

Articles

Applying Taurek's 'Should the Numbers Count?' to (un)justify Hiroshima and Nagasaki: A combination of historiography and applied ethics

Tets Kimura

Abstract

There is a belief that the use of the atomic bombs caused the end of the Pacific War and thus saved many lives. However, historical accounts indicate that the war could have ended less destructively. A greater number of Japanese civilians died from the atomic bombs than the expected casualties of American soldiers – casting doubt on justification for Hiroshima and Nagasaki. However, Taurek's 'Should the Numbers Count?' reveals that numbers may not necessarily play a role in making a moral decision. This paper examines Taurek's ethical arguments in relation to the historical events and concludes that, while Taurek's argument may appear plausible, his philosophical ideas do not adequately justify the use of the atomic bombs.

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In August 1945, two atomic bombs were released over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The catastrophic damage led to the destruction of whole cities. Records of local Hiroshima and Nagasaki governments show that more than 210,000 victims were killed within the first months.¹

¹ For Hiroshima, see '1945 nen 8 gatsu 6 ka: Haikyo no Hiroshima,' Hiroshima Heiwa Kinen Shiryokan (Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum), accessed 8 April

Heartbreaking stories have been recorded,² for example, as illustrated by the testimony of a sixteen-year-old boy, Akira Onogi:

We found this small girl crying and she asked us to help her mother. Just beside the girl, her mother was trapped by a fallen beam...we had no choice but to leave her. She was conscious and we deeply bowed to her with clasped hands to apologise to her and then we left.³

This story, sadly, is only the tip of the iceberg. Those who survived suffered from radioactive fallout, and there have been impacts on future generations because of genetic damage. The ‘Hibakusha’, (the label commonly given to atomic bomb survivors) have often experienced social discrimination including inability to gain employment. In addition there has been damage to the environment. Shortly after the nuclear attack, newspaper editorials all over the world (including those in the United States and the United Kingdom) expressed concerns about the catastrophic weapon.⁴ The tragedy has influenced our feelings regarding the inhumanity of the destructive weapon. However, the United States (US) President Harry S. Truman justified his decision to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, by arguing that they ended the Pacific War and saved many lives including those of American soldiers.⁵ Even in the twenty-first century, the crew who were responsible for atomic bombing of

2013, <http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/outline/index.php?l=J&cid=18>. For Nagasaki, see ‘Genbaku no Iryoku: Genbaku Saigai Hokoku,’ Nagasaki City, accessed 8 April 2013, <http://www1.city.nagasaki.nagasaki.jp/peace/japanese/record/iryoku.html>.

² See Kyoko Selden and Mark Selden, eds., *The Atomic Bomb: Voices from Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1989); James V. Neel and William J. Schull, eds., *The Children of Atomic Bomb Survivors: A Genetic Study* (Washington DC: National Academy Press, 1991).

³ ‘Testimony of Akira Onogi,’ Voice of Hibakusha, accessed 8 April 2013, <http://www.inicom.com/hibakusha/akira.html>.

⁴ G. V. Portus, ‘The Atom Bomb and the World,’ in *The Atomic Age*. Kerr Grant and G. V. Portus (Adelaide: United Nations Association, South Australian Division, 1946).

⁵ Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs: Volume 1 Year of Decisions* (New York: The New American Library, 1965).

Hiroshima publically admitted that they ‘have no regrets.’⁶ Ideas such as utilitarianism and political expediency have been used to justify this decision.

This paper will examine the historical background of the atomic bombing and discuss its moral justification. Jonathan Dancy argues that ‘to have the relevant sensitivities just is to be able to get things right case by case.’⁷ Applied ethics which has become an active philosophical activity since Peter Singer became noted four decades ago,⁸ is used to theorise this paper. Due to the massive destruction caused by nuclear weapons, not just to the current generation but future generations and the environment, the justification of atomic bombing is one of the biggest challenges to morality. Although the justification of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has been discussed by researchers including but not limited to Gar Alperovitz,⁹ Barton F. Bernstein¹⁰ and Tsuyoshi Hasegawa¹¹, historical accounts, instead of moral philosophy, have stayed at the centre of these discussions. Almost seventy years has passed since the tragedy, yet historians are unable to reach a consensus.¹² Because it is unlikely that any new documents will be discovered,¹³ it is time to find an alternative method to analyse the justification of the atomic bombings. This paper challenges the existing debate on what historical events made

⁶ ‘Enola Gay crew “have no regrets”’, *BBC*, 4 August 2005, accessed 12 February 2014, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4743061.stm>.

⁷ Jonathan Dancy, *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 64.

⁸ See: James Rachels and Stuart Rachels, eds., *The Right Thing to Do*, 4th ed, (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2007), 138.

⁹ Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1965).

¹⁰ Barton F. Bernstein, ‘The Atomic Bombings Reconsidered’ *Foreign Affairs*, 74:1 (1995), 135-152.

¹¹ Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* (Cambridge: The Belnap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

¹² For example, see: ‘H-Diplo Roundtable- Racing the Enemy Roundtable’ *H-Diplo Roundtables*, 7:2 (2006), accessed 12 February 2014, <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/archived-roundtables.html>.

¹³ Gar Alperovitz, ‘H-Diplo Roundtable- Racing the Enemy Roundtable, Alperovitz on Hasegawa’ *H-Diplo Roundtables*, 7:2 (2006), 9, accessed 12 February 2014, <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Alperovitz-HasegawaRoundtable.pdf>.

Japanese surrender. History, things which happened in the past, are taken as factual events only. This paper acknowledges that three historical factors, the *unconditional* surrender requested of Japan, the entry of the Soviet Union (the USSR) into the war, and the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, each affected the Japanese decision to announce the end of the war on 15 August 1945, not earlier or later. Furthermore, this paper also acknowledges that there was a race between the US and the USSR to gain the upper hand in the post-war situation. International politics is like a game of chess, although not the two dimensional game that is known to us but that of multi-dimensions, thus it would have been illogical if the leaders were not considering the post war situation. Aside from historiography, John M. Taurek's use of applied ethics theory in his article 'Should the Numbers Count?'¹⁴ seems best suited to morally justify the use of the atomic bombs. He argues that we are morally permitted to save *ourselves* even though the casualty of others is larger.

What could be the justification for dropping atomic bombs?

In order to state moral justifications in general, well-recognised ethicists such as James Rachels¹⁵ and Adam Morton¹⁶ use dot points. This form provides a step-by-step explanation that can be easily understood. This paper combines this style of moral philosophy and Truman's thoughts, which could be best postulated after reading his book,¹⁷ to justify dropping the atomic bombs. This is how the argument follows.

- 1) It is morally right for American soldiers not to be killed unnecessarily, as they are innocent people.

¹⁴ John M. Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?' *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 6:4 (1977), 293-316.

¹⁵ James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1999).

¹⁶ Adam Morton, *Philosophy in Practice: An Introduction to the Main Questions*, 2nd ed. (Malden: Blackwell, 2003).

¹⁷ Truman, *Memoirs*.

- 2) Invasion of the main islands of Japan will cause the death of 25,000 – 46,000 American soldiers.¹⁸
- 3) Thus, it is morally acceptable to act somehow in order to avoid the invasion, hence the subsequent deaths.
- 4) Consequently, the American leaders had asked Japan to surrender *unconditionally*.
- 5) However, as Japan did not accept this, it was right to try ending the war some other way and avoid the need for invasion.
- 6) Atomic bombing of Japan would likely end the war.
- 7) Thus, it was morally right to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima *and* Nagasaki to end the war.

Although this argument seems to flow, there are three objections that make it difficult to employ. First, *conditional* surrender could have been proposed to Japan instead *unconditional* surrender. Second, the use of atomic bombs on both Hiroshima and Nagasaki could have been avoided. Last, the disproportionate number of Japanese deaths and other destruction from the atomic bombs does not seem morally defensible.

Why unconditional surrender?

As the ‘kill ratio’ between the US and Japanese was one to twenty four towards the end of the war (between March 1944 and April

¹⁸ Bernstein, ‘The Atomic Bombings Reconsidered,’ 149. Also note that The US government revealed *after* the war that ‘prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945 (when the invasion was planned), Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated.’ – but the invasion was an active plan at the late stage of the war. See: ‘United States Strategic Bombing Survey Report: Summary Report (Pacific War)’, Washington D.C., 1 July 1946, 26, accessed 4 February 2014, <http://www.anesi.com/ussbs01.htm>.

1945),¹⁹ it was no longer a matter of who would win the war, but when. Japan's unconditional surrender was first requested on 26 July 1945 in the Potsdam Proclamation, after the meeting of three political leaders; the US President Truman, the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and USSR leader Joseph Stalin.²⁰ Although conditional surrender could have been requested, it might have been seen as too lenient by the US citizens. Unconditional language was politically important for Truman to build his political security, as he was only a newly appointed (not elected) president after the sudden death of his predecessor, Franklin D. Roosevelt.²¹ On the other hand, for the Japanese leaders, the language of unconditional surrender would have been a difficult political pill to swallow.

Additionally for the US, it was important that the \$2 billion atomic bomb project not be seen as a waste but significant – politically the revolutionary weapon needed to be used to end the war. The use of the atomic bombs in nowhere remote location, such as a deserted island, to scare the enemy off was not considered adequate. Therefore, the weapon 'had to be used against an enemy target.'²² By late April 1945, the atomic bomb target was focussed on four cities, based on the idea of 'large urban areas of not less than three miles in diameter existing in the larger populated areas.'²³

Meanwhile in Japan, by early May, the Emperor (the official head of the Japanese Empire who approved the decisions of his advisors), was becoming flexible regarding possible surrender.²⁴ The Emperor had a meeting with Japanese cabinet officials on 22 June and personally opened the proceedings by declaring that it was necessary

¹⁹ Selden and Selden, *The Atomic Bomb*.

²⁰ Neel and Schull, *The Children of Atomic Bomb Survivors*, 454.

²¹ Gar Alperovitz, 'Hiroshima: Historians Reassess,' *Foreign Policy*, no. 99 (1995), 26.

²² Truman, *Memoirs*, 462.

²³ Bernstein, 'The Atomic Bombings Reconsidered,' 140.

²⁴ 'United States Strategic Bombing Survey Report: Summary Report (Pacific War)', 25-26.

to consider the end of the war by negotiation.²⁵ It is plausible that if the Potsdam Proclamation was ‘softer’, Japan could have surrendered before the atomic bombing. The US Acting Secretary of State Joseph C. Grew even asked Truman to consider being flexible but sections embodying such flexibility were deleted from the final draft of the Proclamation.²⁶ The proposal of unconditional surrender possibly played a role in delaying Japan’s decision to surrender, whereas an offer of a conditional surrender may have produced a more timely decision. In fact, the future entry of USSR into the war, made it even more likely that Japan would have surrendered without the use of atomic bombs.²⁷

Why Hiroshima and Nagasaki

The war entered its very final stage in August 1945. Hiroshima was destroyed on 6 August. The Emperor most likely learnt about the nuclear attack on the next day, and became ‘increasingly articulate and urgent in expressing his wish for peace.’²⁸ On 9 August, there were additional ‘twin shocks’²⁹: Nagasaki became the second nuclear victim and the USSR broke the Russo-Japanese Neutrality Pact and declared war on Japan, as agreed with the US in Potsdam,³⁰ Churchill said, ‘when Russia came into the war against Japan, the Japanese would probably wish to get out on almost any terms short of the dethronement of the Emperor.’³¹ It was now plausible that Japan would have surrendered anyway. However in the US, there was ‘no indication that the decision to drop the second bomb was ever

²⁵ Robert A. Pape, ‘Why Japan Surrendered’ *International Security*, 18:2 (1993), 184, 185.

²⁶ Sadao Asada, ‘The Shock of the Atomic Bomb and Japan’s Decision to Surrender – A Reconsideration’ *Pacific Historical Review*, 67:4 (1998), 500.

²⁷ See: Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy*.

²⁸ Asada, ‘The Shock of the Atomic Bomb and Japan’s Decision to Surrender,’ 487.

²⁹ Asada, ‘The Shock of the Atomic Bomb and Japan’s Decision to Surrender,’ 490.

³⁰ Pape, ‘Why Japan Surrendered,’ 177. Note also that although USSR’s entry to the war took place earlier than originally planned and that was between 20 and 25 August see Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy*, 178.

³¹ Alperovitz, ‘Hiroshima,’ 21.

reconsidered... and no one thought it necessary to change the course because of the Soviet entry into the war.³² Truman learnt about the USSR's action before the B29 that was to bomb Nagasaki had left an airbase,³³ and it was still technically able to jettison the atomic bomb to abort the mission after the take-off.³⁴ However, no action was taken to avoid the second nuclear attack.

Meanwhile in Tokyo, discussion to accept possible unconditional surrender started in the late morning of 9 August – the news of Nagasaki nuclear attack was delivered during the meeting but had little impact on the decision making.³⁵ Around 2am on 10 August, Japanese leaders finally had concluded that it would be more than likely that they would accept the Potsdam Proclamation. However, even though the atomic bombs and the USSR's entry into the war had clearly caused Japan to surrender, they did not discuss directly whether either event caused the surrender.³⁶ Japan's unconditional surrender was decided officially on 14 August, and made public on the following day.

American political leaders were concerned that if the USSR's entry clearly caused an end to the war, the USSR would have insisted on their right to occupy a part of Japan (just like eastern Germany was claimed since the USSR's contribution to win against Germany was undeniable).³⁷ Therefore, it has been said that the atomic bombs saved Japan's future from communists. The USSR continued attacking Japanese territories even after the announcement of the end of the war. For example, on 18 August, the USSR forces began landing at Shimushu, the northern end of archipelago of Kuril Islands, kilometres away from the Kamchatka Peninsula. The invasion went on and by early September, the USSR occupied all the Kuril

³² Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy*, 194.

³³ Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy*, 194.

³⁴ Robert S. Norris, *Racing for the Bomb: General Leslie R. Groves, the Manhattan Project's Indispensable Man* (South Royalton: Steerforth, 2002), 421-424.

³⁵ Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy*, 204.

³⁶ Bernstein, 'The Atomic Bombings Reconsidered,' 133-134.

³⁷ James R. Van de Velde, 'Opinion: The Enola Gay Saved Lives' *Political Science Quarterly*, 110:3 (1995), 457.

Island,³⁸ but did not land on Hokkaido which is only kilometres away from the southern end of Kuril Islands. If this operation had escalated, there was a possibility that part or whole Hokkaido might have fallen under communism). By using the atomic bombs, the US could claim that the cause to end the war was atomic bombing, rather than the USSR's entry into the war. Japan was politically controlled by the Allies, led by the US until 1952.

However, even if these claims regarding communism were true, the use of two atomic bombs was still morally questionable. It may be that the impact of Hiroshima would have been strong enough for the Japanese leaders to consider unconditional surrender. The atomic bomb was a revolutionary weapon. After the first atomic bomb, 'some [Japanese] civilian leaders were immediately convinced that Japan could not sustain this new form of warfare.'³⁹ Similarly, the use of one or two atomic bombs would have made no difference to the USSR, because at that time, they did not have the technology to build a nuclear weapon. Thus, it is likely that the use of two atomic bombs was unnecessary, as one atomic bomb would have made a huge impact on both Japan and the USSR.

Unequal numbers/one-sided utilitarianism

The third objection is related to a form of utilitarian account: utilitarianism stands for the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest amount of people. In earlier 1945, it can be argued that the greatest good was achieved by ending the war. As has been mentioned in this paper, the war could have ended in ways other than it did. Even if it did not, the justification to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is morally explained by 'one-sided utilitarianism', not even full utilitarianism. The justification of killing the Japanese people to save the American lives can only be accepted by the Americans and for the Americans, thus ignoring the moral rights of the Japanese people.

³⁸ Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy*, 289.

³⁹ Pape, 'Why Japan Surrendered,' 176.

Furthermore, the number of Japanese casualties was far larger than the expected casualties of the American soldiers. For example, the American casualties from the invasion of the Japanese main islands were expected to be between 25,000 and 46,000. On the other hand, no fewer than 210,000 victims died as a result of the atomic bombs. Additionally, many more thousands of survivors as well as their future generations suffered from the impact of radioactivity.

However, unlike the moral failings identified in historical events (the proposal of unconditional surrender and the use of two atomic bombs), the unequal numbers might be justified by adopting Taurek's argument 'Should the Numbers Count?'.⁴⁰

You are entitled to save one/s you like

Taurek's view is best explained in the David example. In this example, David, who is 'someone I know and like'⁴¹ is in danger of losing his arm, and a stranger experiences a near death situation (such as terminal cancer). According to Taurek, it is typically believed that you should save the stranger's life rather than David's arm if there is only one medication that can save either David's arm or the stranger's life.⁴² However, Taurek argues that this is not always the case.

Taurek argues that if the choice were up to David, he would morally be permitted to save his arm rather than the stranger's life as this is in his own interest. It is natural for an individual to take care of their own interest rather than someone else's. Consequently, Taurek says, 'unless it is for some reason morally impermissible for one person to take the same interest in another's welfare as he himself takes in it, it must be permissible for me, in the absence of special obligations to the contrary, to choose the outcome that is in [David's] best interest.'⁴³ You would be morally permitted to take care of David's welfare, unless it is your duty to take care of the stranger, as much as David himself permissibly takes care of himself, especially if

⁴⁰ Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?'

⁴¹ Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?', 295.

⁴² Derek Parfit, 'Innumerate Ethics' *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 7:4 (1978), 285.

⁴³ Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?', 302.

David is someone you deeply care about.⁴⁴ Taurek also says the number of strangers does not have to be singular but can also be plural.

Why don't numbers matter?

Suppose that you had a supply of a medicine, and six people would certainly die if they were not given the medicine. Suppose also that one of the six, namely David, needs all of the medicine for his survival and another five need only one-fifth each. Taurek says that most people think to save the greater number.⁴⁵

However, Taurek's belief is different. He says if David is 'someone I know and like', and the other five are strangers, you might decide to give all of your medicine to David.⁴⁶ Taurek says that the idea was that this consideration would make a difference in the decision making process, because in the view 'the death of the one person would in fact be a worse thing to have happen than would be the deaths of these five.'⁴⁷ In other words, Taurek says that you are allowed to choose the one you prefer to save regardless of numbers, and you are morally allowed to behave accordingly. You can still save David even if he only suffers from losing his arm, and the other five suffer from the loss of their lives. This decision-making is influenced by the moral force of the decision maker, because 'I cannot imagine that I could give David any reason why *he* should think it better that these five strangers should continue to live than that he should.'⁴⁸

In the atomic bomb scenario, Truman could say the following. 'I, as the President, cannot imagine that I could give American soldiers any reason why they should think it better that people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki should continue to live than they should.' Therefore, Truman has the 'moral force' to take care of the smaller number of American soldiers rather than the larger number of Japanese civilians. This can be summarised as follows.

⁴⁴ Parfit, 'Innumerate Ethics,' 286, 287.

⁴⁵ Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?,' 294.

⁴⁶ Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?,' 295.

⁴⁷ Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?,' 296.

⁴⁸ Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?,' 300.

1) American soldiers would not be morally deficient if they preferred that Truman saves them rather than thousands of Japanese civilians.

2) Therefore, the death of the Japanese cannot be a worse outcome than the death of American soldiers.

However, this is not yet a full counter argument to justify saving a smaller number of American soldiers than a larger number of Japanese civilians. In general, people tend to believe that it is moral to save larger numbers of people, since people ‘work out which action will produce the most happiness compared with unhappiness or pain.’⁴⁹

In the case of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the negative consequences were significantly large due to the effects of current and future generations in addition to environmental damages. Therefore, from a utilitarian point, the use of the atomic bombs cannot be morally justified as it was not the best way to maximise utility. Therefore, the following statements can be said:

1) The morally right thing to do, on any occasion, is whatever would bring about the greatest balance of happiness over unhappiness.⁵⁰

2) Since the use of the atomic bombs violated this utility balance, it is not morally justified.

This argument is plausible. However, this utilitarian argument is rejected by C. S. Lewis, who argues suffering is not additive or cumulative.

We must never make the problem of pain worse than it is by vague talk about ‘the unimaginable sum of human misery.’ Suppose that I have a toothache of intensity X: and suppose that you, who are seated beside me, also begin to have a toothache of intensity X. You may, if you

⁴⁹ Noel Stewart, *Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 13.

⁵⁰ Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 100.

choose, say that the total amount of pain in the room is now 2X. But you must remember that no one is suffering 2X: search all time and all space and you will not find that composite pain in anyone's consciousness. There is no such thing as a sum of suffering, for no one suffers it.⁵¹

Thus, by employing Lewis' idea, Taurek's argument could be used to justify that the unequal number of deaths does not matter. Taurek himself tends to agree with Lewis' view. In the David example, he says that for each of the six people, there is no doubt that death is a terrible thing. Each member faces the loss of something among the things he/she values most – thus it is better if s/he can avoid death.⁵² However, Taurek also says 'Five individuals each losing his life does not add up to anyone's experiencing a loss five times greater than the loss suffered by any one of the five [individuals].'⁵³ Just like Lewis, Taurek believes suffering is not additive, therefore it is rather important to consider whom you are saving from suffering. The numbers, in themselves, simply do not count, but rather who they are and what kind of relationship you have, count.

Special obligation: To whom should the priority be given?

Taurek approves of giving priority or 'special obligation' to 'someone I know and like,' but there is no clear explanation of 'how far' this concept can be stretched. It is difficult to imagine that 'someone I know and like' can be beyond someone you personally know. They are probably your family members or friends. In some exceptions, this person might be a celebrity (thus you do not know them personally), but at least you know of them. Without knowing or knowing of them, it is impossible to like them. Of course, it is still possible to decide to like some stranger by looking at, say, their Facebook profile photo. You now like them because they appear attractive. However, this does not mean you know them. Instead you merely like their appearance after viewing their photo.

⁵¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: The Centenary Press, 1940), 103-104.

⁵² Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?', 307.

⁵³ Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?', 307.

The atomic bomb decision was not a personal but a political decision. It is clear that Truman did not know and like all American soldiers whom he prioritised, even if he was able to read all soldiers' names in a file, (or Facebook profiles if they existed in 1945). At best, with the exception of his own family and friends who happened to be in the military, Truman would only know names and other available personal details such as date and place of birth, not personality. It is implausible that Truman knew all the soldiers, and it is even harder to prove that he liked all the soldiers. Considering everyday life, it is obvious that you do not like every citizen of your own country. Taurek's idea of 'someone I know and like' does not fit in this historical case.

Taurek also argues that your moral decision can also be affected by your occupational duty. For example, Taurek states that a Coast Guard Captain is 'duty-bound'⁵⁴ to act in a certain way when considering whom he should save. In this example, the Captain has to make a decision to save a larger number of people on the northern coast, or a smaller number of people on the southern coast. It is the captain's moral obligation to go to the north, and surely the captain is not permitted to go to the south even if his friends are in the south.⁵⁵

Consequently, as a politician, it was Truman's duty and responsibility to take care of his citizens, including soldiers. Truman's duty as the President is to act in his best interests of the country and his citizens. Therefore, it can be said that his strongest interest was to end the war the best possible way for the US, including consideration of the post-war international politics. So it was perhaps politically justified (although not morally justified) to use atomic bombs (or just one atomic bomb) to end the war.

Not everyone would be convinced by this argument. Taurek argues that your concern for another person comes from your appreciation of what your situation means to you. For example, Truman had a political right to choose whether to save the certain

⁵⁴ Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?', 311.

⁵⁵ Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?', 310-311.

death of American soldiers from invading Japan's main islands.⁵⁶ It is highly unlikely American soldiers thought they should not have Truman's moral force to save them. Therefore, atomic bombing could be justified.

The problem with this view, as in the David example, is that no one has a right to cause harm actively in order to save David. This means that Truman did not have the right to increase the suffering of the Japanese (by killing them and making the future generations suffer), assuming that the decision to use atomic bombs (or any bombs) was seen as immoral after all. However, the argument may not be as simple as that.

Atomic bombs or ordinary air raids: Can Taurek's argument be used to justify 'killing'?

As for the medication in the David example, since the atomic bombs were owned by the US, the American leaders might have had a degree of justification and permission to use them under special obligation. The question here is, were the American leaders permitted to kill the Japanese citizens *actively* to save the American soldiers? In the David example, strangers were not actively killed, but more or less passively killed by not receiving the medication. Importantly, the right of the strangers to life is not taken away, but simply not given, even though the strangers were not going to survive without your medication.

Historically, many Japanese civilians were killed from regular ordinary air raids after the fall of Saipan in July 1944. The geographical distance between Saipan and Japan made the US able to bomb Japanese cities without an aircraft carrier. American bombers flew daily over Japan's main islands, resulting in the massacre of Japanese civilians. Although there are many calculations to identify the number of deaths, according to Nihon Keizai Shimbun, (a leading

⁵⁶ Note that soldiers are 'political instruments' and obliged to act according to what they are told to maintain the practice at a higher level, see Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 4th ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 29.

Japanese newspaper which leans neither left nor right), 330,000 Japanese civilians died in ordinary air raids.⁵⁷ As sixty four out of sixty six of Japan's largest cities had already been thoroughly burned out, bombers had begun to destroy Japan's smaller cities and towns.⁵⁸ The Japanese casualties were already high and likely to be higher.

The destruction caused by the two atomic bombs far outweighed any destruction that may have resulted from ordinary air raids (given the atomic bombs' huge impact and the effect of radioactivity on future generations and the environment). In the David example, by saving David rather than five strangers, Taurek says the right of strangers are not breached: 'I violate no one's rights when I use my drug to save David's life.'⁵⁹ Whereas in the historical incident, the right of the Japanese civilians might have been breached as they were actively killed. The difference between the David example and this historical incident is the breach of someone else's moral right.

Importantly, in the case of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the difference between dropping atomic bombs, and conventional bombing may not be so great, given the fact that so many Japanese civilians were killed by ordinary air raids. The Pacific War was a total war, in which all Japanese males aged between fifteen and sixty, and all females aged between seventeen and forty were obligated to form a fighting corps within their neighbourhood.⁶⁰ If Japan did not surrender until the fall of Tokyo⁶¹ (just as Germany fought until the fall of Berlin), the war was likely to continue until sometime in 1946 (since the invasion of the Kanto/Tokyo plain was planned around 1 March 1946).⁶² The

⁵⁷ Ryo Inoue, 'Nihon Saisei no Kioku to Isan.' *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, August 10, 2011, 34.

⁵⁸ Pape, 'Why Japan Surrendered,' 191.

⁵⁹ Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?,' 301.

⁶⁰ W. G. Beasley, *The Rise of Modern Japan*, 3rd ed. (London : Weidenfield and Nicolson, 2000), 211.

⁶¹ As of August 1945, Japan was still the only player which had the power to end the war. See: Michael Gordin, 'H-Diplo Roundtable- Racing the Enemy Roundtable, Gordin on Hasegawa' *H-Diplo Roundtables*, 7:2 (2006), 2, accessed 12 February 2014, <https://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Gordin-HasegawaRoundtable.pdf>.

⁶² Pape, 'Why Japan Surrendered,' 168.

casualties of Japanese civilians would not only have been as a result of ordinary air raids, but from resisting American soldiers during an invasion. In the battle of Okinawa (the islands that are located between the Japanese main islands and Taiwan) that took place between March and June 1945, Japanese soldiers and even civilians, including women and children, fought almost to the last individual.⁶³ It was likely that on the main islands, they would have followed the same trend. Huge numbers of Japanese civilians could have been killed anyway without the atomic bombs.

There are, however, some important differences between the two types of bombings. If atomic bombing is seen as active killing, the ordinary air raids can be seen as passive killing as they were already regular occurring events and the normal state of affairs at that time. It might be considered that this passive killing is regarded as similar to not giving the medication in the David example. Perhaps, the use of an atomic bomb is said to be ‘vastly destructive’⁶⁴ since it destroys the whole city and its future. It is impossible for an atomic bomb to be used to aim a specific military target, such as factories and naval dockyards, since the bomb is designed to destroy a large area. On the other hand, ordinary bombing was designed to ‘break civilians morale.’⁶⁵ If you aim to attack military targets only, the number of civilian death could be minimal. The difference between atomic bombing and ordinary air raids does exist.

Whichever option the American leader took, it was in fact proactive killing. The US government even admitted a year after the war that ordinary air raids were so destructive: ‘even without the atomic bombing attacks, air supremacy over Japan could have exerted sufficient pressure to bring about unconditional surrender and obviate the need for invasion’⁶⁶ For example, in the early morning hours of 10 March 1945, mass air raids killed more than 100,000 ordinary civilians

⁶³ Pape, ‘Why Japan Surrendered,’ 179.

⁶⁴ John Mueller, ‘The Essential Irrelevance of Nuclear Weapons: Stability in the Postwar World’ *International Security*, 13:2 (1988), 57.

⁶⁵ Beasley, *The Rise of Modern Japan*, 211.

⁶⁶ ‘United States Strategic Bombing Survey Report: Summary Report (Pacific War)’, 26.

of Tokyo. Unlike the strangers who were not given the medication in the David example, the rights of Japanese civilians were not simply taken away.

The use of the atomic bombs was a political decision and not a personal decision of the American leaders, even if their emotions might have been involved in making the decision to drop them. Perhaps, considering post war international politics, the American leaders only had two realistic options, atomic bombing or continuing ordinary bombing followed by invasion. If there were only two choices, this is where Taurek's final solution might be used, and that is to flip a coin.

Taurek's solution: Flipping a coin

The moral answer might be found in Taurek's final solution in which Taurek says you could flip a coin to decide, because then everyone will be given a fifty per cent chance of survival.⁶⁷ In the David example, both David and the strangers are given a fifty per cent survival rate. The scale of atomic bombing is a lot larger than the David example, but Taurek 'cannot see how or why the mere addition of numbers should change anything.'⁶⁸

Some might say that flipping a coin is not a serious way of making a moral decision. However, in situations where there are no morally distinguishing features to decide one way or the other, then flipping a coin is as good as any other process. Taurek says 'where such an option is open to me it would seem to best express my equal concern and respect for each person. Who among them could complain that I have done wrong?'⁶⁹ This point is probably the fairest conclusion where special obligation does not apply.⁷⁰ In this case, everyone is given an equal chance of survival, without the influence of personal and subjective opinions.

⁶⁷ Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?', 303.

⁶⁸ Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?', 306.

⁶⁹ Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?', 303.

⁷⁰ Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?', 303.

In the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings, since the American leaders had their special obligation, it is not morally justified for the American leaders to flip a coin to make a decision. However, what if a third party flipped a coin? It sounds morally justified since the third party does not have a moral obligation towards the Americans or the Japanese – in light of Taurek's argument, flipping a coin seems as fair an approach to make such a difficult moral decision as any other. However, there are three objections that explain why it cannot be used to morally justify the atomic bombing.

Firstly, in the final stage of the war, Japan and the US were not on a level playing field. As previously mentioned, many Japanese civilians had a great chance of being killed by ordinary air raids. There was no equal chance. By flipping a coin, the chance of survival was likely to be fifty per cent for the American soldiers – or at least, the chance of involving deadly invasion was fifty percent. If they were fortunate after the coin toss, the deadly operations could have been avoided. On the other hand, the Japanese civilians faced either ordinary air raids, followed by possible invasion, or the atomic bombs, and both of these were what they wanted to avoid. It was not fair as the Japanese, by the flipping of a coin, did not have a fifty per cent chance of avoiding the deadly experience.

Secondly, flipping a coin is only applicable if there is no other moral weighting. In the David example, there is one way of surviving that is to receive medication. In the historical incident, the atomic bomb decision was not an either-or-situation. Atomic bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki was not the only alternative to ending the war. There were other alternatives. The best way to have avoided invasion and the loss of American (and Japanese) lives was probably to propose a conditional surrender to Japan – which the American leaders did not offer, due to political reasons. Alternatively, Japan may have accepted unconditional surrender, without the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki once the USSR entered the war.

Finally, in the Coast Guard example, it is immoral for the Captain to flip a coin to justify his moral decision as he is involved in the

moral activity.⁷¹ Applying this to the atomic bombing, flipping a coin should be avoided by the American leaders or anyone who was involved in the war. So who should flip the coin? During the WWII, all major countries (whether they chose to be or not), except perhaps Switzerland, were involved in the war. Switzerland was known as a permanent neutral state – unlike other neutral countries such as Belgium and Luxembourg which were invaded by the Axis (particularly Germany), Switzerland stayed away as much as it could have from the war. So should the Swiss President have been appointed to flip a coin? This could have been the moral way to decide whether to drop the atomic bombs. The answer is no, because using atomic weapons were not the only available option to end the war as this paper has continuously mentioned.

Conclusion

This paper has considered whether Taurek's view can be used to justify the use of atomic bombs. Taurek argues you are allowed to save ones who are inclusive of your 'moral force', regardless of the numbers of people involved, and especially given that numbers do not count. You could therefore develop an argument that:

- 1) You are allowed to save the ones to whom you have moral obligations.
- 2) American political leaders were permitted to make a decision to save their soldiers, rather than the Japanese.
- 3) Taurek says numbers do not count, since individual suffering is not additive. Thus, the fact that the death casualty of Japanese civilians was larger than the expected American soldiers' death does not matter.

However, this does not mean that the use of the two atomic bombs is justified. Using this rationale, the use of an atomic bomb on Hiroshima might be justified from the point of view that numbers do not count when you are permitted to save ones who have priority.

⁷¹ Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?', 310.

However, the use of the second bomb on Nagasaki cannot be justified using this argument.

In fact, Taurek's view is not sufficient to be used for either situation at the end of the war for the following reasons:

4) The atomic bomb decision was not between killing or letting die as seen in Taurek's example. To use atomic bombs or to attack Japan by ordinary air raids (followed by possible invasion) were both interfering activities.

5) The atomic bomb decision was not set on an even-playing field. Japanese civilians do not avoid suffering from either outcome – killing by atomic bombs or killing by ordinary air raids. Taurek's argument cannot be used to justify this, as neither outcome is favourable to the Japanese civilians, and one is worth more than the other.

6) Historical facts are too complicated and Taurek's view is too simplistic and more adaptable for an either/or situation – for example, atomic bombing was not the only way to end the war.

Although there are elements of Taurek's argument which are worthy of consideration, this paper concludes that on balance, Taurek's theory cannot be used to justify the use of atomic bombs on Hiroshima or Nagasaki.

About the Author

Tets Kimura is a PhD candidate at the School of International Studies, Flinders University; as a recipient of an Australian Postgraduate Award. He initially developed the idea of combining historiography and applied ethics to justify Hiroshima and Nagasaki when he was an Honours philosophy student in the early 2000s – a couple of years before he was reporting from Baghdad's war zone as a journalist. His current research interests focus on Japanese soft (cultural) power.]