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Giorgio Agamben on *Kairos* and Nuclear War

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Abstract: Giorgio Agamben's critiques of Karl Jaspers' book *The Atom Bomb and the Future of Man* expose several key limitations regarding attempts in the Western world to build an ethic of peace by relating to Hiroshima as a representation of a possible apocalyptic end that reason must avert. Agamben's central contribution to a possible peace ethic lies in his deployment of Pauline concepts such as *kairos* (messianic time). For Agamben, kairological temporality holds a different relation to time than chronological temporality, so Jaspers' concerns about an end of humanity wrought by the nuclear age need to be reconsidered in terms of possibilities for choice that exist in the present. Kairological thinking invites one to regard each moment as affording a unique opportunity to renounce or transform unjust realities. Such thinking, for example, holds promises for furthering the peace culture that is being developed in Hiroshima, where prospects for an ethos of peace are present in the peace philosophy of the Hibakusha (the survivors of the atomic bomb).

Keywords: Jaspers, Karl; St. Paul the Apostle; Hibakusha; Hiroshima; Nagasaki; ethic of peace; temporality; Messianic time; Apocalypse.

Introduction

Everyone brings a unique perspective and existential frame to one's own consideration and analyses of Hiroshima and the nuclear age. A guiding assumption of this essay is that all these vantage points exist significantly in the matrix of humankind's collective reality, and as such demand serious and respectful reckoning, which is not the same as merely adopting an uncritical relativism. In reading this piece, the reader's assessment of my account will also benefit from knowing where I as the author stand in relation to this topic. Firstly, I unapologetically acknowledge that I have never ceased to reject the moral validity of the atomic bombings, ever since I first learned about them with gross historical inaccuracy from my otherwise progressive elementary school teacher. They were introduced to me in about 1988 in the framing of what I now recognize to be, in the words of Robert Lifton and Greg Mitchell, the "official narrative,"[1] namely as horrific evils necessary to end WWII, whereby approximately one-hundred thousand civilians of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were annihilated in instant death, and an additional one-hundred thousand civilians survived with life-long injuries, many of whom died from these injuries a few years later. This historic event serves as an eternal warning of the dangers of the nuclear age to

[1] Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: Fifty Years of Denial*, New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons 1995, p. xvi.

which humankind is now exposed; it is the constant reminder of the possibility of total annihilation of all life on Earth. This essay, however, will not pretend to enter the Hiroshima debate, as my purpose is not to judge the past but to envision the future with an awakened present. Yet, an evolving relationship to the past, both personally and collectively, via memory and commemoration, in the shape of selection, construction, and forgetting, informs the present moments of choice in which the seeds of the future are nurtured. For my own part, Hiroshima has repeatedly entered my existential field as a significant crisis point of choice. As recently as 2013, it operated as an intervention in my passion for committing to the mission of the Society of Jesus as a faith that does justice, a mission generated by Pedro Arrupe, S.J. who had radically re-founded this influential Catholic order, and by his own understanding born out of his time living and working in and outside of Hiroshima—specifically at the Jesuit novitiate in Nagatsuka—at the time of the bombing.[2] Subsequently, I married a Shingon Buddhist monk from Japan and carry the surname of a Samurai Rinzai Zen family (今中: Ima-Naka, literally, "Now-Middle") that has resided in Hiroshima for over four hundred years. My daughter exists only because of the fortuitous decision of her paternal great-grandfather to relocate his family to Tokyo during the war. In the summer of 2023, we traveled twice to Hiroshima: the first time on family business and the second time on Hiroshima Day in 2023. The inspiration for writing this essay arose out of those visits, especially via the encounter with the overwhelming experience of the Culture of Peace that suffuses Hiroshima in and around August 6th.

Let us commence by honoring the suffering of the dead and the survivors, the Hibakusha, that is, those exposed to the bombing and its radiation aftereffects. This essay cannot do justice to their testimonies and witnessing. It is an important pillar of Hiroshima's Peace Culture that their stories are being heard. In that spirit, my hope is that readers of this essay will visit the two cities if you have not already done so, where one will experience Hiroshima's initiative of Promoting a Culture of Peace. The City's aspiration is to preserve, disseminate, and convey the Hibakusha's testimonies, memorials, and artifacts, to foster

> The Will for Peace Based on the Realities of the Atomic Bombing.[3]

Absent a visit, please consult some credible accounts, including the one by Fr. Arrupe and the influential piece by John Hersey that used to be standard high school reading.[4] The 2024 awardees of the Nobel Peace Prize, the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers, Nihon Hidankyo, have a wealth of resources on their website offering witness testimony to the effects of the atomic bombings as well as materials on how they have sought to ensure that there is never another repetition of such atrocities.[5] In keeping with the Hibakusha philosophy, this essay intends to contribute to the collective witness to the suffering spirits of all nationalities in any way connected to the events before, during, or after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

A Culture of Peace in Hiroshima

The philosophical journey presented in this essay toward a peace ethic in today's heavily militarized nuclear era finds its main starting point on Hiroshima Day in 2023. August 6th in Hiroshima annually is a day that brings together Hiroshima citizens and leaders and delegations from all over the country and the world for a formal, organized sit-down Peace Memorial Ceremony followed by myriad events, activities, and rituals occurring into the night. My family did not have the requisite tickets obtainable by advance registration; however, we were able to enter the Peace Park and observe the formal ceremony via video in a large indoor auditorium. Our entry into the park commenced by randomly following other attendees along the unclear pathway toward the security checkpoint, ushered by loosely organized groups of apparently unarmed guards, as Japanese police kept their holstered guns out of sight, many of whom gazed kindly, gently, and with welcome upon the diverse attendees in search of entrance. What

[2] Pedro Arrupe, *Pedro Arrupe: Essential Writings*, selected with an introduction by Kevin Burke, S.J., Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2004, pp. 39-51; 187-97.

[3] City of Hiroshima, *Promoting the Culture of Peace: Creating a Culture that Renounces all Forms of Violence*, https://www.city.hiroshima.lg.jp/uploaded/life/335028_698308_misc.pdf, p. 11. [Henceforth cited as *PCP*]

[4] John Hersey, *Hiroshima*, New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946.

[5] https://www.ne.jp/asahi/hidankyo/nihon/english/about/about1-01.html.

initially struck me as odd and amazed me being an American, was how light the security apparatus was for an event of this size, magnitude, and significance. The news later reported that approximately fifty thousand visitors were in attendance. The Prime Minister of Japan spoke at the event to the loud sounds of demonstrators in the distance. Overall, the event aims for a solemn atmosphere, with a bell rung annually at 8:15 am, in memorial for the time the bomb was dropped in 1945. Overall, the emotive atmosphere amongst participants that day had an open-hearted, warm, quality, where folks make easy connections as it tends to happen at peace marches. The peace culture felt palpable that day in the city and on the other days of our stay. The experience generated an impression of an aspirational humanity that astonished and touched me as the message of hope stood in stark contrast to the manifest horrors of the atomic bombings. This tension between the reality of past evil and a beautiful vision for a peaceful and humane future nurtured the curiosity that inspired this project.

Looking deeper into the politics surrounding Hiroshima and Hiroshima Day via news coverage revealed a web of conflicts and tensions that had lain nearly invisible to my experience. Activists were certainly hovering around the periphery of the Peace Park distributing various kinds of material and had also contributed to the auditory disturbances during then Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's talk. Kishida, whose family is from Hiroshima, expressed reservations about nuclear disarmament in the face of threats from Russia and many activists distributed anti-Kishida brochures outside the main event. The national politics surrounding Japan's nuclear stances remains a source of difficulty, to put it mildly. Afterwards, I discovered that the United States Embassy and Consulate in Japan had previously issued a "Demonstration Alert" on July 21, 2023, regarding the dates of August 6th, 9th, and 15th, advising Americans to:

> Avoid the areas of the demonstrations. Exercise caution if unexpectedly in the vicinity of large gatherings and protests. Monitor local media for updates. Keep a low profile.[6]

Due to demonstrations, security has been increasing on Hiroshima Day in a manner of moving against the peace culture I had encountered.

Secondary scholarship is instructive in making sense of these experiences so as to understand the philosophy that undergirds the Hiroshima peace culture. To that end, the only existing book in English on this topic follows up on relevant primary sources. Yuki Miyamoto traces the development of and articulates the contours of a unique hibakusha ethics.[7] She sums up the aspiration of this ethics in the creation of an "inclusive community of memory" (*BMC* 25) that seeks to commemorate the bombings in a way that goes beyond the borders of a particular ethnic group and strives to incorporate the entirety of humankind. This community attempts to include all of humanity who are to remember the bombings so as never to repeat them. What is more, this community seeks to promote peace broadly, beyond the objective of abolishing nuclear weapons, reaching across boundaries that otherwise divide people and engender conflict. This unique ethical vision had been evolving since the late 1940s when Hiroshima was designated by the new Japanese constitution on August 6, 1949, as a Peace Memorial City in Article 95, dedicated to the perpetual work of fostering lasting world peace. Miyamoto describes how the city had refashioned its identity with a new sense of purpose to be both a symbol of this human ideal of peace and a sort of laboratory for the continuous and one might think Sisyphus-like project of creating a peace culture both locally and globally (*BMC* 29-45). This project is about both the abolition of nuclear arms and the broader fostering of peace that brings an end to both direct and structural violence, informed by the theories of Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung (*PCP* 5-6). A tangible and inspiring instantiation of this vision is the non-governmental organization Mayors for Peace, founded in 1982, and to date inclusive of nearly ten thousand cities around the globe.[8]

Throughout her book, Miyamoto refers numerous times to the phrase, "not retaliation, but reconciliation" (*BMC* 13), taken from a 2004 speech

[6] U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Japan, "Demonstration Alert—Mission Japan, July 21, 2023," Emergency Information for American Citizens, https://jp.usembassy.gov/demonstration-alert-july-21-2023/.

[7] Yuki Miyamoto, *Beyond the Mushroom Cloud: Commemoration, Religion, and Responsibility after Hiroshima*, New York, NY: Fordham University Press 2012, pp. 81-110. [Henceforth cited as *BMC*]

[8] https://www.mayorsforpeace.org/en/.

by Hiroshima mayor Tadatoshi Akiba, in which the mayor articulated the core of the hibakusha message to the world. In an earlier speech, Akiba had been identifying numerous contributions the hibakusha had made to the world, including their basic choice to continue living (instead of committing suicide) and thus proving that nuclear weapons had "failed to obliterate the spirit and backbone of human beings." He also noted the advocacy of "new models of relations among nations" and their having "promoted a cooperative and altruistic model of the world."[9] It was not until 2008, that Akiba introduced the language of hibakusha philosophy to express the unique vision emanating from Hiroshima and Nagasaki (*BMC* 29). This philosophy was not new, however, since it had its inception in the early days of the reconstruction of Hiroshima and in the thoughts of Mayor Shinzō Hamai from 1947. After quoting a passage from Hamai's book, *A-bomb Major: Warnings and Hope from Hiroshima*, Miyamoto writes:

> Hamai finds that the basis of peace—self-reflection, modesty, tolerance, and firm determination—is nurtured in taking responsibility for the atomic bombing. Moreover, Hamai's insistence on the importance of critical self-reflection extends to the hibakusha themselves. [*BMC* 34]

Ultimately, Miyamoto argues that this unique hibakusha ethics draws its strength and inspiration from True Pure Land Buddhism and Roman Catholicism, both of which nurture critical self-reflection (*BMC* 108).

As an American philosopher with an interest in the history of Western thought tracing back to the Ancient Christian era, I seek both to learn from the hibakusha ethics as presently developed and to make sense of it in light of my own theoretical orientation. The hibakusha ethic of peace aims to be inclusive of a variety of worldviews, religions, and identities. Hence, my standpoint includes the identity of one who has benefitted from being on the presumed victorious side of this history and being theoretically enmeshed in projects that critically evaluate the role of Western systems of military and economic power in coercing, dominating, exploiting, degrading, and annihilating other lifeways and peoples in both the past and possibly projecting into an ominous future. From this vantage point, philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben who unearth these origins of Western thought and action offer valuable critical lenses with which to think about events and potential catastrophes such as the atom bombings and the threat of nuclear war. At the same time, Agamben's work often searches out yet-to-be-acknowledged potentialities in trains of Western thought that have been buried, forgotten, or erased by what he oftentimes refers to as the onto-political machinery that relentlessly holds life in its teeth.

The End of Humanity? Agamben's Critique of Jaspers

Karl Jaspers delivered a celebrated set of lectures, broadcasted in 1956, on the atomic bombings that he developed into a book in 1958, *Die Atombombe und die Zukunft des Menschen*, incorporating responses to the many letters he had received based on his broadcasts.[10] At the XXIV World Congress of Philosophy in Beijing, Mats Andrén presented a lecture, arguing that Jaspers offered a significant innovation regarding the concept of responsibility and highlighting the philosophical extensions of this concept in the late twentieth century as "world responsibility" and its significance for countering populism and ethno-nationalism in the twenty-first century.[11] I will pick up on this trajectory by considering how Jaspers' philosophy pertains to the peace culture movement in Hiroshima. However, I will use a short article by Giorgio Agamben to approach Jaspers through a skeptical lens regarding the relevance of his work to the current political situation in the West.[12]

[9] Hague Appeal for Peace 1999: Hiroshima and Nagasaki Mayors Speak at Overview Session, *Inter-City Solidarity Newsletter* 12 (August 10, 1999), 2-5, here p. 2, https://www.mayorsforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/1990s/file-Newsletter_12_E.pdf.

[10] Karl Jaspers, *The Atom Bomb and the Future of Man*, transl. E. B. Ashton, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1961. [Henceforth cited as *AB*]

[11] Mats Andrén, "Karl Jaspers on the Atom Bomb and Responsibility," *Existenz* 14/2 (Fall 2019), 1-9, here pp. 8-9.

[12] Giorgio Agamben, "La Guerra Atomica e la Fine dell'Umanità," Quodlibet, Una Voce, Rubrica di Giorgio Agamben (October 7, 2022), https://www.quodlibet.it/giorgio-agamben-la-guerra-atomica-e-la-fine-dell-u2019umanita, §6. [Henceforth cited as GA with paragraph number]

Agamben has regularly published short reflection pieces on the Italian website Quodlibet, many of which deal with current events. Presumably against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine where the possible use of tactical nuclear weapons has been floated occasionally in the news, Agamben offers a poignant reflection on Jaspers' book, informed by Blanchot's 1971 article "The Apocalypse is Disappointing."[13] Agamben launches an attack on Jaspers' book aimed at devastating its insightfulness and relevancy, concluding with the drastic recommendation that

> it is, therefore, necessary to drop Jaspers' argument without reserve, that pays the consequences of the inability of Western reason to think the problem of an end that was produced by [reason] itself, but which it is unable to master in any way. [*GA* 6]

Arguably inspired by the subtitle of Jaspers' book, "The political conscience of our time," Agamben finds that Jaspers fails to meet his own aspirations, as stated in the introduction, namely to think an ethos that would enable humanity to respond to the perils of probable nuclear-induced extinction of human and, indeed, almost all life. Agamben is inspired by Blanchot's observation that:

> in the very book that should be the consciousness, the summing up of the change and its commentary, nothing has changed—neither in the language, nor in the thinking, nor in the political formulations that are maintained and even drawn more tightly around the biases of a lifetime, some of them very noble, others very narrow-minded. [*F* 102]

It soon becomes apparent that Blanchot's main objection to Jaspers is his treatment of communism and the elevation of the threat of Bolshevism as being on par with that of atomic warfare, a political viewpoint that Agamben does not happen to share. Yet Agamben seems more interested in Blanchot's general critique of Jaspers' ordinary political sensibilities informed by a moderate liberalism and grounded in the Kantian tradition of rationality. He also appreciates Blanchot's notion that humankind lacks compassionate regulation over its own technological powers, which Blanchot views as being partially due to humanity not yet existing as a totality, except in its complete death by nuclear war. He says that the foundation of Jaspers' argument is destroyed at its base by the awareness that humans' real lack of power—when viewed under the realities of political oppression by the state—implies that it would not even occur to a majority of people that a possibility even exists for transforming their ethical political conscience (*GA* 5). Here, Agamben seems to suggest that the problem is not with the people and their conscience but rather with the system of power embodied in political realities.

In considering the current state of nuclear predicaments, Agamben also takes issue with the pertinence of Jaspers' account of the nuclear situation. He opens his blog by pointing out that Jaspers' assessment of the probability of nuclear annihilation, now seventy years later, has just become

> an obvious fact, which newspapers and politicians evoke every day as an absolutely normal eventuality. [*GA* 2]

This banality Agamben views through his characteristic thesis that the exception has become the rule. Moreover, as someone who has thought extensively about the meaning of potentiality, Agamben critiques Jaspers' notion of "real possibility", pointing out that it has just become a matter of randomness whereby possibility has now become randomness. Hence, Agamben states that one needs to repose the question to which Jaspers had sought to respond, suggesting that it was not properly posed in the first place. It is worth noting, thereby following Andrén, that the etymology of the word Jaspers uses for responsibility, *Verantwortung*, means "to give an answer", as in providing *eine Antwort*, or a reply. Agamben seems to think that first, the world situation has changed sufficiently since Jaspers' writing that would require giving a completely different answer, and second, that there was something conceptually amiss in the original formulation of the problem as stated by Jaspers.

Agamben goes on to emphasize the random nature of the myriad- and not merely nuclear threats to which humans are subjected by politicians, a point regarding which it is not at all clear whether Jaspers would disagree. Nuclear annihilation is no longer just a distinct possibility that humans may rationally assess and seek to

[13] Maurice Blanchot, *Friendship*, transl. Elizabeth Rottenberg, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 1997, pp. 101-8. [Henceforth cited as *F*]

manage through reasonable precautions and changed sensibilities. In becoming a random possibility (*casualità*), nuclear war, being just one of many random causes of a catastrophic end to humankind, is beyond the scope of rational planning and control. Indeed, Agamben suggests that it is reason itself that is the ultimate cause of this state of affairs that has exceeded all its powers of intervention. Moreover, it appears that Agamben also objects to the mood or tone of sobriety and well-reasoned gravity that Jaspers seems to expect to be possible, a sensibility flouted by the overweening sense of ordinariness of accidental terror to which modern societies have largely become so accustomed as to have become practically indifferent or unmoved by it. Hence, "the apocalypse disappoints"! In stark contrast to Jaspers, the mood or tone of Agamben's writing here and elsewhere has neither the measured gravity of Jaspers nor the delicate ennui of Blanchot; rather the latter strikes a prophetic chord meant to startle if not outrage the reader. An example of this emotive style may be found toward the end of Agamben's blog, where he suggests that:

> a humanity that has produced the bomb is already spiritually dead and that it is the awareness of this *reality* and not the *possibility* of this death that one needs to start to think...The war that we fear is always ongoing and never reaches an end, it is like the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki that have never ceased being dropped. [*GA* 6]

In this paragraph, Agamben also appears to invoke his thinking about Pauline temporality in which messianic time is understood via qualitative *kairos* rather than mere quantitative *chronos*. St. Paul's notion of *kairos* is sometimes translated as time-out-of-time, now-time, or God's time. Put simply, *chronos* signifies calendar or clock time that can be broken down into increments and measured. Agamben argues that, for Paul, messianic time sharply diverges from apocalyptic time. He writes:

> If you want to formulate the difference between messianism and apocalypse, between the apostle and the visionary, I think you could say, using a phrase by Gianni Carchia, that the messianic is not the end of time, but *the time of the end*...What interests the apostle is not the last day, it is not the instant in which time ends, but the time that contracts itself and begins to end...or if you prefer, the time that remains between time and its end.[14]

According to Agamben, *kairos* comes closer than *chronos* to time as humans *de facto* experience it. *Kairos* corresponds to a sort of operational time involved in creating representations of time as *chronos* which are usually linear (*TTR* 63-9). What makes *kairos* messianic, is its "transformative contraction" of time (*TTR* 64) and Agamben prefers this temporal understanding, as it is in his estimation a better rendering of the Greek term in 1 Corinthians 7:29, which is usually translated as a shortening of time.[15] This contraction enables a connection between the present moment and time in its entirety, including the future *eschaton* or end of time and the past understood as *typos* or figure and recapitulation, but also as a time within time (*kairos* within *chronos*) wherein kairological time contains all time that must be seized or grasped. In this context, Agamben rejects the commonly used translation of Luke 17:21 that states, the kingdom of God is "within yourself." Instead, he prefers the translation offered by Alexander Rüstow, namely, the kingdom of God is "close at hand, within the range of possible action" (*TTR* 73). Agamben explains in this respect,

> the time of the messiah is the time that we ourselves are, the dynamic time where, for the first time, we grasp time, grasp the time that is ours, grasp that we are nothing but that time. This time is not some other time located in an improbably present or future time. On the contrary, it is the only real time, the only time we will ever have. To experience this time implies an integral transformation of ourselves and of our ways of living. [*CK* 12-3]

Agamben suggests in this paragraph that one cannot, strictly speaking, think of an end, as being apocalyptic (that is, understanding it as an eschaton represented chronologically). Another way of thinking about Agamben's point is to argue that such an end amounts to a fantasy or projection for a time that is always imagined as being delayed and hence not real.

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[14] Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, transl. Patricia Dailey, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2005, p. 62. [Henceforth cited as *TTR*]

[15] Giorgio Agamben, *The Church and the Kingdom*, transl. Leland de la Durantaye, Calcutta, IN: Seagull Books 2018, pp. 44-5n2. [Henceforth cited as *CK*]

Rather than relying on Jaspers' reason in the context of the contingencies and absurdities of political realities, one can instead face them

> each time according to the concrete instances in which they occur and the forces that are at our disposal in order to oppose or escape them. [*GA* 6]

Here the reader can yet again see in Agamben the notion of Pauline temporality at work, for time is being conceived of as a sort of seizing hold of time (*TTR* 70-1]. In my reading, the time to act and think is always in the now and not something to be deferred or anticipated as a future end. Although *kairos* is often simplistically rendered as now-time, Agamben is clear that Paulinian thought does not reduce it to a mere equation with the present tense. Moreover, Agamben also points out that Paul's usage of the Greek word adds the present tense to *kairos* in the expression *ho nyn kairos*. He explains it thus:

> this contracted time, which Paul refers to in the expression *ho nyn kairos*, "the time of the now," lasts until the *parousia*, the full presence of the Messiah. The latter coincides with the Day of Wrath and the end of time (but remains indeterminate, even if it is imminent). Time explodes here; or rather, it implodes into the other eon, into eternity. [*TTR* 63]

Practically speaking, one might ask oneself what choice one ought to make with reference to all that has preceded the moment and the ultimate end of time, either considered with Christianity as a Day of Judgment or secularly as the point at which no more possibility for choice will exist for anyone. Agamben intends this sensibility informed by kairological time to serve as a guide for action, namely, as a reminder of the necessity of having to make choices.

Evaluation of Agamben's Critique

Agamben's insistence that humans are already spiritually dead, seems overstated, to say the least. It fails to differentiate the actors within this humanity that are already dead and that, as he suggests along with Blanchot, do not exist even in an undifferentiated manner. His insistence also does not specify temporally or historically whether there was any point at which humanity was not already spiritually dead, much less when it was spiritually birthed, nor when or how it died. Agamben seems to be implying that something in humanity, or possibly just Western humanity and its emphasis on reason or even reason itself, has reached an end that one needs to contemplate rather than dwelling on anticipations of a future end, as he charges Jaspers with so doing. This idea has promise, but remains vague as stated, and carries a dramatic tinge.

Moreover, Agamben's suggestion that atomic bombs never cease being dropped must be taken more metaphorically or existentially, and in such a way that this experience or understanding could only pertain to those not already having been affected by the bombings as the hibakusha are. There is something simultaneously dangerous and disrespectful in treating this tragedy so abstractly. If one harkens back to Mayor Tadatoshi Akiba's 1999 statement in the Hague Appeal for Peace, one sees an entirely different message, namely, one that emphasizes the resilience of the human spirit in the face of so much bodily death, illness, and material devastation. The hibakusha ethics testifies to the spiritual endurance of humans who have been victimized by an atrocity perpetrated by specific humans, not humanity in general. In this case, Agamben's charge of spiritual death in this case would be better confined to limited actors or systems, a view that he himself seems to adopt in following Blanchot's critique of Jaspers. In failing to differentiate the humans from humanity here, Agamben reveals himself to be rather cloistered within the confines of Western thought when thinking through the meaning of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

It would also appear that Agamben did not study Jaspers' book carefully nor read it to its end, as in the Foreword Jaspers insisted on this being a necessity for comprehending its meaning. He writes:

> The book will take patience. To be understood, it will have to be read to the end. It approaches every idea from a point of view which is subsequently transcended. [*AB* viii]

Jaspers himself concludes the book with Christian themes regarding the coming kingdom, themes that are also dear to Agamben:

> Jesus told his disciples: "Behold, the kingdom of God is within you"—it is here. So it is to philosophical thinking: what counts is the reality of the eternal, the way of life and action, as encompassing immortality.

> This presence of eternity may result in mankind's rescue from suicide. And in this presence, even if reason and existence fail, hope will remain. [*AB* 342]

On the final pages of the book, Jaspers dwells on mystical themes, emphasizing transcendence and the source of human reason in God. He also identifies immortality and eternity with love, which is to be found in the eternal present [*AB* 341]. Jaspers briefly critiques a conception of immortality as an afterlife of Heaven and Hell, suggesting instead that eternity can be encountered or experienced in moments of transcendence where a sense of higher meaning is acted upon or realized. Jaspers' eternal present transcends reason, with transcendence taking one outside of ordinary conceptions of time so that there is a sort of meeting of minds between him and Agamben in the ending. However, these final reflections remain brief and suggestive, lacking the development that has been given in the previous several hundred pages dedicated to the proper uses of rationality in upgrading Western ethical and political conscience in the service of peace, or at least, to forestall an end to humanity. Agamben's comments on Jaspers and nuclear war here are also terse; however, they connect to his extensive writings on time, end of times, power, and catastrophe, so his considerations of Hiroshima constitute more of an example of his wider theorizations rather than an exploration of the challenges wrought by the nuclear age per se. Both Agamben and Jaspers appeal to the New Testament as they gesture toward an ethical-political renewal in our thinking about the end of humanity.

Whether either philosopher can offer the opening to think, act, and live the beginning envisioned by the hibakusha is a different question. My suggestion at this juncture consists of arguing that both philosophers' conceptions of temporality can be incorporated into a peace ethic whose contribution will be greatest to the degree that they incorporate Christian revelation. From the Christian vantage point, the challenge is to resist apocalyptic thinking that issues ultimatums and eternal damnations, an attitude that both Agamben and Jaspers seek to challenge in different ways. *Kairos* invites humans to grasp the consequences of prior events especially as they pertain to actions of which we are the beneficiaries for better or worse. This recapitulation of time must also avoid fatalism about an apocalyptic future necessitated by the past. Rather, the present is the moment of choice from which standpoint human beings do not defer responsibility to an unknown future or cede whatever freedom they possess to outside parties or forces, however powerful or controlling they might be. Kairological thinking insists on a radical assumption of responsibility for whatever freedom one has at one's disposal in the only time one can act, which means in the now, as humans evolve one choice at a time toward a peace culture. This kairological interpretation helps to shed light on the meaning of the words "and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15).

The Hiroshima peace culture offers abundant insights and perspectives regarding the challenge of how to transform the consciousness conditioning of the neoliberal security state toward more open, nonjudgmental, and equitable modes of being in relation with one another, both interpersonally and politically. This process involves merging multiple spatiotemporal dimensions of existence while also experiencing the present as a state of *kairos*—entering each moment with an expanding appreciation of how it both realizes an unfolding past and unceasingly presents chances to release, shift, and transfigure reality to liberate the compassion that has been entrapped by various "apparatuses," to use this term of art in Michel Foucault's theories, referring to how technologies of power govern and operate in ways that may appear invisible or normalized to their subjects. Kairological time holds a different relationship to the end than chronological time does, and this difference applies to considerations regarding the end of humanity and, in this context, to nuclear war. Agamben tries to take his readers beyond Western conceptions of reason and responsibility that had transfixed Jaspers in his thoughts regarding *The Atom Bomb and the Future of Man* but does converge with the religious turn he takes toward the book's conclusion. Holistically seen, Agamben's thinking also concurs with Jaspers' wise repudiation of either dystopian or utopian thinking. They both offer valuable insights concerning the task of how to confront the end of humanity through transformed consciousness, particularly regarding the time of choice. One can see that both philosophers reach their limits in their suggestions on how to conceive

the end of humanity in the nuclear age. I advance the thesis that hibakusha ethics offers promise for how to meet these challenges as one envisions new beginnings for peaceful relationality.

In conclusion, Agamben's interpretation of Paul's notion of messianic time opens up a set of possibilities for human choice and responsibility that takes one out of the potential for apocalyptic thinking about an end of humanity, a view that haunts Jaspers' account. With his interpretation of *kairos*, Agamben invites one to consider how time must always be seized to relate authentically to a sense of an ending. Such an orientation compels heightened responsibility for choice and action in the world wherein one comes to grasp each moment from the standpoint of one's entire life. While this mindset may seem demanding, it actually serves to transform humans continually so that the selfish sides of human nature are always moving toward love, wherein the depths of human freedom lie. In this way, the kingdom of heaven ceases to be deferred to the next life but comes to exist inside and among ourselves in the time of the now. Such a kairological approach to crises uncovers a different space of freedom wherefrom to resist any apocalyptic end of the world, in either thought or reality.