



Among the Dead Cities: The History and Moral Legacy of the WWII Bombing of Civilians in Germany and Japan

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When Nuremberg was scouted in 1945 as a possible site for the Nazi war crime trials, an American damage survey of Germany described it as being "among the dead cities" of that country, for it was 90% destroyed, its population decimated, its facilities lost. As a place to put Nazis on trial, it symbolized the devastation Nazism brought upon Germany, while providing evidence of the destruction the Allies wrought on the country in the course of the war.

In *Among the Dead Cities*, the acclaimed philosopher A. C. Grayling asks the provocative question, how would the Allies have fared if judged by the standards of the Nuremberg Trials? Arguing persuasively that the victor nations have never had to consider the morality of their policies during World War II, he offers a powerful, moral re-examination of the Allied bombing campaigns against civilians in Germany and Japan, in the light of principles enshrined in the post-war conventions on human rights and the laws of war.

Intended to weaken those countries' ability and will to make war, the bombings nonetheless destroyed centuries of culture and killed some 800,000 non-combatants, injuring and traumatizing hundreds of thousands more in Hamburg, Dresden, and scores of other German cities, in Tokyo, and finally in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. "Was this bombing offensive justified by the necessities of war," Grayling writes, "or was it a crime against humanity? These questions mark one of the great remaining controversies of the Second World War." Their resolution is especially relevant in this time of terrorist threat, as governments debate how far to go in the name of security.

Grayling begins by narrating the Royal Air Force's and U. S. Army Air Force's dramatic and dangerous missions over Germany and Japan between 1942 and 1945. Through the eyes of survivors, he describes the terrifying experience on the ground as bombs created inferno and devastation among often-unprepared men, women, and children. He examines the mindset and thought-process of those who planned the campaigns in the heat and pressure of war, and faced with a ruthless enemy. Grayling chronicles the voices that, though in the minority, loudly opposed attacks on civilians, exploring in detail whether the bombings ever achieved their goal of denting the will to wage war. Based on the facts and evidence, he makes a meticulous case for, and one against, civilian bombing, and only then offers his own judgment. Acknowledging that they in no way equated to the death and destruction for which Nazi and Japanese aggression was responsible, he nonetheless concludes that the bombing campaigns were morally indefensible, and more, that accepting responsibility, even six decades later, is both a historical necessity and a moral imperative.

Rarely is the victor's history re-examined, and A. C. Grayling does so with deep respect and with a sense of urgency "to get a proper understanding for how peoples and states can and should behave in times of conflict." Addressing one of today's key moral issues, *Among the Dead Cities* is both a dramatic retelling of the World War II saga, and vitally important reading for our time.

Among the Dead Cities: The History and Moral Legacy of the WWII Bombing of Civilians in Germany and Japan Details

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Alex Milledge says

For its content and subject matter, I give this book a 4-5, but in Grayling's argument for the immorality of area bombing, I give it a one.

Leave it to a philosopher to create more problems and raise more objections than he attempts to solve, Grayling attempts to make the case that area bombing was inadequate means to be used against Germany and Japan, or *jus in bello*, and arguing that Governments must respect international war treaties which reduce the capabilities of Nations and its means of waging war and uphold human rights. He attacks historical arguments of the Allies saying that it was a necessary use of force against a vicious enemy and the appeal to the barbarity of war to justify the crimes of the Allies against the Axis.

But in all objections, I believe his arguments do not make the case adequately enough to destroy the utilitarian aspects of area bombing and its use in fighting a war that was against an enemy that deserved the use of the strategy, and how we can see in a revisionist analysis of history, that absolute and total victory for the allies was the best outcome of the war as opposed to Grayling's suggestion that the war ended before 1945 and thus no need to have launched the area bombing campaigns of 1945.

Grayling builds his argument off of the *jus in bello* principle, that means used ought to be proportional to the end required. He says that the Allies wanted to win the war, and could have done without the use of area bombing. If the allies had this goal in mind, they ought to have stuck to purely military and industrial targets which would stymie the war-making capacity of nazi germany, however to make civilians a target of the this bombing was unjust and not required by the end to acheive this end.

Clearly from this argument, Grayling does not understand the nature of war. He does quote variously from Sun-Tsu and Carl Von Clausewitz, which I believe demonstrate the point that goal of war is to win and to use any means necessary. But someone like Grayling would ask: Do you believe that nations can resort to barbarism in order to win a war? This kind of question reflects ignorance, and is framed in a war that is completely loaded. It does not mean that nations ought to resort to barbarism, but they ought to fight a war smartly, and this means using an adequate proportion of violence and means that the enemies also employs, as Grayling said, *jus in bello*. And this is precisely the case of area bombing.

There is a genuine objection to raise that the Japanese and Germans committed war crimes that far outweigh the carpet bombing campaigns done by RAF and USAAF. The Japanese and their rape of nanking, bombing civilians similarly to the Germans and their Blitzkrieg strategy, and need I mention the Holocaust, one of the worst war crimes in modern times. Grayling would say that this is wrong based on the analogy he gives on someone who tries to justify murder based on what their victims did. Grayling says that we ought not to resort to their barbarism.

This is false, because he raises an age-old objection to war by trying to apply murder in society to murder in war, which can be supported by a just war theory. One cannot apply the civilian crime of murder to military crimes committed in war, however, I agree, not in all cases. But this brings me to the Utilitarian and just principle of carpet bombings that uphold the morality of carpet bombing.

The Japanese and Germans were a formidable enemy, strong and vicious, and fanatically loyal to their leader

to their own personal death and destruction of the collective. Carpet Bombing, in Germany's case, struck a psychological blow to German invincibility, in which Hitler promised the people through Goering that a not single Allied aircraft would fly into Germany. The Germans believed in their invincibility, and once the Allied bombers were able to carry the war to Germany, this undermined Hitler's demagogic cult and promises which was used to keep Germans in support of the war. In Japan's case, the US destroyed Japanese fanaticism to the emperor by unleashing a force never seen which made the Japanese come to their senses and realize the war was over. These are legitimate utilitarian reasons which support the carpet bombing campaigns and the Atomic bomb drops over Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

Grayling would say: Even at the expense of targeting civilians? As I said before, mentioning the crimes of the Axis, we can see that area bombing was justified against the fanaticism of the Axis, and that civilians who live in a country of war are a part of the war itself. Civilians pay taxes and facilitate policies carried out by their governments in times of war. For instance, the German people helped facilitate the Holocaust by ostracizing Jews into ghettos and not speaking out against their round-up and deportation to concentration camps which were built in and around their community. Passivity in a time of war is to side with the country and its war-time policies, and if they do not want to take part in the war, must leave or make known their objections to the war. Hum

Grayling though would make the case that Human rights ought to be respected, and thus non-combatants should be left out of conflict as much as possible. The issue of Human rights in which Grayling brings up is problematic, since in the World War, governments did not respect human rights clearly. The issue of human rights is also problematic because if it's up to governments to uphold human rights, what happens if they don't? They must have some higher body of government to enforce it. This makes human rights forced down upon by governments, whereas the intrinsic value of human beings should be upheld as a source in-themselves, and not left to governments to obey treaties and declarations in which may countries and warring bodies ignore. Modern examples of this include ISIS, which clearly do not respect human rights, and Assad's regime, which turn chemical weapons onto their own population. But who will stop them, only if a force greater than government could step in and stop them, but it's not the actual fact of human intrinsic worth that is stopping them.

As for history and posterity, the use of carpet bombing still is upheld. Grayling suggests that the war was over before 1945, and could have easily been accomplished without the carpet bombing strategy. In retrospect, I think we ought to see the end of World War II in its complete victory for the allies as a good thing. If the allies settled for peace with countries like Germany and Japan, we would have gone to the table for peace with nations that were corrupt, dangerous, and violent. The complete dismantlement of Germany and the end of the Nazi government ended Nazi war crimes in the Holocaust, and the unconditional surrender of Japan to the Allies helped to regain the sovereignty of countries occupied by Imperial Japan, and similarly with Germany. Although in many regards it was not a perfect peace, but it brought an end to governments which endangered the future of mankind.

As Trotsky said, "You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you." This shows the far-reaching aspects of war and its interlocutors, even non-combatants. Bertrand Russell said "that war does not determine winner from losers, but from who's left." We are all in a sense survivors of war, and especially World War II, in war where 60 million people were killed, and in a sense, everyone was a participant, if they served themselves or watched it first-hand or through the newspaper and radio broadcasts. Grayling's argument does trump the utilitarian outcomes of carpet bombing. I do believe in the person's right to object to war and to be a pacifist, but I think that many pacifist objections do not fully grasp the understanding of war and how it can be used as a wise and strategic use of government policy. Pacifists can be correct about the barbarity of war, but if we were to allow Nazi Germany to exist and submit to their quests for world domination, I believe that we would have all lost tremendously.

Efrem Sepulveda says

A.C. Grayling's book on the aerial bombardment of Germany and Japan is one that makes the public think about the horrors of war. What World War I did to combat troops, the Second World War did to civilians in terms of bringing the ghastliness of the martial activity to people.

Grayling contends that the indiscriminate bombardment of the Axis powers was unnecessary and that it brought dishonor to the Allies which fought for freedom and democracy. Grayling contends that the use of precision bombing of factories and oil refineries was far more effective in bring the war to a close. In his work of 280 pages plus appendix, the author takes steps to point out that while the bombardments were immoral, they did not hold a candle to the massive atrocities carried by Japan and especially Germany via the Holocaust. He divides his book into various chapters that expresses the viewpoint of the bombed, the ones who did the bombing and contains the voices of dissent to the bombing including Geoege Bell, Bishop of Chicester and Vera Brittain who wrote a book (Seed of Chaos) rebuking the attacks as early as 1943 when the outcome of the war was still in doubt. Grayling uses the arguments of philosophers such as Aquinas, Augustine and others to determine whether area bombing was just. In his final chapter, Judgement, he contends that the bombing was not just and he closed his book with words by Ms. Brittain that the conduct of the bombing will evidence criminal lunacy of the political leaders of that time to future generations.

The last part of the book contains an appendix of all of the aerial attacks that were carried out by RAF Bomber Commnand from 1940 until the close of the war, an extensive bibliography and an index. Some might disagree with Grayling's thesis, but I think he makes a sound argument in terms of needless loss of lives. He could have put much of the text containing treaties and conventions in a separate appendix, but I think the book was not long-winded and kept its arguments brief. Four stars.

Erik says

This was a difficult book to grade, as I found myself in complete agreement with the author's premise but thought the book was written poorly. This book should have focused on the technical arguments on area bombing such as bomb sights and weather, but seemed to simple repeat over and over the moral implications and personal questioning of several key leaders to illustrate that the Allies knew what they were doing was wrong. I feel that justifications were also not fairly addressed, as little weight is given to Japanese cultural beliefs or the desire to show advancing Soviets the utter destruction the Western allies could bring down upon them should the Communists not stop in Germany.

I am probably being generous with the 3 stars because I do agree with the author often enough, but surely wish this topic was better addressed in proper arguments in the book. I have a somewhat unique perspective, as I had family on both sides...my mother being bombed and uncles on my dad's side serving the Allies. Hearing my mother's stories leave me little doubt of Allied intent; my mother survived P-47 fighters strafing and bombing her schoolyard with the pilot so low she said she could see his face looking at her after he dropped his bomb (which fortunately was a dud as he was too low for the bomb to arm). Other kids nearby were not so lucky as the bullets did not miss.

Every side in war commits war crimes. Sometimes terrible things are done for the right reasons. This book did provoke some deep thoughts in me on warfare, and it might just give you some soul searching as well.

Lysergius says

For anyone who has wondered about the morality of the RAF area bombing of Germany or the USAAF area bombing of Japan, this should book should clarify exactly why it was wrong. Grayling examines both the pros and cons of the bombing and its justifications and confirms just that.

Grayling is aware of neo-Nazi attempts to reduce Nazi culpability by labelling the bombing offensive a war crime and goes to some lengths to dispute these claims.

All in all, a balanced and objective look at a subject that has troubled my generation since the war.

Matt says

This book presents an interesting thought experiment: was the Allied air war against Germany and Japan a war crime?

You don't really see a lot of books like these. The ones you do see tend to scream agenda, which makes them historically questionable. *Among the Dead Cities* does not suffer from this defect. If anything, it is too equable for its own good.

Any book tackling the subject of potential Allied war crimes risks running afoul of the Greatest Generation Crowd (defined by their resemblance to Tom Brokaw and their distaste for anything French). The standard objection to any such discussion is that we (meaning 21st century Americans) aren't fit to judge mid-20th century soldiers fighting the greatest war in history (this is the same line of reasoning that compels us to accept the dubious morality of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, those slave-holding scions of liberty). Of course, such an argument misses the point. We can judge them. In fact, that generation has been judged. By their peers. At Nuremberg and Tokyo. By the International Military Tribunals. It's just that America, Great Britain and Russia never had to sit in the dock.

Philosopher A.C. Grayling puts them in the dock. His book is as meticulous as a trial brief. It starts with the briefest of overviews of the bomber war against Germany and Japan, paying a great deal of attention to Britain's Bomber Command, especially over Hamburg. The story then moves on to the experience of those beneath the bombs, which looks at the effect of bombing on civilian morale and a nation's ability to make war.

Four-story-high blocks of flats were like glowing mounds of stone right down to the basement. Everything seemed to have melted...Women and children were so charred as to be unrecognizable; those that had died through lack of oxygen were half charred and recognizable. Their brains tumbled from their burst temples and their insides from the soft parts under the ribs...The smallest children lay like fried eels on the pavement. Even in death they showed signs of how they must have suffered - their hands and arms stretched out as if to protect themselves from that pitiless heat.

Next, you get the viewpoint of the bomber, and the various rationales given for area bombing, which included destroying civilian morale, drawing defenses away from the front line, and decreasing armament production. Grayling then intersperses this history lesson with an interesting overview of contemporary

bombing-protests, to show that some people disagreed with area bombing even while it occurred. The book's final two chapters make the case for and against area bombing.

The verdict is not surprising (at least not to me; I didn't purchase a book authored by a philosopher espousing a "we should have dropped three nukes!" line of argument): Grayling determines that Allied area bombing was a war crime. In doing so, he pokes holes in certain area-bombing supports, such as the idea that bombing lowers civilian morale (in reality, over time, area bombing does just the opposite). He also makes a weak argument that America's precision bombing was far more effectual. (In light of the contemporary overpraise heaped on the Norden bombsight, Grayling's reasoning here is a bit shaky. Indeed, this section is emblematic of the book's shortcomings: simply put, philosophical rigor is not the same as historical rigor. I never trusted that Grayling had spent enough time with this subject to be assured of the soundness of his history).

My overall reaction to this book was "fine." It was fine. A resounding, stop-the-presses, call home immediately "fine."

But "fine" doesn't do it for me. At least not here. My problem is that this book completely lacks any passion and conviction. If you've got a point to make, make it! Shove it in my face! Make me eat your point like the neighborhood bullies used to make me eat grass! Challenge my assumptions; get me riled up.

Alas, none of that happened. It's as though Grayling was scared of that midnight visit from the ghost of Stephen Ambrose. He jumps through hoops and does cartwheels to remain uncontroversial. In a way, Grayling's approach is almost quaint. He could have gone the agent provocateur route, pulled a Ward Churchill, and sold quite a few copies of *Among the Dead Cities*. Instead, he wrote an "on the other hand" kind of book, in which everything is qualified, and every bitter conclusion is smeared with layers of grape jam (or your topping of choice) in order to go down smooth.

What this book needed was a little provocation. It needed Grayling to stop hemming and hawing and just answer his own question.

Was the Allied area-bombing of Germany and Japan a war crime? Was it morally reprehensible? Yes and yes. Emphatically yes. By any measure, including the metrics established by the Nuremberg Tribunal and the Tokyo Trials. General Curtis Lemay - General Buck Turgidson himself - admitted that he would've been tried as a war criminal if America had lost the war. That's the only difference between America/Britain/Russia on one hand, and Germany/Japan on the other: the Allies were never put on trial.

Of course (and this is a big "of course), this does not place the Allies and the Axis on the same moral footing. To the contrary, the Allied Powers and the Axis Powers are vastly different in terms of culpability, motives, and mitigating circumstances. That is to say, simply, that the Axis started it. (Sometimes playground philosophy is the most elegant philosophy).

For purposes of this argument, though, there is a difference between explanations and excuses. Saying that we dropped two atomic bombs on Japan in order to shorten the war and avoid an invasion (a debatable point in and of itself) is an *explanation*, **not** an excuse. If you don't believe me, try switching out the variables. Japan and Germany had their explanations, too; that didn't excuse their actions.

My other criticism is what this book did not do. Despite *Among the Dead Cities'* obvious contemporary implications, Grayling never extrapolates his verdict to the present day. I mean, the elephant in the room is "the War on Terror," but Grayling doesn't touch that with a 50-foot pole.

Allow me to explain. There is a certain argument that area bombing is justified because every civilian in an enemy-nation is somehow culpable (either as a factory worker, a war supporter, or a passive non-supporter). This is a form of imperfect justice. When you bomb Dresden, you aren't killing the perpetrators of the _____

Holocaust. Those people are at the death camps, which aren't being bombed. And when you bomb Hiroshima, you aren't killing the perpetrators of the Baatan death march; those soldiers are in the Philippines. Instead, you are going after the support system, however attenuated or tacit that support might be. This is an argument for area-bombing. It's also the mindset of any number of terrorist groups who attack Western targets symbolizing capitalism or militarism.

Perhaps I'm asking too much from Grayling to expect such a comparison (however obvious it appeared to me). I suppose it would've been professionally dangerous in our consensus-loving, banality-seeking world (especially for anyone teaching at a public institution). And maybe it's just too incendiary to handle, no matter how thoughtful you are. Still, I would've liked to see Grayling try to tackle this question. At the very least, it'd add some texture to a historical time period that has been glossed over and romanticized in recent years by the aforementioned Brokaw, Ambrose, and the dynamic duo of Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks

(This should not be taken as criticism of the work these men have done capturing the stories of individual soldiers, stories that would otherwise have been lost. To the contrary - now I'm equivocating like Grayling - they have brought history to a wide audience that might not have cared about history before. It's just important to remember that World War II wasn't as simple as Gramps heading over to Europe and shoving an American flag up Hitler's bum).

As it is, the book stands as a thoughtful, carefully outlined argument. It has as its virtues reason, logic, and lucidity. It has as its shortcoming a noticeable lack of verve.

Mohammed Khogir says

A provocative thought-inducing book, who doesn't like one of those !?

The book is meticulously well-researched and well argued and tackles the ethical and moral standing of the allied area-bombing campaign during world war II superbly

David Gross says

A.C. Grayling's Among the Dead Cities means to offer something like a formal moral and legal judgment on the (largely British and American) policy of using area bombing to destroy German and Japanese cities and kill their residents during World War II.

Grayling meticulously describes how the policy of destroying cities developed and what goals it was meant to serve and how technology, the progress of the war, bureaucratic infighting, war theory, propaganda, and international posturing shaped and drove the policy.

He looks both at the reasoning applied by the policymakers during the war, and at subsequent actual and possible defenses and justifications for the policy. Against this he looks at the rather inchoate laws of war of the time, at the norms that though not formally coded into law were considered to be sufficiently self-evident to serve as the basis for the Nuremberg trials, and at subsequent attempts to formalize international law concerning the protection of civilian populations during war.

He also takes some time to describe what the area bombing campaigns looked like from the perspective of the crews that flew the missions and of the victims who lived in the cities being bombed. And he spends

some time looking at the contemporary debate about the policy, and the work of some groups and individuals to temper it.

He concludes that by even the minimal legal standards and norms of just conduct during war, this policy was criminal and morally repugnant. Of the justifications offered for it, many are not justifications at all, while the ones that might be valid (largely variations on “the Allies were obligated to do whatever would be most effective to defeat such an evil threat”) fail on factual grounds: in particular, the area bombing campaigns were objectively ineffective failures at their goal of striking blows against the Axis war machines, particularly in comparison to other uses that could have been made by the Allies of the personnel, technology, and armaments involved.

Here he stops, with little more than a trite “those who forget history are doomed to repeat it”-style reflection on the project. He addresses the culpability of the non-policy-making individuals who carried out the bombings in a single paragraph, says little to nothing about the culpability of the larger public in its support for the campaign (or its ongoing justification of it), only briefly nods at the fact that the major theory behind the area bombings — that anything that degrades the morale of the enemy’s civilian population is a valid war aim — is the same theory that animates the grandchild of Dresden and Hiroshima: “shock and awe.”

What must be done after this indictment has been handed down? Lots of passive voice stuff, sadly: a more honest appreciation of the character of the war needs be infused, a fact should be profoundly and frankly regretted, moral atrocities ought to be recognized, points should by now be maturely and dispassionately accepted, records should be gotten straight, and so forth.

That seems mighty weak stuff, considering that policies and weapons of mass destruction are far from things of the past, and individual decisions whether to support or oppose these policies are available to all of us.

Alexandra Sundarsingh says

Grayling writes a moving prose account of why we should evaluate the Allied bombing campaigns in WWII Germany and Japan along the same criterion used in the Nuremberg trials. While I found the material a bit difficult to work through quickly, Grayling manages to strike the right balance between rational considerations of the ethics in play, and acknowledgement of what may have been on the minds of the men and women experiencing the bombings, planning them, executing them, and even advocating them. This is history well done.

Vheissu says

Grayling's book is a measured, balanced, and fair inquiry into Allied area bombing during the Second World War. Grayling concludes that area bombing in the war was "immoral," "criminal," and "very wrong." His argument is convincing, although I confess I had already come to these conclusions before reading his book and was therefore predisposed to his point of view.

His argument is simple and straightforward. Without repeating his factual support, which has been mentioned in other reviews on GR, Grayling asserts that area bombing:

1. was not necessary for victory in Europe or Japan;
2. inflicted damages that were disproportionate to the military objectives derived therefrom;

3. contravened the humanitarian principles that people and nations have sought since the mid-nineteenth century in order to control and limit war;
4. offended the moral standards of Western civilization established over the last 500 years, if not also 2,000 years;
5. at a minimum violated national laws prohibiting murder, bodily harm, and destruction of property.

One Voice: Pacifist Writings from the Second World War by Vera Brittain

Like Vera Brittain before him, Grayling's book was pilloried by veterans, veteran associations, and others who refuse to entertain even the slightest criticism of U.S. foreign and military policy. Most prominent among his critics is the U.S. Air Force Association, publisher of *Air Force Magazine* and the *The Almanac of Airpower*. (In the interest of full disclosure, I should note that I have subscribed to *Air Force Magazine* for approximately 35 years and am an admirer of the USAF, just as Grayling is an admirer of the RAF.) Writing in the June 2006 edition of the magazine, recently retired Editor in Chief, Robert S. Dudley, provides a scathing review of Grayling's book ("Of Airpower and Morality"). Rather than repeat what Grayling has written and what reviewers have already said about his book, I would like to address some of Dudley's complaints in order to offer a rebuttal of his comments and a defense of Grayling.

Among other things, Dudley writes:

It must infuriate World War II bomber veterans for critics to suggest that they are war criminals...For Grayling, guilt flows even to individual airmen; they, after all, failed to back away from what he believes were immoral deeds.

Not quite. Grayling indicts government and military leaders for permitting area bombing, knowing full well the consequences, as well as airmen who had a keen awareness of the missions and did not refuse to complete. Grayling excuses, however, those airmen who were not completely aware of the consequences of their missions because of the exhortations of their superiors, the support of public opinion, or even their own, personal hatred of the enemy. The diminished capacity of some airmen to comprehend the cruelty and futility of area bombing is an affirmative defense for Grayling (p. 277).

The first point to make is that World War II airmen, to the exasperation of their academic critics, are convinced their area-bombing efforts did, in fact, contribute to victory. They do not grant to Grayling his pivotal claim that Allied area-bombing in Europe and Japan had little military impact. This is a key count in his "war crimes" indictment; without military justification for bombing cities, there could be no moral one.

It should not be surprising that those who risked life and limb in defense of their country should construe their missions as meaningful contributions to the achievement of peace. This, however, was not the conclusion of the postwar U.S. Strategic Bombing Surveys, *The Campaigns of the Pacific War* and *Guide to the Reports of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey*. While the surveys reported that *precision bombing* by the Eighth and Fifteenth Air Forces in Europe contributed significantly to V-E day, they made no such claim regarding *area bombing*, in either Europe or the Pacific.

Moreover, in Germany, area bombing kept anti-aircraft guns and troops pinned down and away from other fronts. Hitler's minister of armaments, Albert Speer, left no doubt about this. "The real importance of the air war consisted in the fact that it opened a second front long before the invasion of Europe," said Speer.

Grayling points out that *precision bombing* would have produced exactly the same diversion of German

forces as area bombing, except without the moral degeneracy of the latter. Moreover, once German air defenses collapsed completely in late 1944, the Allies increased the intensity of area bombing. In that respect, Dudney claims:

Critics overreach with another claim: that the Allies continued to pound away months—perhaps years—after the Axis nations were beaten. Doing so, they argue, was morally wrong. But how, one may ask, could Allied leaders—or anyone else—know at the time when Germany and Japan were defeated? Stalin could create a serious reversal of the war all by himself. Hitler's V-2 rockets and nuclear arms program caused deep anxieties. In the Pacific, Japan's fanatical defenses of Iwo Jima and Okinawa made it clear that Tokyo, in 1945, planned for a grisly fight to the finish.

The complete collapse of air defenses in both Germany and Japan by the end of 1944 might have tipped off Allied leaders that the end was in sight. Remember, the Allies increased their area bombing after the collapse of Axis air defenses rather than reducing it. Dudney's comments concerning Hitler's *Vengeance* weapons and nuclear research programs are odd, since neither were located in urban areas. How did bombing Berlin or Dresden reduce the threats of V-1 and V-2 weapons in isolated Peenemünde? And why would Stalin strike a deal with Hitler in 1944 or 1945 while the Red Army was winning and proceeding apace to the German capital? With respect to an invasion of Japan, the Americans had no plans to invade Kyushu until late October or early November, 1945, and Honshu was slated for summer 1946. American intelligence, however, believed that Japan would be forced to surrender by September or early October, 1945, at the latest because of the naval blockade, not because of the area bombing.

Finally, the war crimes accusation has about it the aroma of ex post facto moralizing. As even critics of the bombing concede, the Allied attacks on Axis cities did not constitute a war crime at the time of World War II. The relevant international proscription didn't appear until 1977, more than three decades after specific military acts which the academics now condemn.

The charge of *ex post facto* prosecution was leveled at the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg, of course, where Nazis were charged by the Allies with, among other things, wanton destruction of cities and artifacts that were the common heritage of mankind, along with "devastation not justified by military necessity." Lest the German defendants claim a *tu quoque* defense, essentially that "you did the same things," the Tribunal simply prohibited defenses on that basis.

The argument that "relevant international proscription [against area bombing] didn't appear until 1977" is both preposterous and historically wrong. 1977 is the year that the United States signed the Fourth Geneva Convention Protocol, which was negotiated and approved by most of the international community in 1949. States had negotiated various conventions and treaties at least since the mid-nineteenth century aimed at controlling war and prohibiting the deliberate targeting of undefended cities and non-combatants. On September 1, 1939, the date of Germany's invasion of Poland, American President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent the following warning to the early adversaries:

THE ruthless bombing from the air of civilians in unfortified centres of population during the course of the hostilities which have raged in various quarters of the earth in the past few years, which have resulted in the maiming and death of thousands of defenseless women and children, has profoundly shocked the conscience of humanity.

If resort is had to this sort of inhuman barbarism during the period of tragic conflagration with which the world is now confronted, hundreds of thousands of innocent human beings, who have no responsibility for, and who are not even remotely participating in, the hostilities which have broken out, now will lose their lives.

bombing. Writing in the September 2002 edition of *Air Force Magazine*, Phillip S. Meilinger, author of *Airpower: Myths and Facts*, writes:

*No one in the Air Corps hierarchy during the 1930s advocated such an strategy [the bombing of urban centers]. On the contrary, for **military, legal, and humanitarian reasons**, such an air strategy was expressly rejected.* (Emphasis added)

Grayling argues with proper legal support that the prohibition against indiscriminate targeting of civilians and non-combatants has today become a preemptory norm of customary international law (*ius cogens*), binding on all states irrespective of whether they accept the norm or not (e.g., the United States). Even if the RAF and USAAF did not violate the "law" as it was at the time, they clearly violated the laws that were in development then and that have become binding today.

Finally, Dudney expresses his suspicion that Grayling's "target" really isn't World War II bombing, but instead, and quoting Michael Burleigh that,

...it is British and American pilots operating over Afghanistan, Iraq, and perhaps Iran, whom the professor would like to see in the dock...

This suspicion is wholly unwarranted. The U.S. military has spent decades developing "smart, precision-guided" weapons. While these weapons occasionally miss their mark because of intelligence failures or equipment failures or simply the "fog of war," no one seriously believes that the U.S. Air Force is intentionally targeting non-combatants in Iraq, Afghanistan, or perhaps Iran. Certainly your obedient correspondent does not believe that, dear reader.

Nonetheless, the arguments above do have contemporary relevance with respect to nuclear weapons, especially high yield thermonuclear bombs (5 megatons or more). These are the ultimate, indiscriminate weapons. The only practical use of hydrogen bombs is to incinerate the enemy's population, which today is pretty clearly a crime against humanity. Moreover, there is no legitimate military objective that might render the use of hydrogen bombs necessary because there would cease to be an adversary with which to negotiate surrender terms, much less to occupy!

Furthermore, the generally accepted purpose of nuclear stockpiles, deterrence, is itself of questionable legality. The UN Charter, of which the United States is a state party, provides:

All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations. (Chapter I, Article 2, paragraph 4)

What is nuclear deterrence other than a threat to use indiscriminate weapons against the territorial integrity or political independence of our adversaries?

Ernest says

Is the targeting of civilians in war ever justified? This weighty moral question is the subject of this book by noted philosopher A.C. Grayling. Grayling starts by outlining the historical background of the bombings during World War II. Although not a professional historian, I appreciated learning about this as it is something I did not know much about. Not only does Grayling set out the facts of the actual bombings, but goes behind them to explore the people involved in planning and executing the operations and the mindsets they had. This alone would have been it a useful book.

It is Grayling's examination of whether the targeting of civilians is ever justified that gives the book its central depth. In analysing the moral question (for and against the proposition), he is almost overscrupulous in setting out, probing and reasoning through the assumptions, moral logic, and conclusions he identifies and draws. Some may have wish for a stronger, more overtly emotive and vociferous position, but I found this presentation strengthened rather than weakened the force of his argument.

This is not an easy question to intellectual grapple with. The moral dilemmas are complex, the possibility of conflating issues easy, and it is, rightly, a difficult time in history to revisit. Nevertheless, it behoves us not just as citizens of the world, but as those for whom those questions are still very much present today. A.C. Grayling has made a most welcomed contribution in this area.

KB says

A. C. Grayling's *Among the Dead Cities: The History and Moral Legacy of the WWII Bombing of Civilians in Germany and Japan* asks if these Allied area bombing campaigns were war crimes and if they were just in their targeting of civilians to achieve larger war aims. German suffering and the idea that they were also victims during (and right after) the war is something that very recently has started to interest me. The bombings were quick to come to mind, so I searched for a book that tackled the topic in some way, and this looked to be a good choice.

Grayling is a philosopher, not a historian, but I don't think that this necessarily affects how the book was written. He gives a short biography of himself, and it is clear he has a lot of knowledge about these bombing campaigns and understands the history well. The introduction is excellent; it lays out exactly what questions Grayling attempts to answer or addresses and how he is going to do this throughout the book. What I really liked about this was how he introduced the controversial nature of this topic. He lets the readers know that serious discussion about the bombings are often brushed aside because they are still seen as controversial. Many think debating their morality or necessity takes away from the bravery of the men who carried them out. Others think that it takes the focus away from the horrendous things the Nazis did, or attempts to equate the Allied and Axis war aims and events. Grayling explicitly states that this is not what he intends to do. He says leaving these questions unaddressed leaves room for right-wing extremists in Germany to use this topic for their own aims. More generally, he feels it's something that needs to be discussed before we become too removed from the Second World War and leave the topic as-is.

One thing I really liked was Grayling stating that explanations are not justifications. Regardless of whatever reasons the Allies had for their bombings, it does not automatically mean they are justified. Surely there could have been some other way to come about ending the war than indiscriminately bombing cities and terrorizing citizens (and, therefore, non-combatants). While the US in Germany had strategic goals of bombing factories and oil fields, the British bombed cities in hopes of lowering the morale of Germany's citizens (which, Grayling points out, did not happen). Grayling shows that area bombing did not even halt production in Germany - rather, it increased until toward the very end of the war. He also suggests that this did not even remove large amounts of troops or weapons from the front to help the cities. Of course, it diverted some, but was not the reason Germany lost the war. To add to this, Germans learned how to react to bombings (since these cities were bombed repeatedly) and were thoroughly prepared.

These area bombings went beyond necessity. Grayling shows how successful American strategic bombing was, but also notes that if you aim for military targets, civilians casualties are inevitable. Homes might be destroyed and people will be killed, especially if targets aren't 100% clear. These things, however unfortunate, are a reality. With that being said, the British indiscriminately bombed entire cities. They also bombed cities simply because they hadn't been bombed, such as Dresden or Wurzburg, neither of which had

any military significance.

As I read, I wondered why Grayling did not include many (any?) German sources for the book. Thankfully, he did address this toward the end, as he states that he wanted to give information from the victors' perspective. He does provide some examples of what the bombing was like for civilians from survivors which were taken from English sources, which I'm guessing probably consulted original German sources.

I have to agree with others that Grayling is never explicit enough in saying that the bombings were war crimes and immoral. It's obvious that he believes this, even in the chapter on the case supporting the bombings all he does is refute the supposed justifications. However, it seems that he does not want to come across as offensive or be too controversial. In my view, if you're writing a book like this, you might as well just go for it. I think any rational person reading this, even if they don't agree, wouldn't get worked up or be horribly offended if Grayling flat out said, yes, these bombing should be considered war crimes and were unnecessary. I think his wording needed to be more concrete.

The other thing I'd point out is that Germany is the main focus of the book. To me, anyways, Japan always seemed like an afterthought, left for a couple paragraphs at the end of a chapter, or quickly thrown in amid a chapter. While I totally see why Grayling included it as it fits right in with what the Allies were doing in Germany, I almost think he should have left it out. I don't think there was enough focus on it to warrant being part of the book.

Overall, it was a good read and I think Grayling tackled the topic very well. I would definitely recommend it for those interested in history, especially World War II, obviously.

James says

Thought-provoking and troubling - Mr. Grayling makes a convincing case that the nighttime area - bombing of German cities in Germany by the British Royal Air Force (RAF) Bomber Command, which was explicitly aimed at their civilian populations, was immoral by the standards of pre- and post-war treaties and of the Nuremberg trials; he bases his case on the arguments that these bombings were not necessary or even critical in defeating Nazi Germany, unlike the daylight bombing raids by the U.S. Army Air Force (USAAF) targeted at specific factories, railyards, and other strategic targets, and that they were also not proportional to any advantage the Allies hoped they would achieve. He does an excellent job of thoroughly analyzing arguments for and against his thesis.

He extends the same argument to the USAAF's mass bombings of Japanese cities, both the firebombings of Tokyo and others and the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima or Nagasaki, but with much less rigorous analysis. I believe this assertion needs to be questioned at least as intensively as the part of his case focused on the bombings of German cities, though, both because of the differences in both the workings of Japanese war industries, which were much more decentralized into cottage industries throughout residential areas than was true in Germany, and because of the differences in the psychologies and attitudes of these two Axis powers. Specifically he states that both city-bombing campaigns took place mostly or completely after the defeats of the targeted countries had become somewhere between very likely and inevitable. However, he is silent regarding the documented fact that the Japanese government was grimly determined to keep fighting no matter how many cities were bombed, even after the expected Allied invasion of the home islands, to the extent that they were preparing small children to attack American soldiers with pointed sticks. Even after Hiroshima they initially refused to surrender, and all evidence is that without the atomic bombs they would have kept fighting until their entire nation was forcibly overrun. That invasion and conquest on land would have caused the deaths of several hundred thousand American servicemen and probably several million

Japanese soldiers and civilians. In light of that, I would argue that the atomic bombs were both necessary and proportional, and were the least of the available evils.

Sarah Crawford says

This is a book which examines the morality of what is called area bombing on the cities of Germany and Japan. (Since this page is part of my Japan and World War II section, I will not go into details on the German bombing, although the book does provide a great deal of information about that as well as about the bombings of Japan).

There are two main types of bombing; precision bombing and area bombing. Precision bombing is, as the name implies, trying to bomb a precise location such as a factory or some facility that makes weapons. It's involves bombing only military targets. Such bombing can be difficult to do.

Area bombing means the bombers come in and drop bombs over a certain area, attempting to destroy whatever is in that area. The target is the area, not necessarily any specific factory, so military targets can be hit, but civilians can also be killed. Such bombing began by the Nazi's in World War II when they bombed London; the practice was carried on when the Allied forces were able to bomb German cities, and the height of the practice was when US forces firebombed Japanese cities, and then used two atomic bombs on two other cities.

The book very early on makes the strong point that, even if the Allied area bombing was an immoral act, it does not compare in scale or horror to how the Jews were treated during the Holocaust. There were around 800,000 civilians, including women and children, killed during the war by area bombing, but that number is only a fraction of the six million Jews and others murdered by the Nazis in the concentration camps.

Still, when something is morally wrong, it's morally wrong, even if it does not affect as many people as something else does.

Apparently the majority of the civilian populations of Britain and the US felt that bombing civilians was acceptable.

The decision to bomb German cities with populations over 100,000 was made in 1942.

The March 9/10 firebombing on Tokyo resulted in over 85,000 dead. The destruction caused was actually greater than that caused by either atomic bomb.

The book notes efficiency of the atomic bomb, since the damage and casualties caused by that one bomb would have required 220 B-29's carrying 1,200 tons of incendiary bombs, 400 tons of high explosives, and 500 tons of anti-personnel fragmentation bombs.

If area bombing is a moral crime, then the bombings in the last six months of the war in both the European and Japanese theatres of war have what lawyers call an aggravated character-an intensified moral questionability, partly because victory was no longer genuinely doubtful, and partly because the motives for dropping the atom bombs might have been additional to realization of the Allied war aims regarding Japan.

In other words, if area bombing is immoral, it is especially so when done in a situation where the enemy is clearly beaten, even if the enemy has not yet surrendered.

The number of Japanese casualties among soldiers in the war was around 780,000. The number of civilian casualties was around 806,000.

The bombings also helped lower morale since many civilians evacuated the cities, and with them went the stories of the bombings being carried out with little if any Japanese military resistance at all.

German civilian deaths ranged from 305,000 to 500,000.

Henry Stimson, the Secretary of War, was not in favor of the use of the atomic bomb. He did manage to get Kyoto removed from the list of possible targets.

Another reason the atomic bomb was used was to impress on Russia how far ahead the US was on atomic bomb research, to make Russia more manageable in Europe.

One possible focus of area bombing is to destroy a country's entire culture. That way the victor can replace it with whatever they want.

The book notes several reasons for the use of the area-bombing. One was a hope that it could shorten the war. Another was blatant anti-Japanese racism. This was due to the way American POWs were killed; the kamikaze attacks; Pearl Harbor, and the general way that the Japanese soldiers fought so fiercely.

No matter how strongly US civilians felt about this, people in the military felt even stronger and some advocated the area-bombing as being justified reaction to what the Japanese military had been doing.

Acts of injustice can be perpetrated in the course of a just war, and if the injustices committed are themselves very great, their commission can threaten the overall justice of the war in which they took place.

>In relation to the rules of war, if the allies had lost, the argument could have been used that the area bombings were inhumane acts committed against any civilian population. Proportionality also be involved. What is questioned, for example, is the amount of military-related structures in Hiroshima, for example, in proportion to the entire area destroyed. If the military structures amounted to only a small percentage of the city, then destroying the entire city just to destroy those structures would be an act out of proportion to the value of the military targets, and thus could be construed as a war crime.

The book has sections of the Geneva Convention protocols in it, and it's easy to see how much of what has happened since them actually violates the protocols.

One argument in that has been given in favor of area-bombing is that there is little difference between the civilian who makes a weapon (or a part of a weapon) and the soldier who actually uses the weapon; thus, the civilians are justified targets.

The book questions whether lowering civilian morale couldn't have been done just as easily by dropping a demonstration atomic bomb somewhere where tens of thousands of civilians would not have been killed, but they would still have understood what could happen to them ultimately

From 1939 through 1945, around 15 million military people were killed in all theaters of war; over 45 million civilians were killed.

Were there alternatives to area bombing? More effective precision bombing could have been undertaken; more isolation of the country by mining the waters could have been done; etc.

There is also the question of whether or not morality has any place in a war at all.

The book holds in the end that the area bombing was an immoral act. The book holds area bombing was not absolutely necessary, it was not proportionate, it was against the general codes of Western civilization, and it was against national laws against murder, bodily harm and destruction of property.

James Murphy says

This is a terribly interesting book. It's a book that'll change your understanding of the strategic bombing of Germany and Japan during the Second World War. I've read a considerable amount of military history and thought I understood the bombing campaign. But Grayling presents details and perspectives new to me. For instance, I was aware that the Americans bombed by day while the British bombed by night. And I thought the 2 campaigns were directed against targets supporting the enemy war effort. I was unaware there were 2 bombing philosophies, that of the British against cities and populations and that of the Americans against military targets. The book's careful discussion of the reasons behind the 2 philosophies is fascinating. I was unaware that among the Allies there were dissenting voices who protested the fate of Dresden and other cities. I'd never understood the British bombing campaign as area bombing designed to reduce Germany to an agricultural state so that it could never again build industrial strength to threaten Europe. Grayling discusses, too, how the looming presence of the Soviets worried the British and Americans so that near the end of the war they began to worry the bomb damage inflicted would prevent the German postwar recovery they were learning would be necessary to offset Soviet ambitions. Grayling uses the word culturecide to describe British bombing objectives in Germany. On the other side of the world when American bombers became able to reach Japan during the final months of the war, the same doctrine of area bombing against cities and populations prevailed, along with the same moral issues. As an aside, currently reading a book on 20th century strategy by Colin S Gray, I thought it interesting that he defends American methods in Japan as the only way of attacking the dispersals of industry within the cities. Gray's concerns are entirely strategic while Grayling's addressing morality, but the debate's an interesting one. Grayling does touch on the possible necessity of area bombing of Japanese cities. He writes that by the time the Allied advance brought the strategic bombers within range of the home islands, Japan's situation was such that it couldn't win, though avoiding an invasion of the homeland became important to the Allies. In 7 chapters Grayling carefully describes the bombing campaign from the perspectives of bombers and those bombed, the military objectives, arguments both in favor of and against area bombing, and convincingly concludes the campaign of firebombing of cities and populations during the war was immoral. His argument is carefully laid out. It's structured and layered and developed point by documented point to present a conclusion as definite as a legal brief. Yet near the end he gives weight to the school of thought that it would've been immoral for the Allies to have lost the war, and that fact justifies any means to win. The entire menu of issues discussed in Grayling's book provides a fascinating discourse. Of importance to the debate is weighing area bombing against the atrocities of the war which came to light near the war's end. He writes a telling anecdote about Churchill watching a film of a bombing mission. Horrified at the effect the bombs have on the city and imagining what it must be like on the ground, he asks, "Are we animals? Are we taking this too far?" Grayling concludes we did. His moral argument, as I said, is convincing. But the book explains all sides of a complex, disturbing side of the war. Though his argument is firm, he understands why there's still controversy. In writing my impressions here I've touched on only a small portion of the intellectual wealth of Grayling's book. I want to say this is one of the most important books on the subject. I can only say for sure it's a book important to my understanding of the war and that it's significant enough I'll make use of its information and ideas in the future. I doubt it'll have any significant bearing on the conduct of war.

Kusaimamekirai says

I'm at a loss for words for how profound this book is, but I want to say something about it. More philosophical inquiry than war chronicle, (although his analysis of the effects of bombing civilian targets is stark and detailed) this book seeks to find an answer to the question of essentially whether the ends of winning a just war ever justify the means of doing something morally evil to obtain it. The author goes about this in stages of examining what the world looked like at the beginning of the war, the thought processes behind the decision to bomb civilian targets, the aftermath of those decisions (the descriptions of Allied fire bombings on Japanese and German civilians are heartrending and extremely difficult to read), some prominent figures who voiced moral objections to it, and finally the cases for and against it. Grayling's arguments are so clear, persuasive, and well reasoned that it is difficult to walk away from this book and not feel what happened in Dresden, Hiroshima, Nagasaki and other cities were morally reprehensible actions. This is not to say they were on a par with the atrocities committed by the Japanese and the Nazis. Grayling makes it extremely clear he does not see an equivalent and argues that the precision bombing of military targets carried out by Britain and the US was morally justified and effective. But a wrong remains a wrong. As he points out, a man who murders 2 people rarely argues that his crime is less worthy of punishment than a man who murdered 5. If there is no adherence to some kind of a moral code, even in a state of emergency, the peace that is won is obtained at such a cost that it will invariably be paid for with a reckoning later down the line.
