illogical and self-defeating policies of the Cold War, the nuclear arms race, and the pursuit of national security through nuclear weapons. It also provides answers to some of the questions raised, but unanswered, by Robert Jay Lifton's theory of psychic numbing: Why, in the midst of numbing, do nuclear images proliferate, and how do they enhance rather than diminish numbing? Why are images of physical self-destruction embraced? How do they reinforce tendencies to psychological self-destruction? But the exposition of Laing's views offered here has not yet answered other questions that Lifton raises: Why did the psychodynamics underlying both nuclear imagery and numbing set in long before 1945? What is distinctive about the post-1945 situation? Most importantly, what can be done to break through psychic numbing?

The answers to these questions depend on answering a more basic question: If the schizoid strategy and the social false self system are motivated by ontological insecurity, what is the source of this insecurity? Why should our society be so riddled with a fear of losing its reality that it goes to such extreme lengths in trying to preserve its reality? Is not our reality the one fact that is self-evident, needing no special measures to preserve it? Some might suggest that the Bomb itself is responsible for our ontological insecurity. No doubt the nuclear threat has exacerbated our insecurity and trapped us more firmly in the schizoid strategy. But if the schizoid strategy explains how we came to be under the nuclear threat, then the insecurity that generated the strategy that generated the threat must have existed before nuclear weapons existed. So we are still in need of a theory to explain our society's pervasive ontological insecurity. One resource for solving this problem is a resource upon which both Laing and Lifton have already drawn: the thought of Paul Tillich.

3

The Neurosis of Modernity

R.D. Laing and Robert Jay Lifton show little direct concern for theological issues in their writings. Yet both have found much value in the work of the theologian Paul Tillich. In theological circles Tillich, who began as a critic of tradition, is now virtually a pillar of tradition. His ideas are common currency, having been commented on and criticized at great length. Certainly his interpreters and critics have moved far beyond his own thought in numerous valuable directions. Yet if Tillich is ranked among the old masters of theology, he has earned that rank by the richness of his thought. Like all old masters he can still offer new insights when approached from new perspectives.

Laing, Lifton, and other psychologists have opened up a new perspective by setting aside Tillich's own principal concerns, religious faith and philosophical truth, to approach him as an interpreter of the human psyche. They demonstrate that one need not share Tillich's faith commitments and theological affirmations in order to turn his insights to good psychological advantage. In an earlier era, some socialist thinkers who did not share Tillich's theological concerns found much value in his social and cultural criticism. Going a step further, Tillich's psychology can be combined with his social and cultural thought to explain why ontological insecurity became the precarious foundation of Western modernity. That explanation, and its relevance to the nuclear dilemma, is the subject of this chapter.[1]

Infinitude and Existential Anxiety

There are obviously problems in appropriating a religious thinker to address secular concerns. Tillich's thought is grounded from first to last in the issues and language of theological on-

tology. He defines faith as "ultimate concern": caring infinitely about that which is truly infinite. Since all beings are inherently finite, only Being is infinite and therefore worthy of ultimate concern. So his theology is an inquiry into the nature of Being and the human being's relation to Being. Psychologists cannot use such language very readily. But they may quite legitimately sidestep the philosophical and theological difficulties of the concept of Being by translating it into their own terms and developing an ontological psychology. Many psychologists who would not talk about Being are still quite willing to speak, as Laing does, of an individual's "sense of personal reality" in more or less quantitative terms. There are some people, they would say, who simply do not feel fully real.

The psychology implicit in Tillich's concept of ultimate concern goes one step further. It contends that everyone must feel some measure of personal unreality. His analysis here follows familiar lines of modern European existentialist thought. We meet the limits of our reality, he reminds us, when we feel the gap that inevitably separates us from other people and from the world. Eventually, we know, our separation will be total, in death. As separated, precarious, contingent beings, we do not feel fully real. We try to overcome our separation by participating in the world. Unlike other animal species, though, we have no specific relations to people or things forced upon us. We must constantly choose the nature of our connections with the world. The essential defining quality of human reality is thus open-ended possibility: that which might be but is not now real. Since the largest part of our being is, at any given moment, pure potentiality, we can never feel entirely actual or perfectly real. The more free we feel—the more we strive to transcend ourselves by creating tomorrow's new reality out of today's unreality—the more we sense just how open-ended, indeterminate, and unreal we are.

Whatever interaction with the world we choose, Tillich points out, it must be expressed in symbolic forms of word, action, or relationship. Symbolic forms, freely chosen, concretize the values and concerns that make life worth living. Ideally we could bridge the gap between ourselves and our world perfectly if we could embody our values perfectly in daily life. We could feel completely real if our lives felt completely meaningful. But we inevitably fall short of this ideal. There is always an empty spot where some part of life seems to be without meaning; there

is always a sense of guilt for failing to live up to our own highest values. The gap between ideals and reality is just part of the larger gap between self and world. Symbolic forms are our only means to actualize our possibilities and fill the gap. Yet in creating these forms we project an inner possibility into the world as a fixed, static, discrete reality that is now separated from ourselves. Every attempt to overcome separation thus leads to further separation, heightening our sense of unreality. And it inevitably leads to demands for new choices, entangling us further in the complexities of finite freedom and its unrealities.

In sum, our sense of personal reality is limited along each of the six axes that constitute the basic structures of Being: separation from the world and participation in the world, dynamic change and static form, freedom to become what we want to be and destiny to become what we must be. These are the dimensions of finitude that many modern thinkers affirm in one way or another. Although Tillich clearly derives much of this analysis from other philosophers with whom he shares the label "existentialist," he goes beyond existentialist humanism by pointing to a central thread running through this whole analysis: in every case, we feel some degree of imperfection only because we can imagine a state of perfection. We feel partially real only because we can imagine a state of total reality. In fact, the very concepts of 'partial reality' and 'imperfection' entail a prior awareness of their opposites. So as soon as we acknowledge our limitedness, we necessarily invoke the logical alternative: that we might have been unlimited. We acknowledge the gap between actuality and possibility, between the finitude of what we are and the infinitude of what we might imaginably be. This capacity to imagine and desire perfection is the mainspring of life:

> Man is able to understand in an immediate personal and central act the meaning of the ultimate, the unconditional, the absolute, the infinite. . . . Man is driven toward faith by his awareness of the infinite to which he belongs, but which he does not own like a possession. This is in abstract terms what concretely appears as the "restlessness of the heart" within the flux of life. . . . Man experiences a belonging to the infinite which, however, is neither a part of himself nor something in his power. It must grasp him,

> and if it does, it is a matter of infinite concern. Man is finite, man's reason lives in preliminary concerns; but man is also aware of his potential infinity, and this awareness appears as his ultimate concern.[2]

Every concern that motivates us in life is a token of our ultimate concern, the particular value that holds out the promise of perfect fulfillment. Whenever we actualize some possibility, we dream of actualizing all possibilities; whenever we enact a partial reality we are striving toward complete reality. Of course infinitude is unattainable. In every act we sense the gap between our imperfection and the perfection we seek. So every act makes us feel less than fully real. But precisely because the goal is unattainable, we can go on striving toward it forever. Like a mathematical asymptote, it is a limit-concept that draws us ever closer.

The lure of this limit reflects a uniquely human gift: the ability to think and live in absolutes, to extrapolate from the finite reality of the given world to the infinite reality of the possible. We can imagine infinite reality because our relationship to the world is so open-ended, because our essential reality is so laden with pure possibility. But we pay a heavy price for this gift. We can imagine infinite reality only as the sum total of all our possibilities, all that is not yet real. To imagine infinite reality is thus, simultaneously and necessarily, to imagine infinite possibility, which means infinite unreality.

The infinitude of possibility that stretches before us is, in Tillich's view, both a limitless promise that grounds our reality and a limitless abyss that threatens to swallow up every limited reality, including our own. This infinitude is "at the same time the No and the Yes over things . . . the absolute Nothing and the absolute Something."[3] As soon as we are aware of our finitude we see ourselves stretched between the poles of total reality and total unreality, and we must face the possibility of falling wholly to the latter side and vanishing into nonexistence. As soon as we make choices and call up our feelings of relative unreality, we must also confront our fears of absolute unreality. The risk of self-transcendence becomes an infinite risk. The awareness of this risk of ontological extinction is anxiety. Since everyone desires perfect reality, everyone experiences their own reality as finite and therefore feels anxiety.

Tillich's analysis aims to elucidate the irreducible paradoxes of finite existence. We can feel real only when we affirm ourselves by freely transcending ourselves and participating in symbolic meanings. But every such act must make us feel somewhat unreal. The hidden core of every act of self-transcendence is the desire for perfect reality. The more we affirm this core the more we affirm ourselves and the more real we feel. But the more we desire perfect reality, the more we must open ourselves to the realm of infinite possibility, feel our own finitude, and therefore feel the threat of total unreality. To feel more real we must increase our anxiety and risk feeling more unreal. To feel fully real and alive we must risk feeling fully unreal.

Religion is the realm in which we encounter this ultimate promise and ultimate risk. "The religious aspect points to that which is ultimate, infinite, unconditional in man's spiritual life. Religion, in the largest and most basic sense of the word, is ultimate concern."[4] Religion affirms that, paradoxically, finite human beings can experience themselves as surpassing or being freed from the limits of ordinary everyday life. But it offers infinite fulfillment only at the price of infinite risk of the self. Infinitude must always be represented for finite human beings by some finite "piece" of reality, which becomes a symbol pointing toward infinitude and demanding infinite surrender of the self, while itself remaining finite. This means that infinitude must always be tempered by finitude; perfect infinitude remains impossible. As we acknowledge the dimension of infinitude and feel ourselves drawn toward it, therefore, we also come face to face with the inherent anxiety of our finitude and recognize that we must experience our anxiety fully in order to transcend it. Religion does not remove anxiety, Tillich insists. Rather, as it brings us to the infinite ground that is also an abyss, it offers a grounding that enables us to risk the threat of the abyss. It gives us "the courage to be."

Neurotic Anxiety

What happens to those who refuse to take this infinite risk and try to evade the inevitability of anxiety? Tillich answers with his theory of neurosis. Neurotics, he contends, are more sensitive than other people to the possibility of infinite unreality

(perhaps because they are more sensitive to the possibility of infinite reality). So they refuse to take the risk of anxiety. They deny their desire for unlimited reality in order to avoid the possibility of losing their limited reality. They restrict their lives to the purely finite realm. Or, in Robert Jay Lifton's terms, they become physically numb; Lifton has defined psychic numbing using Tillich's definition of neurosis as "the way of avoiding nonbeing by avoiding being."[5]

For Tillich, then, normal anxiety is the threat of unreality we feel when we are open to limitless possibility, responding to changing realities with the freedom of self-transcendence. Neurotic anxiety is the threat of unreality we refuse to feel when we deny our aspiration to infinitude, refusing to exercise the freedom of self-transcendence. A neurotic tries to avoid the anxiety of self-transcendence by avoiding the situation that breeds it—the encounter of a separate being with a changing and uncontrollable world:

> The self which is affirmed is a reduced one. Some or many of its potentialities are not admitted to actualization, because actualization of being implies the acceptance of nonbeing and its anxiety. . . . He affirms something which is less than his essential or potential being. He surrenders a part of his potentialities in order to save what is left. . . . This is, so to speak, the castle to which he has retired and which he defends with all means of psychological resistance against attack.[6]

Neurotics mask their growing feeling of unreality with the apparent security of a rigid life in a rigid, radically finite world. They construct an imagined world that corresponds directly to their own limited needs and desires, a world robbed of all otherness. They learn to forget how to respond to the real demands of the real world. No new choices are made and no new meanings considered. Life becomes a monologue with an inert world that is only one's own static reflection. Neurosis is therefore inevitably self-defeating: attempting to save life's reality, it ends up draining life of its reality.

Although neurosis tries to avoid unreality by refusing to face the fearful side of reality, it actually generates more fears, hoping to pin its anxiety to real concrete objects. Yet its fears are often highly unrealistic. Neurotics fear much that is not actually threatening. On the other hand, because they see only what they want to see (and can afford to see), neurotics often fail to fear things that really are threatening. Their impregnable, because largely imaginary, "castle" is ultimately a mask for the fond illusion of immortality, in Tillich's opinion. It excludes every threat to life by treating it as unreal; the more threatening and imminent the danger, the more likely it is to be ignored.

The hope of saving life by sacrificing life is inevitably in vain, however, for the threat of unreality grows on every side. Neurotics end up caught between two intolerable threats, "two types of nightmare. . . . The one type is the anxiety of annihilating narrowness, of the impossibility of escape and the horror of being trapped. The other is the anxiety of annihilating openness, of infinite, formless space into which one falls without a place to fall upon."[7] The world of neurosis is therefore a vicious ever-tightening circle. Life becomes increasingly more rigid and more rigidly defended against an ever-increasing sense of threat. Whether that threat is imagined as a trap or a formless void, it is a symbolic image of the nightmare of infinite unreality. Every attempt to use neurotic defenses to escape from this nightmare only leads further into it. Thus the core of every neurosis is a mounting spiral of ontological insecurity.

Radical Finitude and the Neurosis of Modernity

In most times and places, neurotic anxiety plagues only a few unfortunate individuals amidst a generally health populace, Tillich claims. However, "there is a moment in which the self-affirmation of the average man becomes neurotic." Such a moment is evident in "the mass neuroses which usually appear at the end of an era," he asserts, and then he asks: "To what degree are present-day Existentialist descriptions of man's predicament caused by neurotic anxiety?"[8] Tillich breaks off the discussion at this point without answering his own question, but the context indicates that his answer would be: "To a very high degree." He attributes this mass neurosis to rapid social change that undermines the average person's confidence and courage (comparing our own time to the late Roman Empire and waning of the Middle Ages). But a more radical view is implicit in the total corpus of Tillich's work. This view contends that modernity is unique and that only the full spectrum of its unique features can account for the scope, meaning, and ubiq-

uity of its neurosis. On this view the self-destructiveness of nuclear imagery and psychic numbing is rooted in the self-destructiveness of modernity's neurosis.

At the center of Tillich's view of modernity is his notion of 'radical finitude.' Life in the twentieth century West, Tillich contends, is still shaped by the three great forces that created the industrial society of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: science, technology, and capitalism. Each of these forces has the same overriding characteristic—total adherence to finite reality:

> We come out of a time in which existence was directed toward itself, in which the forms of life were self-sufficient and closed against invasions of the eternal. Not a single phase of that life out of which we have come, not even the explicitly religious phase, was exempt from this attitude. Even the forces which assailed it became its victims. We come out of a time which no longer possessed any symbols by which it could point beyond itself. Capitalist society rested undisturbed in its finite forms.[9]

Tillich's past tense here indicates that he was optimistic that his own protest would join with others to produce a fundamental change. Yet his later writings and an honest look at present-day society both indicate that in fact the forces attempting to assail modernity still become its victims. Although the present century has seen some protest against self-sufficient finitude, the protest has failed to alter the basic structure of modern Western life, as Tillich's writings describe it.

There is a great irony in this, Tillich points out, for modern science, technology, and capitalism each grew out of aspirations for genuine self-transcendence beyond the finite level. Science began in the search for the ultimate meaning of nature, for the Creator's eternal laws shining through the material world. Technology began as a quest for ultimate self-transformation through the transformation of nature. Capitalism began as a drive for emancipation from an oppressive hierarchical society; the ideal was for everyone to transcend themselves as far as their individual talents and initiative could carry them. In each case, a concrete vision of perfection was driving human life beyond itself. In each case, however, the spirit of finite self-sufficiency eclipsed the spirit of

self-transcendence, and the dimension of infinitude was excluded from the common stock of cultural realities.

These finitized visions came together in the utopian ideal of unlimited progress and perfection through material abundance. All of nature became a mechanical object to be taken apart and controlled—a means to an end—underscoring the scientific estrangement of human consciousness from its natural environment. Ultimately nature became an enemy, for its untamed reaches represented chaos and death, the impassable limit to the imposition of control. Technology, on the other hand, represented the perfect ordering of life and thus the dream of eternal life. When the victory of life over death was believed inevitable, perfect reality was imagined as a goal realizable in mundane reality, not a transcendent limit. The gap between real and ideal was closed, rendering life one-dimensional. But the goal was to be attained by sequential realization of an endless stream of finite possibilities. So every purpose became a means to some future goal, a goal that was always receding into a more distant future. The vision of a simultaneous realization of all possibilities was ruled out in principle.

With material prosperity raised to the level of ultimate concern, society made itself a replica of science's objective world, a huge machine of finite parts interacting only in cause and effect relations. As all things became inert commodities to be possessed and controlled, so people became commodities too. Education became primarily socialization into the production/consumption machine. Government became preoccupied with keeping the machine well oiled and pursuing peace—which now meant the optimal situation for global capitalist expansion. As the machine required more complex bureaucratic organizations to keep it going, everyone from the most powerful capitalist to the lowliest worker had to adapt to the demands of the whole.

> Man is supposed to be the master of his world and himself. But actually he has become a part of the reality he has created, an object among objects, a thing among things, a cog within a universal machine to which he must adapt himself in order not to be smashed by it. But this adaptation makes him a means for ends which are means themselves, and in which an ultimate end is lacking. Out of

> this predicament of man in the industrial society the experiences of emptiness and meaninglessness, of dehumanization and estrangement have resulted. Man has ceased to encounter reality as meaningful.[10]

Wherever we look, then, we see modern Western culture making immense, and immensely successful, efforts to exclude the dimension of infinitude—not only as a living reality but, more importantly, as a possibility. All our social institutions and processes conspire to make us forget that experiences of infinitude are within the range of human potential. The religious symbols that once embodied the dream of perfect reality have been stripped of their power, and the very nature of modernity insures that no new symbols can arise to take their place. It is not enough, then, to say that this is an age of anxiety. The crucial point is that this age of anxiety has no antidote, no path to point beyond our feelings of limited, partial reality. Thus it has become an age of universal neurosis.

Neurosis and the Nuclear Age

Tillich's understanding of neurosis, coupled with his critique of modernity, shows how the psychodynamics of nuclear images and nuclear numbing in the Cold War world are rooted in the neurotic fears characteristic of modernity. Neurosis tries to avoid unreality by refusing to face the fearful side of reality. The tremendous achievements of science and technology make us virtually fearless in the face of nature. The evil spirits that once populated waterways and wilderness and darkness are banished. So we learn to fear other people: the ethnic and racial minorities, the Communists, or whatever others are most convenient at the time. We cling to these fears so persistently just because our potential range of fears has become so narrow. Fixation on a small number of intensely held fears is a prime characteristic of neurosis.

Neurotic fears assume a special quality of unreality in two senses: they express the threat of unreality in especially vivid symbolic terms, and they are often unrealistic. The pervasive fears of our own day display both these qualities. Among all the others, we especially fear the shadowy, impalpable, unknowable other: the terrorist, the thief in the night, the infiltrating spy, the stranger on the other side of the street—or the tracks, or

the world—whom we will never meet. All these people are unreal to us, yet we guard ourselves against them with special caution, spending huge portions of our wealth to buy security, because we never know what They will do next. Our publicly shared fears do little to concretize our anxiety. For the most part, they simply reinforce our sense of helplessness in the face of intangible dangers. So we feel compelled to limit our anxiety by neurotically limiting our world and our own possibilities. Many of these fears may be unfounded and others exaggerated, but we simply have no way to find out the facts.

Neurotics cherish their unrealistic fears as a buffer against reality. They strip genuine dangers of their reality for the same reason. Whenever possible, they ignore real dangers and refuse to feel fear at all. If fear cannot be avoided, the second-best line of defense is to talk about the danger (sometimes incessantly) without internalizing it or intending to respond to it. In our societal neurosis, this verbal defense is quite common. We cannot totally ignore our fears about environmental destruction, urban decay, or the threat of nuclear annihilation. "It's a terrible problem," we say. "Someone really ought to do something." With that we confirm our own impotence. We diminish our reality in the face of the problem so that we can diminish the reality of the fear and danger. In a life of radical finitude this maneuver is especially easy. Subject and object, person and world, life and death are permanently separated in any event. Thus the danger, even if it represents death itself, becomes just one more object "out there," too far away to touch—or to touch our lives. So we deaden ourselves to very real dangers and sink back into psychic numbing. The more dangers there are, the easier it is to feel totally detached and numb.

Yet as we take refuge in our pure subjectivity, we also take refuge in our sense that we are just objects, cogs in the machine, inert and incapable of response. Ignoring our capacity to act, we settle into a convenient fatalism. "It's all too overwhelming," we say. And in fact we are quite easily overwhelmed. In the narrow shelter of our finitized world, we systematically train ourselves to be incapable of contemplating threats to the whole. Embedded in temporality, we can only deal with concerns of the short run. Our minds boggle in trying to think of global centuries-long consequences. And a nuclear threat that conjures up eternity with its image of "the end of all life" is impossible to take in—which is just the way neurotics want it.