

I docked the small piece of driftwood upon which my frail body now was at rest. I walked down the dock, down narrow streets, past narrow buildings—to a restaurant where there was no beginning and no ending. It seemed as though I were becoming another self—destined to no beginning and no ending...only a forever that is built on the theory of Love, which has no beginning and no ending—only endless days and nights. Endless as Eternity!

Randy Morris and Walter Endler,
Nagasaki Spirit, Hiroshima Voices:
 (Saint Paul: Hamline Univ. Press),
 2003.

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The Psychology of Extinction

Inquiries into Anxiety in the Nuclear Age

1985

WE LIVE IN A SELF-CONSCIOUS “AGE OF ANXIETY” and much of our professional life as psychologists is spent understanding and confronting this malaise. Recent developments in world politics, however, have heightened our awareness of a new kind of anxiety associated with the threat of nuclear war, instilling in us and our clients a special kind of dread of the unknown and uncontrollable. This anxiety is unique because it contains within itself the threat of extinction—not only of ourselves, but also of our species as a whole. Given the urgency of this threat, two questions arise: what is the nature of the psychology being shaped by the threat of extinction, and what is our responsibility as helping professionals to act on behalf of mental health? This essay is an interdisciplinary response to these questions utilizing categories of understanding derived from the disciplines of biology, psychology, and existential philosophy. Only through such a general approach can we hope to encompass the full range of issues posed by this fearful topic.

Let us begin with an image of health and vitality. Consider the image of the Earth as viewed from the moon. I believe that this is the most significant image of the twentieth century, showing in a graphic way the global interdependence of man and nature. The significance of this image lies not in the ethical behavior it has evoked from the citizens of “spaceship Earth,” but rather in the ethical behavior it *ought* to evoke. The blue-green colors of the Earth’s biosphere beckon to us, proclaiming the sanctity of life and illustrating the interconnectedness of living things and the *ecos* they inhabit. This image of global interdependence is the most significant image of the twentieth century because it provides us with a moral imperative, a

controlling image of health, vitality, and strength around which we can organize human behavior.

Consider now an image of disease, literally “dis-ease.” The English word *anxiety* is derived from the Greek *anxere* meaning “to choke” or “to hurt.” In the Greek worldview, the spirit or soul was in the *pneuma* or breath, which left one’s body at death. Anxiety, therefore, has the connotation of a choking of the soul, a slow squeezing of vitality, a draining of the spirit. Thus, anxiety is an apt image for the insidious way in which modern life sucks away our vital juices until, unbeknownst to us, we are merely a husk of flesh and bone, living in our routines, separated from our soul, our center lost.

THE PROBLEM

The image of a healthy, harmonious, and interconnected Earth is threatened from many directions. These threats are experienced as either direct fear or vague anxiety, fear without a clear object. Of course the threat posed by nuclear weapons is not the only problem confronting the Earth and its inhabitants. Pollution, world hunger, and the problem of disenfranchised third world nations are other significant issues that come to mind. However, the threat of nuclear war, and therefore of extinction, is psychologically unique for a number of reasons. Consider that if a nuclear war were to happen, destruction would be immediate, unlike other world problems in which we would be warned by signs of progressive decay. The feeling that we should continue to live our lives in a normal way, knowing the possibility of instantaneous destruction, instills in us a sense of foreboding. The mere possibility of apocalypse erodes our trust in the continuity of the Earth. Consider, too, that as we try to visualize the consequences of nuclear war we see that the destruction it will cause is relatively complete. But our imaginations cannot encompass the totality of the destruction because images require a subject to imagine them. Just as no one can really imagine his own death, so no one can really imagine the holocaust, because in imagination the subject always survives. Consider also a 1982 survey in Britain of 15- to 18-year-olds, 70 percent of whom thought nuclear war was inevitable. Even more surprising, one-third of those polled did not know that atomic weapons were used against Japan in World War II. There is no doubt that we are dealing here with widespread fear and ignorance, but what are its consequences?

And finally, consider that our participation in world events forces us to join in a nuclear debate that is rife with conflicting theories and false feelings. Indeed, the current negotiating strategy of the United States and the Soviet Union—mad, or mutually assured destruction—forces us to place our trust in terror, an aberrant form of emotional investment that requires us to separate our morality from our thinking.

The rhetoric of this kind of “mad” reasoning, the very purpose of which is to maximize fear, can reach ludicrous proportions. Consider the front page of a local newspaper on September 7, 1983, soon after the downing of a Korean Airlines jumbo jet by the Russians. On one side of the front page President Reagan denounces the Russians as “inhuman.” He says: “The attack on the airliner was an act of barbarism, born of a society that wantonly disregards the rights of the individual and of human life... But we shouldn’t be surprised by such inhuman brutality.” On the left-hand side of the same page are comments by a Russian spokesperson: “We can compare the White House with Nazi Germany, accusing it of sacrificing people for its own aims. When the Hitlerists made an attack they placed women and children in front of them. I do not think this comparison is too strong. I think it is just right.”

This is strong rhetoric indeed, capable of instilling a great sense of insecurity in the people who must listen to it and whose fate is being decided by it. While this rhetoric frightens most people, it should also pique the curiosity of the psychologist in us. The deep structure of this language is a tangled web of fear, anger, projection, aggression, repression, conscience, evil, and a host of other psychological issues. There is no doubt that the language warrants a psychological analysis, but the problem is how to begin to untangle the knot. Clarifying the mess is only part of the problem, however. We must also use our skills as healers to confront, re-order and renew the lives that are being affected by this “disease.” Furthermore, we should provide the foundations for an education that is psychologically adequate for citizens of the nuclear age.

As we embark on this task, it is appropriate to remind ourselves that as healers, we too are wounded by the very afflictions we try to heal in others. In healing ourselves, others are healed: “Physician, heal thyself.”

THE SELF-PROCESS

How then do we access the circle of nuclear thinking? How can we get to the heart of the problem? Let us return to a fundamental issue in psychology and expand our awareness from there. Consider the self. The history of psychology is filled with various attempts to grasp this elusive concept. For our purposes, the definition used by Robert Lifton, an important writer on nuclear issues, will suffice. Lifton (1967) defines the self as "the person's symbol of his own organism" while the self-process is "the continuous psychic re-creation of that symbol." Using his definition as a stepping stone, let us bracket the issue of nuclear war. Let us pretend the nuclear threat does not exist and observe how the self-process works in a nuclear-free environment. We immediately discern that while the self-process has its strengths, it is also assaulted from many sides. Let's examine in more detail the virtues of the self-process as well as some of the threats to its inherent vitality.

The self-process is a marvelous extension of biological regulations embedded in the natural world. To be sure, the environment presents us with constraints or "coefficients of resistance" to which we must respond or die, but the success of our species as a whole lies precisely in the flexibility we have demonstrated in adapting to a changing reality. Flexibility within constraint, then, is a hallmark of the self-process.

Because the self-process is a natural extension of organic regulations, it is subject to the fundamental principle of living things: hierarchical organization. In other words, the psychic re-creations of the self-process cannot proceed in a random fashion but must be re-ordered according to specific principles of hierarchical organization. The existential counterpart to this biological process is the personal myth, the psychic narrative that tells a coherent story about how an individual has coped with the vicissitudes of life. We may say, therefore, that the life story is made possible because the mind seeks order.

The question then arises, from a phenomenological point of view, how do we experience re-ordering and renewal? How do we write a life story that is always essentially incomplete? This is a question concerning meaning, creativity, and the construction of a vital design. Simply stated, our task as the makers of our own meaning is to build a coherent image of our future and to make choices that will allow us to grow into this image. Ortega y Gasset expresses this idea in the following way: "Life means the inexorable

necessity of realizing the *design* for an existence which each one of us is... The sense of life... is nothing other than each one's acceptance of his inexorable circumstance and, on accepting it, converting it into his own creation." To the extent that we are able to live out this vital design, we experience a sense of gratification and achievement, a conviction that we are becoming what we were meant to become. It is an experience of authenticity.

However, we cannot construct a vital design in a social vacuum. Living means living with other people in community. Our relations with these others must be governed by principles of mutuality in which we support their designs for living even as they support ours. This mutual social regulation is not possible without the fundamental existential category of care—the glue that binds self and other. Without care the authentic reciprocity between self and others is impossible and the self-process ceases to function.

How do we recognize the relative success of self-in-process? Given the frailty of our imaginative designs for living and the brute power of environmental constraint, how do we know those moments when our desperate struggles are fulfilled? We recognize them through the emotion of joy. The experience of joy is made possible primarily through suffering. If happiness is the absence of discord, joy is the recognition that discord is necessary for psychic renewal, making available to us new possibilities to explore (May 1981). Joy, then, is a kind of release, a letting go of our old self to make way for the new. Joy is the experiential signature of the successful self-process.

In these five principles of the self-process—flexibility within constraint, mind seeking order, the construction of a vital design, care and community, and joy—we have described a horizon of meaning wherein we can understand some of the threats confronting the self-process. While continuing to hold the issue of nuclear war in abeyance, let us see how modern life threatens to unravel this marvelous tapestry.

Many social critics and psychiatrists in America have written about the problem of narcissism (May 1981; Lasch 1978; Kohut 1971; Kernberg 1975). In its most general sense, narcissism is the tendency of individuals to focus on their own feelings and problems in such a way as to exclude other people from their emotional orbit. Narcissists care mostly for themselves, while other human beings are simply means to this end. In this sense, narcissism is essentially a threat to community because the individual refuses to acknowledge his debt to the society that nurtured him. In this search for

freedom from entanglement with other persons, the narcissist inevitably suffers from his failure of compassion and commitment. Narcissism is a failure to care authentically, a refusal to cooperate in the mutual construction of vital designs, and it destroys the social fabric binding the generations of mankind.

A second threat to the self-process is a psychological style Robert Lifton termed "proteanism" (Lifton 1967, 1970). The protean style is characterized by a series of experiments in living, each of which can be readily abandoned in favor of new and better quests. Protean man, then, jumps from role to role, switching masks at such a rate that he is no longer certain who he is. Protean people do not experience a center in their lives and their life story does not contain a unitary theme. Lifton argues that the Protean style is an adaptive response by the self to the flood of images and superficial messages mass-produced by the media. By constantly shifting the meaning of his life, Protean man can maintain a better adaptive equilibrium in a rapidly changing cultural environment. But there is a real danger to this psychological stance. In Lifton's analysis, the Protean style is a symbolic form of father-less-ness, a breakdown of the super-ego, a blurring of the criteria between right and wrong such that one's conscience requires only momentary and superficial justifications. Because Protean man cannot commit himself to a single lifestyle long enough to probe its depths, he experiences a nagging sense of unworthiness, like a plant that cannot find suitable ground in which to sink its roots. The Protean person moves from place to place and person to person, searching for authenticity, but never finding it. The Protean style threatens the coherence and integrity of the self-process because it denies both the center around which to organize experience and the personal responsibility such a center requires.

When the self is cast adrift in search of personal identity in a time when social, economic, and political turmoil are rampant, another threat to the self-process provides an alluring but dangerous solution, namely, the tendency to commit one's self to a narrow and exclusive ideological worldview. This tendency, referred to as "totalism" by Robert Lifton (1979) and Erik Erikson (1980), is dangerous because it surrenders the autonomy of the self to a predetermined set of beliefs. Rather than develop a set of hard-won personal beliefs that resonate with the full psycho-social historical development of the self, totalism suggests that we submit ourselves to a set of simple

prescriptions for existence and salvation. The price of admission to a totalistic system is the surrendering of responsibility for one's life. The promise is that of shelter from a tumultuous world. But the price is too high and the promise is counterfeit because ideologies are too narrow to encompass and respond to the full complexity of reality. Simplifying personal choice requires limiting personal choice, and in a world of rapid change the self needs a great range of possibilities and flexibility in which to maneuver. Ideologies by definition are essentially rigid and conservative, but personal, social, and natural reality is not. The result of totalism is a dangerous split between cognitive reality (the world as we understand it) and the real (the world as it is). Furthermore, totalistic thought often fails to resonate with the personal history of each of its adherents, and as a result it provides superficial and inauthentic solutions to complex and deeply felt problems. In general, totalism is a threat to the integrity of the self, because it exchanges the autonomy of the individual for simplistic and short-range solutions.

The final threat I want to discuss is "infantilism." Infantilism refers to the basic store of unconscious, childish rage in the adult, a rage with great potential for destruction. For purposes of clarification, we may say that acting childlike is a regression in the service of the ego, but acting childishly, or with infantile rage, is a submission of the adult ego to self-indulgent feelings of dependency, hatred, and revenge. Erik Erikson (1964) argues that the rage of infantilism is evoked as a result of "adaptive impotence." When the ego experiences frustration and self-doubt in its attempts to respond to the constraints of reality, it responds like a baby. One danger of infantilism, argues Erikson, is that such rage can be exploited by political leaders for ostensibly moral purposes. Submerged feelings of rage can surface in the adult as moral indignation and condemnation of others. According to Erikson (1964):

Irrational and pre-rational combination of goodness, doubt and rage can re-emerge in the adult in those malignant forms of righteousness and prejudice which we may call *moralism*. In the name of high moral principles all the vindictiveness of derision, of torture and of mass extinction can be employed. One surely must come to the conclusion that the Golden Rule was meant to protect man not only against his enemy's attacks, but also against his friend's righteousness. (pp. 223-24)

The function of the ego is to guard against such irrational intrusions, but when the ego is weakened it is more likely to submit to the irrational. This is especially true in times of rapid change. Stressful times require an ego strength bordering on the ascetic, but infantilism threatens the ego's ability to cope with the irrational. In so doing, infantilism manifests itself as childish behavior between adults, political groups, and nations, causing immature actions that are justified by a simplistic morality.

These four threats to the vitality of the self-process—narcissism, proteanism, totalism, and infantilism—are symptoms of our times. Our task as psychological healers is to confront and understand these threats in order to sustain the integrity of the self-process. Of course, this list of threats is by no means exhaustive and few suggestions have been offered how best to deal with them. Nevertheless, this descriptive overview of the self-process and the threats to it provides a field of understanding in which to contextualize the anxiety caused by nuclear war. Let us now lift the brackets separating our understanding of the self-process and its relation to nuclear anxiety in order to explore further the psychology of extinction.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF EXTINCTION

There are a number of ironies that arise when human beings reflect on their own extinction. For instance, extinction is a very common occurrence. According to evolutionary theory, 99.9 percent of all the species that have ever lived on the planet Earth are now extinct. Human beings are merely a recent experiment in evolutionary design, and if they cannot adapt to the threats of the nuclear age they will cease to exist. The real irony is that in the event of an all-out nuclear war, the human species will destroy the very possibility of future species.

A second irony is that extinction is a limiting concept; it can never be experienced. Extinction does not happen to anybody because, by definition, there will be no one there to experience it. A question arises as to the appropriateness of using this category. But extinction is analogous to death, which always stands outside of life, yet which conditions it in a powerful way. Just as death affects the living more than the dead, so it is with extinction. In the words of Jonathan Schell (1982), whose writing on this topic is quite eloquent,

Like death, extinction is felt not when it has arrived but beforehand, as a deep shadow cast back across the whole of life. The answer to the question of who experiences extinction and when, therefore, is that we the living experience it, now and in all the moments of our lives. Hence while in one sense it is true that extinction lies outside human life and never happens to anybody, in another sense extinction saturates our existence and never stops happening. If we want to find the meaning of extinction, accordingly, we should start by looking with new eyes at ourselves and the world we live in and at the lives we live. (p. 147)

Let us turn now to the specific threats to the self-process caused by the anxiety of nuclear war.

The first thing to realize about nuclear anxiety is that it makes all the other threats we have discussed more acute. People may choose to ignore the realities of nuclear conflict, but they are nevertheless burdened by the possibility. As social bonds become more tenuous and uncertain, the narcissist is even more justified in withholding authentic relations with others, while the protean style is strengthened because, when the Earth itself is threatened, there is no virtue to sustained commitment and responsibility. Likewise, totalism is encouraged as the search for simplistic answers is intensified and feelings of helplessness in a world that cannot be controlled engenders a great deal of regressive rage.

Perhaps the dimension of human existence most deeply affected by nuclear anxiety is the sense of psycho-historical embeddedness in a culture with a coherent past, a meaningful present, and a promising future. When more than 50 percent of the youth in advanced industrial societies consider the possibility of nuclear war likely, we are confronting a serious impairment to the adolescent's perceptions of the future. "Why should I invest my time and energy in a future that, in all probability, will not exist? Why should I not indulge myself in the present?" This pattern of reasoning will occur to anyone, child or adult, whose thoughts about the future contain nuclear imagery and the possibility of the destruction of all future generations.

The imaginative destruction of a viable future also affects the present. "Live for today because tomorrow you die" is a reasonable alternative to anybody living in a futureless world, providing a useful license to enjoy life

in the moment with few restrictions. But this attitude eventually begins to wear thin as the pleasures of the moment fail to disguise an underlying sense of loneliness and emptiness. In Jonathan Schell's (1982) words:

The moment itself, unable to withstand the abnormal pressure of expectation, becomes distorted and corrupted. People turn to it for rewards that it cannot offer—certainly not when it is ordered to do so. Plucked out of life's stream, the moment—whether a moment of love or spiritual peace, or even of simple pleasure in a meal—is no longer permitted to quietly unfold and be itself but is strenuously tracked down, manipulated, harried by instruction and advice, bought and sold, and, in general, so roughly manhandled that the freshness and joy that it can yield up when it is left alone are corrupted or destroyed. (p. 159)

Just as perceptions of a nonviable future lead to a bloated present, so do they also lead to a trivializing of the past. Without the assurance that there will be a future, it is difficult to muster the motivation for mastering the past works of mankind, the very cultural matrix in which meaning is made possible. What is being threatened here is the basis by which we construct an intergenerational common world. The ties that bind us as a particular people located in a certain space-time have been unraveling for some time, but the threat of nuclear war exacerbates the process.

Let us turn now to the way in which nuclear anxiety participates in and affects certain cognitive processes. Gregory Bateson (1972) coined the term "double-bind thinking" to describe the etiology of certain schizophrenic behavior disorders. In Bateson's view, the victim of a double-bind situation has been given two mutually contradictory messages such that responding to either message constitutes "wrong" behavior. The result is a cognitive confusion that can eventually lead to schizophrenia. There is no doubt that the current negotiating strategy between the United States and the Soviet Union contains patterns of double-bind thinking. MAD strategy is based on a theory of nuclear deterrence which reasons that only by threatening to use our nuclear capability can we prevent the other side from attacking us. In other words, we avoid self-extinction by threatening to perform the act. The double-bind irony of this negotiating strategy becomes particularly obvious when we realize that our only protection from nuclear war is to place our trust in terror. Unfortunately, the very people whose lives depend

on this strategy have no experiential context in which to understand this ironic juxtaposition of trust and terror. No mother has taught her child to trust terror.

Another way of reasoning that contains patterns of double-bind thinking concerns the role of self-criticism in the setting of the nuclear policy of democratic countries. Because both sides of a nuclear confrontation must show their willingness to strike at a moment's notice, neither side can afford to display any kind of internal weakness. What happens, then, when a particular policy needs revision or change? It must be done in secrecy or not at all, thereby nullifying the very checks and balances that make for a strong democracy. In other words, deterrence deters debate about itself and in so doing chokes off the very democratic values it is designed to protect.

The deleterious effects of double-bind thinking are not limited to the rarefied atmosphere of international nuclear negotiating strategy. Consider the plight of school children, many of whom have been exposed to images of nuclear destruction by the age of five. If parents refuse to discuss with children the fears engendered by this imagery, then the active imaginations of school-age children are free to assume the worst possible scenarios. But even if the most reasonable parents discuss the nuclear issue in a realistic way, they must still insist that the children live in full knowledge that a series of bombs capable of great destruction can fall on them at any time and yet they should continue to live their lives in a normal way. It is not surprising that children are confused by the problem of nuclear war.

What is the effect of this kind of thinking on individual psychology? Double-bind logic leads to a dissociation between thought and feeling, a psychic gap caused by the fact that in order to go about "business as usual" we must deaden our feelings about what we know. When feeling is inhibited or repressed, the people and things of the outer world diminish in value. Their apparent loss of importance renders them vague and unconvincing. We lose interest in the outer world; it becomes dull and flat, incapable of arousing our passions concerning its present plight. We drift toward the end of our world in a profound and lethargic state of apathy. This response to the effects of double-bind thinking has been called "psychic numbing" by Lifton and others. It is perhaps the most prevalent and dangerous response we can have to the anxiety of nuclear extinction. It is especially dangerous when political leaders become numb to the consequences

of nuclear war. At this point they begin to use a rhetoric of "limited nuclear war" in the belief that such a war can actually be won. They become victims of a distortion of human experience, the glorification of knowledge to the detriment of feeling. The psychic costs of this split between thinking and feeling are seen in the huge gap between our technological skill in manufacturing and deploying weapons of great violence on the one hand and limited capacity for moral and spiritual imagination on the other. In fact the psychic split between thought and feeling is the heart of the psychological dilemma posed by the threat of nuclear extinction. The size of this gap is an indicator of our lack of progress, and the gap itself is the oozing wound that the psychic healer must stanch, both in himself and in others.

Are we then caught in a double bind, strung between a position of psychic numbing and helplessness? How do we counsel individuals who are willing to confront the problem but do not know how? The situation seems to breed despair; indeed despair seems to be the only valid response. Yet, as we shall see, it is despair that provides the seeds of our renewal.

The origin of despair can be elusive. It may be experienced as a conscious response to the possibility that the human species may destroy itself in a nuclear war; but more likely it will be experienced as a vague feeling that, for some unknown reason, the future holds no hope. In either case, despair is an admission that we are powerless to do anything about what will happen to us.

The experience of many psychotherapists has been that by getting their clients to admit and own their despair, rather than repressing it, a feeling of relief is experienced. Rollo May (1978) describes the psychotherapeutic function of despair in the following way:

We know in psychotherapy that often despair is essential to the discovery on the part of the client of his or her hidden capacities and basic assets. The function of despair is to wipe away our superficial ideas, our delusionary hopes, our simplistic morality. There are some misguided therapists who feel that they must reassure the patient at every point of despair. But if the client never feels despair, it is doubtful whether he ever will feel any profound emotion. (pp. 236–37)

Just as suffering is often a prerequisite to joy in the self-process, so those who can confront despair and survive are those who can experience the

most intense elation. In mythical terms, the celebration of death is a precursor to any rising from the dead; to win the Holy Grail we must be willing to endure the dark night of the soul.

So what happens when we are willing to admit our despair? In her work with despair groups whose specific concern was nuclear war, Joanna Macy (1983) discovered that by owning one's own despair, individuals release a great deal of emotional energy that was previously blocked. The result is a resurgence of hope as the individual recognizes that the anguish is rooted in a deep caring for the Earth and its inhabitants. In Macy's experience, breaking taboos against despair and permitting it to be openly expressed results in a release of emotional energy and a stronger commitment to resuming the task of human survival. Through this psychotherapeutic ordeal, an even deeper discovery is made, one which validates the latent healing power in the threat of extinction. In Macy's words:

Through our despair something more profound and pervasive than our despair comes to light. It is our interconnectedness, our interexistence. Beyond our pain and because of our pain we awaken into that. For our feelings of despair for the planet and its beings are concerns that extend beyond our separate egos. Therefore they testify to our essential unity—and by owning them we re-experience that unity, emerge into it afresh. In that dawning we recognize that the very crises of our time can open us to new dimensions of awareness, a sense of mutual belonging so real that the response is one of wonder, even joy. That is why the workshops are often called "Despair and Empowerment." (p. 241)

Thus the despair generated by the threat of extinction can become a kind of virtue in that it provides us with a source of emotional energy that can be used for purposes of social responsibility. Despair can also awaken us to the fact that we are truly interconnected with other human beings on the planet. The value of reaching this conclusion through despair rather than intellectual insight is that through despair an emotional component accompanies the understanding, thereby intensifying the authenticity of the experience. The idea of the interconnectedness of human beings is further enhanced when we realize that, because the threat of extinction is a problem shared by all, it can serve as a focal force by which to define a common humanity. As Schell (1982) puts it, "nothing underscores our common

humanity as strongly as the peril of extinction does: in fact, on a practical and political plane, it establishes that common humanity” (p. 227).

Whether despair is induced specifically by the nuclear threat or generally by an inability to cope, individuals invariably gain valuable self-knowledge as a result of their successful confrontation. Being more psychologically aware, they begin to discover an inner world that contains the same potential for good and evil that the outer world contains. They begin to discover that they are not merely victims of social circumstances but that they have allowed themselves to become victims. Recognizing one’s own capacity for evil is a first step to controlling it. Thus, the virtue of despair is that it enhances our self-knowledge while liberating our motivational power. In so doing, despair provides the seeds of our renewal.

EXPERIMENTS IN SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Given the fact that despair, when overcome, is a vital reminder of our social interconnectedness and leads to a heightened self-awareness, what principles can individuals use to direct their newly liberated energies toward a resolution of the nuclear threat? How can we cease to feel helpless? Recall the basic virtues of the self-process—flexibility within constraint, mind seeking order, the construction of a vital design, care and community, and joy. Despair revitalizes the latter two virtues, but it is the first three that inform our response. The decision to act on behalf of social responsibility after a confrontation with despair requires the development of a coherent plan or design. But the key to the construction of this plan is to remain open and flexible to the constraints of the environment while remaining true to the thematic motifs of the life story. The search for such an authentic design is a search for existential truth, the living truth that one “is.” In this view, truth is not an absolute toward which one gropes; rather truth is a process of lived experience and is constructed through experimenting with one’s life.

Consider the example of Mohandas Gandhi, who titled his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Gandhi’s life was a series of experiments concerning nonviolence, truthfulness in thought and word, celibacy, and God. Gandhi showed that truth is a product of action, that we construct our own truth through deeds. Gandhi’s message was a call to strengthen the self’s will in the context of an expanded morality. His saint-

liness lies in the fact that his life was a paradigm of this search for truth. It is important to understand that this does not imply that we should simply appropriate Gandhi’s truth as our own. This is the path that leads to totalism. Rather, we should appropriate Gandhi’s *method* for achieving the truth, realizing that the truth we seek is a unique product of our own historical struggle to become an authentic self.

Applying this insight in the context of the peril of extinction, we can see that our own personal vital design for social responsibility should be constructed as an experiment, the efficacy of which is dependent on the results. Of course, good experimentalists design their experiments so that the probability of success is high; but it is more important to realize that knowledge is gained even when the experiment fails. As long as a principle of coherence is maintained throughout these life experiments, we are presented with a reverse double bind—instead of being unable to win, it seems we cannot lose.

But calling for a new asceticism of the will is not adequate in itself. We must learn to exercise our will in the context of an enlarged concept of love. Instead of thinking only in terms of caring for our immediate family and friends, city or nation, we must begin to define ourselves in the context of our love for the planet. In other words, the moral imperative for social responsibility in the nuclear age must be a genuine caring for the Earth, the ecos in which we and all other things live. An important dimension of this ecological care and concern is the idea of universal parenthood, the realization that, whether we have children or not, we are all parents of the future generations of mankind. Such a love must be like parental love, which begins before the child is born and which is unconditional. Parental love does not attach to any particular quality of the beloved; it only wants the child to be and it is quick to forgive any shortcomings. Forgiveness, then, is an essential element of planetary care and an important antidote to the rage we feel toward the various forces that put us into this nuclear predicament.

As examples of experimenting with social responsibility, I would like to briefly describe two projects I am currently conducting in the city of Hiroshima, Japan. These experiments are proceeding in the belief that peace education must address itself to both the social dynamics of the outer world as well as the psychological dynamics of the inner self. Because these projects are “in process,” I am not in a position to judge their efficacy; they are

worthy of mention only insofar as they stimulate other experiments by other concerned citizens of the planet Earth.

As a teacher of a single classroom of 12- to 15-year-olds at the Hiroshima International School, I have been experimenting with the idea of global education. I began with the assumption that the task of global education is to inculcate values of global unity in my students. But the problems began to arise when I pondered the question of how best to teach these values. Clearly, a broad knowledge of the social and political structure of the world had to be an essential part of the curriculum. Equally important was the focus on specific problems that illustrate the interconnectedness of human beings, problems such as pollution, war, hunger, poverty, and so on. Valuable as this information was, I began to realize that there was a missing element to my instruction. I was asking my students to learn human values by talking about those values. As long as my instruction remained at this purely cognitive level, I was unable to change the underlying attitudes of my students. I had to find a way to penetrate the affective web of understanding, to educate the very roots of motivation. But how?

One answer, I have come to realize, lies in the everyday interpersonal conflicts that occur with dismaying regularity in any classroom or playground of incipient adolescents. What better laboratory to learn the skills of conflict resolution than in the heat and rage of an argument over some trifling matter like a neighbor tapping his pencil too loudly or a student accidentally (or purposefully) bumping his classmate? It is precisely when the emotions are aroused that the most valuable affective education takes place. In those volatile moments I try to shape the act of empathy whereby one person experiences the thoughts and feelings of the other. "Forget who is right or wrong," I say to my students, "and focus on what your adversary *must be thinking* in order for him to feel the way he does. How is it *possible* for both of you to observe the same incident yet interpret it so radically differently? Given your opponent's perspective, would you have behaved in the same way?" Of course the dynamics of the classroom do not allow every interpersonal conflict to be an exercise in global conflict resolution, but the lesson to me has been clear: social perspective-taking is the key to inculcating the values of global utility in children. To emphasize the point, I have prominently displayed in my classroom a large photograph of the entire Earth, above which are written the words "Home Sweet Home."

My second experiment in social responsibility is called "The Dream Peace Project." Confronted with the problem of intellectual knowledge devoid of emotional understanding, I began many years ago to study the psychology of dreams. Experimenting with the interpretation of dreams, first my own and then those of children of various ages, I began to realize the motivational power of the dream image and its ability to anticipate and accompany psychological growth. I also began to realize that one's dream life is a training ground for the development of the inner self.

When I came to Hiroshima I established a small study group of dreamers, with several questions in mind. First I was interested in collecting dream images of war, especially nuclear war, in the hopes that a typology of the imagery could yield some insight into the psychological dynamics of conflict and fear. Furthermore, the various ways in which the dream contextualized and resolved the imagery might lead to some new insights into how the ego could attenuate or resolve conflict situations in waking life. Second, I was interested to see if the powerful symbolism of Hiroshima itself might induce or "incubate" particularly powerful images of war and peace. I knew that my own dream life was being altered by the fact that I was living in the shadow of the bomb. But was the same thing happening to foreign visitors? And more important, in what way was it happening? And what about longtime residents of Hiroshima, including the hibakusha, the survivors of the A-bomb? How were their dreams affected by this experience? Having suffered more than my share of nuclear nightmares, I became convinced that anyone who experiences the terror of annihilation, whether in a vivid dream or in real life, is hibakusha and as such has both the right and the responsibility to speak out concerning the horrors of nuclear war. Furthermore, I believe that more and more people are experiencing the terror of nuclear nightmares as a collective response to the present possibility of nuclear conflict. Can these dreams be a biological reaction on the part of the psyche designed to cut through the numbing defenses of the ego in order to make us really *feel* the terror so as to prevent it?

A third idea that motivates my experiments with dreams is the construction of a collective myth written by all members of the dream group. Was it possible, I asked myself, to write a story based on the images of our collective dreams that not only symbolized our struggles with the nuclear issue but that also suggested a solution? The experiment has been divided

into three parts. The first is a long nuclear nightmare dreamed by one of our members that ends with an unexploded nuclear bomb leaking radioactivity. A group of concerned citizens, suffering from radioactive contamination, meets in a restaurant. At this point, I wrote a short transition section in which a disembodied voice speaks to those assembled:

"You question deeply for difficult answers. It is a beginning, but it is not enough. The balance of the world sways in the wind, yet it bends toward truth. Seek out this truth. You will find it first beyond the darkness of your own heart and then in the collective spirit of your group endeavors. The path is long and difficult, but your hope shall make you strong."

In mythological terms, this voice is the "call to adventure" that beckons the hero to assume the quest. Notice that the task of the hero is first to confront the shadow, the evil within one's self, before attempting to participate in responsible social action. In real life, understanding the shadow and social action proceed in dialectical fashion, with each new insight from one dimension informing the other. However, the sequence of the narrative allows us to place our emphasis first upon understanding the darkness of one's own heart.

The second task of our myth writing is to confront doubts and fears we have concerning the possibility of war and peace by forcing our alter ego in the story to ask our questions for us. The answers are provided by a wise person encountered in the narrative. Note that the author both asks the questions and provides the answers, albeit through the mouth of a wise one. A gift is extracted from this wise person, but its power is not known. As the hero returns to the restaurant, he or she is assaulted by dark forces drawn from the author's imagination. The battle that follows is eventually won through the grace of the gift, the full power of which is now revealed. The third part of the myth takes place when we all meet again at the restaurant, wiser now for having confronted the dark side of ourselves, ready to pool the resources and talents of those present for purposes of social action. Throughout the myth, dream images are woven into the narrative. In this sense, the writing process is a form of active imagination as described by C. G. Jung. The hypothesis of this dream experiment is that by utilizing techniques of active imagination and guided imagery we can become more fully

aware of our inner lives, revealing both the source of evil and the shape of the healing power that resides within the psyche of us all.

This essay has been an attempt to understand anxiety in the nuclear age by naming the patterns of experience working for and against the processes of self-realization and fulfillment. But, as Wittgenstein reminds us, the thing named is not the thing itself. For us this means that while the professional task of the helping professional may be to name the phenomenon, the personal task of the helping professional is to live it. Likewise, the task of any hero in the nuclear age is to actively seek the evil within in order to better recognize its insidious encroachment on the quality of life in the outer world. Battle lines are symmetrical within the psyche, one facing inward and the other facing outward. We must proceed on both fronts. But only the hero can come to know the true meaning of what he or she does and why. The task of the helping professional, then, is to assist individuals in their quest for authentic meaning by providing support, clarifying choices, and serving as an object of transference. But given the moral imperative suggested in this essay, any assistance rendered by the helper must be given in the knowledge of the possibility of extinction. Used judiciously, this knowledge can be a sorely needed voice for the cause of life itself.