

University, cleaned, catalogued and printed the negatives. They subsequently presented them in a range of journals, the 1996 book *The Killing Fields*⁴ and in the current exhibition, which has been shown in Europe and the United States.

Thus, over the past four years, these tragic images have been brought to a wide public. Along the way, they have also engendered a good deal of controversy. Largely, critics have been concerned either that the exhibition diminishes the gravity of the subject by presenting the photographs as art or, by reproducing them, effectively replicates the Khmer Rouge's subjugation of its victims. It does neither. Instead, *Facing Death* informs a wide public about those atrocities and, equally, functions

as a critique. The exhibition acknowledges that photographs operate at a number of levels, not solely as aesthetic works (although art itself can be a powerful means of critique). Reproducing photographs or words is not tantamount to endorsing their original message: all forms of expression are open to multiple interpretations. In this case, the anguish and fear apparent in these photographs provides a devastatingly vivid account of the Cambodian genocide. Moreover, the publication and exhibition of these photographs provide important — if wrenching — resources for people of Cambodian descent who want to find information about missing family members and to address the nightmare of those years. In short, *Facing Death* tries to fulfil the moral imper-

ative articulated by the Primo Levi in his memoirs of Auschwitz: to tell the story, to bear witness.

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Room for a view

Instinct and survival: an exchange of letters between Einstein and Freud

I have seen the future, brother;
it is murder.

—Leonard Cohen, "The Future"

In 1931 the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation was instructed by a committee of the League of Nations to arrange for an exchange of letters, intended for publication, between representative intellectuals to promote discussion of the concerns of the league. One of the first to be approached was Albert Einstein; the person he, in turn, chose to correspond with was Sigmund Freud. Einstein had met Freud five years earlier in Berlin, at the home of Freud's youngest son, and they had discussed their work and respective fields. Einstein believed that Freud could shed light on "a question which seems the most insistent of all the problems civilization has to face." And so it was that in 1932 the scientist who redefined for 20th-century humanity its understanding of the physical world posed the following question to the

physician who had changed its perception of the psychological one: "Is there any way of delivering mankind from the menace of war? It is common knowledge that modern science has come to mean a matter of life or death for civilization as we know it." Although the building of the atomic bomb was still some years away, Einstein had already discovered the science that would make it possible and feared its catastrophic potential. He asked Freud "to bring the light of [his] far-reaching knowledge of man's instinctual life to bear upon the problem" and hoped that his "most recent discoveries might blaze the trail for new and fruitful modes of action."

Einstein was concerned about the role of elites in promoting war, the "small but determined groups, active in every nation, composed of individuals who, indifferent to social considerations and restraints, regard warfare, the manifestation and sale of arms, simply as an occasion to advance their personal interests and enlarge their personal author-

ity." This phenomenon was later termed the "military-industrial complex" by US President Dwight Eisenhower. In Einstein's view, the elites were able to wield power because "the schools and press, usually the church as well [were] under its thumb" and so were able to "whip up the hatred and destruction of the masses into a collective psychosis." Thus Einstein invoked the language of psychiatry and madness to describe the propaganda machine already operating in Nazi Germany. He proposed the establishment, "by international consent, of [a] legislative and judicial body to settle every conflict arising between nations" but lamented that "we are far from possessing any supranational organization competent to render verdicts of incontestable authority and enforce absolute submission to the execution of its verdicts." However, as Einstein observed, there are "strong psychological factors" that "paralyse" efforts to enforce the peaceful coexistence of nations. And so he sought Freud's counsel.

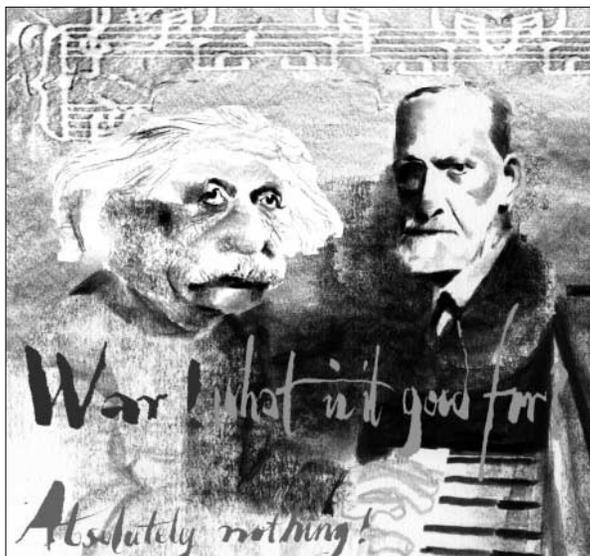
Replying to Einstein's letter, Freud expressed his surprise that, as a physician and psychoanalyst, his advice regarding a social rather than clinical problem had been sought. However, he wrote that he agreed with everything Einstein had said, "particularly the need for a central authority." He described war as futile. "The results of conquest are as a rule short-lived," he wrote, "the newly created units fall apart once again, usually owing to a lack of cohesion between parties united by violence." He, too, was concerned that the League of Nations lacked "the necessary power to act, and shared Einstein's apocalyptic sense that "a future war might involve the extermination of one or perhaps both of the antagonists." Freud then went on to outline for Einstein his theory of Eros, the life instinct that "seeks to preserve and unite" and of Thanatos, the death instinct. For Freud, aggression was the manifestation of Thanatos and thus an essential element of human nature. For that reason, he characterized Russian communism as "an illusion trying to make human aggression disappear."

What Freud offered Einstein by way of an answer were "indirect methods of combating war." These were, first, education to create "independent minds not open to intimidation and eager in the pursuit of truth." Second was a sense of "identification," that is, of "whatever leads men to share important interests" and thus creates a "community of feeling." Third, Freud suggested that "cultural attitudes and the justified dread of the consequences of a future war may result within a measurable time in putting an end to the waging of war itself."

As events unfolded, Einstein left Germany for the US in 1933, and Freud left Austria for England in 1938. Einstein found himself drawn into doing what he most dreaded. Fearing that Nazi scientists would develop an atomic bomb, he helped to initiate the Manhattan Project. He would live his last

years working for disarmament and global government, anguished by his impossible, Faustian decision.

Despite Einstein's efforts, the atomic bomb has since its nefarious birth during World War II metastasized into the current proliferation of nuclear arms, propelled, as Einstein himself had predicted, by propaganda



and profit. As the 21st century begins, the bulk of the world's population has for the first time in history been raised under the threat of possible extinction by its own hand. Although nuclear war has receded from public consciousness this past decade, the situation is in a number of ways more precarious than it was during the Cold War.

Freud used the concept of Thanatos as a means of explaining recurring patterns of self-defeating and self-destructive behaviours, which he called "repetition compulsion." The term in current vogue — "reenactment" — understands repetition in interpersonal rather than instinctual terms: the acting-out of past tragic dramas through wilful blindness, which seeks comfort and control in punitive ways. In the spinning of vicious circles, the solution is the problem. Thus children from violent homes may become, more often than by chance, violent parents themselves, and the poison of substance abuse passes from one generation to the next. At a sociopolitical

level, we also see recurring patterns. Nowhere are these so disastrously self-destructive as in war. While we pray for peace, it is always combat we prepare for. With the invention of nuclear weapons, this affliction has reached its ultimate suicidal possibility.

We must understand that there is no dark beast that we must tame, other than ourselves. The malevolence of war and the cancer of nuclear weapons that it has borne are within us. As Einstein understood, the answers to the puzzle we must solve to ensure our survival do not lie in the physical sciences and their technical creations. Rather, they can be found in Freud's field of inquiry: the mysteries of human feeling and behaviour. The answers lie in how we, as individuals and as societies, counterbalance our fears and aspirations, our drive to compete and our need for care, our desire to be connected and to be free, our wish to trust and our fear of harm. They lie in how we determine the currency of conflict

and in the ways we seek its resolution. We can succeed to the degree that we understand and become reconciled with our individual and collective pasts and accept our flawed and often forgotten common humanity. The more we are at peace within ourselves, the more we can make peace with each other. As citizens of the world, Einstein would have us reach for the tablets of Moses rather than perish as Samson, who took his own life to annihilate his enemies. If we are to survive, it will not be by our wits but by our wisdom.

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