

What Is At Stake: Jewish Responses to the Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Alisha Monterial
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Department of History
Central European University

Budapest, Hungary

Supervised by Prof. Karl Hall
Second Reader: Prof. Michael Miller

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Abstract:

This work explores the ways in which Jews responded to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. There is a special focus on early and emerging responses, but some responses from after 1949 are also mentioned. The work does not heavily discuss specific nonproliferation movements of later decades, but instead focuses on the immediate cultural discourse surrounding the bombing, and the ways in which it was received by Jewish communities and scholars in the aftermath of World War 2. Themes of trauma and group identity are presented analytically.

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Introduction:

*“Since Auschwitz we know what man is capable of,
and since Hiroshima we know what is at stake.”¹ – Viktor Frankl*

In the first week of August of 1945, after the United States dropped two atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, many felt as though World War Two may finally be coming to a decisive end on the Pacific front. In the United States, there was a sense of relief that Japan received such a damaging blow, enough to prompt a surrender shortly afterwards. However, even during a war which saw tremendous and unprecedented human loss, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were acknowledged as being historic. In the decades after the end of World War Two, the context of the Cold War and thereafter, a large body of research and publications were written in regards to nearly every topic from the history of physics, to bomb-related security studies, to the literary and cultural significance of the atomic bomb; additionally, innumerable scholarly works about the Holocaust and other atrocities which occurred throughout the war (not to mention a large body of work which treats post-War Jewish culture and society) have been and continue to be enthusiastically welcome in academic circles as well as popularly consumed. My question begins to explore an intersection of these bodies of work, which often only peripherally reference each other. How did Jews respond to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? To what extent was the decision to use the bomb seen as part of the larger picture of violence of the war? Additionally, to what extent was the novelty of the bomb influence reactions; and what factors contributed to common responses?

Because existing literature on related to this question often touches upon aspects of it

¹ Viktor Frankl lecture, Third World Congress of Logotherapy, Regensburg University, June 19, 1983.

to some degree, but rarely treats it as an independent topic, it was necessary to narrow the scope of the question by assessing the existing scholarly work in conjunction with the data which was available to work with, in order to produce a hypothesis, and later, an analysis. The goal was not to reproduce the conclusions of larger, more exhaustive bodies of work, but instead to use a constellation of responses which hopefully add new nuance to previously assumed generalizations.

For assistance in digesting the many aspects to my question—atomic technology, violence, memory, Jewish identity—I turn to the work of Robert Jay Lifton, psychologist and scholar in ethics related to nuclear technology. Lifton’s contributions to these topics are indispensable and were highly influential in the formation of my hypothesis. Though I am not sure how Lifton would feel about it, I will attempt to treat his body of work not only as one of my primary sources of critical analysis, but also as a sort of meta-response. In other words, because Lifton is Jewish and produced a prolific body of work on the topic of atomic bombs, his perspective is *itself* a response to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as well as an appropriate critical perspective. More on the personal responses of Lifton in Chapter 3, “Cultural, Religious, and Ideological Responses.” Lifton refers to his very interdisciplinary body of work as “psycho-history”,² a term which may sound antiquated or cumbersome, but reflects the body of work accurately. There are assertions which Lifton makes frequently which will in turn influence how my findings are analyzed. In claiming that victims of the bomb demonstrated psychological patterns which were consistent with the victims of other disasters³, there is a foundation for comparative analysis of different traumas experienced by different groups.

Lifton will assist in making a connection between the social status of Hiroshima

² Robert Jay Lifton, *Psychological Effects of the Atomic Bomb in Hiroshima: The Theme of Death* (Daedalus 92, no. 3, 1963), 463.

³ Lifton, *Psychological Effects of the Atomic Bomb in Hiroshima*, 463.

survivors, and the social and cultural status of Jews and Judaism in the post-War United States. Survivors of the Hiroshima bombing reported resenting the “special status” the bomb gave them⁴, that they felt “compelled to take on this special category of existence, by which they felt permanently bound, however they might wish to free themselves of it.”⁵ Lifton articulates the experience of Hiroshima and Nagasaki using cultural phrasing that relates to how many Jews have traditionally understood their historic situation, and it. In addition to being part of a stigmatized social class the survivors of Hiroshima, called *hibakusha* in Japanese, had a “special relationship to death”.⁶ While Jews in the aftermath of World War Two certainly have a “special relationship” to the human tragedy in Europe, these experiences cannot be considered interchangeable, though Lifton makes extensive use of Holocaust-Hiroshima comparisons to different degrees. Sometimes this is for the sake of distinguishing between the unique means of violence; for Lifton, a major difference is that the atomic bomb was dropped from far away, whereas the murder of Jews during the Holocaust took place with the perpetrators extremely close to them.⁷

Despite the obvious differences of factors like motivation, scale, and duration, Lifton finds commonality between the Holocaust and the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by seeing them as being only possible with the assistance of certain technologies. Later this point will be explored in terms of whether there indeed was a perception that the atomic bomb was special; and if not, then at what point did the bomb begin to be thought of as a different type of weapon. Lifton’s link between the bomb’s uniqueness and its ability to produce a particular type of trauma will be useful in several of the individuals documented in Chapter Two.

While it is more obvious to examine the link between the bomb and the violence

⁴ Lifton, *Psychological Effects of the Atomic Bomb in Hiroshima*, 480.

⁵ Lifton, *Psychological Effects of the Atomic Bomb in Hiroshima*, 480.

⁶ Lifton, *Psychological Effects of the Atomic Bomb in Hiroshima*, 486.

⁷ Robert Jay Lifton, *The Dimensions of Contemporary War and Violence: How to Reclaim Humanity From a Continuing Revolution in the Technology of Killing*, (Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, July 1, 2013.)

associated with it, it is less obvious to examine the relationship between the bomb and Jews. It is important to keep in mind that in many ways, physics and atomic science in the 20th century was associated with famous Jewish intellectuals and also early victims of Nazi anti-Jewish policies. Because Nazi ideology thought of itself as a totalizing authority which sought to free Germany of corrupting and corroding influences, science was often a fundamental aspect of selling that authority; other attempts at Aryan science outside of physics and math were attempted, such as the Aryan archaeology/anthropology and literature. Certain subjects were considered less tolerable than others; the ground breaking theory of relativity by genius Albert Einstein was particularly detested by ideologically determined Nazi physicists and party officials. Quantum theory and the implications of Einstein's work was considered objectionable by many within the scientific community worldwide, but it was only with Nazi Germany's scientific standards that Einstein's ideas were rejected on the grounds that it was part of a "Jewish science"; these ideas would become the inspiration for many of the scientific works which would go towards developing nuclear weapons and nuclear energy technology.

Germany suffered a large haemorrhaging of intellectual resources due to their policies which targeted Jewish academic researchers. This put the Nazi atomic bomb project at a large disadvantage from the beginning, though their ideological leanings more than likely clouded their perception about this fact, they were likely to argue that they were more intellectually equip to successfully complete their ambitions in a timely manner due to having purged scientists whom they thought to be problematic, or "politically unreliable"⁸. The reckless dismissal of 13%⁹ of physicists and 18% of mathematicians¹⁰ (including scientific giants such as Albert Einstein and Hungarian mathematician Johann van Neumann) for being "politically unreliable" is a strong testament to the lengths at which the Nazi government was willing to

⁸ Fabian Waldinger, *Peer Effects in Science: Evidence from the Dismissal of Scientists in Nazi Germany*, (Oxford University Press on behalf of The Review of Economic Studies Limited, 2011.) 839.

⁹ Waldinger, *Peer Effects in Science: Evidence from the Dismissal of Scientists in Nazi Germany*, 839.

¹⁰ Waldinger, *Peer Effects in Science: Evidence from the Dismissal of Scientists in Nazi Germany*, 839.

impose its ideological stronghold perhaps to a stronger extent upon disciplines which are popularly thought to resist ideological obstacles, such as math and physics. For Nazi policy makers, math and science were predisposed to being politically dangerous simply due to their close association with Jewish thinkers.

The quest for the bomb itself became a powerful symbol of the war, and the Nazi uranium project's failure is an integral part of that legacy since World War Two had an overwhelming amount of ideological, technological, and human tragedies. Due historic nature of the technology, the intellectual resources and coordination it required, as well as the massive amounts of materials disposed of to construct the actual bomb itself, all made the atomic bomb a symbolic product of the war. Nazi Germany lost the race to the bomb, and lost the war, and whether the bomb would have been a difference maker for them cannot be known but only speculated upon. However, much insight can be gained about the irrational ideological approach that the Germans had to physics and modern technology, and how this influenced their decisions and rationalizations. Atomic technology was hostile to the Nazi project as much as the Nazi national project was hostile to it; where Nazism was conservative and reactionary, atomic technology was at the very least a game changer which would have consequences enduring through the 20th century and potentially impacting global affairs beyond that.

For those reasons, the premise of the question at hand assumes that the bomb was created in a pre-politicized way which was of special interest to Jews even before the bomb existed. The anticipation of a unique response among Jews is only natural based on this. To help isolate the reactions which were unique to Jews, it is necessary to have a foundation of what general responses were to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; likewise, to distinguish the experiences of Jews from those of other minority groups, particularly in the United States, the work on the relationship between African Americans and the bomb by

Vincent J. Intondi in his 2015 book, “African Americans Against the Bomb” makes for interesting comparison. The title itself suggests something about his findings.

There are likely to be poignant differences and surprising similarities between the responses of African Americans and Jews, with both the commonality and difference being equally valuable in developing a textured understanding of the early impact of the bomb. This has been integral to going forward in the exploration of Jewish responses because it challenged me to assess what significance my findings had with nuance. Because of Intondi’s work, it was possible to consider explanations which would not otherwise have been possible. For example, “African Americans Against the Bomb” notes that newspapers as early as August 18th, 1945 published pieces exploring African American involvement in making the bomb.¹¹ If one were to *only* look at Jewish responses (since, as will be presented, exploring the large number of Jews involved with the bomb project was also a common early response of Jewish newspapers), it would be easy to use this as evidence of the special, historic relationship Jews had to the bomb. However, in attempting to reconcile this, one is forced to think more deeply about the way identity itself was an integral factor in response to a historic event. On the surface, it would seem as though two minority groups having a specific reaction in common would undermine the hypothesis that Jews had a unique response; however documenting a common interest can also reveal deeper insights into historic behaviors and our perceptions of historic behaviors.

Before being able to understand whatever significance there is to the ways in which Jews responded to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it is important to know how American responses were in general. Although many of the Jewish actors treated in this work are not American, there was an attempt to limit the examples to a those in which were at least accessible to (for example, by way of publishing in English) the larger American cultural

¹¹ Vincent J. Intondi, *African Americans Against the Bomb: Nuclear Weapons, Colonialism, and the Black Power Movement*. (Stanford Nuclear Age Series 2015), 10.

sphere. According to one poll, taken on October 3, 1945, 85% of Americans supported¹² the decision to use the bomb on Japan on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, compared to 72% of British respondents¹³, so it is important to discuss the context within a specific cultural conversation. Since most of the popular response to Hiroshima and Nagasaki affirmed the decision to drop it, situations in which someone or a group deviates are of course of special interest. However when examining a special group, there is a foundational assumption that the group is distinguished somehow from the majority, and therefore it is often unsurprising that they will perhaps have a different pattern of response. This is why there will be an attempt to document to what extent Jewish responses followed a pattern of response similar to the general public of the United States as well as beginning to build a body of work which works in conjunction with the African American response for added comparative nuance.

In the immediate days after the bombings after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there was a sense of awe among popular reactions. The New York Times reported that a “new age”¹⁴ was ushered by means of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on their issue published on August 7, 1945, the day after the bomb was dropped. The news of the second bomb, the one which was detonated over the Japanese city of Nagasaki on August 9th, was published in that morning's papers, also on August 9th. The majority of the newspapers from the week that the atomic bombs were dropped reflect the general perception among the majority of Americans—that the bombings were a strategic military victory, a blow to Japanese morale and military capacity. A look into the headlines published by the Chicago Tribune at the same time revealed a similar insight about the initial reactions to the bomb—that there was mostly spotlight on its military impact.

Although there was, as demonstrated by the New York Times headline, that the atomic

¹² Hazel G. Erskine, *The Polls: Atomic Weapons and Nuclear Energy*. (Public Opinion Quarterly, 1963.)

¹³ Erskine, *The Polls: Atomic Weapons and Nuclear Energy*.

¹⁴ “New Age Ushered: Day of Atomic Energy Hailed By President Revealing Weapon.” New York Times, August 7, 1945.

bomb was at least a glimpse into a potential new type of warfare, though the ways in which atomic technologies would shape the latter half of the 20th century could not be fully appreciated, as they were of course not known. It is critical, when assessing the responses to the atomic bombings, to not use “20/20” hindsight; while historians have the privilege of a relative birds-eye view of certain aspects of events (of course, full objectivity is nearly impossible, as far too many variables at any moment in history exist), one must be careful not to impose that wisdom onto the records left by historic actors. It will be a challenge to assess each example within its specific historic context, as a matter of weeks or even days in nuclear history can make a significant difference in what knowledge and ideas were available.

Just like it is important to understand the larger American attitude to the use of atomic weapons during World War Two in order to compare them to the specific Jewish reactions, it is likewise critical to take into consideration the broader status of Jewish identity in the post-War United States. This includes taking into account religious, political, and other socioeconomic factors which could lend an extra insight into analysis and understanding. Major historic forces affected the Jewish community in the aftermath of World War Two. From understanding the Holocaust, to navigating McCarthyism, to the ongoing situation in Palestine, Jews after 1945 had quite a bit of social priorities which influenced community life. In “By The Bomb’s Early Light”, Paul Boyer notes that Jews responded in a range of ways much like other groups of Americans did, emphasizing the quick ending of the war and seeing the bomb technology as having the potential for good or bad.¹⁵ Boyer asserts that “overshadowing the response to the atomic bomb was the destruction of European Jewry”¹⁶ and provides a brief sketch of the ways in which the Holocaust filtered some responses from Jews in both spheres of religion and spirituality, as well as in regards to Jewish ethics and

¹⁵ Paul S. Boyer, *By The Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture At the Dawn of The Atomic Age*. (University of North Carolina Press, 1994) 222.

¹⁶ Boyer, *By The Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture At the Dawn of The Atomic Age*, 223.

Jewish ideals.

Due to the myriad of strong political and cultural forces influencing the Jewish community after World War Two, it is necessary to limit the number of chosen responses to those which do not lead too far into the domains of other subjects. For this reason, there will be only periphery treatment of the 1960s and afterwards; otherwise, when getting closer to social movements like the Civil Rights movement in the United States, and the global disarmament and nonproliferation movements, as well as the Israeli quest for the bomb, there would be too many large factors for the argument to take into account. These points for further exploration will be discussed in the conclusion. Because of this, only the first 15 years of cultural response will be taken into consideration, up until about 1960, though the primary focus will be on the way that immediate responses emerged.

When looking for primary sources to help answer my question, it was necessary to decide what would be considered a *Jewish* response, or whether it was simply necessary for it to be a response *by a Jewish person*. It was important to assess whether there were clues about the response had a relationship to some otherwise established Jewish space. The question to be asked was therefore, “did this person or platform have a Jewish social experience?” at all. There is no official or correct way to “Jewishly” express an opinion about something; however for it to be included in Chapter 3, which examines the responses of individuals, there needed to be some type of evidence that the person filtered part of their life experience through either being Jewish or being *perceived* as being Jewish.¹⁷ The extent to which Jewish identity and Jewish social experience influenced their responses of course should be examined on a case-by-case basis. Indications of this was often subtle, such as mentioning the Holocaust and Nazi atrocities, or the use of religious language or allusions to

¹⁷ Here I say being “perceived as being Jewish” because many people were *halachically* Jewish (in other words, they had a Jewish mother), but did not ever practice Judaism and nonetheless experienced antisemitism because of their heritage, as was the case with Lise Meitner, to be explored later. Conversely, someone could *not* be halachically Jewish and still experience antisemitism.

Biblical symbolism.

My hope is to lay a foundation for future research to further build upon not documenting more types of Jewish responses to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but also for future scholars to create intersectional analyses of special groups' responses.

Chapter One: Newspapers, Impressions

Overview:

Comparing newspaper articles from Jewish newspapers and Jewish publications provides interesting insight into the informational priorities of its readership during the days after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In some instances, the topics covered correspond roughly to the same topics covered in publications meant for non-Jewish audiences; this was especially the case in the first few days after the bombings. Common topics were often predictable, with the potential impact on the Japanese military and hastening the end of the war being the most immediate concern. Additionally, the struggle to describe the bomb and its significance can be observed in several examples of early reporting on the bombings. It is not surprising that there were many official attempts at limiting the type of information available to the public, but some argue that the clumsy descriptions of the bomb's damages were not the result of an official attempt at censorship which left reporters with few resources, but instead was due to the novelty of the device. In other words, journalists were unable to accurately describe the damage and other effects of the bomb because they did not know exactly what an atomic bomb was; the "social construction of organizational knowledge" made it difficult to articulate and imagine.¹⁸ Most focused on the impact of the blast, rather than the fire damage, with the *New York Times* publishing sixteen articles about the blast being published in the first three weeks after the bombing.¹⁹ Understandably, the most difficult concept for journalists to report on was the effects of the radiation poisoning, with only fifteen articles about radiation poisoning being published in the first ten months

¹⁸ Janet F. Brodie, *Radiation Secrecy and Censorship After Hiroshima and Nagasaki*. (Journal of Social History, Summer 2015). 844.

¹⁹ Brodie, *Radiation Secrecy and Censorship After Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, 843.

after the bombings on Japan.²⁰

The Palestine Post: Column One, and Immediate Reactions:

While the general public took a broad view of the events, Jewish publications were quick to discuss specific Jewish links to not only the science of the bomb, but the decision to design and use the bomb. A brief survey of articles published in the *Palestine Post* (now known as the *Jerusalem Post*) demonstrates that while the military and tactical uses of the bomb were of interest to their Jewish audience, there was a fair amount of open-ending musing about the potential moral ambiguities of such technology.

The August 8, 1945 issue of the *Palestine Post*, printed less than two days after the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, had nine articles on the bomb, including the “Column One” editorial introduction piece; there were eleven articles on the front page on other topics, all related to the topic of information related to the end of the war.²¹ While reporting on the facts of the bombing were of course important and included, there is a large amount of content which examines the moral and “psychological”²² effects of the bomb. This was the major concern of Column One on August 8th. Its author, David Courtney, worried on the front page of the *Palestine Post* that the bomb was more “evil”²³ than good, and that its use “stings the conscience as well as the imagination of the world.”²⁴

A number of anxious motifs were laid out in this front page column, and many of the sentiments expressed were echoed in responses throughout the following years. Speculating that only “the scientist” (who he says, is a “cautious man”) can provide reliable estimates of the potential for peace or war that the bomb could be used for; this motif is present in a

²⁰ Brodie, *Radiation Secrecy and Censorship After Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, 847.

²¹ *The Palestine Post*, August 8, 1945. <http://web.nli.org.il/sites/JPress/English/Pages/Palestine-Post.aspx>

²² “New Balance of Power Emerges.” *The Palestine Post*, August 8, 1945.

²³ “Column One.” *The Palestine Post*, August 8, 1945.

²⁴ “Column One.” *The Palestine Post*, August 8, 1945.

majority of Jewish discourse surrounding the bomb. The scientist is not blamed; in some instances, the scientist is invoked as being vulnerable of government and/or political exploitation but well intentioned, whereas in other instances they are spoken of as though they have unique wisdom, perspective and knowledge.

On the front page of the *Palestine Post* on August 8th is also a short piece about two refugee scientists, Rudolf Peierls and Franz Eugen Simon, and how they were glad to help the Allies win a race to stop a bomb which “would help shorten wars”.²⁵ The message in the *Palestine Post* in its first issue responding to the bombing of Hiroshima is careful to emphasize that the bomb has the potential to be a peace-maker if it is used correctly, but is skeptical of whether authorities are responsible or wise enough to know how to use it. Because of this, scientists are not blamed for having created a “monster” (David Courtney’s word) which uses “psychological warfare” as the bomb is described as in Column One.²⁶

The atomic bombing of Hiroshima “stunned imaginations everywhere”,²⁷ and its potential for easy destruction did not comfort Jews who were, in parallel, unpacking the often unbelievable extent to which Nazi Germany destroyed European Jewry.

Column One reads, echoing this sentiment:

“If the imagination is to let go on the impulse of yesterday’s details,
it foresees a world not more prosperous or more peaceful, but
crushed into groaning bits by dark and ultimately
incomprehensible energies it has itself released; an exaggeration,
to be sure, but not without some measure of probability.”²⁸

But Column One does offer an interesting suggestion for avoiding future nuclear wars, one

²⁵ “Scientists’ Patience Rewarded.” *The Palestine Post*, August 8th, 1945.

²⁶ “Column One.” *The Palestine Post*, August 8th, 1945.

²⁷ “Column One.” *The Palestine Post*, August 8th, 1945.

²⁸ “Column One.” *The Palestine Post*, August 8th, 1945.

which seems to be influenced by larger atrocities of World War Two as well as the sense that a “new balance of power” was on the rise in its aftermath. In order to limit the possibility for a nuclear “World War Three,” according to Column One, it would be necessary for the world to do away with its “clutter of national prejudices”.²⁹ This included doing away with traditions which were “rooted in tyranny”³⁰, eliminating national sovereignty and borders, planning industrial output, collectivizing natural resources, and aiming to “level up standards of common people”.³¹ Column One asserts that if the construction and use of the atomic bomb was possible, then this effort could also be a feasible project, “A tall order? Yes, as tall as the atomic bomb.”³²

By the time the August 9th edition of the *Palestine Post* was published, news had fully broke that the Soviet Union declared war on Japan, and that the Allied forces dropped the second atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Nagasaki. The *Palestine Post* featured thirteen articles on topics related to the atomic bomb, and the topics included predictable ones such as the extent to which the British and Soviet officials knew about the construction of the bomb and the decision to use it, as well as features on Jewish refugee atomic scientists (specifically, Lise Meitner has a small spotlight piece).

The post-Nagasaki August 9th edition of “Column One” does not hold the same hopeful and ambiguous tone as it did the day before. “People are afraid,” it begins, and one can sense the shift in mood from seeing the bomb as something which could have to potential to shorten wars with “psychological warfare”, to something which could make mass-scale destruction a common occurrence in warfare of the future. The rest of articles mentioning the bomb focused on details such as the science behind the bomb, or piecing together information about what was known about the atomic bomb project under the Nazis (which was not much

²⁹ “Column One.” *The Palestine Post*, August 8th, 1945.

³⁰ “Column One.” *The Palestine Post*, August 8th, 1945.

³¹ “Column One.” *The Palestine Post*, August 8th, 1945.

³² “Column One.” *The Palestine Post*, August 8th, 1945.

at that point, other than the fact that some Nazi physicists in Germany were arrested under suspicion that they were “still” working on creating an atomic weapon³³; the idea that German scientists were seeking to build a device with such destructive capacity was not a soothing idea for Jews in the post-War social landscape worldwide). Column One on the day of the bombing of Nagasaki was quite stark in contrast to the tone of the other articles. The piece expressed skepticism about whether the technology used to create the bomb would ever enter into civilian use at all, if ever.³⁴ Further, it expressed no comfort in the possibility that controlling the information about atomic science may be limited to certain trustworthy countries. Column One abruptly shifts to describe the chaos left behind in Europe in the aftermath of the war, the lack of “authority”, the lack of food and the great number of displaced persons; after giving a quick summary of the general disorder of Europe, Column One ends darkly with, “War teaches us nothing, except how to make atomic bombs.”³⁵

The August 10th issue of the *Palestine Post* is generally similar regarding information about the state of affairs in Europe, but the excitement and awe of the bomb is not present. Even the hard-hitting “Column One” takes a break from darkly musing over the fate of humanity now that the United States demonstrated the destructive power of the bomb. There was exactly one article regarding atomic bombs, and it was about the Nazi atomic bomb project being halted by the atomic bombings of Japan. The piece eased fears that the Nazis could have been close to the bomb, stating that even the most fundamental research still had not been carried out by the Nazis at the time of the bombing, and that “science under Hitlerism was doomed to fail.”³⁶ In the early moments after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the relationship between “science” and the war was of critical interest. The morality of atomic science was of great interest, particularly as it related to the Jewish scientists involved with

³³ “German Key Scientists Seized.” *The Palestine Post*, August 9th 1945.

³⁴ “Column One.” *The Palestine Post*, August 9th 1945.

³⁵ “Column One.” *The Palestine Post*, August 9th 1945.

³⁶ “Bombing Stopped Nazi Scientists.” *Palestine Post* August 10, 1945.

its development (and hence, in stopping the war, especially in the Pacific arena), as well as relief that Nazism could not produce such a game-changing device.

Pittsburgh's "Jewish Criterion" and Community Reactions:

While the *Palestine Post* does a great job creating a picture of the typical response of Jewish newspapers after the bombings with a very global perspective, it is important to zoom into the way particular communities responded in the days after on a local level. In the Pittsburgh "*Jewish Criterion*", there were an array of interesting responses to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Whereas in the *Palestine Post* many of the responses are very information-focused, with emphasis on how the bomb fit in tactically with the rest of the war (with the notable exception of Column One, which epitomized early anxieties surrounding the news of the bomb), the Pittsburgh *Jewish Criterion* published a large variety of responses, and because of its more locally focused platform, was able to document community events and happenings which illustrate the curiosity about the bomb that existed in the Jewish community of Pittsburgh.

By August 17th of 1945, news was fully available that Japan had announced its surrender on August 15th, nine days after the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. In the "National and Foreign News" section of the *Criterion* there were several pieces on the atomic bomb and its influence on the end of the war, much like the *Palestine Post*. The Foreign News section contains a column section titled "Science" in which the only news about atomic science and technology is in regards to a contribution to split the atom by a Jewish-Soviet physicist in Moscow;³⁷ the science itself was not the focus in the majority of articles, but the potential influence of this new technology was.

At the center of the "National and Foreign News" section of the *Criterion*, in large

³⁷ "Atom Researcher". *The Pittsburgh Jewish Criterion*. August 17, 1945.

bold text, was a quote from a woman identified as “Mrs. Levin”, who was the mother of the first American to fire at the Japanese during World War Two.³⁸ Her son, Meyer Levin, died during the war (though the piece does not specify when or under what circumstances). For Mrs. Levin, the end of the war was a chance for her to finally have closure about the death of her son. Mrs. Levin is quoted as saying “thank God for the atomic bomb, as terrible as it is...let us pray to God that this will be the last war.”³⁹ The short blurb noted that the reporter described Mrs. Levin’s voice as “hysterical”. This inclusion, bolded and centered in the middle of the National and Foreign News section of the *Criterion* served a specific function in this context. That function was to set the tone and mood as a frame of reference for the rest of the articles on the page. It was not part of a specific story about the war, but it was part of the larger *experience* of the war.

On the same page as Mrs. Levin’s plea to God that the death of her son not be in vain is a piece by General David Sarnoff, who offered a particular way of thinking about the bomb, and the future of the bomb. Sarnoff advocated for the potential civilian uses of atomic technology and atomic science. He urged citizens to withhold their judgements about the bomb technology, and stated that leadership is unable to understand the larger picture of what the potential future uses of atomic technology could be; he said the reason for this was because the advancements of science “piled up during the war”.⁴⁰ General Sarnoff presents the future of atomic science as a sort of playful dare from nature; he painted a picture of man with all this newfound knowledge and potential, being “dared”⁴¹ by the sun regarding his next move. His tone is cautious, but optimistic that the vast potential for atomic science is an opportunity which should not be missed.

³⁸ “National and Foreign News” *The Pittsburgh Jewish Criterion*. August 17, 1945.

³⁹ “National and Foreign News” *The Pittsburgh Jewish Criterion*. August 17, 1945.

⁴⁰ “Mankind Faces Fateful Decision, Says General Sarnoff”. *The Pittsburgh Jewish Criterion*. August 17, 1945.

⁴¹ “Mankind Faces Fateful Decision, Says General Sarnoff”. *The Pittsburgh Jewish Criterion*. August 17, 1945.

In the *Palestine Post*, there were *implications* that the Jewish scientists involved with the bomb project were doing so as part of an effort to stop Hitler.⁴² However, in the *Criterion's* editorial page from August 17, 1945, an unknown author pulls no punches during an editorial piece simply titled “Atomic Research”. The author takes an ironic jab at the idea of Nazi’s being a “superior race” who lost the war, according to him, because of a bomb built by Jews who were exiled for being ethnically inferior. “It must be a rude awakening for the Nazis,”⁴³ the author says. This feeling of validation is present in several examples, but here it is unfiltered, and its tone is stern and proud. Like many other reactions to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War Two, a primary point of concern for Jews was insisting that Jewish researchers (and the United States) did not *want* to make a bomb and cause so much destruction and death, but were acting in the interest of scientific progress for mankind first and foremost.

On page seven of the same issue of the Pittsburgh *Jewish Criterion* is an article titled “Atomic Research, Hastening Peace, Owes Much to Jews”. This larger piece exploring the history of the bomb again centers Jewish scientists, and insists that it was Hitler who started the race for the bomb, and that the American bomb project had the good intentions of restoring peace. The piece itself was written by a professor who was exiled under Nazi racial laws and was working in the United States;⁴⁴ for him, it was obviously a personal matter of which he was deeply connected. The three most common scientists which are mentioned here and elsewhere are Lise Meitner, Neils Bohr, and J. Robert Oppenheimer.⁴⁵

The article, “Atomic Research, Hastening Peace, Owes Much to Jews” has an

⁴² The extent to which this is true, is of course a matter of debate and varies widely depending on which scientists one takes into consideration. It is important not to paint with a broad brush here, but instead to focus on the way the newspapers themselves thought it was important to craft a story which left motivations ambiguous.

⁴³ “Atomic Research”, *The Pittsburgh Jewish Criterion*, August 17, 1945.

⁴⁴ “Atomic Research, Hastening Peace, Owes Much to Jews”, *The Pittsburgh Post*, August 17, 1945.

⁴⁵ “Atomic Research, Hastening Peace, Owes Much to Jews”, *The Pittsburgh Post*, August 17, 1945.

afterword section titled “Press Comments” which attempts to contextualize the sentiments expressed by the author of the piece, referred to as Dr. Esterman. This part attempts to place the history of the bomb, particularly as it related to Jews, within the larger context of the war and Hitler’s policies against Jews. In many ways, it reads like an extension of the aforementioned editorial which expressed that the bomb was built by early victims of Nazi policies. However, in this section there is an interesting shift from the focus on “Jewish” scientists to a celebration of “non-Aryan” scientists who helped make atomic discoveries. The article taunts the Nazis by addressing them directly with phrases like, “what a mistake you made.”⁴⁶ An interesting example of this was the mention of Enrico Fermi, who was not Jewish, but his wife was. The inclusion of non-Aryans who were also not Jewish is an interesting move in an attempt to move the conversation away from a sort of Jew-versus-Nazi dialogue to a more general solidarity with those who fascist forces threaten.

Throughout the weeks after, the *Criterion* published articles which gave considerable attention to the relationship between what Jews perceived as a connection between Jewish refugee scientists, the atrocities in Europe, and the success of the atomic bomb in Japan. For some this was a triumph, but for others it was an uncomfortable truth which marked an ugly end to an ugly and catastrophic war.

In October of 1945 the *Criterion* published a piece entitled, “Plain Talk: This Human Race” which explored the realities of post-War Poland. The article was stylized in the form of a piece of fiction, offering insight into the mind of a 50-year old “gentleman” on the state of affairs of the world. He implored the reader to consider the behavior of “the Poles”, but cautions the reader not to think there is something unique about the Poles’ complicated moral situation. He goes on to describe that Jews who were returning to their homes in Poland after the war were being driven out again, harassed, and harmed to various extents; that they were

⁴⁶ “Atomic Research, Hastening Peace, Owes Much to Jews”, *The Pittsburgh Post*, August 17, 1945.

afraid to be seen as Jews, and afraid to use Yiddish in public.⁴⁷ While his argument is strange, for some reason this is deeply connected to the building of the atomic bomb for him. The “moral collapse”⁴⁸ of the Poles was of course not caused by the atomic bomb; and the “gentleman” of the piece only treats the Nazi occupation of Poland as a potential contributing factor to their “moral” situation. Instead, the atomic bomb frames the situation symbolically, but only exists in the background, as opposed to acting directly in the decision making process of individual Poles.

To be certain, the Plain Talk piece does a poor job of articulating its point. The concept is bizarre and disjointed; the author speaks about the gruesome experiences of Jews in Poland, and then switches abruptly to a speculation about what God must think of the discoveries which made the atomic bomb possible. The “gentleman” speculates that God must have lost patience with humankind by now, and that human beings must choose to “perish or live the life of the abundant.”⁴⁹ For the author, the solution to the Jew-Bomb-Holocaust riddle which was on the forefront of the minds of so many in the days and weeks after the war, is God. The title of the article, “Plain Talk”, is anything but plain talk, yet it reveals the frustrating lengths that people were willing to go to make sense out of two of the most shocking events in their historic memory happening at the nearly same historic moment.

⁴⁷ “Plain Talk: This Human Race” *The Pittsburgh Jewish Criterion*, October 19, 1945.

⁴⁸ “Plain Talk: This Human Race” *The Pittsburgh Jewish Criterion*, October 19, 1945.

⁴⁹ “Plain Talk: This Human Race” *The Pittsburgh Jewish Criterion*, October 19, 1945.

Chapter Two: Early Cultural Responses

The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki affected the happenings in Jewish community life as well as just being a topic discussed as a current event in the news. There was a demonstrable effect in religious and secular circles, but the aftermath of the Holocaust was still prioritized. As weeks went on in the fall of 1945 and into 1946 and 1947, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were less actionable than the aftermath of the Holocaust; especially regarding documenting crimes, fundraising for displaced persons, assisting in aiding refugees, and simply dealing with the human loss. In spite of all that, the atom bomb and atomic technology maintained a constant but relatively low key presence, buzzing in the background of Jewish community affairs. In some instances, it was front and center, and in others, it was missing entirely.

The Hand of God: A Flier About Refugee Scientists

In August of 1945, a flier of ambiguous origins was published in New York on the popular topic of scientists who fled Nazism and contributed to the success of the bomb project. While its origins are ambiguous, its message is not. On the front page of the flier, in all capital letter block print, below a photograph of Lise Meitner and another of Neils Bohr, it reads, “THEY HELPED CREATE THE BOMB THAT SAVED A MILLION AMERICAN LIVES.”⁵⁰ Underneath that headline is a line from Psalm 118: “The stone which the builder rejected hath become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing. It is marvelous in our eyes.”⁵¹ The entire flier is soaked in religious references, quotes from religious scriptures and evoking the name of God in approval of building the bomb. The opening paragraph predicts

⁵⁰ “They Fled Nazi Persecution” Reprinted from The Montgomery Advertiser. August 22, 1945. Published at Community Service 386 Fourth Avenue. New York 16, New York. Accessed Online <http://web.nli.org.il>

⁵¹ “They Fled Nazi Persecution”, 1.

that the bomb gave man the potential to destroy the world or make it “paradise”. For the author of this flier, the connection between Jews and the bomb was of divine influence; and stated that when telling the story of Meitner “one must feel the hand of God”⁵² guiding her to America and into the atomic bomb project. After again referring to divine type of guidance in the fate of Meitner, and presenting the question of whether atomic science will be used for destructive or constructive purposes, the author writes that the “finger of God” has indicated which to choose⁵³ though does not name the “correct” answer explicitly.

Once more, the idea that Nazi science was stunted because of its ideology based on racial hatred is mentioned, and the flier mocks the “Super Race” for having an ideology which “defeats itself.”⁵⁴ The following section on “non-Aryans” was headlined in the flier, in capital block letters with the sentence, “American editors were quick to realize that the Nazis had defeated themselves through intolerance.”⁵⁵ The flier goes even further, and hypothesizes that if Hitler were less cruel to Jews, some of them may have stayed in the Reich longer, and “the ending would have been tragic indeed for the whole world.”⁵⁶ This implied that if Jewish scientists had an incentive to stay in Nazi Germany, their fate may have been different and they would not have had the opportunity to contribute to the success of the atomic bomb project. The flier concludes that the United States “profited” from the “exodus” of non-Aryan scientists from Nazi Germany.⁵⁷

The heavy use of religious language stands out among other examples of Jewish responses to the bombing. Though many of the themes are the same, such as the focus on refugee scientists and the connection between Nazism and physics research, the explicit religious and spiritual tone conveys an interesting message. Whereas the “Plain Talk”

⁵² “They Fled Nazi Persecution”, 1.

⁵³ “They Fled Nazi Persecution”, 3.

⁵⁴ “They Fled Nazi Persecution”, 3.

⁵⁵ “They Fled Nazi Persecution”, 5.

⁵⁶ “They Fled Nazi Persecution”, 5.

⁵⁷ “They Fled Nazi Persecution”, 5.

example assumed God would be impatient with humanity after World War Two and the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, this example insists that God (referred to once as “Master of Universe”, which is used in Jewish prayers) the bomb conquered evil. It is interesting to note, that Hiroshima and Nagasaki are not mentioned, and the fact that Nazis were not the target of the any atomic bomb attack is absent. There is only a direct link made between the defeat of Nazism and the construction and use of the bomb.

Jewish scripture obviously has no precedent in its laws and customs for the use of atomic weapons, although there are many religious laws in regards to what is permitted and expected during war; these issues are not the focus of concern among Jewish responses that make use of spirituality or religion. Instead, the issue of *responsibility* is often front and center. In specific regard to “megabombs” like the atomic bomb, some Jewish scholars have examined potential ways of interpreting *halacha*.⁵⁸ In a short essay on the topic, “Torah and the Megabombs” by Joseph Polak, the issue of how to frame the topic of atomic bombs according to the perspective of Jewish law has many interesting points, including one on the issue of responsibility: “The nuclear danger, halakha seems to be telling us, is man’s responsibility. Promises of redemption, in the face of imminent catastrophe, must give way to prudence. The first lesson of classical Judaism, that man be cognizant of his extraordinary new responsibility, remains clear.”⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that few responses rely on specific Jewish interpretations of the bomb or of warfare even generally, but do lean on concepts like fate or divine providence.

⁵⁸ Jewish Law, sourced from the Torah, the Talmud, and other religious writings.

⁵⁹ Joseph Polak, *Torah and the Megabombs*, (Aleph: Historical Studies in Science & Judaism Vol. 13 Issue 2. 2013), 305.

Ongoing Community Interest:

At the opening of the World Jewish Congress meeting which took place in London on August 20, 1945, Dr. Stephen Wise said that the “world was shocked by the obliteration of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by atomic bombs, but no such shock was noticed when innocent Jews ten-fold the number of victims in the two Japanese cities combined were exterminated in Europe.”⁶⁰ The trauma of the Holocaust, as it would come to be known, was on the forefront of many people’s minds, and for Dr. Wise, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki seemed small in comparison. It is probable that wise was not alone in his feeling that the world had neglected to immediately understand the extent to which European Jewry was thoroughly destroyed. However, for many other Jews, there was a complicated symbolic connection between the Holocaust and the atomic bombings. Many of these connections are not factually-based; the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki did not stop the operation of death camps like Auschwitz, for example. Nonetheless, the connection between the need to stop Hitler and the need to build the bomb was evident in the thoughts Jewish Americans expressed, though the logic was often faulty or supplemented odd rhetorical strategies.

In mid-October of 1945, rabbis in Ohio affiliated with the Reform movement of Judaism celebrated the 70th anniversary of the founding of Hebrew Union College. Their pronouncement to the graduates of Hebrew Union College that year was optimistic, focusing on the accomplishments that Reform Judaism has made in America, saying that it made greater advancements in the United States than anywhere else.⁶¹ The pronouncement only lightly touched on the massive loss of the Jewish community in Europe during the war, but

⁶⁰ “World Jewish Congress Policy Outlined by Dr. Wise at Parley of European Delegates.” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*. August 21, 1945.

⁶¹ “Rabbis Celebrate Hebrew Union College Anniversary, Read Pronouncement” *The Pittsburgh Criterion*, October 19, 1945.

the flow of the speech slows when it reaches a comment about the atomic bomb and the future of science in regards to ethics. After declaring that it is their duty to ensure that Judaism will always “advance” (word choice indicates influence from the popularity of scientific discoveries), the speaker expresses optimism for the potential of atomic technology:

“The world is entering upon an unpredictable era. The age of atomic energy promises once again to transform economic, social and political life the world over. The world may well stand aghast at its present power of human mass-annihilation. But, equally, it is imperative that it dedicate the new-found source of energy to the emancipation of society and the liberation of all who are slaves.”⁶²

This optimistic yet strong speech addressed several key points. It expressed faith in the future of Jews and faith in Judaism’s ability to “advance” and not become an artifact of history, and it in turn expressed a determination not to be defined by historical events, however monumental they may have been; the same way that atomic technology would not be limited by the world “standing aghast” by its capacity, the Rabbis at the Hebrew Union College did not want to be defined by the carnage of World War Two.

In other community events related to the atomic bomb after the bombing of Japan, the Young Men’s & Women’s Hebrew Association of Pittsburg held several lectures in the autumn and winter months about atomic technology, indicating a sustained community in information and development regarding atomic science. One lecture was held during a speakers’ series called, “The Politics of Peace” on November 2, 1945, in which Marquis Childs spoke to an “overflowing audience” on the importance of using the “atomic bomb secret” for diplomatic leverage.⁶³ Childs expressed an urgency in doing this, and argued that

⁶² “Rabbis Celebrate Hebrew Union College Anniversary, Read Pronouncement” *The Pittsburgh Criterion*, October 19, 1945.

⁶³ “Overflow Crowd Hears Marquis Childs Pronounce Atomic Bomb Key To Peace” *Young Men’s & Women’s Hebrew Association Pittsburgh Weekly*. November 2, 1945.

soon too many countries would figure out how to make an atomic bomb, and therefore it would lose its capacity for leverage.⁶⁴

Another lecture at Congregation Rodeh Shalom was promoted to take place on November 18, 1945.⁶⁵ The topic of the lecture was, “The Religious Answer—Atomic Power: To Share or To Keep?”⁶⁶ This issue, of whether atomic science should remain a national secret, to convert it into a useful national secret (the way Childs suggested, by means of diplomatic leverage), or to share it, was very much at the forefront of the community conversations in the months after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In mid-January, a professor of physics was scheduled to give a lecture at the Pittsburgh Young Men & Women’s Hebrew Association on the “Social and Political Implications of Atomic Energy”.⁶⁷ Interest in the topic seemed to be sustained throughout the months into 1946.

Beyond Curiosity: Leftist Politics & Atomic Science Among Jews

“We have split the atom; we must now unite the world,”⁶⁸ wrote Aaron Levenstein in a pamphlet published by the League for Industrial Democracy, a socialist organization. The title of the pamphlet was “The Atomic Age: Suicide, Slavery, or Social Planning?” It provided three potential responses to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which correspond to the subtitle of the pamphlet (suicide, slavery, and social planning). Though the pamphlet was not intended for consumption by only Jews, the Jewish author used many Jewish motifs and constructed his argument in a manner similar to the ones examined previously.

The second section, which explored the alternative of “slavery” as a response,

⁶⁴ “Overflow Crowd Hears Marquis Childs Pronounce Atomic Bomb Key To Peace” *Young Men’s & Women’s Hebrew Association Pittsburgh Weekly*. November 2, 1945.

⁶⁵ “Congregational News” *The Pittsburgh Jewish Criterion*. November 16, 1945.

⁶⁶ “Congregational News” *The Pittsburgh Jewish Criterion*. November 16, 1945.

⁶⁷ “Dr. Estermann To Talk On Atomic Energy” *The Pittsburgh Jewish Criterion*. January 11, 1946.

⁶⁸ Aaron Levenstein, *The Atomic Age: Suicide, Slavery, or Social Planning?* (League For Industrial Democracy, 1946) 1.

contained a large number of biblical references. Levenstein drew a connection between socialist values, biblical verses about work, and Einstein's famous equation. "The secret of our long struggle for economic survival has been the biblical dictate: 'By the sweat of thy brow shalt thou earn thy bread'. That was a poetic way of saying that only by expanding energy can we hope to feed, clothe, and house ourselves."⁶⁹ Levenstein is optimistic but skeptical about the potential for atomic technology to be a liberating social force. He quotes William L. Laurence (born Leib Wolf Siew) at length on the potential energy stored not only in uranium and plutonium but in common things like "a handful of snow". The future of atomic science seemed limitless; future sources of energy and the potential to harness, control, and use that energy stimulated the extremes of Laurence's and Levenstein's imaginations. Because of the successful rapid advancements in atomic technology, Levenstein cautioned against believing that civilian-use was the safest path towards using atomic technology peacefully. Due to his socialist perspective, it is predictable that he would be worried about the consequences of privatizing the technology, and thus becoming "slaves to the machine" of production.⁷⁰

For a Jewish socialist like Levenstein, the fact that such a powerful difference-making technology came from a government project rather than "free enterprise"⁷¹ (as he describes it), was an indication that social planning was superior to a competitive market system. He wrote that it was not the "profit motive"⁷² that led to the success of the bomb, but rather the government.⁷³ He quotes a Republican Senator, describing him as an "admirer of the profit system,"⁷⁴ who despite that wants atomic science to remain under government control, saying,

"Atomic energy must never be allowed to become a money-making device.

⁶⁹ Levenstein, *The Atomic Age: Suicide, Slavery, or Social Planning?* 16.

⁷⁰ Levenstein, *The Atomic Age: Suicide, Slavery, or Social Planning?* 20.

⁷¹ Levenstein, *The Atomic Age: Suicide, Slavery, or Social Planning?* 31.

⁷² Levenstein, *The Atomic Age: Suicide, Slavery, or Social Planning?* 31.

⁷³ Levenstein, *The Atomic Age: Suicide, Slavery, or Social Planning?* 31.

⁷⁴ Levenstein, *The Atomic Age: Suicide, Slavery, or Social Planning?* 31.

This awesome power is a sacred trust placed in our hands. It came from the government, which is the people. It belongs to us all. It must never be allowed to pass into the private sphere, which might misuse it.”⁷⁵

In his attempt to appropriate the bomb as a symbol of socialist success, Levenstein aligns the bomb against military and private use, but favors government control of the technology.

The solution Levenstein proposes is “social planning”. Levenstein proposed the creation of an international “atomic democracy.”⁷⁶ For this to succeed, the responsibilities of the average person would have to increase, but it would not burden the worker, according to Levenstein. He goes on to reference Norman Cousins’⁷⁷ “Modern Man is Obsolete”, that man in the atomic age has outgrown his old self, and that the atom has “created new responsibility not only for your government—but for you!”⁷⁸ The argument also relies heavily on unsourced quotes from Albert Einstein, stretching more than a page and a half long, stating that the quotes Einstein endorsing a “soundly managed socialist society” should bring “reassurance” to the reader.⁷⁹ Levenstein was not alone in this concept of creating an international “atomic democracy”; in November of 1945 the Synagogue Council of America “urged” that the United States give information about the bomb to a “properly constituted international control commission.”⁸⁰

When attempting to understand the multitude of ways that Jews responded to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, one must keep in mind that there were many communities to take into consideration. From religiously minded Jews, to politically left-leaning socialists and communists, to secular Jewish intellectuals and scholar. Inevitably, one

⁷⁵ Levenstein, *The Atomic Age: Suicide, Slavery, or Social Planning?* 31.

⁷⁶ Levenstein, *The Atomic Age: Suicide, Slavery, or Social Planning?* 25.

⁷⁷ More on Norman Cousins in Chapter 3.

⁷⁸ Levenstein, *The Atomic Age: Suicide, Slavery, or Social Planning?* 26.

⁷⁹ Levenstein, *The Atomic Age: Suicide, Slavery, or Social Planning?* 29.

⁸⁰ “Synagogue Council of America Urges International Control of Atomic Energy” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*. November 11, 1945

would expect that they would respond differently to such a radical event in history. To make the situation even more difficult to accurately represent, Jewish culture in post-War America was going through a cultural shift. The chaos of navigating World War Two and reconciling the reality of the extent to which European Jewry was destroyed caused many cultural questions to be raised, if not implicitly.

Chapter Three: “Negative Theology”, Individuals in Focus

This chapter will focus on several individuals who reflect the trend in responses to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki demonstrated in the previous chapters. The hope is to explore the ways in which the response of the individual differs from that of a community, and to understand the ways in which community responses differed from individual responses. Because there are a so many prominent Jewish scholars and thinkers of the 20th century who expressed their thoughts about the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, many indispensable voices will not be able to be represented. In spotlighting certain individuals, the goal was to enhance the depth of understanding and to add nuance to the larger group responses.

Jacob Beser: Hiroshima and Nagasaki Crew

Jacob Beser was a crewmember on the both the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombing flights; he was the only person who served on both missions. Beser and Abe Spitzer⁸¹ (who flew on the Nagasaki mission with Beser) were the only crew members whose Jewish identity was confirmable. Beser rarely spoke about being Jewish in interviews, but his lifelong dedication to speaking about his experiences before, during, and after the bombings is integral to understanding the larger picture of how Jews responded to the bomb. In interviews and in his personal life, Beser had to defend his proximity to the decision to use the bomb and his enthusiastic participation in the event on a very regular basis, which he did very publically; very little of his testimony changed over time.

Jacob Beser was not raised in an orthodox Jewish home, but he described himself as

⁸¹ Abe Spitzer was indeed Jewish, though I chose not to include his responses to the bombings because they were not distinguished from other responses (Jewish and non-Jewish) in character or content.

being “religious” after the war ended.⁸² His relationship to his Jewish identity was strong before the war, and he enlisted with the intention of going to fight the war on the European front, stating that his family was being “chewed up”⁸³ in the war, adding that his father’s side of the family still had relatives in Germany, and his mother’s side had friends and family relations to Eastern Europe.⁸⁴ While Beser of course was not aware of the intention to use the atomic bomb at the time of his enlistment (or the ambitions of the United States to build one, etc.), his favorable view of the military was heavily influenced by the news about the Holocaust, and needless to say his personal relationship to the events in Europe.

For Beser, the morality of the decision to use the bomb was not complicated. Unlike the examples examined in the previous chapters, Beser did not believe that the (often Jewish) scientists were acting in an apolitical manner (in other words, he did not believe they were doing research for research’s sake). Beser believed that the scientists “knew exactly what they were doing”⁸⁵; the idea that they were reluctant participants or that they were conflicted in any way was not believable to him as he saw them as deliberately acting in solidarity with an effort to decisively end the war with a favorable outcome for the Allied powers.

When describing the bombing itself, Beser called it “uneventful”⁸⁶, and used unemotional language that could have been interchangeable with nearly any other military mission. Additionally, he claimed that he felt “nothing in particular”⁸⁷ when confronted with the images of the Hiroshima victims, but added that there a person feels “something else when it’s your family,”⁸⁸ which one can assume is a reference to how close he felt with the victims

⁸² Beser Foundation, Miscellaneous Interview Collection PDF.

<http://www.beserfoundation.org/New%20Folder/Jacob%20Beser%20Interviews/Miscellaneous%20Interviews.pdf>, 8.

⁸³ Beser Foundation, Miscellaneous Interview Collection PDF, 24.

⁸⁴ Beser Foundation, Miscellaneous Interview Collection PDF, 24.

⁸⁵ Beser Foundation, Miscellaneous Interview Collection PDF, 9.

⁸⁶ <http://manhattanprojectvoices.org/oral-histories/jacob-besers-lecture>

⁸⁷ Beser Foundation, Miscellaneous Interview Collection PDF, 9.

⁸⁸ Beser Foundation, Miscellaneous Interview Collection PDF, 9.

of Nazism in Europe. When listening to Beser interviews, one gets the impression that the issue was quite black and white for him, that he was not suffering the same moral crisis of other Jews responding to the atomic bombings. For him, a Jewish American in the air force, the bomb was simply the weapon that won the war; it being a new weapon with other potential technological or diplomatic uses was not a concern. Beser did not attempt to redeem the bomb by saying that the technology could be used in future civilian or industrial capacities; for Beser, the bomb worked to decisively end the war and that was enough to justify its use. Likewise, Beser did not make efforts to speculate on the potential future civilian applications of atomic technology, or express the sentiment that the bomb could be used for either good or bad, as was on the minds of many others.

That does not mean that Beser believed the atomic bombing of Japan was conventional warfare. Beser thought that the war itself was an extraordinary circumstance, unconventional in and of itself due to the unprecedented situation occurring under Nazism, that it therefore called for an unconventional solution. The first thing that struck him after the bombing was the “sheer nature of the thing,”⁸⁹ in other words, the fact that it had caused so much destruction with “one plane, one bomb, one city.”⁹⁰ When asked about radiation and the aftermath of the bombings, Beser said that he knew there was a radiation hazard at the Las Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, where he was briefed about the mission beforehand, but he did not hypothesize that there could be radiation effects after the bomb was dropped which would have effected civilian casualties.⁹¹ He further states that he would have thought differently if the bomb contained “poison gas”⁹² or another quality designed to deliberately enact prolonged suffering and death. Though Jacob Beser was always very supportive of the decision to drop the bomb, and insisted in several instances that he found it to be no different than any other

⁸⁹ Beser Foundation, Miscellaneous Interview Collection PDF, 12.

⁹⁰ Beser Foundation, Miscellaneous Interview Collection PDF, 12.

⁹¹ Beser Foundation, Miscellaneous Interview Collection PDF, 12.

⁹² Beser Foundation, Miscellaneous Interview Collection PDF, 12.

wartime casualty, he did once mention that after the bombing of Nagasaki, that there was a sense on board the plane that no one wanted to do anything like that ever again.⁹³

Jacob Beser attempted to keep his reaction to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as uncomplicated as possible; it is when he would comment on the more complicated aspects of the bombing (for example, the fact that the war was ending in Europe or the effects of radiation in the aftermath) that he would begin to provide less stern testimony to his experience and the convictions associated with it.

Gunther Anders, His Correspondence with Claude Eatherly, and the “Commandments in the Atomic Age”:

Gunther Anders was a Jewish philosopher who became an anti-nuclear activist, and who came to have a long correspondence with Claude Eatherly, a pilot who flew a support plane for the Hiroshima mission. Anders left Europe to go to the United States during the rise of Nazism with his wife at the time, Hannah Arendt, though he returned to Europe in 1950. After the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Eatherly was in quite a large amount of mental distress. Eatherly’s condition was well known among crew that were associated with the bombings because of his behavior afterwards. Anders’s correspondence with Eatherly happened many years after the bombing, between the years of 1959 to 1961.

On July 2, 1959, Anders responded to a letter from Eatherly, who was by then in the hospital, by including his “Commandments in the Atomic Age”, which outlined Anders’s philosophical musings on the ways in which everyday thinking had changed since the debut of atomic technology. These are not *atomic commandments*, or commandments about atomic science and technology; they are *commandments in the atomic age*. The difference is subtle

⁹³ Beser Foundation, Miscellaneous Interview Collection PDF, 10.

but significant. Commandments in the Atomic Age implies that the “atomic age” has modified the commandments, whereas atomic commandments would have left the possibility to exist alongside other types of commandments. The word “commandment” has an obvious religious connotation, referring to the ten commandments given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Anders made many other religious references during the correspondence, in fact.

The first commandment is that upon waking in the morning, one’s first thought should be “atom.”⁹⁴ Anders described the function of this thought as being a sort of reminder of one’s mortality.⁹⁵ “Nothing will have been... as our ancestors had hoped, an episode between two eternities; but one between two nothingnesses...”⁹⁶ The atom, for Anders, in all its scientific implications, revealed a new story of Creation and a new story of being. The second “commandment” concerns the “Apocalypse”, in which Anders describes man having a responsibility to do the “work”⁹⁷ of the apocalypse but in which man is unable to decipher who is in control or how they are controlling the direction of the apocalypse. This in turn creates a gap between the actions of man and the imagination of man, according to Anders. Since the development of atomic science and technology, Anders wrote in his *Commandments* that “the classical relation between imagination and action has reversed itself. While our ancestors had considered it a truism that imagination exceeds and surpasses reality, today the capacity of our imagination (and that of our feeling and responsibility) cannot compete with that of our praxis.”⁹⁸ One can see here that Anders was concerned with the inability of people to understand the “atom”, and how that could paralyze discussion and potential courses of action for riding the world of the threat of atomic warfare.

⁹⁴ Robert Jungk, *Burning Conscience: The Case of the Hiroshima Pilot Claude Eatherly, As Told in His Letters to Gunther Anders*. (Burning Conscience: The Case of the Hiroshima Pilot Claude Eatherly, As Told in His Letters to Gunther Anders. (Rowohlt Verlag, Hamburg, 1961), 11.

⁹⁵ While I cannot find evidence that Gunther Anders was influenced by Jewish prayers directly, I was personally reminded of the *modeh ani* prayer that religious Jews say first thing upon waking, which also emphasizes the theme of mortality.

⁹⁶ Jungk, *Burning Conscience*, 11.

⁹⁷ Jungk, *Burning Conscience*, 11.

⁹⁸ Jungk, *Burning Conscience*, 12.

The next *commandment*, Anders asserts, was to recognize that the discovery of the atom means that “we humans are smaller than ourselves”⁹⁹ and that this should make people aware of their “limitlessness” and in turn “terrify” them.¹⁰⁰ This, Anders hoped, would prepare the person to “widen” their “moral fantasy.”¹⁰¹ These bizarre existential thoughts were meant to prepare the person for Anders’s main concern, which was that people were surrounded by fear in the atomic age, but were allowed no outlet with which to express that fear. He called this “the age of inability to fear”, which he attributed to what he dubbed the “competence-craze”¹⁰² which developed in the atomic age. Anders was worried that knowledge and skills were becoming so specialized and esoteric that people no longer felt permitted to be afraid; likewise, the responsibilities of different parties were so compartmentalized that people felt as though they did not need to worry about what was happening in outside the domain of their immediate responsibility and expertise. Those who claimed that they were the gatekeepers of competency, Anders nicknamed “Clerics of the Apocalypse”.¹⁰³ Because the situation was classified by what one could not understand, what one could not articulate, what one could not conceive of, Anders referred to his proposed response as “negative theology.”¹⁰⁴

It is not until the concept of negative theology was introduced that Anders specifically referenced atomic bombs. A mindful reader and scholar of nuclear history would be able to immediately identify the concept of “negative theology” as an abstracted interpretation of the concept of nuclear deterrence. Anders argued that people should not believe that “the thing serves as a deterrent (to itself).”¹⁰⁵ He states:

“Articles, the usage of which exhaust themselves in their non-usage have never

⁹⁹ Jungk, *Burning Conscience*, 12.

¹⁰⁰ Jungk, *Burning Conscience*, 12.

¹⁰¹ Jungk, *Burning Conscience*, 13.

¹⁰² Jungk, *Burning Conscience*, 14.

¹⁰³ Jungk, *Burning Conscience*, 15.

¹⁰⁴ Jungk, *Burning Conscience*, 15.

¹⁰⁵ Jungk, *Burning Conscience*, 16.

existed. At best articles which sometimes were not used, for instance, when the mere threat proved sufficient. Besides we must, of course, never forget that the thing already (and that with no adequate justification) has been used in fact—at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.”¹⁰⁶

Anders attempted to criticize the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki through a type of existentialism which he dressed in the religious frame of “commandments”. By framing his interpretation and ideas in a religious context, Anders delivered even more symbolic meaning into his ideas. Anders was arguing that the atomic age had become an integral part of the moral and social fabric of society, one which so permeated everyday thinking that it was almost taken for granted. Additionally, the religious framing speaks to the metaphysical existence of the atom; in many ways it was everywhere and no where in Anders’s view. And lastly, the atom became a political and cultural frame of reference, influencing many spheres of society, as Anders addressed the many ways in which people felt their domains of authority had shifted since the atomic age began.

Norman Cousins:

Like Gunther Anders, Norman Cousins believed that the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was a game changer for not only the norms of warfare but for the entirety of human civilization. Whereas Anders believed that the bomb changed how people fundamentally think and engage with everyday issues in society, Cousins believed that the atomic bomb created the need for an international system of government.

When asked what his reaction to the atomic bombings was, Cousins said it was as though “a blanket of obsolescence had been thrown over human history, because all the things that human beings did, in terms of civilization, suddenly seemed to have no validity because

¹⁰⁶ Jungk, *Burning Conscience*, 16.

there was now no mechanism by which human beings could provide for a reasonably secure future.”¹⁰⁷ He went on to further describe that the “habits of war” and the “habits of thinking about relations between nations” had not changed, and therefore humanity was “trapped”¹⁰⁸ in terms of its options for reconciling the new reality of a world in which atomic weapons existed. Cousins believed that modernity and all the fruits of modernity were not compatible with the existence of such potentially destructive weapons, and therefore mankind had to rise to the challenge of the atomic age by adapting to its new circumstances.

Cousins throughout his life proposed that the most important change to make the world safer in the atomic age would entail a shift from the dominance of the nation state and its traditional roles to the creation of an international system of government that would control atomic knowledge and information, as well as of course atomic materials; that was the major thesis of his editorial (later published as a small book) titled “Modern Man is Obsolete”, which Cousins wrote the week that Hiroshima and Nagasaki was bombed. The concept of a world governing system of was very important to Cousins for the prevention of future war involving atomic bombs. Much of his latter peace advocacy was centered around this concept. Cousins founded the Hiroshima Maidens project, which provided reconstructive surgery to victims of the bombing, and focused the majority of his early activism on providing relief for the victims of the bombing. Cousins did not blame the citizens of the United States for the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and he also did not blame the scientists, who he believed acted in good faith to ensure that the atomic bomb was not used recklessly.¹⁰⁹

In 1949, Cousins gave a speech to the “Cultural and Scientific Conference of World Peace” which was later published as a short editorial piece titled, “Tell the Folks Back Home.” In this piece he outlines the need for the world to put aside the concept of nation when dealing

¹⁰⁷ Henry Kreisler, *The Quest for Peace: A Conversation with Norman Cousins*.
[Http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/conversations/Cousins/](http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/conversations/Cousins/). 1984.

¹⁰⁸ Kreisler, *A Conversation with Norman Cousins*

¹⁰⁹ Kreisler, *A Conversation with Norman Cousins*

with the issue of peace and focus on the concept of ‘people’. He stated that when concepts like nation, national identity, ideology, etc., were prioritized over human rights which were applicable to everyone, that there could not be a foundation upon which peace could be built. A major concern of his was that the United States and others had veto power in the United Nations; he argued that no nation should have a veto option, theorizing that vetoes made it unnecessary for countries to cooperate with one another, and could then skew the balance of power. Cousins was a strong believer that American leaders had a “dangerous narcissism” which lead them to believe that no other country was capable of producing nuclear weapons; he feared that underestimating the capabilities of the Soviet Union would lead to an avoidable arms race.¹¹⁰ In this speech Cousins was primarily concerned with communicating to the world that the American political landscape was not monolithic, and that the political views of Americans have a large degree of variation. He said, “Tell the folks back home that it is a lie to say that any single group dominates the thoughts or actions of the American people—not excluding Wall Street or the American Communist Party...Say that to Americans, democracy means the sacred right to make mistakes and the even greater right to correct them.”¹¹¹

For Norman Cousins, the reaction to the atomic bombings was similar to others but distinguished in several ways. While most others make at least some reference to the European front and the atrocities happening there, Cousins notably does not. There is not a connection between the need to defeat Japan and the need to stop suffering in Europe in the response of Norman Cousins. He saw the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in a way that focused solely on the human aspect and not on the labels that contextualized it.

¹¹⁰ Kreisler, *A Conversation with Norman Cousins*

¹¹¹ Norman Cousins, *Tell the Folks Back Home: Peoples Are More Important Than Nations*. 1949.

Robert Jay Lifton:

Psychiatrist and historian Robert Jay Lifton dedicated almost his entire career to documenting the psychological effects of the atomic bombings of Japan. Lifton describes his grandparents as having been “progressive” Jews from Russian “shtetls”, which he says impacted his perspective on the world very much.¹¹² Lifton recalled being “stunned and pleased” when hearing the news of the atomic bombing of Japan, because he thought it meant that the war would finally end, a reaction he later felt very ashamed of.¹¹³ Lifton felt very influenced by his father’s sense of ethics and justice, as well as his father’s anti-orthodox Judaism sentiments (which he recalls his grandparents were “very steeped in”¹¹⁴). Despite this secular influence, Lifton describes his Jewish identity as informing his sense of ethics particularly in regards to the events of World War Two, even stating that the orthodoxy he experienced through his grandparents had an “ethnic idea about human beings, that they ought to be treated well.”¹¹⁵

It was not until 1962 that Lifton began to take an interest in those effected by the Hiroshima blast in a professional manner, but that did not mean it did not remain a deeply personal issue for him. In fact, when Lifton began his research into the psychological responses of Hiroshima victims, his understanding of his relationship to the Holocaust as a Jew deepened. “I realized the symbolization of life and the symbolization of death was what we are all about,”¹¹⁶ Lifton said. He later went on to study the psychology of Nazi doctors and the “psychology of genocide.” In studying the Nazi doctors after studying Hiroshima, Lifton came to a more thorough understanding of his connection to the two topics. He said,

¹¹² Henry Kreisler, *Conversations with History: Evil, the Self, and Survival* (Institute of International Studies, UC Berkeley. November 2, 1999.) <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/people/Lifton/lifton-con1.html>.

¹¹³ Kreisler, *Evil, the Self, and Survival*

¹¹⁴ Kreisler, *Evil, the Self, and Survival*

¹¹⁵ Kreisler, *Evil, the Self, and Survival*

¹¹⁶ Kreisler, *Evil, the Self, and Survival*

“I came to see that the combination of my being a Jew and the Holocaust and its influence on my life very early on affected my way of responding to nuclear weapons and the Hiroshima experience.”¹¹⁷ This in turn further cemented Lifton’s concept that the idea of death was a totalizing symbol which constantly loomed over those who are within its proximity.

The effect of death in these unique encounters, Lifton argues, is “layered”. First, the person experiencing the traumatic event is entirely immersed in it, and is powerless to find reprieve. The next layer is in the form of mysterious illnesses and physical symptoms which cause the victim to feel as though death is lurking. The third layer is involves an extended “disease” that lasts for years reminding the victim of their traumatic experience and their inability to escape it; in the case of Hiroshima, it was a literal disease, in the form of cancers and other varieties of “A-bomb Disease”.¹¹⁸ Additionally, part of Lifton’s observation regarding the response to traumas like Hiroshima and the Holocaust are in regards to the common ways victims would attempt to extract meaning out of their experiences. Survivors create a “mission” according to Lifton, like the peace groups which Hiroshima survivors are known to join. Lifton enthusiastically acknowledges that Holocaust survivors share a pattern of behavior which is quite parallel to those of Hiroshima survivors. The “mission” parallel to this according to Lifton is the creation of the State of Israel.^{119 120} Interestingly enough, Lifton is also interested in the category of atomic scientist as a type of survivor of the trauma of Hiroshima.¹²¹ Lifton argues that the experience of the scientist is something that was emblematic of the larger social experience of witnessing the bombing of Hiroshima (which

¹¹⁷ Kreisler, *Evil, the Self, and Survival*

¹¹⁸ Robert Jay Lifton, *Nuclear Energy and the Wisdom of The Body*, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, September 1976, 17.

¹¹⁹ Lifton, *Nuclear Energy and the Wisdom of The Body*, 18.

¹²⁰ I am surprised by this; I am unsure about why Lifton does not use a more analogous example, like Holocaust survivors participating in anti-genocide campaigns. His rationale seems to be based in part on the fact that Hiroshima and Israel are both physical places where the layers of trauma could unfold. He states that the “many-sided tragic dimensions of the Middle East is that all of the protagonists have the sense of being survivors.” On page 18 of the same article as footnote 36.

¹²¹ Lifton, *Nuclear Energy and the Wisdom of The Body*, 19.

Lifton refers to as the “atomic holocaust”¹²² with a lower-case ‘h’). In analyzing the reaction of the scientists to the atomic bombing, Lifton believes one can gain insight into the broader civilian response because of the ways in which scientists were at once caught between the scientific integrity of their work and how it intersected with their more general participation in society.

¹²² Lifton, *Nuclear Energy and the Wisdom of The Body*, 19.

Conclusion

*“Is there a proper “Jewish” attitude towards the atomic bomb? Was Japan ready to surrender to the allies well before the bomb was dropped? Was the atomic energy commission justified in refusing clearance to J. Robert Oppenheimer? These questions—and many others—are raised and answered, not always satisfactorily...”*¹²³

Before the atomic bombing of Japan, a shift in cultural attitudes in America among Jews was already taking place. The rise of Nazism through the 1930s and the intensifying race relations in the United States created an atmosphere which prompted many Jewish communities to engage in reexamining their relationship to the dominant power structure.¹²⁴ Jews began to lose faith that their position in American society was maintainable; they saw what happened to the German Jewish community and wondered if assimilation was the right decision, or conversely if any degree of distinctiveness was worth maintaining.¹²⁵ The ongoing news about the Holocaust undoubtedly deepened these feelings.

When the atomic bombing of Japan occurred, there was a sense that a new chapter of history had been opened, and along with it came new responsibilities as well as new opportunities. Norman Cousins expressed that the atomic age made the traditional role of the nation state obsolete, and Robert Jay Lifton echoes that from a cultural and psychological standpoint. Lifton argues that the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima destroyed the “sense of connection men have long felt with the vital and nourishing symbols in their cultural traditions, the sense of connection with their own history.”¹²⁶ Lifton also makes a point similar

¹²³ Harold Ticktin, Untitled Archived Clip, *Pittsburgh Jewish Criterion*, 1954.

¹²⁴ Susan Glenn, *The Vogue of Jewish Self-Hatred in Post-World War II America*. Indiana University Press. *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3. 2006. 100.

¹²⁵ Glenn, *The Vogue of Jewish Self-Hatred in Post-World War II America*. 102.

¹²⁶ Robert Jay Lifton, *Explorations in Psychohistory*, Simon and Schuster. 1974. 38.

to Gunther Anders regarding his argument that the atomic age left people trapped in a space of historical “betweenness”. Lifton continues in saying that since the bombing of Hiroshima and its psychological effect, “we hunger for both connection and transcendence, we have need to experiment with the historical and antihistorical boundaries of both.”¹²⁷

In the examples provided, one can see the ways in which Jews struggled with both the literal and symbolic collapse of their history; something which they had to navigate alongside the collapse Lifton argues the world experienced after the bombing of Hiroshima. There was of course not a literal collapse of society and nations because of the atomic age (though relations between nations dramatically changed during the Cold War and the arms race later), but there were radical changes, and more importantly there were radical unknowns about the future to come. Jews often tried to reconcile these two traumas, which occurred during a time when Jewish culture in the United States was broadly in transition already. The attempt at dealing with both the Holocaust and with the atomic bombing of Japan in the same historic moment was not always successful, and many of the editorial responses were not able to stick the landing in making their point. Likewise, even brilliant philosophers like Gunther Anders who specialized in trauma and the philosophy of technology struggled to clearly articulate their point, and their works often seemed confused and unfocused.

At the time of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Jewish people had many political and social priorities that were not always compatible with one another. The unique experience of World War Two filtered much of the responses to the bombings, but to varying degrees. At first, the bomb could only be understood within the context of the war, and the war was something which could not be divided from the destruction of European Jewish civilization. It was easy for people to gravitate towards details about the refugee scientists for this reason; it helped to create a more complete narrative which was easier to

¹²⁷ Lifton, *Explorations in Psychohistory*, 38.

understand and write about.

There was a common pattern of logic which laid the foundation for the responses of Jews, particularly in the immediate weeks and months after the atomic bombing of Japan. First and foremost, Jews were concerned about whether or not the bomb was the difference maker that would finally end the war. Second, Jews were interested in the relationship between the persecution of Jewish scientists from Europe and the success of the bomb project; this interest seemed to be both a matter of recreational interest (morale building, or even perhaps an interesting distraction from the rest of the rather dark news of the time), as well as a point of almost literary irony. The third and most important commonality between responses was the “fork in the road” concept, which articulated the idea that mankind had a “choice” to make about whether to use atomic technology for constructive or destructive purposes in the future.

There were also many types of responses which were anticipated but not found in this research effort. There was little effort made by actors to draw upon historic Jewish intellectuals, religious authorities, etc., as justification for their thoughts and opinions about the atomic bombing; the only exceptions to this were of course when it was a prominent intellectual or authority responding. However, there was heavy reliance on the perceived wisdom of the refugee atomic scientists and famous physicists like Einstein; this was a recurring topic in responses. The lack of an attempt to contextualize and legitimize their opinion by means of the vast number of Jewish intellectuals (or really, any intellectuals at all), is in many ways a testimony to the true uniqueness of the events considered; in many ways, there was no intellectual precedent for processing such a monumental event.

There were factors which were hypothesized to be indicators of what types of responses would occur, which were only partially observed in the represented findings. Belief in God and spirituality did not seem to be a reliable predictor in the way Jews responded to

the bomb; both secular Jews and religious Jews had responses approving and disapproving of the decision to use the bomb to varying degrees. Additionally, proximity to the war in Europe did not seem to be a reliable predictor of response type. This was particularly interesting due to the common idea that the bomb was part of the effort to stop the war.

Several limitations existed which affected the representation of Jewish responses to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The major obstacle was addressing the issue of scope, and the possible depth into which the question could be taken. It was not possible to extract a large number of potentially repetitive and insignificant responses for the purpose of scope; therefore, the responses were chosen based on their ability to contribute unique qualities to the attempt to answer the questions at hand, rather than representing dozens of responses with little more to contribute than acknowledgement that the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Japan. Similarly, the individuals in focus in chapter 3 were selected with the same idea in mind. They did not necessarily need to have a relationship to their Jewish identity which explicitly influenced their ideas, but it was important that the ideas they expressed in the aftermath of the war went beyond expressing anti-war sentiments (or pro-bombing sentiments) and represented a more vibrant understanding of Jewish responses. Because of this goal, scope was not a priority but giving priority to examples which would provide insight and foster thought for further research was prioritized.

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