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Compartmentalization of Science, Power and Social Responsibility as exemplified in the life of J. Robert Oppenheimer. WILLEM VAN DE MERWE, TODD REAM, Indiana Wesleyan University — Many biographies of J. Robert Oppenheimer have recently been published; each emphasizing some different aspects of his life. Physicists can learn much about physics in the early 1900s and about the practice of physics in society from these biographies. Oppenheimer, the “father of the atomic bomb,” seems to have struggled early in life with finding a framework for understanding himself and for finding guidance for making responsible decisions. In this paper, we will briefly consider his upbringing in the Ethical Cultural School, his studies in physics in Europe, passion for poetry, including the influence of the Bhagavad-Gita, and his initial sympathizing with left-wing political groups. In this context, we will consider whether a quality liberal arts education might help physics students formulate their framework to guide them throughout the course of their career in science.

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