Talker: I would really love to be a lover of humanity; I really would. But then every time I turn around I hear of someone doing something horrible to someone else. It’s enough to make me want to just retreat into a cave or something.

Listener:
A. You’re saying that you hear lots of bad news about people doing bad things.
B. You wish to be filled with love for your fellow human beings, but they always seem to spoil it by being cruel to each other.

Talker: I can’t believe how smart people had to be to invent these nuclear bombs. Einstein and Oppenheimer and all those guys. If only they had been smart enough to figure out how to keep people from blowing each other up.
Listener:
A. You’re impressed with how smart people have been in inventing weapons, but you wish that people had harnessed their intelligence in figuring out how to have peace, is that right?
B. It sounds like you fear that nuclear war will wipe out humanity, is that right?

Talker: And then we have all these guys who just get their assault rifles and go out and shoot a bunch of people up, for no good reason. People they don’t even know! Accomplishing nothing! What is wrong with these people?
Listener:
A. You feel more than exasperated that so many mass shootings have sprung up, that have no possible rationale.
B. You really don’t like it that people shoot people that they don’t know.

Talker: Whenever there’s one of these mass shootings, people always act so perplexed about it. But they aren’t perplexed about the fact that most of the teenagers, the males at least in this country, seem to spend most of their existence playing shooter games. It’s great fun for kids to do thousands of murders virtually, and then they are supposed to be revulsed at the idea of doing it in real life.

Listener:

A. You think that violent videogames are one of the causes of real life violence?

B. You sense a real disconnect, where people accept that fantasy violence is fun to do, but then people are surprised when someone actually does what they’ve practiced in fantasy.

Talker: I was reading that with the game, Halo, they somehow kept track of how many “kills” people made. Somebody figured out that in that game alone, there were more people killed in virtual reality than all the people who have ever lived.

Listener:
A. You’re staggered and dismayed by the sheer quantity of fantasy practice of violence that is going on.
B. If I understand you right, there must have been billions of “kills” in Halo.

Talker: I’m not holding my breath for people to lose their fascination with violence in entertainment. They’ve probably been that way since stories were invented. But, back in Shakespeare’s day when people watched all the main characters of Hamlet get killed, they had to hike to the theater and sit through a lot of talk first. Now all anyone has to do is press a button or flip a switch, and the body count beats that of Hamlet within a minute or two.

Listener:
A. You’re pointing out that even in Hamlet and in lots of other stories that people have flocked to, centuries ago, there was lots of violence.
B. You’re worried by the fact that although people have always been attracted to stories about violence, electronic media have made fantasy violence much easier to come by now.

Talker: I read an article that almost all Olympic athletes these days are using some sort of fantasy rehearsal to help them perform better – for example, ski jumpers and divers and gymnasts do their moves in imagination to practice. And people have gotten over fears of flying and other things by virtual exposure and practice. But then some people would have you believe that practicing killing people in fantasy has no effect at all.

Listener:
A. Sounds like it’s very impressive to you how people have used fantasy rehearsal in sports and therapy.
B. On the one hand, you’ve seen lots of evidence that fantasy rehearsal has big effects, and on the other hand, you see people denying effects of fantasy rehearsal spurred by entertainment violence.

Talker: I read that Grand Theft Auto got into the Guinness Book of World Records for things like highest amount of money made by an entertainment product in a day. I read that Grand Theft Auto has sold around 500 million copies! On Youtube you can see clips of where in GTA, the player has simulated sex with a prostitute and then murders her to get the money back; the game incentivizes this. How sad for our society. I wonder if this one game does more harm than the good done by all nonviolence books put together.

Listener:
A. You find it extremely sad that people are doing such a huge quantity of fantasy rehearsal of very bad actions in games like GTA.
B. You’re objecting to the depiction of interaction with prostitutes in Grand Theft Auto.

Talker: But there’s more for me to rant about than just screens. Why is it that the murder rate here in the USA is so many times higher than it is in Singapore, Iceland, Japan, and many other countries? In those, almost nobody owns guns. Somebody will say, you can kill and hurt people with knives and clubs and fists and shoves, but guns make it much easier. Here in the USA there are more guns than there are people!

Listener:

A. You think that some other countries are doing better than we are in preventing murders.

B. You’re very much aware of how many fewer murders there are in some countries where very few people have guns.

Talker: But then I saw that in Switzerland, a pretty high fraction of people have guns – not as many as in the USA – but their homicide rate is also a lot lower than ours. And the researcher said that the number one predictor of a country's homicide rate was the amount of income inequality plus poverty. There is not nearly the amount of that in Switzerland, or Singapore, or Japan, or Iceland, that there is here.
Listener:
A. So not only guns, but also the combination of income inequality and poverty is an important factor that your reading has alerted you to.

B. You're saying that guns couldn't be the whole story, because they have enough of them in Switzerland to be very violent, if they wanted to, huh?

Talker: Some friends of mine came to interview for a job at the same place I work, and they got held up at gunpoint, right in the parking garage. They decided to go to a different place to work! This city has lots and lots of poverty. I can't condone muggers of course, but I can understand how when people see that others have so much more than they do, it seems unfair, and it probably makes them very angry.

Listener:
A. Even though you hate violence, you can empathize with the people who are in poverty and seeing richer people around them.
B. You're saying that you had friends who were held up in the parking garage of your own workplace, and this must be very scary for you, thinking that the same could happen to you?

Talker: I read a book called Savage Inequalities. Lots of people say that if poor people would just work harder in school and spend more time studying, they could lift themselves out of poverty. But this book documented that because of the way schools are funded in this country, by local property taxes, schools in poor neighborhoods are themselves poor. Stuff is broken down, teachers don't have the equipment they need, there aren't enough personnel.

Listener:

A. So you're saying that schools in poor neighborhoods aren't funded well enough.

B. You're saying that even though education is held up as a solution to inequality, there's big inequality in schools themselves.

Talker: And then you have these people who think the answer to poverty and violence and everything else is to open up boxing training programs for kids. With that idea, I don’t know whether to laugh or cry. The wrong-headed ideas that people can get into are just so upsetting.

Listener:
A. People think that boxing training programs are good for kids, but you disagree, and you feel very confident that you are correct in that opinion.
B. You disagree in the strongest way with the idea that training kids in boxing helps with poverty or violence.

Talker: People have known for decades that getting hit in the head is not good for the brain, right? And there's research now on football players as well as boxers getting very aggressive as a result of chronic traumatic encephalopathy. But with boxing and mixed martial arts, the sorts of blows to the head that would get someone charged with assault and battery anywhere else, help you win the so-called game. The one who can produce the most concussions is the best.
Listener:
A. You're making the points that brain injury is linked with aggression, and that brain injury is the object of the game with boxing and mixed martial arts.
B. You're saying that in football, as well as in boxing, people can get chronic traumatic encephalopathy.

Talker: It’s not as though the effects of boxing on the brain are small ones, or that they’re in doubt. A recent review I read found that about half of the boxers studied had abnormal cognitive performance, and about half had abnormal CTs or EEGs. The study concluded that more research should be done on headguards, because after all this time it’s not clear whether they help. My conclusion is that there was enough evidence to outlaw this barbarian practice several decades ago.

Listener:
A. You think that government should get involved in whether boxing is permitted?
B. The evidence you’ve seen for brain injury seems very clear that boxing is harmful enough to brains that it should be banned.

Talker: And then there's the idea that boxing is a great way to get out your aggression, so that you drain off all the urge to hurt anybody. And there's even the idea that watching boxing, or other violence, drains off aggression from the spectators. I think one of the most momentous, but underrated and ignored, scientific achievements of the 20th century was the tremendous amount of research that really conclusively disproved the "catharsis" hypothesis. Because of this research, we know that you generally can't get aggression out of your system by pounding on something or watching people hurt each other. But the catharsis myth is still widely believed.

Listener:
A. You reject the idea that you get anger out of your system by watching or doing aggressive things.
B. You're aware of the large amount of great research disproving the catharsis hypothesis, but you're also aware of how ignored that work is.

Talker: But when I think about this topic, I’m not just depressed. I dream about ways to solve the violence problem, and fantasizing about that makes me hopeful and uplifted.

Listener:
A. With all there is about this topic that upsets and dismays you, you are able to maintain hope by dreaming of possible solutions.
B. It sounds like you think there is a solution to the problem of violence.

Talker: I see how good people get at basketball, or other sports, or playing music, by doing lots of practice. And I even manage to take hope from seeing how good they get at certain videogames by practicing things over and over. If we can only get people to very repetitively practice handling conflicts and criticisms and other provocations in rational ways, we can change the course of human history.

Listener:
A. You're pretty amazed to see how good people can get at basketball when they practice enough.
B. Your vision for ending violence involves lots of practice at nonviolent handling of the situations that trigger anger and aggression.

Talker: One of the big things that results in violence is conflict between people. What if people were trained to state what their own needs and wishes are, make sure they understand the other's needs and wishes, generate options for a solution, talk about the pros and cons of the options, and try to agree on a solution, all while being civil and polite to one another? What if they were taught how to do this and started practicing from a very early age, and continued throughout their education?

Listener:
A. Part of your vision is teaching people steps in conflict-resolution, and promoting practice of these, starting in childhood and continuing for years.
B. It sounds like you think lots of time should be devoted to teaching nonviolence in schools.

Talker: Another thing that triggers violence and aggression is when one person insults or criticizes another. Part of universal education could be a list of different possible nonviolent responses to criticism, and practicing generating them and picking among them for all sorts of different criticisms, again practicing the skill over and over.

Listener:
A. You think that people should be able to take criticism from others without getting too upset about it.
B. You envision teaching people options for responding to criticism, and having them repeatedly practice generating those and picking among them for lots of different critcisms.

Talker: And for any sort of situation that can made someone mad, and we can list hundreds of those, people can practice how to think about them: affirming that they can handle the situation, deciding on what outcomes are desired, listing options and rationally choosing what to do to bring about the desired outcome, and celebrating their making a thoughtful and nonviolent choice.

Listener:
A. You're saying that it's possible to list hundreds of situations that could make someone angry, because just about anything that people want, that they don't get, can make them angry.
B. You're envisioning people practicing several rational ways of thinking about situations that might trigger anger, and doing this with very many of the trigger situations.

Talker: What do kids need to practice the most in school? Reading and writing. How about if they read a bunch of models of the exercises I’m talking about, and then write a bunch of them? You don’t need to stop doing academic work to practice nonviolence skills; you can practice nonviolence and practice reading or writing at the exact same time.

Listener:
A. What I hear you saying is that academic skills and nonviolence skills are not in competition with each other for time spent in schools, but you can practice both simultaneously.
B. If I understand you correctly, you feel that reading and writing are the most important academic skills that children need to get good at while they are in school?

Talker: I’m not naive enough to think that there’s going to be large scale training in nonviolence skills from an early age any time soon, particularly in this country. But it’s comforting to me just to believe that there is a way to reach a nonviolent society if enough people make up their minds that this is what they want.

Listener:
A. It sounds like you think other countries might be better suited for your vision than this one.
B. Even though you are not expecting a nonviolent society to arrive any time soon, it still feels good to believe that people can produce it if they can get motivated enough.

Talker: If the human species can ever get its act together to train people to be nonviolent, kind, and able to be friends with one another, from a very early age, I think the impact on mental health will be huge. So much of post-traumatic problems will be eradicated. Lots of anxiety will go away when people aren't fearing each other. People will be able to make each other happy by being friends with each other, and that will reduce depression tremendously. Even people with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder will have better outcomes if they can be in families or groups with positive emotional climates.

Listener:
A. Your vision is that teaching skills like nonviolence, kindness, and friendship-building from a very early age can have a huge positive impact on mental health.
B. You would like for skills training to produce a utopian society.