

Hiroshima: The Trajectory and Promise of History

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WORLD War II and its immediate aftermath yielded some important lessons, institutions, and promises for and to human beings; it also highlighted certain lessons or meanings, many of which one of your most distinguished moral leaders, Dr. Diasaku Ikeda, has unfailingly sought to bring to our individual and collective attention. Under the profound moral aura of this city, I would like to share some views with you, respecting those lessons, institutions, promises, and meanings.

The Usual Narrative

The usual narrative of World War II and developments immediately following, most often observe the fact that the War itself was a killing field; that during its conduct, we had the worst case of genocide, in modern times; and that very important institutions, such as the United Nations and its specialized agencies, came out of the War, with the U.N. itself representing a structure as well as a spectrum of values, which were designed to avoid slaughter of the kind human beings faced during the war.

One cannot disagree, apart from its incompleteness, with that that narrative, especially if one associates oneself with the more “progressive view” of the United Nations, its origins, and its intended evolution and behavior. According to this progressive view, the U.N. was created to serve certain common ends, among them that of international peace and security. This is most compellingly codified in article 2 (4) of the Charter, which requires that states “shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of states...”¹ Likewise, while expecting that conflicts would continue between and among states, this expectation was specifically accompanied by the textual commitment to use pacific modes of conflict resolution (mediation, arbitration, and

adjudication, for example) to accommodate international differences. This is what is embodied in Chapter VI of the UN Charter.² Only, as a sad, last resort would recourse to the use of force (provide for in Chapter VII of the Charter) be allowed, in dealing with differences. And, in the case of this last resort, it would be through a world-wide body.³

The progressives go further. They observe that long-term international peace and security, through the UN and its members states, were seen as closely linked to the removal of certain social and economic privations provided for in articles 55 and 56 of the UN Charter, relevant articles in the International Bill of Human Rights—constituted by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights—and the special work of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

In the case of the Article 55, it calls for the creation of “conditions of stability and well-being, which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples.”⁴ Those conditions include: “higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development; solutions of international economic, social, health, and related problems and international cultural and educational cooperation; and universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all...” Article 56 goes on to recite that *all* [author’s emphasis] member states of the UN “pledge themselves to take joint and separate action in cooperation with Organization [UN] for the achievement of the purposes set forth in Article 55.”⁵

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (and we will use this instrument to re-present the International Bill of Human Rights) has been seen as one expression of this “joint and separate action,” in the area of human rights; and the creation of UNESCO has also been seen as an important expression of like action in the field of cultural and educational cooperation.

The work of UNESCO is particularly significant, progressives have contended, because it represents a form of full recognition of the deeper, underlying causes of the War and has sought to deal with those causes. Those causes, the Constitution of UNESCO contends, revolve around “ignorance of each other’s ways and lives,” which has been a “common cause throughout the history of mankind,” of “suspicion and mistrust between the peoples of the world,” and which, in turn, have occasioned “differences [that] have all too often broken into war.”⁶

In the case of the human rights regime, focus has been on that regime's bringing of individuals into full subjecthood under international law, rather than having them remain as mere extensions of the state, as well as establishing associated norms, such as the right to a free press, to free speech, to conscience and religion, among others. In short, the War, despite its admitted brutalities and general moral degeneration, is also linked with an improvement in human consciousness, expressed in the creation of the UN itself, in the notion of collective defense, in the apparent commitment to engage in the use of force to deal with international differences, only as a sad, last resort, in the espousing of international peace and security as important values, in the emphasis on social and economic improvement, for all, and in the creation of UNESCO to help root out suspicions we harbor about one another.

I will not here seek to dispute the position of progressives, the views of whom are to be admired and respected. I will simply say that there is much, much more to the War and its indicated aftermath. This "more" bears largely on the then goings-on in Asia, and particularly this city, and their impact and meaning for the world at large.

Another Narrative

World War II was not simply the war which took more lives than any other war; implicated more of the people of the world than at any other time before; and wreaked more savage cruelty than any other like series of combat among nations. It was also that, despite the changes it seemed to have wrought in expanding human consciousness through science, religion, and human contact, the War brought to the habit of organized violence, the habit of using force—force on the part of the state—to resolve differences between states, and to the habit of national security and national loyalty, the highest levels of destructiveness that humans are capable—that of the extinction of the species itself.

From the time of the *Iliad* and the *Gita*, among other like narratives (East and West, North and South) the focus on war has had an objective, other than the security of the nation-state, the city-state, or the empire-state. (After all, neither has had any security from its wars). It has had an unspoken or little spoken about objective—that of reducing human beings to the status or condition of "a thing," what one may safely call the "thingification" of human beings, that is, not only reducing them to animate inanimate objects to be controlled, possessed or owned, and be disposed of, but ultimately, to make a corpse of them.⁷ The means employed are often blunt, coarse, and even crude, but they can be

“refined” as well.

Hiroshima (and when I reference Hiroshima, one should understand that it includes Nagasaki, also) represent the consummation of a long, cruel road in the process of thingification of human beings; and in the case of Hiroshima, it was made possible the replacement of the use of human and animal muscle power with the harnessed inanimate forces of nature which, in fact, “dwarf the physical power of any living creature in both potency and scale.”⁸

The creation of the UN and its specialized agencies, along with their associated values (some of which are important to understand Hiroshima) did not rid the world of the habit of national security, the sovereignty of states, national loyalty (or the ego of self, a collective self, which the state ostensibly embodies). Indeed, the UN Charter is based on all these values. Article 51 of the Charter, in fact says that: “Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the *inherent* [emphasis is the author’s] right of individual or collective self-defense”; and, in article 2 (7) of the very Charter states that *nothing* contained in the Charter shall “authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state” (for example, to determine the size of armies or lethality of weapons it may elect to possess.)

In the case of UNESCO itself, the same values just mentioned, continue to obtain, despite the work of that agency. One finds, for example, that one of the labeled, “most enlightened statesman” of our day, former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, in an article “A Battle for Global Values,” divides humanity into “we” and “they,” “ours” and “theirs.”¹⁰

A feature of the thingification of human beings, of the use of might, force, violence to resolve international differences, is that human beings have had an history of human vulnerability to other human beings, and to help “cure” that vulnerability or mitigate it, they have sought to pursue a politics that tries to create a scarcity of capacity on the part of others to use force, while augmenting that capacity for themselves. So societies have striven to “increase their power in absolute terms in order to avoid a perilous diminution of their power in the only terms that have mattered throughout history: the relative terms of ‘who has more?’”. This has been the history of all arms races between and among countries; it was the central element of the Cold War, as strategies of “mutual assured destruction,” between the United States and the former Soviet Union, aptly embodied “who has more?”

In a system or culture where power is both indispensable and scarce,

people learn to see political and other collective interactions (sometimes even interpersonal ones) not in terms of co-operation and mutuality, but as a zero-sum game.¹¹ Dr. Ikeda, in his joint work with Dr. Joseph Rotblat, *A Quest for Global Peace*,¹² deals with the psychology of zero-sum game, during the second half of the twentieth century.

With respect to the human rights regime, it did and does provide for rights such as that to free speech (as said before), to property, to conscience and religion, and even to health and education. But the most important elements of that regime are not the specific rights it encompasses; rather, they are other elements: the idea of the essential dignity of all human beings, which is actually the source of the rights people like to mention, and the other is the elimination of moral scarcity, through article 2 (2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That section reads: “Every one is entitled to the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”¹³

Together they—the inherent dignity of all human beings and the idea that everyone is entitled to all the rights recited in the Declaration—mean that the human rights regime, at its most fundamental, must be understood to have eliminated the zero-sum game of who has more, created a single moral community, for all human beings, with states pledging to co-operate with the UN in promoting *universal* respect for and observance of human rights.

What Past Do We Elect to Recall?¹⁴

The alternative narrative just presented does not complete the meaning and significance of World War II and its immediate aftermath. First, merely referring to the textual rendition of common standards for all human beings does not say much about commitments, as so effectively shown by Jonathan Glover in his book, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*¹⁵, which sees that century, including its second half, as the most brutal in the history of human beings.

This is so, because we cannot have a commitment to a single moral community, without accepting the inherent dignity of all human beings; and we cannot accept the inherent dignity of all human beings, and, then, focus on preparing to engage in warfare, the object of which is the thingification of humans, reducing them to corpses—the very antithesis of dignity. This has been the fundamental to Dr. Ikeda’s focus on dialogue. And this brings us to Hiroshima.

As said before, the dropping of the bomb on the city (and one has but to look at the photographs, before and after) was the ultimate in thingification and the ethic of “who has more”? In his dialogue with Dr. Ikeda, Dr. Joseph Rotblat (who worked on the Manhattan Project, which ultimately produced the bomb, but who opposed the use of the bomb against Japan) said that, assuming the bomb was successfully created, “I still hoped that the Americans would tell the Japanese, ‘Look! We have this super weapon’ [we have more] and then the war would be over.”¹⁶ There was no such discussion with the Japanese, of course, but the underlying thinking explains, in part, the use of the weapon—the Japanese would come to know, first-hand, the utter destruction resulting from the bomb and would seek to avoid complete destruction. This is what Emperor Hirohito said to the Japanese people, in his surrender message, after the bombing of Nagasaki. With, as reported by Radio Tokyo, “practically all living things, human and animal...literally seared to death,” the Emperor said that the “enemy now possesses a new and terrible weapon with the power to destroy many innocent lives and do incalculable damage. Should we continue to fight, not only would it result in the ultimate collapse of the Japanese nation, but also it would lead to the total extinction of human civilization.”

We had “become death,” as Oppenheimer, taking his instructions from the *Gita*, is reputed to have said, in his reaction to the bomb. This is the ethic, which governed the construction of the Security Council of the United Nation; is the weakness out of which the veto principle was created, for certain members of that organ; and is the weakness that began and shaped the development of the Cold War. But Hiroshima, brought to ashes by the bomb, as if inspired, as Dr. Ikeda would say by the experience of its suffering, also became the Phoenix-like site from which the promise of the moral and intellectual solidarity, called for in the Constitution of UNESCO, might be realized.

One finds part of that promise in Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, which was inspired by the experience of the War, in general, but really the encounter with the atomic bomb.

That article reads:

Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes. To accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.

Japan, as the quoted article suggests, committed itself to foreswear the right to war, which until then has been seen as incident to the very status of statehood, in the interest of inter-national peace. It would deny to itself the right to engage in the thingification of human beings, in the interest of justice and order—social and moral order; and it rejected the notion that out of weakness, out of vulnerability, it should gain, through the redoubling of effort, the development of weapons by which lives could be vaporized, steel beams twisted into writhing ghoulish forms, and “the puniness of human flesh and habitat”¹⁷ revealed with a clarity and reverberating conviction never before known or thought about.

Japan rejected more: it denied itself the “right of belligerency”—a right which, since the emergence of the modern nation-state, had never been before foresworn. This was not the Declaration of Paris, also known as the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which in 1928 sought to have countries renounce war as an instrument of policy, or the personal commitment of Emperor Asoka. This is a constitutional commitment of a society to repudiate the very definition of the modern state.

Were one to examine the terms of the Kellogg-Briand Pact,¹⁸ one would discover, in the context of its ratification, that its meaning was and is much less significant than what the language may initially suggest. The treaty had its signatories “condemn recourse to war for the solution of international controversies, and renounce it as an instrument of national policy”; second, the signatories pledged that “the settlement or solution of all disputes or conflicts of whatever nature or whatever origin shall never be sought except by pacific means.”

Please note: the settlement or solution of *all disputes or conflicts of whatever nature or whatever origin shall never* be sought, except by peaceful means. Yet, in ratifying the pact, an act which makes its terms binding, many reservations (qualifications) were made to the effect that the terms of the treaty applies to “offensive” wars, only, not to defensive ones.

In the case of the US, it explicitly said that the pact did not impair its right of self-defense, including the enforcement of the Monroe Doctrine. This is the same right of self-defense one finds in article 51 of the United Nations Charter, although article 2 (4) of that document has its signatories pledging that they “shall refrain in their international relations from the treat or use of force...” In short, since “defensive” wars are included in the phrase “disputes of conflicts of *whatever nature*, it is clear that states that were parities to the 1928 pact did not intend to be bound thereby. And at a time when departments of “war” were being changed to departments of “defense,” the use of the term

“defensive war” lacked precise meaning, with few states, if any, willing to admit that it fights any war except defensive ones.

The Future We Seek

This is why the action of Japan is so significant. But its significance lies elsewhere, also. The Japanese people, through their Constitution, said they were going to set an example—an example that others might emulate on the journey to a new moral order, one which would be co-extensive with the order of might, of war, especially the capacity to kill. Of course, when we are setting an example, we are also engaging in another course of conduct—we are also “will-ing, we are also saying that, in exercising our *will to be* part of a certain order, we want others to *will* the same, to join in a common effort. (This, again, has been one of the great burdens of Dr. Ikeda, as he has sought, through dialogue, to expand common and joint actions for peace, urging people to become examples).¹⁹

In this sense, what Japan did after Hiroshima should not be confused with what, in the Western tradition, may be called the Nietzschean view,” which states that morality is but charms and spells, expressed in dogma, that the weak invent to contain the strong; or the view of Thrasymachus in Plato’s *Republic*, as well as a dominant view in classical Marxism, that morality is but right and wrong which, respectively, aligns or misaligns with the interest of the strong.²⁰ The action of Japan is nothing less than that of launching us, all human beings, on a journey that invites us to deny ourselves some (if not all) of the deceits—national security, for instance—to which we are so unfortunately prone, and look to our disfigured self that has been bequeathed to us by the culture of war, and see that most of our miseries are the offsprings of war; and that all of us are, in fact, “victims of the narrow limitations our respective societies [have] prescribed for us.”²¹ A return to that culture is, therefore, counterproductive and ill-suited to the view that we can consistently will against long-established habits. Hiroshima (or article 9) means more.

It does not simply mean that one rejects self-deceits; it also encompasses an affirmation of the very law of our being, something that yearns for expression. It is that all human beings seek peace. For Dr. Ikeda, it is a “natural feeling shared by people everywhere: the desire to live in peace, the wish to protect those we love, the determination to spare the world’s children needless suffering.”²²

That the truth of the latter statement has remained largely hidden, for

so long, is a testimony to the effectiveness the deceitful decades (and centuries) within which we have lived, and moved, and constructed our being and becoming. It is also, however, due to the fact that the journey to the truth that human beings yearn for peace is not one that can be completed in any single act, however profound, event, or movement, because it actually requires a certain moral growth, a certain moral consciousness, among human beings, as well.

Likewise, it requires *action*, voices other than those which are inchoately, symbolically, and, for those who understand it well, eloquently voiced by Hiroshima and Article 9. Dr. Ikeda, again, has been at the forefront of inviting people to raise their voices and take action to build a world-wide solidarity, on behalf of peace. His focus on promoting human security and a culture of human rights in his 2013 Peace Proposal is but the most recent in his commendable body of actions.²³

Hiroshima and Article 9 anticipated, endorses, and affirms the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is based on the idea that the world is a cosmopolis, a single moral community within which lives a single *human* family. Basic to the idea of such a community is the concept of the inherent dignity of every human being, and the call of the Declaration for us to recognize its terms as a “common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations”. As well, the Declaration urges “every individual and every organ of society” to strive by teaching and education to promote respect for the rights it contains and affirms.²⁴

Part of the culture out of which the modern nation-state was created and which, in turn, the nation-state has perpetuated is that which denies the existence of a single moral community, despite the work of “great religions” suggesting the contrary. Indeed, that culture argues that national societies constitute different moral communities, some of which are superior to others, thus making it possible to isolate and objectify some societies and peoples. There is also what may be called a certain moral skepticism, which governs the conduct of modern nation-states—a skepticism which questions whether a single moral community is at all possible. The Declaration does not only say it is possible, but contends that it exists by virtue of the above-mentioned, inherent dignity of every and all human beings. What we must do is to find ways of recognizing it, and, in all we do, promoting it.

Resorting to war as a means of settling international or inter-communal differences is therefore an assault and ultimately a rejection of that dignity. Dr. Ikeda, in his 2013 Peace Proposal captures this conclusion most aptly, in his focus on nuclear weapons: “the very existence of these weapons represents the ultimate negation of the dignity of life.”

This is why in none of the instruments which compose the International Bill of Human Rights is there any reference to war. Hiroshima and Article 9 give expression to the spirit of human dignity, the singly moral community, and the idea of the single human family. Again, they do more.

Earlier, I indicated that giving up the right of belligerency means giving up the nation-state, as we know it; that an entity which, so territorially, culturally, politically, and populationally partial, should presume to take humanity from a condition of non-war to one of war, with the possibility—because of the unpredictable dynamics of war—of rendering, in the words of W. H. Auden (in his *The Shield of Achilles*) human habitation bare, without feature, a blade of grass, or sign of neighborhood; or should dare to confront humankind with the possibility of its own destruction is unacceptable. In other words, we cannot possibly accept the idea of a single moral community, a single human family, and also accept the existing nation-state system with its right to belligerency.

Article 28 of the Declaration recognized as much; so did a concurrent resolution of the United States Congress, in 1949; and Europe is on its way to giving expression to that recognition. In the case of Article 28, it states that: “everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration [the right to dignity, to life, to liberty, to security, education, to work, equality before the law, against torture and degrading treatment, against arbitrary arrest, to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, for instance] can be fully realized.”²⁵

The drafters of the Declaration understood that the rights contained in that document could never be realized within the then and current international system or order. This is what Article 9 is saying to us; this is what the Congress of the United States came to realize, during a brief but important period, in 1949, when both the House of Representatives and the Senate joined to pass Concurrent Resolution 64, the text of which reads, in part, as follows:

Resolved by the House of Representatives, the Senate Concurring, that it is the sense of the Congress that it should be a fundamental policy of the United States to support and strengthen the United Nations and seek its development into a world federation, open to all nations, with defined and limited powers adequate to preserve peace and prevent aggression through the enactment, interpretation, and enforcement of world law.

One can find fault in the phrasing of the resolution, but bringing its terms into being would change the nation-state, as we know it; and this is what the example of the Article 9 asks of us. This is also what Europe is doing or attempting to do, through its emerging Common Security of Defense Policy, which would contribute to human security rather than the security of national borders, and would ensure the development of a regional federation that could serve as a model for global governance.

Article 9 (and Hiroshima) means that we are called to help remove the greatest moral darkness, in modern times—that of taking steps to correct the wrong we have been required to participate in, for most of our lives: in war. And here, I take special notice of Dr. Ikeda’s beginning his work on “*New Human Revolution*,” on August 6th. It speaks to a faith in human possibilities, regardless of existing discomfort, pain, and suffering, of the capacity of human beings to develop the species-consciousness, the species-identity, and the species-loyalty, to grapple with the idea of humanity as a single family, and to extinguish the habit of warfare. It also speaks to the possibility of a “new humanism,” through which, people “mutually treasure human dignity,” as he offers in his 2013 Peace Proposal, and become one with those who have, through their Buddha nature, come to know how not to respect the empire of violence, so that we can be fully free to love, be compassionate, and pursue the ends of justice.

Article 9 and Hiroshima invites us to transform the trajectory of history, to create where we once destroyed, to hope where we once despaired, to share what we once took, to seek unity and solidarity, where we pursued division and disassociation, and to affirm and embody liberation where we once sought domination. They are the truest spirits out of World War II.

In his poem, *Prometheus Unbound*, Percy B. Shelley’s final lines capture what I think we have been touching on, and what Dr. Ikeda has again and again said to us, in his instruction of the relationship between human suffering and human best achievements.

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
 To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
 To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
 To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
 From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
 Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;

This, like thy glory Titan, is to be
 Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
 This alone is Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.

May Article 9 and Hiroshima help to lead us to the victory of our single human family and our single moral community, out of the moral wreck in which we find ourselves and out of which Hiroshima has hoped and built. I dedicate this presentation, in due respect for his work on behalf of both this family and this community, to Dr. Ikeda.

Notes

- ¹ See *U.N. Charter*
- ² *Ibid.*
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ See Article 55
- ⁵ See Article 56
- ⁶ See *Constitution of UNESCO*
- ⁷ This is the burden of Simone Weil, *The Simone Weil Reader* edited by George Panichas (London: Moyer Bell, 1977) pp. 153–183
- ⁸ See Arnold Toynbee's "Mechanization, Regimentation, and Boredom" in his *Change and Habit: The Challenge of Our Time* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966) pp. 212–217
- ⁹ See *U.N. Charter*
- ¹⁰ See Tony Blair, "A Battle for Global Values" in *Foreign Affairs* vol. 86 #1 *January/February* (2007) pp. 79–90
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² See Joseph Rotblat and Diasaku Ikeda, *A Quest for Global Peace* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2007)
- ¹³ Emphasis is the author's
- ¹⁴ This subtitle implies a link between past and future
- ¹⁵ Jonathan Glover *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999)
- ¹⁶ *A Quest of Global Peace, op. cit.*, pp. 18–19
- ¹⁷ John Pina Craven, *The Cold War Battle Beneath the Sea* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), p. 13
- ¹⁸ Named after the leading negotiators of the treaty, Frank B. Kellogg, U.S. Secretary of State, and Aristide Braind, the Foreign Minister of France
- ¹⁹ Two of his most recent statements may be found in his 2012 Peace Proposal ("Human Security and Sustainability," and his 2009, "Building Global Solidarity Toward Nuclear Abolition.")
- ²⁰ "Nietzschean" refers to Friedrich Nietzsche's views, especially in his works, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *The Will to Power* and the *Antichrist*.
- ²¹ John Lewis, *Across The Bridge* (New York: Hyperion Books, 2012) p. 125
- ²² Ikeda, *op. cit.*, "Building Global Solidarity Toward Nuclear Abolition."
- ²³ *Ibid.*: see, also the 2013 Peace Proposal
- ²⁴ See Preamble of the Declaration
- ²⁵ See Article 28 of the Declaration