

## INTRODUCTION

The first thing to realize is that, if there are not to be nuclear wars, there must not be wars. —Bertrand Russell

The paradox of contemporary civilization is that beyond a certain point the individual's security begins to vary inversely with the power embodied in the systems meant to ensure that security. Not only can the increasingly powerful domestic security apparatus of the state at any time be turned against him—a potentiality kept from fruition chiefly by chance, circumstance, and, where they exist, by the fragile safeguards of democracy—but, even more importantly, the capacity for destruction which states have acquired through their efforts to outdo one another in the pursuit of security through armaments effectively deprives all of the security they seek. In consequence, as civilization moves farther from its primal state, it becomes increasingly like that state in the insecurity it holds for the individual person. Its claims to progress ring hollow when its achievements contain the seeds of its own destruction.

War epitomizes the gravity of this paradox. For if war is no more capable of undoing civilization than is, say, overpopulation or the depletion of natural resources, it is nonetheless capable of doing so with greater dispatch and by means that are all the more tragic because they are designed and implemented for the express purpose of killing people. We have to deplete natural resources in order to live. But we do not have to kill other human beings. We have to cope with conflict in order to live socially. But we do not have to wage war. However much we wrap our rationalization in the language of necessity, we *choose* to do these things. And as with all our choices, these are subject to moral assessment.

This is the aspect of the problem that concerns me in the present study. For I believe it is the most urgent of the problems we face today. If we do not in the near future resolve the problem of the proper relationship of the individual to the state, the world will continue on, characterized, to be sure, by injustice and oppression but at least with hope of eventual ameliorization of the situation. The same with poverty or overpopulation. But in the case of war

we face a threat to the very conditions under which progress toward the resolution of these and other problems can even be made. It is a threat to the very conditions under which human rationality and moral sensibility can continue to exist. As such it dwarfs in importance the controversies between Jews and Palestinians in the Middle East, Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, or communists and capitalists in the ideological struggle of the cold war; not because the issue of war per se is necessarily more important than these others but because of the form the problem takes in the modern world. Alfred Nobel, founder of the peace prize, believed the key to peace lay with the development of war technology and that once the nations of the world acquired the capacity to annihilate one another—and he expressly included civilian populations here—war would disappear from the face of the earth. This was the technologist's dream. But we can no longer stake our future on such a dream. It is precisely the failure of technology and militarism to slow the acceleration of civilization toward catastrophe that must be confronted. And to do so requires trying to understand the problem of war in its moral dimension.

There has, it is true, been increased awareness of the problem, but it has taken the form of an almost exclusive concern with the threat of nuclear war. As commendable as this is, it has had one untoward consequence. The preoccupation with nuclear war has fostered the idea that the problem of war in general can wait, that as desirable as it would be to rid the world of war, to do so is a project for the future, after the nuclear threat has been defused and we can be confident there will be a future. Accordingly the growing opposition to nuclear war has been accompanied by a growing acceptance of conventional war. This is true even among many so-called "nuclear pacifists," who feel that national security demands that nuclear disarmament, or even a significant reduction in nuclear armaments, be accompanied by a buildup of conventional forces. Conventional war thus acquires a kind of respectability. It seems an acceptable compromise between the magnitude of the violence of nuclear war, on the one hand, and the abhorrent quality of the violence of terrorism, on the other.

This attitude is understandable, but I believe it is misconceived. What is wrong with war is as wrong with conventional as with nuclear war. In that sense there is no moral difference between the two. But more importantly, I believe there is no realistic hope of counteracting the nuclear threat without dealing with the general problem of war as well. The acceptance of conventional war, with

all that implies in the way of attitudes towards killing and destruction and the institutionalization of violence in society, makes nuclear war virtually inevitable.

Let me make clearer why I think this is so. Assume for the moment the legitimacy of war. If a nation may justifiably go to war, what may it justifiably do in the course of waging it. Should it restrain itself, or is restraint in such an undertaking an absurdity?

The answer is yes or no, depending upon what we take the question to mean. As I shall argue in Chapter Three, moderation is not an absurdity if we suppose it to require only that we refrain from inflicting gratuitous death and destruction beyond what is necessary for the attainment of the ends of war. But the answer is arguably yes if one means that nations should exercise restraint in the sense of knowingly doing less than is minimally necessary to achieve their objectives. One resorts to such bloody and destructive measures as war because the objectives are thought to warrant them. If, then, once these measures are undertaken one deliberately does less than is necessary to achieve them, it would indeed seem absurd, a violation of the tenet of rationality, that to will an end is to will the indispensable means to its attainment. This tenet, as we shall see later, underlies the principle of military necessity. And it is probably accepted by every nation that goes to war.

This means, I suggest, that given the rationale behind resorting to war in the first place, in any circumstances in which attainment of the objectives of war requires the use of nuclear weapons, they are likely to be used; and when they are not possessed but the need for them is foreseen, they are likely to be acquired. The logic of war demands it. The fact that the weapons are nuclear *in and of itself* makes no difference. Moreover, in circumstances in which they are possessed and national survival is believed to be at stake, it is virtually certain they will be used. Few world leaders would preside over the destruction of their country if they thought that by using nuclear weapons they could prevent it.

The evidence for the truth of these two claims is substantial. The one wartime use of atomic weapons occurred when the United States thought it could further its objectives by dropping them on Japan. And those were not even basic objectives; the war was already won. They were the subsidiary goals of minimizing the loss of American and perhaps Japanese lives. As for acquisition, the superpowers today multiply the numbers of nuclear weapons they possess, and nonnuclear nations strive to acquire them.

But might not the resort to nuclear war risk crossing a threshold

beyond which one's objectives *cannot* be achieved, because it would threaten a level of destruction that would jeopardize the attainment of *any* objectives at all? And would not the logic of war, with or without a principle of military necessity, preclude such resort?

While nuclear war does indeed risk crossing such a threshold, it does not necessarily involve crossing it. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki did not, and they *did* serve American ends. And many scenarios for nuclear war do not involve crossing the threshold. In fact, many projected limited nuclear wars involve fewer casualties than the major conventional wars of the twentieth century: the more than 50 million dead left by World War II would equal those of a fairly large nuclear war. Resort to war of any sort risks an outcome in which one's objectives become unattainable, if only because going to war risks losing; and inasmuch as no war has more than one winner, and some have none, history is replete with examples of conventional war taking one or the other or both sides over that threshold.

Still, it is true that conventional war rarely takes a nation over the threshold beyond which no objectives can be attained *ever again* in the way in which all-out nuclear war would. But it has happened. The Romans annihilated the Carthaginians in the third Punic War as effectively as if they had dropped a nuclear bomb on them. And it could happen today. A third world war fought without nuclear weapons, but with large-scale use of chemical and biological weapons, could rival a nuclear war in its effects. And if not the third, then the fourth or the fifth or the *n*th world war could do so. The sophistication, accuracy, and destructive power of conventional weapons is rapidly closing the gap between conventional and nuclear war. Nuclear weapons will always have greater *destructive* potential. And they are quicker. But once war of either sort can destroy civilization, those differences become relatively unimportant so far as the threshold in question is concerned.

Even if this were not so, the preceding consideration argues only against *crossing that threshold*, not against using nuclear weapons. True, using nuclear weapons at all increases the probability of crossing the threshold; and it is doubtful that nations could be expected to exercise sufficient restraint to avoid that outcome. But if it is unrealistic to expect nations to deploy nuclear weapons and yet to restrain themselves from using them in time of conflict, it is equally unrealistic to expect them to make full use of conventional

weapons and yet to restrain themselves from *producing* nuclear weapons if they are able. Why suppose that the restraint necessary to refrain from using nuclear weapons in an otherwise conventional war, or to limit their use if they are resorted to, is greater than that necessary to refrain from producing them if rising tensions or the exigencies of a long war argue for it? And is that not what is supposed when it is proposed to ban nuclear weapons but to allow conventional armaments; or to allow nuclear weapons but to limit their numbers and kinds? Except for the fact that they can more *readily* be used if possessed than produced and used if not possessed, it is hard to see a difference here. If people want to minimize the prospects of annihilation, they will not go to war at all, conventional or nuclear.

Thus, while we can assuredly discern a moral difference between *all-out* nuclear war and most conventional wars, we can also see a moral difference between all-out conventional war and most nuclear wars. My point is that nuclear war is not *in itself* any worse morally than conventional war, even if (which may not even be the case) the worst possible nuclear war might be worse than the worst possible conventional war. Death and destruction are central to both. So is the inevitability of killing innocent persons. And the magnitudes of death and destruction can vary on either side.

## I

What I have said thus far, of course, is more or less theoretical, in the sense that the situation we actually confront in the world today is one in which both superpowers are heavily armed with nuclear weapons and prepared to use them if necessary. And there is little likelihood of that changing in the near future.

This situation underscores the difficulty, perhaps the near-impossibility, of both preserving conventional war and eliminating nuclear weapons, even if it should be conceded there is a significant moral difference between the two. On the one hand, as I have said, the increasing destructiveness of conventional weapons and the refinement and sophistication of both conventional and nuclear weapons is blurring the distinction between the two. When B-52 bombers can in a matter of minutes drop explosives equivalent in power to the atomic bomb that leveled Hiroshima, and when nuclear weapons can be made so small as to be fired on the battlefield from conventional "dual capacity" weapons, there is a merging of nuclear and conventional weapons into a single war-

fighting capability. If military necessity calls for a job to be done that can be done more efficiently by tactical nuclear weapons than with conventional ones, we can have little confidence that the use of such weapons will long be foregone. Nor, if one accepts the premises underlying the resort to war, is it easy to see why it should be.

On the other hand, the use of nuclear weapons has been so integrated into policy planning as to make their elimination virtually impossible short of dramatic change in such planning. When I say the "use" of such weapons I do so advisedly. Nuclear weapons are being used today and can be expected to be used in the future.<sup>1</sup> Not that they are being detonated; that has not happened in wartime since Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But that is not a requirement of their being used. A man uses a gun when he sticks it in your ribs and demands your money. He does not need to fire the gun. And a country uses nuclear weapons when it makes it known that it may launch them unless certain conditions are met, as the United States did against the Soviets in the Cuban Missile Crisis, against China during the Korean War, and against North Vietnam during the Vietnam War. And the very threat of retaliation that is at the heart of nuclear deterrence is a use of nuclear weapons, even if it is not the actual exploding of them.

Moreover, nuclear weapons are used when they are relied upon as an express or implied threat in escalation. And that threat is an integral part of current strategic thinking. Secretary of Defense Casper W. Weinberger made this clear when he said that an adversary "must know that even if his aggression should succeed in achieving its immediate objectives, he faces the threat of escalation to hostilities that would exact a higher cost than he is willing to pay."<sup>2</sup> He then added, "Thus the United States must maintain a credible threat both of escalation and of retaliation to secure deterrence across the spectrum of potential conflict" (italics mine).

When the United States refuses to renounce a first use of nuclear weapons in Europe, it is to convey to the Soviets that we might initiate a nuclear war in response to a conventional attack against NATO forces. Indeed, the positioning of U.S. troops so they will

<sup>1</sup> As has been pointed out by Daniel Ellsberg in his "Call to Mutiny," in *The Deadly Connection: Nuclear War and U.S. Intervention*, ed. Joseph Gerson (Cambridge: American Friends Service Committee, 1983), pp. 17-32 (reprinted from *Protest and Survive*, Monthly Review Press). See also Douglas P. Lackey, *Moral Principles and Nuclear Weapons* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanheld, 1984), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> "U.S. Defense Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* (Spring 1986): 679.

unavoidably become engaged with Warsaw Pact forces at the outset of hostilities constitutes a trip wire, involving us and providing a rationale for resorting to nuclear weapons if that should be deemed necessary. The Rapid Deployment Force, or Central Command, serves a similar function in the Middle East. It has in fact been called a "portable Dienbienphu," in reference to the decisive battle of the French Indochina War during which the United States offered the use of nuclear bombs to break the Vietnamese siege. British unwillingness to support such a use dissuaded Eisenhower from proceeding with the plan. Moreover, the threat of escalation to nuclear war provides a protective covering for U.S. operations in the Third World, as it did in Cuba, and later in Granada and Nicaragua. It is virtually inconceivable that the Soviets would commit troops to combat in those areas under threat of U.S. escalation. This gives the United States a free hand to wield the conventional sword under a nuclear shield and makes it highly improbable—assuming a continuation of current thinking—that it would ever agree to eliminate all nuclear weapons. It is simply too dependent upon them.

## II

For all of this, there is symbolic significance to the distinction between conventional and nuclear war. Once that line is crossed it will be easier to cross it again or, having crossed it, to escalate to all-out nuclear war. To the extent that keeping the line clearly in view lessens the likelihood of a nuclear holocaust, it is important to do so.

But there should be no illusions about the chances of success so long as the assumptions and values underlying the readiness to wage war of any sort are left unchallenged. Any line can be crossed, whether in the use of weaponry or in their production when the capability is possessed. What makes the difference is the attitudes toward war itself. The risk of nuclear war is a function of more than the mere possession of nuclear weapons; it is a function of attitudes concerning ideology, national interest, self-defense, conflict resolution, and, perhaps most importantly, toward the use of violence and the taking of human life. Leave these unchanged and there is little chance of eliminating the risk of nuclear war. The war system has a momentum and logic of its own. When a country's economy is permanently war-oriented, when nearly half its scientists and engineers work on military-related projects, and

when force and the threat of force are accepted features of its foreign policy one can hardly expect to reverse a movement that is a product of these forces. *We minimize the magnitude of the problem of nuclear war if we suppose that anything short of a radical change in our thinking has the remotest prospect of success in dealing with it.*

John Dewey recognized the futility of trying to deal with the problem of war in piecemeal fashion. In thoughts that have relevance to our present concern, he said:

The proposition . . . is not the moral proposition to abolish wars. It is the much more fundamental proposition to abolish the war system as an authorized and legally sanctioned institution.

How long have we been taking steps to do away with war, and why have they accomplished nothing? Because *the steps have all been taken under the war system*. It is not a step that we need, it is a right-about face; a facing in another direction.

If there be somewhere some grinning devil that watches the blundering activities of man, I can imagine nothing that gives him more malicious satisfaction than to see earnest and devoted men and women taking steps, by improving a legal and political system that is committed to war, to do away with war.<sup>3</sup>

This, regrettably, is what one sees in so much of the antinuclear movement. In leaving the war system intact, we in effect are saying that we want to continue playing the game without having to accept the consequences. We want to keep the war system but eliminate the risk of nuclear war.

If the likeliest way a nuclear war will start is by escalation of a conventional war, then we must deal with the threat of conventional war. And if readiness to wage conventional war is a function of the institutionalization of violence on a massive scale, we must find ways to deinstitutionalize violence. It is not nuclear violence alone that is the threat to mankind. It is the willingness to kill and destroy our fellow human beings—the innocent as well as the noninnocent—for political ends. Unless we are willing to redirect our time, energy, and resources away from perfecting the means of mass destruction of whatever sort and into exploring nonviolent

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Rafter, ed., *Intelligence in the Modern World: John Dewey's Philosophy* (New York: The Modern Library, 1939), pp. 515, 523.

alternatives to war itself, our efforts to combat the threat of nuclear war are likely to be of no avail.

But is this not asking too much? Whereas people might conceivably be prepared to dismantle nuclear weapons, is it not too much to expect that they come to grips with the whole problem of the war system itself?

Perhaps. But this is only to say that we may be incapable of saving ourselves. A man overeats, smokes heavily, drinks too much, and gets no exercise. He learns he has high blood pressure and a weak heart. He decides to switch to filters, drink a little less, skip seconds on desserts, and walk a few blocks now and then. Is that not a step in the right direction? Certainly. But it probably will not save him. What he needs is a change in his whole way of life. We, too, can go on fueling the furnace of war and take our chances on being able to control the heat. But let us not deceive ourselves that this is likely to save us either. The whole history of civilization shows that we have never been able to resist heaping more fuel onto the fire. Or to avoid burning ourselves periodically with increasing severity. Less of what we have been doing wrong is not good enough. We must stop doing it.

What the people of today's world need first and foremost is ruthless honesty about themselves. And about their condition. For it is more serious than they want to believe. If we detach ourselves for a moment from our customary outlook in which the acceptance of war is deeply engrained, we can better appreciate the predicament we have created.

If a visitor from outer space were to come to know individual beings on this earth, but to know them only in their personal lives, at work and play, and without knowledge of human history or international affairs, what would he conclude?

Undoubtedly that virtually everyone values peace, happiness, and friendship; that most people love their families, desire basic creature comforts, and seek neither to suffer nor to cause pain to others; that they rarely harm one another, and then do so mainly under duress or in fits of anger directed against friends or loved ones and regretted soon after; that while they can all be insensitive, and a few of them cruel, they for the most part treat those they know with friendly feeling and others with civility; and that most of them wish nothing more than to be left alone to work out their life plans according to their lights, which they do with varying degrees of success when given the chance. If having observed all of this the visitor were then told that a scheme had been pro-

posed by which to improve the world—not in the foreseeable future or in any future the proposer could identify—but which for the present would require that people pour their wealth into the production of weapons of destruction, organize vast authoritarian bureaucracies called armies, train their youth to kill and periodically send them off to slaughter and be slaughtered by other youths similarly organized by their governments; a scheme that above all would require risking for everyone the horror of thermonuclear annihilation; if the visitor were told that humans could improve their lot provided only that they do all of these things, he would ridicule the scheme as not having the slightest chance of success, and even less of being accepted by rational beings.

Yet this is precisely what humankind has been led to accept in the case of war. It has proven willing to abandon virtually everything worth living for and to do things all agree are abhorrent for reasons few understand and for ends like peace, which history shows cannot be secured by these means.

How have we let it come to this?

Perhaps because at no time did any one generation have to confront the choice of the whole of this state of affairs. Had it done so, it might have seen its full absurdity. Successive generations simply responded to the perceived threats of their day without regard for the cumulative effect of such responses over the course of history. In the process most societies gradually became transformed into war systems, geared socially, politically, and economically to the maintenance and often the glorification of their capacity for organized violence.

As a result, we today have inherited a world deeply committed to war as the ultimate means of settling disputes.

Since originating an estimated forty thousand years ago, war has consumed more wealth, demanded greater sacrifice, and caused more suffering than any other human activity. In shaping history it has eclipsed even religion, in whose service it has so often been enlisted. But although war has brought out the worst in man, it has also brought out some of the best. While it cannot be said to have done much for music, it has inspired literature and poetry and brought advances in science, medicine, and technology that otherwise might have been long in coming. Ruskin claims that it has been essential to art as well. It has sometimes been the cohesive force that has brought together divided peoples to form strong and durable societies. Not least of all, it has given the virtues of courage, loyalty, and self-sacrifice unexcelled opportunities

to flourish—so much so, in fact, that some have been led to deny that war is even bad. They are convinced that in its absence mankind becomes flabby and decadent and that periodic trials by fire are necessary for the moral health of persons and states.

This was the outlook of various nineteenth-century German writers and is reflected in twentieth-century Fascism. "Mankind has grown great in eternal struggle," Hitler wrote, "and only in eternal peace does it perish."<sup>4</sup> And in an 1895 address to the Harvard graduating class, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., said that "war, when you are at it, is horrible and dull. It is only when time has passed that you see that its message was divine." While expressing hope that we would not soon be at war again, he said that we need a teacher like war in order that

we may realize that our comfortable routine is no eternal necessity of things, but merely a little space of calm in the midst of the tempestuous untamed streaming of the world, and in order that we may be ready for danger. We need it in this time of individualist negations . . . revolting at discipline, loving flesh-pots, and denying that anything is worthy of reverence.<sup>5</sup>

To be sure, Holmes here speaks only of the need for a teacher like war, but the admiration for what war instills in man, and the sense of its ennobling functions, is clear. It was in deference to this conception, in fact, that William James argued that the only way to do away with war is to replace it with the same kind of commitment and sacrifice. He considered martial virtues absolute and permanent goods but thought their development could proceed by alternative means—a "moral equivalent" of war, as he put it—particularly in the form of national service.

Most people, however, do not think that war is a good thing. They would agree with George Kennan that "major international violence is, in terms of the values of our civilization, a form of bankruptcy for us all . . . that all of us, victors and vanquished alike, must emerge from it poorer than we began it and farther from the goals we had in mind."<sup>6</sup> But they see no alternative. They view war as a problem so large and complex as to be incapable of solution by the efforts of the individual and that therefore can only be accepted as though it were part of the nature of things. And

<sup>4</sup> *Mein Kampf* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1962), p. 135.

<sup>5</sup> Julius J. Marks, ed., *The Holmes Reader* (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1964), p. 104.

<sup>6</sup> *Memiors: 1950-1963* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1972) 2: 102-103.

thus, portending the defeat of the human imagination and spirit, they resign themselves to being swept along by the currents of history to whatever end chance or fate decrees.

But war is a problem of our own creation, and it can be solved by our own effort. To do so requires courage, determination, and a resolve to effect a revolution in our moral and conceptual thinking—which have been left behind with the acceleration of civilization down the path of technological development—comparable to the Copernican Revolution in astronomy. A part of that effort must, in the first instance, go into trying to understand the moral problem of war. For if war is *not* wrong morally, then nowhere will be found the resources with which to rid ourselves of it. To do so, in fact, may not even be desirable.

### III

My contention is that war in the modern world is not morally justified. I say "in the modern world" because my aim is not to try to assess wars that have been fought throughout past history, much less those that might be conceived in the imaginations of philosophers or writers of science fiction. The consideration of some of those is useful for purposes of illustration or the clarification of the finer points of theoretical analysis. But they are not the wars of vital concern to people. The wars that engaged our moral sensibilities are those which nations are prepared to wage today, for whose preparation they gear their economies, and into whose waging they pour their wealth, their hopes, and their youth.

The argument is not that wars under all conceivable conditions are morally impermissible, an absolutist position that properly understood, is neither particularly interesting nor defensible. My position differs little in principle from that of the ordinary person. He does not believe that all wars under all conceivable circumstances are justified, but only that war under certain conditions is justified. The difference between his position and mine concerns what the conditions are. He believes that war is justified in circumstances calling for national defense, or to assist in the defense of other nations, and the like, whereas I maintain that the conditions that might theoretically justify war simply are not met in the actual world, hence that war is impermissible in the world as we know it.

This is a moral position, and many people are uncomfortable discussing morality in a serious and sustained way, as though to

do so were a giveaway that one has succumbed to emotionalism and subjectivity. But objectivity does not consist of having no opinions; it is not neutrality. One can fail to have opinions on issues of great importance only by not thinking at all. Nor is objectivity to be found in concealing one's opinions. One either has opinions or not, and if he does, to conceal them—even when that is done successfully—merely deprives others of the opportunity to weigh them when assessing what is presented. Such sham neutrality is no particular virtue. Objectivity consists rather of treating one's subject matter in as fair, open, and accurate a way as possible, whatever one's own views, and of minimizing so far as possible the risk—which exists whether one professes neutrality or not—of distortion and misrepresentation.

When people talk about the morality of war, it is usually to proclaim that we all "know" that war is wrong. However, they usually continue with a "But . . ." and proceed to say that although we all hate war, nonetheless some wars are necessary to avoid greater evils. And in any event, there have always been wars and always will be, and you cannot change that unless you change human nature.

This combination of views—that war is immoral but nonetheless necessary—effectively removes the need to question the morality of war. Its wrongness has already been conceded in a way that allows for the continuation of war and even for a belief in its inevitability.

Those who take this line do not mean that war is wrong in the sense I mean it, however. What they mean is that war is bad, or unfortunate, or tragic, not that it is morally impermissible. And these are different modes of assessment. Plagues, pestilence, floods, and droughts are bad, but they are not immoral. The reason they are not is because they are not the acts of rational beings. Certain of them can be caused by the actions of such beings. But even then it is the act of bringing them about that is immoral, not the phenomenon itself. Everyone but the most fervent glorifier of war agrees that war is bad. That is not the issue. What is at issue is whether it is wrong. What I mean by saying that war is wrong is not only that it is bad but that it ought not to be waged, that governments ought not to declare and fight wars, societies ought not to provide them with the means by which to do so, and individuals ought not to sanction, support, and participate in wars.

My concern throughout will be with actions that are fully authorized and carried out in execution of governmental policies;

that is, with actions which are in all nonmoral respects fully legitimate. My intention is to distinguish such actions from those many cases of acts in wartime that are universally condemned even by those who believe that wars are necessary and sometimes justified—acts, for example, like the massacre at My Lai during the Vietnam War. Important as they are to the question of morality in the conduct of warfare and to understanding the psychology of men in combat, such acts are of minor interest so far as the question of the morality of war is concerned. It goes little toward showing that war is unjustified to argue against actual or hypothetical wars that fail to meet even the standards to which the war advocate holds.

It is not, in other words, such recognized acts of atrocity that we shall be concerned with, or the carrying out of illegitimate orders, or the incidental acts of gratuitous barbarism that have always been a part of warfare; but rather the fully sanctioned acts that are part of the ongoing process of fighting a modern war, and for whose performance, if it demands unusual bravery, people are honored and deemed heroes by their countrymen. These acts, unlike those at My Lai, are not aberrations. They do not arise from the occasional failure to abide by the rules of war. They are rather the norm. It is their assessment that must be at the heart of any critique of war.

In the first chapter I point out that war is organized and typically institutionalized violence, and therefore to understand the nature of war one must understand the nature of violence. Because the concept of violence by its nature is partly evaluative, implying the intent to harm those against whom it is used, war by its very nature cannot be assessed independently of moral considerations. I try to show why the doing of violence to innocent persons is presumptively wrong, meaning that one may not justifiably do such violence unless he can produce reasons why that presumption is defeated in the circumstances in which he proposes to do violence.

Some may be prepared to grant this for the usual case, but they deny that it has any bearing upon warfare. In warfare, they hold, as in international affairs generally, morality is either irrelevant or of limited relevance. That is, two main approaches are open to those who want to defend war. They can simply deny that morality has any significant bearing upon international relations at all, and hence that judgments such as that war is morally wrong are

misconceived. This may be part of a more sweeping rejection of morality itself, as in the case of moral nihilism, or part of a narrower outlook, called political realism, that typically acknowledges morality among individuals but denies that it has central relevance to the conduct of nations. Or, they can accept the relevance of morality to international affairs but argue that war can be justified on moral grounds. This, in effect, is the course of reasoning represented by the just war tradition.

Any thorough assessment of the morality of war must take account of both approaches. Accordingly, I examine political realism in chapters two and three and argue that in the forms it has taken in American thought, it provides no compelling reason to discount the role of morality in international relations, much less in war in particular. Moreover, I argue that the doctrine of reason of state, which one finds embedded in much of political realist thought in the notions of national interest and national survival, opens the way in principle to a government's use of force against its own citizens with the same severity usually reserved for foreign enemies.

In chapters four and five I examine the just war theory, beginning with its foundations in Augustine's thought, highlighting some of the most important features in its historical evolution, and looking at the forms it takes among contemporary writers. I argue that by failing to confront squarely the question of the justifiability of what one must do in the waging of any war, the tradition fails to provide a moral justification of war in the modern world. For modern war, I maintain in the sixth chapter, inevitably kills innocent people, not only because of its weaponry but also because of the implicit or explicit principles bound up in its conduct. Of particular relevance here are the well-known principle of military necessity and what I call the principle of just necessity, both of which can readily conflict with any principle prohibiting the killing of innocent persons. My contention is that the strong presumption against the moral justifiability of killing innocents in wartime is not defeated by the usual arguments thought to warrant such killing. In short, my contention is that if modern war inevitably involves killing innocent persons, then one cannot justify modern war.

The theory of nuclear deterrence, however, holds promise in the eyes of many of providing a paradoxical guarantee of peace in the world, a peace in which the very threat to annihilate millions of innocent persons serves to guarantee that such annihilation will never come about. Even if actually waging such war should be



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immoral, credibly threatening to wage it is not immoral if it prevents such a war from taking place. In the seventh chapter I examine the reasoning underlying such thinking. I argue, first, that the threat to retaliate massively in the event of a nuclear attack is not rational; and, second, that contrary to the usual wisdom, we have no good reason to believe that nuclear deterrence has worked in the past or that, if it has, it will continue to do so in the future. More than that, I point out that even if nuclear deterrence should be one hundred percent effective, it still increases the probability of nuclear war.

Finally, I propose in the last chapter that there is available to people, if they choose to develop it, an alternative mode of conflict resolution in the form of nonviolence, which can be adapted to national defense. It provides, I contend, not only a moral response to conflict and conflicts of interest but also very likely a more effective practical means than violence of creating the conditions for a lasting peace.

## O N E

# VIOLENCE AND THE PERSPECTIVE OF MORALITY

I object to violence because, when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent.

—M. K. Gandhi

"The characteristic feature of all ethics," Simone de Beauvoir once wrote, "is to consider human life as a game that can be won or lost and to teach man the means of winning."<sup>1</sup> The point, we may suppose, is that without ethics there is no purpose to life, no winning or losing, no reason to live one way rather than another. This, we may suppose further, is true even for those with a religious commitment, for even religion bears upon conduct only to the extent that it at least implies an ethics.

De Beauvoir was speaking here of individual human life, of course. But much the same might be said of the collective life of humankind. And one need be no more than a casual observer of the course of events in the nuclear age to appreciate the fact that humankind may not win the game of life. Without a change in the direction of civilization it may not even have a future.

Can ethics "teach" us a way of winning this game? Not in any ordinary sense. It imparts no simple prescriptions that will miraculously achieve that end, and such prescriptions as are offered in philosophical and religious thought often contain divergent counsel. The means must be worked out by people themselves, drawing upon their own resources and wisdom. But without ethics it is unlikely they will succeed.

There are many possible ethics, among them the ethics of power, love, freedom, profit, work, and honor, each comprising a system of rules and principles for the guidance of conduct or, alternatively, presenting models—religious, historical, political, or

<sup>1</sup> *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Citadel Press, 1962), p. 23.