

Morals and nuclear war¹

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Morality is not immediately concerned with what happens but with what people do. The characteristic moral judgment is not 'It would be better to have this happen than that' but 'It would be good to do this, better to do this other, and definitely bad to do that'.

It is important to restate this platitude because nearly all muddle in questions of morality comes from forgetting it. Take for example, the business of the population explosion and contraceptives: you can have an interesting discussion about whether the world would be a better place with a large population or a small one, whether a large population means too many mouths to feed or more hands to work, and so on. Such a discussion can be very interesting but is attended by a curious difficulty—apart from dogma and prejudice it is exceedingly difficult to rest the discussion on any firm basis at all. You get difficult exchanges like 'If you do such and such, the human race will not survive'. 'Why should the human race survive?' 'Well I just want it to'. Mr Evelyn Waugh's famous and characteristic remark that he saw no objection to the destruction of the human race, especially if, as seems likely, it should happen accidentally, was taken as some kind of joke. But it is perfectly serious. Mr Evelyn Waugh sees no objection, if you are surprised it is up to you to think of an objection. One of the most interesting things about a discussion of this kind is that it brings you up against these curious puzzles. We normally take it for granted that it is a good thing to have a human race about the place for as long as possible; in such a discussion we have to ask ourselves not only whether this is true, but whether it means anything at all.

But interesting or not, such discussions are very different from moral discussions. The moral questions do not arise when we ask whether it would be good or bad to have a large population, they arise when we ask what we propose to do about it. Moral questions concern the human actions which bring about happenings. In abstraction from the human actions the happenings themselves are morally neither good nor bad. Take the death of six million Jews in the concentration camps. This took place some years ago and quite a lot of the people concerned

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would have been dead by now anyway; but we think of their death as constituting a staggering moral fact because some people were responsible for them, because of the human deeds that brought them about.

All this is true of the discussions that go on about nuclear warfare. You can have a fascinating discussion about whether it would be better to have a world dominated by Communism or a world in which industrial civilization had been destroyed and the human race either eliminated altogether or reduced to a tiny fraction living in the remoter forests of Africa and South America. Lord Russell holds that it would be the lesser evil to suffer Communist domination—it would not last more than a few centuries at the most anyway, whereas to build human civilization starting more or less from scratch after the nuclear catastrophe would take thousands of years. The more clear sighted of the advocates of the bomb take the opposite view. It seems to be largely a matter of choice, there seems to be no way of deciding between the views. Of course there are the people in between who have not thought through the consequences of an actual all-out nuclear war, and these you can argue with. You can say 'Look, this is what happens when a nuclear explosion takes place; a certain number of these are due to take place, the final result will depend on their distribution over the earth's surface. A certain number of people are able to survive without the organization and communications of industrial society; if these are not actually burnt to death or destroyed by radiation sickness or the epidemics coming from the centres where people *have* starved to death, then this number of people are likely to survive'. You can have a pleasant discussion on these lines—the latest contribution seems to be Herman Kahn's book *On Thermonuclear War*—all about the likely extent of the nuclear catastrophe. You can get the same sort of fun out of this that you get from writing or reading science fiction, and indeed a great deal of imagination is required to fill in the gaps in our information. There is a lot of guesswork involved. But I suppose that very few people would guess that democracy would survive the crash, the kind of government needed to pull together the survivors would be something much more primitive and inhuman. However when you have finished calculating and guessing, you are still left to choose as a matter of taste between Lord Russell and the others.

Now my point is that none of this is a moral discussion. You can say 'I would rather be killed than governed by Communists' and this is a statement of personal preference, a matter of taste. You can say 'I would rather my friends and children were killed than ruled by Com-

munists' and this too is a statement of preference, it is not yet a moral judgment. The moral judgment only comes in when you say 'I ought (or ought not) to do this to prevent Communist rule'. Morality is a matter of what you do.

The intelligent moral objection to nuclear war is not that in such a war a lot of people are liable to die, but that such a war involves murder. Death is morally neutral, the destruction of the entire human race is morally neutral provided, as Mr Waugh reminds us, it occurs by accident. Let us then look at the morals involved. A Christian is absolutely committed to the proposition that there are certain actions which one must not do, whatever the consequences. In this the Christian tradition differs from a great deal of the ethical thinking going on at the present day in Europe. The tendency of many contemporary philosophers—and deriving from them, the tendency of popular writers, is to seek solutions to moral questions in the end in terms of consequences alone: 'It must be right to do this (e.g. use contraceptives) because the effects of not doing so are so bad'. Now very often moral questions can be decided in this way, but according to the teaching of the Church, occasionally you come up against a snag: there are certain things which we have not the authority to do even if by doing them we could make the world a happier, sweeter, pleasanter place. The foundation of this teaching is that we are not in absolute charge of the world, there are limits to our competence. I shall make no attempt here laboriously to defend this thesis, it is as I say, a teaching fundamental to Christianity, though it is very frequently questioned outside the Church.

The first problem before us is therefore a clearly defined one: Is the use of nuclear weapons one of these acts which may not be done however good the consequences which might follow? If we decide that it is then we need not weigh up our guesses about probable consequences, the use of such weapons is ruled out from the start. There would be further questions such as how best to prevent them being used and what our personal responsibility is in this respect, but these further questions would depend on what sort of answer we gave to the first.

Let us therefore see first whether there are moral absolutes involved in the use of nuclear weapons. Those who claim that there are assert that the use of these weapons involves murder—the deliberate direct killing of innocent people. We have to decide whether their case holds water.

First of all, what do we mean by nuclear weapons? For the purpose

of this discussion I mean the Hydrogen Bomb as it has been tested in various parts of the world and the warheads of ballistic missiles. Of course there could be much smaller nuclear weapons: the rockets intended to destroy aircraft and so on. With these we are not immediately concerned. By a nuclear war we mean a war waged with nuclear weapons on the scale of Hydrogen bombs.

It is clear that these weapons are used to kill people so we must ask what precisely are the conditions under which I may kill someone. Let us distinguish very clearly between punishment and other forms of defensive action. Punishment, from one point of view at any rate, is a means by which the community defends itself: it consists in the legal authority doing something unpleasant to someone who has deliberately broken the law in order to deter others from imitating him. Punishment presupposes a settled law and a common authority. A man is clear from the start that he is under a certain single authority and that it has made these and these laws, or he ought to be clear about this. Punishment takes place after the event in order to make it less likely that others will commit the same offence. The whole purpose and justification of punishment is that it keeps down the statistics of crime. It is commonly held by Christian theologians that as a last resort, if it keeps down the crime statistics and nothing else will, the state is justified in using killing as a punishment.

The reason why we have wars is that there is no settled law and common authority as between people in separated parts of the world. For this reason the whole basis for the administration of punishment is lacking. You cannot justify killing enemy soldiers as a punishment. How then is it justified, if at all? It is justified as a form of defence. Here we traditionally distinguish between what is permissible to an individual in his private capacity and what is permissible to him as an agent of the State. If a man is trying to steal your property you may not, of course, prevent him by deliberately killing him. This would be direct murder. The only defence if he died would be that his death was accidental in the modern English sense of that word—a something that you did not intend and which happened through no fault of your own. You threatened him with a gun and did not know it was loaded.

If however a man is trying to kill you, then you are entitled to use the minimum necessary force to prevent him even if this results in his death, and the same is true if he is trying to kill someone else. Here you are saving someone's life and it is unfortunate but no fault of yours that you are saving it in conditions which involve the death of the would-be

murderer. If it is anybody's fault it is his own. Let me clarify that a little. If two children are trapped in a burning house and I can only save one of them I shall have to choose between them. One of them I leave behind, but I am not responsible for his death although I could have prevented it. Clearly what I have done is save one of the children, I have only killed the other *per accidens*, not now in the sense of accidentally but in the sense that his death was involved in saving the other. Now the would-be murderer and his victim are like the two children in the burning house (except that in this case the situation is due to the would-be murderer; in this case one of the children deliberately set the house on fire) I save the victim and it is not my responsibility if this means the other man has to die. There is a further moral point to mention here: I am not responsible for the man's death so I am morally in the clear about it, but of course I can always spoil things by wishing him dead. If I am due to inherit large sums of money from him and I am delighted to find him in the position of would-be murderer so that I can kill him legally, then I am guilty of murder in my heart, just as I am when I wish anyone to die violently. This is how 'intentions' come into morals: a bad intention can make an otherwise good act bad, but a good intention cannot make an otherwise bad act good.

A private person then cannot ever deliberately and directly seek the death of another man, though he may get into a position where he must do things that involve the death of another. The same is traditionally held not to be true of the State. In defending its integrity against an attack the State (which means individuals acting in the name of the State) may, if that is the only effective way, kill the attackers in order to prevent them doing what is unjust. In other words a soldier may deliberately intend to kill an enemy soldier in order to defend the community. Let us be clear where the justification lies. We are in the first place not punishing the enemy soldier, we are not killing him because he is a wicked man (we are indeed bound in charity to believe he is a good man unless we are forced to believe otherwise) we are killing him to prevent him doing the objectively unjust act that he is engaged in doing. If he stops it (if for example he surrenders) we have no justification left for killing him. What we mean by 'innocents' in a war are not morally good people but (in the etymological sense of the word), relatively *harmless* people, people who are not professionally engaged in harming us in the sense of seeking by violence to overthrow the authority of our community. It is not a justification for killing someone that he agrees with the enemy, we are not allowed to kill a civilian merely

because he is wholeheartedly in support of the enemy side.

Conversely we do not have to ask whether our enemy soldier is a convinced Communist or Nazi or whether he has been dragooned into fighting against his will. Our purpose is not to punish or to educate but to defend ourselves. Hence it is quite irrelevant to ask whether in a totalitarian state the soldiers have any say in what they do. We do not kill them because they are responsible for the war but because they are engaged in carrying it out.

This is perhaps the point to notice a change in the grammar of the word 'war' which has taken place since medieval times and can confuse us slightly. War, for us, is the name of a *situation* in which two or more countries are involved. Medieval theologians thought of it primarily as the name of an *action*—the act of making war. Two or more countries made war on each other. The war of Italy against France was one action, the war of France against Italy was another. Thus when they spoke of a 'just war' they meant the just waging of war by one state and this could only happen if the other state was waging war unjustly—for the only justification recognized for war by the central Christian tradition is defence against unjust war. The idea that it is right to wage war on people because they are Communists or obnoxious in some such way is a modern heresy condemned when it first appeared by the theologian Vittoria. It follows that in the situation of war as a matter of objective fact, at most one side is justified in killing the men of the other side. Maybe neither side is engaged in just warfare but certainly they cannot both be.

If then I am engaged in just warfare I have the right to kill the enemy combatants in order to put them out of action—and generally speaking in the past the economics of war have been such that this is all a commander wanted to do. It is expensive to do more than is strictly necessary. This did not necessarily work out perfectly in practice, partly because of the incompetence of commanders and partly because of cruelty and desire for revenge, but in theory the moral demands of a just war were in line with the economic demands. Once upon a time the killing of civilians was not an efficient way of putting troops out of action. An army had a sort of autonomy—men went off to war and came back again or failed to come back again. The situation is now different, we have or let us hope we *had*, a thing called total war, and for our purposes one important consequence of this is that it is now technically possible to put troops out of action by killing non-combatants. To a large number of contemporary moralists and, if we are to

believe what they say, to a large number of military men, this presents no special moral problem. Whatever means will put the enemy out of action as quickly and efficiently as possible is, for them, a justifiable means. For them a total war means one in which the killing of civilians has become a means of winning the war and therefore is now justifiable.

The Christian however cannot take this line. For him the invention of the techniques of total war is parallel to the invention of the techniques of contraception. As a means of population control the old techniques of abortion were both dangerously inefficient and morally wrong, so Christian and non-Christian were agreed about them. But contraception is not dangerously inefficient so Christian opinion is left alone to protest. Saying that something has become economically possible does not for him mean the same thing as saying that it is justifiable.

There are however two ways in which we might justify the killing of civilians. The first is to say that they are really combatants in disguise. The second is to say that they are killed *per accidens*—like the would-be murderer or the child you leave behind in the burning house.

Let us examine these in turn: sometimes when people say that nowadays everybody is a combatant, it turns out that they simply mean that we have total war, i.e. war in which killing civilians is an efficient way of immobilizing troops. This of course is true or pretty nearly true, but the question is not whether it is possible but whether it is morally permissible. The fact that techniques have so far progressed that contraception now achieves the same effects as total continence has no tendency to prove that contraception is a disguised kind of continence. Similarly the fact that killing them may have the same effect has no tendency to show that civilians are a kind of combatant. This argument is therefore a mere begging of the question, and no argument at all.

Another argument which is usually muddled up with this one is the much better one that in modern war the number of combatants is conspicuously bigger than the number of men in uniform. A combatant in an unjust war is one who is actually engaged in an objectively unjust activity directed against the authority of your community. Now it seems clear that the men engaged in making armaments and transporting them to the troops are doing just this. Armaments are things that the troops need simply in order to attack you. If they stopped attacking you they would stop needing them, their manufacture is thus obviously a part of the attack on you that you are entitled to stop if necessary by killing the people engaged in it. You are therefore, I am sorry to say, in

a just war quite entitled to machine-gun workers coming out of a munitions factory. That is, you are entitled directly and deliberately to kill them. Notice here that it is not a question of killing them *per accidens* in an attempt to destroy the factory—we will come to that in a minute—it is a question of killing them deliberately as you would kill a soldier on the battlefield. It is perfectly true, I think, that they are combatants and let us be quite clear what this means, it means we are entitled to kill them in cold blood. Notice also that, as with the soldiers it makes no difference whether they go voluntarily and joyfully to the factory to make weapons because they hate you, or whether they are slave labourers longing for you to win. You are entitled to kill them simply because whether they like it or not they are objectively engaged in an unjust activity which you must stop. Of course you may only kill them if it is going to help, just as you may only kill soldiers if it is going to help.

Now there is a wholly woolly notion that because combatants extend beyond the armed forces they in some vague way extend indefinitely. It is as though people had got so hypnotized by the military uniform, which used to mark the boundary between combatant and non-combatant, that once this safe and easy boundary mark is down there is no way of making the distinction.

We must be clear that a combatant is a man or woman you are entitled to kill in cold blood to prevent the actual unjust action he or she is doing, and then ask about the rest of the people in the enemy society. It is perfectly obvious that the overwhelming majority of them are not combatants at all. Remember once more, it is not the fact that his life and work is valuable to the army that makes a man a combatant, it is the fact that he is engaged in combative work. Quite evidently the people producing food are not in this position. Food unlike armaments is not something that men need simply to attack you, the manufacture of food simply cannot be regarded as part of an attack upon you. Of course if it ceased the attack would cease, but this does not mean you are entitled to make it cease by murdering people. Of course you can try to make it cease in other ways, by burning crops, bombing trains and sinking ships, in the course of which operations non-combatants may get killed, but that is another point we shall be coming to next. It seems then that the theory of a whole population of combatants does not hold. 'A nation in arms' is a good slogan to encourage the agricultural worker and the bus driver to work harder but it does not make his work into warfare.

Let us turn then to the other way in which we might justify the killing of civilians: this is that they may be killed *per accidens*. We have already seen the sort of thing that this means.

When you leave a child behind in a burning house because you can only rescue one, you are killing him *per accidens*. It does not mean 'accidentally' for you know exactly what will happen and it happens through what you do. The fundamental principle here is that although you are forbidden directly to kill any innocent man you are not always bound to take all possible steps to keep him alive. If keeping him alive for example meant letting others die you have no obligation to keep him alive rather than the others. You may not however kill him in order to save the others. This again will be a principle that is familiar. It is one which arises in the famous question of 'mother or child' and a form of it lies behind the distinction between the use of contraceptives and the use of the sterile period.

Now suppose you wish to destroy a munitions works. Any large factory will have amongst its staff people like nurses and window cleaners who are certainly not combatants. Nevertheless you are not bound to refrain from bombing the factory in order to preserve their lives. You may not deliberately kill them in order to put the factory out of action but they may die *per accidens* in your destruction of the factory. The case is not the same, of course, with the factory workers themselves. They are combatants as has been correctly argued, and may directly be killed without a qualm.

Now suppose that instead of two children in the burning house there was one child and my favourite cat. If I rescued the cat and left the child I should be blamed for the death of the child. Not because I have directly killed the child, for I have not, but because there was not sufficient justification for letting him die. To apply the parallel here if I am not to be blamed for the *per accidens* death of civilians in my bombing raid, the thing I have come to destroy must itself be a sufficiently important military objective, a sufficient concentration of combatants or some particularly powerful weapon.

The importance of the military objective is of course to be measured by its effect on the enemy war effort, by the damage which would be done by destroying *it*—not by the damage done by the killing of the civilians in the course of its destruction.

These then seem to be the two ways in which one can justify the killing of civilians, either (1) they are combatants although not in uniform, and this we have seen may be true of certain civilians but only a

minority, or (2) they are killed *per accidens* while attacking combatants or other direct military objectives.

Now it is evident that this is not what nuclear weapons are for. Their purpose is to destroy cities and so to disrupt the life of a country that it is helpless before your invading forces. It is true that according to some writers the immediate object of the first wave of nuclear missiles would be the launching bases of the enemy's nuclear weapons, but the whole reason for this is that the nuclear weapons are intended for use against cities. If nuclear weapons were merely used to destroy each other they would have no reason to destroy each other. There is no need to quote from defence experts and military men to show that nuclear weapons are for the destruction of cities, nor will I give any account of the effect of these weapons. These things we should all be familiar with by now.

A distinguished Catholic author has argued that there could be legitimate targets for these weapons—that is, targets whose destruction does not involve the death of an overwhelming number of non-combatants, a fleet at sea is his favourite. Those of us who feel that we are expending millions of pounds a year on nuclear weapons to destroy obsolete battleships will take this point with due seriousness.

It seems to me therefore to be clear that nuclear weapons, in the sense in which I am using the term, are not legitimate weapons of war. Apart from one or two improbable targets they are weapons whose function has murder built into it, just as contraceptives have sexual sin built into them. Unless we are agreed about this it will be impossible to discuss the second question I want to raise: that is the question of our responsibilities in the face of existing nuclear weapons. I want to make clear what seems to me the logical consequence of applying Christian principles to nuclear warfare: it is that we may not use nuclear weapons. It does not matter how good the effect might be, it does not matter whether somebody else such as the enemy has used them first. The thing being wrong in itself it cannot be justified by any circumstances. It is vital to be clear about this: some weapons are peculiarly horrible even though they may be legitimate, of these we may well say 'We will not use them unless the enemy uses them first' (as we said of poison gas in the last war) but the case of nuclear weapons is different, they are not just horrible but wrong in themselves.

Now if we agree about this (and only if we agree) we may ask the different question: ought we therefore to manufacture and possess these weapons or not? The answer to this by no means follows directly from the answer to the other, though I think that frequently members

of CND suppose that it does. When we have an action such as murder which is wrong in itself we have two sorts of obligations: in the first place we must not under any circumstances do it ourselves and secondly in most circumstances we should try to prevent it being done by others. We have an absolute obligation not to commit murder, we have not an absolute obligation to prevent it. If for example an interrogating officer threatens to murder my father unless I reveal the names of members of my underground network, I have no obligation to prevent this murder by betraying my companions. Nevertheless I normally have an obligation to prevent murder and when it is murder on the colossal scale implied in the use of nuclear weapons, I have a very strong obligation indeed, one of the gravest positive obligations that any man has at the present day. Positive obligations, like for example the obligation to pray or to eat, do not as the medievals put it, bind *ad semper*. You are always obliged to pray but you are not obliged to pray all the time. Thus though we are always obliged to prevent H bombs being dropped we are not obliged to spend our whole time doing this. Nevertheless someone who gave no thought to whether his activities were increasing or decreasing the likelihood of these weapons being used, would be in a very dangerous moral state.

Notice that our obligation to prevent them being dropped has nothing to do with who drops them. We have an equally grave obligation to do all in our power to prevent the Russians from dropping them as to do all in our power to prevent the Americans from doing so. We may perhaps have more power in the one case than the other but the obligation is radically the same. Now it is precisely here that the argument between unilateralists and others starts or ought to start. On the unilateralist side you frequently get people who think it sufficient to say that the use of the bomb is wicked; this is true but not enough. Also you get people who believe that when a wicked action is in the offing, your first duty is to convince other people that it is a wicked action. This is not true: your first duty is to prevent the wicked action being done.

On the other side the opponents of the unilateralists are frequently people who have either not thought about the morals of nuclear warfare or have come to the false conclusion that the use of nuclear weapons is justifiable. According to a recent newspaper report 'One small trade union, the Metal Mechanics, were easily and almost casually converted (from unilateralism) in a pub one Sunday when Mr Howells met the standing committee, and put the simple question

whether they believed in defending Britain'. Our destinies do not lie wholly in the hands of the Metal Mechanics but the event is symbolic of a widespread blindness to real moral issues. It is as though someone were converted from his opposition to mercy-killing by being asked the simple question 'Do you want this man to be in pain?'

No, both the unilateralists and their opponents have better cases than this. Both can begin by agreeing that the use of these weapons is absolutely out in any circumstances, but then the argument can begin. The unilateralist case briefly is that there is a tendency for these weapons to spread and for more and more countries to think it worth while spending the enormous sums required to manufacture them. This tendency can be checked by deliberately getting rid of the weapons wherever they are. The tendency is a vicious spiral which can only be broken by breaking it. It does not matter *where* you break it so long as it is broken somewhere, then the tension will go out of it. No country, it is argued, wants to have nuclear weapons around (not because of any high virtue but because of the cost), they only have them because others have. Now so long as there are a lot of these things lying around, sooner or later some fool is going to use them.

The opponent of the unilateralist has a different picture: for the unilateralist the tension of nuclear competition is what leads to the expansion of nuclear weapons. For his opponent it is what prevents them being used. The Deterrent Theory is that we are justified in having nuclear weapons in order to prevent them being used.

There is one criticism of the deterrent theory on moral grounds which we may dispose of straight away. This is the argument that deterrence involves a paradox. If you have nuclear arms, the argument runs, you either intend to use them or you do not. If you do intend to use them then you are not relying on deterrence to justify your possession of them; if you do not intend to use them they will not be a deterrent. In order for them to be deterrent you would have at least to pretend by lying that you would use them, and lying—like the little girl in Rikkiti Tikkiti Tin—we know is a sin. This argument will not do because we do not in fact need to tell lies about our intentions. If I have rockets with nuclear warheads pointing at Moscow, however much I claim that my Christian morality would debar me from using them, Krushchev is going to be deterred from launching his. The Deterrent Theory therefore survives this criticism.

The more damaging criticism is the unilateralist come-back that deterrence is a theory designed for a two-power world. Would

America be deterred from solving its Cuban problems with an H bomb by fear of Russian retaliation? If China eventually makes a nuclear attack on India will Britain court the destruction of London by retaliating against China's allies? The theory of the deterrent is all right for the interim period while we have two nuclear giants leaning against each other and underneath the little people fight it out with napalm bombs and tactical atomic weapons. For the moment as an interim measure we can perhaps stave off destruction by building up conventional forces and relying on them for local contained wars—this at any rate seems to be Mr Kennedy's view, if not Mr Watkinson's. This leads to the paradoxical conclusion that the up-to-date pacifist will be found taking part in recruiting drives and demanding the return of conscription. This might work if we could return to the older idea of war for definite limited objectives, war which ceased when the objectives were either attained or lost, war which ended with terms of peace and not unconditional surrender. We can manage something like this still with local wars, as in Algeria, but the world conflict will not be of this kind. Quite apart from the serious moral objections to the kind of thing that goes on in a modern local war, the unilateralists are surely right in claiming that with the spread of nuclear weapons local wars are not going to be contained indefinitely. Sooner or later, and probably sooner, the nuclear powers are going to be manoeuvred into conflict. It will be a war that nobody wants, it will not start for any clear objective and therefore will not finish with any achievement. It will be in fact an ideological war fought to destruction.

We can delay the catastrophe by intelligent statesmanship or we can hasten it by stupidity and bigotry, but it seems to me that the way of the balance of terror leads eventually—short of some quite unforeseeable discovery or invention—to the destruction of civilization. Of course unforeseeable things do occur, only sixty years ago nuclear energy was one of these. Perhaps we will establish human civilization on the moon before we destroy it on earth—anything may happen. Meanwhile the Russian and the American leaders carry on staving off the catastrophe in the hope that something will turn up. The unilateralist on the other hand wants to take the big risk of catastrophe now in the rather forlorn hope of preventing it altogether. When you are in a runaway car going down a steep winding hill towards a precipice, you can either devote your intelligence to keeping it on the road as long as possible before the inevitable smash, or you can take the risk of jumping out now and perhaps being killed, but perhaps being permanently safe.

The unilateralist wants to take the risk now. If I may declare an interest, on balance I think he is right.

The new social encyclical

J. M. JACKSON

Three times in the last seventy years, a major encyclical has been devoted primarily to economic and social questions. Each has made its contribution to the social doctrine of the Church, setting forth the moral principles which should govern economic and social relationships, drawing attention to the chief social evils of the day, and suggesting the general lines of reform. The latest of these encyclicals, *Mater et Magistra*, makes important contributions to the social teaching of the Church in four areas. First, there is a clear and authoritative re-statement of the principle of subsidiary function at a time when the provision of social services has been and is being greatly extended in many countries, and when the proper role of the state in this field is a subject of considerable controversy. Secondly, in its discussion of wages, profits and the status of the worker, the new encyclical clarifies the Church's teaching, and also shows that despite the reforms that have already come about, in some measure in response to the earlier encyclicals, much still remains to be done. Thirdly, it calls attention to the depressed state of agriculture relatively to industry, and sees in this an evil to be remedied. Finally, far greater attention is paid in this latest encyclical to international economic questions than in *Rerum Novarum* or even *Quadragesimo Anno*.

One Catholic M.P. appears to have found in the new encyclical support for the Welfare State as it exists in Britain to-day, whilst a correspondent writing to one of the Catholic papers has suggested that countries wishing to put the social encyclicals into practice would do well to copy our National Health Service. It is difficult in the extreme to see how any unprejudiced reader could draw such conclusions from reading the Encyclical: ' the presence of the state in the economic field, no matter how widespread and penetrating, must not