no justification" for destroying or risking the destruction of mankind.
11. He could of course say to Gorbachev that species-extinction makes no sense for Gorbachev. Gorbachev could agree, but confidently reply that he knew Schell would not retaliate in any event.

ing his earlier caution and asserting that it is a "lie" to say that "life lived on top of a nuclear stockpile can last" [161]) and "recogniz[ing] the peril, dismantl[ing] the weapons, and arrang[ing] the political affairs of the earth so that the weapons will not be built again." (418) Not only politics but reason itself has misbehaved and must do penance: "Now reason must sit at the knee of instinct and learn reverence for the miraculous instinctual capacity for creation." (156)[12] A partnership of fear (the instinct for self-preservation) and love (particularly love of generations yet to be born)[13] shall give reason a new direction. To these sentiments Schell adds three "principles"—in fact sentiments: "respect" for human beings, for the earth, and for "God or nature, or whatever one chooses to call the universal dust that made, or became, us." (178) In this last phrase Schell as much admits that his humanism does not suffice, that the humans he would preserve must originate somewhere, somehow. He does not revise any of his previous, now contradicted, arguments.

One must also notice that all of these sentiments or "principles" are anti-totalitarian. The modern tyrant respects neither mankind, nor the earth, nor nature; he would conquer them all and deify himself. Yet Schell's arguments thus far allow him no serious means, *not even serious ethical means*, for actively resisting tyranny. If universally adopted, his beliefs would end tyranny as long as mankind upheld them. But they cannot animate men to defend themselves forcefully against tyranny where it exists.

Practice

Schell wisely sees that nuclear weapons reveal not so much a technical problem as a political one. Accordingly, he calls for arms control agreements only as a prelude to the dismantling of the world's current political system, "the system of sovereignty." (187) He raises the first question of all political scientists, 'Who rules?'

Schell contends that the doctrine of nuclear deterrence, where technology meets policy, exposes the failure of the system of sovereignty. In that doctrine, "two irreconcilable principles clash": (197) our fear of using nuclear weapons and our threats to use them.

12. It is not clear how the "miraculous" fits into Schell's otherwise quite secularized world.

13. This love is "unconditional," "willing to forgive any particular failing in the beloved" (175)—an easy enough sentiment to evoke inasmuch as the unborn cannot be said to have any particular failings to forgive.

"We cannot both threaten ourselves with something and hope to avoid that same thing by making the threat—both intend to do something and intend not to do it." (197) The argument is of course logically empty. It fails to distinguish a contingent intention ('We shall counterattack if you attack us') from an overall or 'final' intention ('We therefore hope that you will not attack us').

Schell next asserts that mutual deterrence requires building no workable defense against nuclear weapons. For if one side appeared to be readying a practicable defense-system, "the other side, fearful of completely losing its forces, might, in a crisis, feel compelled to launch the first strike itself." (200) Schell does not explain why, on his terms, any ruler would in effect commit sure suicide in order to avoid the possibility of being killed.

Schell's intended *coup de grâce* comes last. He believes that there is no rational purpose, "no sane justification," (202) for counterattacking after a nuclear attack. You are defeated. Although you would be destroying your enemy and thus ridding the world of the most murderous regime in history, your counterattack "might be the action that would finally break the back of the ecosphere and extinguish the species." (204) "The whole doctrine is self-cancelling," (202) supported in practice only by the fear of revenge, the fear of madness, and perhaps, the decent restraint of all nuclear-empowered rulers so far. This returns us to Schell's fallacious argument that to risk something is morally the same as to intend it. After a Soviet nuclear attack that would result in the death of millions of innocent Americans, the President of the United States would have to weigh the certain murder of millions of innocent Soviet subjects and the possibility of human extinction against the certain worldly reward of the Soviet murderers and the possibility—even probability—of an eventual worldwide tyranny. Whichever horrible choice he made, whichever monumental evil he risked, the dilemma would not cancel itself.

Schell prefers to attempt erasing the possibility of the need to choose between monumental evils by erasing sovereignty altogether. On this he is indeed as vague and utopian as his critics say. He calls for "a common political endeavor, reaching across national boundaries," an "endeavor" that does not "break" or even "bend" the "rules of conduct essential to a decent political life." (228) "Intellectually and philosophically, it would carry the principle of tolerance to the utmost extreme," respecting "each person's will." (229) Obviously, such tolerance, "to the degree it can exist at all, exists under

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one form of government only—liberal democracy."[14] Like Shakespeare's Gonzalo, Schell raises the question, 'Who rules?' addresses it by "speaking of revolutionizing the powers of the earth" (226), then forgets it. "The latter end of his commonwealth forgets the beginning."[15] Having advanced arguments that logically entail the devaluation of liberty and equality, he comes to champion liberty and equality, weakly. He calls today's United Nations "the empty husk of . . . irresolute good intentions" (194) but fails to see that his own argument demonstrates why this must be so, that the problem is not mere sovereignty but the radically opposed political principles that animate different regimes.

The last of dozens of authorities Schell employs to decorate his argument is Jesus of Nazareth. "I come not to judge the world but to save it." "Let us, also, not judge the world but save the world," Schell perorates. (230) One must note that Jesus was speaking at the time of His first coming-into-the-world. The New Testament teaches that shortly after His prophesied Second Coming, Jesus will not save "the world" but judge it. This Judgment is said to be followed by compulsory punishment.

Schell wants messianism without compulsion. Self-deifying humanity is to redeem itself. It will do so with earnest sentiment, irreproachable civility, and careful planning.

Second Thoughts

Schell fails to distinguish between risking an evil and choosing evil. He fails to see that modern science's attempt to overcome the discrepancy between theory and practice leads to utopianism, whether it is what might be called the 'hard' utopianism of Machiavelli or the 'soft' utopianism of Gandhi. He fails to find a stable place for mankind in the natural order, in part because he attempts to abstract man from political life even as he raises the most political of questions, 'Who rules?' He fails to see that messianism without force cannot even save itself. Thus at every major point in the course of his argument, Schell confuses the relations between means and ends because he misunderstands the relation between

14. Glynn, *op. cit.* Schell makes no effort to reconcile absolute tolerance with the absolute love he commended earlier (see above, p. 11). That such reconciliation is necessary may be seen by reflecting upon the difference between the statements, 'I love you' and 'I tolerate you.'

15. William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, II, i, 154.

practice and theory, having uncritically accepted the modern account of theory. He is right to call for a "re-examination of the foundations of political thought"—perennially good advice to those equipped to undertake it. But he is right for the wrong 'reason.'

Recently, Schell has partially rethought his argument in light of the many objections to it.[16] He begins by restating his claim that human life has an 'absolute' moral status:

> the extinction of mankind would destroy not only every person's life but also every larger cause, including the lives of others, for which a person might be willing to give his life. Extinction therefore threatens not so much each person's life . . . as the *meaning* of our lives. (I, 36)

Again, one notices that even if one grants the premise the "therefore" does not follow. One may give one's life not to obtain a good but to avoid an evil; one might risk lives, even all lives, to avoid universal tyranny. The wisdom of doing so in a given circumstance will always be arguable, but the dilemma remains a serious one, not an absurdity.

This restatement notwithstanding, Schell begins to see the seriousness of the dilemma or, at least, that it is a dilemma. With the invention of nuclear weapons, "Political man held a knife to the throat of biological man, but since politics, like every human activity, is possible only where there are human beings, political man also held a knife to his own throat." (I, 52) Schell then clearly admits for the first time that "political man" has something on his mind more substantive than "national sovereignty" or "national beliefs." Biology and politics are not 'reality' and 'illusion,' respectively, but "opposed realities." (I, 54) Although he devotes much of his essay's first part to restating his attack on deterrence, he admits that there is a considerable problem with world government, the often-proferred antidote to the 'disease,' national sovereignty, whose symptom deterrence is. Schell admits that almost no one today in the commercial republics of the West really wants world government, and for good reason.

Almost no one today in the West wants world government because almost everyone there recognizes that a "central authority

16. Jonathan Schell, "Reflections—The Abolition," Part I, "Defining the Great Predicament," *The New Yorker*, January 2, 1984, 36-75; Part II, "A Deliberate Policy," *The New Yorker*, January 9, 1984, 43-94. The essay later appeared in a book, *The Abolition* (New York: Knopf, 1984).

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can be, in a moral sense, as 'lawless' as any individual." (II, 43) "[I]f a lawless government were to assume control of the world and such slaughter [as in totalitarian regimes] were to be carried out in the global darkness of the oppression of all mankind the horror of the situation would be beyond all imagining." (II, 44) However, in a "limited, tragic sense, world government, even at its worst, would be a way out of the nuclear predicament," for it would not cause the extinction of the human species. (II, 44) One simple way to achieve this government would be for the United States to disarm unilaterally and accept Soviet dictates. "The strongest and most honest argument in favor of the possession of nuclear weapons . . .—for those who believe in liberty—is that upholding liberty is worth the risk of extinction." (II, 55)[17] Schell objects to this argument because "we must pay an inconceivable price" if deterrence fails and the weapons are used. (II, 55) He compares the "radical disproportion between ends and means," the end of maintaining liberty by the means of risking human extinction, to attempting to deter burglary by instituting a penalty of death. (II, 55)

This time, Schell does not misrepresent his opponents' argument by failing to distinguish between risk and outright sacrifice. But his analogy disintegrates under even a moment's scrutiny. Burglary means the theft of a possession or possessions; tyranny means the destruction of a way of life. While liberty has no absolute status (one asks, 'Liberty *for what*?'), its 'possession' is logically prior to the possession of objects; moreover, the very enjoyment of objects requires some liberty, however limited. *Political* liberty enables the development of full humanity through the exercise of the distinctively human capacity for speech. The objects of a burglar's attention are less likely to contribute to such development. The burglar would possess things, the tyrant, people. While instituting the death penalty in an attempt to deter burglary would end human lives merely in order to protect human property, risking a 'death penalty' for mankind in order to protect liberty enables some human beings to achieve full humanity and prevents the inhuman debasement of most human beings.[18]

After this last attempt to refute the moral basis of deterrence,

17. This is, of course, Glynn's argument. Schell never mentions Glynn.

18. Schell also hints that to uphold liberty partakes of subjectivism. The phrase "for those who *believe in* liberty" suggests that such persons partake of a sort of religiosity or mysticism. Schell does not elaborate on this, much less prove it, if he in fact intends the hint.

Schell admits that, moral or not, rational or not, deterrence now exists. Perhaps in order to meet the charges of utopianism, he seeks a means of worldwide disarmament that begins with the facts of deterrence and national sovereignty, using them for a new purpose. As a first step, Schell recommends formal recognition by countries possessing nuclear weapons of the international *status quo*; the Americans would agree to, as it were, let Poland be Russia's Poland while the Soviets would agree to stop efforts to 'Sovietize' additional countries. Although Schell does not say it, this would require Soviet abandonment of its stated world-revolutionary aspirations. In effect, Schell would replace their revolution with his own.

Schell's second step would be a worldwide "agreement abolishing nuclear arms" and limiting conventional forces. (II, 61) He would have this enforced "not by any world police force or other organ of a global state but by each nation's knowledge that a breakdown of the agreement would be to no one's advantage and would only push all nations back down the road to gloom." (II, 61) He advocates the construction of defensive weapons systems to be used against greatly reduced nuclear forces, a further disincentive to cheating. Finally, he would "permit nations to hold themselves in a particular, defined state of readiness for nuclear rearmament." (II, 62) This would deter sudden 'breakout' by any country. He calls it "weaponless deterrence" (II, 63), and it would require extensive inspection, including on-site inspection. He notes that a country that cheats might still be deterred from attacking because its rulers might suspect that enemy rulers have cheated in the same way. (II, 78)

Deterrence, then, would "remain in effect at every stage" of Schell's program. (II, 87) After the abolition of nuclear weapons, new ways of solving international disputes could be explored. Schell sees that by accepting deterrence provisionally he relies on a policy that he regards as profoundly immoral. But he finds realistic improvements preferable to futile moralizing. He foresees dangers to the West in his program, among them that the commercial republics might "grow complacent and soft, while the Soviet Union, still kept under a harsh discipline by totalitarian rule," might remain "militant and tough." (II, 92) He judges such risks worth taking.

There are, to say the least, some practical problems with Schell's recommendations. Soviet rulers have yet to fear nuclear weapons sufficiently to consider abandoning 'fraternal aid' to 'socialist revolutionaries'; arriving at 'balanced' conventional force levels would exceed balanced nuclear arms limitations in its difficulty;

tyrants generally have an understandable reluctance to allow extensive inspection of their territory; cheating will always be easier for tyrants because their superior control over their populations includes control over the organs of publicity. By recommending the use of *political judgment* to select policies that can make things better but not perfect, Schell leaves behind part of his utopianism. But he continues to underestimate the messianism of late modernity. He acknowledges the serious differences between commercial republicanism and modern tyranny, 'totalitarianism,' but he fails to see the implications those differences have for policy.

"Philosophers" Object to Nuclear Deterrence

Theory Revisits Practice

To the foregoing a critic might reply that Jonathan Schell is no philosopher. To demonstrate the incoherence of his argument, therefore, hardly rates as a refutation of the best case against the use or possession of nuclear weapons. To identify the best case, one must consider the arguments of thinkers more substantial than a staff-writer for *The New Yorker*.

But perhaps, to paraphrase Flannery O'Connor, a good philosopher is hard to find. Another exacting soul has insisted on the rarity of philosophers, observing that a man is lucky if only one such exists in his lifetime. But surely this writer was not serious. He must have known that every modern university identifies not one but several of its staff as professors of philosophy. Their works are legion. The anthology, *Objections to Nuclear Defence: Philosophers on Deterrence*, is but one instance of these works.[19]

"In the early 1980s," the editors write, "a number of British philosophers established a common belief that the nuclear debate needed more contributions from philosophers themselves"; although "most of them [were] in varying degrees committed to the aims of the peace movement," they were "unhappy with the conduct of the nuclear debate on both sides," finding it "inexpert." (3-4) "[C]onfused thoughts lead to practical mistakes and . . . practical mistakes about nuclear deterrence may mean the end of us all." (4) In a volume titled *Dangers of Deterrence: Philosophers on Nuclear*

19. *Objections to Nuclear Defence: Philosophers on Deterrence*, edited by Nigel Blake and Kay Pole (Boston: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1984).

Strategy, the professors treated "political and strategic questions." In this volume they treat "the overarching moral consideration." (4)

Of the nine essays following the introduction, five may be dismissed as more or less tendentious blather. Michael Dummett, Wykeham Professor of Logic at the University of Oxford, concocts a bilious mixture of wild accusation (the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki "proved ourselves to be criminals as much as those we had been fighting" [32]); lying ("the only time a nation has had the opportunity to use such weapons against an enemy that could not retaliate, it did so" [36]); glib complacency (it "seems unlikely to me that the Soviet Union would want to add to its troubles by extending its domination to the rest of Europe" [38]); paranoia ("the greater danger would be American attempts to destabilize or wreck the economies of neutralist Western powers" [38]); blindness ("All ideological content was long ago squeezed out of the cold conflict with Russia" [39]); and stupidity (the United States, particularly the Central Intelligence Agency, constitutes "a yet greater menace to the freedom of other nations" than does Soviet Russia [39]). John Krige, author of a book titled *Science, Revolution, and Discontinuity*, claims the Warsaw Pact states will not attack Western Europe, because their tanks are too old and NATO anti-tank missiles outnumber them; he fails to mention that Pact military exercises consistently rehearse attacks, not defenses, with this allegedly obsolete and outgunned hardware. He then claims that military data are unreliable and subjectively interpreted, a point that contradicts his previous assurances. This notwithstanding, he ends by claiming that we must not "fall prey" to "skepticism" about military data, but must formulate "rational policies" (84). In sum, a woolier head could not be found amongst all the mutton of Australia. Kate Soper, "a writer, translator and part-time teacher of philosophy at the Polytechnic of North London," imagines that because "there can be no such thing as civil defense" of the general public against nuclear weapons (86), planning civil defense only "serves to conceal from us the methods of a police state" that will use bomb shelters to "protect rulers from those they rule" (91)—a curious notion indeed, if the ruled are all killed in a nuclear attack. Rip Bulkeley, evidently an unemployed Marxist, suggests that "nuclear terrorism . . . has perhaps replaced fascism as the pre-

20. George Orwell: "The Lion and the Unicorn," in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), Vol. 2, 74.

ferred from of barbarism for desperate rulers." (149) Both West and East are capitalist empires, using terror to block the internationalization of labor, even as the sinister internationalization of capital proceeds. The Soviets do American capitalists the favor of terrifying American "subjects" (his very word), even as the Americans return that favor by overawing those subjected to the capitalists of the Kremlin. At the same time, the two groups of rulers really are enemies—a contradiction Bulkeley blames not on himself but on capitalism. The charm Marxism exerts on many intellectuals may well partly derive from this extraordinary exculpatory power. Finally, Andrew Belsey, Lecturer in Philosophy at University College, Cardiff, puts the phrase "free world" between quotation marks because he detects, in the wake of Britain's expedition to the Falkland Islands, "an extraordinary conspiracy on the part of politicians, press and populace, partly conscious, partly unconscious, to narrow and restrict the boundaries of what are regarded as possible and legitimate ways of thinking" (179)—specifically, by shouting down criticism of the government's military action. This was surely the broadest conspiracy in British history, involving perhaps ninety percent of the population, conscious and unconscious. The professor warns of "the dangers of fascism" in "the nuclear state," announcing that it's "time to trust the people." (181) The conspiring "populace" evidently must not be confused with the trustworthy "people," to whom erstwhile secrets, including military secrets, ought to be disseminated. "There is no paradox in every citizen of the state knowing that state's military secrets," an averral that makes (paradoxically) a wacky sort of sense, if one endorses Belsey's plan to abolish the state altogether.

Ranging from the malicious to the dotty, these five essays confirm that Orwell's description of periodicals written by England's "left-wing intelligentsia" in the early 1940s remains accurate today: "There is little in them except the irresponsible carping of people who have never been and never expect to be in a position of power."[20] It is as if Dickens had returned from the grave and hired a philosophy department for his own amusement.

The other four essays deserve more serious attention. In each, thinking figures more prominently than exclaiming. One consists of a defense of the moral foundation of nuclear deterrence. Bernard Williams, the Provost of King's College, Cambridge, ends this essay with a brief assertion that British unilateral nuclear disarmament makes sense on purely prudential grounds, which he does not trou-

ble seriously to examine. The assertion qualifies the essay for inclusion in the volume, while the main argument excuses it from scrutiny here.

"Better Dead Than Red"

Anthony Kenny, Master of Balliol College, Oxford, and the author of books on Descartes and Wittgenstein, examines the proposition that it is better to be dead than 'Red.' He agrees: "one ought to be prepared to be killed rather than to submit to Communist rule," which "would be a disaster for a country such as the UK or the USA." "I am claiming that pacifists are wrong and that there can be such a thing as a just war." (13-14)

A just war serves as "an instrument of policy," that is, as "a means to a desirable, morally defensible goal." (15) Kenny offers three criteria by which one can judge this: first "the good to be obtained by the righting of the wrong must outweigh the harm which will be done by the choice of war as a means"; second, "the harm done in warmaking shall be no more than is necessary for the achieving of the legitimate goal of the war"; third, the "rules of war," particularly the refusal to kill noncombatants, must be observed. (15) While a 'conventional' war against communist attackers could fit these criteria, a large-scale nuclear war could not. In a nuclear war, "Better dead than Red" means, "Better for everyone—both on our side and on theirs—to be dead than for us to be made red, than for us to have Communist rule forced upon us." (18) This argument "enshrines a monstrous falsehood" because it excuses mass killing of innocents, that is, mass murder. The "non-material" superiority of the Western republics, which consists of the liberty we have to pursue "the many values we cherish," would be forfeited by such an act.

> Respect for innocent human life and for international law is no less a part than freedom of speech or rights against arbitrary arrest of what gives us a right to cherish the values of Western democracy. To the extent to which we forfeit our respect for life and law we forfeit our claim to have any moral superiority to defend against Communist threat. (19)

Even if a republic could perpetuate free institutions after a nuclear attack by a communist state, if it retaliated with nuclear weapons, this very act would destroy "the claim that it possessed a system of human values . . . worth defending; its institutions would deserve

no more respect or loyalty than those of Hitler's Germany." (19)

The problem with the argument becomes clear in that last assertion. Except for Professor Kenny's colleague, Professor Dummett, few would claim that American use of nuclear weapons on Japanese civilians, including thousands of innocent children, in an attack that was not even preceded by a nuclear attack on American civilians, so blackened 'the Allied cause' that our republican institutions were rendered as odious as those of Nazi tyranny. Much as one might condemn the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, few seriously doubt that much good remained intact in their aftermath. Professor Kenny tacitly admits this by referring to the "non-material advantages" the liberal West enjoys over the communist East. Therefore, nuclear retaliation against nuclear attack would not necessarily destroy the republican claim to a "system of values . . . worth defending."

Kenny advances other arguments against nuclear retaliation: Revenge is an unworthy motive; retaliation itself would have no deterrent effect, since the first strike already would have occurred; retaliation would "decrease the possibility of the survivors of the strike . . . receiving the medical assistance and economic aid which they will need if they are to rebuild anything of their stricken society" (21)—no Kremlin version of the Marshall Plan could occur. This last absurdity may best be passed over in silence, after remarking that the point about nuclear deterrence having failed if nuclear deterrence has failed is true but tautologous. If, however, the devastated republics intended to deter not the Soviet attack that already happened but the expansion of the Soviet empire into the political vacuum caused by the destruction of the West, then retaliation would be the most effective deterrent—indeed, preventive—imaginable. Similarly, if revenge is unworthy of us, perhaps the infliction of punishment is not.

Kenny returns to his strongest point, that deterrence is wrong because it involves "the intention to commit mass murder." (23) The punishment inflicted by nuclear retaliation would punish murderous tyrants, but it would also destroy millions of their more-or-less innocent subjects. The republics are "following a policy which makes it the mark of the good serviceman to be willing, in the appropriate circumstances, to commit murder on a giant scale." (23) Kenny dismisses the possibility of bluff—deterrence without intention to actually retaliate—on pragmatic rather than moral grounds. "I wish the deterrent policy were one of bluff," because "the wrongness of lying is very much less than the wrongness of the intention to commit mass murder." (22-23)

On this, two problems deserve consideration. First, bluff is much more feasible than Kenny believes. He assumes that the secret "could never be kept" (24), but there is no reason why nuclear weapons could not be secretly disarmed—not dismantled, but rendered inoperable—by a team of specialists operating as 'repairmen.' The small number of people involved could surely remain silent, but even if one did not, the Soviets could not base strategy on such anecdotes. Bluff is probably feasible. This is of course very far from saying that it is likely to be the basis of current policy.

This leaves the serious objection that a policy of nuclear retaliation, whether stated honestly or with humane dishonesty, requires the intention to commit mass murder from many who live in the country whose rulers adopt the policy. The murders might be retaliatory alone, punitive and preventative; if the stated policy were a hoax, they would not even occur. But the policy would still be either murderous in intention or a toleration of, even an inducement to, murderous intention.

Kenny needs to present an argument showing mass murder, even in extreme circumstances, to be *absolutely* wrong. For his solution to the dilemma involves what he concedes to be "a terrible risk." He recommends "total unilateral disarmament by the Western powers," which "would leave them vulnerable to Soviet blackmail." He judges this "terrible risk" to be "less terrible than that of a nuclear war," because "the wrong we would do, if we used nuclear weapons in a major war, would be incomparably greater than the wrong we would suffer if the worse came to the worst after nuclear disarmament." (26-27) By the worst, Kenny means a Great Britain "reduced to the status of Romania" or Poland. (26) Individuals in those beleaguered countries may risk their lives and kill for the sake of freedom, but none appears to invite the destruction of the countries themselves, or the destruction of innocent Soviet subjects.

Kenny overlooks (as Schell overlooks) the modern technological threat not only to life but to liberty. Contemporary Romania and Poland might not resemble the 'socialist' society of the future, if a technologically-empowered Soviet empire destroyed or enslaved its most powerful enemies. Indeed, one of the circumstances that may well contribute to the relative mildness of Soviet domination in contemporary Eastern Europe (relative, that is, to Stalinism or Maoism) may well be the very existence of republics, where liberty of the press enables citizens to see tyrannic abuses in neighboring lands,

and where political liberty enables those citizens to demand and obtain government sanctions against tyrannies.[21] Kenny and several other contributors to this volume regard Western opposition to Kremlin designs as provocative, but Soviet tyranny might easily harden, not soften, without that opposition. And technological prowess would make modern tyranny perpetual. Further, nuclear disarmament might not make Soviet attack less likely. The absence of Japanese nuclear weapons did not make American nuclear attack less likely during World War II. And if Kenny recommends 'conventional' as well as nuclear disarmament, even that need not persuade the Soviets to forego a nuclear attack. By disarming, we tempt avowed enemies to use their arms against us. To tempt evil men to compound their evil itself partakes of evil. Kenny's fundamental argument against nuclear retaliation is the principle, "basic to European morality for centuries since its enunciation in ancient Athens, that it is better to be wronged than to do wrong." (27) But this is not the whole argument. Socrates, for example, would rather suffer a wrong than commit one, but he does not say that one should suffer a great wrong rather than commit a less great wrong.

Is the mass murder of nuclear retaliation a greater wrong than perpetual, technologically empowered, worldwide tyranny? Kenny could justifiably claim it is only if he could demonstrate an absolute moral imperative against mass murder, or, alternatively, if he could produce a moral calculus demonstrating the superiority of likely perpetual, worldwide tyranny over the contemporary toleration of a will-to-murder—a toleration that evidently makes actual murder unlikely. Moreover, his proposed solution to the dilemma, total unilateral disarmament by the republics, ignores the possibility of using non-nuclear weapons systems to counteract weapons of mass destruction. Such a system would obviate or at least reduce the need to staff our armed services with would-be mass-murderers, because it would destroy the enemy's weapons, not his people, and would not involve the collateral human devastation wrought by nuclear blast, radiation, and heat.

Another Theological-Political Foray

Roger Ruston, a Roman Catholic priest who teaches moral theology at Blackfriars, Oxford, should be well equipped to make

21. To be sure, Stalin and Mao flourished contemporaneously with Western liberties. They ruled countries isolated from public scrutiny, however, and at a time when journalists were even greater gulls than they are today.

the absolutist case against nuclear deterrence, the case Kenny can only assert. Ruston's first few arguments disappoint because he begins with prudential arguments, for which neither his vocation nor his scholarly training has equipped him.

Deterrence is unstable, he claims, because new weapons are always being developed, and "the more credible the weapons are as a deterrent, the more they have to look as if you would use them; the more usable you try to make them, the more you believe you can use them, the more likely they are to be used in the end." (47) This argument fails because Ruston words it so imprecisely. The more credible the weapons are as a deterrent, the more they have to look as if your would *and could* use them *in retaliation*, a technologically different characteristic than utility in a first strike. Effective retaliatory forces are built to survive attack, but not necessarily to attack. The more *your enemy believes* you can use them *for retaliation*, the *less* likely they are to be used in the end. "Unusable weapons go deeply against the grain of the military mentality" (48), Ruston claims, but the more usable retaliatory weapons are, for retaliation only, the less they should either offend the military or endanger your own civilians.

This leaves the threat to innocents in the enemy's country, to whose plight Ruston now turns. "[T]here are some things which may never rightly be done, or even contemplated," he asserts, "not because consequences do not matter, but because some actions are unacceptable consequences in themselves, whatever the initial justice of one's cause." (49) The killing of non-combatants is one of those things, although a "defence deterrent" against attackers or would-be attackers is legitimate. (50) Nuclear weapons cannot discriminate sufficiently between military and non-military targets; the use of nuclear weapons is immoral, as is the threat to use them. Ruston rightly attacks the contention that this era of 'total war' makes everyone guilty—that, because numerous civilians participate in modern war efforts, in munitions factories, communication networks, etc., civilians are now legitimate targets of attack, no longer innocents at all. This argument is only partly true. More civilians share war responsibility today than in previous centuries, but not all civilians do. One might also ask, 'In the totalitarian regimes, what choice do they have?'

Ruston's argument becomes more problematic when he attempts to refute a more subtle version of nuclear deterrence justification, advanced by Paul Ramsey in his influential books, *War and the*

Christian Conscience and *The Just War*.[22] Ramsey argues that the *threat* of so-called collateral deaths inflicted during an attack on military targets is not out of all proportion to the good sought by the making of the threat. The "central" intention of the threat is deterrence, whose aim is peace. Ruston admits the theoretical weight of this argument, but calls it unrealistic. It depends upon the rationality of the enemy and the stability of the nuclear balance. Ruston has already failed to prove the nuclear "arms race" increasingly unstable, and adds nothing to his failed argument here. Because any policy concerning nuclear weapons—disarmament above all—depends upon the rationality of all those who possess the weapons, Ruston's argument fails on this count, too.

Returning to his absolutist argument against mass murder, he writes, "I believe it is necessary for us to accept that there could be no proportionate reason" for the use of nuclear weapons, because "there are degrees of destruction in relation to which no conceivable justifying purpose could be advanced." (59) For example, the claim that "mutual annihilation—even when it is brought about by the system itself—would always be a better fate than Soviet domination . . . would put us outside rational argument altogether." (45) Ruston does not say why it would, thus putting his assertion outside rational argument altogether. This is probably where it belongs: as an assertion of conscience, of religious sentiment. Indeed, the most curious aspect of Ruston's argument is this appeal to rationality. Reason may well be able to prove mass murder wrong, but Ruston does not avail himself of any such argument. He merely asserts that wrongness, and calls it absolute. He claims that the absolute wrongness of submission to tyranny is not rationally demonstrable, but offers no argument there, either. Yet he refrains from any argument based on divine revelation, as well. Citing 35 different articles and books, he never mentions the Bible. Nor do any of the relevant publications by the Vatican rate attention here. An absolutist case against nuclear deterrence, based upon Biblical sources, should not be difficult to make. But Ruston does not make it. He asserts his own principles with a sort of divine certainty. He questions his opponents' rationality without rationally discrediting it.

He ends, lamely, by asserting that "ultimate weapons make ultimate enemies," and by calling for an unspecified "alternative

22. Paul Ramsey, *War and the Christian Conscience: How Shall Modern War Be Conducted Justly?* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1961). *The Just War: Force and Political Responsibility*, (New York: Scribners, 1968).

defence system which can be used in a moral and a rational way." (62) But if ultimate weapons make ultimate enemies, why are France and Britain not now ultimate enemies? It makes more sense to say that ultimate enemies make ultimate weapons to use against, or at least threaten, one another. Soviet Russia regarded itself as the ultimate enemy of the commercial republics, long before Hiroshima. The fact that Soviet rulers endorse the writings of Marx and Lenin as authoritative sources of guidance for all human beings, the fact that these writings contain nothing to prohibit mass murder and some encouragement to it, makes Ruston's silence on revelation all the more regrettable.

Moral Fervor: The 'Ultimate Weapon'?

Consideration of Ruston's essay raises the question of morality's foundation. Susan Khin Zaw, a Lecturer in Philosophy at the Open University, addresses this question in a sophisticated but unsatisfactory manner. She intends "to redescribe the change in our moral world," a change wrought by the existence of nuclear weapons. She will do so "in a way which will allow moral concerns to take their proper place and have their proper weight in the political and strategic debate." (116) Unfortunately, she begins by misstating the principal moral question raised by nuclear deterrence: "Can it be right to threaten or intend to do something acknowledged to be terribly wrong, even for the sake of avoiding actually having to do it?" This formulation leaves out an important moral good nuclear deterrence brings, the avoidance of having something terribly wrong done to you and yours. If you and yours are *worth* defending, nuclear deterrence is no mere show of selfishness. Zaw's misstatement skews her argument later on.

"[W]e need to rethink our view of what moral writing (writing about morality) *is*." (119) Zaw identifies two "styles" of moral argumentation: the exhortatory or 'emotional' style favored by "crusaders"—those who "want to change the world" (119)—and the "philosophical" or 'rational' style favored by "casuists"—individuals who want to understand the world. Casuists must show that morality is rational—a "highly controversial," indeed "unproven," view. (121) Zaw's casuists are not only observers of morality, then, but practitioners of it—not so much philosophers as philosophic moralists.

Zaw prefers the crusaders. She defends their rationality by

observing that they do use the casuistic *method*, comparing a given case with an overarching moral "paradigm" (121), even if they do not adopt the casuist's rationalist *style*. They need to evoke emotion in order to change people's minds, but that in itself does not make the crusaders irrational. Further, both crusaders and casuists "in effect" ask, "In your heart do you believe it is morally right to do this?" (125) Morality rests on emotion, not reason. "[M]oral relevance in the end cannot be proved without recourse to intuition, gut feeling, or prior conviction." (129) Reason comes in when moralists look for inconsistencies between a community's practices and its "shared intuitions." (126)

As a further defense of crusader-moralism, Zaw examines a much-criticized 'emotional' argument against nuclear deterrence. Paul Ramsey likens nuclear deterrence to a policy of tying babies to automobile bumpers in order to decrease the chance of collisions. Casuists dislike the argument because the analogy doesn't hold, at least not for long. We recoil at the grotesqueness, or perhaps laugh at the absurdity, of the image of bumper-babies not so much because innocents are at hazard but because those innocents are being subjected to discomfort, confinement, and constant terror, none of which contemporary citizens suffer as a result of nuclear deterrence. Zaw replies, "I recoil morally from babies on bumpers *both* because it is no life for a baby on a bumper *and* because it is putting innocents on the firing line." (126) Her reply fails because the moral recoil at the babies' misery is superfluous and distracting; the extra emotion is extraneous. It may be rhetorically useful, and rhetoric may serve good principles, but rhetoric should not be confused with principle. In addition, Zaw fails to see that the image does not explain why, if nuclear deterrence is bad, one necessarily makes it any better by untying the baby from your avowed enemy's bumper without requiring him to untie your baby from your bumper. One less baby is at risk, but the remaining baby is at even greater risk from a driver who no longer has to worry about losing his baby. Here Zaw's misstatement of the principal moral question raised by nuclear deterrence—her omission of the moral goodness of self-defense, if one's self is worth defending—causes her to overlook a clear implication of Ramsey's analogy.

Zaw's underlying argument, that fundamental moral 'principles' really express nothing more than emotion, causes her argument several problems, some of which she sees. If moral judgment "implies membership in a moral community defined by shared intui-

tions" (126), and if the crusader would somehow change that community, does this not undercut the crusading project itself? Why should the community change to suit the emotions of its crusaders? Then again, why should it not? Why *should* it do anything? Zaw argues that a crusader may be trying to change only one aspect of the community, by appealing to other aspects of it. But even if the crusade is more radical, she argues, it is not necessarily absurd or self-canceling. "It is possible for the conditions of life to change so drastically that the values with which one is already equipped are simply inadequate for dealing with the world." (129) Having denied the existence of any non-emotional, trans-communal foundation for morality, Zaw quietly avails herself of one: "adequacy." As an example of this new moral criterion, she mentions the Ik, a tribe studied by anthropologist Colin Turnbull. Confronted with extreme scarcity of food, the Ik bridled the sentiment of compassion and took delight in the misfortunes of the weak. This "new morality suited to the exigencies of the time" exemplifies the process whereby "old virtues can become obsolete." (130-31) Another example of this process may be seen in the reaction of "most modern readers," who find "some of the virtues listed by Aristotle in his *Nichomachean Ethics* incomprehensible *as virtues*." (131) Contemporary technological advances, including but not limited to the invention of nuclear weapons, cause Zaw to "suspect that we are now in a time of virtue-generating change"; "plausibly, if we go on as we are we shall not survive." (131)

All of this appears to assume that survival, and the pragmatic 'coping' survival requires, form the purpose of Zaw's morality. She sees that this might well strengthen the doctrine of nuclear deterrence, which she has criticized not so much because it does not permit survival but because it gives license to a wicked intention. She acknowledges that mere survival is "pointless." (134) But she also insists that both survival and morality are necessary if "the present" and "the future" are to make sense. (135) "Moralities, systems of values *placed* on actions and attitudes [italics added—note the retreat to subjectivism], are a central part of the enterprise of making sense of the world." (134) At the same time, without the survival of human beings, whose existence nuclear weapons threaten, nothing will make sense, either: "Signifiers must signify *to someone*." (141) If humanity perishes, there will be no one. On this level, survival 'at all costs' (including national suicide, if necessary) is moral. Survival and morality are one.

This is Schell's argument, open to the same criticisms. It assumes atheism is true. It assumes that humanity's apparent uniqueness entails unique value. It assumes "there is self-evidence in the assertion that something is better than nothing" (142), then falsely applies that assertion at the level of *human* survival. The argument also assumes that the alleged loss of significance after irreplaceable and unique humanity's destruction would make such "suicide" a "pointless" act (141); even this is untrue, as the act of destruction would 'signify' up until the last human life expired. The very argument condemning mass murder depends on this, but Zaw wants to make both arguments. Finally the very term "suicide" is wrong, here. Suicide or self-murder cannot refer to humanity's destruction, because humanity does not constitute a *self*.

The attempt to 'absolutize' nuclear war entails the attempt to 'absolutize' human survival, or alternatively, the attempt to demonstrate an absolute prohibition against mass murder, including unwanted or 'collateral' mass murder, as part of an absolute system of moral principles. The latter attempt requires religious faith, which philosophy can perhaps clarify but not provide. The former attempt requires the investment of humanity with absolute worth. It further requires mustering absolute certainty of that absolute worth. But if humanity is a god, its own reason requires it to be a skeptical god, a god with doubts about itself. An agnostic god cannot command absolutely. Alternatively, human beings may say to themselves, 'As far as we *know*, our species consists of the only moral agents in the universe, and, as far as we *know*, humanity is irreplaceable, and, therefore, as far as we *know*, good and evil will forever mean nothing without us. Therefore, the preservation of this species is all important, an absolute, unless we learn otherwise.' This provisional absolute (so to speak) does indeed comport with agnosticism. But the "therefore" clause still does not follow, for a very simple reason: We cannot jump over our own shadow. As the putative sole source of value, humanity cannot *be* valued. Value cannot judge the value of itself, because this presupposes some 'outside' value, precisely the thing agnostic humanism admits it does not know.

Zaw claims that nuclear weapons' destructive potential makes all humanity a "collective." Unfortunately, "there is no tribe to look after this collective." (141) She dares not say, 'ruler or rulers.' In this, her argument resembles a slogan whose apolitical naivete perfectly captures so much of 'peace movement' sentimentalism:

'Think globally, act locally.' The crusaders now trying to "start . . . an attempt to *create* such a sustaining tribe" (141), haven't quite managed a way around the modern embodiment of politics, the nation-state.[23] On this question of means and ends, Zaw has even less to say than Schell.

The modern insistence that theory serves action amounts to a sort of moralism. This seems paradoxical, since modern political philosophy originates with Machiavelli, its supposedly amoral founder. But Machiavelli is very far from being amoral. He is an immoralist, that is, a sort of moralist. Machiavellianism is a morality that attacks traditional morality. The Machiavellian Bacon moralizes science in a way previous thinkers and believers regarded as immoral. In modernity, the scientist becomes less the lover of wisdom and more the knowing prophet, a leader. Traditional science explained practice, changing it only insofar as explanations change what they explain. The new science deliberately changes human practice and attempts to remake nature. As many scholars have observed, modern science does not know *what*, but it does know *how*. In its lowest form, modernity yields cynicism; in its elevated form, it yields 'idealism.' In any form, it manipulates reality in order to make reality accommodate human desires.

The writers considered here accept these assumptions. From a political scientist's standpoint, their most noticeable characteristic is their tendency to devalue liberty. Each of them either overlooks the threat to liberty totalitarianism poses, or trivializes that threat. This devaluation of liberty accompanies a weakening of the desire for self-defense. Commercial republics, it seems, are not worth defending, at least not if their defense rests on a threat to murder massively in retaliation after nuclear attack. But modern political philosophy seems to defend liberty against authority—so much so that a prominent political writer titled a book *The Machiavellians: Defenders of Freedom*. Have the critics of nuclear deterrence abandoned modernity for some as yet unidentified postmodernism?

The problem, rather, lies in the modern defense of liberty. John Locke states it rigorously:

> . . . I have reason to conclude, that he who would get me into his

23. For an elaboration of this point, see Charles T. Rubin, *"The Fate of the Earth" Reviewed*, in *The Gambier Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (September 1982), 2, 11-12.

> Power without my consent, would use me as he pleased, when he had got me there, and destroy me too, when he had a fancy to it: for no body can desire to *have me in his Absolute Power*, unless it be to compel me by force to that, which is against the Right of my Freedom, *i.e.*, make me a Slave. To be free from such force is the only security of my Preservation: and reason bids me look on him, as an Enemy to my Preservation, who would take away that *Freedom*, which is the Fence to it: so that he who makes an *attempt to enslave* me, thereby puts himself into a State of War with me. (*An Essay Concerning the True Origin, Extent, and End of Civil Government*, III, 18)

The critics of nuclear deterrence who make survival the purpose of human life forget the danger tyranny poses not only to liberty but to life itself. Accustomed to the blessings of liberty, they cannot foresee all the results of its loss. Such books as Solzhenitsyn's may teach them. If not, they could only learn by experience, an experience their more courageous and prudent contemporaries are trying to spare them.

But Locke's argument leaves an opening to weakness. Liberty is good because it prevents loss of life. The right to liberty serves the right to life; Locke subordinates the one to the other. He does it more prudently than our Jonathan Schells and Susan Khin Zaws do. But he does it. To the argument that Locke elsewhere argues for liberty of religion and liberty of intellect, one must observe that he does so because tamed, tolerant religion does not threaten life, and useful intellect serves comfortable self-preservation. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* is a monument to determinism, not freedom.

While Locke's defense of liberty holds for individuals, and even for nations, it cannot defend liberty against a threat of universal destruction. The modern attempt to use liberty in order to conquer nature and put it at the service of human desires, cannot resist the threat to end all human desires by ending human life itself.

It has been said that modern commercial republics rest on the low but solid ground of self-interest rightly—that is, shrewdly—understood. This has been true, most of the time. It has not been true all of the time. The American Civil War and this century's world wars do not make sense as mere exercises of bourgeois calculation. The defense of liberty in the nuclear age will require some of Locke's tough-minded and far-sighted insistence that we defend ourselves by defending our liberty. But it will take more than that. Some of the 'older' virtues have indeed become incomprehen-

sible, or perhaps merely uncomprehended, as Zaw suggests. Those virtues served life, but much more than life. Perhaps the best task for intellectuals today is to understand those virtues and help others to understand them.

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