

Dorothy Rowe offers a new way of looking at a complicated and threatening world. It might also be the technique for saving the world. Walter Schwarz reports

"PEOPLE born after 1945 construe their fate differently. We used to talk about the future. They keep telling me they don't plan ahead for more than a year at most." Dr Dorothy Rowe, head of North Lincolnshire's clinical psychology department and best-selling author on depression, was describing a particular form of depression: living with the bomb.

I'm not sure if I agree. Of my three older children one, who is 16, plans like mad. The other two (20 and 23) don't. But only one could be suspected, with no hard evidence, of nuclear depression. I never planned ahead either, but technically I grew up in the nuclear age (I was 15 in 1945 and so was Dr Rowe.)

Yet Dorothy Rowe's new book, to be published in the autumn, will probably be another best-seller, because it is about something that affects us all, but has rarely been explored. She has already begun lecturing on its central themes: the causes and treatment of nuclear depression and, by implication, a possible long-range cure of the nuclear predicament.

Nuclear depression, though rarely expressed, affects all ages, but is more dramatic for the young, because the

future is more important for them. So it constitutes the profoundest "generation gap" — deeper, even, than the "unemployment gap." Throughout history, people have been able to feel that whatever happened, they had a chance. If they were young, they could assume, as young people do, that death wouldn't happen to them before its time. Today, people freely admit that they would not survive, and would not wish to, even if they could.

The young talk this way more freely than the old when the subject is raised. But more usually it is not raised: young and old practise the dangerous and neurosis-forming habit that psychologists call denial.

Does nuclear depression show in exam results? Does it predispose young people to failure? Is there a cure and could a cure, widely enough effected, ease the danger of war? "People probably won't change," says Dr Rowe, but she does not sound, or write, like a pessimist.

She is a positivist. Her prize-winning book was called *Depression: the Way out of your Prison*. The resulting fame put her in touch with hundreds of people in many countries in

addition to her patients in Lincoln and she has been in international demand as a lecturer, using these contacts to help construct her theory.

Her first conclusion is that denial is as dangerous here as in other forms of defence: on a massive scale it can help bring disaster closer. Nuclear disarmers have already grasped this and it encourages them to demonstrate.

The core of her message is: if you don't like the bomb, you must start by growing up. Forgive your parents, forgive yourself, break bad patterns when you bring up your own children. Only then can you begin to see the Stranger as different rather than dangerous. Her analysis begins in infancy and ends with Reagan's "evil empire" and its Moscow equivalent.

"We can never know something unless there is a contrast," she argues. "If there were no darkness we would never know light. If there were no death we would not know we were alive. If there were no Stranger we would not know ourselves. The question is how we define the Stranger."

She finds that children cope with pain and humiliation by identifying with the parents that cause it — a pattern which then repeats itself

Solution to nuclear depression

the next generation. Political leaders exploit this because it makes people gullible and submissive. Dr Rowe concludes: "The human race can no longer afford such leaders."

To outgrow our need for leaders who express our own projected fears of the Stranger "we would have to extend our knowledge of ourselves, knowing that gaining self-knowledge is a continuous process. We would need to discover and face the harm that was done to us as children, to endure the pain such remembering brings, to turn our guilt into sorrow, to mourn and not fall into despair nor hate the people who did this harm."

She says that in her job she is always puzzling over the difficulties individuals have with forgiveness and reconciliation. "Human beings have to live in groups and the only way we can perceive our group is in terms of that group's enemies. So, having enemies is a necessary condition of life."

This makes arguments about disarmament seem futile to her unless we can recognise our need for enemies and decide to modify its expression. "This requires a profound alteration in the

eradicate the cruelty and contempt with which we treat our enemies."

Dorothy Rowe fosters an attitude of total responsibility reminiscent of existentialism. "We are totally responsible for the way we define ourselves, for deciding which group we belong to and to what extent: our family, our country and so on. We are responsible for how we define the Stranger."

All this she puts across with a disarming blend of the maternal and the irreverent. When she isn't being comforting or sorrowful she sounds like the sardonic, fourth-generation Australian she is, whose 17 years over here have not enabled her to take pommies seriously, or anyone else either.

The nearest she comes to loathing — an emotion banned in her own philosophy — is directed towards politicians. "My pet fantasy is seeing Reagan and Gorbachev settling it between them in a joust. Another is that war is reserved for the over-fifties."

Her theory, she says, has been received "in silence" by professional colleagues — which she takes as assent, "because they are generally a very bitchy lot when it comes

sional experts, especially other psychologists, seem to come next to politicians in her exemplification of wrong thinking.

"There they are," she says, "men of education, setting out to frustrate one another, not to let the other chap win — and the patient is the last person to be consulted. If this group can't learn to get along with others, can I possibly expect it from people like Ian Paisley?" She uses simple prose, she says, to undermine the system.

The new book indeed promises to be subversive. But is the Rowe theory right, and can the treatment work? Personal improvement, forgiveness of enemies, sublimation of anger — it sound religious. Dorothy Rowe, though, is a humanist, for whom mental health and maturity are sufficient ends. "We become depressed when confronted with a moral issue we cannot solve."

But what if the Stranger really is dangerous? Claiming no optimism, she admits implicitly that her revolution needs to be world-wide. But nuclear disarmers will be quick to point out that growing up all by ourselves — in Britain, Europe, the West —

could end "evil empire" thinking, and spread the notion that strangers with abhorrent political systems may also be afraid. She makes the obvious point: "The more secure you are in yourself, the less you worry about them."

In the end, Dorothy Rowe has said nothing very new, and admits it. E. P. Thompson had a parallel idea in his BBC-banned Reith Lectures of 1983, when he regretted that outer space would not provide us with the Stranger we need to unite us. Since we have to have enemies, he recommended that "we" should be the disarmers, and "they" the people who perpetuate the arms race.

Yet Rowe's appeal could add a new dimension to the peace movement. Its own enemy has long been the person who asks "What's the use? What can I do?" Dorothy Rowe offers something more absorbing and personally rewarding than going out on demos: forgiving, understanding, bringing up children to see the funny side of Mr Heseltine. Growing up.

Living with the Bomb, by Dorothy Rowe, will be published by Routledge and Kegan Paul in October.