Reviews

A SAY IN THE END OF THE WORLD by Roger Ruston, *Clarendon Press,* **Oxford, 1989, Pp. 272, £15.00**

This study in 'Morals and British Nuclear Weapons Policy 1941—1987' by a former lecturer in Ethics and Moral Theology at Blackfriars, Oxford, is a most welcome addition to the discussion of the morality of nuclear deterrence. It comes from the same stable as the work by Finnis, Boyle and Grisez on *Nuclear Deterrence: Morality and Realism,* and has much in common with that work as far as conclusions go. On the other hand, it has a virtue lacking in the latter work, which is that it tries to discuss morality in a detailed historico-political context: that of British policy and its history.

Ruston's assumptions are those of the just war tradition, rooted in a sound philosophical analysis of such key concepts as intentions, innocence etc. His conclusions are that British nuclear policy has been dictated more by considerations of Great Power status and supposed influence in the world than by any coherent military strategy, let alone by any political understanding of the diminished role of Britain in the post-1945 world. His historical analysis is largely derived from other well known sources (Gowing, Pierre, Freedman and others) but it is backed up by close original analysis of government policy-statements, Cabinet papers and parliamentary debates.

Treating parts of this large subject at relatively short length has its dangers. For example, the argument requires the author to enter rather too briefly into the extremely tricky area of assessing the relative military strengths of the opposing sides in the European theatre. The problem here is not merely one of getting reliable data on weapons, manpower etc., or even of finding satisfactory methods of classification: it is not even that the problem of the relative *quality* of opposing forces is crucial but resistant to measurement of any kind. It is that—as the author makes clear elsewhere—deterrence is all about perceptions. A 'threat' exists only as long as the perception that it exists governs the behaviour of the 'threatened' side. A recent commentator has concluded (Adelphi Paper 239) that 'the conundrum of force comparisons remains unsolved'. This point is important not only for arms-control negotiators, but for the moralist. It is risky to base much on any alleged Soviet military superiority, whether in support of Western policy or in criticism of it.

Ruston criticises Sir Michael Quinlan (now the senior civil servant at the Ministry of Defence) for thinking of nuclear deterrence in terms of a chess game, in which the 'defender' calculates the 'aggressor's' moves with a degree of rationality that beggars belief, in a setting abstracted form the real world of complex, unpredictable and multi-polar relationships. 'The kind of combat which the strategy is intended to deter is not likely to be the one that would happen in practice'. (p. 206)

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Interestingly, this criticism has also been levelled, by Jeff MacMahan, at Finnis, Boyle and Grisez. They too wrongly assume 'a chess-player's model of rational decision making'. (*Ethics*, January 1989, p. 413)

The problem here is that, of its very nature, deterrence seems to imply a 'game' between two parties: X is deterring Y. Where could a Z, or set of Zs fit into this picture? This of course, is the basic conundrum of 'extended deterrence'. It is interesting to speculate on the problems that will arise if, in the process of loosening up the Eastern European bloc, with the buffer states gaining some freedom of manoeuvre, the USSR finds itself faced with the same conundrums of extended deterrence that have long faced NATO. Be that as it may, the two-party model of deterrence, with what Ruston calls its misleading 'domestic' analogy of single combat, is hard to get rid of. It goes back to the analysis of war itself, for example in Clausewitz's first chapter: 'War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale ... each tries through physical force to compel the other to do his will'. Now it is extremely difficult to devise a theoretical model, whether of war or of deterrence, that does not boil down to a 'duel', or a complex of simultaneous duels. Even when a multiplicity of parties are 'at war', they tend either to get into alliances, thus forming a larger duel, or to disperse into what we can hardly avoid thinking of as a set of simultaneous but distinct duels, or wars. So too with deterrence. I do not see how to avoid, nor for analytical purposes what is wrong with, the duel model of deterrence. The real questions are: a) Whom is the duel between? Governments? States? Nations? Whole populations? (This is where the moral issue of third parties, in the shape of non-combatants as innocent hostages, enters into the deterrence debate): and b) are the real dangers, in the multi-polar world of 1990, any longer those of the superpower 'duel' at all?

Notoriously, there is a western deterrence theory, not shared by the Russians (who have a different view of things). This theory is supposed to hold whether or not the other side shares it. That is precisely its point: that it is valid for all circumstances, even including the circumstance (to which Ruston draws attention) that its claim of being purely defensive cannot be distinguished by the other side from an offensive, indeed a first-strike, capability. If deterrence is a kind of gigantic international chess-game, this is indeed a fatal flaw. You cannot have so watertight a theory when the matter concerned consists of human perceptions. This is why Ruston is right that 'the chess model of deterrence is likely to be dangerously misleading to those who operate it' (p. 206) and why MacMahan may be right that those in charge would not think like Finnis, Boyle and Grisez do, in a crisis. The trouble is that while deterrence *policy* is all politics, based on history, deterrence *theory* is necessarily only theory, the truth of which cannot be confirmed, but may be catastrophically falsified, in Popperish fashion, by its own failure. The moralist has to deal with both aspects, but each according to its own logic.

Ruston shows convincingly that most decision-makers simply donot think out their model of deterrence coherently at all. (This does not mean they do without a theory: only that it is a badly thought-out one. The exceptions, like McNamara, end up with intractable theoretical

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problems). Thus, British politicians have never seriously been required to answer the question of how our 'independent' deterrent might be used independently, let alone morally, in defence of our supreme interests. This is partly because British moralists, unlike some American ones, have not publicly and collectively challenged them to do so, but have preferred to talk to, or even across, each other. Given the power of the historical 'myths' surrounding appeasement and strategic bombing, where much of the trouble began, as Ruston shows, this is understandable. But it is also a sad reflection on the state of British moral and political culture. At crucial moments when choices were still open, and morality could have been heard, it was not. But perhaps it is not too late to start now, when British policy is coming under the spotlight once again, as arms-control negotiations develop. Ruston shows clearly how much material there is for such a debate.

He traces the problem of conducting such a debate partly to confusion between two types of deterrence: Deterrence 1 (deterrence by denial) which theoretically could be squared with just war criteria because it does not have to depend on immoral threats, and Deterrence 2 (deterrence by retaliation) which does. Flexible Response, the official doctrine of NATO, is the product of a politically astute, though rationally incoherent, attempt to combine the two. It was and is a fudge designed to reconcile various competing interests. On the one hand, the Americans are interested in a deterrence which threatens limited nuclear counterforce war. This, would of course take place in Europe. The Europeans see deterrence as a means of preventing any kind of war, by the early use of nuclear weapons to escalate the conflict to unacceptable proportions. This difference of aims is important for deterrence morality, but is too little discussed. Are they even compatible with each other? Anyhow, at this point, many in NATO have until recently objected that what European security requires is better conventional forces, in order to postpone nuclear use as long as possible ('first use—yes, but early use—no'). Of course, strengthening conventional forces to postpone nuclear use, is not at all the same thing as relying on a non-murderous deterrent. But British arguments for postponing nuclear use, by Jonathan Alford and others, could have done with being discussed at greater length at this stage of the argument. I'm not quite clear how they fit into Ruston's analysis.

The distinction Ruston draws between American and European interpretations of Flexible response is important for the moralist. For escalation on the European interpretation necessarily consists in a threat to lose control. Yet the opposing American emphasis, on the need for controlling limited nuclear war, is based on a very dubious proposition. Certainly, the best experts on the topic, such as Ball and Bracken, said enough to convince the American Bishops in 1983 that there is no justification for anyone to initiate nuclear war. (They have reiterated the point in their recent 'update' of 1988). The risks are simply too great. Yet the official British theory, as in Quinlan's version, depends on just such a hope (one can hardly call it more) of retaining control. Furthermore, Ruston insists, the restraint on actual use this case requires is not really 'for the purpose of imposing moral and legal limits on destruction, but for the

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purpose of restoring credibility and demonstrating that there is much more to come if the enemy does not back off'. (p. 221) It is important to insist on this point, because the seemingly moral limits built into British policy, in the Quinlan version, weigh heavily with Bishops and others who are impressed by the use (others would say misuse) of just war criteria with which it is buttressed. It is also worth noting that although Quinlan certainly insists, for moral reasons, on limiting as far as possible the number of civilians that would be killed by the British Trident deterrent, Mrs Thatcher is apparently content to stick with deliberately targeting centres of civilian population. (*The Independent*, 20th Oct. 1988). Hence the deliberately ambiguous talk, in the official Government papers, of targeting 'key aspects of Soviet state power', to cover both points of view.

Ruston's book is welcome as the first full-length attempt to confront the official justification of British nuclear policy, in the light of a full awareness of its history, and to show its moral vulnerabilities. Of course, it is not the first time that many of the arguments have been put forward in public. Walter Stein for one has been at this task for several decades. But by his loosening of the deadlock between the historical and moral arguments, Ruston pulls the rug out from under a lot of sloppy British pro-nuclear thinking. Whether, given the British capacity for thinking several incompatible thoughts at once, it will stop such sloppiness remains to be seen. Anyhow, the conclusion is convincing and formidably argued: 'both the theoretical commitment to the possibility of unlimited destruction ... and the high practical probability of it indicate that Flexible Response is ethically unsupportable'. Hence 'an alternative system for defending Western Europe is required'. (p. 231)

With a commendatory reference to the work of the Alternative Defence Commission, this is where the argument ends. Because much of the work was done before Mr. Gorbachev had got into his stride, it would seem that it was not possible to ask whether or not recent developments in Eastern Europe now make such a requirement easier to fulfil. This is a pity, for the current 'official' policy of the Church is a 'strictly conditioned' acceptance of deterrence, based on Pope John Paul II's well-known statement in 1982. That acceptance was prefaced by the qualification 'In current conditions ...' and it is surely arguable that conditions have changed so drastically since 1982 that a complete reassessment is in order (something, alas, the American Bishops have not done. Nor have they in any way confronted the arguments of Stein, Finnis and Ruston on the irredeemably murderous nature of all existing forms of nuclear deterrence). Discussion of this point is surely the next stage of any enquiry into the intertwined history and morality of nuclear deterrence.

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FAITH, CULTURE AND THE WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY by Michael Warren. *Paulist Press.* **1989, Pp xvi + 214.**

Despite its title, this book is about catechesis in its broadest sense—the process of building the faith and passing it on to the next generation. It is the fruit of its author's twenty years of pastoral work and reflection, and his care for the formation of Christians. His reading has been wide and he presents

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