

# Atomic age places existence in peril

Forty years ago, a spectacular mushroom cloud formed over the Japanese city of Hiroshima. The bomb did not discriminate. Children, the elderly, newlyweds, rich, poor; all types of people were ravaged, disfigured and killed. Tens of thousands of people died. The lucky ones died instantly, and the not-so-lucky ones died slowly and painfully.

And at the same time, a dark, dismal cloud formed over the future of humankind. With the explosion of the atom bomb, humankind entered the nuclear age. And with each bomb that is built, and every dollar spent for nuclear research and development, the cloud grows darker.

This knowledge places humans in peril shortly after the birth of humankind. If the chronology of the earth's history is mapped within one year's time, as was demonstrated by a calendar designed by Carl Sagan in his book "The Dragons of Eden," the first human beings do not make a showing until 10:30 p.m. December 31, the last day of the year. The birth of Christ occurs within the last four seconds of the year, and all of the United States' history is enveloped in less than one second.

Humans have barely made their entrance onto the universal stage, and already are facing the problem that will determine whether we will continue to exist or cease to exist.

The control of nuclear knowledge involves more than whether our children or our grandchildren will live or die, though. As far as anyone knows, it may involve the existence of life itself. All life, intelligent or otherwise, that humans have come in contact with, originated on earth. The instruments that continually monitor outer space radio noise for any sign of intelligent life, the probes designed to test for microbes on Mars; all have failed to discover even the faintest sign of life.

The laughter of a child, the songs of birds that greet the sunrise, everything that lives may be unique to this one tiny speck of dust in the vast universe. Obliteration may silence the only voice the universe knows.

That life thrives here, in the corner of the universe, tucked away on the edge of one of a 100 billion galaxies, is an incomprehensible rarity. And we may squander it away on our political pride and national arrogance.

What a shame it would be to destroy this glimmer of magic, as soon as it has struggled into existence. Just as humans are fighting to live, the breath of life could be extinguished. All of the accomplishments that we have suffered for, all of our triumphs, our joys and our sorrows, could be gone. Our existence could be destroyed before we even understand it.

And if life does exist elsewhere, it would be a fathomless tragedy to have lived and died without the recognition of a single living soul. All of our knowledge and experience would be wasted.

But even after witnessing the horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, humans continue to hurtle themselves toward extinction. The world's powers possess a destructive force capable of leveling all of the world's cities many times over. The Geneva talks between the United States and the Soviet Union founder, the Reagan administration continues to funnel billions of dollars into research for the Strategic Defense Initiative, an effort to move the nuclear arms race into space, and even underdeveloped countries such as India are adding nuclear weapons to their arsenals.

Monday, a bell tolled in Eugene at 4:15 p.m., 40 years after the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Let the bell toll for peace and resistance against the arm's race. Do not let it toll for humankind.



## letters

### Connection

While the UO President Paul Olum maintains that the State Board of Higher Education must divest its funds in South Africa, he chooses to turn his back on the connection between South Africa and the proposed Riverfront Research Park. The connection between classified research/high tech, companies is an intimate one. IBM, for example, supplies the computer works the white South African government uses to keep track of its 24 million black citizens. The U.S. also depends on South Africa for the majority of the uranium used in American nuclear warheads. Who mines the uranium used in making U.S. bombs? Certainly not the 4 million whites who rule that country.

But there's another tie that links high technology to apartheid. South African President Pieter W. Botha was formerly tried for pro-Nazi activities after World War II. It is interesting to note that during World War II Paul Olum and other scientists worked on a classified project (the nuclear bomb) designed to end the reign of fascism.

Despite all this, the UO vice president of research stated that without classified research, there would be no Riverfront Park (Women's Press, July/Aug., 1985). It appears to me that the "profit over people" mentality prevails in Olum's office. And I intend to write a letter to Carley Capital (the developer) expressing my opposition to the Riverfront pro-

ject. As a student at this University and a resident of Eugene, I do not support the Riverfront project and the sanctioning of racism in my name!!!

Sue Dockstader  
Eugene Free South  
Africa Movement

### Probability

In response to Tom Visoky's letter (ODE, Aug. 1) regarding a previous letter of mine (ODE, July 30), in the Lakota Sioux language one cannot conjugate the verb "to think" into "she/he/they think(s)." This accurately reflects the impossibility of proving what is in another person's mind. Although the idea of fixity and absoluteness are comforting to some people, we live in a universe based on probabilities.

We can assign a high probability to our assumptions of Hitler's thoughts about Jews, based on his actions and words. This does not constitute absolute proof, but belief beyond reasonable doubt is enough for conviction.

A classic example of presumed thoughts and actions that don't match is Ronald Reagan. The impression is that he really cares about kids. The actuality is that, due to his policies, babies in Detroit are dying at the same rate as in the least developed nation in our hemisphere, Honduras. How does one prove what (or if) Reagan thinks?

Visoky asked what I think the study of history is. It is generally an examination of the opinions of white, male, ethnic-Christians regarding a selection of confrontational events or of opinions of white, male, ethnic-Christians.

Like the I-Ching, history has its uses, but its limitations should be noted and balanced with a healthy dose of personal wisdom. To extend the classic idea: Those ignorant of the excesses of the past are doomed to repeat them, those without wisdom are doomed to create the excesses of the future.

Jack Straton  
Graduate student  
Physics

### Thanks, but . . .

Frale de Guzman's article about the UO grounds crews and maintenance workers (ODE, July 25) was greatly appreciated. It highlighted a group of employees who make a major contribution to the visual appearance of the University, but who themselves remain largely "invisible" to most members of the campus community. This attention has certainly been well received by these crews; hopefully, the story will also encourage campus users to show increased respect for the grounds and buildings these workers maintain.

I do have two small quibbles, though. First, even though the article quotes a variety of people, apparently no one spoke to any of the regular crew members — only to their supervisors and to two student employees. We might have found out a lot more about the work of these crews; if we had heard from the people who actually do it year-round. Second, no mention was made that most of these employees are represented by Oregon Public Employees Union and covered by a recently negotiated collective bargaining agreement. Unions, it seems, are often no more "visible" to those outside them than the workers they represent.

Thanks again for the story. It was good to see all these employees' efforts recognized and praised.

Kurt Wilcox  
Business Agent  
Oregon Public  
Employees Union

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## oregon daily emerald

The Oregon Daily Emerald is published on Tuesdays and Thursdays during the summer session except during exam week and vacations by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, 97403.

The Emerald operates independently of the University with offices on the third floor of the Erb Memorial Union and is a member of the Associated Press.

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**Production:** 686-4381  
**Circulation:** 686-5511