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# CONCERNED PHILOSOPHERS FOR PEACE

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## RESPONSE TO JAMES STERBA'S "ON ACHIEVING NUCLEAR DETERRENCE"

Patricia Murphy  
Temple University

I would like to respond to James Sterba's remarks which appear in the March 1984 Concerned Philosophers for Peace newsletter. I would like to highlight some points which I have made in a fuller response to his theory in an as yet unpublished paper.

1) Mr. Sterba, while claiming to avoid both implicit and explicit threats through the presentation of his theory, has not done so. Threats, far from being merely verbal are, as I have argued elsewhere, also properly construed as actions (such as dangling children out the uppermost windows of the Washington Monument), and situations (such as unfenced swimming pools in the presence of young children and non-swimmers of all ages). Likewise, threats can be properly construed as things, such as unleashed vicious dogs.

In each case, someone is threatened through virtue of a heightened likelihood of

harm to obtain in the case that the threat exists, than in the case that it did not exist. According to Mr. Sterba, the mere possession of a nuclear force does not constitute a threat. This can be seen as entailed by his final line: "In this way, it would be possible for a nation to achieve nuclear deterrence without either implicitly or explicitly threatening nuclear destruction." Though we may not verbally threaten, the mere having of nuclear weapons does I think, place us in the position of creating a threat.

2) At one point, it does seem that Mr. Sterba acknowledges that having nuclear forces is a threat, but that it is one that can be morally justified. This occurs in his discussion of the hunter. The hunter is justified in having his guns which function as threats because they serve some other "legitimate and independent" use, namely that necessary part of his recreation act of hunting. Creating a similar "legitimate and independent" use for nuclear forces would then justify those weapons, as being only 'accidentally' serving as threats. Such a

(cont. p. 2)

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Reply by Sterba  
P. 2

Sample Course #5  
P. 3

Announcements  
P. 3

Bibliography  
P. 5



"That was very naughty, Sir Pincus. You're not supposed to use gunpowder—it's only a deterrent."

Handelsman, United Kingdom, "Punch"



legitimate and independent other use amounts to, in Mr. Sterba's opinion, claiming that we know we don't need the weapons now, but we might need them in the future. (His words at APA in December 1983 were "just in case.")

If the analogy is to hold, then we must imagine that the "hunter" is a "hunter" even if he has never actually gone hunting, but only knows that someday he might. It does not seem that in ordinary life we call people "hunters" if they have never gone hunting, but only engage in fantasies about it, make frequent trips to sporting goods departments, and have penchants for sporting red billed caps. If we are unwilling to term such arm-chair hunters, "hunters" in any real sense, are we then willing to maintain that their guns (which have never been used to hunt with) have some "legitimate and independent" use over and above that of threatening would be intruders? I think not. Yet, if we accept Mr. Sterba's suggestion that nuclear forces would enjoy a "legitimate and independent" other use by virtue of being available in the case that they are needed, we must be willing to call our non-hunting fantasizer a "hunter."

3) Given the above two objections it seems clear that to suppose that the possession of weapons can be justified through appeal to "legitimate and independent" uses, aside from their function to threaten, is a delusion. To attempt such contorted lengths to justify their possession ought to render us aware of the moral status of possessing them. We reach for justifications precisely when we know there is something morally "fishy" in our midst. Although Mr. Sterba has attempted to cover his tracks, the path is now so inordinately clear that anyone might follow him. His attempt to remove from the realm of threats the fact of possessing a nuclear force does not succeed. As such, he has not succeeded in presenting a theory free from "implicit threats" as he claims to have done in his final line. And, by merely presenting a theory which escapes the charges of verbal threats only, it is difficult to see why such a theory ought to enjoy the title of being morally preferable to others in which the threats inherent in deterrence are rendered overt.

#### JAMES STERBA REPLIES:

My account of the possibility of achieving nuclear deterrence without implicitly or explicitly threatening nuclear destruction trades on a distinction between threatening and threats that Ms. Murphy does not seem to notice. For Murphy "threats" can be properly construed as "things, situations or actions." But something can be a threat, or more typically be perceived as a threat, without anyone threatening. Thus I am not denying that the superpowers would perceive each other's nuclear arsenal to be a threat; I am only denying that a nation which possesses such an arsenal must necessarily be construed as implicitly or explicitly threatening to use it. Thus what is crucial to my account is not the mere absence of a verbal threat but rather the possibility of a legitimate and independent use for the possession of nuclear weapons, namely, to have the capability of threatening quickly, if necessary, on some future occasion.

With respect to my "hunter analogy," although it is certainly possible to possess a gun for the purpose of going hunting and yet never in fact go hunting, we would probably not, as Murphy correctly points out, call such a person a hunter. But what is the relevance of this to my account? Certainly, if hunting were the purpose for which a person possessed a gun, the possession would still constitute a legitimate use, even if the person, for good reasons, never in fact went hunting, and, hence, could not strictly speaking be considered a hunter. Moreover, in the case of the possession of nuclear weapons, I never denied that a nation which possessed nuclear weapons for the purpose of threatening nuclear retaliation if circumstances changed for the worse, might not find that circumstances had changed for the worse and then legitimately threaten nuclear retaliation. I only claimed that such threatening is not presently necessary.

Finally, while I obviously think that the difference between achieving deterrence as the foreseen consequence of one's action and achieving deterrence as the intended consequence of one's action is morally relevant, I never claimed that it is all that



is morally relevant. That is why in the longer paper to which Murphy refers,\* I argued, for example, that the possession of nuclear weapons should be limited to a submarine force alone and that expenditures for nuclear weapons should never take precedence over expenditures for basic welfare. Yet while this foreseen/intended difference is admittedly not the whole story, it still is an important part of that story, and, hence, it should not be ignored by those, like ourselves, who are looking for meaningful and practical steps to slow down and ultimately put an end to the nuclear arms race.

\* "How to Achieve Nuclear Deterrence Without Threatening Nuclear Destruction," in The Ethics of War and Nuclear Deterrence, ed. James P. Sterba (Belmont, 1984), 155-168.

#### JOINT MEETING SCHEDULED AT EASTERN APA

Concerned Philosophers for Peace, Gandhi-King Society, Society for Women in Philosophy, Society for Radical Philosophy, and others will meet jointly to discuss issues and projects of mutual interest at the New York Eastern APA meetings. The meeting is planned for December 28, 7:15 PM, Nassau Suite A.

Suggestions for issues or projects should be sent to organizer David Weinberger, Philosophy Program, Stockton State College, Pomona, NJ 08240; 609/652-1776 x463.

The joint meeting is in addition to the regular CPP meeting to be held December 28, 12-1:50, Sutton Parlor South.

#### HELP WANTED, PACIFIC APA MEETINGS

CPP members attending the March 1985 APA meeting in San Francisco and willing to chair or help organize the CPP meeting there are urged to contact Rupert Buchanan, 3403 NE 11th, Portland, OR 97212; 503/281-6260.

#### SAMPLE COURSE #5

Domestic and International Conflict  
James Leehan  
Cleveland State University

Description: This course will be a multidisciplinary examination of the causes of conflict in our society at the personal, social, and international levels. Theories of conflict and conflict resolution will be studied and applied to specific forms of conflict. Students will be involved in experiential conflict resolution activities.

#### Texts:

Studies in Domestic and International Conflict (SDIC), eds. Theodore Kotila, Karen Clark, and Gordon Hinzmann (Wayne State Univ, 1977).  
Getting to Yes, Roger Fisher and William Ury (Penguin, 1983).  
Alternative Methods for International Security (AMIS), Carolyn Stephenson (Union Press, 1982).

#### I: Introduction

Definition of conflict  
Nature and kinds of conflict  
Nature and forms of peacemaking and conflict resolution

#### Readings:

SDIC, 3-30, 77-83

Getting to Yes

#### Recommended:

Peace and Change, Vol 8, Nos 2&3, 3-28

Peacemaking, Barbara Stanford, 15-86

Stable Peace, Kenneth Boulding, 3-66

Conflict and Defense, K. Boulding, 1-40, 80-188

#### II and III: Domestic Conflict: Family

Violence and Racism  
Sources of Family Conflict  
The Abusive Family  
Racism

#### Readings:

SDIC 84-103, 113-164, 195-202

Getting to Yes

Definitions of racism (handout)



## Recommended:

Childhood Comes First, Ray Helfer, 3-100  
The Abusing Family, Blair and Rita  
 Justice, 25-107  
Kerner Report  
Peacemaking, B. Stanford, 143-266,  
 254-308

## IV and V: Domestic and International

Conflict: Hunger  
 The problem  
 The causes  
 Proposals for solution

## Recommended:

Food First, Frances Moore Lappe and  
 Joseph Collins, 13-21, 75-85, 111-118,  
 181-187, 325-343, 373-383  
Bread and Justice, McGinnis, 7-53,  
 238-253

## VI: International Conflict: National Security

Increasing lack of world security  
 Problems with national security system  
 Approaches to national security

## Readings:

AMIS 27-36, 47-67, 156-202

## Recommended:

World Military and Social Expenditures  
 1983 (WMSE), Ruth Sivard  
A Stable Peace, K. Boulding, 31-92  
 "The prediction of war using the  
 tensiometer," A. Newcombe and R.  
 Klaassen  
 "The prediction of war," A. Newcombe  
Toward a Human World Order, Gerald and  
 Patricia Mische, 5-100  
Toward an Alternative Security System,  
 R. Johansen  
Toward a Dependable Peace: A Proposal  
for an Appropriate Security System,  
 R. Johansen, 25-58  
This Endangered Planet, Richard Falk  
 93-213  
Conflict and Defense, K Boulding,  
 227-344

## VII and VIII: International Conflict: Nuclear

Arms  
 The numbers: who has how much of what?  
 Nuclear strategy concepts (deterrence,  
 countervalue, counterforce, first  
 strike, etc.)  
 Ethical implications of nuclear arms: can

there be a just nuclear war?

The military: costs and conversion  
 Possibilities and procedures for  
 prevention (What works in arms  
 control negotiation? Can we trust  
 the Russians? US domestic problems  
 with negotiations)

## Readings:

SDIC 295-321  
 AMIS 37-46  
Getting to Yes

## Recommended:

The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Threat,  
 Alan Wolfe  
Toward A Dependable Peace..., Johansen  
 (op. cit.), 1-16  
The True Worlds, Johan Galtung, 186-205,  
 215-236  
 WMSE  
The Challenge of Peace (Bishops  
 Pastoral)

## IX: International Security: Policy

Possibilities

Proposed procedures for reducing the  
 possibility of war and achieving  
 global security (gradual reciprocated  
 initiatives in tension-reduction,  
 demilitarization - depolarization  
 etc., international peacekeeping)  
 Values necessary for a just system for  
 international security (peace,  
 economic well-being, social justice,  
 ecological balance)  
 Models and structures for world order  
 (self-reliance, regionalism,  
 functionalism, world federalism,  
 international law, integration)

## Readings:

AMIS 69-101  
 SCID 325-343

## Recommended:

Toward a Human World Order, Misches,  
 241-276  
Peacemaking, B. Stanford, 409-478  
Toward an Alternative Security System,  
 R. Johansen  
A Stable Peace, Boulding, 93-122  
The True Worlds, Galtung, 255-392  
A Study of Future Worlds, Richard Falk,  
 11-40, 150-275  
This Endangered Planet, Richard Falk,  
 285-438



On the Creation of a Just World Order,  
S. Mendlovitz, 189-206  
Toward a Just World Order, R. Falk et al,  
198-215  
An Alternative to War or Surrender,  
Charles Osgood, 85-183

X: International Security: Methods of Change  
Consciousness raising  
Political organizing (coalitions,  
networks, campaigns)  
Nonviolent direct action  
Theory and discipline of nonviolence  
(hazards of violence, methods of  
nonviolent protest, methods of social,  
economic, and political  
non-cooperation, methods of  
nonviolent intervention)

#### Readings:

AMIS 103-149  
Getting to Yes

#### Recommended:

Toward a Human World Order, Misches  
217-329  
The Politics of Nonviolent Action, Gene  
Sharp  
Peacemaking, B. Stanford, 88-125,  
349-405, 483-490

### RECENT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Journal of Applied Philosophy, 1 (1984),  
5-21.  
Beres, Louis Rene, Mimicking Sisyphus:  
America's Countervailing Nuclear  
Strategy (Lexington, 1984).  
Fox, Michael and Groarke, Leo, eds., Nuclear  
War: Philosophical Perspectives (Peter  
Lang, forthcoming, Spring 1985).  
Gauthier, David, "Deterrence, Maximization  
and Rationality," Ethics, 94 (April 1984),  
474-500.  
Murnion, William, "The Role and Language of  
the Church in Relation to Public Policy,"  
in Catholics and Nuclear War  
(Crossroads, 1983).  
Shaw, William H., "Nuclear Deterrence and  
Deontology," Ethics, 94 (April 1984),  
248-260.  
Wells, Donald A., War Crimes and Laws of  
War (Univ Press of America, 1984).

### COURSE SYLLABI

Philosophers designing courses on the  
nuclear arms race should be aware of two  
new resources:

UCAM has a 10-page "Summary of Courses  
on Nuclear War" listing and briefly  
summarizing some 70 courses offered at  
colleges and universities throughout the U.S.  
The Summary costs \$2 and each syllabus  
ordered from the summary costs \$2 or five  
for \$7.50. Write to:

United Campuses to Prevent Nuclear War  
1346 Connecticut Ave, Suite 1019  
Washington, DC 20036

The World Policy Institute has issued its 4th  
edition of Peace and World Order Studies: A  
Curriculum Guide, ed. Barbara Wien (WPI,  
May 1984). Mainly consists of model syllabi  
on militarism and the arms race, world  
political economy and economic justice,  
women and world order, hunger and the  
politics of food distribution, and other topics,  
but also includes a description of some 40  
major and minor peace studies programs and  
a list of over 70 sources of seed money for  
peace and social justice education. And  
more: a filmography, bibliography, a list of  
peace and world order programs worldwide,  
and an annotated compilation of key  
organizations. \$9.95. Write to:

World Policy Institute  
777 United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY 10017

### PHILOSOPHERS CONFER

A conference on philosophy and nuclear  
arms is scheduled for Sept. 28-30 at the  
University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L  
3G1. Sessions will focus on significant recent  
work. For more information write the  
Department of Philosophy at above address.

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The newsletter of Concerned Philosophers  
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2524 NW Savier #3, Portland, OR 97210;  
503/227-5549. Brief papers, syllabi,  
bibliography, and news of interest to our  
readers are all welcomed.