FACING APOCALYPSE

DAVID MILLER
ROBERT JAY LIFTON
DENISE LEVERTOV
MARY WATKINS
WOLFGANG GIEGERICH
DANILO DOLCI
JAMES HILLMAN
NORMAN O. BROWN
JOANNA MACY
MIKE PERLMAN

edited by
VALERIE ANDREWS
ROBERT BOSNAK
KAREN WALTER GOODWIN

To Salve Regina

MARY WATKINS

Mary Watkins, Ph.D., is a clinical and developmental psychologist practicing in Littleton and Cambridge, Massachusetts. Born in 1950 in Texas, Dr. Watkins is a Research Associate in the Department of Psychology, Clark University. Her publications include a widely acclaimed study of the power of images called *Waking Dreams* and, most recently, *Invisible Guests: The Development of Imaginal Dialogues.*

"In Dreams Begin Responsibilities"
Moral Imagination and Peace Action

Delmore Schwartz, with all his Yeatsian influence, entitled a volume of short stories *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities,* and a cycle of poems "The Dreams Which Begin in Responsibilities." Dreams begin responsibilities, responsibilities dreams. What are some of the meanings of these phrases as we face the threat of nuclear apocalypse? What are the relations between image and responsibility, imagination and peace and disarmament action?

I.

Let us begin with "in dreams begin responsibilities." With respect to the possibility of nuclear war, many psychologically-minded writers—Fromm, Lifton, Mack, Macy, Boulding, and others —have stressed the importance of imagination in preventing nuclear war, seeing quietism in relation to the possibility of nuclear war as a failure or inadequacy of so-called "moral imagination." How is this so? First of all, it is only through imagination that the dimensions of the Third and last World War could *possibly* be approached, as nothing that has ever taken place—not even the horrific annihilations at Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Dresden—can anticipate it fully. So vast. So perhaps even *un*imaginable it would be. Secondly, as the Romantics pointed out, the imagination approaches facts in a different manner than reason does. Whereas the latter focuses on the general and the abstract, the imagination brings to life the particular—particular scenes with particular characters. In so doing, it moves the heart. The imagination's way

into perceiving nuclear war is not the rhetoric of numbers, technological jargon and probabilities (which numb one), but it is of specific images, particular losses.

It is also only through imagination that we can entertain the possibility that these weapons could be dismantled in the name of peace, as never before have weapons been made and not used. It requires a utopic imagination, an imagination which does not simply mirror the world but which can create what the Romantics called a heterocosm—a world other than this one—which, once alive imaginally, can inspire action.[1]

Imagination has also been seen as critical in breaking down the divisions between one nation and another, in particular between American citizens and those of the Soviet Union. For through imagination we can escape our bodily limitations and identify with others—the others who, as Lifton points out, would be the likely objects of our weapons. Through sympathetic identification we can begin to break the process of dehumanizing the other that occurs when he is seen only from the external point of view.

Critical to the role of imagination in inhibiting nuclear war is its spontaneously compensatory aspect, pointed out by nineteenth-century psychologists. Imagination brings to our awareness the forgotten, the extruded, that which is undervalued by consciousness or defended against. As Michael Carey's work documents, in spite of our attempts to disregard or minimize the nuclear danger, disturbing, nightmarish imagery does break through in our dreams and thoughts, turning attention—even if only momentarily—to our desperate situation.[2] In dreams I have collected on nuclear war, the Jewish holocaust is often linked to the nuclear holocaust, dissolving the distinction between Jews and non-Jews. We are all Jews beneath the falling bomb. There is no special dispensation. Dreams place us amidst the rubble of something we have loved—a medieval city, the Metropolitan Museum, a street of our home town. There are dreams where we cannot move or talk, dying slowly as we are of internal contamination, radiation sickness—alone, without comfort. These unbidden images need only the sound of an approaching airplane or a moment of nausea to take root, to unfold.

Imagination's anticipatory, utopic, sympathetic, and compensatory nature extends us into the very nuclear world we try to

escape from, defend against. In doing so, this nature awakens an Enlightenment and Romantic idea of the imagination as moral.

Philosophers and poets claimed this morality for imagination because it was held to be the residence of "sympathy," that is, the capacity to place oneself into other situations and beings in order to experience their reality and feelings. Shelley argued for the moral importance of poetry, and imagination in general. In his *Defense of Poetry* he proposed that

> A man to be greatly good must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination. . . .[3]

But there was a strange transformation in this concept of moral imagination. Earlier writers in this period (like Adam Smith) saw such sympathetic participation as the root of moral action. Later Shelley thought that it was not the image that inspired moral action to benefit the other, but that it was the very act of imagining which affects the other. Then poets like Keats were involved in such sympathetic identifications, not for another's sake, but purely for their own interest in the chameleon-like mind. Keats describes looking out the window from his writing desk and becoming the sparrow he sees, pecking at the gravel. Keats contended that the true poet has no character or identity of his own, annihilated as he is in the characters around him.[4] These Romantic poets held Shakespeare as their ideal, extolling his Proteus-like ability, claiming that it was this quality of imagination that makes the poet transcendent. The Romantic Henry Hazlitt said of Shakespeare: "He had only to think of anything in order to become that thing with all the circumstances belonging to it."[5] Hazlitt, Novalis, Coleridge, Blake, Shelling and others saw the imagination as freeing us from a self-centered world.[6]

This notion of moral and sympathetic imagination ran amuck by the end of the Romantic period due to the goal all too often imposed on such imagining: to expand the limits of the self by this chameleon-like activity, to enrich the self with the bounty of the world. That which was originally linked to action—sympathetic imagination—became alienated from it. This alienation of im-

agination from moral action, due to the Romantics' focus on self-realization, has profoundly influenced our twentieth-century view of imagination.

In psychoanalysis we no longer find the imagination lauded for its ability to transport us into the world's concerns and others' sufferings, but rather for the reverse. Imagination is seen as a preserve of wishes, the self's wishes which stand in stark contrast to the realities outside and, indeed, which defend us against the harshness of the external world. Work with images within psychology has been exclusively focused on improving the self—psychologically, spiritually, physically. It is little wonder that Soviet psychology berates our psychology of imagination as "bourgeois."[7]

Our twentieth-century psychology has demoralized the imagination through its individualistic focus, its subjectivistic reduction of images which reflect the crisis of the world back into the personal history and intrapsychic dynamics of the patient; and often its naïve faith in the "evolution of consciousness" which contradicts facts and experience. If we look at the recent history of the uses of imagination, we find ourselves in the Romantics' dilemma again—imagination is seen as panacea. We are directed to entertain images to cure cancer, sexual impotence, warts, stress, insecurity, lack of productivity—images to increase personal power, solve personal history, enhance personal growth. In this tradition, entertaining nuclear images could become just one more exercise in the growth arena. Images which in their singleness could help move one to action now in their proliferation defend us from it, keep us occupied with our interior journeying, journal writing and dream interpretation.

If we take the claim that imagination is intrinsically moral, we can poignantly see the problem with Romantic hyperbole. For is not imagination as responsible for the building of Auschwitz as it is for the founding of the United Nations; isn't it as active in an actual rape as it is in a moment of sympathetic compassion? Ironically, the sympathetic imagination was credited by some in the nineteenth century for beginning to unite the classes in Germany. But it was just such a solidarity that made it possible for Germany to take on the rest of the world in our own century—to engage in an "us versus them" mentality which was pathologically devoid of sympathetic identification.

So it is interesting that, in the midst of a century that has turned

imagination into an egocentrically oriented faculty, we begin to hear again of a "moral imagination." Perhaps with this in mind, we can propose a different notion of moral imagination. Not all imaginings are moral in and of themselves. Some serve to sustain our narcissism and self-centeredness, as psychoanalysis amply shows. Some imaginings, by virtue of their structure, do prompt the moral sense, precisely by their quality of "sympathy," of letting us feel realities apart from the self's. Others prompt the moral sense through their anticipatory, compensatory, or utopic functions.

But for the imagining to be moral, I believe, it must have another component, and that is action. It is not enough for our heart to be stirred by an image—shall we say of a little Hiroshima girl, burnt, orphaned, surrounded by the carnage of everything she's known. That heart-stirring has an implicit movement toward action in it that must be nurtured. Otherwise, as Donald Moss has pointed out, we use these images perversely: "to get off" on the "erotics of destruction."[8] Or we use them to "develop the self" ("Well, now I'm in touch with the nuclear thing. I think I'll take a weekend workshop next month on. . .").

Yet, we can't just append action to any image and come up with moral imagination—images do not necessarily have intrinsic moral value. How we respond to them, act or refrain from action with regard to them, is crucial. Responsibilities can begin in a person's dreams and images, but they cannot be fulfilled there. As the Romantic experience teaches us, we can use imagination's capacity for sympathy either as a stimulus for moral action or in the pursuit of self-interest.

Being aware of nuclear war and being able to imagine it and its alternative are not enough. Awareness is not always enough to motivate action. Several years ago when Harvard students were asked what probability they assigned to the likelihood of a nuclear war within the next ten years, most of them answered "ninety percent." Ninety-percent probable that there will soon be a nuclear war! And yet only five percent of them were active to avert this possibility. What discourages us from acting on the images that we've already entertained of Hiroshima, from further educating ourselves or talking about nuclear war to our friends, family and colleagues? What discourages us from joining a peace group and participating in its activities rather than just quieting the anxious God with a biannual check? What restrains us from making

changes in our lifestyles, in our hierarchy of life-priorities, that would support a commitment to action to help avert nuclear war? Can we use imagination to help us understand this in order to act?

I believe we can, and I would like to turn to Schwartz's second way of putting the relationship we're looking at: responsibilities begin dreams. As we've seen, it can be images which awaken us to the evil of nuclear war. But once we are awakened, it is our responsibility—the necessity to respond, to act—which leads us back to the imagination to understand what holds us back from action.

II.

We recognize that much of thought is a conversation of voices—questioning, answering, criticizing, advising, praising, expressing. Our action depends on the orchestration of these voices, on which point of view, which character, is dominant at a given moment. Is it a "mothering one" who runs to soothe the other's anxiety, or a "working one" who longs for solitude in which he or she can become absorbed in a project, or is it a "fun-lover" who looks for ways to lighten, humor, enjoy? Often a single voice becomes so prevalent about an issue that it seems as though there is no other perspective, no second voice who objects or queries. At such moments, we say that one is "identified" with the first voice. To change habitual action or inaction, the relations among voices must shift.

For instance, let us take as an example an individual who becomes paralyzed around certain aspects of her work. We may find that within this person's depression she is the victim of a harsh voice who pinpoints with precision—and expresses with hyperbole—the nuances of inadequacy: "You never go far enough." "Your work always sounds shallow." "You're no good at this. You should give it up. It's a joke to continue." The ego voice may simply be overwhelmed, agree, and echo the critical voice, such that there sounds but one voice, a single point of view. In order to move from paralysis to action, one must begin to hear *in particular* what the voice says, what it is like, what its motives are. One must become aware of the process of "identification" and thereby regain a standpoint from which to hear the voice and eventually to

dialogue with it. As one breaks the identification, one begins to take a more active role with respect to the voice—agreeing, disagreeing, acknowledging some criticism, but arguing, perhaps, for better-timed deliverance of the criticism—i.e., not at the inception of an action, where it will crush the action's future, but later, when pointing out a shallow part or a failure of logic will strengthen the work. How can we use these therapeutic insights regarding the voices of the imaginal—these insights which help us with our personal problems—to help us move toward action with regard to social problems, such as the prevention of nuclear war?

Lifton posits that each of us lives a "double life" with regard to nuclear war: one part of us doesn't want to hear about the possibility, defends itself through a state of *psychic numbness,* and goes about "business as usual"; while another part understands, and experiences feelingfully, that everything precious could be destroyed forever.[9]

If nothing else, the twentieth century should have taught us to keep a vigilant eye on "the numb one." For Wilhelm Reich, this is the one armored against feeling. Being "shut off from immediate contact with nature [and] people," the numb one acts with false pride, concerns himself with superficial appearances, engages in the banal, the ordinary.[10] For Reich, evil is none other than numbness. For Hannah Arendt, a student of the atrocities of our century, evil also takes on an ordinary face, the face of banality. Adolf Eichmann exemplified this for her. Unlike our usual notions of how evil people would seem, Eichmann was striking only in his "manifest shallowness." Though the "deeds were monstrous," the doer "was quite ordinary, commonplace, and neither demonic nor monstrous."[11] He presented himself with "clichés" and "stock phrases," "adhering to conventional, standardized codes of expression and conduct." He was not stupid but "thoughtless."[12] So if evil occurs in this mundane, ordinary way, then it is possible for all of us to perpetrate it—by sins of omission, by the actions we hold ourselves back from, as well as by sins of commission.

Grange Copeland, a Black character of the novelist Alice Walker, puts it this way to his granddaughter:

> "When I was a child," he said, "I used to cry if somebody killed an ant. As I look back on it now, I *liked* feeling that way. I don't *want*

to set here now *numb* to half the peoples in the world. I feel like something soft and warm an' delicate an' sort of *shy* has just been burned right out of me."

"Numbness is probably better than hate," said Ruth gently. She had never seen her grandfather so anguished.

"The trouble with numbness," said Grange, as if he'd thought it over for a long time, "is that it spreads to all your organs, mainly the heart. Pretty soon after I don't hear the white folks crying for help I don't hear the black."[13]

For the past three years I have met with small groups of people around our nuclear dilemma—both individuals who are inactive and those struggling to sustain or increase their anti-nuclear activism. We have met together to better understand this double life and to begin a dialogue between these voices within ourselves and our culture: the one who doesn't want to hear about nuclear war, the one who can't pretend she does not hear, and often a third, the one who can *act* to help avert nuclear war.

Just as in the example of a depressed person paralyzed around an aspect of work, the emphases have been on coming to know the voices who inhibit activism and those who sustain it, to work against an identification with a single voice, and to work toward a dialogue that allows one to move from a habitual stance of inaction or limited action. Let me caution. This effort has not been to eliminate one voice in favor of another, to kill off the numb part of one in partiality to the activist part. First of all, this proves impossible in the long run. The neglected or repressed voice always reasserts itself, often without our awareness. Secondly, as we shall see, some of the characters unconcerned about nuclear war can be valuable voices when their area of concern is circumscribed. It was the very tendency to isolate these voices we were trying to work against. When split, each presents itself simplistically, black or white, as polar opposites. Each voice sounds trite, stereotypic, uncomplicated, unsophisticated. When a dialogue can be sustained, each voice develops its point of view and becomes more internally complicated. It is less dismissive of the other and thereby less inhibitory.

I would like to share with you some of the imaginal background to activism and quiescence that we found. In groups whose members ranged in age from seventeen to sixty-five and which in-

cluded students, professional and working people, we found an amazing confluence of imagery and characters among the 175 participants.[14] It is this commonality I would like to share with the hope of its striking a chord in you, that it might help you in your own action with respect to nuclear war (and other social problems as well).

We know that committing oneself to action is not achieved in a moment nor ever achieved once and for all. As with a commitment to another person, one comes up against doubts, frustrations, despairs, depressions, seemingly insolvable conflicts of interest. Both the path to becoming more active and the path of sustaining commitment to action require confrontations with the voices of denial, discouragement, belittlement, disillusionment—the voices who want the simpler life, the life of pleasure, the life of circumscribed pursuits.

Well, let's meet some of these voices—as we are sure to encounter them both in ourselves and in those we work and live with.

Let us begin with the one whose eyes skip over the column in the newspaper dealing with the installation of the MX; the one who flips the television channel as European protest against nuclear war becomes the topic; the one who does not want to think or feel about the possibility of nuclear war—the one who tropistically moves toward achieving a state of anaesthesia or numbness with regard to the topic of nuclear holocaust like a snail moves toward the safety and calm of its shell's darkness. The one who denies or minimizes the possibility of catastrophe and who clothes the images of Hiroshima in the statistics of survivability. The one who treats prophecies of nuclear war like weather predictions —possibly untrue and, if true, inevitable, leaving no recourse to human hands. The one who, like the citizens of Pompeii, goes about the business of planning life without figuring in this item of possible upset.

Who is this one who in seeming ignorance, naïveté, disinterest, preoccupation carries the evil of being benumbed, anaesthetized to the possible? Who is this one who tells us action is impossible? It will not make a difference.

I asked people to imagine this part of themselves as a character

(like one in a short story or novel) and to find out what this character's world was like—what is important to him or her, what is the scene or setting of his or her activities? It would help you to understand their images if you shut your eyes for a moment and asked yourself the same questions: "What is that part of me like who hates sitting here reading a book on nuclear apocalypse, who does not want to have to act to avert nuclear war, whose interests and passions lie in other realms? Where does this one live? How does he or she spend an average day? What does he or she want a day to be like?"

It was possible to sort the kinds of figures who arose into six types of voices (neither exhaustive nor discrete)—six kinds of presences who benumb us to the reality of social problems, the immediacy of the nuclear danger. As I describe them, see if you can recognize each, in yourself, in the world.

Let's begin at the beginning with the character of the child—the child in us who is not immersed in the world of political daily events, but in the world of play. (Of course, actual children worry quite directly about nuclear war, but the imaginal child lives apart.) On one extreme is the child in nature, uncorrupted by the evils of society. When asked who inside of him doesn't want to hear about nuclear war, one thirty-year-old man saw a small, gentle, innocent boy, naked and vulnerable to the thoughtless whims of others. He lives in a dark, warm cave far above the city and society, on a mountainside in the wilderness, far away from the cruelties man inflicts upon his fellows. He avoids others, for contact with them is painful and frustrating. He'd rather be alone, living in harmony with nature and himself, allowing others to do what they may.

We meet another child down by a brook, on a bright summer day. She is eleven years old, lean and graceful with long golden hair. She plays with her friends, rides her horse through the meadows. She cannot comprehend what nuclear war means, what it is. She cannot imagine the possibility of her world being destroyed, for everything seems so peaceful, so completed.

Upon reflecting about this golden child, the woman who entertains her says that it is this innocent child who

blocks me from acting. It is the optimistic inability to comprehend

the destruction of my world, the actual horror of the effects of nuclear war. When one part of me thinks it will happen, the child, in all her freshness, says it isn't possible.

Of course, there are other children too: the teenage boy who runs from one baseball game to the next, the spoiled little girl contained in the world of her own desires, and so on.

Besides the imaginal child's self-centeredness, absorption into the world of play and pleasures, besides her innocence and naïve belief in the continuation, the eternity of life, we confront the child's feelings of impotence, inability, and inadequacy within ourselves—the voice that stops our potential activism by saying "this problem is too complex, too big for me." "I don't know what to do about this. I wouldn't know where to begin." "My voice is too small. Nobody would hear me." There is an adult within who knows that, finally, there is no recourse to someone older and wiser to accomplish the things that must be done; that whether adequate to the task or not one must try, or it will never happen. The child within us stills this voice, leaving the tasks for someone older, more experienced to do.

Do you know what I mean? In this way, the child's innocence and youthfulness are potentially lethal, breeding as they do an evasion of responsibility, an evasion of trying to do whatever one *can* do.

The second type of numbing character is the worker in us, usually the specialist. For the worker, life is narrowed to the confines of the job. All else is experienced as unwelcome intrusion, interruption. The Worker moves very fast and efficiently, working long hours. He or she is absorbed—monomaniacally—in the task at hand. There are seldom people or family around. If there are, they are experienced as being in the way. The Worker's sense of self is sustained by the mastery of a specialized task in a circumscribed world. Let's meet a few of these workers.

A twenty-year-old woman, concerned about nuclear war but inactive, sees imaginally a janitor, busily cleaning up the daily messes of everyday life. He feels frustrated, angry. He is picking up rubbish in the auditorium. He is never there for the show, only afterwards, alone. He wants to be left alone to do his work, but he keeps hearing a voice over the intercom. He looks over his

shoulder as though to tell this authority, this voice, to leave him alone, to stop bugging him and let him live his own life. He lives in a small, plain house in a uniform development.

Can you recognize this janitor? The one who cleans and tidies the mess of our daily life? Whose clean-up is never a prelude to getting started on a project? The one who makes a world of straightening the files, emptying the trash, watering the plants, arranging the chairs, balancing the checkbook; whose work is never done; who goes on repetitively each day re-cleaning, re-arranging the same rooms as yesterday? Can you feel how this one who tidies gets in the way of changing action? His job is never done. He pulls us to complete what is left unfinished, discourages us from starting something new that could increase the mess and further intrude upon the order he tries to set up.

A thirty-year-old woman sees another kind of "worker" character, Holly. Holly runs about frenetically all the time. In her twenties, Holly works as a computer personnel placement consultant for a Route 128 Boston firm. She loves everything fast, particularly cars. She lives with her husband and children in a prefab three-bedroom suburban ranch house, but this is not her life focus. She and her family rush past each other all the time, just as Holly rushes to and from work, and past people on her job. She's excited by the money she's making, the things she's able to buy, the deals she's able to take advantage of. For Holly, "profit" has utterly lost its original meaning, its meaning in the Bible and in Spinoza, of profit for the soul.[15]

Can we see Holly? The part of us on the ladder, moving up, excited by doing well at something, whether or not it means that much to us.

A different kind of "worker" character is the Scholar. The one who sits in his library, poring over leather-bound books, pondering specialized questions for long hours. His house is surrounded by a wall, cutting off the hubbub of the city beyond. He wants to be left alone; his project demands it. He works hard at what he does and believes he deserves his remove from the world. He is the one who tells us we must not take time from our pursuits to work on such things as nuclear war. We must stick to what we do well and leave world problems to others who are meant to work these things out. The importance of our projects and our dedication to them give us special dispensation.

The third type of character who benumbs us chooses isolation from the world of people to become surrounded by nature—most often he or she has "taken to the woods," which soon becomes a completed world. There is a dim awareness of outsiders' concerns about nuclear war, but nature soothes and comforts these concerns by its strength, continuity, massiveness. A mother of two imagines the numb aspect of herself as such a naturalist character, a rugged, individualistic woodsman. He lives alone with his animals in the woods and guides his life by the signs of nature. It is inconceivable to him that anything or anyone could destroy his world—it is too precious.

Another character is a woman who has moved to the woods with her children and husband because she wants to avoid hearing about nuclear war. She has no television or radio, and only slight contact with the townspeople to get supplies. She enjoys her isolation and detachment. She is healthy, hardy, cares well for her children. She hikes in the mountains, farms and cooks. Her main concerns are to live off the land and enjoy life. She writes every day for herself on matters that concern her.

As does a very strong and vital man who lives simply on an island in Maine, close to the earth and the sea. This character speaks to the imaginer, an activist professor with a long history of social concern. The only people who come to visit this character are other writers. They leave refreshed by the meeting.

Of course, we recognize these characters in the outer world as back-to-the-land people, as those individualists who will always struggle with their hermit-like proclivities, off on their own. But closer to home—amid the city as well—we can detect in ourselves a trend to isolation and detachment, an effort to take comfort in all that's natural (be it health food or flannel sheets) as a refuge against the atrocities and life-defeating technologies of the twentieth century . . . in, once again, an effort to live a circumscribed life, tending to the daily matters of sustaining life in the wilderness of modern times.

This isolation happens in the fourth type of character as well—the suburbanite. The world apart from one's own plot of neighborhood is a terrain to pass through—quickly on the commute, windows rolled up, doors locked, as much on the over- and underpasses of the superhighways as possible.

A twenty-five-year-old graduate student sees a character named

Jack building a brick wall. Jack proceeds methodically, one brick and then the next. As the wall gets taller, he sees a bomb blast in the distance. He picks up his supplies, moves to the other side of the wall, and continues to lay bricks. From here we see that this wall will surround his patio. He is looking forward to finishing so he can lie down on the chaise lounge with a beer and enjoy sitting in the sun with his wife on this gorgeous Saturday.

With their worries about mortgages, taxes, money-market funds, and their enjoyment of gardens and barbecue pits, the suburban characters carry that which is uniform, predictable, somewhat anonymous or stereotypic about our lives. The suburbanite neither gives himself over to work or hedonistic pleasures, but balances each in a circumscribed existence of family, work, and friends. This is the part of us that doesn't want to go too deep, doesn't want to give up the web of expectations that the mess of our lives hangs neatly upon. It is the part that does not want to make a move toward activism if that means moving out of the structure: secure job, pleasant home, average family. Let's face it, Levittown provides a residence for each of us psychically—pond sitter and urban dweller alike.

The fifth kind of character who doesn't want to think about nuclear war we'll call "the hedonist." Quite aware of the impending apocalypse but feeling powerless to avert it, he chooses to enjoy the moment. Time collapses into a pleasurable present. One is 'blissed out' on drugs, or nature, or the aesthetic pleasures of art, music, literature. Here we encounter the voice who says sarcastically that it doesn't matter what we do (live more frugally, join an anti-nuke group, give up aspects of professional or family life to devote oneself to social change). It simply doesn't matter, because life and the world are going to end anyway. One is reminded of the Germans in Hitler's bunker, dancing and drinking until the Russians came. (Or more contemporarily, one is reminded of the punk culture which has accepted the inevitability of annihilation and has set out to celebrate 'the end' in the present.) The only solution is to live now; buy the French meal, go to the Caribbean, make a bundle and retire early. "Go ahead, build a hot tub in the basement. The loan will never come due."

These characters embrace Thomas Hobbes's notion of happiness as the continuous progress from one greed to another. Their style of life is the radical hedonism Erich Fromm speaks about,

where "the aim of life is happiness, that is maximum pleasure, defined as the satisfaction of any desire or subjective need a person may feel."[16] Not only is such hedonism a response to apocalyptic possibilities, but also as Fromm points out in *To Have or To Be,* it breeds war in its establishment of classes within and between nations, further dividing "the haves" and the "have nots."

There is a neighboring and last group of these characters whom we'll call the "gray lifers," who share the pessimism and sense of impotence of the hedonists. They too are confined to the present, not because they can enjoy its sweetness, but because the difficulties of the daily chain them there. Just surviving occupies their energies. These characters are buried with family and work responsibilities, struggles with money, and the drabness of their jobs and homes. These "gray lifers" are depressed, fearful, apathetic, dull. Unlike the "workers," they move slowly and do not enjoy their work. To take on thoughts about nuclear war would be one more burden. For some of them, the prospect of nuclear war is actually a relief, a final end to the hardness of daily life.

We find this one inside at those moments when to take up a cause seems too weighty. One is already exhausted, depleted, struggling to meet obligations, responsibilities. And now one is asked to go to more meetings, entertain more phone calls, more letters, more talk of depressing realities. This part of us, burdened down, loses a sense of life's beauty, of what is loved and treasured. When thinking of nuclear annihilation, this character borders on saying, "So what if it happens? No great loss." Or "It's what we deserve anyway." The thought of its happening confirms one's sense of life as desperate and unsalvageable.

If I have been successful in describing these to you, you will have been able to see most of these aspects working in your own relation to nuclear war. There is another way to hear these also, which has already crept in. That is, that we also find people who exemplify these voices, who have identified with one or another of them. Adults who speak with the naïve innocence and optimism of the child ("It will never happen") or with the child's inability to deal with the world of grownups ("Well, I don't know anything about politics or nuclear warfare, so I can't help on this"), people who confine themselves to the circumscribed world of their work, or who isolate themselves in the security of nature. Inside the consulting room one hears individuals who speak in the gray-lifer

voice, who essentially say that life is so hard that nuclear devastation would put them out of their misery. Recently in *The New Yorker*, Lawrence Weschler described how Poles look forward to a nuclear war to solve some of their problems.[17] On the one hand, they magically feel when it happens it will not hit Poland. On the other, as one Polish woman put it, "But it's strange. Things are so bad that people here are almost longing for it"—longing for the devastation.

Let's change scenes now and turn to the characters who are not numb to the possibility of nuclear war, who are aware of it, think about it, and feel it. Again I asked people to let that part of themselves occur as a character in a book might: What would he or she be like, where would he or she live, what activities would he or she be engaged in? Ask yourself these same questions.

Once we meet the first group of these characters, we can better understand our eager identifications with the voices we have just heard. For these are alone, isolated in their despair, opened irreparably to the suffering coincident with nuclear war. One can see this in their eyes. In one description, blood streams down the face of a handsome blond character as he is strapped to the surface of a giant golden coin, arms and legs spread wide, stomach torn open. Blood streams down his face because his eyelids have been cut off—condemning him to constant sight, sight without the refuge of sleep or closed eyes. His open gut has been filled with every disease on earth. The coin turns over and over, as if it is being flipped by some giant hand beyond the man's control. Another character wanders blind, alone, crying. His eyes have been burnt blind by the horrific sights of postwar suffering.

The children are no longer playing in the meadows and the baseball fields. They are mongoloid, saddened, lost, wounded or deformed. No longer do they enjoy the protection of pursuing their own concerns and pleasures. As deformed children, they carry the awareness bred by wounds. One such child would have become a flower when looking at a flower if there were one around, but now in this postwar world she cries or moans, becoming the victims around her. Indeed, she embodies the Romantic notion of "sympathy"—of becoming the other. The rest of the children lie dead around a woman who is all alone, filled with

anger at this sight of decaying, mangled and burnt bodies of children. These characters are far from numb. They stand immersed as victims in the images of destruction, as immobilized onlookers to the holocaust. They are passive, overwhelmed by emotion, despairing.

We are understandably afraid of this part of ourselves, which if led to focus on the possibility of nuclear war would lose itself to intense feelings of despair and depression. Anticipating this, Joanna Macy and others have provided "despair groups," places with other people at which one can contact these emotions and gradually go through them to a place of action to avert the holocaust.[18] When the despairing voice is repressed, Macy points out, one experiences a numbing of *all* affects, not just those concerning nuclear war.

This desperate group of characters, however, is not the only one aware of and responsive to the nuclear danger. The second we'll call "activists," though there are two distinct sides to this image. On one side we see "the peace activists" as young, hip, attractive, very busy people. They are confident, successful at movement work, enthusiastic about solving social issues. They've "got their heads together." Living in the city and surrounded by like-minded souls, they go to the museums and films, enjoying their awareness. There was a surprising uniformity about these characters, though—unlike the authors of the suburban characters described earlier—the imaginers failed to recognize such stereotypicality. Listening to these characters, I couldn't help but feel that their half-life was very short—limited as they seemed to be to youth.

On the other side we see a quite different group of inner activists: lonely, depressed, isolated, overworked characters. They, like the gray lifers, suffer through their responsibilities, without time for enjoyment or family and friends. Though at work in the city, they live in such places as a snow-covered mountain, above the tree line, with no shelter. These characters sacrifice themselves, without reward or certainty of success. They are pessimistic, nonescapists. One can see these characters as becoming increasingly depressed, burnt out, angry, bitter, although on the other hand they carry a kind of selfless dedication and awareness, a desire to persevere in spite of feelings of failure and inadequacy.[19] C. Wes Churchman, a student of world hunger, has stated that just such an active *acceptance* of oneself as a failure is critical to long-term

commitment to social action.[20] Those who must succeed all the time cannot take on the tangle of a serious social problem.

The last class of such characters includes those who do not numb themselves to the possibility of nuclear war because of their love—their love of something in particular, which they wish to protect. In the previous group one doesn't know if the love of things has been covered by depression or whether the active struggle occurs more on the level of ideals, of the abstract.

For the present group, however, love and enjoyment of what is loved come first and motivate feeling and action. The loved objects are primarily the presence of nature and children. Within this group we find mother and teacher characters. The mothers come from various walks of life and, although activism is not their primary occupation, one senses renewable dedication, fed as they seem to be by concern for what is treasured.

III.

Well, what happens when the side of us who is numb and indifferent to the possibility of nuclear war meets with the side who recognizes, cognitively and affectively, the danger? I asked each participant in these groups to imagine and record a dialogue between the two characters who had arisen to them. This was done with the hypothesis that, if action can be supported or at least understood by both sides, if both sides can be taken into account when planning, then action will be less likely to be undermined or inhibited by a side of oneself.

What we found was that certain kinds of dialogue between these characters seemed destined to fail, end in stalemate, and result in further isolation of these two sides of ourselves. The most pervasive disaster in dialogue was the activist voice coming on piously self-righteous, indignant about the concerns and values of the numb one, unable to listen in the effort to preach—condescending, sarcastic, dismissive.

One character, a self-confident, energetic activist, stands over the bed of a "gray lifer," an exhausted one just trying to survive. She stands over the bedside singing exuberantly "Put on a Happy Face," "What the World Needs Now Is Love, Sweet Love," and "Amazing Grace." She tries to get the other one up, condemning

her for her apathy. She does not speak to the depression and the exhaustion, but tries to override them entirely. We all know how successful this manner of approach is.

The encounter can move the other way also. The *unconcerned* character, involved in her pregnancy and back-to-nature existence, tells her activist counterpart that she is making a big mistake doing this peace work. She should be getting married and having a family, but instead looks dowdy and overworked, never has any fun. And sometimes, of course, there is mutual derogation, back and forth, which leads to a quick "So long." Each lobbies to make the other become like herself, as though stubbornly sticking to her own position might succeed.

We are as familiar with these kinds of dialogue externally as we are internally. In fact, when discussing these modes of interacting, many participants recounted painful instances of being turned off to causes by the holier-than-thou approach of some activists. But now they could feel that tendency within and its roots in such things as disgust, frustration, disappointment and zealousness, in the fight of the active side not to be submerged by the pessimism, depression and self-interestedness of the other side.

But what kinds of rhetoric did work in these dialogues? What enabled the dialogue to be sustained, to be picked up again in the future, to not end in further alienation?

In one dialogue the character of a young mother who has entered the anti-nuclear movement to help protect her children meets a woman who has moved to the mountains. The latter says, "I find these nuclear issues quite distressing, and my husband and I have moved to the mountains to live our lives in solitude because of this problem." Instead of disparaging her for her escapism, the mother acknowledges that she too has thought of doing such a thing, as recently as several months ago. In joining the woman, she reduces the gap between them and is then able to share what made her stay—her fears for her children if legislation to fund the MX passes. The woman who has chosen solitude then confides that she doesn't think people have the power to change such decisions. The mother again empathizes with her point of view:

Mother: You know, I used to feel the same way; but we do have power to act as a whole.

Country
Dweller: Well, I do vote. But that's where my action stops. It's such a hopeless situation to me.

At this point, something remarkable happens in the dialogue. The mother *recognizes* her partner in dialogue. She realizes she had seen her in Washington, D.C., in 1967, speaking against the Vietnam war.

Country
Dweller: Yes, that was me. Perhaps... You remember that day. ... my friend with me had been killed that day by the police. That was the end of my radicalism.

Do you hear what is amazing about this dialogue? Rather than condemn this country dweller for her escapism, the mother recognizes within herself some of the other woman's feelings, and this in turn locates the activist within the one who escapes. And in this location one is given direction for dialogue. The former activist cannot just bounce into activity; she has feelings of loss, powerlessness and disillusionment to deal with. She could never be a naïve activist, as she has already seen war.

Incidentally, in these dialogues no set of characters succeeds in allowing and nurturing the movement of the numb character as much as those who identified themselves as mothers or teachers. Their usual tactics are either to find out what their partner in dialogue treasures and appeal to them to protect that or to patiently, very slowly introduce the other to the threat of nuclear war.[21] This might be the part of us who begins getting us involved by sharing "a little" reading for us to do—i.e., not demanding that we become instantly involved.

In the failed dialogues, the supposedly more "feelingful" character takes the inactive one at face value—as indifferent, uncaring, self-centered—and does not respond to hints of deeper feeling. For instance, remember the character of the janitor, trying to do his job while a voice over the intercom bothers him? It turns out to be the voice of another character, a determined, powerful young woman on her way to a rally against nuclear weapons.

Janitor: Why don't you leave me alone? I just want to go on with my work.

Young
Woman: You're just going to go about your business and leave the work to us?

Janitor: I don't want to know.

Young
Woman: I feel like just walking out on you because there's no communication. Do I have to pull you out the door of this auditorium and push you into the middle of the rally's crowd outside?

Janitor: I'm doing my work. Can't you see? And when I come home I want to find meaning. I can't deal with doing this job and at the same time feeling a pile of jigsaw pieces in my stomach.

Young
Woman: You've got to put away your other self and *be* that part who wants to change things.

Janitor: I am too out of touch with that part. It's buried under some floor boards deep inside. He's pushing to get up, but I don't want to see him.

Instead of asking about the jigsaw pieces in his stomach or about the one pushing up on the floor boards, the young woman terminates the conversation. She misses attending to his clues that his indifference is not simple-minded, but complex—it is not what it seems. Through his manic, repetitive work, he tries unsuccessfully to nail down the floor boards. She needn't "walk out on him because there is no communication" or tell him what she would do if she were him; she could simply focus him on those floor boards.

In some dialogues it was possible for the activist one to recognize and draw on the strengths of the more detached character. The ability to circumscribe a manageable area in which to work and succeed may be a natural instinct to the numb one which the activist badly needs in order not to be overwhelmed by the immensity of the problem. Let me give you an example:

Billy, a character who is a copyboy in a newsroom, is upset about nuclear war but is not a strong newswriter. He usually runs maniacally from one assignment to the next. He goes to visit the

strong, vital man who lives simply on an island in Maine, close to the earth and sea. Though not an activist himself, he is willing to talk about war when Billy brings it up. He inspires Billy to write a set of relevant columns and, perhaps as importantly, gets him to do a little fishing before he goes back to the mainland.

Indeed, this invitation "to do a little fishing" seems critical in some of the dialogues. Particularly the isolated, overworked activist and the despairing one with eyes fixed open could use "a little fishing." As a psychic alternative, fully identifying with these characters would seem to have a very short future. I am reminded of Robert Coles's piece "Social Struggle and Weariness" written during the Civil Rights movement in the South, where such isolated and despairing souls would burn out.[22] Battle symptoms of exhaustion, weariness, despair, frustration and rage would often precede either leaving the movement altogether or becoming "troublesome, bitter, and a source of worry, of unpredictable action, of potential danger to themselves and their 'cause'."[23]

Indeed, in studying why individuals leave movements—for civil rights or peace—one finds that the first set of voices has asserted itself strongly—the one who wants to enjoy the pleasures of a profession, of a family, or of a more middle-class existence. The individual who leaves a movement is often tired of fighting against "big problems," a struggle in which one never fully succeeds, and often feels as though things are worsening despite devoting so much time and energy and sacrificing so much of what life offers. One longs for the more circumscribed existence enjoyed by former friends, who can experience both pleasures and successes, who can feel effective within a narrower world. These findings would suggest to those of you who are very active in the anti-nuclear movement that dialogue with the first set of voices is as critical to sustaining one's commitment to action over the long haul as listening to the second set of voices is important for others in becoming more active.

As Jonathan Schell points out in *The Fate of the Earth,* "As far as we can tell, there will never again be a time when self-extinction is beyond the reach of our species."[24] This fact has a consequence for the shape of our activism. Peace activism can no longer be largely relegated to periods of tension, war or possible war. It must be ongoing, ever vigilant, no matter what gains are made in its favor. This means that we must nurture a lifelong commitment to

action to promote peace—not just a commitment for our "student years" or our "retirement years," but during the rest of our life, amidst our busy-ness with other things.

I have suggested that one way of supporting such action is to be aware of those voices in thought that surround our attempts at action. It is such dialogue that Hannah Arendt speaks about as a way to overcome the "thoughtlessness" of our own Eichmann-like tendencies. She reminds us that for Socrates thought is an internal dialogue. In the *Hippias Major,* Socrates says that when Hippias, "an especially thickheaded partner . . . goes home, he remains one [single], for though he lives alone, he does not seek to keep himself company. He certainly does not lose consciousness; he is simply not in the habit of actualizing it."[25] Hippias does not think about his deeds; he holds no inner dialogue. When Socrates goes home, however, he is met by a voice: "a very obnoxious fellow who always cross-examines him," whom Socrates describes "as a very close relative [who] lives in the same house."[26] Socrates wants to come to some agreement with this relative—to become friends with this voice—because, after all, they must live under the same roof. Hippias avoids this voice by ceasing to think, by not opening the dialogue. Arendt elaborates Socrates' example:

> [the] criterion for action will not be the usual rules, recognized by multitudes and agreed upon by society, but whether I shall be able to live with myself in peace when the time has come to think about my deeds and words.[27]

If we follow this logic, one form of moral imagining would be to open ourselves consciously to the kinds of dialogues I have described around nuclear war; to allow the sides to challenge and contradict each other; to stick with them as they find a way of living with each other; and, most importantly, to follow the path of action that their dialogue points to.

1. Elise Boulding, Warren Ziegler and others have been extending Fred Polak's theory of "the image of the future" to our present planetary crisis. Briefly, group participants are asked first to imagine a world without weapons thirty years hence. Second, they are asked to work backwards from this utopic image and describe (as a historian might) events at each five-year period from the future image to the present reality, i.e., events that would have to happen if the more ideal future image were to eventuate.

This last step is critical, for as Hirschman has pointed out, utopic imagining alone can lead to the breakdown of the very vision it promulgates. Activists who have been unable to imagine *intermediate* visions of society experience continual disappointment and frustration because of the gap between imagination and reality. These feelings of despair and discouragement can lead to abandonment of a movement, and a turn in the culture from a period of public action to one of private interest. Cf. Elise Boulding, "The Social Imagination and the Crisis of Human Futures: A North American Perspective," *Forum for Correspondence and Contact* 13/2 (1983): 43–56; F. Polak, *The Image of the Future,* trans. E. Boulding (New York: Oceana Press, 1961); A. O. Hirschman, *Shifting Involvements: Private Interest and Public Action* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

2. See M. J. Carey, "Psychological Fallout," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 38 (January 1982): 20–24. For a summary of this work, see also R. J. Lifton, *The Broken Connection* (New York: Simon & Schuster [Touchstone], 1980).

3. Quoted in P. Ball, *The Central Self: A Study in Romantic and Victorian Imagination* (London: Athlone Press, 1968), p. 14.

4. W. J. Bate, "The Sympathetic Imagination in Eighteenth-Century English Criticism," *English Literary History* 11 (1945): 149.

5. Quoted in ibid., p. 144. One reason for the harshness of the Romantics' critics was that their claims were so vast for imagination as to be considered indiscriminate.

6. J. Engell, *The Creative Imagination* (New York: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 8, 243.

7. T. A. Repina, "Development of Imagination," in *Psychology of Preschool Children,* ed. A. Zaporozhets and D. B. Elkonin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971).

8. D. Moss, "The Erotics of Destruction" (Presented at The American Orthopsychiatric Association Symposium, "Dealing with Plans for the Annihilation of Life on Earth: The Reality of the Arms Race," Boston, April 4–8, 1983).

9. R. J. Lifton, "Psychological Effects of Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear War," in *Proceedings of Harvard Medical School Conference: The Medical Consequences of Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1981).

10. W. Reich, *Ether, God and Devil* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), p. 124.

11. H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), p. 4.

12. Ibid.

13. D. Bradley, "Novelist Alice Walker, Telling the Black Woman's Story," *New York Times Magazine,* 8 January 1984, p. 27.

14. Each group met only once for one to three hours, depending on circumstance. With a few exceptions the participants had no training for imagery work, and yet each was able to experience the presence of these voices. The descriptions of these characters are drawn from participants' written reports.

Those familiar with imaginal characters will note that they are in the beginning stages of character development, often lacking the depth and complexity of voices one has entertained in imagination over time. Nevertheless, it is their very closeness to consciousness that allows us so easily to recognize them in our daily actions and attitudes.

15. E. Fromm, *To Have or To Be* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), p. xxvi.

16. Ibid., pp. xxv–xxvii.

17. L. Weschler, "A Reporter at Large (Poland–Part II)," *The New Yorker,* 18 April 1983, p. 10.

18. J. Macy, "Despair Work," *Evolutionary Blues* (Summer/Fall, 1981); and Macy, *Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1983).

19. Both images of the activist suggest the critical need to broaden and deepen our perceptions and images regarding action. The range of action participants imagined was narrow, mainly limited to demonstrating and organizing. Even the images in these two categories lacked specificity.

20. C. W. Churchman, Lectures at the Wright Institute, San Francisco, California, Summer 1981.

21. It is interesting that all the individuals who entertained this kind of character (mother and teacher characters) were women. This finding, however, must be seen in conjunction with another. Whereas over half of the women in these small groups imagined one or more of their characters as a male, not a single male spontaneously entertained a female character. Many men may indeed be cut off from the feminine voices in dealing with "the numb one."

22. R. Coles, "Social Struggle and Weariness," *Psychiatry* 27 (1964): 305–15.

23. Ibid., p. 308.

24. J. Schell, *The Fate of the Earth* (New York: Avon Books, 1982), p. 55.

25. Quoted in Arendt, *Life of the Mind,* p. 188.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., p. 191.

Additional References

Keniston, K. *The Uncommitted.* New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1965.

Mack, J. "Psychosocial Effects of the Nuclear Arms Race." *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (1981): 18–23.