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[Book Review of] *Indefensible Weapons*, by Robert Jay Lifton and Richard Falk

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natural family planning. It includes some review questions, a book list and a glossary of terms.

The values are interwoven and laid on subtly. Although written from a Christian perspective, it is not highly doctrinaire and its appeal is to broadly-accepted principles. The scientific aspects are sound and not at all pedantic, and the approach is to both sexes although, not unexpectedly, there is more to say about female reproduction. The treatment of dating and courtship is very sketchy, but the authors have a disclaimer for those who would want the book to provide more than its limited purpose would allow. It can be read easily in a single sitting and then reread for its technical points. It should be read to be shared, however, and it merits a wide acceptance.

— Eugene F. Diamond, M.D.
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Indefensible Weapons

Robert Jay Lifton and Richard Falk

Basic Books, New York, 1982, 301 pp., \$6.96.

Indefensible Weapons presents a case against nuclearism from the viewpoint of psychology and politics. The psychological case is developed by Lifton; the political case by Falk. While the two authors present the case from different viewpoints, both agree on the solution to the problem—a movement away from nuclearism.

Nuclearism consists in entrusting our security to nuclear weapons. Lifton finds a curious inconsistency here, putting our security in ever-increasing numbers of the very weapons which have initially undermined it. He argues that current policies and justifications are based on certain illusions regarding these weapons. These, in turn, are engendered by our feelings of helplessness toward nuclear weapons, feelings which we refuse to face. The illusions are that we can control and limit nuclear warfare, that we know how to deal with nuclear weapons and what to expect, that we can prepare for nuclear bombing, that we can protect ourselves against it, that we can harden ourselves to the destruction caused by these bombs and recover from it, and that we can handle it all in a reasonable way.

According to Lifton, nuclear weapons have introduced man to the image of extinction. Man has always been confronted by death, even by large numbers of deaths, but now, for the first time, he is faced with the possible extinction of the human race, and even of all life on our planet. The author sees this as having a profound impact on our way of life, and particularly on what he calls our sense of immortality. He presumes that this sense depends on the continuation of human life on this planet. This, of course, is not the traditional Christian understanding of immortality, but there is no doubt that the prospect of imminent extinction of life on our planet would have a profound impact on our lives.

Lifton feels that we have not really faced the consequences of nuclearism but have numbed our true feelings toward them. This has been done more easily because we have had no real experience of these consequences. But it can also be done by blotting out the images one can get from reading about them, imagining them, etc. While recognizing that the numbing process may be salutary at times, he takes the position that in the case of nuclearism, it inhibits an effective reaction to a real menace.

Lifton maintains that the only way to overcome nuclearism is to break through the numbing process and try to imagine the real consequences of reliance on nuclear weapons. An awareness of the realities of nuclear "security" is the only way to cure nuclearism.

In making the political case against nuclearism, Falk shows that our policy since the discovery of the atomic bomb has been to keep the nuclear advantage. This was easy enough until the Soviets developed the bomb. Since then the task has been to keep ahead of the Russians and has been more problematic. All this is in the name of security, but it has presently reached the point where both sides have far more nuclear power than necessary, and enough to destroy the world many times over, making us far more insecure than secure.

Falk feels that even before the discovery of the nuclear bomb we were prepared for the route we have taken by a Machiavellian mentality — to do anything necessary to bring about military victory. He argues, too, that nuclearism was made possible only by departing from the democratic process. The people had nothing to do with policy-making. Any who were disturbed by nuclearism were pacified by an appeal to the Soviet factor. Nuclearism was a lesser evil. Falk thinks that the Soviet threat was deliberately exaggerated to promote nuclearism.

Like Lifton, he thinks that passivism is the great obstacle to any move away from nuclearism. But he is not satisfied that an activism based on fear will solve the problem. What is needed is what he calls a holistic world picture which sees the human race and the world as one.

The ultimate enemy is not nuclearism but war itself and the Machiavellian mentality that underlies it. This is a long-range goal, but meanwhile, much can be done to change the nuclear mentality. The goal of "keeping ahead" should be abandoned in favor of a strictly defensive goal. Falk seems to think that 10 or more nuclear weapons would be sufficient for this purpose. There will be many points in the book with which the reader may well disagree. For instance, Lifton's understanding of immortality as symbolic rather than real or personal will not be accepted by Catholic readers. Falk's estimate of the number of nuclear bombs required for defense sounds somewhat simplistic, even if considered apart from the needs of deterrence; it does not seem to make much allowance for destabilizing factors. There also seems to be a gross underestimation of the Soviet threat. And there may be other areas of disagreement. But no one should disagree with the goal of nuclear disarmament and the elimination of war as a way of solving international disputes. The holistic approach proposed by Falk is rather vague, but it is certainly worth pursuing.

— John R. Connery, S.J.
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