

AlbertMohler.com

The Morality of Knowledge

Thursday, October 12, 2006



The threat of nuclear weapons in North Korea is deeply troubling. The very idea that the Hermit Kingdom could be armed with nuclear weapons is enough to send the rest of the world into a state of international anxiety. The political and military dimensions of the Korean quandary are complex and unclear.

Nevertheless, one central moral dimension is clear enough — the morality of knowledge. As one observer remarked, the North Koreans may dismantle their nuclear weapons, but they will never forget how they made them. They now possess that crucial knowledge, and it will not be forgotten.

The morality of knowledge is a foreign concept to many Americans, and to many Christians as well. The very fact that there might be forbidden knowledge runs counter to the spirit of the age, and to the modern instinct for unrestricted knowledge.

Of course, the idea of forbidden knowledge is an essential part of the biblical story. The occasion of the Fall was a desire to eat from a tree of forbidden knowledge — the knowledge of good and evil. Once Adam and Eve ate of that tree, they knew . . . and so do we.

In this fallen world, the morality of knowledge is never a simple issue. The knowledge of nuclear physics produced both the Bomb and life-saving medical advances. Apparently, we cannot have one without the other. The same is true with most technologies and realms of knowledge. We can use the knowledge to hurt or to heal, and the knowledge to do one carries the knowledge to do the other.

We should be humbled by this realization — and by the acknowledgement that we are morally responsible for what we do with what we know.

SEE ALSO: My essay, "[Dangerous Knowledge — Is There Anything We Should Not Know?](#)", March 8, 2004.

An excerpt:

The issue is the morality of knowledge, a matter quickly swept under the carpet in most ethical debates. After all, we moderns live by Francis Bacon's famous statement that "Knowledge itself is power." The powerful are those who possess knowledge and can thus use it to their own purposes. But is there a moral duty not to know something that can be known?

*The question came to Roger Shattuck from the cockpit of a B-25 bomber as he flew over Hiroshima just days after the nuclear attack had leveled the city. He has been haunted by the quandary ever since. In *Forbidden Knowledge*, his most significant book of essays, Shattuck presses the question: "Can anyone or any institution, in this culture of unfettered enterprise and growth, seriously propose limits on knowledge? Have we lost the capacity to perceive and honor the moral dimensions of such questions?"*

