

Devil's bargains and the real world

The paradox of deterrence, in a nutshell, is as follows. Your best way to dissuade someone from doing harm may be to threaten retaliation if he does. And idle threats may not suffice. To succeed in deterring, you may have to form a genuine, effective conditional intention. You may have to do something that would indeed leave you disposed to retaliate if, despite your efforts, he does that thing which you sought to deter. It seems that forming the intention to retaliate would be the right thing to do if, all things considered, that was the best way to prevent the harm.

Yet it may also be, foreseeably, that should the occasion arise, it would serve no good purpose to retaliate. It would just inflict further, useless harm. Then it seems that retaliating would be the wrong thing to do. Thus it seems, incredibly, that it may be right to form the conditional intention, wrong to fulfill it. That is the paradox.

What to say? We might conclude, as Kenny and others have, that after all it is wrong to form the intention.¹ We might conclude, as Gauthier does, that after all it is right to fulfill the intention.² Either

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1 Anthony Kenny, "Counterforce and Countervalue," in *Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience*, edited by Walter Stein (London: The Merlin Press, 1965).

2 David Gauthier, "Deterrence, Maximization, and Rationality," in Douglas MacLean, ed., *The Security Gamble*. My quotations come from the preliminary version of the paper which Gauthier gave at the Maryland conference on "Nuclear

conclusion seems to fly in the face of powerful consequentialist arguments – and the stakes may be as high as you please. Or we might conclude, as Kavka has and as I do, that the truth is indeed remarkable: in such a case it is in truth right to form an intention that it would be wrong to fulfill.³

Battle is not squarely joined between Kenny, Gauthier, and Kavka. There are two different paradoxes, depending on what we mean when we speak of right and wrong. We might be speaking of instrumental rationality: of right and wrong ways to serve one's ends, whatever the moral quality of those ends may be. Then the paradox is that, seemingly, it may serve one's ends to form an intention that it would not serve one's ends to fulfill.

Or we might be speaking of morality: of good and evil ways to act or to be, whatever one's actual ends may be. Then the paradox is that, seemingly, it may be a good act to form an intention that it would be an evil act to fulfill; or that a good man might form an intention that it would take a wicked man to fulfill. Gauthier addresses the paradox about rationality; Kenny and Kavka mostly address the paradox about morality.

But it doesn't matter. Suppose that your ends are morally good ones, so that it would be morally right to pursue them in an instrumentally rational way. Suppose also that they are urgent enough that it would be morally wrong to pursue them in an instrumentally irrational way. This may be so – let the stakes be high. Then it doesn't matter whether we speak of right or wrong in an instrumental or in a moral sense. The two senses coincide, the two paradoxes coalesce.

Although I side with Kavka against Gauthier, I admire Gauthier's paper. Most of it is just right. In particular, I applaud the way that he distinguishes paradoxical cases of deterrence from all the other cases there might be. It is not to be thought that just any case of deterrence presents our twofold paradox.

Deterrence: Moral and Political Issues," at which the papers in *The Security Gamble* were first presented. Not all of these quotations appear in his final version.

3 Gregory S. Kavka, "Some Paradoxes of Deterrence," *Journal of Philosophy* 75 (1978): 285–302; see also Kavka, "Nuclear Deterrence: Some Moral Perplexities," in Douglas MacLean, ed., *The Security Gamble*.

It might be wrong for independent reasons to form the deterrent intention. For it might be too risky; it might be unlikely to succeed; it might carry other costs, e.g., in damaging the relationship between the parties. Or there might be better means of dissuasion available. It might be possible to deter without forming a conditional intention to retaliate: by pretending to have the intention, or by making retaliation automatic, or by creating fear not of intended retaliation but of uncontrolled rage, or simply by leaving it uncertain what might happen. It might be better not to use deterrence at all. If it is wrong to form the deterrent intention, for any of these reasons or any other, then our paradox does not arise.

Alternatively it might be right for independent reasons to fulfill the deterrent intention. Retaliation might not be retaliation pure and simple. It might serve some genuine end. Or it might at least seem to stand some chance of doing so. Or it might be foreseeable that retaliation would at least seem useful at the time. (Any of these things might be so by prearrangement, as when one stakes one's reputation in order to enhance the credibility of one's threat.) If it is right to fulfill the deterrent intention, for any of these reasons or any other, then again our paradox does not arise.

So much for agreement. I disagree with only one small part of Gauthier's paper. But it is the vital part, as he has said. (And vital for his views about many things besides deterrence.) What I reject is his "moving from the rationality of intention to the rationality of action, rather than vice versa." I move *neither* way. I insist on considering the two questions of rationality, or of morality, separately – each on its own merits.

In Section 5 of Gauthier's paper, several objectors come on stage one after another. The preliminary objector recommends the method of pretending to intend. He is misguided. By definition, the paradoxical case is one in which that method won't succeed. You don't make a paradox go away by talking about an unparadoxical case instead.

The first and third objectors both say that it is rational to form the deterrent intention only if it would maximize utility to retaliate, should the occasion arise. (The third objector says more besides, but he has already said too much to be true.) They are wrong: we have

seen exactly how it might happen that it is rational to form the intention although it would not maximize utility to retaliate.

I am the second objector, the one who says that “it may be rational to adopt an intention even though it would be, and one knows that it would be, irrational to act on it”; I claim that it may be “rational to commit oneself to irrational behavior” (and also that it may be good to commit oneself to evil behavior). Gauthier claims that my position is no different from his own. Not so; I deny what he firmly asserts, that there may be actions which “in themselves and apart from the context of deterrence would be irrational, but which in that context result from rational intentions and so are rational.” (Likewise I deny that there are actions which in themselves and apart from the context of deterrence would be evil, but which result from intentions it was good to adopt and so are good.)

When he is done saying that my view is the same as his own, Gauthier goes on to call it inconsistent. “If our objector accepts deterrent policies, then he cannot consistently reject the actions they require.” Why not? I accept the policies as right, I reject the actions they (conditionally) require as wrong. My opposed judgments are consistent because I make them about different things. To form an intention today is one thing. To retaliate tomorrow is something else. If we have a genuine case of paradoxical deterrence, the first is right and the second is wrong.

Gauthier fears we are talking at cross-purposes, and so explains his meaning: “To assess an action as irrational is, in my view, to claim that it should not be . . . performed.” Right; I *do* speak his language. What I claim about cases of paradoxical deterrence is that the action of forming the intention to retaliate should be performed, and that the action of retaliating should not be. The sad thing is that the action that should be performed might cause the one that shouldn’t, if deterrence fails.

And that was all that Gauthier said against the second objector.⁴ I rest my case.

4 There is something else to be said on Gauthier’s side, however, as follows. What is it to “implant an intention” in yourself? It’s not enough just to mutter “I shall . . .”

It seems too quick. Perhaps we have asked the wrong question, and bypassed the heart of the paradox. (Henceforth, I shall have in mind mostly the paradox about morality.) We were asked to judge *actions*. And we were free to pass two opposed judgments because we found two different actions to judge. But there is only one *person* to perform the two actions. What shall we say if asked to judge not the two actions but the one person?

What if the nuclear deterrence practiced by the United States on behalf of all of us is paradoxical deterrence? Suppose it is. Then what are we to think of the men in the missile fields, in the cockpits, in the submarines? What are we to think of the Commander-in-Chief? These men, we suppose, have formed a conditional intention to do their part in retaliating if the country comes under attack. In forming that intention, they did the right thing: *ex hypothesi*, they did just what they had to do to protect their country in the best way possible. They are great patriots, and benefactors of us all. And now that they have formed the intention, they are ready to commit massacres whose like has never been seen. They are ready to inflict terrible devastation when they have no country left to defend, when what they do will accomplish nothing at all except vengeance. *Ex hypothesi*, that is what they even now (conditionally) intend to do. They are evil beyond imagining, fiends in human shape.

They are vengeful. Not because they formed the intention to

in the right tone of voice! An intention seems to be some sort of compound of belief and desire concerning your own future actions. To implant an intention, you would have to implant something that would motivate you to fulfill it. But then this something would be a desire that would make it instrumentally rational to fulfill the intention. So if it were instrumentally rational to implant the intention, and if you *did* implant it, then it would be instrumentally rational to fulfill it. (Of course, this argument concerns only the paradox about rationality, not the paradox about morality.) I reply thus. If you implant the intention by implanting a desire that fails to cohere rationally with the rest of your desires, then fulfilling the intention is instrumentally rational only in a minimal sense: it does fulfill a desire you have, but it cannot be said to serve your system of desires taken as a whole. For related discussion of the difficulty of implanting an intention that would not cohere with your other desires, see Gregory S. Kavka, "The Toxin Puzzle," *Analysis* 43 (1983): 33–36.

retaliate; they had a better reason to form the intention, viz., that thereby they protected the country. But after they form it, then they have it; and to have such an intention as they now have – an intention to retaliate uselessly and dreadfully – is to be vengeful.

I myself would not despise them just for being vengeful, though I think many moralists would. For I think their vengefulness is part of a package deal. It is inseparable from their love of their country and their solidarity with their countrymen. Conceptually inseparable, I am inclined to think – could a man really be said to love his country if he were not at all disposed to make its enemies his own? Could he really be said to make them his enemies if he were not at all disposed to harm them? I doubt it. Be that as it may, surely the vengefulness and the solidarity are at least psychologically inseparable for people anything like ourselves. It seems artificial to try to take the package apart, despise part of it, and treasure the rest. And it seems repellent to despise the whole package. I cannot find it in my heart to reproach a fierce Afghan patriot who seeks to avenge his countrymen – I would sooner reproach the moralist who does reproach the Afghan – and I see no call to apply different standards to my own countrymen. True, the vengeful fall short of being utilitarian saints. They are not motivated entirely by impersonal benevolence. But, as philosophers increasingly perceive, the utilitarian saint himself is a repellent figure.⁵ If it is the business of moral philosophy to sing his praises, moral philosophy only makes itself repellent. We should be less alienated from the things that real people really treasure. And these include the loyalties and affections from which vengefulness is inseparable.

(The Christians have a special objection to vengefulness. They say that vengeance is the Lord's; a vengeful man pridefully usurps the prerogative of his Superior. We atheists need not concern ourselves with that.)

But whatever may be said in (faint) praise of vengefulness falls far short of exonerating our retaliators, if indeed they would deliver massive nuclear retaliation to accomplish nothing but vengeance. Whatever might be said in favor of some vengefulness, we cannot

5 See Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982): 419–39.

condone theirs. For it is almost entirely off target. Only a small share of our vengeance would fall only on the enemy who had chosen to attack us, and on his loyal followers (if he has any). For the most part, it would fall on his powerless and disaffected slaves. By and large, these slaves obey him out of fear – like ourselves, they are subject to *his* deterrence – and do not accept him as acting on their behalf. However much can be said in favor of vengeance against our enemy, the slaves are not our enemy. They are our enemy's victims. And this goes for the slaves in Moscow as it does for the slaves in Warsaw and Prague.

(It would be otherwise if the Soviet Union were a popular democracy, as we are, full of citizens who by and large give allegiance to the regime and accept some responsibility – whether or not they are *causally* responsible – for its actions. Vengeance against such a population, whatever else could be said against it, would at least be on target. (Mostly. But of course there are still the infants.) That suggests a distressing conclusion. It *is* otherwise in the reverse direction. Must we conclude that those Soviet officers who stand ready to retaliate against us are in a better moral position, at least in this one way, than their American counterparts? As an American, I hope that isn't so. And I think it isn't, for reasons that will emerge before I finish.)

We are back to our question: what shall we think of one man who has done right and now stands ready to do wrong, who both does his best to protect his country and is prepared to massacre countless slaves, who is benefactor and fiend in one?

Well – I've just told you what to think. He is a man who does right and would do wrong. He is a strange mixture of good and evil. *That* is what to think of him. Isn't that enough? Why do we need a simple, unified, summary judgment?

If there were a last judgment, it would then be necessary to send the whole morally mixed man to Heaven or to Hell. *Then* there would be real need for one unified verdict. I would be very well content to leave the problem of the unified verdict to those who believe in a last judgment. And they would do well to leave it to the Judge.

(I am reminded of a problem put to me years ago by Philippa Foot: The Case of the Conscientious Nazi (or: Does Erring Conscience Excuse?).⁶ The Nazi follows his conscience rigorously, resisting all temptation to do otherwise, and what his conscience tells him is to kill the Jews. What a steadfast sense of duty! What a vile notion of where his duty lies! Then what are we to think of him overall? I decline to think *anything* of him overall. I am prepared to recognize and admire and praise his genuine virtues, even when I meet them in the worst of company. (To some extent – his are not my favorite virtues.) I am no less prepared to detest his wicked and dangerous moral errors. But *is he a good man?* I leave this question to the Last Judge. Apart from Him, who needs it?)

Thus the paradox of deterrence in which persons are judged goes the way of the paradox in which actions are judged. Though we have only one person, that person has many moral aspects. We can still have the opposing judgments that seem called for, because we can still make them about different things.

It is even simpler if forming the intention to retaliate is what Kavka has called “self-corruption.” That is: if we start with men who are good through and through, and they see that wickedly vengeful men are needed if their country is to be protected in the best way possible, and they volunteer for the tragic sacrifice of virtue, and they make themselves genuinely evil. Then the difference is one of time: first they are good, afterward evil. The question how they are, not at any time in particular, is another piece of nonsense for the Last Judge. But self-corruption is artificial. The more likely thing – if *any* tale of paradoxical deterrence can be called likely – is a deliberate slacking off in self-improvement, with good and evil mingled all along. Then we need simultaneous aspects, rather than successive temporal parts, as the different things to be judged differently. And we need separable aspects, not parts of a close-knit package deal. But if the evil in

6 A related question, whether to say that a murderer who boldly faces danger in order to commit his vicious crime has acted courageously, comes in for discussion in Philippa Foot, “Virtues and Vices,” in her *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978).

question is not just vengefulness, but wantonly off-target vengefulness, then I think we have separability enough.

I find it interesting to compare our paradox of deterrence with another paradoxical case: the Devil's bargain. It is a puzzle for Christians. They think that salvation of souls is of supreme importance, infinitely more valuable than life or pleasure or earthly love or knowledge or any others among the goods we usually cherish. Right; let's adapt a stock example to their new currency. The Devil offers you a bargain; you may give him your soul, and in return he will see to it that seven others are saved. Those seven would not otherwise have stood a very good chance. Here you have an opportunity to serve the very best purpose of all. Will you take it? What should we think of you if you do?

What a noble deed! You will have made the supreme sacrifice that others may live. You will have made the *really* supreme sacrifice – not just given up your earthly life. And you will have bought the seven a gift ever so much more precious than mere life itself. You will be a hero beyond compare.

You will be a damned soul. You will be a genuine damned soul, just like the others around you in the fire. Don't think you will suffer torture with a pure heart – the Devil will not be cheated. You will be despicable in the ways that any other damned soul is. You will be a hater of God. And that, so the Christians say, is the very worst thing that it is possible to be.⁷ It seems, incredibly, that if you accept the Devil's bargain you will be each of two opposite things, wondrous hero and damned soul.

What to say? We might conclude that after all you will not be such a splendid hero, perhaps because an embargo against trading with the Devil takes precedence over the service of even the highest ends, or perhaps because you were meant to look after your own

7 Not I; I only take it as a hypothesis of the case. My own opinion is rather that of Mill and McTaggart: see John Stuart Mill, *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, & Dyer, 1865), chap. VII; and J. M. E. McTaggart, *Some Dogmas of Religion* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1906), secs. 174–77.

salvation rather than salvation generally. Or we might conclude that after all you will not really be a damned soul. *Ex hypothesi* you will be something exactly like one in intrinsic character, but perhaps damnation is a historical rather than an intrinsic property and your state will not be damnation when reached in the way that you reached it. Small comfort! Or we might conclude that, strange to say, you really will be both. In succession: first heroic, then damned.

Which conclusion should a Christian draw? None of them, I think. Instead, the Christian should insist that the case is completely bogus.⁸ He should draw no conclusion about what you would be if *per impossible* the Devil offered his bargain and you accepted it. It is preposterous to suppose that it is in the Devil's power to give or to deny salvation, to buy or sell souls. God offers salvation to all men, who accept or decline it of their own free will. The most the Devil can do is tempt us to damn ourselves.

I think the most important thing to say about the parallel case of paradoxical nuclear deterrence is exactly the same: the case is completely bogus. The paradox of deterrence is good fun for philosophers. But I think it has nothing to do with the nuclear deterrence that our country practices. It is good that Gauthier and Kavka have insisted that not just any case of deterrence is paradoxical, and good that they have declined to say that our nuclear deterrence is a paradoxical case. But such disclaimers do not go far enough. I am sorry to complain to the Center for Philosophy and Public Policy about their program for this conference, but I think this particular bit of philosophy contributes nothing but mischief to the discussion of public affairs. There is much that philosophers can indeed contribute to our understanding of issues about nuclear deterrence: for instance,

⁸ At this point I have consulted some who are more expert than I about Christian thought; I am grateful to Robert M. Adams, Mark Johnston, and Ewart Lewis. Adams notes a complication. The case of an *honest* Devil's bargain is bogus, but the case of a fraudulent one is not. Then the thing for a Christian to say resembles our first conclusion. The man who accepts the fraudulent bargain is reprehensible. He was gullible; what's worse, he lacked faith, because he was ready to suspect God of allowing the Devil to buy and sell souls.

to the topics of decision under extreme uncertainty, of incommensurable values, of complicity and innocence of civilians. But I wish we could leave the paradox of deterrence out of it. I am afraid that because paradoxical deterrence is philosophically fascinating, it will be much discussed; and because it is much discussed, it will be mistaken for reality. We don't need a bad reason to be discontented with our predicament and with our country's policies. After all, we have plenty of good reasons. And we don't need a picture of nuclear deterrence that implicitly slanders many decent patriots in the American armed forces and in the White House.

In his contribution to this volume, McGeorge Bundy has a lot to say about our vast ignorance of what would happen in a nuclear war and afterward.⁹ It is a vivid awareness of this ignorance, on all sides, that is our great safeguard against nuclear adventures when the time seems as opportune as it ever will be. All that is right. And I add that the ignorance would diminish very little if the war had actually begun.

That is why our nuclear deterrence is not paradoxical. It might indeed be true, if deterrence failed, that our retaliation would serve no good purpose, would accomplish nothing but dreadful and off-target vengeance. It might also be false. What is preposterous, no less preposterous than it would be to think the Devil could grant salvation, is to imagine that anyone could *know* that there was nothing left but vengeance. It is perfectly all right if our retaliators do not intend to inflict useless and off-target vengeance. For the choice whether to deliver that vengeance is not a choice they could ever knowingly face. Whatever happened, the real choice before them would be a harder one.

Imagine the situation of the Commander-in-Chief (de jure or de facto), if deterrence had failed and there had been a large nuclear attack. How much would he know? He would know that there had been many nuclear explosions. He would probably know roughly where some of them had been. He would know something about how much was gone; less, about how much was left. It would be

9 McGeorge Bundy, "Existential Deterrence and Its Consequences," in Douglas MacLean, ed., *The Security Gamble*.

hard for him to know the yield of the explosions, their exact location with respect to vulnerable populations and weapons, which were groundbursts and which airbursts. Perhaps he would know what sort of attack the enemy *could* deliver; but he should not take it for granted that they had done their worst. He should put no faith in scenarios of “wargasm” that flourish mainly because they make for a good read. Neither should he be taken in by circular reasoning to the effect that nuclear war would have to be fought in the most mad and fiendish way possible, because those who fought it would be mad fiends, as is shown by the mad and fiendish way they would fight. Neither should he put his faith in the opposite scenarios of “surgical war.” He might indeed have his a priori scenarios for nuclear war – even as you and I do – but he ought to put little trust in any of them.

Even if, *per impossible*, he knew exactly what attack had been delivered, he would still not know how much would be left when its effects had run their course. He would probably not know which way the winds were blowing, or where there had been fog. And he would not know whether to believe all the prophecies that indirect effects – economic disruption, disabling despair, anarchy, plague – would prove more lethal than the blast and fire and fallout. He might have his opinions on the question – even as you and I do – but he ought to know that such opinions are sheer speculation. In short, he would be far from knowing whether or not he had a country left to protect.

He would be far from knowing what would best protect his country, if it still exists. Maybe surrender would be best. But maybe it would be best to destroy the enemy’s unfired strategic nuclear weapons – *some* would be unfired, who knows how many. Maybe an attempt at tit-for-tat retaliation would offer the best hope of stopping the war before all was lost. Maybe it would be useful to destroy the weapons and the resources that could give the enemy command over the affairs of the postwar world. A nuclear counterattack would not be *known* to be useless. It might indeed be useless; or it might serve a good purpose. It might even be the only way to save the country. The duty of the Commander-in-Chief is to protect his country, in

war no less than in peace. He would have to consider whether some sort of counterattack might be the best way to disarm the enemy, to stop the war, or to give the country some chance of surviving the years ahead. It might well be so. But there could be no certainty that a counterattack would accomplish these things. And it would be risky: it might elicit a further attack that could have been avoided. And it would massacre vast numbers of the enemy's slaves, who are our fellow-victims; there would be no telling how many. And it would devastate a great part of the earth. And if our country were doomed already, the counterattack and its dreadful harm would be all in vain. The decision whether to launch a counterattack, or what sort of counterattack to launch, would be a hard one indeed. It would be a terrible decision under extreme uncertainty, with extremely high stakes and incommensurable values. I say that it might well be right to launch the counterattack: instrumentally rational and morally right, all things considered. As right, that is, as any choice could be in so desperate and tragic a predicament.¹⁰

Likewise for the men in the missile fields, in the cockpits, and in

10 I do not mean that it is "objectively" right to launch a counterattack: that is, that doing so would in fact produce the best consequences. Maybe so, but I don't know it. In fact, it is my main point that such things cannot be known. Rather, I mean that it might well be "subjectively" right: that it might well be the best gamble, taking account of the full range of uncertainty about what had already happened and about what actions would produce what outcomes. To understand the distinction, imagine that an epidemic is raging and you have inadvertently locked the entire supply of antitoxin in a safe and lost the combination. The subjectively right thing to do might well be to hunt up a skilled safecracker, even if finding him would take a week you can ill afford. That would be objectively wrong. The objectively right thing to do would be to dial 44-0223-65979 straightway, for that is the unknown combination that would in fact open the safe. The objective wrongness of going off to find a safecracker is no reason – or it is merely an "objective reason" – not to do it. Throughout this paper, I have been speaking always of subjective, never of objective, rightness. But take care: subjective rightness is only one department of reason and morality. What you do may be the best gamble, given your beliefs; it may in that sense be rational and right; but it may in a broader (but still subjective) sense be irrational and wrong, if the beliefs on which your actions are premised are themselves irrational given your evidence.

the submarines. They too would know what vital purposes a counterattack might serve, if all was not yet lost; and they too would know the harms and risks that it would bring. They would know even less than the Commander-in-Chief about the attack that had taken place. But they would know that their orders come from someone whose aims are much the same as theirs, who is probably somewhat better informed than they are, and whose orders afford their only hope of coordinated action. I say that it would be right for them to obey orders to fire: instrumentally rational and morally right, all things considered. As right, that is, as any choice could be in so desperate and tragic a predicament.

(Also, they have sworn obedience, at least if the Commander-in-Chief from whom they have their orders is so *de jure*. I do not at all mean to set aside reasons of honor as morally weightless, but I do think that they fade into insignificance when the stakes get high enough. Consequentialism is all wrong as everyday ethics, right as a limiting case. So I rest my argument on the consequential reasons why it would be right to obey.)

Suppose that our retaliators intend to launch a counterattack if and only if it would be right to do so; and that they intend to launch only the right sort of counterattack. Then what they conditionally intend to do if deterrence fails is no more than what it would be right for them to do. Then our nuclear deterrence is not paradoxical. Nor can they be reproached for intending to retaliate, if they intend to do no more than would be right. They are right so to intend, and they would be right to fulfill their intentions. I think that this is the actual case: that our retaliators rightly intend to do no more than would be right. I certainly hope that this is so.

But suppose it is not so. Suppose instead that our retaliators intend to launch a counterattack whether or not it would be right, or that they intend to launch more of a counterattack than could possibly be right. They would be wicked in so intending, even if they became wicked or remained wicked for admirable reasons, and even if there was much good mixed in with their wickedness. They would also be a danger to mankind, and we ought to remove them from their posts at once. But our nuclear deterrence *still* would not be paradoxical.

For on this supposition, I say that it was wrong for them ever to form such intentions. They would have been mistaken when they thought it beneficial to implant wicked intentions in themselves. There is no paradox if they have wrongly formed an intention that it would be wrong to fulfill.

Their intentions would be wrong to form not because they would be wrong to fulfill, but because they present a needless danger. Here I rely on a premise of fact: that no such intentions are needed to provide deterrence. The intention to launch a counterattack only if, and only to the extent that, it is right provides deterrence galore. We don't need "assured destruction." The sort of counterattack that might serve a good purpose would be a dreadful retaliation as well. If that is our only threat, maybe we threaten less-than-assured less-than-destruction, but our threat remains fearsome. Take an extreme case: suppose we attacked nothing but the enemy's unfired strategic nuclear weapons (plus a lot of empty holes, unless we had better information than seems likely) and suppose we attacked those in the very most "surgical" way. We would still destroy much more than the weapons, for the enemy has by no means cooperated in the separation of targets. And would he not fear to lose the weapons, even if he stood to lose nothing else? He would probably think he had need of them, no less after he had provoked our anger than before.

Anyway, we can threaten worse retaliation than we really intend. For he cannot know just what we do intend, and he cannot know that we would not do worse when angered than we intend beforehand. Again I join Bundy in praise of uncertainty, and in insisting that the owners of an arsenal like ours just do not have any problem in looking scary.

Thirty-five years ago, our nuclear threat was puny by present standards. Yet we thought it a convincing deterrent, and I dare say we were right. In those days, we deterred Stalin himself. Are his successors bolder desperadoes than he? To be sure, the *balance* of threats has changed since then; and advocates of a larger arsenal do claim that an uneven balance is what deters, rather than the size of our threat; but why should that be so?

No; our enemies are cowards. Their cautious adventures scare us –

because we too are cowards, well and truly deterred, and a good thing too – but they really do not act like people whom it is difficult to deter.

Kavka and Kenny have suggested that although the deterrent threat to launch a counterattack if, and to the extent that, it was right is not itself paradoxical, yet paradoxical deterrence must lurk in the background.¹¹ Whatever we might do on the lower rungs of the ladder of nuclear escalation, doesn't it remain true that we intend to respond to an all-out countervalue salvo with a like salvo of our own? And wouldn't that be useless off-target vengeance? And isn't it this ultimate threat that affords our only slim hope of staying on the lower rungs?

I don't think so. I agree that an all-out retaliatory salvo could be nothing but vengeance. It could not possibly be right. But I hope and believe that we intend no such thing. If we did receive an all-out salvo, we could not recognize it as such. Our counterattack might in fact be nothing but useless and off-target vengeance on behalf of the doomed, but we would nevertheless launch it in the hope that it would serve a purpose, and we might well be right to do so.

And if I am wrong, and we do intend to deliver a useless all-out salvo if worst comes to worst, then there is still no paradox. It is wrong to form or retain such an intention, unless that intention is needed for deterrence. I say that our deterrence, even if it is deterrence of escalation during nuclear war, needs no such intention. In the very worst case as in other cases, the counterattack thought to serve a good purpose would be retaliation enough, and the threat of it would afford deterrence enough.

I said that I hope and believe we do not intend to respond to even the worst nuclear attack by launching an all-out salvo, a counterattack that would be good for nothing but off-target vengeance. – But do we not have plans for just such salvos? – We do: our war plan calls them “massive attack options.”¹² But do not infer our intentions from our plans. I suppose that our planmakers are told that it is not

11 Kavka, in discussion; Kenny, “Counterforce and Countervalue.”

12 Desmond Ball, “U.S. Strategic Forces: How Would They Be Used?” *International Security* 7 (1983): 31–60.

for them to set national policy, and that it is better to have too many options than too few; and obligingly they churn out all sorts of plans. These include some very frightening plans that it would be wrong to carry out, no matter what had happened. It is no waste of effort if they produce plans that no one ever intends to follow. For one thing, the making of many plans contributes to our own understanding of nuclear warfare.¹³ Further, the plans themselves are part of our deterrent – after all, they do not come bearing the label “will not be followed no matter what.” They are no secret, except in their details. If a scholar in Canberra can write about our massive attack options in the unclassified article I cited, surely the enemy is no less well informed. And if you and I find these plans frightening, even doubting as we should that anyone intends to carry them out, surely the enemy finds them no less frightening.

I find myself in unwelcome company. I seem to be agreeing with the views of the war-fighters. I say, as they do, that nuclear retaliation might serve a useful purpose, might accomplish something better than vengeance. I say, as they do, that the right retaliation would be a counterattack meant to accomplish something useful. I say, as they do, that such retaliation is the only sort we ought to intend. I say, as they do, that if it is our policy to deliver useless vengeance, then our policy is immoral and our retaliators are wicked.

It is true that I have taken a leaf from the war-fighters' book. But it is a loose-leaf book, and I insist that I have left most of it behind. Their position is founded on confidence: confidence in certain remarkably optimistic scenarios for nuclear war. Mine is founded rather on skepticism: even-handed skepticism, directed against optimistic and pessimistic scenarios alike. They say that victory is possible.¹⁴ (Provided, of course, that their views about strategy and procurement gain acceptance.) I would not go so far as to speak of “victory,” but I do take an

13 And thereby makes a welcome contribution to our self-deterrence; as witness the tale of McNamara's unsettling briefing at SAC headquarters, told in Gregg Herken, “The Nuclear Gnostics,” in Douglas MacLean, ed., *The Security Gamble*.

14 Colin S. Gray and Keith Payne, “Victory Is Possible,” *Foreign Policy* 39 (1980): 14–27.

interest in outcomes that would be noticeably better than total destruction. I would not go so far as to say that such outcomes are “possible” (except in the philosophers’ sense, in which it is also possible that pigs have wings); but I do say that we cannot have much confidence that they are not possible, wherefore it might well be right to try for them even by means of a nuclear counterattack.

It’s not that they go in for optimism generally, whereas I am a general skeptic. They are optimistic about success in nuclear war, something of which we have next to no experience; they are skeptical about success in deterrence, something of which we have a great deal of experience. With me it’s the other way around.

They say that deterrence is difficult, so that one main reason to intend only useful retaliation is that otherwise our threats will be incredible and the enemy will not be deterred. I say that deterrence is easy, given an arsenal like ours and an enemy like ours. Credibility is not a worry. At least, not if we limit the scope of our nuclear deterrence; and probably not even if we extend it beyond (what I would take to be) prudent limits. My reason for intending only useful retaliation has nothing to do with credibility. My reason is that if deterrence failed, it would be better not to do a lot of useless harm.

Bundy has suggested that debates about how to fight a nuclear war are not what they seem to be; really, they are debates about criteria for the procurement of weapons.¹⁵ Often so, I’m sure; but not in my case. I have been talking about how we ought to intend to use whatever weapons we might have. What I have said is consistent with a wide range of positions on questions of procurement. Not with all conceivable positions – it is possible to favor weapons that are no good for anything except useless vengeance, it is possible to favor skimping on command and control – but with all that stand any serious chance of adoption by an American government, and with more besides. It is otherwise with the war-fighters. Their position is indeed part of a case for procurement. They have higher hopes and more confidence than I about what a counterattack could accomplish, if only the weapons were right. Therefore it is more important to them than it is to me that the weapons should be right.

15 Bundy, “Existential Deterrence.”