Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 24 | Issue 1 Article 10

1-1-2007

Sohail H. Hashmi and Stephen Lee, eds., ETHICS AND WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

Tomis Kapitan

ample, Yolton ends a discussion of the happiness of God by saying: "*Perhaps* the happiness of spirits (and God) is just their superior knowledge." (p. 82, emphasis added)

In the end, Yolton has succeeded in intriguing me, but not convincing me. It is at best an uphill battle to engage in the task which Yolton has undertaken for himself, and it may be that he has done the best that could be done with what is to be found in Locke's text. But if there are speculative, theological and spiritual concerns positively informing Locke's philosophy, we have yet to fully uncover it.

Ethics and Weapons of Mass Destruction, edited by Sohail H. Hashmi and Stephen Lee. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, xiii + 533 pages, $85.00 hardback, $37.99 paperback.

TOMIS KAPITAN, Northern Illinois University

This book is devoted to ethical issues concerning the use, deployment, possession, and regulation of so-called "weapons of mass destruction" (WMD). The topics are approached from a broad range of theoretical and practical perspectives, with nearly half the space given to the views of six major religious traditions. Also included are essays representing political realism, natural law ethics, liberalism, feminism, and pacifism. Contributors were asked to address six questions:

- What are the general norms concerning the use of weapons in war?
- Is it ever justified to use WMD in warfare?
- Is it ever justified to develop and deploy WMD as deterrents?
- If some nations possess WMD, is it proper to deny possession to others?
- Should there be a WMD disarmament?
- What are the policy options of the major ethical traditions concerning WMD?

This technique serves not only to distinguish major positions, depending on how these questions are answered, but also to facilitate comparison among the represented viewpoints. For the most part, the volume is historically sophisticated, sensitive to contemporary political concerns, and replete with state of the art thinking about the ethics of WMD. With its breadth and thorough index, it would be an excellent text for use in courses devoted to war, violence, and international conflict.

The editors note that there is some difficulty in determining what counts as WMD. Typically, nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons are cited, but the question has been raised whether such mechanisms as economic sanctions and machetes shouldn't also be included, since both were used to destroy hundreds of thousands of lives in the 1990s. Perhaps the best distinction between WMD and "conventional" weapons is that the former

cannot be employed without killing many civilians, that is, they are inherently indiscriminate. Still, one wonders just how sharp a demarcation this is, since combatants and military installations can be the targets of restricted uses of WMD, and throughout history, conventional weapons such as catapults, fire, exploding shells, and, more recently, aerial launched bombs have been noticeably indiscriminate when used in places other than open air battlefields.

With few exceptions, the contributions are well-written and informative, and both the editors' introduction and Steven Lee's conclusion are particularly instructive. The first two essays, by Susan Martin and Paul Szasz, nicely prepare the ground for assessing the subsequent normative discussions. Martin supplies informative charts on types of chemical and biological weapons, and also a chart on the comparative effects of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. Szasz gives a persuasive reading of "customary international law" according to which the use of chemical and biological agents is illegal, though he acknowledges that the situation is less clear concerning the use of nuclear arms.

The essays representing the major religions are largely descriptive, though at least half of them also advocate. Nigel Biggar details both traditional and contemporary positions within Christian just war thinking, and Martin Cook supplies a vivid account of the *dispensationalist* views of evangelical Christianity according to which it is both inevitable and desirable that WMD be used. David Chappell and Donald K. Swearer emphasize the cosmopolitan attitude of Buddhist ethics which generally favors elimination of WMD, with Chappell arguing persuasively that Buddhist ethics calls for "changing economic ruthlessness and national ambition into a community of interdependence through more inclusive institutions of global governance." Julia Ching, in her instructive essay on Confucianism and contemporary Chinese politics, similarly argues that WMD should be outlawed though a system of global governance. More varied responses can be found within Hinduism. While Katherine Young describes its pacifist tendencies and the pioneering opposition to WMD by Gandhi and Nehru, Kanti Bajpai describes a political Hinduism that "embraces" nuclear weapons and whose extremists rival those of dispensationalist Christians.

The essays by Sohail Hashmi and John Kelsay reveal that extremist views constitute only one segment of opinion within contemporary Islamic thought. Both describe the just war elements within the *jihad* framework. Hashmi advocates a "Muslim WMD pacifism" by encouraging Islamic nations to eschew the possession of WMD, though he acknowledges that this is a minority position within Islam. Reuven Kimelman and Joseph David describe a variety of viewpoints within the contemporary Jewish discussion of WMD, with David claiming that while the Jewish tradition "offers no single or conclusive answer" to questions about the use and possession of such weapons, it points to their rejection. On the other hand, Kimmelman concludes that Israel's possession of WMD can be justified as a deterrent, that unilateral disarmament by Israel and American—the "guarantors of the security of the Jewish people"—would be immoral, and that the nuclear club should "bully" other countries into compliance with treaties and conventions that limit or ban WMD.

The essays representing the secular ethical viewpoints are largely concerned with articulating and defending answers to the questions posed. Scott Sagan, representing the realist perspective, points out that while a realist might predict that a state would use WMD in a preventive war, national interests may very well dictate otherwise since the use of such weapons can lead to dangerous proliferation. Susan Martin argues that realism mandates a consequentialist approach to international politics which defends the possession of nuclear weapons because their powerful deterrence value enhances state security. A deterrence strategy is opposed by others, e.g., C. A. J. Cody, writing from a natural law tradition, and Henry Shue representing liberalism. WMD are effective as deterrents only if there is a conditional intention to use them, yet, any use of WMD would amount to a massive violation of *jus in bello* principles of proportionality and discrimination. Moreover, deterrence operates by arousing fear, heightening the mentality of "supreme emergency," and, thereby, causing escalation and proliferation. Disarmament is preferable despite the difficulties of achieving it. The point here is not that WMD do not deter; they do, whenever a state concludes that there is too much to lose by waging war against a possessor of WMD. The problem is that a possessor's miscalculations, whether of its own strength, or of the threats to it, or of the strength and resolve of its adversaries, increase the probability that WMD will be used, whether in response to an overt aggression or as a first-strike option against a "potential" aggressor.

Carol Cohn and Sara Ruddick, writing from a feminist perspective, are also critical of the deterrence argument, not only because of the enormous costs involved—they estimate that U.S. has already spent at least $4.5 trillion on its nuclear arsenal—but also because their possession makes their use possible. For the same reason they oppose proliferation, and keenly observe that the language of 'proliferation' by those who already possess WMD has been instrumental in producing hostility in other states. However, they find themselves in an unresolved ethical quandary, for while opposing proliferation they are aware that the campaign of non-proliferation favors the pro-Western balance of power. They conclude that feminists should drop the vocabulary of "proliferation," combat the tendency to think of nuclear power in terms of sexual potency, and commit themselves to bringing about nuclear disarmament and redressing the worldwide inequalities underwritten by U.S. military superiority.

Michael Walzer, by contrast, correctly observes that it is wholly infeasible to expect powerful nations like the U.S.A. to disarm in the presence of proliferation. His preference is that the "enlightened liberal states" do their utmost to block "dangerous states" from gaining WMD for the sake of "civilized values," and for this reason, he defends the invasion of Iraq on the grounds that it prevented Iraq from gaining WMD. Walzer is an easy target for the charge of "hypocrisy" against non-proliferationists; why should some states be allowed WMD and not others? Robert Holmes slams the simplistic division of nations into "good" and "bad"—a charge that affects not only the arguments of Walzer, but also those of Kimmelman, David, and Lucinda Joy Peach. There are no moral grounds for defending non-proliferation that cannot also be turned into an argument for total disarmament, viz., if it's too dangerous for one country to have WMD, it's too dangerous for any country to have them. Claims about the moral

superiority of "enlightened liberal states" are laughable given that the most frequently cited candidates have been among the leading aggressors and supporters of unjust regimes around the globe ever since WWII.

The essays by Robert Holmes and Duane Cady, articulating and defending varieties of pacifism, are the most philosophically proficient in the book, though both are at their strongest in criticizing those who support the possession and deployment of WMD. There is little question that a pacific settlement of disputes is a moral ideal worth espousing and pursuing, and also, that it is morally correct to advocate a complete abolition of WMD—precisely because their destructive force is so powerful and difficult to contain. But short of an effective coordinated effort on the part of all nations to disarm, neither Holmes nor Cady provide a convincing response to the simple query that confronts the WMD pacifist; what about a situation of self-defense? Are we ever justified in taking up arms against an aggressor? If so, are we not also justified in preparing ourselves for defense against would-be aggressors, or at least, those who have demonstrated aggressive intent against us? If so, are we not justified in preparing ourselves with weapons that either would actually deter them or would be powerful enough to defeat them, e.g., WMD? I see an affirmative answer to each of these questions, however disturbing it might be.

The problem with the call for disarmament is this: because WMD are seen as vital to self-defense given that some states already possess them, then it is impractical to expect any nation to unilaterally disarm in the absence of international mechanisms that would ensure *universal* disarmament. Few nations will voluntarily abandon their defenses if it means submitting to the hegemony of others, yet, at present, the dominant nations have not allowed any international agency to engineer an effective program of universal disarmament. This is a further reason to distrust non-proliferation arguments, especially when it comes to one of the main regions where political tensions and the likelihood of proliferation are the greatest, namely, the Middle East. Israel, with its nuclear weapons, its record of aggression against neighboring states, its atrocities against Palestinians under occupation, and its virtually unqualified support from the U.S., provides Arab and Islamic peoples a legitimate concern for their own safety, and a real incentive to follow the lead of Pakistan by acquiring WMD of their own in order to better their defenses and political leverage. I fault Hashmi for not highlighting this concern, and no one should be surprised or indignant if his advice for Islamic countries to unilaterally abandon efforts to acquire WMD falls upon deaf ears.

T*he Christian Platonism of Simone Weil*, edited by E. Jane Doering and Eric O. Springsted. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004. Pp. xii + 252. $45.00 (hardback); $27.50 (paperback).

PATRICK SHERRY, Lancaster University, England

The work of Simone Weil (1909–1943) is still too little known among theologians and analytic philosophers. I hope that this volume will do something to remedy this situation, both because of the quality of the twelve essays