

THE ETHICS OF CALCULATION

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Last May George F. Kennan in *The Atlantic* ("Foreign Policy and Christian Conscience") had some advice for moralists concerned with nuclear weapons and international politics. Much of his advice is good. He warns against "pouring Christian enthusiasm into unsuitable vessels . . . designed to contain the earthly calculations of practical politicians." His lucid statement on the limits of the United Nations and foreign economic aid can help provide the basis for morally responsible support of these widely misunderstood foreign policy instruments. His comments on the moral ambiguities in the colonialism issue are timely.

But when Mr. Kennan deals with nuclear weapons and bomb tests, he falls into the very legalism and moral absolutism he denounces so effectively when he analyzes the UN, foreign aid and colonialism. Perhaps the chief reason for this contradiction is his ambiguous attitude toward calculation in world politics. Pointing to "the irony that seems to rest on the relationship between intentions of statesmen and the results they achieve," Mr. Kennan concludes that the statesman "is best off when he is guided by firm and sound principles instead of depending exclusively on his own farsightedness and powers of calculation." If it is difficult for the statesman to calculate with assurance, how much more difficult it is for the "Christian onlooker."

Mr. Kennan understands the limits of human calculation in politics, but he fails to recognize its possibilities. He seems to overlook the fact that calculation is both a political and moral necessity. Calculation is the rational process by which men relate human and material resources to their goals. Calculation is the life blood of politics and the heart of ethics. Calculation is the bridge between the given and the desired, between facts and dreams.

Some moralists have attempted to bridge the gulf between political necessity and high moral principle by "middle axioms" or practical rules which can guide the citizen or statesman in relating

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the *is* to the *ought*. But who really believes there are laws or axioms for every occasion? And if there were, who would know which one to apply?

Even "simple" human problems such as rearing a four-year-old child are too complex to be handled by a legal sliderule. A mother must take many calculated risks every day as she attempts to anticipate the probable effect of alternative lines of action on the character of her child and on the serenity of her household. Perhaps a calculated risk is a better risk than an uncalculated risk.

If calculation is a necessity in child rearing, it is an ever greater necessity in the incredibly more complex business of world politics. Yet, Mr. Kennan advises "the government," apparently as a political and moral alternative to calculation, to use "good methods" rather than "bad ones." He says we can be "as sure that the good methods will be in some way useful as that bad ones will be in some way pernicious." A government should be guided by "firm and sound principles instead of depending exclusively" on its "powers of calculation." "A government can pursue its purpose in a patient and conciliatory and understanding way, respecting the interests of others and infusing its behavior with a high standard of decency and honesty and humanity . . . sheer good manners will bring some measure of redemption to even the most disastrous undertaking." What help are Mr. Kennan's manners and principles to a statesman wrestling with the present Berlin crisis? How could they have helped the South Koreans when their country was attacked in 1950?

If Mr. Kennan has not confused manners and morals, it seems clear that he has confused manners with policy—a dangerous error for a person in a position of responsibility. In politics the substance of the response counts most. The manner of the response may be important, but it is not a substitute for policy.

Principles, goals and values are inescapably involved in all political decisions. The principles may be good or bad, the goals worthy or unworthy, the values enduring or ephemeral. These intangible ingredients are present in every political act whether the actor is a Hitler, a Khrushchev, or an Eisenhower. No statesman can make policy from principles alone. He must relate goals and ideals to the political facts of life. This means calculation. And calculation is the foundation of strategy and tactics—policy.

Incidentally, Jesus of Nazareth apparently assumed that statesmen had a moral obligation to calculate, to analyze the balance of power be-

tween two hostile camps. "Or what king, going to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an embassy and asks terms of peace." (Luke 14: 32, 33.)

The simple fact is that Mr. Kennan does not follow his own advice. He makes particular policy proposals for particular problems and he bases his proposals on calculation. His controversial "disengagement" proposals for easing tension in Europe and his more recent implied proposals for ending nuclear tests are not based on moral maxims alone. They emerged from a rational attempt to relate facts to values, which certainly included a calculation of the probable consequences of competing policies.

The larger fact is that everyone instinctively makes moral-political calculations when dealing with world politics. The real issue is not: shall we calculate or shall we not? The real question is: what factors shall we take into account when we calculate and what weight shall we give them when we make policy?

Sir Winston Churchill once said that "facts are better than dreams." What he meant is that neither the statesman nor the citizen can make politically wise and morally responsible judgments by consulting only his goals. He must consult the facts—the universal facts about man and history, and the particular facts about a political situation. The dream without the fact leads to this-worldly nightmares or to other-worldly escape. The fact without the dream leads to boredom and despair.

Mr. Kennan's nonchalant attitude toward facts and calculation in the area of nuclear weapons leads to less than adequate moral and political judgments. This same nonchalance has crept into some of the previous essays in *Worldview* on the same subject.

After quoting a "random sampling" of press reports on the dangers of nuclear fallout, Mr. Kennan concludes: "But whoever gave us the right, as Christians, to take even one innocent life?" His implied judgment that all bomb tests under all circumstances are morally wrong seems to be based in part upon a picture of fallout danger that bears little resemblance to the findings of leading research institutions in this country and abroad.

Earlier contributors to this debate in the pages of *Worldview* have also made rather unqualified

generalizations about the destructiveness of nuclear weapons. John Cogley says: "Modern war means that the defended will die as surely as the defenders; it means that nothing will remain for the aggressors to grab." Walter Millis seems to share the same view: "We are faced with a situation in which *any* war seems likely to escape entirely from the control of man . . . so far as we know now, *resort* to [nuclear weapons] can never promote defense." Stephen G. Cary says: "To talk of limited war in the atomic age is to try to turn back the clock. When survival is at stake . . . it appears the height of folly to talk of applying reason to the situation. War's necessity is terrible and, once released, its course lies almost wholly beyond the compass of those who seek to make it a servant of their ends." He adds: "To suggest that it is possible to control it requires a rosier view of human nature than I am able to support."

(Apparently Mr. Cary seems to overlook the fact that control and restraint in international politics, and human relations generally, do not depend mainly on the "goodness of men" but rather in a balance of forces and interests among sinful men. Both the Communists and the United States showed great restraint in the Korean War. Neither side used atomic weapons. The Communists did not use submarines and we did not bomb beyond the Yalu River. Apparently it was in the interest of both sides to exercise restraint. Is it too much to suggest that in a future conflict, even in this nuclear age, there may be important factors on both sides which in the name of prudence, even expediency, make for restraint? To suggest this is a possibility does not imply a "rosy" view of man. Rather it acknowledges that God can make the self-interest of hostile nations to praise Him.)

These four men and many other morally concerned persons tend to expect the worst in the event of serious hostilities and they tend to exaggerate that worst. It is important to consider soberly the findings of respected research institutions.

According to the best projections available the *maximum* possible loss of life from a general nuclear war involving the full present capacities of the Soviet Union and the United States would be about twenty percent of the earth's population. The number killed might well be considerably less. There would be practically no casualties of any kind south of the equator. If the United States had a comprehensive fallout shelter program in operation, eighty million or more additional American lives probably would be saved. These estimates include persons killed by blast *and* radioactivity.

Among the eighty percent who would survive such a war, the natural genetic damage to the human race might be doubled in areas of heavy fallout. Any injury is always an individual tragedy. But genetic damage resulting from tests or general war or both, like the number of automobile deaths in the United States, is well within the range of what a civilized society is prepared to tolerate.

Every human life is precious in the eyes of God, and even one innocent death or crippling disease is one too many. Any decent human being recoils from the horror of a lynching or a nuclear war. We are all agreed here.

The problem we are concerned with as American citizens is what national security policy the United States should pursue. Faced with the possibility of a catastrophic nuclear holocaust on the one hand and a dynamic and expansionist Sino-Soviet bloc on the other, shall we recommend a radical change in our present foreign policy?

Many pacifists and neo-pacifists say we should. My comments are directed primarily to the neo-pacifists who insist that we are confronted by an entirely new situation as a result of the technological revolution. Mr. Cogley says: "We must begin to think of living in a world without war. With the development of modern weapons, war has lost its last semblance of logic." Mr. Kennan says: "I am skeptical of the meaning of 'victory' and 'defeat' in their relation to modern war between great countries." Today, says Mr. Cary, "the old rules and the old assumptions no longer apply."

The assumption that we are in a radically new situation, upon which these appraisals are made, is itself subject to question. I would hold that the basic realities of politics among sovereign states have more in common with previous eras than they have differences. The main elements then and now are the visions, interests and demands of morally ambiguous men projected from the vantage point of national power. The new element is technological, but even the drastic discontinuity in this realm does not mean that there has been a corresponding discontinuity in the history of man, much less in the pride and passions of man.

If calculations of those in the best position to know are reasonably accurate, the worst nuclear war possible now would leave eighty percent of the earth's population alive and healthy. Such a war is probably the least likely contingency, but

it seems to be the only contingency that the neo-pacifists talk about. It is possible, perhaps probable, that World War III will be less destructive than World War II, or even than World War I. Many students of military strategy believe that it is militarily redundant and politically unwise to knock out population centers, and that a future war may well be more concentrated on military targets, such as air and missile bases, than was World War II.

And there is nothing in history or in Judeo-Christian religious ethics which makes a general nuclear war inevitable. We may have limited wars, limited by political objectives, and therefore limited in terms of the weapons employed. Korea was limited. So was every violent conflict since the end of World War II. We can have limited conventional wars like Korea. We could have a limited atomic war. Limited wars are dangerous because they have present within them the seeds of a general conflict, but the possibility of prudential restraint should neither be overlooked nor counted upon.

In short, there are many possible forms of military conflict. None of them is attractive, but certainly a limited engagement is far less unattractive than an unlimited holocaust.

What does this mean for moralists and statesmen who are wrestling with the nuclear weapons question? Does it mean we should destroy our stockpile of atomic weapons regardless of what the U.S.S.R. does? Does it mean that we should unilaterally cease U. S. nuclear tests? I am not going to deal with specific policy questions here, except to say that I am gratified that the United States has extended a self-imposed nuclear test ban until the end of 1959 in order to give our negotiators at Geneva more time to reach a viable ban agreement with the Soviet Union. I hope that an effective test-ban agreement with adequate international inspection provisions can be hammered out.

One final point. In addition to emphasizing the moral necessity of calculation based upon the most significant relevant facts, I would like to suggest that one is obligated to examine with equal thoroughness the probable consequences of the policy he advocates and the policy he rejects. A policy designed to save ten thousand persons from possible future death by radioactivity which had the actual effect of inviting the death of ten million persons or the enslavement of a hundred million persons today could hardly be called morally responsible or politically wise.