

# U.S. MILITARY POLICY AND "SHELTER MORALITY"

They Illustrate a Dilemma of Deterrence and Defense

Paul Ramsey

The people of this country may at last have faced up to the realities of all-out nuclear warfare. Russia's resumption of nuclear tests and the 100-megaton bomb have awakened us, for a brief moment, from the dream of deterrence. Even if this has meant only rather panicky discussion of "shelter morality," it is good that we have looked out on the world with open eyes. Before world events permit us to return again to our slumbers, this moment should be seized; the opportunity to think through the moral and political dilemmas long inherent in our massive deterrence policy should not be allowed to slip from us.

Until lately, we have been deterred by our own deterrent from discussing its possible failure and the consequences of such a failure. We supposed it possible to become so skilled in the *non-use* of these weapons that war would be abolished. True, our sleep was sometimes troubled by the thought that deterrence might fail and the system have to be used. We knew that if the system failed and had ever to be used, it would have failed *tragically*—but not *morally*, since all we knew of political morality was concentrated in the justification of *retaliation* against aggression. Ours has been a doctrine of unlimited, total yet *immaculate* war because this was brought within the concept of "defense." We appear to have believed that if any government *starts* nuclear exchanges that nation obviously deserves capital punishment.

In recent months we have awakened from a simple justification of defense on the grounds that it is expected to prevent the use of the weapons and force now in being. We have been compelled to take the next step and think through the act of actually using nuclear weapons in retaliation. We have had to face up to the possibility of the failure of the original scheme.

To carry out the logic of the first position was, of course, always contained in it. Only we could not bring ourselves to think so. There may still be people who, as John Bennett describes them, "have an amazing assurance that nuclear war [will] be pre-

vented in this way," and who "avoid all discussion of the moral dilemma, so great is their sureness." However, we may be grateful to more realistic analysts (from Herman Kahn to Khrushchev) who no longer allow us the luxury of these dreams, who have brought home to us the fact that on some occasion and in some fashion, military forces are intended for use.

If there are ethical and political issues raised by contemplating *first* use of massive nuclear weapons as a means of effecting policy, these same issues arise with regard to the use of such totally destructive, purposeless power in retaliation, or its use in the supposed *defense* of some policy. These same moral, and consequently political, problems lie also at the heart of the planned non-use of such weapons in the form of a standing *threat* to use them. There are many good men and excellent heads and strong imaginations among us, but all these good and imaginative heads have been asleep under the spell of the belief that the possession of such horrendous weapons rather automatically assured that they would never be used.

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Our awakening has been rude! With what result? With the result that we all began talking about shelters. Ours has not been Philip Toynbee's "single test for deciding whether or not we have truly contemplated the reality of nuclear warfare," namely, whether we have *asked* and *answered* the question: "How are we to kill the other members of our household in the event of our being less injured than they are?" Before any dreamer refuses *that* as a significant human question—and even if he still concludes that no parent who is a Christian could do such a deed—let him read again a description of some of the injured who lived on a short while after Hiroshima, and imagine them to be his own children!

Ours, rather, has been the question: What are we permitted to do to try to save those for whom we have special responsibility? Only if one or the other of these questions has become significant for us, can we be sure that we have contemplated the reality.

The Christian response to raising such questions as these has been most astonishing. On all sides we hear articulated a very strange view of the "state of nature" which prevails *prior* to society or *after* social institutions have collapsed under the shock of ther-

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monuclear war. Previously, the debate in modern political theory has been whether Hobbes' or Locke's "stature of nature" more accurately sums up those basic ingredients in human nature which political wisdom has to take into account. For Hobbes, men in a state of nature would constantly war "every man against every man"; and, there being no moral law to limit or social bonds to guide them and since every man had by nature a "right to everything," such a life would be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."

In contrast, John Locke taught that there were moral responsibilities in the state of nature and ways of distinguishing justice from injustice. Heads of households might do this. Civil government only remedies that greatest of all "inconveniences of the state of nature . . . where men may be judges in their own case." Still, "before" society and positive law came into existence, every man, by his duty to preserve mankind in general, "hath a right to punish the offender, and be executioner of the law of nature." In order that "the law of nature be observed, which willeth the peace and preservation of all mankind, the execution of the law of nature is in that state put into every man's hand . . ." "Force without right" makes a state of war; right without enforcement by a common judge makes the state of nature. In the absence of government, an "official" capacity descends upon the head of heads of families.

It is, of course, the viewpoint of John Locke that is enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. This is shown not only by the reference to natural or unalienable rights in the Declaration; but also by the provision, in the Bill of Rights, that one of those rights never completely to be abridged by government is the right to bear arms. That never meant, as at first we might suppose, the right to bear arms in defense of the country (such is a duty, not a right); but the right of a husband or head of a family to enforce the moral law of nature there where the executive arm of civil government may not be effectively present. This has been rightly circumscribed in civil society. Still, the closer human existence comes to a state of nature, the more is reinstated every man's right and duty to enforce the law of nature as far as he can.

One would have supposed that, upon imagining a breakdown of common enforcement after or in the face of nuclear attack, our reflections upon the state of nature would return to some such view as that of John Locke. Or else that we would be compelled to believe that Locke was too much an optimist, that Hobbes was more correct in believing that men by themselves have no moral competence and that human affairs would return to jungle-law without the presence of government to lay down for the first time the meaning of "right," "duty," "jus-

tice," etc.

Today, however, Christians have intervened in the discussion to declare instead that the state of nature would be rather like the Kingdom of God. Without the normal enforcements and restraints afforded by government and the ordinary institutions of society (when these must be supposed to have broken down under a nuclear attack that penetrates a deterrent that cannot defend), then will come into play, supposedly, something else to define our responsibilities. This will be a heedless, uncalculating charity, and Christian love which of itself requires self-giving, sacrifice, and death to be chosen by every moral agent and for anyone in his care or keeping. Where such love reigns, there is no place for the exercise of discrimination between duty to one's children and duty to one's neighbors, or between one's family and some aggressor upon the household, and no place for a charity limited to saving as many of one's neighbors as possible when it would be vain to try to save all. While the national guard is needed in the "natural disasters" we have known to date, upon nuclear attack only unqualified love prevails to define for us, probably for the first time, the full measure of our responsibilities.

L. C. McHugh, S.J., who first boldly justified the exercise of some preferences in such a state of nature, was described by the editors of *America* as a man who himself would be the first to step aside from his shelter door to make room for his neighbor. Even Reinhold Niebuhr has written against this "excuse" that "this reservation limits charity in the day of disaster to celibates." But has not Niebuhr been saying for some time that charity is thus limited—or rather thus to be expressed? In vocational witnessing action, or in forms of realistic action relevant and relative to the concrete situation? True, when he writes "Woe unto the rest of us who must murder to protect our children," Niebuhr speaks for mankind, for ordered social life, and—without probing so far—for limited deterrent weapons that can defend something when massive deterrence fails. The Scripture also says, "Woe unto those who are with child!" Prescinding from that word "murder," we are faced with the question: Is the state of nature, or is natural human moral agency, governed by jungle-law (Hobbes), or by each man in some sense sharing in executing justice (Locke). Or is it governed directly by divine charity translated without more ado into proscriptions of universal, indiscriminate sacrifice under the most horrendous conditions?

Of course, Christianity has another myth of origins, and a quite different view of man's "original righteousness" than that of Locke. Of course, we are not content to say that only when a man's "own preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as

much as he can, to preserve the rest of mankind." Closer bonds of covenant linking life with life as it first came from the hands of the Creator, and the love of men as Christ loved us all, sum up for the Christian the meaning of quintessential manhood. Still it is the case that such an ethic also takes form in an understanding of the responsibilities of persons in an "official capacity," and in realistic determinations of what should be done to save life. There is no duty that all should die when not all can be saved. As Luther wrote: "In the one case you consider yourself and what is yours, in the other you consider your neighbor and what is his. In what concerns you and yours, you govern yourself by the Gospel and suffer injustice for yourself as a true Christian; in what concerns others and belongs to them, you govern yourself *according to love* and suffer no injustice for your neighbor's sake."

It is also the case that there is another ingredient in the natural man and among the premises upon which rest is social groups and arrangements throughout the length and breadth of his historical existence. This ingredient, the sinfulness of man, should probably lead us to suppose a "state of nature" in some respects resembling that of both Hobbes and Locke. The fact that this is the case among fallen humanity is, by contrast, made clear precisely in the light of Adamic righteousness and in the light that has shown forth in the face of Jesus Christ. From neither Scripture nor sound reason can one discover grounds for believing that, once the restraints and remedies of social enforcements and juridical procedures disappear, the kingdom of divine charity would arrive, or official responsibilities go into suspense, or clarity then cease to be heedful to the tragic needs of the hour as it shapes itself for realistic action.

Only he is entitled to that opinion who also says that, in the "state of society," pure *agape* expresses itself with like purity—and irresponsibility. One often has occasion to wonder if Christian people know what is *now* being done in the defense of their families (by others, in *their* official functions, and through the inert impact of the social system generally); and how they account for their involvements (which are deep even if indirect) in these dire necessities. William James spoke correctly, even if he did not say enough, when he remarked that civilization is built on a slaughter house. It accomplishes nothing, for our present justification, for us to say that science has put into our hands the means of some day rectifying this state of affairs, or that we can imagine a world in which we and our loved ones can receive God's gift of the evening and go to blessed sleep without there being 100,000 people sleeping in misery on the open streets of Calcutta.

Who *now* does not live upon the disease or death of his neighbor? Except for the man who partially delivers his soul by unusual acts of self-giving in

some special vocation, who *now* does not preserve his family at the expense of committing outrageous deeds or omitting to sever all involvement in them? We are sustained by a state of society that now rests upon these facts.

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All this would not be worth mentioning were it not for the fact that a crypto-pacifism, which still informs American Christian life and thought, affects the relevant or irrelevant words we are able to address to the principle issue of our time. For comprehending the "state of society" and what Christians are saying about this, it does not matter whether their "state of nature" ever existed; or whether even now we can actually succeed in imagining human life to be completely without its political fabric. It does not matter whether, with John Locke, we say that "in the beginning all the world was America ["inland vacant places"], and more so than that is now." It does not matter whether Christians believe there actually was a time (before law, police and constraints entered in) when human relations were ruled by pure charity without discriminations. It does not matter whether we can or should think our way backward to such a time or forward into such a time.

This is to say: it does not so much matter whether we *can* or *should* think about the problems of "shelter morality." We probably *should* but actually *cannot* do so, since we have so much difficulty confronting the reality of nuclear warfare that inevitably we suppose some elements of "society" as we know it to endure beyond the attack.

Our myth of a natural charity unqualified by any "official" distinctions shapes our dreams about military policy; and it will continue to do so until we are driven to adopt other profound categories of analysis. It very much matters *whither* our thought is going whenever we try to think about that state of affairs to which human life would be reduced if stripped of normal political restraints and enforcement, even if we never quite succeed in imagining such a state of nature. This discloses in a crucial test *whether* as Christians we have in our minds *any* fundamental and *positive* definition of the official responsibilities of the statesman, the soldier, and the citizen; and *what* are for us the limits of his just action and justification of his action. From the shock of, in any degree, taking thought about "shelter morality" we then might find better things to say about the morality of weapons-systems, the design of war, and United States military policy.

For us as a people to become sober about "shelter morality" would be a gain if this meant that we had finally awakened from our slumbers to become sober about the morality of warfare. This is not to say that certain intermediate questions are unimportant, such as: whether there should be pri-

vate or community shelters or both; whether either is possible or desirable; whether to procure an adequate shelter-system would only make us accustomed to actually fighting a nuclear war; whether a great nation does not need a permanent doctrine of the use of armed force; whether protecting our population and "removing hostages" would not un-stabilize the deterrent and so lead to war; whether civil defense is for the purpose of strengthening a deterrent that can never fail or saving lives *when* deterrence fails; whether it is another one of those instruments which will have completely failed if ever used; whether we can become skilled in the non-use of this "weapon" also, or whether use must be feasible, and intended, if deterrence is to be kept credible.

But as some of these last questions already demonstrate, thinking soberly about "shelter morality" goes mainly to the point of requiring us to think soberly about deterrence itself. Recent discussion of shelters has not so much called in question the selfishness or unselfishness of the average American, as it calls in question U.S. military policy—if the cornerstone of this is a deterrent threat that can defend nothing or effect no purpose if it is ever used. It calls in question whether, as Christians and as citizens, we have yet thought through certain ultimate questions that lie at the heart of military policy in the shape of modern warfare itself.

We may and should deplore any kind of division between citizens or the setting of family against family. Perhaps this will open our eyes to the fact that today we contemplate such possibilities because there has taken place a division between the military establishment and the society it is supposed to defend, and a division between legitimate defense and the supposed requirements of deterrence—a massive deterrent immoral ever to use, incredible if not meant to be used, and which can effect none of the purposes of defense. When any man today gazes into the shelter depths of civil defense, our present

deterrent grins back at him! An "official" function in defense descends upon the head of a household only because massive deterrent weapons fail to shield, and can by no manner of means be made to shield.

Weapons alone are not responsible for this, but political decisions in which we all share to some degree. Community shelters would be worse than private ones if this kept us from gazing into the depths or allowed us to continue to dream they would defend anything, on some suppositions as to the kind of war this nation is preparing, if need be, to wage. More details about what to do or not to do in civil defense are useless unless we know and are resolved as a people that ours is a *limited* fight-the-war policy. If this is not true, or if we want a shelter system as one part of the deterrent that has virtue only if it be not used, then a lengthy parenthesis about a public shelter program will still be preceded by a minus sign.

Perhaps we cannot control what may happen to us in this matter of obliteration-warfare, but we should be able to exert some direction upon what we are prepared to *do* or to *threaten*, or to have done in our supposed behalf. Until the gap between deterrence and defense is closed, there can be no healing of the gap that has opened up between families, as those who care for them contemplate their duties.

We cannot, by exalting the highest norm of self-sacrifice avoid thinking about weapons-morality and shelter-morality at the same time and in responsible terms. Instead, by the power of the highest charity come down to earth for us men, must we do just this. Precisely when we acknowledge our common vulnerability should we still try to save. A Christian should not regard the family simply as a community of selfishness, but rather as a divine gift and task. He may hope that he is not reduced to this. He must know that massive deterrence reduces to just this.

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