
Ethics and the Nuclear Age

By **Ronald H. Epp**

*Managing Editor
Choice*

A preview of two upcoming television specials.

Early in 1989 two television series will premiere as part of the Annenberg/CPB Collection. Librarians are familiar with other series in this collection: "The Constitution," "The Brain," "Congress: We the People," "Planet Earth," and two recent productions reviewed in *C&RL News*: "The Africans" (September 1986) and "Voices and Visions" (December 1987).

The two new series, in distinctly different ways, will educate us to certain harsh—and at times inspiring—moral truths about ourselves, our neighbors, and our leaders. They both will make us uncomfortable, although wiser.

Ethics in America

One series, "Ethics in America," consists of ten one-hour-long roundtable discussions about permissible conduct in contemporary America. The other, "War and Peace in the Nuclear Age," is a thirteen-part series that documents the events that brought about the atomic era; many fear that this period may be but the prelude to the state that Jonathan Schell has so chillingly characterized in *The Fate of the Earth* (Knopf, 1982): a republic of insects and grass.

"Ethics in America" records nine separate conversations that took place in 1987–88. In each program twelve to fifteen panelists work their way through an unrehearsed case study (there is no dramatization, merely the verbal development of the example). Each program is introduced by Columbia University professor Fred W. Friendly, who sharply contrasts the main ethical dilemmas to be examined by panelists seated before a small au-

dience. Above this group hang placards with the names of Plato, Aristotle, Demosthenes, Kant, Mill, Marx, and other philosophers of considerable renown, reminding viewers of the ethical heritage that preceded these discussions.

In Socratic fashion a so-called moderator paces before them, questioning each roundtable participant and directing the development of each case study. Charles Ogletree, Arthur Miller, and Charles Nesson of the Harvard Law School, and Lewis Kaden of Columbia Law School serve this critical function of facilitating discussion.

Twenty-three females and five blacks are among the 100 participants in this series, including an impressive array of prominent public figures, although fortunately the less well-known predominate. Several panelists participate in more than one program.

Although considerable attention seems to have been given to the mix of panelists for each program, some discussions were too heavily weighted in one area of expertise. Contrariwise, in a lively dialogue on whether a physician indeed *knows* what is best—in the largest sense—for the patient, the panel includes only two ethicists; indeed, ethicists were omitted from three programs where their expertise in the complexities of human conduct may have benefited the discussion.

Moreover, many viewers will object that the programs downplayed daily matters of ordinary conduct that are ethically vexing for most of us. Others may question the choice of topics, arguing that the ethical dimensions of inequality, resource allocation, or abortion should have been treated.



(Left to right) Arthur R. Miller, Peter Jennings, Joseph A. Califano Jr., Jeane J. Kirkpatrick.

Generally, lawyers were the most heavily represented (e.g., Justice Antonin Scalia, and James E. Neal) followed by journalists, editors, and publishers (e.g., Peter Jennings, Katherine Graham, Mike Wallace) and physicians (e.g., C. Everett Koop, Williard Gaylin). Politicians (e.g., Jeane Kirkpatrick, Allen Simpson, and Geraldine Ferraro), military figures (e.g., Generals William Westmoreland and E.P. Foote), and business leaders were present in considerable number, with an educator or social service figure occasionally included. All in all, spokespersons for the law, medicine, and the media were in the majority.

Produced by the Columbia University Seminars on Media and Society, the series begins with consideration of one of the most fundamental ethical questions: who are my neighbors and what do I owe them? Most of the programs treat topics that ethicists would identify as part of the domain of political philosophy: on the obligations of lawyers to defend a guilty client, on the concept of trust as it is used by public officials and private citizens, and on the related concept of truth as it is applied by the media and by legal practitioners.

The series at times seems to play to the crowd, as when the final program examines the role of the press and the public's right to know during an election year. (In fact, half of this program was aired before the 1988 election in order both to capitalize on public interest and to whet appetites for the forthcoming programs.) However, it is not only timing but the manner in which the so-called mod-

erator directs the development of the case studies that he provides. That each is affiliated with a law school may account for the impression that the questions are not value-free, but often the leading questions of the skillful attorney.

Two programs deal with matters of social philosophy. The first, "Anatomy of a Corporate Takeover," raises diverse ethical questions about the responsibility of a corporation to the shareholders, investors, employees, consumers, and the public. Many of the issues raised here were recently considered by B. Barber in *The Logic and Limits of Trust* (Rutgers, 1983); for an historical/sociological analysis of trust refer advanced readers to S.N. Eisenstadt's *Patrons, Clients, and Friends* (Cambridge, 1984). More advanced readers should be directed to Daniel Goleman's *Vital Lies, Simple Truths* (Simon & Schuster, 1985) for lively essays on the psychology of self-deception, a theme implicit in many of the panelists' responses. Of course there is Sisela Bok's *Secrets* (Pantheon, 1982) and Paul Ekman's *Telling Lies* (Norton, 1985), which treat deceit in the marketplace, politics, and marriage. For a bibliographic essay on "Recent Work in Business Ethics," see the fine review by T.R. Machan and D.J. Den Uyl in the *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 24 (1987).

The second two-hour program is titled "Under Orders, Under Fire" and shows radically different views about special aspects of military responsibility under both ordinary and extraordinary circumstances. This program encourages viewers to take

sides—we must choose between duty and decency. Again and again we hear military personnel—and many public officials—defend the obedience imperative. Paraphrasing philosopher Thomas Nagel, most of us do not have the option to justify our conduct by saying that we were only following orders or doing our job. Readers who wish to explore the military approach to conduct should consult Peter L. Stromberg's *The Teaching of Ethics in the Military* (The Hastings Center, 1982).

Finally, two programs deal with two case studies that reveal the personal agony that is traditionally thought to be the heart of ethical reflection: in "Does Doctor Know Best?" a terminal cancer patient who is pregnant struggles with her physician and family, thereby raising intriguing questions about patient autonomy and the limits of medical paternalism; and the "Human Experiment," which focuses on the medical justifications involved with putting volunteer subjects at risk. Viewers who want resources on bioethics should consult the annual volumes of LeRoy Walter's *Bibliography of Bioethics* (Gale, 1975-).

The print resources to support this series are widely scattered among many disciplines. If students begin with the title of the series and attempt to use the card catalog to locate material on American ethics, they will quickly be forced to approach the reference desk or make use of the Library of Congress Subject Headings. Although some sources can be located under "United States—Moral Conditions" or "United States—Social Life and Customs—1980- ," the bulk of the literature must be located under the "Moral and Ethical Aspects" subheading of specific subjects (e.g., "Mass Media—United States—Moral and Ethical Aspects").

Three audiocassettes are available that should impose on the ideas articulated in the videotapes the more formal requirements of philosophic discussion. One is on a general theme (the nature of ethics), another focuses on a specific problem (the ethics of killing), and the third is a dialogue between Columbia University students and two faculty. To purchase audio cassettes/videocassettes, call 1 (800) LEARNER.

Two print sources accompany this series. *Ethics in America Source Reader*, edited by Lisa H. Newton (Prentice-Hall, 1989), contains primary source material from the history of philosophy that covers four ethical traditions implicit in the discussions: Biblical, Greek, moral law, and utilitarian. Editor Newton is director of the Program in Applied Ethics at Fairfield University. Newton has also edited *Ethics in America Text/Study Guide* (Prentice-Hall, 1989), which is the more essential acquisition for both libraries and students since it not only discusses ethical theory—which any standard ethics text might do—but in separate chapters are clearly detailed summaries of each television program, including extrapolation from and synthesis of the ideas of the video participants.

From beginning to end, the series "Ethics in America" conveys an impression that at this time ethics is no longer the domain of the philosopher or the theologian, perhaps not even the province of the ordinary citizen. In terms of the sheer weight—in both policy and practice—the ethical arena is influenced largely by attorneys, politicians, the media, and other special interest groups. As Thomas Nagel puts it (in "Ruthlessness in Public Life," *Public and Private Morality*, edited by S. Hampshire, Cambridge, 1978), these people may be attracted to the role by the special requirements of the position and their release from some of the ordinary restrictions. Encapsulated in their roles, "they are insulated in a puzzling way from what they do...as agents they have a slippery moral surface."

Moreover, many viewers will be left with the impression that Plato's Thrasymachus in the *Republic* may still be on the mark when he locates the rationale for justice within the exercise of power. That is, that in matters of right and wrong these panelists may be guided more by externally driven public standards, and very infrequently by the internal standards inspired by the cumulative wisdom of our Judaeo-Christian heritage.

This is not the lesson that Professor Friendly and the producers of "Ethics in America" wish the viewers to draw. They nowhere propose that the series answers any of our fundamental ethical problems. Instead, they rightly see this series as provocative, initiating discussion that may be ethically fruitful. The panelists repeatedly show that ethical questions remain unanswered even after all the relevant information has been secured. This series shows the limits of moral reasoning in an informed group of well-intentioned panelists who were dealing only with imaginary circumstances.

The Nuclear Age

Like the "Ethics in America" series, the thirteen "War and Peace in the Nuclear Age" programs were designed as a college-credit course. To license either series as a television course, call 1 (800) ALS-ALS8. The disciplines of political science or history are most likely to express curriculum interest. Accompanying print materials—a reader, study guide, and tradebook—from Alfred A. Knopf were not available for preview. This series will be captioned for the hearing-impaired. Produced by WGBH Boston and Central Independent Television (UK) in association with NHK (Japan), the series has extensive foundation support.

"War and Peace" covers the first half-century of the Nuclear Age from the late 1930s to the present. It blends archival film footage with recent interviews with significant U.S., Soviet, European, and Asian participants to show how technology both pushed and responded to political and moral pressure, influencing profoundly the character of international relations and the substance of contemporary thought.

Two unedited preview tapes were provided this reviewer. "Dawn" establishes the historical and cultural backdrop for the development of the first atomic bomb from the late 1930s through the failure to reach international control of atomic weapons after Hiroshima. "At the Brink" establishes the background to events that led to the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

It is hoped that the final version includes an introduction that exposes the audience to the intentions of the producers. For viewers over forty years of age much of the archival footage will be fairly commonplace, requiring little narration. For younger viewers the names and events may fly by with such speed as to blunt the visually unprepared mind.

This series clearly intends to provide viewers with an accurate history of this period, supplemented by recent retrospective insights given by key participants. In "Dawn," physicists Victor Weisskopf, Bernard Feld, Hans Bethe, and Sir Rudolph Pierls focus almost exclusively on the political factors that propelled developments in nuclear research. Prominent Soviet and German scientists are also featured, which gives this program—and perhaps the series as a whole—a more thorough character.

The narration and skillful editing combine to involve viewers in the urgency of the race to complete and test the first atomic bomb. Viewer involvement is more keenly experienced as documentary footage covers the highpoints of the political brinksmanship of Kennedy and Khrushchev as they brought us to the edge of nuclear war. In "At the Brink" we also hear the disarming interpretations of McGeorge Bundy, Robert McNamara, and their Soviet counterparts. Viewers are forced to confront the psychodynamics of this most horrifying form of political posturing.

Eleven programs that were not previewed will treat the origins of the Cold War, Soviet technological achievements—including Sputnik—during the late 1950s, NATO and European nuclear weapons, the policy changes implemented by McNamara and then Kissinger during the era of détente, Europe and the Nonproliferation and SALT II treaties, weapons systems, SDI, and future visions of war and peace.

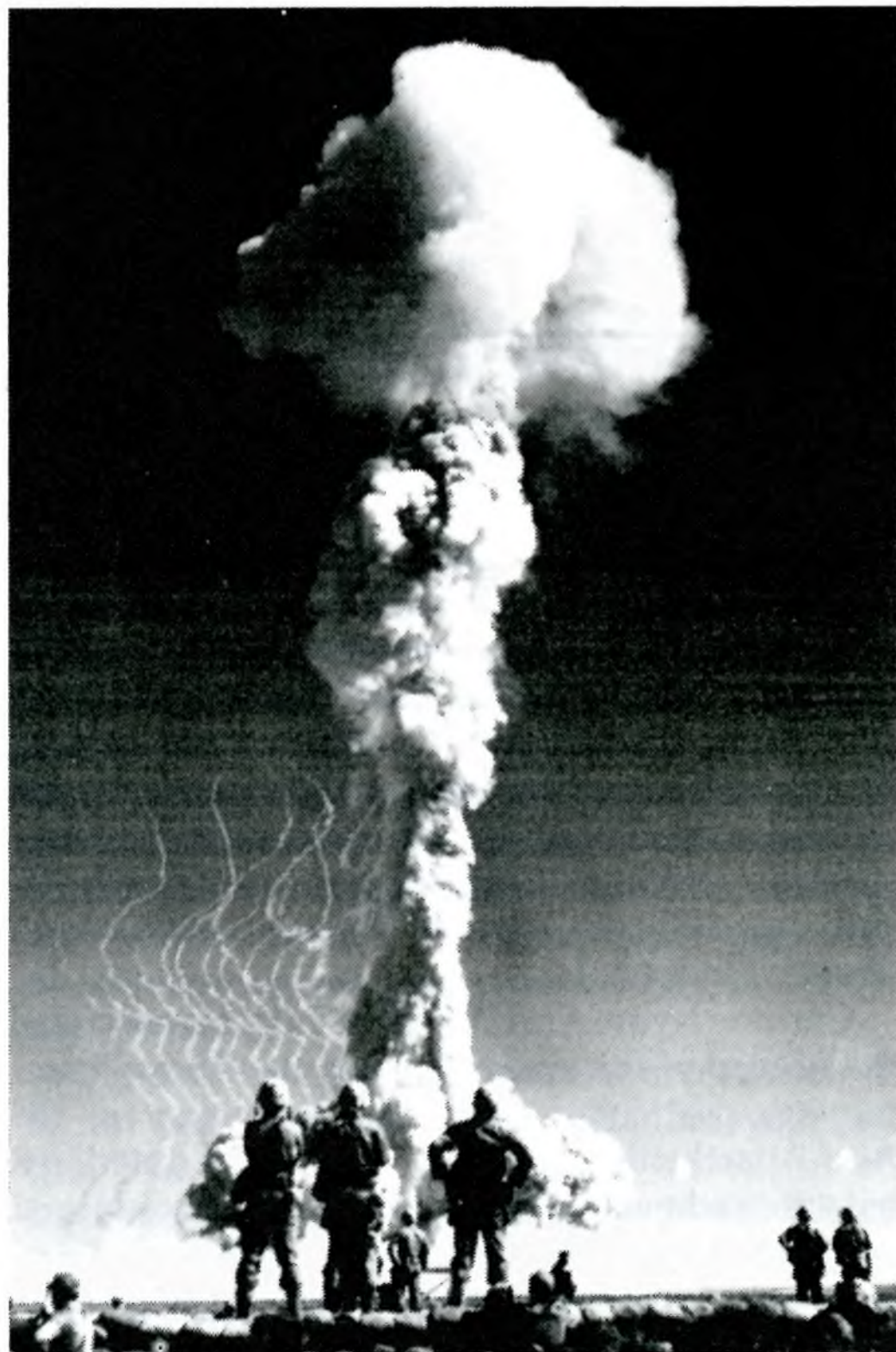
One is reminded of Dean Acheson's remarks regarding the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 when he speaks of the "irrelevance of the supposed moral considerations brought out in the discussion." Perhaps this series will force the public to recognize that there may be a divergence between the interests of morality and the interests of the United States. On this matter see Douglas P. Lackey's *Moral Principles and Nuclear Weapons* (Rowman & Allanheld, 1984), while more advanced readers should seek out John Finnis, et al., *Nuclear Deterrence, Morality, and Realism* (Clarendon, 1987).

There is little evidence in this promotional material to suggest that the series will relate to most of

the issues discussed in the "Ethics in America" series. However, it could be seen as a background to the two programs in that series titled "Under Orders, Under Fire."

Given that nuclear war could destroy all human life, many ask whether it makes any sense to apply ethics to war of such magnitude. Viewers may indeed associate loyalty, obedience, courage, and selflessness with the military profession, but can the moral language of an institution be applied to the ethics of personal relations—are we dealing here with moral apples and oranges? Libraries that do not have the second edition of M.M. Wakin's *War, Morality, and the Military Profession* (Westview, 1986) should consider it as a companion to Joseph S. Nye's *Nuclear Ethics* (Free Press, 1986). Most recently, Ian Clark's slim volume on *Waging War* (Clarendon, 1988) is a most appealing philosophical introduction.

In addition to sources secured through online searches and the standard indexes, librarians may wish to direct readers to some of the following very recent bibliographies published since 1980. *The Atomic Papers*, by Grant Burns (Scarecrow, 1984), remains the most useful starting point, supplemented by the sixth edition of *To End War*, edited by Robert Woito (Pilgrim, 1982). *Peace and War: A Guide to Bibliographies*, edited by Bernice A. Carroll, et al. (ABC-Clio, 1983), is also a useful starting point for undergraduates. More special-



Marines watch an atomic cloud surge skyward during tests in Nevada in the 1950s.

ized is Richard Scribner and R.T. Scott's *Strategic Nuclear Arms Control Verification* (AAAS, 1985), an annotated bibliography that surveys the sources from 1977 to 1984.

The Nuclear Almanac, compiled and edited by the faculty of MIT (Addison-Wesley, 1984) and Jonathon Green's *The A-Z of Nuclear Jargon* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986) will help new readers with the fundamentals.

There are also numerous recent dictionaries and directories that emphasize efforts to achieve peace: the *American Peace Directory, 1984*, edited by M. Fine and P.M. Steven (Ballinger, 1984) treats more than 1,300 groups; if interest is more far-reaching, viewers of this series should be directed to *Peace Movements in Europe and the United States*, edited by W. Kaltefleiter and R.L. Pfaltzgraff Jr. (St. Martin's, 1985). The leaders of these movements are well characterized in the *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Peace Leaders*, edited by Harold Josephson (Greenwood, 1985). Forthcoming from ABC-Clio is a *Nuclear War and Peace Dictionary*, by S.R. Ali.

More advanced readers may wish to use *The Long Darkness*, edited by L. Grinspoon (Yale, 1986), provocative essays on the psychological and moral implications of a nuclear winter, or the unique study by Guenter Lewy, *Peace & Revolution* (Eerdmans, 1988), which is a chronicle and critique of recent trends in the policies of pacifist organizations in the United States.

Journals that treat normative questions include the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *International Security*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, and *Survival*. Somewhat less technical discussions will be found in *Foreign Af-*

fairs, *World Affairs*, *Commentary*, and two journals that will also be useful for viewers of the "Ethics in America" series: *Ethics* and *Philosophy and Public Affairs*.

Colleges and universities may find that portions of this history of the nuclear age are already part of their audio/video collections. In recent years a number of fine film/video programs have been produced, most notable the award-winning "Day After Trinity" (1981), which chronicles the role of J. Robert Oppenheimer, and "In the Nuclear Shadow" (1982), which reveals the thought and feelings of representatives of yet another new generation that lives with the constancy of the nuclear threat.

Librarians might compare coverage in "War and Peace" with the scope and content of five other notable programs: "War Without Winners II" (1983), "Race to Oblivion" (1982), "Nuclear War: A Guide to Armageddon" (1983), "No First Use" (1983), and the stirring "Hiroshima and Nagasaki" (1982).

It is my hope that many viewers will stay with each series and not be put off by the documentary character of "War and Peace" or the scenarios in "Ethics in America" that will seem to many to be detached from the ordinary ethical dilemmas with which each of us deals on a daily basis. For, after all, ethics is not just roundtable talk about what we should do given the circumstances, but the application of ethical reasoning to conduct. Each series will succeed if viewers are moved to discuss with their families and friends the issues generated by these panelists. Who knows? They may even look to members of the academic community for assistance in resolving these questions. ■■

South Africa and the free flow of information

This complex and highly charged issue was the subject of a panel presented at the annual meeting of the African Studies Association (ASA), held in Chicago, October 27-31, 1988. Sponsored by the ASA/Archivists-Libraries Committee and chaired by Alfred Kagan (University of Connecticut), the panel discussed positions for and against the unrestricted exchange of information with South Africa, especially the potential effect of constraints on libraries and scholars.

Corinne Nyquist (SUNY/New Palz) summarized the history of this controversy in the library community, particularly since the enactment of the Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986. As Nyquist stated in a background paper, "The librarians' abhorrence of censorship was pitted against their abhorrence of apartheid." The conflict was clearly illustrated by the defeat at the 1987 ALA Annual Conference in San Francisco of a resolution opposing the application of sanctions legislation to purchases from or

sale to South Africa of books, periodicals, and research materials.

Thomas E. Nyquist (SUNY Central Administration, Albany) articulated the dilemmas facing scholars, both Americans invited to lecture in South Africa or who want to do research there, and South Africans who want to visit the United States. He pointed out that the presence of American scholars in South Africa could be interpreted as an act of solidarity with anti-apartheid forces, but could also as easily be construed as support for the South African government.

Two other panelists offered diametrically opposed views. Stating both his own position and that of E.J. Josey, Ismail Abdullahi (University of Pittsburgh) urged a complete academic and informational boycott of South Africa. Lorraine Haricombe, a black South African librarian currently pursuing doctoral studies at the University of Illinois, argued that denial of information is in fact

hurting those whom the boycott was intended to aid, resulting in the availability of even fewer resources for libraries serving black students and scholars.

Audience response reflected the complexity of the topic. Several participants strongly supported exemption of informational materials from an otherwise solid boycott. Although the position of the African National Congress is total isolation of

South Africa, other participants made it clear that the ANC is not the sole voice of anti-apartheid forces. As Corinne Nyquist concluded, the importance of the session lies not in its resolution of the problem but in its open discussion. The panel will be repeated at ALA Annual Conference in Dallas next summer.—*Helen MacLam, Choice magazine.*



A customized database on Scandinavian government

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*Customized bibliographic databases and educational
innovation.*

The development of the Scandinavian political studies database is a joint project of Martha Brogan, a professional librarian and former bibliographer for Western European Studies, and Robert B. Kvavik, a political scientist with a specialty in Scandinavian government and politics.

Originally and ultimately intended to facilitate the compilation of a published bibliography, the project—while still in its developmental phase—has already served a beneficial use to support research and instruction at the University of Minnesota. During Winter Quarter 1988, in a graduate seminar on Scandinavian government and politics, the database was used effectively to develop specialized readings lists on such topics as Finnish for-

eign policy, Norwegian and Icelandic interest groups, and coalition governments in Sweden. The customized lists were discussed with the students, and research themes were identified which could be investigated using materials held by the University Libraries.

The database also produced a master reading list for an undergraduate class on Scandinavian politics. The electronic bibliography saved us, our students—and presumably some of our library staff—precious time in identifying and locating relevant materials. Rather, the faculty member's energy focused on helping students specify research problems, the student's on synthesizing materials and formulating positions on agreed-upon prob-