

# Running scared

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Among the psychological traps which lock us into the arms race are the following:

1. *the illusion of immortality*: the oft-observed incapacity of the human mind to imagine its own death; psychological disorders that develop from suppression of death anxiety; effects of subconscious dread of death on expectations and plans for the future; the example of the high-speed automobile and its illusion of safety.

2. *the disease of abstraction*: roots of abstraction in the academic approach to education; the affluent style of life and its avoidance of physical realities, its anesthetizing effects; technology and its insulating effects; the military approach to war and death; the "defense intellectuals" and their scenarios; the distancing effects of physically inactive life; the numbing effects of excessive mental stimulation.

3. *paranoia*: its roots in insecurity; generating threats and enemies to justify aggressive responses; fear as passive defense becoming fear as active aggression; threats and counter-threats (expectations and predictable responses); the paranoid style in politics; the political use of fear as a source of power and technique of manipulation.

4. *the preoccupation with winning*: persistence of the myth that victory is both possible and essential, while contemporary political rivalries increasingly turn to stalemates; bankruptcy of winning as an idea; the military definition of victory; the dread of losing and its consequent humiliation and shame; the notion that only winning is success, and only success is acceptable.

5. *the persistence of ancient antagonisms and limited identities*: nationalism, tribalism, factionalism, sectarianism—their attractions, their psychological roots; intolerance—its roots, attractions, political uses.

6. *the disease of distraction*: excessive information in contemporary life and its bewildering effects; reduced capacity of the mind to hear and comprehend, to distinguish between important and trivial matters; preoccupation with trivia as a means of escape from anxiety; the absence of occasions for stillness or silence in modern life patterns; the role of the media in distraction and bewilderment, in confusing events of small and great importance; distracting effects of narcissistic culture—preoccupation with self and narrowly-defined self-interest.

7. *the feeling (and myth) of helplessness*: how modern social and economic institutions discourage self-reliance and independent action; how political institutions discourage the possibility of grassroots influence; the history of failure in arms control and avoidance of conflict and its negative effects on present and future expectations of success; the use of arguments of helplessness as an excuse for inaction.

8. *the myth of non-responsibility*: leaving it to the politicians and experts; experts as secular priests; the nature of the apolitical mind (educated and uneducated varieties); the illusion that we have no part in making it happen (through taxes, investment, and war-related employment); the fear of being overwhelmed by the problem.

9. *the impulse of self-annihilation*: in the apparent absence of more affirmative possibilities, the attraction of self-destruction as quick, simple, and dramatic action; its relation to the will to power and control; the relation between individual and mass impulses; the fascination and pride of technology in exercising a feat of

such proportions; born-again evangelism and its predictions; "signs" of nature and human society in crisis.

10. *we don't realize how much we have to lose*: the non-traditional and anti-historical nature of postwar culture; its roots in the experience of the last war and its incapacity to recognize or remember the efforts expended over generations to create civilization; the widespread contempt for the products of our own (and our ancestors') labor; inexperience in the present generations with the labor of initial creation, and the lesser commitment among those who simply maintain; the absence of an authentic conservation ethic in the ideology and practice of the still-dominant ruling elites; the historical inexperience (of Americans of recent generations in particular) with war on home ground; the idea of progress, its hold on the popular imagination, the substitution of its opposite (the notion of inevitable decline) and the history of that idea.

11. *the weak image of disarmament and peace*: lack of a peacemaker's image to replace the ancient ideal of warrior; absence of an historical precedent for disarmament; the argument of "peace through strength"—its limited validity, its numerous fallacies; unilateral disarmament—history of the idea, why it has attracted so few adherents, possible future of the idea.

12. *the illusion that nuclear war is quick and easy death*: origins of the mistaken perception; attraction of the "painless" way; popular images of what such a war would be like.

13. *the lingering romance of war*: remnants of the ancient infatuation with battle.

14. *the prestige of weapons*: nuclear weapons and their peculiar fascination and attraction as quick fixes for messy situations (experience of the Second World War); France, Pakistan, India, and their motivations for building nuclear weapons, weak character (or weak political structure) and the borrowed strength of weapons; the urge to become a "great" power.

15. *the illusion that our weapons protect us*: weapons protect only so long as the adversary has fewer; between equals, weapons threaten, and deter only precariously and temporarily.

16. *unappeasable insecurity*: profound instability of recent postwar life; the pace of change and its contribution to insecurity; the insurance syndrome—the yearning for guaranteed security, the impossibility of fulfillment of such guarantees; material attachment and inflexible responses to changed circumstances; the hunger for security and why we never feel we have enough; insecurities fostered by the arms race.

17. *the numbing effects of perpetual crisis*.

18. *boredom*: its presence in contemporary life, especially in paid labor; frustration as a product of boredom, and aggression as a quick release from frustration; the attraction of "action"; boredom as a mask for other emotions.

19. *the persistence of machismo*: the universal appeal of machismo; the desire and drive for dominance; chauvinism and its substitution for personal inadequacy; the dread of being thought weak.

20. *the inability to trust*: on all sides, for "good" (historical) reasons and bad; individual suspicion and group suspicion; the fear of being caught vulnerable; non-violence and *ahimsa*. (harmlessness).

21. *the territorial instinct*: its biological roots; its expression in history and in contemporary international relations; possibilities for accommodating the instinct while tempering its fierceness.

22. *over-specialization*: its presence in all technologically advanced nations; the narrowed perspective of specialized minds; the incapacity of the narrowly focussed intelligence to perceive general trends, longterm consequences; cultural myopia.

23. *a failure of imagination*: the decline of creative and functional imagination and the concurrent rise of violent fantasy; the absence of precedent for a nuclear war and the failure of imagination to envision it; the protective function of imagination and the vulnerability of cultures whose imaginative faculty is impaired.

24. *hubris*: the distorted image of man above and apart from nature; its origins in the struggle for survival; its expressions in contemporary culture and effects on the arms race.