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Moral Judgments and Wars of the Twentieth Century

Robert Newman

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- 1 Most of my lifetime has been spent wrestling with evaluation of wars. World War I hung over my high-school years like the ghost of Hamlet. The Spanish Civil War occasioned my first partisanship. World War II claimed me as a minor actor. The interminable and perplexing Cold War, with its ghastly flare-up in Vietnam, made me an anti-war activist. Confronted now with George W. Bush's peculiarly labeled War Against Terrorism, which convulses us all, I am compelled to revisit that presumably arcane discipline to which I was subjected at Oxford University in 1948 and 1949: moral philosophy.
- 2 In this essay, I want to apply an elementary axiological critique to the two great wars of the twentieth century, emphasizing the major pressure-point of argument about the decision to use atomic bombs to force Japan's surrender. I focus on (1) the judgment of an influential scientific elite about that decision, (2) the resulting public deliberation and its dominant vicious ethnocentrism, and (3) the damage of this miscarriage of values to the antinuclear cause, to which I subscribe. A simple narrative can provide a preview. Leo Szilard and his supporters perverted the deliberations. The public swung over to their "only the atomic carnage matters" evaluation. Lost to the peace movement, as a result, was the powerful support of the B-29 crews who saw at close range how awful these weapons were. Paul Tibbets, Charles Sweeney, and colleagues became anti-nuclear believers to a man. In reviling their deed, *the anti-Hiroshima, knee-jerk peaceniks shot themselves in the foot*.
- 3 It has been particularly appropriate to enter this arena under the aegis of Iowa's Project on Rhetoric of Inquiry. What inquiry is more vital than the effort to think about the assignment of value to an activity that involves whole peoples – Huntington (1996) says that it will pit civilizations against each other – while bringing death and destruction to the furthest corners of the earth?
- 4 Public discourse on all these wars exhibits a peculiar blindness to this discipline, given that it faces directly such matters as war-

fighting morality. Michael Walzer has written a popular treatise on *Just and Unjust Wars* (1992), but its writ does not run far outside academia, and even most academic disciplines ignore completely the considerable literature by Walzer's colleagues. How is it possible for Paul Boyer's *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (1985), a widely used book by an academic historian, to completely ignore every one of the many writers, even the relatively popular Walzer, on war-fighting morality? Whatever trust one invests in fashionable belletristic writers, and I do put Boyer into this category, they are no substitute for Augustine, his interpreters, and successors – both in the church and out.

- 5 I assume, but do not argue closely, a consequentialist moral theory: political acts are to be approved or condemned on evaluations of their outcomes. This means, in making predictions, that we accept the judgments of probable consequences as estimated by authorities whose track records warrant belief. This will satisfy no fundamentalist: neither Christian millennialist nor Jewish messianist nor Islamicist. If one must adhere to some more or less systematic code, I would opt for that of Human Rights Watch, which recognizes international laws and agreements that include the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and the Helsinki Accords.
- 6 Applying HRW standards to World War I, it is hard to avoid a negative overall judgment. That great convulsion imposed the loss of almost a whole generation of young European males; and it resulted in the Treaty of Versailles, which planted the seeds of World War II without achieving any of the positive goals sought by Americans.
- 7 World War II, conversely, is almost universally thought to have resulted in a substantial improvement in the lot of humankind. Its death and destruction were terrible, but it overthrew three execrable tyrannies, and the postwar settlements left their citizens clearly advantaged. East Germans were probable exceptions to this outcome, and the Communist tyrannies in China and elsewhere were unfortunate; but few would want to argue that the monstrous German, Italian, and Japanese regimes should have been allowed to consummate their imperial objectives.
- 8 This judgment about World War II is often qualified, however, by an unanticipated consequence: the development and use of atomic weaponry much more destructive and frightful than any previous

weaponry. World War I did introduce chemical weapons, which universal consensus condemned; and aircraft were used for the first time, opening the way for bombing by Italy in Ethiopia, Japan in China, and Germany in the Spanish Civil War. But the atomic carnage at Hiroshima and Nagasaki brought condemnation more intense than gas warfare or strategic bombing before Hiroshima. What should we make of that one strategic use of atomic weaponry?

- 9 War weariness and casualty shyness by the close of 1944 were powerful enough to cause General George Marshall to worry that the United States did not have staying power sufficient to prosecute the war in the Pacific to clear-cut victory (Matloff 1959). There was some talk of negotiating an armistice, as had been done in World War I. But all the top leaders, including Franklin Roosevelt, knew that the virus infecting Japan had to be killed or a generation later the same imperial drive would reassert itself (Iokibe 1981; Villa 1976). There had to be unconditional surrender. The Japanese had to see that the race of Yamamoto was not destined to govern all of the Pacific Basin – some Japanese chauvinists even contemplated a wider empire.
- 10 Consequently when Soviet entry into the war plus two atomic bombs enabled the Emperor to beat down General Anami, the effective Japanese leader, who demanded a fight to the bitter end (Asada 1998), there was universal rejoicing. The American electorate overwhelmingly approved this use of the atom. Opposition was less than ten percent of those polled.
- 11 But this approval did not last. The long and tortured argument over President Harry Truman's decision finally erupted in 1995, with the cancellation of the planned National Air and Space Museum exhibit on the Enola Gay. Public approval of Truman's decision had dropped to about fifty percent. The bitter argument that swirled around that strategic use of two nuclear weapons offers many insights into the ways that fallible humans make their most vital decisions. Three tentative conclusions emerge: (1) Scientific competence does not improve political wisdom. (2) Ethnocentrism has horribly skewed public deliberation on the 1945 decision. And (3) the antinuclear cause has suffered greatly from misplaced hostility toward the Truman Administration and the crews that dropped the bombs.
- 12 Leo Szilard was a major player in the atomic story from the beginning. Szilard had been involved with Albert Einstein and

Alexander Sachs in agitating for nuclear weapons in the first place, and he never gave up the pride of place he felt because of that initiative (Weart and Szilard 1978). As a member of the Chicago lab that laid the scientific groundwork for making the bomb, he began early to think about its use.

- 13 Szilard believed that the Soviet Union would get nuclear weapons in the near future, that American use of nuclear weapons against Japan might alienate the Soviet Union and speed Soviet atomic research, and that the Soviets in six years would be able “to destroy all of our major cities in a single sudden attack” (Weart and Szilard 1978, p. 197). In March 1945, he wrote a long memo about these fears to President Roosevelt. Szilard’s memo did not complain about government inattention to the policy advice of scientists, nor did he warn against early use of our first bombs. Instead Szilard induced Einstein to deal with these matters in a cover letter, dated March 25. The two documents were to be transmitted via Eleanor to Franklin Roosevelt, but he died on April 12 not having seen these messages.
- 14 With a new crew at the helm, Szilard found a channel through Matt Connelly, Truman’s appointments secretary. The new president addressed this unusual correspondence in late May. To Szilard’s consternation, Truman did not respond directly but asked Connelly to arrange for Szilard to go to Spartanburg, South Carolina to discuss the matter with James Byrnes, slated to become Secretary of State. Szilard was not deterred; he took his friends Walter Bartky and Harold Urey south to see Byrnes (Smith 1965, p. 51).
- 15 The confrontation of the three scientists and the canny politician became paradigmatic for relations between scientists and power brokers in the new atomic age. The scientists claimed to take the long view, anxious to secure international control of atomic energy and avoid an arms race. The power brokers were straining to end a war that was taking more resources than they had planned, against an enemy that seemed to grow more ferocious with each defeat, and the politicians wanted to obtain terms that would discredit fascism forever.
- 16 In *A Peril and a Hope*, Alice K. Smith presents the view of the scientists, not just Szilard and friends, but the view she attributes to scientists on the War Department’s Interim Committee and its advisory appendage: Vannevar Bush, Karl Compton, Arthur Compton, Ernest Lawrence, Robert Oppenheimer, and Enrico

Fermi. Smith distinguishes the beliefs of the scientific advisers from those of the Chicago Met Lab. The scientists closest to “the nerve center of decision” dealt primarily with the immediate problem: ending the war on the least costly terms. The disengaged scientists took the long view.

- 17 This is a reasonable but incomplete analysis. What Smith neglects is the assumption – arrogant as I see it – that working scientists had superior insight into policy because they were free of operational responsibility. Szilard was the foremost proponent of this position. The letter he carried to the meeting with Byrnes declared: “Thus the Government of the United States is at present faced with the necessity of arriving at decisions which will control the course that is to be followed from here on: These decisions ought to be based not on the present evidence relating to atomic bombs, but rather on the situation which can be expected to confront us in this respect a few years from now. This situation can be evaluated only by men who have first-hand knowledge of the facts involved, that is, by the small group of scientists who are actively engaged in this work” (Weart and Szilard 1978, p. 206). Then Szilard complained that there was no mechanism by which he and his fellow specialists could channel their wisdom to the decision-makers.
- 18 James Byrnes is not my candidate for sage of the era, but one has to empathize with his negative impression of Szilard. The scientist, too, was unhappy with their interaction: “I thought to myself how much better off the world might be had I been born in America and become influential in American politics, and had Byrnes been born in Hungary and studied physics. In all probability there would have been no atomic bomb and no danger of an arms race between America and Russia” (Weart and Szilard 1978, p. 184-85).
- 19 Smith’s approving accounts of the Chicago scientist’s movement appeared in several issues of *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* and in her 1965 book. At the core of her book is the Franck Report, named after the chairman of a committee on Social and Political Implications of atomic energy. In addition to James Franck, the committee consisted of Eugene Rabinowitch, Glenn Seaborg, and Leo Szilard. Their first meeting was June 4, and their final report was ready June 11. It warned about the possible impact of the new weapons. The Franck Report became the most prominent artifact of the Chicago Met Lab, and a sacred text of the anti-nuclear war

movement.

- 20 Naturally the Franck Report was classified. Despite the prominence of its authors, therefore, it dropped from sight until May 1946. The naïveté with which it was received when it became available puzzles me to this day. Franck himself carried the report to Washington, where it was turned over to the personal assistant of Secretary of War Stimson. Smith believes that Stimson never gave it his “careful and personal attention” (1965, p. 46). No wonder. It is so internally inconsistent as to be incoherent: clearly the product of a rushed, ill-informed committee.
- 21 Most, but not all, of the report emphasizes the awesome destruction to be wrought by these bombs: “nuclear power is fraught with infinitely greater dangers than were all the inventions of the past” (p. 561). Since many other nations know the fundamental facts of nuclear power, it is a threat to the United States. This threat cannot be removed by building a massive stockpile; the only way it can be avoided is by creating an international authority to control all nuclear developments. There is an “apparent defense,” involving “dispersal of those industries which are essential to our war effort and dispersal of the populations of our major metropolitan cities” (p. 564). In other words, the U.S. could resort to Soviet-style commands to reorder the whole society. But remember, these are physicists talking.
- 22 Then the text shifts to the immediate situation: whether to use atomic bombs in the Pacific War. Some officials want “to use them without warning on an appropriately selected object in Japan” (pp. 565-566). Now a totally different tone takes over. “It is doubtful whether the first available bombs, of comparatively low efficiency and small size, will be sufficient to break the will or ability of Japan to resist, especially given the fact that the major cities like Tokyo . . . already will largely be reduced to ashes by the slower process of ordinary aerial bombing” (p. 566). So the bombs may not be more dangerous than the munitions of the past.
- 23 But the tone shifts again. If we actually use this bomb, “Russia, and even allied countries, which bear less mistrust of our ways and intentions, as well as neutral countries may be deeply shocked. It may be very difficult to persuade the world that a nation which was capable of secretly preparing and suddenly releasing a weapon as indiscriminate as the rocket bomb and a million times more destructive, is to be trusted in its proclaimed desire of having such weapons abolished by international agreement” (p. 566).

- 24 What do these people really believe about the power of the bomb? Only two alternatives are available: (1) it is possible to create international agreement on a total prevention of nuclear war, or (2) effective international control is impossible. Franck and the other members lean toward the first possibility. But having already told us that dropping the bomb on Japan might not have much effect, they now shift to saying that “the military advantages and the saving of American lives achieved by the sudden use of atomic bombs against Japan may be outweighed by the ensuing loss of confidence and by a wave of horror and repulsion sweeping over the rest of the world and perhaps even dividing public opinion at home” (p. 566). Therefore the United States should demonstrate the atomic bomb in a desert or on a barren island. Then, if the U.S. must obliterate a Japanese city, there would be no “wave of horror and revulsion” (p. 566). But would there be any bombs left and would a low-efficiency bomb really obliterate anything?
- 25 Yet more puzzling recommendations are to come. Atomic weapons have been compared to poison gas, which cannot be used because of world opinion. Now we read that, after a demonstration and “an ultimatum to Japan to surrender or at least to evacuate certain regions as an alternative to their total destruction” (p. 567), we just might bomb them. “This may sound fantastic,” says the report, “but in nuclear weapons we have something entirely new in order of magnitude of destructive power” (p. 567). No, not fantastic, just confusing: would use on a Japanese city shock the enemy into surrender or not?
- 26 Now the second alternative comes into focus. Perhaps international control is impossible. On this view, “early use of nuclear bombs against Japan becomes even more doubtful – quite independently of any humanitarian considerations. If an international agreement is not concluded immediately after the first demonstration, this will mean a flying start toward an unlimited arms race. If this race is inevitable, we have every reason to delay its beginning as long as possible in order to increase our head start still further” (p. 567). What would be more likely to induce “a flying start toward an unlimited arms race” (p. 567) than increasing our lead as fast as we can?
- 27 Here the vast ignorance of the scientists is displayed. The race was already on. Stalin ratcheted it up several notches the minute he knew that the United States had a bomb, even though it had not

been used (Holloway 1994, p. 133).

- 28 Next a really obtuse discussion of the “stages of production” of nuclear weapons appears. The U.S. had reached only the first stage but was on the threshold of the second: “This stage probably requires no elaborate plans and may provide us in about five or six years with a really substantial stockpile of atomic bombs. Thus it is our interest to delay the beginning of the armaments race until the successful termination of this second stage. The benefit to the nation, and the saving of American lives in the future, achieved by renouncing an early demonstration of nuclear bombs and letting the other nations come into the race only reluctantly, on the basis of guesswork and without definite knowledge that the thing does work, may far outweigh the advantages to be gained by the immediate use of the first and comparatively inefficient bombs in the war against Japan” (Smith 1965, p 568).
- 29 In Heaven’s name, what inefficient bombs? The ones that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki? But if these bombs were so inefficient, how could they save American lives? And which nations did the Franck Committee think would come into the arms race reluctantly? North Korea perhaps.
- 30 I trash this report not only because Smith thinks it accurately “forecast the course of the postwar armaments race” (p. 45), but because a freshman logic student would have little trouble finding its inconsistencies. While it may not be indicative of total ineptitude on the part of nuclear physicists, it has to be seen as a warning against accepting scientific genius as a qualification for geopolitical savvy. These scientists assumed that, because they knew how to make the bombs, they knew better than anyone else what to do with them. Were there room here for a major digression, I would cite by way of contrast the deadly accuracy of that contemporary world-affairs expert, George Kennan. He told us in 1946 that the Soviet Behemoth was not an ordinary Western-style polity but that it was not another Nazi Germany, either, with a commitment to world conquest. He told us for good measure in 1949-1950 that the paranoia of the blueprint for the Cold War, NSC 68, was wrong, the decision to build the hydrogen bomb was wrong, and the assumption that the North Korean attack on South Korea represented the first step in a Soviet campaign to conquer Asia was wrong. Scientists should not be the ultimate arbiters of societal values.
- 31 The scientists by and large were heeded; the prophet was not.

- 32 But it is time to move to the venality of American and Japanese ethnocentrism. In all the heated public discourse over the mission of Enola Gay, the predominant concern of those opposed to the bomb is the number of Japanese – most, of course, noncombatants or “innocent” civilians – who were killed and injured. Those who think the bombing was right are concerned with the loss of Americans and other Allies who would have been killed had we needed to invade. Arguments about whether Truman had ever seen casualty estimates in the seven-figure range for an invasion, the Japanese were ready to surrender, they would have surrendered had the U.S. dropped the “unconditional” clause, or they would have surrendered had we guaranteed the continuation of the Emperor are tangential to what is essentially a moral issue. Only a handful of analysts, including the war-fighting moralists, cared about the victims of the Japanese Empire.
- 33 Awareness of the death and destruction caused by Nazi Germany is widespread in the United States. Even my recent students, college seniors for whom World War II is nothing but Tom Brokaw’s pipe dream, know about the six million Jews killed in the Holocaust. Ask about the damage done by the Japanese Empire, and they know that we lost a few thousand sailors at Pearl Harbor or even that a “whole bunch of Chinese were killed at Nanjing.” Some have heard of Bataan or the Bridge on the River Kwai. What was the total carnage caused by the Japanese? I have yet to hear an estimate in seven figures. Yet the conservative scholarly estimate is twenty million, most other Asians.
- 34 Why the awareness of German crimes but ignorance of Japan’s? The Pacific War was far away from us. Millions do not visit the 434 Japanese prison camps scattered over half the globe; whereas Buchenwald, Dachau, and other Nazi camps are tourist magnets. Because Allied armies rushed into Germany and confiscated records by the ton, we have had hard evidence of massive crimes by Germans. The Japanese had several weeks when tons of records went up in smoke between the end of fighting and the occupation by Americans. In that period, biological-warfare factories disappeared, infected animals were loosed in the countryside, and most evidence that Lieutenant General Ishii Shiro infected the Chinese with plague, cholera, typhoid, anthrax, and glanders was destroyed. Nazi creations from human skin and other atrocities entered the world of well-known artifacts.
- 35 Moreover the traumatic conquest of China by Mao upset American calculations for Asia. Chiang Kai-shek had been for us the “Savior

of the Orient,” a Christian, a capitalist, a democrat: people really did believe that in the late forties. When Chiang fell, the Japanese became our sole bulwark against the Communists in Asia (Newman 1992). This Cold War realignment discouraged Japanophobia; it even restored the Japanese to their previous status. As Yukiko Koshiro explains, we never directly discussed the place of ethnic minorities and former colonial subjects with the Japanese.

Instead, the Japanese and the Americans collaborated to restore the kind of racial hierarchy that had existed in the days of Japan’s colonialism. . . . As the Cold War advanced in Asia, Japan was reappointed as the region’s junior leader, and the idea of pan-Asianism was restored. . . . Thus, Japan was allowed to preserve – and resume under the Cold War sanction of the United States – its presumption of superiority over other Asians. Also, Japan’s racist wartime ideology, which had propelled atrocities against Asian soldiers and civilians alike, escaped scrutiny and condemnation. . . . The postwar collaboration was built on a shared racist view of the world in which both nations assumed a duty to lead the “inferior non-West” nations, a concept in which Japan was an “honorary Western nation” (1999, p. 107).

- 36 These factors obscure the price in death and destruction that was being paid every day the war continued in 1945. They held irrespective of major battles such as Okinawa; the decisive cost of the war came from the death throes of the Japanese Empire. The primary Japanese killing field was still China, but every other occupied nation was caught up in the slaughter. This is where the ethnocentrism of the dispute is the most debilitating. The only credible evidence of how long the war would have gone on in the absence of the atom bombs is the judgments of the Japanese leaders: a majority said there would have been no surrender until 1946 (Newman 1995). At least five more months of war? At a probable 400,000 deaths per month?
- 37 Ah, but these dead would be predominantly Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Malaysian, Indonesian, even lepers on Nauru, shoved off a cliff into the ocean when the Japanese wanted to get rid of them. Look at public discourse on the last six decades: the text to accompany the Enola Gay exhibit at the Air and Space Museum,

the ABC documentary hosted by the witless Peter Jennings, the History Channel program in September 2003, the massive 571-page reader on *Hiroshima's Shadow* edited by Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifschultz (1998) with 542 pages of diatribe against Truman's decision and 29 for it. Take any source you choose, except the few non-American accounts of Japanese atrocities, and you find nothing whatsoever about the Asian lives saved by the bomb. Paul Fussell and others in harm's way will of course Thank God for the Atom Bomb. The Truman-bashers regret the deaths of 200,000 killed by the two bombs. None of them even consider that the Japanese Empire was a slaughter house bigger even than that of Nazi Germany.

- 38 It is tempting at this stage to bring in some of the more graphic descriptions of what was happening in the far reaches of the Empire, even as the Americans were sweating a landing on Kyushu. Gavan Daws is about the best, in *Prisoners of the Japanese*: "Asia under the Japanese was a charnel house of atrocities. As soon as the war ended, evidence of war crimes began piling up in mountains, POWs, civilian internees, and Asian natives starved, beaten, tortured, shot, beheaded. The water cure. Electric shock. Cannibalism. Men strung up over open flames or coiled in barbed wire and rolled along the ground" (1994, p. 363).
- 39 Then there was the acceleration factor. The last year of the war was what John Dower (1999, p. 299) calls the "most deadly" year, and others name the "killing year." All observers agree that the closer the war got to Japan, the more gratuitous killing there was. Thefts escalated of medical supplies and Red Cross bundles intended for prisoners and helpless victims of Japanese tyranny. The rage of the losing armies mounted. As Laurens van der Post puts it, the frustrated Japanese, no more able to see themselves as the overlords of Asia and the Pacific, were going to "pull down their own sprawling military temple, Samson-like" (1971, p. 22), and destroy their enemies along with themselves.
- 40 The critics of Truman's decision without exception ground their case against the atom-bomb deaths on the report of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey. Commanded by Paul Nitze, this group spent two months in Japan in the fall of 1945 and concluded that it would have surrendered before we were scheduled to invade, so that the deaths of Allies from fighting on the Home Islands would not have taken place. Hiroshima and Nagasaki, wrote Nitze, were unnecessary to obtain surrender. Unfortunately none of the critics went to the basic data. The Nitze report was a

complete fraud, but its exposure began in earnest only in 1995 (Newman 1995a; Gentile 2001).

- 41 Chinese always had known that the destruction of the Pacific War was borne primarily by Japan's victims and that continuation of Japanese control meant continued casualties for them. When the big controversy erupted over the Enola Gay exhibit, letters to the NASM defending Truman came not only from WWII personnel but also from Asians. Astrid Pei wrote director Martin Harwit on September 18, 1994:

As Americans, we are genuinely appreciative of you and your staff's efforts in preparing the exhibit of "The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II." But as Asian-Americans, particularly those of Chinese descent, we feel we are being ignored and insulted, simply because while in the 14 years of war (1931-1945) between China and Japan, the Japanese had virtually killed over 30 million Chinese, nearly 90 percent of them being innocent civilians, more than the casualties of all our Allies in World War II combined, no Chinese Holocaust which is doubtless worse than that of the Jewish has been planned in your exhibit. Any discussion on war in Asia without due emphasis on the Sino-Japanese War is a distortion of truth and history.

There were other, similar protests. Given the determination of the curators to change the minds of those Americans who still thought Truman did the right thing, such pleas were unattended.

- 42 Many of the war-fighting moralists support the anguished objections of Astrid Pei and her kinfolk. The most direct and specific is R. M. Haré, in an issue of *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. He discusses the necessity for factoring into one's judgment not only the noncombatants who are killed by an act of war, but those who are saved: "I would include more people in the class of those whose sufferings are relevant to our moral decisions (for example, in the Hiroshima case, those who will die if the war is not ended quickly, as well as those actually killed by the bombing)" (1972, p. 181).
- 43 The bottom line is that intense preoccupation with the evil of killing noncombatants at Hiroshima and Nagasaki has effectively marginalized or suppressed the moral claims of the millions of

victims of Japan's aggression. Single-minded concern for the carnage of the atom has preempted the humanitarian consideration due survivors of Nanjing, the Death Railway, the Nauru leper colony, and other millions of victims, actual and potential. It has taken fifty years for the victims of Japan to capture the attention of the international community. One reason is the vehemence of attacks on the administration that ordered the atomic bombings.

- 44 In this category, one ill-informed zealot stands out: Robert J. Lifton. The considerable influence of his overly righteous *Hiroshima in America* (1995) has turned many toward the belief that the Japanese were the victims, not the perpetrators, of Pacific War horrors.
- 45 Some Japanese scholars manage objective accounts of their country's rampage throughout Asia. Seiitsu Tachibana's discussion of "The Quest for a Peace Culture: The A-bomb Survivors' Long Struggle and the New Movement for Redressing Foreign Victims of Japan's War" intelligently balances these two arenas. He recognizes that Japan's ills were self-inflicted, and that the atomic casualties must seek redress from their own government. He also knows that the Japanese "have been slow to realize their role as victimizer. Thousands of Asians suffered as a result of Japanese aggression during the war, and during the early 1990s these foreign victims began to voice their long-overdue demands for compensation" (1996, p. 168).
- 46 Tachibana sees the invidious aspects of the Tokyo war crimes trials: they ignored the crimes committed against the peoples of Asia, "giving the impression that the war's Asian victims were unimportant. Moreover the subsequent execution of seven class-A war criminals produced a general impression that Japan had adequately absolved itself of all war crimes and need not worry about additional compensation in the future" (1996, p. 169). He sympathizes with lawsuits by the comfort women, forced laborers for Japanese firms and government, and the many other sufferers under the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.
- 47 I come now to the American peace movement for abolition of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. I have belonged to this movement since the 1960s, from the Vietnam War teach-ins through SANE/Freeze to the present Peace Action. Its bottom line has always been the elimination of what George W. Bush wants to eliminate from all arsenals but our own: weapons of mass

destruction. Obviously the ideology of those now in charge of the U.S. Department of Defense is compatible with the objectives of this peace movement as I see them. So what can the movement hope to accomplish? The Point of No Return in the development of the Cold War was 1950, when the decisions were made to adopt NSC 68, build hydrogen bombs, and interpret the North Korean attack as Soviet-inspired. Those fatal decision-points cannot now be called back for correction.

- 48 What can be done is to pare down the obscene nuclear arsenals, especially those under our control: 77,000 deliverable nuclear warheads of all sizes by 1997 (Gottlieb 1997, p. 79). Presumably this was what various peace groups sought when they urged the anti-Truman curators at the National Air and Space Museum to retain the text for the 1995 Enola Gay exhibit that had Truman making the wrong decision.
- 49 NASM files on the Enola Gay exhibit overflow with letters to the curators. World War II veterans and Air Force supporters demanded that the first drafts of the text be made less hostile to Truman. Letters from the academic establishment and peace groups insisted that the anti-bombing slant be strengthened.
- 50 Martin Harwit, NASM Director and an innocent in the ways of Washington, vacillated. He and the curators made several blunders. They enforced anonymity, refusing to identify the scholars depended on for describing the bomb decision. They bragged shamelessly that the exhibit would incorporate the best scholarly research about the end of the Pacific War, yet they refused to consult a single credentialled historian of the war, the decision to surrender, or the development of the U.S.-Soviet nuclear arms race. At the same time they promised veterans that the exhibit would display proudly the patriotic service of the men who won the war, they promised the Japanese that it would show the bombing as un-American. Harwit wanted to reorient NASM to show “the dark side of aviation” as he put it in the prospectus he wrote soliciting money from the MacArthur Foundation, dated November 1, 1988 and now in Smithsonian Institution Archives.
- 51 Hypocrisy was compounded by ignorance. The NASM consulted no recognized historians of the Pacific War, either American or Japanese, but it listened repeatedly to lobbyists for the special-interest groups. There is one pathetic set of minutes for a meeting on September 20, 1994 of peace activists with NASM officials. Father John Dear of Pax Christi organized representatives of

American Friends Service Committee, Physicians for Social Responsibility, and the Fellowship of Reconciliation to persuade Harwit and his curators to restore the tough anti-Truman tone of the original script, which had been modified under pressure from veterans and politicians. Dear wrote of this meeting, "We talked about conscience and morality, and appealed to their integrity. Crouch and the curators did not speak at the meeting, and Harwit seemed exasperated. He said to us, 'Where have you been? You are too late. Why haven't you been in before? Why haven't you talked to the media?' Without making any promises to restore or strengthen the script, he thanked us for coming" (Harwit 1996, p. 343).

- 52 Dear passed around a sign-up sheet to record the name, organization, and phone number of each participant. Eleven NASM officials signed, four representatives of peace groups, and seven writers, most known to me as supporters of peace groups who had done superficial reading in anti-Truman literature, but none of whom had read all of the ULTRA decrypts, nor read widely in the Strategic Bombing Survey files. Half of these true believers carried the imprimatur of the federal government; and they were under attack by the other half, who thought the NASM staff was craven. Obviously this sign-up sheet was not intended merely to record. Did Dear think getting the NASM people to sign would stiffen their spines?
- 53 This was the first of three such meetings. By Harwit's account, the hottest topic was the number of expected casualties for American troops that the script should give for the scheduled invasion of Japan. Dropping out of sight was the potent question that these people should have been discussing: How can we convince the governments of the nuclear powers that the existing nuclear arsenals are unconscionable and must be eliminated? Quibbles about casualty estimates highlight the sterility of the whole process. Kai Bird, biographer of cold warrior John McCloy, participated. As he said to the *New York Times*, "It was a humiliating spectacle. Scholars being forced to recant the truth. Curators at the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum in Washington have been compelled by veteran's groups to rewrite the text for an exhibit of the bombing of Hiroshima. . . . During two closed-door sessions with representatives of the American Legion, they agreed to censor their own historical knowledge" (Bird 1994).

- 54 No scholars on relevant issues shared these meetings. Nor was Nitze's fraudulent Strategic Bombing Survey, the basis for most polemics against the mission of Enola Gay, grounded in respectable scholarship. With Ronald Spector, arguably the best analyst of the Pacific War, scarcely a mile away at George Washington University, NASM consulted no historian of that war. Although it sent several parties to Japan, they consulted no authority on Japanese materials about the decision to surrender. Instead they talked only with curators of the Hiroshima Museum and other officials. No biographer of Harry Truman darkened NASM doors. The reigning American authority on the origins of the Soviet-American nuclear arms race, David Holloway at Stanford, was never approached. Had the curators condescended to consult a professional student of war-fighting morality, there are several in the D.C. area. My preference would have been Paul Ramsey, just up the road at Princeton.
- 55 Kai Bird could flatter the curators and their anonymous sources by calling them scholars, but attaching the label does not establish even one of them as knowledgeable about the Japanese decision to surrender. They were special pleaders, determined to disabuse the American public of its previous belief that dropping the bomb had shortened a reign of terror and saved lives.
- 56 The attack on Enola Gay was an error. The real task of the peace-minded in the last half of the twentieth century was not to obsess on the frightful explosions of 1945, but to concentrate on righting the wrongs done to the comfort women, slave laborers, victims of biological warfare, and the other millions of Asians;. Today the task remains to reduce the power and waste of the nuclear establishment. The most persuasive advocates were precisely the crews who had flown the 1945 atomic missions. None of these men were warmongers – just the opposite.
- 57 Ted van Kirk, who navigated Enola Gay to her target, said at a 509th reunion, "We're as anti-war and anti-nuclear as anyone you'll ever see in your life." Also at a reunion, Norris Jernegan added, "We're here for the camaraderie. . . . None of us celebrate war" (Meyer 1994). General Charles Sweeney flew on the Hiroshima mission and piloted Bock's Car to Nagasaki. "It is my fervent hope that there will never be another atomic mission," he has said. "The bombs we dropped in 1945 were primitive in comparison to nuclear weapons today. As the man who commanded the last atomic mission, I pray that I maintain that

singular distinction” (1997, p. xiii).

- 58 General Paul Tibbets thinks there are too many nuclear weapons in the world. “But we’ve always had too many, I mean, there’s such a thing as overkill” (Meyer 1994). Columnist Bob Greene’s *Duty* (2000) is a long tribute to the humanity and empathy of General Tibbets. Frank B. Stewart, a navigator in the 509th, wanted the plane restored “to serve as a symbol so that this . . . will never happen again. We’re not hawks – nobody wants nuclear war” (Harwit 1996, p. 17).
- 59 Thomas L. Karnes, adjutant of the 509th, later a Ph.D. from Stanford and a history professor for the rest of his life, wrote a long letter to the *Journal of American History* protesting the left-wing historical establishment’s attempt to malign those who had fought the Japanese. Karnes remembered Tibbets “as one of the most decent men I have ever met . . . and I remember Chuck Sweeney . . . leaving Tinian immediately after his Nagasaki mission to fly halfway around the world to bring a formal mass to thousands of Catholics on the island. Then he raised money for an orphanage in Hiroshima. Is it not about time to cool the rhetoric?” (1996, p. 313-14).
- 60 By attacking these good men, who have spoken powerfully for a nuclear-free world, the peace movement shot itself in the foot. It is unfortunate that commitment to a fraudulent Nietzschean narrative has alienated a large segment of the World War II generation. They are the ones who can talk from experience about the need to eliminate weapons that no one has dared use since 1945, because we saw then how horrible they are. It is no defense of NASM, the History Channel, or the peaceniks to recognize that many veterans groups have been captured by Texas-style chauvinists. An unbiased inspection of the morality of fighting that war justifies honoring and privileging the testimony of those who dropped the only two atomic weapons used in wartime.
- 61 Perhaps there will never be another war as morally unambiguous as World War II. I certainly do not expect another situation where a nuclear weapon could save millions of lives. Morality in every war has to be thought through on its own terms.

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