



# Frightful Syllogism

*Günther Anders*

*The philosopher Günther Anders (1902-1992) left Germany for the United States as a refugee from the Nazi regime in 1933. He settled in Vienna after the war where he was to play a pioneering role in anti-nuclear activism. Anders was a member of the International War Crimes Tribunal on Vietnam. His work has an enduring relevance for those concerned with the past, present and future of humanity.*

## In Honour of Bertrand Russell

*Günther Anders spoke at the memorial meeting, Honour Bertrand Russell – Carry on his work!, organised by the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1970, a few weeks after Russell's death. Anders' comments were published in The Spokesman No. 3, May 1970.*

“So long as I live”, Bertrand Russell wrote in his description of the beginnings of the Foundation, “I shall continue the search for means of survival of the human species, and in all probability I shall leave the work to be continued by others.” Here we are, the “others”, ready to continue. Here we are, and the situation in which we find ourselves requires our going on even more urgently than at the time when Russell spoke his words. The call is more urgent now than ever before.

A quarter of a century has elapsed since the dropping of the Hiroshima bomb. What in reality has become a daily and hourly peril of repetition seems to have shrunk to a chapter in a history book; and it seems to have become an utterly unreal danger, as it has never been repeated. As a matter of fact, today people are indifferent when they hear the word “atomic bomb”. Their indolence, which at first, twenty-five years ago, was caused by ignorance and by lack of fantasy, seems now to be caused by sheer boredom. Since up to now – thus runs the frightful syllogism – the nuclear war has not broken out, why should it break out tomorrow? Or why should it break out at all?

Psychologically, of course, the existence of this syllogism is understandable;

logically, however, this syllogism is the purest nonsense. And even worse. For the situation deteriorates from day to day. Despite the fact that a few days ago the non-proliferation treaty was signed by the two main atomic powers, the danger for mankind is increasing steadily. And this for three reasons:

1. Because now nuclear weapons (if a means of universal suicide can be called a “weapon”) lie in many hands – which means that the delicate equilibrium of the two monsters threatening but not touching each other has been disturbed.

2. New means of mass liquidation have been invented and already have been produced in over-kill quantities: therefore we cannot afford to confine ourselves to fighting atomic weapons, their stockpiling and their testing; the bacteriological and chemical weapons now at the disposal of practically every power, even the least powerful ones, are no less suicidal; and their control is not only far more difficult than that of atomic weapons, but absolutely impossible.

3. Finally, last not least, it is undeniable that every war, however small it may be at its inception, can always degenerate into an A.B.C. war, particularly if and when the technically superior aggressor fails to reach victory with so-called “conventional” weapons.

As a matter of fact, not only is such a war raging today, the one in Vietnam, but this war of liquidation, which President Nixon had promised to liquidate as fast as possible, has expanded and now even in official reports has become a war against Laos and threatens to become a war of such proportions that its sudden degeneration into a total war is far from impossible. The situation is frightful, exactly the kind of situation which Russell was never able to face without trying immediately to do something about it, and this means: something against it.

Friends, if our Bertrand Russell had reached his biblical age, it was because he felt that he could not leave the world in the lurch ... because he felt a centre of resistance had to continue to exist. For many years he successfully forbade death to enter the house of his life, in order to prevent death from entering the house of mankind. Time and again his force of life was nourished by his never ceasing indignation, by his indignation about the blind, the infamous, the indolent, the lazy, the stupid, and those incurably lacking in fantasy. The weaknesses and the vices of the others kept him alive, kept him aflame. When he was ninety, he wrote: “I become more and more of a rebel”, and he goes on: “A minority, however though a growing one, feels as I do, and so long as I live it is with them that I must work.”

Friends, we are this minority. And we, the minority, must not remain a

minority. Through never tiring education and enlightenment of the blind and the indolent, we must become a majority, the majority, so that this majority be saved, so that all of us be saved. And not only all those must be saved who are alive today, not only all of our contemporaries, but with them also all the generations to come, tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. And among those whom we have to save are also those who have lived before us, our parents, and the whole past of our civilisation. They, too, depend upon us. For once there is no one left to remember the past, there is no past left, there has never been the past.

Therefore let us vary his words and pledge: "So long as we live, we will work in his spirit so that others will live after us, sons and daughters and their sons and daughters, and so that the effort of the former generations have not been in vain. Future and past lie in our hands. In the name of the future and the past, let us continue the work of the great old man, let us continue the work of Bertrand Russell."

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## Victims of Aggression

*This article first appeared in Essays on Socialist Humanism in Honour of The Centenary of Bertrand Russell (1972). It mainly relates to the US war on Vietnam, which is again in the public eye.*

The belief that today's aggressors wish to crown their aggression with victories is naive. To win wars is no longer the aim of those who are eager to wage wars – at least not for those who make the prosperity of their country depend upon their armament industry. What American industry demands, in order to guarantee the continuation of its arms production, and, thereby, the continuation of the nation's prosperity, is to *have* wars. Wars are the basis of the industrialist's power. If this basis collapsed – and it would collapse through the victorious conclusion of a war – this power would be defeated. In other words: in the present stage of capitalism, *wars as such are victories*. Victories, in the old-fashioned sense of the word, would amount to defeats, since they would promote a situation in which the further production of weapons (the prerequisite of power and prosperity) would become superfluous. What the US desires is the smooth continuity and escalation of the sale and consumption of armaments, a continuity and escalation just as regular and just as reliable as that of the sale and consumption of bread or gasoline. This means that what is desired is a war which will never end, which will survive and which cannot be

killed. No wonder that those of our fellow men who criticize and try to subvert this situation are called and treated as subversives.

According to the basic lie of our epoch, the production of weapons is needed in order to prevent wars. The truth is, on the contrary, that wars are needed in order not to prevent the production of weapons. It is for this reason, in order to guarantee the production of weapons, that wars are being produced. Thus, they are a means of production.

Nothing is more dishonest than cowardice cloaked as justice or as fairness. Many who fear to be slandered or to be called “biased”, have made it their scandalous principle never to mention an aggressor belonging to the so-called “Free World” without simultaneously discrediting his victim, too. Whoever says something against a President Nixon pretends to be morally obliged immediately to add something against a Chou En-lai, and thereby to prove how objective and how just he is. In a way this cowardly tactic amounts to acting as if we believed in the existence of a universal “equilibrium of guilt” or a “balance of infamies” – a simply ludicrous belief which would imply, for instance, that as many American women and children are being slaughtered by Vietnamese napalm bombs as Vietnamese women and children are being slaughtered by American napalm bombs. And this is not only nonsense but outright hypocrisy and fraud. I am afraid that this fraud in our European and American peace movements will eventually cause their moral ruin. He who applies the same yardstick to the murderers and to the victims is taking sides: for by accusing both of the same violence, he is excusing the aggressors. Let’s leave this task to the murderers themselves.

If we confine ourselves – and this danger exists in the anti-atomic movement – to fighting against nuclear weapons, we prove that we have not mastered the ABC of our epoch. There are those who believe that the B and C (the bacteriological and chemical) weapons or the new mechanical gadgets, such as the “lazy dog”, which are being “tested” and developed in Vietnam today, will not provoke the final catastrophe of mankind, at least not as directly as the atomic weapons, and that, for this reason, they are less dangerous. This argument leads to a frightful self-delusion. If these new weapons are so often belittled as being “only comparatively dangerous” or “only conventional,” or if they are even being welcomed as “human,” this has become possible only because today’s blackmail of total nuclear destruction has become the yardstick with which the magnitude of other weapons is being measured. In other words: the production and the daily testing and usage of the new weapons in Vietnam are taking place under the protection of atomic blackmail. This is indeed a “shield” – though not in the sense in which the manufacturers



and managers of public opinion like to use this word today. For it is not peace or mankind which is being shielded by the nuclear deterrent, but rather the production of those means of destruction the effect of which is not total; and it is not only the atomic weapons themselves which we have to fight but just as energetically the production of other types of arms.

On July 3, 1966, two American jets tried to support some units of the US 1st Infantry Division which were engaged in battle with the Viet Cong. However, the napalm bombs missed their mark and fell upon the American soldiers twenty of whom, screaming, their clothes ablaze, died in the mud. What should we say? Should we perhaps exclaim: "How ghastly that such accidents are possible!" Wouldn't this imply that it might have been less frightful – even not frightful at all – if the American pilots had aimed more precisely so that only Vietnamese would have burned to death? This would be infamous. However, it would be no less infamous to welcome this "mishap" and to stress that at last the aggressors now had the chance to experience what they are doing to others. And no less infamous to say: "Now maybe they will learn that this misfortune was not an exception; that they are always hitting themselves, even when they believe they have hit the mark and have struck only the enemy." These arguments, however true they may be, are no less vulgar than the words of those who regret that the wrong people were burned to death. After all, these American soldiers are victims too; even those who may enjoy their bloody work and who may be proud of it, since others drilled them to enjoy this sort of pleasure and this sort of pride. Even worse than the other responses was that which General DePuy of the 1st Infantry Division made after this terrible misfortune had struck his unit. In a tone which he meant to sound dauntless, but which, in reality, only betrayed his utter emotional illiteracy, he stated: "We are not angry at the Air Force." In order to stress the harmlessness of this "mishap," he commented that, after all, "this was an error of only about 50 meters." Apparently General DePuy felt and wished to convey that the accident would actually have been appalling if the bombs would have missed their mark by 100 meters – that to err is human, human even when through an error B goes up in flames instead of A; that, after all, in the game played in Vietnam such human errors cannot be excluded; that it would be inhuman to expect that every bomb could hit its target; that it would be unfair to demand such inhuman achievements, even in the war against the Viet Cong. In his words, which are obscene, although he may have meant them as words of consolation: "It's the chances of the game." Game indeed.

As an ingenuous gesture – "we have nothing to hide" – the Americans have repeatedly not only admitted but even emphasized that they have

accidentally bombed wrong villages in Vietnam. Nothing is more deceitful than such an exhibition of veracity. For by stressing their error in having bombed this or that village, they are implying that their bombing of other Vietnamese villages has been and will be legitimate. Whenever a criminal volunteers a confession, we have to ask which untrue supposition he thereby tries to make us believe to be valid.

Those – and amongst them are even chancellors and presidents – who like to compare the number of war deaths with the number of traffic deaths, and who then triumphantly proclaim that the number of victims on the highway in the United States is greater than the number of American boys who have fallen in Vietnam, are simply frauds.

Even if their figures should be correct – what do they prove? After all, the number of sex murders is also smaller than that of traffic deaths, but does this say anything in favour of sex murders? Those who make use of such comparisons have no other aim but to lead us to the false conclusion that if we demand the abolition of napalm or lazy dogs (not to speak of atom bombs) we should – or rather, we are even obliged to – demand the abolition of our cars as well. Secretly speculating on our fear of expropriation, they seem to ask us: “And what would you say if we would ask you to give up your cars?”

Unfortunately, it cannot be denied that time and again this pseudo-argument has been successful. When hearing this comparison, most people seem to forget the simple fact that napalm and lazy dogs (not to speak of atom bombs) are manufactured for no other purpose than to kill people – while cars, so I am told, are being produced to transport people, although occasionally they may happen to lead to fatal accidents. And even if it were true (and presumably it is) that there are criminal car producers who, by methodically planning obsolescence of their products, are indirectly planning and committing murder – why should this fact excuse those who are planning and committing murder directly through their production of deadly weapons and genocidal wars?

Of course, it is true – and again and again we must point to the fact – that the Americans are using weapons and gadgets (such as napalm bombs and the lazy dogs) which are banned by international law, and that they are destroying temples, hospitals and schools. And yet, as long as we confine ourselves to protesting against these crimes, we create the utterly false and misleading impression that we wouldn't object to the American aggression in Vietnam if, instead of napalm, only “conventional weapons” were used; if, instead of temples and churches, only “conventional buildings” were destroyed; if, instead of the sick and children, only “conventional people”

were liquidated. Under no circumstances should we allow or make ourselves guilty of causing such a misunderstanding. Once and for all we have to state: the real crime is not that the American government is waging its aggressive war with *this* weapon instead of *that* weapon, but that it is waging an aggressive war; and not that it is destroying *this* type of house instead of *that* type of house, but that it is destroying houses; and not that it is liquidating this human being instead of *that* human being, but that it is liquidating *human beings*. What counts is the attack as such. The atrocities to which one commonly points are only crimes of a second degree. *Only crimes within a crime.*

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On July 22, 1966 *The New York Times* published, without comment, a report about the launching of a Polaris submarine, the *Will Rogers*, in Groton, Connecticut ... and its christening by Mrs. Hubert Humphrey. Despite its brevity, this item contains five disgusting, even obscene, elements.

It is obscene

that a vessel, the underwater rockets of which are supposed to commit genocide, was given a name just as if it were any ordinary banana boat or passenger ship;

that this act of naming an instrument of genocide was called “christening”;

that no more suitable name could be found than that of a humorist;

that this act of “christening” an instrument of genocide with the name of a humorist was imposed upon a woman; and finally

that this woman – no less than the wife of the Vice-President – apparently carried out this request without any inhibitions.

As far as we are concerned, we can only hope that those millions who may be killed by this instrument will feel consoled by the knowledge that it is not to a tragedian, but to a comedian, and not to a missile “christened” by a man, but to one “christened” by a woman, that they have fallen victim.

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... We would lose face if we once again stopped bombing North Vietnam  
 ... *Official Cliché*

I cannot remember that anyone really possessing a real face has ever argued that, because he “couldn’t afford to lose his face,” he was forced to undertake this or that – generally something very bloody – or that he, unfortunately, couldn’t get out of this or that – generally very bloody undertaking. Whoever possesses a face can rest assured that it will stick to him, that he won’t lose it, either in his own eyes or in those of others; it is much easier to lose his hands or his feet. The figure of speech is used exclusively by those who are not only faceless, but so egocentric that it doesn’t enter their minds to try to visualise what (if at all) they look like in the eyes of others. If they did, they would, to their never-ending amazement, have to recognise that it has never occurred to anyone to acknowledge as faces those amorphous spots that they themselves, when looking into the mirror, never tire to admire; and that, therefore, all of their bloody efforts, which supposedly serve the purpose of face-saving, are nothing but a waste of time.

No matter whether they ever had a face which they could lose, what counts are the following questions and answers:

1. Whose eyes are murderers thinking of when they fear losing face in the eyes of others by not continuing their bloody work?

*Answer: Only the eyes of other murderers.*

2. What do they imply and impute by issuing their declaration officially and publicly?

*Answer: They imply and impute that by renouncing their bloody job they would lose face in the eyes of everybody; thus in our eyes too – thus that their way of death is our way of life.*

3. Are they entitled to thus disgrace us?

*Answer: This question can be answered only by our actions.*

News item from Saigon: *During the last week in October US bombers mistakenly attacked the South Vietnamese village of Du Due thereby killing forty-eight civilians and wounding fifty-five.* (Needless to add that the Americans immediately flew medications to the surviving victims and that representatives of the South Vietnamese government promptly expressed their gratitude for this helpfulness.)

When the director of the Molussian\* Mafia, Mr. Fu, saw that his third attempt to blackmail the merchant Bim had failed, he decided to apply measures which were customary in such cases: to do away with the oldest son of this unreasonable man. Of course this action didn't cause any difficulties, and when, on the following morning, the specialist reported to the director about the business dealings completed during the night, he could also, amongst others, relate the decease of young Barn. "What?" screamed Mr. Fu to the surprise of his specialist, "the son of Mr. Barn?" "According to instructions," the specialist replied. "Instructions! Instructions! That's murder! I said Bim, not Barn." Whereupon the employee, remarking that one corpse doesn't exclude another, got up and strolled away.

If and how Mr. Fu has punished his specialist for his negligence is unknown to us. But we do know that he was unable to forget the older Barn, who had been thrown into such grief through an effort of the firm. With the promptness which is known only to the truly virtuous heart, Mr. Fu immediately sent a message of his most profound condolence to the bereaved Mr. Barn, and even let this message be followed by an autographed portrait of himself. It is certainly a consoling testimony to the urbanity of Molussia that the old gentleman Barn, despite his unspeakable pain, showed himself worthy of Mr. Fu's humane gesture, and that he not only expressed his gratitude for the unexpected present, but even gave it a place of honour on the wall of his desolate home.

"For five days now," announced the well-known chief of the Molussian Mafia, Mr. Fu, who temporarily had confined himself to slaughtering only the inhabitants of the Southern part of the city, "for five days now I have most puritanically abstained from shedding blood in the Northern suburbs." And after ten days, he bragged in a similar way, and after fifteen his words were even more boastful. "Truly," he concluded his third proclamation – and the ring of his voice was as ominous as that of all moralists who are about to lose their patience – "truly, if there are still

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\* *The Molussian Catacombs* is a novel by Anders which probes the rise of fascism through a series of exchanges between two men imprisoned beneath the imagined country of Molussia.

people in the Northern part of our city who refuse to trust me and who fail to recognise the unmistakable signs of my peacefulness, I'm warning them for the last time. They will have no right to complain about the consequences of their stubbornness."

And not only did his Mafia Brethren applaud, but also the Most Honorable Gentlemen: the members of the city council, since they too despised nothing more than violence and loved nothing more dearly than peace.

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"Join with people!" runs the second commandment. "Understand their life, use phrases from their language, honour their customs and laws!" And the third commandment: "Treat women with politeness and respect!" And the ninth: "Reflect honour upon yourself and the USA"

Urbane recommendations for the use of Fulbright students sent to European universities? Nothing of the sort, but rather rules belonging to the official code of behaviour handed out to American G.I.'s stationed in Vietnam.

"Use their language!" Of course it is idiotic to expect from American boys, many of whom are not even able to speak their own language correctly, that they should, immediately upon arriving in Saigon or in jungle villages which they are supposed to destroy, attain linguistic genius and overnight toss off Vietnamese proverbs or local expressions. But how harmless is this idiocy compared to the hypocrisy on which the other commandments are based!

How should boys who are being sent over in order to violate the population; who are told to poison rice fields; who are encouraged to pose as brothel masters of cities; who, working as torture specialists, are tape-recording the screams of the interrogated and (long live Social Psychology!) "evaluating" these tapes – how should these poor boys carry out such tasks "with politeness and respect?" And in a way which "reflects honour upon themselves and the United States?"

Some months ago in Auschwitz I walked between the mountains of hair, of eye glasses, of suitcases, of brushes, of artificial limbs; between the mountains of those dead objects which, used to being dead anyway, have survived their murdered owners. I know what the Nazis perpetrated in Auschwitz, but I fear that, compared to those American hypocrites, who have formulated and handed out the Vietnam maxims, these Nazis were – horrible to say – men of honour. Never did I hear that employees in the concentration camps were being told to handle their victims with kid

gloves or treat them with respect. Never that any SS man or anyone else working in a crematorium was ordered to gain the confidence of those to be liquidated by using their native language, never that anyone had to lure the Jews into the gas chambers in Yiddish. Not that. However dreadfully the word “love your enemies” has been destroyed in Auschwitz, even more dreadful are those who, although ordering or executing the bloody handiwork, dare to pretend to fulfil this gospel commandment and are even impudent enough to offer themselves as its missionaries.

## “Chernobyl is everywhere”

Ten Theses on Chernobyl (1986) – Günther Anders

### *Thesis 4*

To distinguish between the military use and the peaceful use of nuclear energy is senseless and deceitful. For we know that the allegedly peaceful nuclear power plants have for some time now, consistently and without respite, threatened not only certain people, or even all of humanity, but have also posed a threat to all life on earth. Their construction and operation are worse than the military use of atomic energy: they participate in a “Herostratic” project. Today, after Chernobyl, now that no one can feign ignorance, their defenders have deliberately committed a crime. This crime is not only called “genocide” – I often use the adverb, “only”! but “globicide”, the destruction of the terraqueous globe. The supporters of nuclear energy, and above all the supporters of waste treatment facilities and super-reactors, are no better than President Truman, who ordered the bombing of Hiroshima. They are even worse than him, because today people know much more than that simple-minded President ever could have known in his time. They know what they are doing; he did not. That we, human beings, should die, whether from a nuclear missile or from a supposedly peaceful nuclear power plant, amounts to exactly the same thing. Both are equally deadly. Killing is killing. Dead means dead. Those who are supporters of the missile and those who are supporters of the power plant, those who minimize the effects of the one and those who minimize the effects of the other, are both cut from the same cloth.