

‘Rethinking Nuclear Weapons’

On 4 November 2010, Ward Wilson, Senior Fellow at the James Martin Center for Non-proliferation Studies, Monterey Institute, addressed a British Pugwash discussion meeting at University College London. He raised the pragmatic question of whether nuclear weapons are effective and of economic or political value, setting aside the many moral arguments that can be made.

Ward Wilson argued that six mistakes made by different groups at different times have led to a false picture of nuclear weapons: belief in the nuclear “revolution”; equating nuclear war with apocalypse; the idea that bombing Hiroshima won the war; belief that H-bombs are “thousands of times bigger”; faith in nuclear deterrence; and the belief that nuclear weapons keep the peace.

He argued that these mistakes have interacted to exaggerate the pragmatic usefulness of nuclear weapons and concluded that there are serious reasons to doubt that nuclear weapons make sense either militarily or diplomatically.