

FIRST STRIKE: THE PYRRHIC VICTORY, OR LESS ----- ELLIOTT #1798

In deterrence theory, the "preemptive strike" has figured since 1945. Its value has been steadily declining: the victory on either side (USA or USSR) would be so costly as to be, in the judgment of history, insane, even though slightly less insane than the action of the first-strikers....When I hit the "s" just before the period of the last sentence, a "lady bug" from the greenhouse (which is, across the library, contiguous to my study, specifically, the IBM Selectric II typewriter), landed one-inch from the "s." I took "her" to the greenhouse: God has given us no friendly insect quite as efficient at bad-bug-eating as the ladybug....Now back from the sanity of nature to the insanity of history:

1. My guess is that "Communism" won a Pyrrhic (i.e., too costly) victory over the USA in Vietnam (though the defeat the USA suffered was fully deserved). We, the USA, were "first strike" there in the sense that in 1954 we took up in Vietnam the lost cause of the French. (As I'd supported Ho Chi Minh since 1945, the whole 1954-and-after performance of my country was an anguish in which I felt myself a "stranger in a strange (though my own) land." In this postmodern world, I have become allergic to first-strike theorizing.
2. As my father was talking almost all the time (not excepting, in my mother's opinion, while asleep), I am aware of the authorities on which he depended for (1) truth and (2) HUMOR. Josh Billings was in the second category. In the year 1865, when our Civil War ended, in his JOSH BILLINGS, HIS SAYINGS, the sardonic sage let this loose: "Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just, / But four times he who gets his blow in fust." What hits me between the eyes, here, is the falseness of J.B.'s irony: In 1860, S.Carolina got its blow in "fust," and lost. By the publication date of J.B.'s volume, it was world-clear that the first-striker had lost. Conclusion: Don't trust the funnymen! Their score is no better than anybody else's.
3. In the 1984 TV series "World War III" (just concluded: Jan/84), first-strike has disappeared as advantageous: nobody wins a nuclear war. So, authorities being knowledgeable on the matter, WWII, if it happens, will be unintended though mutually threatened. This fact calls into question, now, the relative values of promising and threatening: the whole +/- dynamic may have become dysfunctional to human surviving and thriving. If we "make it," it will be because somebody comes up with a fresh-transcendent start beyond the million-years politics of war/peace. God provide!
4. For the historical reason observable in any unabridged dictionary, a "Pyrrhic" victory is one so costly that the winner should not have started (if the winner did) the strife. Now, 1984, techno-history faces us with an even more dire possibility, viz., a worse-than-Pyrrhic victory: a victory not only costly, but destructive, to the victor. I favor the increase of nuclear armaments till the insanity of our 1984 -and-onward situation becomes clear enough to force a fresh start for "arms talks." My choice here is last-resort: a no-nukes pressure is irrelevant to power-thinkers (though I sign all the no-nuke resolutions put under my nose, not to discourage the peace-lover actionists).
5. Deeper than the first/second strike theorizing on nukes is the soul-sense of rightness, justice, what-I-must-do-face-to-face-with-What-Has-the-Right-to-Command-Me. In the West, this sense, the cosmic-moral sense, roots, through Christianity, in (1) the nature of God (Hebraically) and (2) the nature of nature (Stoically): beyond our selves and our society and our history(-ies) lies What-We-Are-Responsible-To, whether personal (as biblically) or impersonal (Hellenistic philosophical ethics). I must say it: The sense is as strong in Marx as in Moses and Jesus. We humans will survive if the West can compose its primary divide; and if that composition of peace is achieved, it will be in the sphere of the sense I'm speaking of.
6. My good audiomemory can hear my father quoting Shakespeare (HENRY VI, Pt.2, III. ii.233): "Thrice is he arm'd that hath his quarrel just." With such a sentiment Pater knowingly, on one occasion (when I was 12), went down to political defeat with more peace than pain. It's part of my heritage to care less what others think than about what I, at the moment, consider honorable to truth, justice, love.