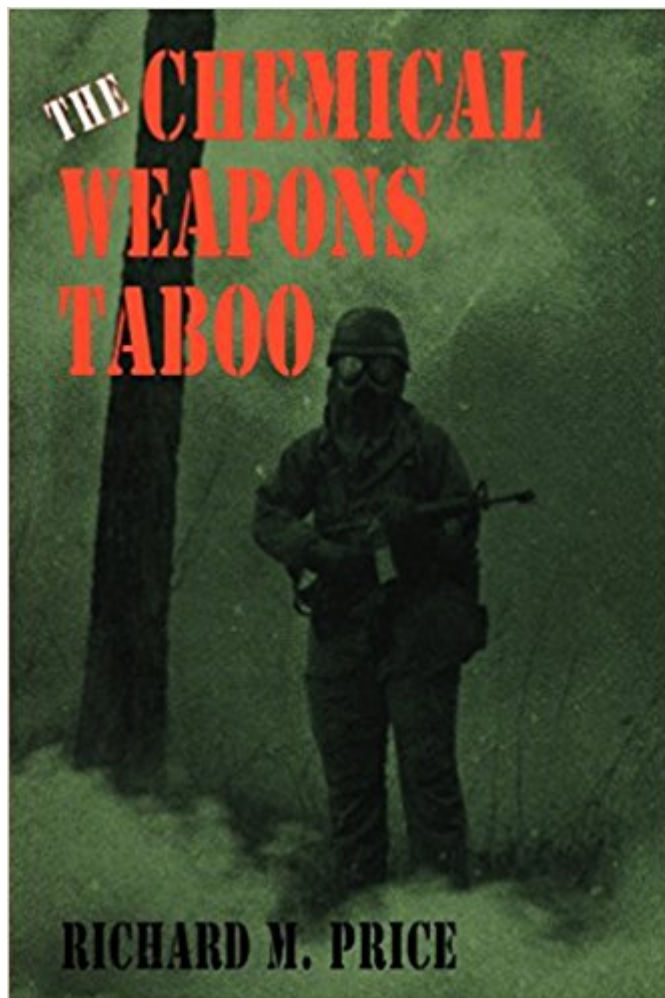


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The Chemical Weapons Taboo



Synopsis

Richard M. Price asks why, among all the ominous technologies of weaponry throughout the history of warfare, chemical weapons carry a special moral stigma. Something more seems to be at work than the predictable resistance people have expressed to any new weaponry, from the crossbow to nuclear bombs. Perceptions of chemical warfare as particularly abhorrent have been successfully institutionalized in international proscriptions and, Price suggests, understanding the sources of this success might shed light on other efforts at arms control. To explore the origins and meaning of the chemical weapons taboo, Price presents a series of case studies from World War I through the Gulf War of 1990–1991. He traces the moral arguments against gas warfare from the Hague Conferences at the turn of the century through negotiations for the Chemical Weapons Convention of 1993. From the Italian invasion of Ethiopia to the war between Iran and Iraq, chemical weapons have been condemned as the "poor man's bomb." Drawing upon insights from Michel Foucault to explain the role of moral norms in an international arena rarely sensitive to such pressures, he focuses on the construction of and mutations in the refusal to condone chemical weapons.

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Customer Reviews

From the first sentence in the preface: "This book is a meditation on the relationship between morality and technology" readers should be prepared more for a philosophical discussion than for hideous descriptions of gagging infantrymen; Nietzsche permeates these pages as much as mustard, sarin, or phosgene. Price (political science, Univ. of Minnesota) argues that chemical

weapons "have thus far defied the usual pattern" and are seen as "contemptible and reprehensible." Would that he could tell us clearly why. Ranging from World War I to the Gulf War, he tries to decipher this taboo, but his argument gets lost in an arcane discourse. What does Price mean by "peculiarities that may have precipitated a postwar reincarnation of the norm"? Although a worthy topic deserving our attention, this is not light reading even for experts. An optional purchase for academic libraries. ?John J. Yurechko, Georgetown Univ., Washington, D.C. Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Price offers a clear account of international law and controversies over legal norms." ? Nicholas A. Sims, *International Affairs* "Price persuasively confirms that chemical weapons have militarily useful capabilities. . . . Price's thorough scholarship shows how chemical weapons have become a metaphor for intolerably offensive extensions of violent capabilities; the efforts to control them have become a metaphor for the potential ascendancy of law over those capabilities. It is a unique historical lesson, with potentially optimistic ramifications." ? Barry Kellman, *The American Journal of International Law* "A masterful analysis of how a moral norm operates in international politics." ? *Pacifica Review* "An interesting and insightful look into the murky world of morality in modern warfare. . . . An excellent book . . . clear in its focus, effectively presented, and persuasive in its arguments. It should most assuredly find its way onto the shelf of anyone seriously interested in the historical, moral, or pragmatic repercussions of weapons of mass destruction." ? *Millennium, Journal of International Studies* "A very good book on an important topic. . . . Price's scholarship is impeccable, his analysis . . . convincing, and his study . . . a hopeful argument for humanity's ability ? at least on occasion ? to remain the master rather than the servant of technological invention." ? *Technology and Culture* "A valuable book for those wishing to be informed on various chemical weapons and the use of non lethal weapons to fight future insurgencies." ? *The Journal of the United Service Institution of India* "An important scholarly work, with implications well beyond the specific subject of chemical weapons." ? Matthew Meselson, Harvard University

This book offers the reader a wide perspective about chemical weapons and how they have been used in the past. As a historic reference, it is invaluable, and as a work that helps the reader imagine what could happen in the future, this is a must. Every person involved or worried about mass destructions weapons, must read and treasure this book.

Richard Price writes a professional treatise on the perception of Chemical Weapons from WWI to current day. It is a profound work, and goes into refreshing details without the slightest redundancy with other works. The Chemical Weapons Taboo can be thought of as an original scholarly work. He clarifies many current day perceptions on Chemical Weapons by analyzing treaties and political decisions. Rather than rely on perfunctory assumptions of those treaties, he analyzes the committee notes and conduct of those treaties to show the conflict of ideas within their own context. Classically he addresses the taboo's of poisons, weapons of the weak, and other themes, showing the inconsistencies in a norm, and how they falter in explaining the Chemical Weapons Taboo. Readers not familiar with the scholarly styles of contemporary writings in philosophy will find this a difficult book to digest. The vocabulary is not scientific/technical, but precise and demanding. Nonetheless, it is insightful on the processes of international law, conduct of states, and the historical era's that have influenced the current day "taboo." An intensely rewarding study (i.e., six-stars). By showing how the "taboo" was arrived at in Western societies, it is apparent that it is not a universally held notion. The author concludes that weapons are "political artifacts," not merely the inevitable consequence of technology. A notion that many in the military-industrial complex can concur with.

The Richard M. Price who wrote "The Chemical Weapons Taboo" is not the same Richard M. Price who has been in chemical and biological and radiological defense since 1983. This is just a coincidence of names.

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