

1986

Morality and the Bomb: An Ethical Assessment of Nuclear Deterrence

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Recommended Citation

Langan, John and Fisher, David (1986) "Morality and the Bomb: An Ethical Assessment of Nuclear Deterrence," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 39 : No. 2 , Article 19.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol39/iss2/19>

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for the layman without being insulting. Anyone interested in how the powers handle incidents will find Dallin's work of great use. *Black Box* is excellent reading about a very tragic event.

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Fisher, David. *Morality and the Bomb: An Ethical Assessment of Nuclear Deterrence*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985. 136pp. \$25

The author of this short work is described on the book's jacket as a "civil servant with the Ministry of Defense." From the evidence of the book itself, it is clear that he is also a person trained in the techniques of contemporary British philosophy and that he is a Christian with a strong concern both for ethical values and for clarity of thought on a difficult subject. His book, because of its sober style and undramatic conclusions, will not generate great excitement, and it may be neglected because the author is not prominent in the American debate on these matters. But that would be unfortunate because this is probably the best work on the most important moral dilemma of our time.

Fisher's book is particularly valuable for the way in which it addressed a major lacuna in the U.S. Catholic bishops' letter on war and peace, namely, the letter's failure to give a satisfactory account of how the Western reliance on nuclear deterrence is to be justified. He begins by laying out the basic structure of

mutual deterrence and explaining why it is unlikely to fail. Like the American bishops and the ultimately rejected report of the Church of England working party, *The Church and the Bomb*, (1982), Fisher works within the just war tradition of thinking about justification for the use of force. With regard to the two fundamental norms of *jus in bello*, he affirms the principle of proportion and applies it to policy issues in a standard way without exploring its deeper difficulties. He also upholds the principle of noncombatant immunity, but he does allow exceptions to it on the basis of what he calls "principled consequentialism." On the basis of these principles he holds that there is "a strong moral presumption . . . against any use of nuclear weapons." On the other hand, he scrutinizes the alternatives to deterrence and finds them less satisfactory and more risky. Then, in an important and subtle chapter in which he pays careful attention to the ethical dilemmas confronting both political leaders and military commanders, he argues that the moral justification of deterrence is impossible "if one believes that any use of nuclear weapons would be morally impermissible." But, in Fisher's view, "it is not possible to establish in advance that there are no conceivable circumstances in which use, in some form, might be morally licit." Since deterrence does not depend for its effectiveness on the risk of unlimited escalation, which would violate the principle of proportionality, it can be justified as a means of preventing

war in general and nuclear war in particular. In two final chapters, he goes on to consider the bearing of his moral argument on declaratory policy and on disarmament policy.

Morality and the Bomb is heavy going in some places since it is written for a philosophically sophisticated audience, but it will repay careful study by any person interested in our developing a morally sound approach to deterrence. It is one book which explains both why deterrence makes a vital moral contribution to our society and why arms control is a morally urgent task. Its one major limitation is that the author's understandable preoccupation with the British debate, in which deterrence came under a stronger theoretical challenge, leads him to treat the American religious debate less fully than it deserves. But he has made a distinguished contribution to our common understanding of the deeper moral issues.

THE REVEREND JOHN LANGAN, S.J.
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Dougherty, James E. *The Bishops and Nuclear Weapons: The Catholic Pastoral Letter on War and Peace*. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1984. 245pp. \$22.50

This study provides the most thorough and balanced assessment to date of the American bishops' pastoral letter on war and peace issued in 1983. The study, published under the auspices of the Institute for Policy Analysis of Cambridge, describes the dominant theological and political forces influencing the drafting of the

letter, assesses the growing impact of pacifism on the American Catholic Church hierarchy, and reviews the teachings of the Catholic Church on the morality of nuclear weapons. A major strength of the book is that it provides a sympathetic, balanced yet critical assessment of the bishops' work. Dougherty probes beneath the simplistic slogans which have dominated the religious debate on nuclear arms by seeking to uncover the strengths and weaknesses of the bishops' argument. "The bishops are to be admired," he writes, "for adopting a courageous prophetic stance, for raising some tough questions about their own government's policy and for introducing a strong moral tone into the national debate about nuclear strategies." At the same time, Dougherty questions many of the letter's emphases and policy recommendations which he believes ultimately tend to undermine U.S. strategic policy.

Dougherty observes that the problem of nuclear weapons cannot be easily encompassed within the traditions of pacifism and just war. Indeed, deterrence requires a wholly new type of moral analysis if it is to adequately come to terms with the problems posed by nuclear technology. The author suggests that many of the letter's limitations can be attributed to the absence of any well-developed body of moral theory or church teachings on deterrence. The bishops' effort to base a qualified endorsement of deterrence on a pacifist-just war dichotomy is, in Dougherty's view, wholly unsatisfactory.