



Atomic Fragments: A Daughter's Questions

Mary Palevsky

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More than most of us, Mary Palevsky needed to come to terms with the moral complexities of the atomic bomb: Her parents worked on its development during World War II and were profoundly changed by that experience. After they died, unanswered questions sent their daughter on a search for understanding. This compelling, sometimes heart-wrenching chronicle is the story of that quest. It takes her, and us, on a journey into the minds, memories, and emotions of the bomb builders.

Scientists Hans Bethe, Edward Teller, Joseph Rotblat, Herbert York, Philip Morrison, and Robert Wilson, and philosopher David Hawkins responded to Palevsky's personal approach in a way that dramatically expands their previously published statements. Her skill and passion as an interlocutor prompt these men to recall their lives vividly and to reexamine their own decisions, debating within themselves the complex issues raised by the bomb.

The author herself, seeking to comprehend the widely differing ways in which individual scientists made choices about the bomb and made sense of their work, deeply reconsiders those questions of commitment and conscience her parents faced. In personal vignettes that complement the interviews, she captures other remembrances of the bomb through commemorative events and chance encounters with people who were "there." Her concluding chapter reframes the crucial moral questions in terms that show the questions themselves to be the abiding legacy we all share. This beautifully written book bridges generations to make its readers participants in the ongoing dialogue about science and philosophy, war and peace.



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