

"THE ETHICS OF CALCULATION"

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Sir: In view of the importance of the subject, I have read Dr. Ernest Lefever's statement (*Worldview*, October) and Dr. John C. Bennett's rejoinder (*Worldview*, November) several times over. I think I understand the first. I am less sure about the second.

Dr. Lefever's line of argument, as I understand it, is: Peace embraces not only the absence of slaughter but also the fostering of an acceptable world order. It is incumbent then to avoid both thermonuclear war and Soviet world dominance. The complexity of this dual problem is hugely aggravated by the character of modern weapons. The difficulties are not going to vanish to please us, and we cannot afford to walk away from them. We must seek the fullest attainable knowledge of the problem and apply it with precision in dealing with the questions of force and foreign policy, and it is no answer to anguish over the problems and to disdain to engage our minds with issues so charged with tragedy. To be in a position to avoid both thermonuclear destruction and Soviet world dominance we require a thermonuclear capability sufficient to balance that of the Soviet. This entails keeping up our relevant strike capability and establishing cover enough to mitigate the effects of a strike against us. The perils—for present and future—in doing these things must be weighed with all possible care against the perils of not doing them.

As a matter of style, Dr. Lefever may overdo the tone of objectivity, but surely this does not deserve the reproaches—callousness and a willingness to harm the future for the benefit of the present—leveled by Dr. Bennett.

The charge of callousness in reference to Dr. Lefever's estimates of the potential of civil defense for reducing casualties in event of thermonuclear attack suggests an analogy. Suppose someone were to say that installation of adequate lifeboats might ensure the survival of eighty per cent of those aboard ship in event of disaster at sea. Would it be in point to charge him with cruel indifference to the fate of the other twenty per cent?

Dr. Lefever does not recommend a resumption of thermonuclear testing. He merely indicates a contingent necessity of appraising the genetic effects of such testing in perspective with the possible dire consequences of not resuming testing. This occasions Dr. Bennett's reproachful remark about favoring the present at the expense of the future. It might be in point if Dr. Bennett had some policy proposal of his own sure to serve the welfare of generations to come. If he has such, I am surely unable to discern it.

Dr. Bennett does acknowledge at one point the requirement of preventing Soviet dominance. Yet he also introduces speculations regarding other possible developments to counter the Soviet thrust and to spare us the burden—(a) "many kinds of resistance in the various countries," (b) "a question . . . as to how far Russia would be able to exercise control at a distance," (c) "the effects of more humane institutions in Russia on the degree of ruthlessness it would exercise abroad," and (d) "the effect of rivalry of the great Communist powers in leaving a space for some form of freedom in other countries." The apparent tendency of all this is to indicate that other factors independent of our actions may well take care of the problem of Soviet power and that for us the problem of peace is therefore reduced to the avoidance of slaughter.

I do wish for more clarity in his line of argument. Does he intend to counsel us to drop out of the competition in military invention and yield a monopoly of prodigious weapons to the Soviet Union? Does he wish us to put our hope in a possibility that, if the worst comes to the worst, others, with far less resource to draw upon than we have, will show hugely more courage than he thinks we should expect of ourselves? Does he seriously suppose that a quarrel between Communist China and the Soviet Union over primacy would afford a new birth of freedom in a conquered world? Does he seriously think we should count on a windfall in the form of forces within the Soviet Union to stay it from exploiting its position in the sequel to so great a victory?

I hesitate to believe that Dr. Bennett is proposing such dubious hypotheses as a basis for policy. Yet if he is not, I cannot see why he is taking issue with Dr. Lefever, unless it is over a mere question of style growing out of Dr. Lefever's failure to express himself in more anguished terms.

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