

THE HUMAN LIFE REVIEW



VOLUME XLV No. 3 ♦ SUMMER 2019

♦ FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE ♦

Helen Alvaré on

ABORTION: NEVER A “SINGLE ISSUE”

Rich Lowry on

THE RIGHT THAT DARE NOT SPEAK ITS NAME

William Murchison on

THE STAGGERING BREADTH OF THE REVOLUTION

Caitlin Smith Gilson on

THE LANGUAGE GAME OF CHOICE (PART I)

SYMPOSIUM: COULD ABORTION EVER BE “UNTHINKABLE” AGAIN?

Malcolm Muggeridge • William Murchison • William McGurn • Anne Conlon • Christopher Bell
Anne Hendershott • Chuck Donovan • Kathryn Jean Lopez

Christopher M. Reilly on

THE MADNESS OF HUMAN GENETIC ENGINEERING

Wesley J. Smith on

TRANSHUMANISM: CHURCH OF THE NEW EUGENICS

Ellen Wilson Fielding on

TALKING ACROSS THE METAPHYSICAL DIVIDE

Jason Morgan on

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE HUMAN PERSON

♦ ALSO IN THIS ISSUE ♦

From the HLR Website: Nicholas Frankovich • B G Carter

Film/Booknotes: Sarah Gallick reviews Elizabeth Lev's *How Catholic Art Saved the Faith*

Appendices: Melissa Ohden & Christina Bennett • Alexandra DeSanctis • Maria McFadden Maffucci

. . . Helen Alvaré and I first met in January of 1996 at a *Firing Line* taping. Jim McFadden, stricken with throat cancer and unable to speak clearly, had sent me to observe the debate between Ms. Alvaré and Naomi Wolf, a *then* VIP-feminist whose recently published *New Republic* essay “Our Bodies, Our Souls”—in which she famously argued that abortion was a “necessary evil”—had rattled the sisterhood. Jim made the essay the subject of a symposium in our Winter 1996 edition, and reprinted the *Firing Line* transcript, as well as a self-deprecating commentary by Alvaré on her own debate performance, in the following issue. The next year, William Buckley announced that Rich Lowry, his 29-year-old Washington correspondent, would become *National Review*’s new editor. I remember how impressed Jim was when young Lowry sent him a note asking for any suggestions Jim might have for him as he assumed leadership of the magazine. That the Human Life Foundation is honoring Helen and Rich as Great Defenders of Life this year seems an especially fitting tribute to our late founding editor, who wielded a mighty pen yet embodied, as they do, a modest disposition. And we are delighted that each honoree has contributed an original article to this issue.

Commenting on Wolf’s essay over twenty years ago, William McGurn wrote: “Were abortion to be treated honestly and openly, the outcome would undoubtedly be an increasing number of restrictions, probably varying dramatically state by state.” Well. As McGurn predicted, restrictions have steadily multiplied and are now exploding—in May, Alabama passed a near-total ban!—driving the abortion-obsessed *New York Times* to an unprecedented level of open and honest advocacy. A May 15 editorial urged readers to make donations, become escorts or otherwise volunteer in local abortion clinics, and to be sure to vote in local elections: “Decisions about zoning and even noise ordinances can make the difference between a clinic staying open or being forced to close.” In another example of frenzied reaction, Planned Parenthood fired its president, Leana Wen, MD, for not being abortion-minded enough (see Alexandra DeSanctis’s report in *Appendix B*, page 92).

Just how dramatically abortion legislation can vary state by state became apparent last January, when New York celebrated baby-killing-on-demand by lighting up the City’s Freedom Tower in pink. (Was the irony of “baby pink” lost on female revellers?) Senior Editor William Murchison, seeing red, asked how we planned to respond. Given that a quarterly has long lead times, we decided on a symposium, which would be posted on our website earlier this summer and then published here (“Could Abortion Ever Be ‘Unthinkable’ Again?,” page 64). Thanks to all who participated—including William Murchison and William McGurn—for their thoughtful responses. Could abortion ever be “unthinkable” again? As I found, and as I believe you will too, it is a question worth pondering.

ANNE CONLON
MANAGING EDITOR

Correction: A review of Obianuju Ekeocha’s Target Africa: Ideological Neocolonialism in the Twenty-First Century, which appeared in the Winter 2019 edition, referred to “the childless” Melinda Gates. William and Melinda Gates have three children. A corrected version can be accessed online at www.humanlifereview.com. We regret the error.



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Vol. XLV, No. 3

<i>Introduction</i>	2
Maria McFadden Maffucci	
<i>Abortion: Never a "Single Issue"</i>	5
Helen Alvaré	
<i>The Right That Dare Not Speak Its Name</i>	9
Rich Lowry	
<i>The Staggering Breadth of the Revolution</i>	15
William Murchison	
<i>The Language Game of Choice</i>	21
Caitlin Smith Gilson	
<i>The Madness of Human Genetic Engineering</i> . . .	31
Christopher M. Reilly	
<i>Transhumanism: Church of the New Eugenics</i> . . .	38
Wesley J. Smith	
<i>Talking Across the Metaphysical Divide</i>	45
Ellen Wilson Fielding	
<i>Artificial Intelligence and the Human Person</i> . .	53
Jason Morgan	
<i>Could Abortion Ever Be "Unthinkable" Again?</i> . .	64
Malcolm Muggeridge	
William Murchison	
William McGurn	
Anne Conlon	
Christopher Bell	
Anne Hendershott	
Chuck Donovan	
Kathryn Jean Lopez	
<i>Film/Booknotes</i>	79
Sarah Gallick	
<i>From the HLR Website</i>	83
Nicholas Frankovich	
B G Carter	
<i>Appendices</i>	89

INTRODUCTION

“I was drawn into the pro-life movement because my lawyer-self can’t tolerate a diet of lies—and the amount of lying I witnessed in the service of legal abortion finally provoked me into action,” recounts Helen Alvaré in our lead essay, “Abortion: Never a ‘Single Issue.’” Alvaré, who will receive our Great Defender of Life award on October 10, is referring to 1980, when she accepted the newly created position of pro-life spokesperson for the national Catholic bishops conference. In “Leading Lady for Life,” a profile which appeared in the *Human Life Review* (Spring 2013), Brian Caulfield wrote that for the next 10 years, Alvaré “became the American Catholic hierarchy’s formidable yet engaging pro-life presence.” Alvaré’s brilliant legal mind and masterful command of an argument and audience have continued to be invaluable to the pro-life movement; but what she writes about here is how entering the pro-life movement transformed *her* life. She “learned the meaning of vocation, the power of example, the necessity of integrity, and how better to live counterculturally.” She also found that countering the “diet of lies” wasn’t easy, because “abortion advocates are not primarily, or even, significantly, interested in demonstrable facts.”

Also receiving our Great Defender of Life award this year is Rich Lowry, the editor of *National Review*, where our own story began. (My father J.P. McFadden created the Human Life Foundation—with the blessing and encouragement of the late William F. Buckley Jr.—while working as Associate Publisher at NR). What a mantle Lowry took up when he became editor of the magazine in 1997 at the young age of 29! Under his leadership, NR continues to champion the rights of the unborn; and in his syndicated columns and TV appearances Lowry valiantly contests the abortion culture. In “The Right That Dare Not Speak Its Name,” Lowry contributes a succinct and far-reaching overview of where we are now, emphasizing the unabashed lying the movement needs in order to survive. “The pro-abortion stylebook demands that abortion be called ‘health’ or, more specifically, ‘reproductive health,’ even though it is the opposite of reproduction and (for one party involved) the opposite of health.” And he includes the June news that a coalition of nearly 200 CEO’s of American companies declared (in a full-page ad in the *New York Times*) that abortion is needed for women’s “equality” and is necessary for the country’s business—though how killing future customers is good for business isn’t clear.

Thanks in large part to the pro-life movement, the abortion rate has fallen dramatically. But so has the American birthrate. The Bible says “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth,” as senior editor William Murchison reminds us in “The Staggering Breadth of the Revolution,” but America, entrenched in the “I-me-mine-culture,” has been steadily drifting away from its Judeo-Christian moorings and forgetting that human life is above all a theological issue: “Life—brought by God to the world He created—is good.” Murchison cites a new study showing that the present child-bearing generation “isn’t producing enough babies to reproduce itself, demographically.” Secular forces worry about the political and economic results of a population implosion;

but Murchison points to the theological ramifications when we lose the conviction that we have a responsibility to the Creator “for the gift of participation in the creation of life.”

The Gospel of John begins: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Truth (yes, with a capital T) has been made accessible through spoken and written language. The integrity of our language is crucial. But as philosophy professor Caitlin Smith Gilson writes next, “our language has been corrupted” to “allow abortion (in its ‘own alternative reality’) to persist.” In “*Advocatus Diaboli: The Language Game of Choice*,” Gilson examines the first six of thirteen “crucial arguments in favor of abortion” and what “response, what apologetic, can be employed effectively to counteract those claims.” She deftly reveals the misleading and dangerous faulty logic and language used in arguments promoting abortion. For example, the argument that size determines a fetus’s value: “If we demarcate a particular size or place as the point at which life is ‘finally’ a person, are we not invoking a hierarchical order where all other lives are lesser and relative to that apex point of absolute acceptability? . . . Is a toddler worth less than a teenager because the toddler is smaller?” Her dissection of the deceit is a valuable tool for all those advocating for life in the public square. (Part II of Gilson’s article will appear in our Fall issue.)

Logic and reason ought to go hand in hand with faith to inform us about the natural order of things. Our next two articles expose unnatural desires that arise when reason is divorced from faith. The “worship of reason can be a source of insanity,” writes Christopher M. Reilly in “The Madness of Human Genetic Engineering.” Genetic engineering researchers, tempted by the “highly profitable business” of answering parents’ wishes for “enhanced” offspring, are “escalating the slaughter of human embryos and gametes,” following “rationally-derived ethical guidelines” that “ignore any moral perspective that fully respects the incalculable value and sanctity of God-given human nature.” The extreme insanity of this kind of adoration of technology, as Wesley J. Smith explains, manifests itself as a new “religion”: Transhumanism (“Transhumanism: Church of the New Eugenics”). This is a social movement, “emanating out of elite universities, funded bounteously by the billionaires of Silicon Valley, and boosted by an uncritical media,” which actually believe that, in just a few years, “cascading technology will become unstoppable and uncontrollable, to the point that it will permit humans to live, if not forever, than certainly indefinitely.” Yes, we are back to the age-old quest for immortality, but this time, seekers believe, it will come in the form of some sort of human-robot hybrid. Believe it or not, that moment is known as “the Singularity,” and faith in it, as Smith writes, is not a “fringe idea.”

The sometimes absurd level of trust our culture places in science and technology is the subject of our next article, “Talking Across the Metaphysical Divide,” by senior editor Ellen Wilson Fielding. “The streamlining of science in the interest of efficiency and productivity, while it sent scientific development into overdrive, was achieved by abandoning the pursuit of wisdom, and the philosophical aspect of science’s early name: natural philosophy.” Scientists have gravitated to the “consoling belief that matter and energy” are all there is, and have largely left behind “consideration of the whole universe’s relationship to its Creator or the Creator’s purposes in creating.” Our

current political and social debates are stymied because those who believe in “only” science argue from a different set of first principles and point to their own evidence and authorities.

As often happens, articles in a single edition of the *Review*, which are chosen separately over time, share a common theme, as if this were our intention. All the articles here ask what happens to man when he forgets where he came from, and no longer believes in Truth. This brings us to our final essay, “Artificial Intelligence and the Human Person,” Jason Morgan’s superb discussion of what is commonly referred to as AI. His opening paragraph echoes Murchison: “Man has lost his way, [has] lost sight of who he is and who he is meant to become” because he has rejected the “old world of God and country, of Sunday school and Sunday dinner.” We wrestle with a new anxiety: the advancement of AI, which some welcome, though many fear. But what is it? Technology has racked up great success with robots and machines able to think like humans, and AI researchers imagine a new sort of “person” who would be, well, comprised of code and thus protected from the human impediment—death (Ray Kurzweil, writes Morgan, teaches that death is an engineering problem, not, as Judeo-Christian belief holds, the “wages of sin.”) But could such a machine with human-level intelligence ever be a human being? No, says Morgan: AI researchers do not “understand the human person, who is made in the image and likeness of God and whose soul is eternal protection against counterfeit. In that sense, AI will never happen. It will always be a bastardization of the original.”

* * * * *

“Could Abortion Ever Be ‘Unthinkable’ Again” is the question we posed to several top pro-life leaders and thinkers, resulting in a symposium, first posted on our website (www.humanlifereview.com) and now included here, with its own introduction on page 64. Next, in Booknotes, Sarah Gallick reviews a fascinating study by art historian Elizabeth Lev: *How Catholic Art Saved the Faith: The Triumph of Beauty and Truth in Counter-Reformation Art*—another look at the importance of Truth-seeking to healthy culture. From our website, we reprint Nicholas Frankovich’s look at similarities between suicide and abortion acceptance, and B G Carter’s reflection on the “curious path” many have taken, banishing hell and “relocating” heaven on earth.

Our appendices this issue include: (A) powerful testimonies by two abortion survivors, Melissa Ohden and Christina Bennett, given at a Congressional hearing on “Threats to Reproductive Rights in America”; (B) *National Review*’s Alexandra de Sanctis on the surprise ousting of Planned Parenthood’s new president, Dr. Leana Wen; and (C) your editor’s Newsmax column about a new threat to life in New York State, the proposed Medical Aid in Dying Act. As always, Nick Downe’s ingenious cartoons give us a touch of heavenly humor, so welcome as we engage in profoundly serious matters.

MARIA MCFADDEN MAFFUCCI
EDITOR

Abortion: Never a “Single Issue”

Helen Alvaré

I was drawn into the pro-life movement because my lawyer-self can’t tolerate a diet of lies—and the amount of lying I witnessed in the service of legal abortion finally provoked me into action. Once activated, I believed that my primary work would be to correct the prevailing lies, empirically, insistently, and one at a time, until every intellectually honest person would have to admit that abortion is a human rights violation. Little did I know that the movement would move *me*, more than the other way around. In fact, by participating in the pro-life movement these past 30 years, I have learned the meaning of vocation, the power of example, the necessity of integrity, and how better to live counterculturally.

Vocation

Though raised in a family where the pro-life position was axiomatic, I had not been an activist in my teens and twenties. But 1980s network television prodded me into action. It proved to be a stream of lies promoting legal abortion. I will never forget watching the Sunday morning talk shows in the 1980s alongside my husband and fulminating over what passed for a fair conversation about abortion. Hearing me talk back at the television once too often, my husband asked me whether I wanted to “take on” abortion advocates more directly. Turns out I did. After having refused invitations for about six months to apply for a newly created position at the national Catholic bishops conference, I finally agreed. Within a week I was hired and on my way.

I arrived at the job with the conviction that pointing out the other side’s lies would be dispositive to pro-life success. We had the proof that we were right. And if I would simply perform enough research, marshal enough first-rate footnotes, and explain the facts in enough outlets and in appealing language, then it would be impossible to disagree with the pro-life position and hold one’s intellectual head up.

Oddly enough, it didn’t work out that way, not because honest research and “winsome” delivery isn’t worthwhile, but because abortion advocates are not primarily, or even significantly, interested in demonstrable facts. Still, research, analysis, synthesis, and the communications arts were and are very helpful to

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the movement. And I came to see as the years went by that these were *both* my favorite things to do *and* a necessary part (not all) of the movement. In short, I was fulfilling a vocation: using a gift I had been given to serve an outstanding need.

But I also saw how the concept of “vocation” was working in the lives of all the members of the movement. In the fabulous women staffing crisis pregnancy hotlines and centers who have patience and sweetness I do not possess. In the “community organizers” who have the gift of networking and leadership to nudge grassroots politics in a particular direction. In the fundraisers who are able to convey the urgency of the need for resources. I even met a pro-life woman whose husband—a construction worker specializing in concrete—was “vocationally” called upon by the pro-life movement to build a sidewalk on a strip of public land, so that a group praying outside an abortion clinic could avoid trespassing. The county owned the land, but hadn’t assigned funds for a sidewalk; the husband built it for free!

Now, I was pregnant and parenting a fair amount of the time that I was engaged in full-time pro-life work. Then (and still) I received about two-dozen requests a week to write or speak somewhere. Everyone assured me that I was indispensable. But we need *you* in particular because you do *this* or *that*, which we are in *special* need of. Living in the midst of the pro-life movement, I knew two things. First, that these children of mine were entrusted to me by none other than God. They were, in fact, the “nearest neighbors” lying directly in the path of the donkey my Good-Samaritan-self was riding on life’s highway. Just as all those other children were naturally entrusted to all those other mothers we were addressing. And second, that I was but one cog in the beautiful machine of the pro-life movement. A useful cog for this and that, but never indispensable.

In other words, my pro-life experience taught me a larger lesson about ceasing to overemphasize the heights or worry about the limits of my own talents and time, and to think of progress as a group endeavor, in every single arena.

The Power of Example

It would be hard *not* to be moved by the example of pro-life activists. During my time with the U.S. bishops’ office, I met them weekly and in 49 of 50 states, traveling sometimes more than 100 days per year. I stayed in their basements and children’s bedrooms. Instead of enervating me, this travel increased my energy and moved my heart.

I met the women who invented “Project Gabriel” (parish caretaking of individual women and children in need), zoning attorneys working to set up affordable apartments for single mothers, and a group stocking a warehouse with every conceivable household item, available for free to women and families facing crisis pregnancies. I met people founding and staffing centers for pregnant women,

and their donors and volunteers. And I met women who had themselves made the “choice for life,” and at no small cost to their prior life plans, and then built a *new* life around caring for their child.

In other words, I met so many heroes in the real sense, *and* saw their joy first-hand. I understood so much more clearly by this seeing: So *this* is what it looks like to “find yourself by losing yourself.” They instilled a permanent longing within me to be like that. It’s still my mission.

Integrity

My husband has been a powerful and witty voice in my ear during my entire experience with the pro-life movement. Take, for example, his remark to me after I looked askance at a woman in her 70s at a county fair, with cigarettes rolled up in her T-shirt and a “sleeve” of tattoos up her arm. He whispered in my ear: “There’s one of those humans you are working so hard to save.”

Oh, right.

When we consider what a radical statement the movement makes about the value of every human life, it is impossible not to ask ourselves during our sojourn on Planet Earth whether or not we are walking the talk. I know I have to ask myself this question every day. It has moved me to adjust my demeanor, give away more money, listen longer, and attend far more carefully to vulnerable people. Eventually, I even adjusted my driving habits. (For a while, I was too ashamed to have a pro-life bumper sticker associated with my driving. I am proud to say that in my 50s, I have finally become a more courteous driver and can again display a pro-life sticker.)

Living Counterculturally

I knew “by the numbers” that it was true: As a woman fixated on the need to overturn the myths of the “pro-choice” movement, I was not “the norm.” Had I not understood this intellectually, it would have become apparent to me after a few flights on the way to pro-life speeches, when, after I answered a seatmate’s question about “what I did for a living,” there would arise uncomfortable silence.

As a woman living in a very pro-choice neighborhood, and eventually teaching at a public university, and generally out and about in the world, I have had to decide how to be both true to my cause and persuasive, while also remaining a decent neighbor and a good teacher and scholar.

I have adopted several methods. The first is never to demur when asked a straight question about my opinion on abortion. The second is to *introduce* my opinion with an acknowledgement that a lot of people find the subject neuralgic, while simultaneously asserting that I don’t get “tense” over disagreement and genuinely like many friends and acquaintances who believe differently. The

third is to “be prepared . . . be very prepared.” I always tell other advocates to be the “smartest person in the room” on the topic, not for pride’s sake, but for the sake of the movement. The worst I’ve elicited from a disagreeing conversation partner therefore tends to be, “Well, you’ve given me something to think about.”

Also important in this business of living counterculturally is everything else about your life. By which I mean, you will want to have a context, a reputation, a lifestyle that doesn’t provoke in an interlocutor a feeling of “Why should I listen to her? She’s an ass.” This is another way of saying that being pro-life should shape up your driving. And everything else associated with virtuous living in community. When you’re pro-life, in other words, if you really want to serve the movement, you have to up your whole game. And when you fall off the virtue wagon, you have to apologize. Like you mean it. You’re representing the whole movement, after all! And while you’re at it, you should get a good haircut and put a smile on your face. Especially when it comes to public appearances, bad hair and a sour attitude are very bad for the movement.

Conclusion

Anyone who has made the pro-life movement an integral part of his or her life will have a story of personal transformation. A story of gaining a new outlook on every human being. Involvement in this movement is transformative, and all in a positive direction. It’s mystifying how the abortion issue has been denigrated to “single issue politics.” First, of course, it’s not politics, it’s the basic stuff of human life: love, family, finding yourself by losing yourself, and welcoming the stranger. Second, it’s not “single,” but intrinsically “multiple,” this matter of working to change hearts and minds and laws about the value of every single human life, and whether or not the pro-life movement shows itself to be an attractive harbinger of the world they would like to create.

One doesn’t have to be perfect in order to be a member of or even an activist in the pro-life movement. Maturity is a process. But at the very least—in order for the work to prosper, and for the development in virtue that should characterize every human life—one has to be open to growth. Fortunately, exposure to “movement people” and their beautiful treatment of vulnerable women and children, and to the literature supporting life, promotes this growth for those with open hearts and minds to see it.

The Right That Dare Not Speak Its Name

Rich Lowry

Finally we're beginning to have a debate over abortion.

Readers of this publication might wonder what we've been doing since 1973. But I've been struck by how the public debate has shifted recently. It used to be that, especially on public-affairs programs, abortion was discussed almost exclusively in terms of political strategy and jurisprudential questions. Lately, the debate has widened to begin to encompass the morality of the thing itself.

Why? I think the explicit terms that President Donald Trump has used to describe abortion have had a catalyzing effect. It used to be that pro-lifers were satisfied if a conservative politician merely said that we need to protect "the culture of life." Trump's rhetoric, beginning in his final debate with Hillary Clinton in 2016, has created a whole new standard. Also, the possibility that *Roe* might be overturned (or more likely, chipped away at) has focused minds.

Yet it remains striking how the other side in the debate can't be forthright about what it is advocating. The purported right to abortion is the sneakiest, most shame-faced of all American rights. Its most devoted supporters don't dare speak its name. They hide behind evasion and euphemism and cant.

Pro-lifers might shrink from public discussion of the hardest cases, rape and incest, or of how to punish the act of abortion under our ideal legal regime. But there's never any doubt about what we hope to achieve, and never any need to try to hide behind wordplay and legal or statistical obfuscations. We are anti-abortion. We seek to ban the vast majority of abortions with the end of creating a country where every child is welcomed and cared for.

The opposition lacks this clarity, even though abortion is at the heart of contemporary progressivism. *Roe v. Wade* is liberalism's Great Writ. Nancy Pelosi considers the supposed right to abortion more sacrosanct than the First Amendment. She would never tamper with or restrict the former, whereas she has sought to amend the latter to permit more campaign-finance regulations.

The evasion of the pro-abortion advocates speaks to a fundamental weakness. The other side knows how difficult it is to say out loud that it considers abortion a positive good that should never be restricted in any circumstance, and that health or any other considerations have nothing to do with it. Consider the "historic" pro-abortion statement signed by nearly 200 CEOs that ran in a full-page ad in the *New York Times* in June. The CEOs defined abortion as

Rich Lowry is editor of *National Review* and a political commentator.

“equality” (“Don’t Ban Equality,” declared the headline) and referred to it as “comprehensive reproductive care,” a term that has the advantage of sounding nothing like what it is describing.

The pro-abortion stylebook demands that abortion be called “health” or, more specifically, “reproductive health,” even though it is the opposite of reproduction and (for one party involved) the opposite of health.

The idea that abortion is necessary for the health of women is one of the most misleading pro-abortion clichés. Comprehensive data from Florida last year shows that three-quarters of abortions were elective, and another one-fifth were for social and economic reasons. A small percentage involve a threat to the mother’s life or health, and pro-life laws account for such cases—even the sweeping Alabama law has a health exception.

Back in 2013, President Barack Obama was proud to become the first sitting president to address Planned Parenthood. But not proud enough to utter the word “abortion” in his talk. He said Planned Parenthood is a group that women “count on for so many important services.” He said its core principle is “that women should be allowed to make their own decisions about their own health.” He excoriated opponents involved “in an orchestrated and historic effort to roll back basic rights when it comes to women’s health.”

Listening to him, you could have been forgiven for thinking that the country was riven by a fierce dispute over whether women should be allowed to choose their own ob-gyns or decide whether to take contraceptives or to get cancer screenings. In his speech, the president said the word “cancer” seven times. About that, he was happy to be straightforward.

Even organizations wholly devoted to abortion shrink from the term. The former National Abortion Rights Action League, and then the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League, finally settled on the name NARAL Pro-Choice America, effacing all reference to the procedure that it holds in such high esteem.

This is a strange reticence. The National Rifle Association doesn’t get defensive when it is pointed out that it protects *the right to bear arms* that allows people to buy *guns*. The late Charlton Heston, in the famous photo-op, didn’t hesitate to lift a musket over his head. The organization isn’t about to remove the word “rifle” from its name. The NRA conducts courses on how to handle guns safely, but its leaders don’t try to pass themselves off as concerned only with “munitions safety.”

Planned Parenthood’s image, too, is dependent on averting eyes from its central purpose. The nation’s premier provider of abortions doesn’t want to be known for providing abortions. According to a poll commissioned by the National Right to Life Committee several years ago, 55 percent of people didn’t

realize that Planned Parenthood performs abortions.

The organization insists that abortion is only 3 percent of what it does. This is an artifice and a dodge, but even taking it on its own terms, it's not much of a defense. Only Planned Parenthood would think saying they only kill babies 3 percent of the time is something to brag about. How much credit would we give someone for saying he only cheats on business trips 3 percent of the time, or only hits his wife during 3 percent of domestic disputes?

The truth is the group performs about 330,000 abortions a year, or roughly a third of all the abortions in the country. By its own accounting in its 2017-2018 annual report, it provides more abortions than Pap tests (270,000) and breast-care services (296,000).

The 3 percent figure is derived by counting abortion as just another service like much less consequential services. So abortion is considered a service no different from a pregnancy test (one million), even though a box with two pregnancy tests can be procured from the local drugstore for less than \$10.

By Planned Parenthood's math, a woman who gets an abortion but also a pregnancy test, an STD test, and some contraceptives has received four services, and only 25 percent of them are abortion. This is a little like performing an abortion and giving a woman an aspirin, and then saying only half of what you do is abortion.

Such cracked reasoning could be used to obscure the purpose of any organization. The sponsors of the New York City Marathon could count each small cup of water they hand out (some 2 million cups, compared with 50,000 runners) and say they are mainly in the hydration business. Or Major League Baseball teams could say that they sell about 20 million hot dogs and play 2,430 games in a season, so baseball is only .012 percent of what they do.

Supporters of Planned Parenthood want to use its health services as leverage to preserve its abortions, as if you can't get one without the other. Of course, this is nonsense. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides free or low-cost breast and cervical cancer screenings—without aborting babies. State health departments provide free cancer screenings—without aborting babies. Community health centers provide a range of medical services—without aborting babies.

In a revealing moment in July, Planned Parenthood ousted president Leana Wen for the offense of taking the organization's propaganda seriously and trying to focus more on health care rather than abortion.

The effort to talk around the nature of the abortion regime extends to its legal keystone of *Roe*. It is usually thought that *Roe* only prohibits bans on abortion in the first trimester, when it effectively forbids them at any time.

The confusion arises from the scheme set out in the majority opinion written by the late Justice Harry Blackmun. In the first trimester, the Court declared,

the right to abortion was absolute. In the second, states could regulate it to protect the mother's health. In the third, states could restrict abortion in theory but had to allow exceptions to protect the life or health of the mother, defined capaciously in the accompanying case of *Doe v. Bolton* to include "emotional, psychological [and] familial" considerations, as well as "the woman's age."

Roe struck down 50 state laws and has made it all but impossible to regulate abortion, except in the narrowest circumstances. More to the point, the argument that its particular set of policy preferences is mandated by the Constitution is flatly preposterous.

Over the years, the decision's laughable constitutional inadequacy has been widely recognized. Shortly after it came down, Harvard Law School Professor John Hart Ely, a supporter of legalized abortion, wrote that "*Roe* is bad because it is bad constitutional law, or rather because it is not constitutional law and gives almost no sense of an obligation to try to be."

"Justice Blackmun's opinion provides essentially no reasoning in support of its holding," a former Blackmun clerk, Edward Lazarus, has written. "And in the almost 30 years since *Roe*'s announcement, no one has produced a convincing defense of *Roe* on its own terms." That's because none is possible.

The continued felt imperative of the pro-abortion side to speak in euphemisms sits uneasily side by side with a greater willingness to portray abortion as something that is an inherent good.

The CEOs who signed the *New York Times* ad contend that abortion is central to their businesses, which might be true if all of their companies had the same business model as Planned Parenthood, one of the organizers of the effort. But Bloomberg L.P., Amalgamated Bank, and H&M, to name three of the companies whose CEOs signed the ad, are hardly dependent on abortion to thrive. The old saw was, "What's good for General Motors is good for America." Now, according to top CEOs, what's good for abortion is good for American business. They seem to consider abortion a crucial component of GDP, just like personal consumption, business investment, government spending, and net exports.

Their contention that restrictions on abortion would put "the economy at risk" is absurd. Are we supposed to believe that the reduction of the abortion rate in the U.S. from its high in 1980 of 29.3 abortions per 1,000 women of childbearing age to its post-*Roe v. Wade* low of 14.6 as of 2014 has been a calamity for corporate America? On what grounds? Do these CEOs really lament that we don't have the abortion rate of Bulgaria, Cuba, or Kazakhstan? By this standard, Utah must be a terrible place to do business, since its abortion rate is so low, and the District of Columbia an enticing place to do business, since its abortion rate is so high. (To the contrary, *Forbes* ranks Utah as the second-best state for business in the country.)

Today it's no longer enough to say that abortion should be safe, legal, and

rare, the old Bill Clinton formulation, because that implies a moral disapproval. Instead, it's a force for good. A stance that once would have been limited to the fringes is considered mainstream enough that CEOs are willing to sign up for it.

In New York last January, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed an abortion bill that perfectly encapsulates the combination of euphemism and extremism. Called, naturally, the Reproductive Health Act, the law aims to bless any abortion under any circumstance. In direct contradiction of a warning from the New York State Catholic Conference, the bill removed abortion from the penal code entirely. This makes it impossible to punish even violent attacks on the unborn.

In a horrific case, the Queens district attorney initially announced that a man would be charged with second-degree murder and abortion for stabbing and killing his pregnant girlfriend and her unborn child. Then the prosecutor had to drop the abortion charge in light of the Reproductive Health Act.

New York is wildly out of the mainstream on this question. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, as of mid-2018, at least 38 states had fetal homicide laws, and 29 of them had laws that applied from conception. There is also a federal law.

It doesn't take much moral insight to realize that stabbing to death an unborn child is a profound wrong that deserves to be treated as a crime. But America's abortion advocates specialize in moral obtuseness. They are opposed to recognition of personhood of any sort for the unborn child, worried that such a concession might undermine the premises of our abortion regime.

Undermining those premises is, of course, the ongoing challenge for pro-lifers—and one of the points of the spate of heartbeat bills passed in Republican states. The most prominent example has been Georgia, which has consequently come under Hollywood pressure, including a call for a “sex strike” by actress Alyssa Milano.

The bills, even if blocked by the courts, have an educative effect. After all, an appendix or a kidney doesn't have its own separate heartbeat. The pro-abortion argument is that a fetus is a blob of cells of no account—with a heartbeat. That the fetus is a non-human being—with a heartbeat. That the fetus isn't truly alive—but has a heartbeat.

Most people don't realize how soon a fetal heartbeat begins—around six weeks into a pregnancy. The pro-life bumper sticker “Abortion Stops a Beating Heart” isn't just a slogan, but a fact.

The fundamental reality that pro-abortion forces shrink from is how the vast majority of people view an unborn child. Even before her child is born, a mother—and her family—sacrifices for her child, protects her child, prays for her child, and dreams for her child. She talks to her child, and often names her child. She takes her child to the doctor. Later in her pregnancy, she knows when

her child is active and when her child is resting. Her unborn child, in short, is already what it will be after he or she is born—a cause of worry and joy and ceaseless wonder at the miracle of life.

This is why the true nature of abortion will never be obscured, no matter how much effort is poured into it, and why the pro-life movement has been so doggedly persistent across the decades.

After *Roe v. Wade*, proliferers were always supposed to go away. We were on the wrong side of history. The tide of public opinion was sweeping us away. Social issues were costing the Republicans and had to be jettisoned (as we were told most recently in “the autopsy” after the 2012 election and in countless other campaign post-mortems over the years).

We never accepted that, and never will. There is no reason for us to be ashamed or slippery about what we believe, because it accords with truth, justice, and mercy. If we are indeed entering a new phase of the abortion debate, we can weigh in with confidence and clarity of thought and expression. The same can’t be said of the defenders of the indefensible.



“Careful—he unfriends you the old-fashioned way.”

The Staggering Breadth of the Revolution

William Murchison

Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. (Genesis 9:1)

The reason I keep on making this point, gentle reader, whether you've noticed or not, and I heartily forgive you if you haven't, what with all the Information this complex era requires us to absorb . . . the point I keep bearing down on is, simply, that human life isn't a political issue, as so many appear to think. Not at all: It's a theological issue. Which is why Americans refuse—often angrily, bitterly, indignantly—to reach some common understanding as to the value, or non-value, of unborn human life.

We're looking at this thing through the wrong lens. We're seeing ballot boxes and news stories about rallies and rights. We can do better than that. We have to, if we're ever as a people, as a culture, to enthrone in our hearts anything resembling respect for the divine gift of life.

Signs of our visual impairment multiply—not just the *Roe* wrangle and its seemingly permanent status as a wedge issue at election time, but now the issue of whether enough Americans are getting born, and what it means if they aren't. That's to say: what it means in the political lingo that passes for meaningful communication in 2019.

How'd we get to this point—human life, unborn life especially, a matter for judicial decisions and campaign speeches? We might look at how we used to think about the matter: not just pre-*Roe v. Wade*; pre-1950s. Such consensus as an already diverse American population ever enjoyed on the unborn-life question went away decades ago, as the country's broad, generalized commitment to Christianity began to unravel. The timing was ironic, inasmuch as the postwar years were considered at the time to be a golden era for religion—lots of church-planting, lots of apparent conversions, lots of religious witness and exhortation (e.g., Billy Graham and Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen) manifesting itself in public life; the Pledge of Allegiance amended to emphasize our under-god-ness.

Many of us grew up in that time. There were invocations at public meetings and high school football games. It was not uncommon to ask people you had just met, "Where do you go to church?" Not "*do* you?" "*Where*?" That was the central question.

The complexities of life lived in the real world forbid pointing, say, to the

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court-ordered disappearance of prayer in public school, in the early 60s, as the first step on the downward slope to—wherever it is we presently find ourselves. Coincidences in timing, nonetheless, when examined, sometimes show themselves not to have been so coincidental at all, as with, on one hand, the aforementioned unraveling of generalized Christian commitment and, on the other hand, fast-growing faith in the idea of sovereign human authority over life—what to make of it, how to live it, and of course when to bear it. We’re the “Me Generation.” Haven’t forgotten that one, have you?

There used to be much more of the divine in this matter than has become the case, as you can easily tell: not just from contemplating the unendingness of our post-*Roe v. Wade* controversies over abortion; rather, in news accounts of a sharply declining birth rate, as noted above. The birth rate is my entry point to the present discussion. There are others, naturally, but this one is very large and, at the moment, very accommodating.

Here is Gerald F. Seib’s succinct account in a *Wall Street Journal* column from last June: “Americans are going to church less often, and are having fewer babies.”

Seib does not couple the two findings, save in terms of their putative effects in the political realm. These “trend lines,” he says, “suggest significant changes in the shape of society in years to come”—tending to “alarm and motivate supporters of President Trump, who essentially promises a return to an America of yore.” I shouldn’t wonder.

But what’s going on here, absent the political complexities? What I think is going on is the working-out of some changed assumptions, some newly dominant habits of thought and action, that the two trend lines have caused to converge.

We have skidded, have we not, into an amnesiac moment of history: one barely aware of formerly familiar injunctions such as “should” and “ought.” *Me?* You’re telling *me* what I ought to do, how *I* ought to live, what choices *I’m* to make in *my* life? Getoutta here!

Such is the tenor of the times: the tenor of the I-me-mine culture, from which all those rows arise over personal and cultural “identity.” Why would we for one minute imagine sexual choice to be seen as different—in contemporary terms—from all the choices made possible by the post-World War II loosening we began fully to confront in the 60s? Couldn’t women—here was possibly the central consideration—after centuries of submission to male whims, do pretty much what they wanted? Without fear of contradiction? Weren’t their bodies their own and they the mistresses of those bodies?

That was to frame the question politically when a more normal practice had been to frame it theologically: in terms of the human relationship with God. The basic question about the body had been to whom it belonged. To the immediate occupant? The answer to that query was certainly yes—up to a point. But the

point was necessarily a limited one. The occupant of the body enjoyed certain spacious liberties, such as the choice of a mate, the choice of a place to live, the choice of what to eat, what to read, what to watch on television. However, the body and mind in charge of these choices had not sprung at will from inchoate matter. They had a Creator. The Creator's name was God. The Lord. In action, the Creator had exercised authority: a different animal from absolute control yet retaining ties of obligation—on both sides. Holy Scripture told the story. To read or hear it was to understand a story incredibly large in scope and the sense of intimate relationship. Life was theological. It was political only in terms of the purely human necessities. The value of its activities stemmed from their consonance with the purposes of God.

Hardly the least of those purposes was the care and perpetuation of human life; its regular renewal, its extension into a future no one could glimpse save in the imagination. However, that was enough. Until, in socio-cultural terms, it ceased to be enough. That is where we are now. And the look of the place is bewildering: nothing so recognizable as like when and where, more often than now, in larger territorial expanse, man and woman looked at God, and God looked back in love.

The implications at this juncture flow fast, the first being the goodness of life. Of life itself as the gift of God—viewed from within or without. Life in an unqualified sense, lacking reference to injuries, anxieties, sorrows, hardships. The worshippers of God have no exclusive sense of this truth; however, the theology they share affords them a viewpoint superior to secular modes. They know, some better than others, what can be called the ultimate reasons for cherishing life.

We are back to where we came in: those trend lines to which the *Wall Street Journal's* commentator points. Supernatural stillness is at an end. Newspaper pages rustle, and electronic screens light up.

In May 2019, the National Center for Health Statistics noted that Americans are having fewer children—just 3,788,235 last year—than at any time since 1986. In fact, said the study, the present child-bearing generation, which is aging, isn't producing enough babies to replace itself, demographically. Women ages 35 to 44 are having slightly more children. Not so teenagers and women in their 20s. From this mound of statistics rise fears, among other things, that in due course there won't be enough workers to keep Social Security and Medicare afloat financially. And of course we'll need more immigrants, won't we? Better open those borders a little wider.

Everyone sees the political dimensions of such problems—the howling and smiting sure to greet any eventual suggestions that eligibility for government payments be sharply reduced or that entry to the country be strictly controlled.

The theological dimensions of the matter are considerably larger, touching—as does abortion, of course—the question of responsibility to God for the gift of participation in the creation of life.

“Be fruitful,” said God to Noah (unless one disdains to believe there was ever a flood or a Noah or any amanuensis to write down the Almighty’s words: in which case one likely doesn’t see the point of talking theology in the first place). The Lord clearly was in no mood for half-measures, the world having been punished by the sudden, watery removal of “every living substance.” “Multiply,” the Lord commanded. “Replenish.” Granted, the context matters. The duty the Lord laid on Noah seems less incumbent on a world presently well-stocked with people of every kind; so many as long ago to have ignited Malthusian fears of runaway population growth.

The theological, as opposed to the purely demographic, point remains. Life—brought by God to the world He created—is good. Presumptions against life had better be convincing, as indeed would be the case with reference to “just wars” or capital punishment in specific cases (which is not rudely to shove aside religious arguments against killing; it is to acknowledge their dependence on theological argumentation). Abortion, as a repudiation of life, as a deliberate weeding out of the merely inconvenient, or too-numerous, would seem to require some extensive ‘splainin’. That is to say, where’s God in all this? Abortion extends and adorns His purposes . . . how, exactly?

The exact number of people the world requires is, to say the least, unclear. This doesn’t vitiate the idea of a direct connection—a theological connection—between human multiplication and the management of human life, just plain life. The Lord would appear to have set up the structures of life, beginning with the human family, in such a way as to fulfill His purposes.

I would suggest those purposes—which really can’t be called ambiguous; not after centuries of reflection and experience—are the topics that cry out the most loudly for sorting through. What’s the deal here? What are we supposed to be doing anyway with the gift of human life? Measuring its effects? Freshening up its appearance?

You might suppose (it seems to me) that these are the things that most need thinking on—far more than political polls or declarations made in the heat of the presidential contest. (The memory as I write is fresh concerning proud affirmations, by male as well as female Democratic presidential candidates, in a nationally televised debate, of “a woman’s right to choose” abortion.) The birth dearth, as we begin to recognize it, brings these questions squarely before us. Yes—what are man and woman supposed to do, in the first place, if not put to work the biological resources wherewith each is invested? Why not a single sex, renewable through repeated divine acts of creation, rather than two sexes to

facilitate the mutual nature of life-creation: extended from one generation to the next, then the next, and so on ad infinitum? However logical a single sex might seem, viewed from a special standpoint, the notion seems not to have engaged the mind of the all-knowing Creator.

The birth dearth—not so pronounced yet as to induce panic but taking on shape—deserves sociological analysis, certainly. Is abortion the cause of it? No question seems more logical, but in fact, abortions are lessening in number: to “the lowest rate observed in the U.S. since 1973 [14.6 per 1,000 women] when abortion became legal in all states,” says the *Wall Street Journal*’s Jo Craven McGinty, and the rate was 16.3 per 1,000. Leave aside—if humanly possible—the horror of even 1 per 1,000. Our quest is to find out what’s going on: and that appears to be the increased use of birth control measures and a reduction in unplanned pregnancies. With it all, according to the National Center for Family & Marriage Research, “Cohabitation has usurped marriage as the most common relationship experience in young adulthood . . . Compared to nearly two-thirds of women in 1995, only half of young adult women had ever married in recent years . . . Young adults are not retreating from union formation but are choosing cohabitation rather than marriage.” We used to refer to cohabitation as “shacking up.” I remember in the late 90s an editor deleting my use of that term in recognition of a social reality requiring shall we say more tactful treatment.

What I am attempting to note here is the staggering breadth of the revolution whose core principle is that a party to it—above all, a female party—can’t be contradicted as to identity and the choices that inform that chosen identity. It’s abortion. It’s LGBTQ rights. It’s the surgical switching of “gender” identities, the better to conform to interior perceptions. It’s marriage if you want it or cohabitation if you don’t. Then it’s marriage for as long as you’re OK with the opportunities your present arrangement affords—but when you’re no longer OK with it, that’s OK, never mind what promises you may have mumbled at some altar.

It’s all, in the end, about the bestowal of power upon those in whose eyes an awakened sense of entitlement outranks competing aims, of whatever supernatural cast. Claims to the right of choice have become so noisy, so limitless, as nearly to overwhelm for practical purposes counterclaims of the sort that gave Western civilization its character: starting with deference to the will of the God who created life in the first place.

“Americans are going to church less often,” says the *Journal*’s Seib. Does that mean if they started going more often all would be hunky-dory? Maybe not: given how often we went to church, and talked about it, on the eve—the 1950s—of the revolution that gave civilizational control to the self-choice movement. Maybe in the churches of the time we weren’t hearing what we

needed to hear in order to understand how life actually worked as opposed to how we thought it did.

I persist. The present problem is political chiefly by courtesy—a matter of polls and votes and laws, due to the politicization of modern life itself and its modes of functioning. The problem, we should understand, is a matter of public beliefs and assumptions gone off the rails and requiring restoration. For what reason? For the basic reason that beliefs and understandings and affirmations and assumptions never just lie there, mutely. They nourish human existence in a way the drone of judges never can. Save, of course, when judges, or lawmakers, or anyone else, powerful or meek, somehow sprinkles water upon realities extant from the start of everything; and those realities start again to flower, in the way surely they were meant to do.



The Language Game of Choice (Part I)

Caitlin Smith Gilson

Abortion persists in our culture only within its own alternate reality, and to allow it to persist, our language has been corrupted. Let us play—quite literally—devil’s advocate: Let us look at some of the crucial arguments in favor of abortion and see what response, what apologetic, can be employed effectively to counteract those claims. In doing so, we are not seeking an alternate position or stance, but the rediscovery of the ground where freedom and the intelligibility of the natural order co-exist. The prolifer is thus a wayfarer ever mindful of home. What truths, if any, are present and what are missed in the pro-abortion position, and what arguments might we be missing when we defend life? If all freedoms are a form of order, let us see what unfolds when following the logic of the abortionist.

There are thirteen interrelated arguments we will confront—six in Part 1 of this article and the final seven in Part 2, which will appear in the Fall 2019 issue of this journal:

1. Life may begin at conception, but *human* life does not: How is a single cell a person? It is not; it is a collection of cells no more advanced than a fleck of skin.

Scientists determine that something is alive if it has the capacity to grow, metabolize, respond to stimuli, adapt, and reproduce of its own accord. So do philosophers. The metaphysician, physicist, and physician, if honest, should find a natural preliminary agreement regarding life. And for this living *action* to occur, what precedes potentiality is *always* actual living reality. From zygote to blastocyst to embryo, there is not one point at which the unborn is inanimate; actual *being* exists from the moment of conception, with heartbeats at day 24 and brain waves at day 43, both of which are well before the end of the first trimester. It is alive and it is human. Therefore, it is a *human life* that is being taken. And it is not only innocent human life but proto-innocent. The willful taking of innocent human life is called murder.

Emily Letts, a 25-year-old woman who filmed her own abortion, pronounced, “*Yes, I do realize it was a potential life. I have a special relationship with my ultrasound.*” The problem is that potentiality cannot exist without actuality.

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The child is only a “potential” child before the moment of conception. I have all the potential to respond to a student’s question, but that potential can only be realized, addressed, and actualized because I am an actual human being with the potential to respond! Emily Letts misunderstands the *grammar of existence*. The unborn child is conceived, it is an actual living being, an actual human child who has *potential* options such as growing more, being born, going to school, preferring soccer over football. Emily Letts could only speak about a potential or possible child if there were nothing actual to look at or to abort! The very sonogram which she holds would have to depict an empty womb to depict a potential child. The fetus is alive; it is *human*: It is a *human* life.

The language of abortion is thus intentionally misleading. And we should be bothered by misleading language. In another example, when antagonists in the abortion debate speak about whether or not one should *have* a child, they are reversing the logical meaning of “have” in terms of potentiality and actuality. All choices by their nature reflect necessity. The “choice” to have the child ended at the moment of conception. In this sense, the pro-life position is truly the pro-choice position because it reflects that choices have limits. The child in the womb is present, that isn’t in dispute. But when abortionists speak of *having* the child, more appropriately it should be termed destroying, terminating, ending that child’s existence. And while abortion advocacy does circle around that language by calling the abortion a “termination,” it unites that termination with the idea of “having” an abortion, which is an inappropriate logical correlation, and an even more dangerous moral and spiritual one. Many are misled into thinking the termination amounts to not having the child when, in fact, the child is *already* present, the child is “had,” and the abortion is instead the killing of that life. You cannot choose to have or not have a child at the same time you choose to terminate: You terminate because you *already* have a child. Otherwise, why do you need to terminate it? It is only before I am pregnant that I can choose to have a child, because there is as yet no child. Again, we should be wary when language misleads us. We should ask *why* it is misleading us.

2. Is a fetus *really* a person? Let us look at the *person* argument from another angle (four, to be precise):

a. *When a fetus gets to a certain size, it is then and only then a person.*

Since when does size determine value? Is a toddler worth less than a teenager because the toddler is smaller? What size determines our personhood, and who determines that? If we demarcate a particular size or place as the point at which life is “finally” a person, are we not invoking a hierarchical order where all other lives are lesser and relative to that apex point of absolute acceptability? And in doing so, have we not (yet again) logically misread the relationship

between potentiality and actuality? How laughably absurd this would be if it were not so ugly!

b. We can abort a fetus before he or she feels pain.

We agree that fetuses are less developed than we are. But may we kill them for that reason? People in their sleep, on anesthesia, or with certain health conditions don't feel pain. Can we kill them? Why does level of development or susceptibility to pain determine value? This is again a dim and juvenile reimagining of the relationship between potentiality and actuality. How important it is for us to see that the abortionist's illogic is not only contrary to the truth but an uncreative and wholly dependent re-configuring of truth. The fact that we can recognize its reconfigured reductionism nevertheless provides us passage back to the truth of things as they *are*.

c. When the baby is born, he or she is now a person.

Since when does location determine value? Am I worth more inside a house than I am outside on the lawn? Why does environment determine value? Did the astronauts, once hurled beyond *terra firma*, simply lose their human value? There are many pro-abortion advocates who believe we should value the baby in the womb—but only at a certain stage of development. On the other hand, not only is abortion permitted in many states up to nine months, even post-birth “termination” or afterbirth abortion has been proposed, a term devised to plant the idea that the infant outside the womb is also not yet a person. So which is it? Inside or outside the womb? We need to remain mindful that a hierarchy of improper values is continuously imposed in order to promote abortion. The abortion advocate's benchmarks are fallacious and cannot help being so. The litany of standards claiming to amount to a human person—e.g., in the womb at seven or eight or nine months, outside the womb, outside the womb but alive for nine months—are all scrambling attempts to deny the undeniable by, yet again, inverting the order of potentiality and actuality.

d. Before a baby reaches viability, it can be aborted.

Does degree of dependency determine value? Infants are completely dependent on others for sustenance. Can we kill them because they are dependent on us? Why should viability outside the womb determine value? Has anyone ever been utterly self-sufficient? How could we claim to be so, given that our own contingent status—unable even to cause ourselves—betrays the falsity of this claim repeatedly throughout our lives? Whenever total independence and self-sufficiency have been politically touted as “virtues,” “ideals,” or essential attributes of a *human* society, they are soon accompanied by a civilizational decline and fall. More on this point momentarily.

3. Does a fetus really have a soul? When babies are born with severe health issues, is it not better to abort? The embryo in the womb is smaller than a grape seed; how is it wrong to abort it?

Religion here is the great defense against abortion, but it also is used by pro-abortion activists to undercut the pro-life stance with such claims as “this is just a religious idea,” “this idea of the soul is something only religious fanatics believe in.” Believers need to be aware that their faith is grounded in reason, and our arguments for the soul precede religious identifications. Plato demonstrated the existence of the soul as the principle of *living* things beyond a reasonable doubt in the *Phaedo*, as did Aristotle in the *De Anima*. St. Thomas Aquinas, among others, appropriates those great themes, but so do modern-day scientists when they speak of life as the capability for growth, change, response to stimuli, reproduction, and so forth. This is not some so-called patriarchal Western idea but a recognition that spans all cultures:

This Self is simply described as “Not, not.” It is ungraspable, for it is not grasped; it is indestructible for it is not destroyed. It has not attachment and is unfastened; it is not attached and (yet) is not unsteady.

The great atheist Sartre knew that his atheism could only be effective if he avoided scientific categories, because such categories affirm the philosophical principle of the soul and, by extension, God. The soul is not some esoteric term but the foundation of classic and indeed modern science with its divisions of species, genus, and so forth. The soul is understood as the animating principle of the body. If things were purely passive, purely material, purely potential, no life could happen. Therefore, the abortion advocate’s argument that, because the baby in the womb is no bigger than a grape seed, it has no soul, does not work. For how can this purely material, passive “grape seed” grow and change without the potential to grow and change? And remember: There can be no such thing as pure potentiality! Potentiality only exists in something actually present! One cannot go from less to more without actuality enabling the transition from potentiality to actuality. The child in the womb who does not yet have heartbeat or legs could not develop them if it were only in a state of potentiality—it has the potential for heartbeat and legs because it already possesses a principle of actuality that allows such growth. The potential for that child to read, learn, skateboard, laugh, cry exists *because* it is *already a human soul*. That zygote in the womb is not a plant, for a plant, whether tiny or massive—mustard seed or oak—does not have the potential to laugh, learn, inquire, graduate, nor will it, because that is not its *actual* nature. “*He is a man who is to be a man; the fruit is always present in the seed.*” Actuality must precede potentiality and, more than that, informs the being of what potentialities are *intrinsic* to its nature. That zygote, blastocyst, and embryo are actual human souls with the potential to do

human things. Therefore, it is *already* a human life.

4. Here is a two-part question: This whole talk of the soul seems to reveal a difference in dependency as key to the abortion argument. My soul and body no longer are dependent on my mother, but the unborn fetus is wholly dependent on the mother for nine months. Isn't that dependency a criterion which shows why abortion is a rational and reasonable choice? Second, how is that dependency fair on the mother? The unborn do not have the right to use the woman's body for nine months. As the feminist mantra puts it: It is my body, my choice. Keep your laws out of my uterus!

For one, we must ask, is the baby inside the mother's womb really part of the mother's body? Genetically, that unborn baby does not have the same genetic markers as every other part of the mother's body. Your leg is genetically yours; your arms, your womb, your ears are also genetically yours, but not that zygote. It is indubitably genetically *other*.

Let's proceed with an absurd example revolving around the seemingly sensible lines: "It's my body, it's my choice." If I put an explosive in my body and let it detonate in a public area where there is a potential for casualties, is that my so-called right? Most would argue against such a right but then uphold abortion as a right on the grounds that, unlike the human bomb scenario, abortion does not hurt anyone else; it is a private affair of one's own determination over one's own body. But is that entirely true or even true at all?

The unborn life in the womb is, again, *not* the woman's life, either genetically nor anthropologically. Not only philosophy but science has confirmed that the unborn baby is not the mother's body; it is something undoubtedly *other*. So if detonating the bomb inside my body is prohibited on the basis of killing others—let alone the serious injunction against killing oneself—am I not killing another human life when I abort the child? How is abortion any different from the detonation of the bomb? In both cases, through my body I destroy a person or persons other than my own body, and in both cases I also do damage to myself, physically, spiritually, and morally. Whether that damage is *felt or reflected upon or acknowledged* is a different question. But the damage *is* present, for abortion is demonstrably a violation of what *is*, in favor of a series of defections that function by inverting the order of potentiality and actuality.

So that we can proceed, let us clarify the requirements of free will or free choice. *Because* I am *able* to make a choice, I am *therefore* responsible for that choice, and thus responsible for the necessity into which I place myself. Free will is not divorced from responsibility but umbilically linked to responsibility. The responsibility, for example, of a doctor is to treat patients, and not to uphold that duty means that the doctor is held responsible for his or her actions. This is the *necessity* imposed upon him by the consequences of his free choice to be a doctor.

The unique essence of womanhood is that we carry life; this is a primal, foundational

responsibility on which the history of existence itself rests. Is it easy? No. But when has easiness been the arbiter of goodness and reward? Is it fair? What does that even mean? Freedom is often misinterpreted as being free *from* responsibility, but this is clearly not the case. If we are free from responsibility, then we are not free. To be free from responsibility would be equivalent to being an unthinking object that cannot choose, as the inanimate stone is wholly free from responsibility and not culpable should it fall or be thrown. Our actions have consequences; this is a sign of our freedom and of our responsibility and thus of an intrinsic fairness. Women are free to *abstain* from motherhood, like the nun, but once pregnant we *are* mothers. Mothers don't kill children and are responsible, indeed guilty, if they do. Again, a woman is only *potentially* a mother and a man is only *potentially* a father when the sonogram shows an empty womb.

It is often claimed that the baby in the womb is wholly dependent on the mother, whereas those adversely affected by the bomb in the park are independent beings obviously capable of life outside the womb. This distinction between dependency and independency becomes the criterion which renders the abortion morally acceptable and the bombing morally unacceptable. But is that true? Is it even a viable criterion?

Does the unborn baby not have the "right" to use a woman's body for nine months? If we go down this path of argumentation, we discover a cycle of dependency where none would have a right to live! For example, how do nine months in the womb reflect a deeper dependency than eighteen years of total dependency on the public school system, or five years on welfare, or three years in rehab after a car crash, or decades depending on the optometrist to make glasses for sight, or a lifetime depending on the farmers for your food? How about your grandparents in a nursing home for their final decade, which may become the fate of your parents, and then your husband, and then you, and then your child when he or she is grown old and infirm? Are any of us utterly and totally self-sufficient human beings? If that were true, we'd be gods or, more accurately, God Himself. Our very birth, growth, decline, and death are undeniable testaments to our dependency on others. This is an inescapable fact of existence from which none is exempt.

However, this primal truth of existence is violated by the logic, or lack thereof, of abortion. When abortionist advocates raise dependency as one of the prime motivations for abortion, they imply that there is a state in life free of dependency, and, more absurdly, that this is the so-called *natural* or normal state. Tell me where that state exists? Can you envision this state anywhere? In addition, historically, when such a state is conceived, these so-called utopias are never planned without gas chambers, death camps, and the wicked ideologies with which the 20th century has scarred our historical landscape. This is why

Pope Francis spoke of abortion as Nazi eugenics with white gloves and used the comparison of hiring a hitman. This is not hyperbole, but the unmasking of a lie disguising cruelty as mercy.

Let us look at this common claim of the pro-abortion movement, “my body, my right,” from a different angle. Historically it was directed against the government, which pro-abortionists saw as meddling where it had no right to meddle. In 1999, Hillary Clinton said: “Being pro-choice is trusting the individual to make the right decision for herself and her family, and not entrusting the decision to anyone wearing the authority of government in any regard.”

This more than implies that morality cannot be legislated. However, what are laws for but to legislate moral action so that we reaffirm that free choice is free because we are responsible for our actions, that our choice imposes a necessity upon us, that we are indeed responsible? If, as Hillary Clinton implies, morality cannot be legislated, why do we arrest wife beaters, child pornographers, and rapists? Why do we praise the fallen officer, the workplace equality activist? Why do we then make laws that promote those morally good choices? Laws legislate morality, and that is an undeniable fact. We enter a problematic quandary if we say that some moral choices can be legislated but others are inexplicably free from such a burden. If choices are free from responsibility, then, as we have already discussed, they are not free choices.

Let us delve into another potentially absurd example: Look again at the statement: “it is my body, it is my choice.” If we were to rephrase that to read, “It is the rapist’s body, it is the rapist’s choice to rape with his body,” what would be the problem with that statement? Well, you may say that in the case of the rape another person is being violated, and it is this that renders the rape reprehensible and capable of being legislated on moral grounds. But haven’t we already clarified that another person is also violated when abortion occurs? The second line of defense is to argue that the unborn child wholly depends upon the mother and cannot live outside the womb. But, again, have we not already revealed a world utterly entrenched in dependency, in which none can self-emancipate from such need? Let’s press the absurdity to its limits: A social worker is caring for someone who is severely brain damaged. Without the social worker’s care, the patient could not live. If we can abort the unborn child on the basis of the child’s dependency on the mother, then the social worker has the *obiter dicta* right to violate and murder his patient on grounds of a similar totalizing dependency. If we would call the latter argument for killing not only absurd but unjust, immoral, and cruel, how can we not call the former, the abortion, unjust, immoral, and cruel? One of the cornerstones of law and relation is fairness. If I hold one person accountable for a crime, how can I release scot-free another who commits the same crime in similar circumstances? If we cannot see the permission of abortion as a glaring transgression of human rights, i.e.,

the rights of the unborn, how can we prosecute the father who beats the three-day-old infant to death, or the careworker who steals from and abuses the Down Syndrome patient? The unborn may be wholly dependent on the mother for existence, but ask yourselves this: How long is a three-day-old baby going to survive if left to its own devices, or the patient with advanced dementia?

Let us return to the Hillary Clinton remark: *“Being pro-choice is trusting the individual to make the right decision for herself and her family, and not entrusting the decision to anyone wearing the authority of government in any regard.”* It sounds generous, but isn’t something amiss here? Trust is something earned, not inborn. We are free beings with the tools for goodness, but our freedom comes with the responsibility to enact that goodness. We have to earn trust and work hard at it. Laws are present to encourage trustful behavior precisely because we do miss the mark, we do fall short, we do lie, steal, cheat, and murder. The primary function of the law, for St. Thomas Aquinas, is to make persons good. The secondary function of the law is to curb the behavior of those willfully opposed to the good. It is problematic when the latter function of the law overshadows its primary duty, which often occurs because the law is drafted with an eye not to the good in itself but to some ideal or perspective often opposed to nature.

Even more problematic is an understanding that law can be suspended in certain matters because its sometime-participants have in certain situations been acknowledged to be arbiters of the Good. Why are we to trust that *all* women will know what to do with the unborn child in their wombs, when we do not (nor should we) always and naively trust *all* women to pay their bills, or never to commit felonies, or never to commit arson or murder? How is it that women are suddenly paragons of virtue *only* when it comes to abortion rights?

Finally, is the feminist mantra *actually* pro-woman? Does not abortion downgrade what it is to be man and woman by diminishing the man’s responsibility for the child, and then mishandling that responsibility by handing it over to the woman? The father, now off the hook, sees his parental responsibility placed solely on the woman, only to be transformed into a right to abortion that completely strips her of that very responsibility. If she decides to keep the child, then the child is her responsibility, and this responsibility can also be extended to the father, sometimes by legal force. If at any time within that pregnancy she changes her mind, then the responsibility for the child somehow erodes into a universal right. The woman is wholly responsible for the decision to terminate, and thus wholly outside the jurisdiction of responsibility and responsible action, for responsibility implies a duty of care to something other than herself, and this has been barred from the abortionist illogic: It is her body and her right, *ens totum*. By making abortion an absolute right, abortion advocates destroy the very freedom they sought to give the woman in the first place, for such a right

displaces responsibility from its participants—mother and father.

5. In life, many potential opportunities change. How can we say that depriving someone of a future is unfair if choice by its nature claims one possibility while leaving other future possibilities unclaimed? If abortion invokes limits, how is it bad? Every choice by its nature limits you from other alternative potential choices. If I choose to go to one university, that means I have chosen not to go to another institution. If free will invokes such parameters, what is wrong with limiting the number of children I have by way of abortion?

We must refer back to our prior and bedrock argumentation. Choices by their nature invoke finitude or limit. This is the language of potentiality, and in terms of the unborn child, planning for that child ended the moment the child actually came to exist, regardless of dependency or whether it is wanted or not. One can no longer plan to limit the number of children once the child exists. Strip the language to its truth: When that zygote or blastocyst or embryo or unborn child is present, one can plan to remove its own distinct life or not. It is dishonest language to speak of *planning* to *have* the child when the child (whether planned or not) is already present. Dante, in the *Inferno*, placed fraud below certain murders such as crimes of passion. Why? Because one animal may snap the neck of another in the heat of the moment, but the way in which human beings can fraudulently deceive others in language and action is unique and terrifying. We must be on guard, we must be vigilant.

6. Abortion is already legal; if it is legal it is good. Why try to change it? Why argue about what is considered legally sound?

Slavery was legal! Does that make it good? Of course not. Such logic implies that laws are truer, more foundational, and more valuable than human conscience. It implies further that human conscience and our participation in existence are utterly dependent on legal rules for their complexion and cultivation, which may be partially true but not *primally* true. In fact, it is the other way around, for *we* draft human laws. If we reverse our understanding of this process and assert that laws *ipso facto* decide human conscience, then the human law becomes a leviathan, a monster in control of us, rather than the shepherd guiding us and reminding us of what is good and true (or failing to remind us of what is good and true). In addition, such laws would place freedom in opposition to order, for the law would be good only if we follow it. In fact, it is truer to say that the law is good because our likeness to it and the law itself are both participations in the natural law.

NOTES

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2. "Afterbirth abortion" is yet another example of the deceptiveness of language, which is the natural bedfellow of the abortionist ideology. This is by definition infanticide, but cloaked in clinical and so-called

palatable language. See A. Giubilini & F. Minerva, "After-birth Abortion: Why Should the Baby Live?," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 39 (2013) 261-263.

3. *Phaedo* 70c-84b, 102b-107c; *Republic* 608e-612b; *Phaedrus* 245c-24ca; *Symposium* 201a-212c; *Meno* 81a-b. See also D. Apolloni, "Plato's Affinity Argument for the Immortality of the Soul," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 34, 1 (1996) 5-32. M. Ficino, *Platonic Theology, On the Immortality of the Soul Vol. 1*, tr. J. B. Allen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001).

4. *De Anima*, 405; *Metaphysics* 71b-76a; *Physics* 194b29-30; *De Caelo* 279a17-30; See also P. Adamson, "Aristotelianism and the Soul in the Arabic Plotinus," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (2001) 211-32.

5. From Hindu scripture written around 700 BCE. Brhadaranyaka Upanisad, IV, 4.

6. Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, §9.

7. The late great atheist Christopher Hitchens was honest enough to recognize this point in *God Is Not Great*, 220: "[An] unborn child seems to me to be a real concept. It's not a growth or an appendix. You can't say the rights question doesn't come up . . . I think it has been demonstrated that an embryo is a separate body and entity."

8. Cf. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

9. H. Clinton, "Remarks at NARAL Anniversary Luncheon" (01/22/1999).

10. See St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica* I-II, 92, a1.

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"Undead is the new alive."

The Madness of Human Genetic Engineering

Christopher M. Reilly

Worship of reason can be a source of insanity.

This is particularly true regarding the moral challenges of the early 21st century. Anyone who values the miracle and dignity of human nature should be alarmed that researchers are hastily developing therapies that will alter the DNA of unborn human beings—radically, unpredictably, and irreversibly. In most cases, such therapies will violate the unique, unrepeatable, and sacred identity of individual persons, and endanger the spiritual destiny of future generations. Meanwhile, genetic-engineering researchers are escalating the slaughter of human embryos and gametes.

While researchers publicly emphasize potential medical benefits, none of the participants in the process care about the embryo as a patient. There is no respect for the dignity of human embryos killed in the development of therapies or in related IVF (in vitro fertilization) procedures. Embryos are treated as raw material for designing persons who do not yet exist; this is not medical care of a patient, but manufacture of a new product. It is also unlikely that alteration of the embryo's DNA would be needed to remove serious abnormalities, since each IVF cycle already involves testing and selecting "healthy" embryos from among several "conceived" for the procedure. Genetic-engineering clinics will instead turn to the highly profitable business of enhancing capabilities and gratifying parents' gender and/or cosmetic preferences.

"To say a child is unwanted says nothing about the child, but it says much about the person who does not want his or her child."¹ Genetic engineering of unborn human beings says much about parents and scientists who put their rational preferences for normality, abilities, and competitive achievement above respect for the awesome miracle of human nature. Pro-life Americans know that killing a person through abortion is wrong; we must also teach our neighbors that respect for human life demands unqualified respect for the human nature through which that life is expressed.

In a far-reaching debate about the appropriate relationship between technology and human identity, the rationally-derived ethical guidelines for genetic engineering currently endorsed by scientists and bioethicists systematically ignore any moral perspective that fully respects the incalculable value and sanctity of

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God-given human nature.² Secular moral arguments that appear to be rational instead abuse reason to justify a headlong pursuit of worldly, practical, and self-interested objectives. It is crucial that we pierce the veil behind which today's scientific and academic communities hide as they misuse "reason" to forcibly impose a dangerous and immoral ideology.

How Reason in Human Nature Was Turned on Its Head

At least since Plato and Aristotle, many thinkers have insisted that rationality is the defining capability that separates humanity from all other beings. Around 500 A.D., Boethius offered the classical definition of a person as "an individual substance of a rational nature."³ He had in mind both the human person and the divine persons in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Human beings were consistently defined as persons throughout the late medieval theology of Thomas Aquinas and in the natural law theology of the Christian church. Natural law theories have borne witness to the uniquely moral character of human beings by highlighting our capacity to discern truths about God's purpose, and by extension the meaning of human life, through the use of reason.

The Enlightenment thinkers of the 17th and 18th centuries, motivated to improve the lot of humanity through a critical analysis of tradition and rigorous use of scientific reason, unfortunately inspired a distorted view of human nature. John Locke diminished the popular image of human nature to mechanical, sense-informed thought and consciousness.⁴ René Descartes unwisely attempted to find a rational basis for all knowledge by doubting everything except his own mind.⁵ By trying to reason from nothing to something, he discarded the very truth revealed in consciousness and faith: that a person is an essential unity of mind (soul) and body.

Immanuel Kant tried to overcome Descartes' error by, ironically, compounding it.⁶ For Kant, and many future philosophers, it was the natural capacity of reason combined with a purely intuitive understanding of fundamental moral principles like the Golden Rule (do to others as you would have done to you) that made human beings uniquely moral creatures. It was this capacity for moral reasoning that alone justified human rights and dignity.

Even so, Kant at least understood that a rational, moral imperative to respect other human beings should be extended to everyone, including unborn persons who do not yet have the full intellectual capacity for reason.⁷ He also recognized the importance of human beings' non-rational attraction to beauty.⁸ Today, however, secular bioethicists champion an ideology that fraudulently simplifies Kant's philosophy by limiting moral responsibility to "persons"—those humans who have the full capacity for rational thought or consciousness.⁹

Pro-life advocates are well aware that once we limit the personhood of human beings to fully rational individuals the moral consequences are absurd

and devastating. Many bioethicists follow the philosopher Peter Singer, who denigrates human dignity by arguing that born infants and intellectually disabled human beings can be ethically killed while non-human animals exhibiting some rational ability should be respected as persons.¹⁰ It is reason alone that is now sanctified in an irrational faith.

Philosophers including Søren Kierkegaard, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Friedrich Nietzsche, Albert Camus, and Jean-Francois Lyotard have disclosed for two centuries the substantial flaws in Enlightenment thinkers' prideful attempts to ground morality in an artificial divinity of Reason. Today's bioethicists, however, still take advantage of a wrong turn in philosophy to discard the concepts of God-given human nature and dignity. They mask their goal of legitimizing anti-life practices and granting moral immunity for scientific excesses by degrading human nature to a mechanistic, rationally practical shadow of its true, divinely bestowed destiny.

As a consequence, nearly all secular bioethicists today assume, without any stated justification, that it is moral to edit the genes of a human embryo that has an intellectual disability or other unwanted genetic "disease" or "abnormality." Many argue for the right or even the obligation of parents to use genetic engineering to enhance the competitive abilities of their children,¹¹ and this inevitably leads to calls for government enforcement (and funding) of such obligations.¹² Selfish, ideological, competitive, and supremely ambitious motives have led scientists, secular bioethicists, and philosophers to jointly close their eyes to the inconvenient truth of a mysterious and magnificent human nature that cannot be confined to its capacity for reason, however impressive.

An Irrational Faith in Scientism

The dominant faith in intellectual reason as the sole basis for Truth has promoted scientific investigation, once limited to methodological naturalism, to an unwarranted role in judging moral perspectives. Overconfidence in the ability of technology to generate human fulfillment has led scientists and our society at large to rashly disparage moral, theological, and holistic views of human meaning as irrational fantasies. Austin Hughes explains this distortion of science as ethics:

In contrast to reason, a defining characteristic of superstition is the stubborn insistence that something—a fetish, an amulet, a pack of Tarot cards—has powers which no evidence supports. From this perspective, scientism appears to have as much in common with superstition as it does with properly conducted scientific research. Scientism claims that science has already resolved questions that are inherently beyond its ability to answer.¹³

The ideology of scientism exaggerates the role of scientific knowledge and its meaningfulness for human life by combining several core ideas: logical thought as the basis and therefore the purpose of human dignity; experimental observation

of physical things as the sole criteria for true knowledge; history as a process of continuous improvement; and the priority of useful technology among human objectives.¹⁴ In addition, the genetic sciences typically exhibit a reductionist commitment to human nature as mechanical and physically determined, and to genetics as a supremely useful field for explaining and improving human nature. Among genetics scientists and bioethicists, the inevitable and therefore good progress of science appears to justify mutilating and killing early-stage human beings in experiments and IVF procedures.

There is an unwarranted belief in a historical mandate to apply every new genetic technology to continuous improvement of human capabilities and elimination of perceived imperfections. As represented in the shameful history of eugenics, this desire arises out of resentment toward the human condition itself, and often from self-hatred. The perceived ethical obligation to assert human power over every disease and abnormality justifies recklessly altering the genetic makeup of future humanity through limited experiments and genetic theories that are woefully deficient in explaining the overwhelmingly complex ways that genes interact in the human body. Those genes have multiple and unpredictable effects, interact in an almost infinite set of combinations, depend on external substances including proteins and bacteria, change through lifetime experience, mutate, and undergo damage. Theories which can radically affect our understanding of human genetics are in constant flux.

The Diversity of Reason

The secular ideology that dominates the genetic sciences distorts our understanding of human reason by limiting it to a theoretical, scientific rationality. Max Weber demonstrated that human beings also exercise what he calls practical, substantive, and formal kinds of rationality.¹⁵ Through substantive reason, we attempt logical and intuitive consistency among the higher values that govern moral behavior. The bureaucratic structures that increasingly dominate economic, administrative, and scientific activity in our modern world forcibly suppress exercise of substantive reason by imposing efficient, functionally distinct, and unquestioned objectives for each segment of the bureaucracy.

Jürgen Habermas also draws a contrast between communicative and strategic (or instrumental) rationality.¹⁶ Strategic rationality is the process of developing and acting on reasons that support achievement of select goals. People and environments are either tools or objects for manipulation. Communicative rationality, on the other hand, focuses on sustained, often unconscious compromise with others for the purpose of shared understanding; participants justify or criticize the reasons for behavior according to democratically negotiated standards (or values, in moral dialogue and action).¹⁷ This vision of reason was also expressed by Pope John Paul II when he declared that “the fundamental moral

requirement of all communication is respect for and service of the truth.”¹⁸

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno demonstrated that the modern, post-Enlightenment emphasis on rationally determining the best means to reach national, economic, political, and consumer goals caused societies to abandon the project of sincerely discerning the ends of human existence and the values behind them.¹⁹ Such values and the discernment process to identify them seemed non-rational and non-scientific. Modern science, in particular, applies a formal rationality for gaining knowledge of the natural world through measurement and calculation. Science intends to assert human control over the natural world—just as medicine attempts control over physical health—so it is based in instrumental rationality (similar to Habermas’s strategic rationality). Our confused, secular society often pretends that Truth outside scientific rationality no longer exists.

As Søren Kierkegaard wrote, “materialistic physiology is comic (to believe that by putting to death one finds the spirit which gives life) . . .”²⁰ Observation, experimentation, and control over nature—these alone cannot produce the humanistic reason that seeks to understand our true nature as privileged agents who act toward divine ends.

Depravity in Human Genetic Engineering

These insights into the diversity of human reason remind us that instrumental and theoretical rationality cannot explain the divine and dignified purpose of human nature. It’s true that we experience a natural drive to improve ourselves and our world, and that we have a desperate need to understand things. The drive to improve, however, has its highest expression in our worship of God, through charitable love of our neighbors and faithful preparation for our union with the perfect Divine. True understanding comes not from a scientific accumulation of factual or operational knowledge of the natural world, but from the insight gained in faith and the frequent exercise of communicative and aesthetic reason. Our human nature thrives when we honestly develop a shared moral sensibility in our interaction with others and in our experience of joy in the beauty of God-given creation. Apparently imperfect or disabled persons are then properly valued as miraculous, one-of-a-kind treasures of our human community.

Despite the call for us to be compassionate toward others who may suffer, attempts to control the life experiences of children by engineering their genes can violently interfere with their opportunities for joy and beauty in pursuit of their higher purpose.²¹ Removing some perceived disease, abnormality, or deficit in an embryo would not at all guarantee that the altered person would be spared unpredictable suffering in his or her life. Suffering is not limited to persons who are “abnormal” or less capable of achievement. Relationships with parents

could become distorted for those children aware of having been manufactured²² and the edited persons might lose the reassurance that comes from miraculously receiving and freely developing one's unique, given identity.²³ The scientific (and often medical) ideology of control generates a mirage through which we can barely perceive the wondrous, irreplaceable, and divinely intended nature of an individual human being.

Concern over enhancing our welfare through wealth and elimination of suffering distracts from the enormous challenge of a rigorously moral life: "No servant can be the slave of two masters" (Matthew 6:24). It is the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that cleared the way for human beings to enjoy eternal life in the presence of the perfect Divine, not any prideful human project of perfection. Suffering is ultimately a gratifying experience of the human destiny.²⁴

Steering our society away from the madness of genetic engineering of human embryos requires Christian evangelization about the divine purpose of human nature, the non-rational essence of humanity in faith, and wonder at the mysterious beauty of God's creation. We must alert others to the devastation that comes from granting dominance to scientific, instrumental reason in genetic engineering and our society at large.

It's the human thing to do.

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Transhumanism: Church of the New Eugenics

Wesley J. Smith

What if I told you that a new social movement—emanating out of elite universities, funded bounteously by the billionaires of Silicon Valley, and boosted by an uncritical media—plans to “seize control of human evolution” and defeat death itself? “That’s nuts!” you might say—and I would agree with you. But these days being “nuts” isn’t an impediment to widespread support among society’s elite and the anti-traditional values crowd.

Welcome to the weird and wild world of transhumanism—whose adherents believe fervently that mortal salvation is just a few years (and some technological advances) away and that humanity will soon be intelligently designed into a “post-human species.” One might call transhumanism our newest faith—a techno religion in which even the crassest materialists feel comfortable expressing the deepest faith.

What Transhumanists Seek

There’s a long list of post-human redesigns that fervent transhumanists hope to usher into reality. Here are their primary goals:

Immortality: First and foremost, transhumanists look to technology in the same way Ponce de León viewed the Fountain of Youth, as their salvation from the grave. Of course, unlike the mythical fountain, technology is real, a powerful tool that has unquestionably transformed human society for the better in the last few hundred years. But to transhumanists, technology is the key to an earthly Nirvana freeing the transhumanist from constrained life expectancies of natural human existence.

Here’s the idea: A time is coming—and soon—when cascading technology will become unstoppable and uncontrollable, to the point that it will permit humans to live, if not forever, than certainly indefinitely. That moment is known, in transhumanism’s lexicon, as “the Singularity.” The most popular immortality meme has transhumanists uploading their minds into computers to live forever in cyberspace—perhaps as part of a collective consciousness with other uploaded people. Another idea adds human cloning into the mix; according to this model, a clone would be manufactured and, when the time is right, a human mind transferred into its new body. Or maybe the download will be into a robot

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or an AI (artificial intelligence) cyborg. Some Singularity believers have chosen to direct that, after death, their heads be frozen to preserve them for transplantation into another body once medicine advances sufficiently. Frankly, the methods discussed are only limited by the imaginations of the transhumanists.

Faith in the Singularity is not a fringe idea. None other than Google's in-house futurist, Ray Kurzweil, is a "Singularitytarian" who expects the Singularity to arrive by 2045. According to *Time*,

For Kurzweil, it's not so much about staying healthy as long as possible; it's about staying alive until the Singularity. It's an attempted handoff. Once hyper-intelligent artificial intelligences arise, armed with advanced nanotechnology, they'll really be able to wrestle with the vastly complex, systemic problems associated with aging in humans. Alternatively, by then we'll be able to transfer our minds to sturdier vessels such as computers and robots. He and many other Singularitytarians take seriously the proposition that many people who are alive today will wind up being functionally immortal.¹

Never mind that having your mind uploaded into a computer—assuming it could be done—wouldn't actually preserve "you," but rather a mere software program that might react to data as you would. Transhumanists insist this would be the same thing as still being alive. Poor dears. A machine is inanimate, no matter how sophisticated. All the technology that can be conjured up can't deliver the spark of life.

Increased Intelligence: Transhumanists are obsessed with increasing cognitive functioning, perhaps because they believe becoming smarter will herald the Singularity sooner. For example, recently the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Elon Musk, founder and CEO of Tesla Inc., had started a company dedicated to developing neural technologies to increase human intelligence by way of a "direct cortical interface—essentially a layer of artificial intelligence inside the brain."² The company is also reported to be exploring "cosmetic brain surgeries" to make us smarter.

Musk is not alone in putting his money where his futuristic dreams are. In 2016, the *New Scientist* reported:

If you could implant a device in your brain to enhance your intelligence, would you do it? A new company has just invested \$100 million into developing such a device, and is being advised by some of the biggest names in science.

The company, Kernel, was launched earlier this year by entrepreneur Bryan Johnson. He says he has spent many years wondering how best to contribute to humanity. "I arrived at intelligence. I think it's the most precious and powerful resource in existence," says Johnson.³

Johnson's belief exemplifies why I find transhumanism both morally deficient and philosophically sterile. There's nothing wrong with intelligence, of course. It is one of the attributes that make humans exceptional. Indeed, our species'

extraordinary brains enabled us to leave the caves. But intelligence is hardly the “most precious and powerful resource” in existence—not even close. That plaudit belongs to love, a virtue about which transhumanists rarely speak.

The Manufacture of Children: Validating the prophetic warnings of dystopian science fiction such as *Brave New World* and *Gattaca*, movement dogma doesn’t “only” want transhumanist technology to enable adherents to redesign themselves, but also seeks the ability and license for transhumanists to special-order their children to possess specific genetic traits they find desirable. Here’s the plan: Deploying IVF or cloning technologies would concomitantly permit “genetic modification and health screening” processes to allow “the child with the best possibility of a good life to be born.”⁴

Here we see transhumanism’s authoritarian side. A child genetically engineered to fulfill the desires of his or her parents would not be truly free but directed by the naked power of DNA toward certain life paths. For example, a frustrated athlete might genetically modify her embryos to ensure that her children would possess outstanding athletic ability. Or perhaps a religious fundamentalist might alter his progeny to have a propensity for intense religious belief, if this was found to be a heritable trait.

Transhumanists argue that many parents already seek to influence their children’s future—think of the parent forcing his daughter to take piano lessons or Tiger Woods’ father directing the development of his son’s golfing talent from a very early age. But as the old saying goes, these influences are only skin deep: The child forced to take piano lessons can always quit if she doesn’t enjoy music. But if a father could insert a gene that might transform his daughter into the musical genius *he* always wanted to be—and moreover, if he could ensure that she would *want* to pursue a music career—the girl’s life would never truly be her own.

Superhero Powers: Transhumanists dream of becoming extraordinary, and this includes possessing the physical prowess of fictional super-heroes, all without having to actually work for it. Do you desire the vision of a hawk? Transhumanists believe that soon biotechnologists will be able to edit the bird’s genes into your genome, and eyeglasses will be a tool of the past. Want to leap tall buildings in a single bound like the 1950s TV Superman? Prosthetics might just get that done for you. Think you’d like to have a prehensile tail to swing from tree to tree? Heck, why not? Transhumanist popularizer and author, public speaker, and ex-presidential candidate on the Transhumanist Party ticket Zoltan Istvan explains:

The human body is a mediocre vessel for our actual possibilities in this material universe. Our biology severely limits us. As a species we are far from finished and therefore unacceptable. The transhumanist believes we should immediately work to improve ourselves via enhancing the human body and eliminating its weak points. This means ridding ourselves of flesh and bones, and upgrading to new cybernetic tissues, alloys, and other synthetic materials, including ones that make us cyborg-like and robotic. It also

means further merging the human brain with the microchip and the impending digital frontier. Biology is for beasts, not future transhumanists.⁵

Some transhumanists even expect to take humans beyond the physical altogether. As far back as his 1997 book *Remaking Eden*, Princeton biologist Lee Silver set out his fervent belief that the wonders of human redesign would, in the distant future, enable our posterity to engineer themselves into a “special group of mental beings” who “are as different from humans as humans are from primitive worms. . . . ‘Intelligence’ will not do justice to their cognitive abilities. ‘Knowledge’ does not explain the depth of their understanding. . . . ‘Power’ is not strong enough to describe the control they have over technologies that can be used to shape the universe in which they live.”⁶ Whether these omnipotent post-humans would have the *wisdom* to possess such powers remains unaddressed.

Transhumanism as Religion

At its core, transhumanism seeks to provide hope for those who have rejected religion. Most transhumanists are atheists—or, at the very least, materialists. Indeed, Istvan has written that he is a transhumanist precisely *because* he is an atheist:

The transhumanist hero is the person who constantly eyes improving their health, life-style, and longevity with science and technology. They are not okay with the past age of feeling guilty for aspiring to be different or better than they were born—or for wanting the power to become godlike themselves. They have no sin to erase; they have no reason to search for something outside of the material universe . . .

If you don’t care about or believe in God, and you want the best of the human spirit to raise the world to new heights using science, technology, and reason, then you are a transhumanist.⁷

Ironically, it is fascinating to trace how closely transhumanism tracks the comforts and promises of traditional faith without the humility that comes from being a created creature, and with the further benefit of eschewing all worry about the eternal consequences of sin, the laws of karma, or a future reincarnation in which our condition is based directly on how we live our present life. In short, transhumanism’s primary purpose is to substitute for religious belief a nonjudgmental and ironic technological echo of Christian eschatology. Consider:

- Christ’s second coming and the Singularity are both expected to occur at a specific moment in time.
- Both lead to death’s final defeat: for Christians, in the “New Jerusalem,” and for transhumanists, in their embrace of a corporeal post-humanity.
- For Christian believers, life in the hereafter will mean an end to all suffering.

Likewise the Singularity, for transhumanists. Indeed, eliminating suffering in fleshly living is one of transhumanism's major aims.

• Christians expect to live in glorified bodies that are both real and immortal, but different from those we now inhabit (as it were). Transhumanists also expect our current biological lives to be transformed. Kurzweil has predicted we will possess “non-biological bodies”⁸ and Silver’s “mental beings” appear to be akin to Kurzweil’s concept—of course, without God’s involvement when “the old heaven and earth have passed away.”⁹

Transhumanism even predicts that the already dead will be raised, an offshoot of a core tenet of Christian faith. For example, Kurzweil is planning to construct a technological version of his long-dead father. He told ABC news: “You can certainly argue that, philosophically, that [replica of your father] is not your father, . . . but I can actually make a strong case that it would be more like my father than my father would be, were he to live.”¹⁰

Why entertain the pretense that the version of you “existing” in a computer would be real, or that through the wonders of transhumanist technology we can someday live something like forever? The answer is as human as life gets: Transhumanism is a wail of despair in the night. We all need hope—and that includes atheists, agnostics, and other assorted materialists. Transhumanist philosophy represents a desperate yearning to escape what most true transhumanists bemoan as an all too brief and maddeningly restricted existence—and one that will be utterly obliterated once their heart stops beating. No wonder transhumanists are such true believers. The philosophy offers them purpose—and the comfort that their corporeal salvation is simply a technological breakthrough away.

Transhumanism Is a New Eugenics

Transhumanism is a futuristic misanthropy. Transhumanists and kindred would-be enhancers deny human exceptionalism—because that would inhibit their ambition to reengineer themselves into their own image. Instead, most believe that the value of any life—animal, human, post human, machine, space alien—depends on the individual’s measurable capacities, particularly their level of cognition. James Hughes, a bioethicist and professor at Hartford’s Trinity College, is one of the movement’s most vehement polemicists. Not only does Hughes (like many bioethicists)¹¹ argue that life doesn’t have intrinsic moral value simply and merely because it is human, he also believes that “post humans” could one day perceive themselves to be superior to “mere humans.”¹²

Such thinking is disturbingly reminiscent of master race advocacy and the evil of eugenics that ran roughshod over the weak and vulnerable in the United States, England, Canada, and Germany in the first forty-five years of the 20th Century. Eugenics rejected human exceptionalism and the equal dignity of all

human beings to embrace invidious distinctions between what movement adherents called the “fit” versus the “unfit,”¹³ a view that led to laws permitting involuntary sterilization of the eugenically incorrect in the U.S. and other Western nations—and led to outright infanticide in Germany during World War II.

As mentioned earlier, transhumanism foresees using genetic engineering to make a “better” human species—just as the old eugenicists did with the cruder weapon of preventing the so-called unfit from procreating. Still, the old eugenics idea of limiting the freedom to have children continues among some transhumanists, as Istvan explained in a *Wired* article entitled “It’s Time to Consider Restricting Human Breeding”:

The philosophical conundrum of controlling human procreation rests mostly on whether all human beings are actually responsible enough to be good parents and can provide properly for their offspring. Clearly, untold numbers of children—for example, those millions that are slaves in the illegal human trafficking industry—are born to unfit parents.

In an attempt to solve this problem and give hundreds of millions of future kids a better life, I cautiously endorse the idea of licensing parents, a process that would be little different than getting a driver’s license. Parents who pass a series of basic tests qualify and get the green light to get pregnant and raise children. Those applicants who are deemed unworthy—perhaps because they are homeless, or have drug problems, or are violent criminals, or have no resources to raise a child properly and keep it from going hungry—would not be allowed to have children until they could demonstrate they were suitable parents.

How would we stop them? Istvan isn’t sure:

The problem is always in the details. How could society monitor such a licensing process? Would governments force abortion upon mothers if they were found to be pregnant without permission? These things seem unimaginable in most societies around the world. Besides, who wants the government handling human breeding when it can’t do basic things like balance its own budgets and stay out of wars? Perhaps a nonprofit entity like the World Health Organization might be able to step in and offer more confidence.¹⁴

Yeah, right.

Istvan can pretend his call to eugenic authoritarianism merely seeks to protect suffering children. But he is really just singing that old eugenics tune updated to allow Istvan and his ilk to preserve their societal place in perpetuity.

Conclusion

Driven by an ethos of radical individualism that countenances no restraints and disdains moral restrictions on personal behavior, hubristically believing that they possess the wisdom to “improve” the human species, yearning desperately for corporeal immortality, transhumanists hope to mount a rebellion against God and nature that would recreate human life. Thus, Simon Smith, editor in chief of the transhumanist on-line publication *Better Humans Daily*,

has written: “Transhumanists unabashedly assert that without gods, it is up to humanity to ‘play God,’ striving to achieve for humanity a total control over its physical and mental state, in some ways similar to that promised in supernatural beliefs.”¹⁵

Transhumanism is a long way from being attained, and the technology that the movement envisions will someday usher in a post-human Utopia is still a distant prospect—if it ever can be developed at all. But the movement still presents us with a potent existential threat. Its anti-human values are poisonous. Its advocacy for what amounts to social anarchy threatens the meaning of organized society. Its authoritarian tendencies would destroy ordered liberty. If we are going to preserve a culture founded on the Judeo-Christian ideal of equal human dignity and the protection of the weak, transhumanism must be rejected not only in our public policies, but equally important, in how we lead our personal lives.

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Talking Across the Metaphysical Divide

Ellen Wilson Fielding

One day in sixth grade, our teacher interrupted his slide presentation on the art and architecture of Europe to ask us whether any of us had been to Europe. We all shook our heads, whereupon he asked a second question: “How do you know it exists? How do you know there’s a Europe if you’ve never seen it?”

Well, we scratched our heads and began throwing things out:

“Because someone else had gone there and told us about it.” (But what if they had just been lying to us, just making up stories?)

“But these are people we know, and they had told us lots of things before about lots of other places, and those things had all turned out to be true. They told me about Washington, D.C., and then I went there on a trip with my parents, and it was all the way they had described it.”

“Besides, there are photos of Europe like the ones you just showed us of the Acropolis and Michelangelo’s David.” (But what if they are faked, or if those are photos of things that are somewhere in America instead?)

The arguments we twelve-year-olds came up with sorted themselves out into roughly two categories: those based on the knowledge and trustworthiness of a person, and a sort of “artifact” argument, featuring some physical evidence either directly connected with what was asserted or at only one remove (souvenirs, photos, documentaries, traveling exhibits).

I was thinking of this long-ago experience recently as I reflected on the frustrating kind of discussions that people on either side of many social and political debates engage in—frustrating, because each side is trying to make the other acknowledge their authorities and consequently accept the grounds of their opinion.

The sources of this problem can be formulated in many ways—the dearth of shared first principles; the polarization of our sources of belief and opinion; the ghettoization of blogs, “news,” and opinion sites on the internet; the seemingly mindless stampedes of social media (reminiscent of my children’s soccer games when they were quite small—“pack soccer,” I used to call it, with the whole mob moving en masse up and down the field in pursuit of the ball).

They all can be reduced to divides in our responses to two questions: Who do you believe? What evidence do you trust?

The first question seeks to identify each side’s authorities. In my sixth-grade’s

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debate about the existence of Europe, we identified both trustworthy individuals (“My grandma went to Europe, and she wouldn’t lie to me about it,” “My friend visited his relatives in Ireland, and he doesn’t fool me about stuff like that”) and a wealth of evidence from many, many people acting individually and not necessarily known to one another (“They can’t *all* be lying or hallucinating”).

But that doesn’t move us along to a place of common ground when it comes to current divides over cultural issues like abortion, euthanasia, gay marriage, fluid gender identity, and bioengineering. Today, our separate authorities either give conflicting advice (“Nope, there was nothing but a giant hole where Europe was supposed to be”) or describe the same thing in quite different terms (“So much beauty and culture!” “Just the droppings from dead white males!”). To some degree our most elemental differences arise over the value we place on what we see and the meaning we assign to observed events. Two people observing the same human embryo will be seeing different things according to how they label that embryo and what value they assign it. Is it a human being? A clump of cells? Does it have inherent rights, or does it only acquire rights after it endures until viability—or until childbirth, or until, along the model of the ancient Roman paterfamilias or the Lion King, it is lifted up by a parent in an act that invests it with an agreed-upon status? Does its value fluctuate over the course of life, depending upon whether it is healthy or unhealthy, productive or useless, a member of the reigning class or ethnicity or demographic, happy or unhappy, young and vital or elderly and infirm? Will its actions throughout life alter its *value*, or just alter the extent to which its independence and freedom of movement are constrained (by the commission of crimes, for example, or by suffering insanity or being unable to care for himself or herself)?

The answers a person gives to questions such as these can influence whether that person sees, well, Europe or a great hole in the ground. Of course the answers will determine what we call the embryo, but then what we call the embryo also influences how we think of it. The effects bounce back and forth.

When crisis pregnancy centers use sonograms to attempt to move a mother to recognize her unborn child and embrace her pregnancy, no matter how unexpected or unhappy the circumstances, it is not because the mother will *inevitably* recognize and acknowledge the child’s right to membership in the human race. Most people by now have been exposed to someone’s sonogram pictures, and many have even seen high-quality images of fetal development. However much that helps give them a frame of reference for imagining and relating to *wanted* unborn children, it does not magically convert all of them to generalized respect for the rights of all preborn human life. What it *can* do is to move or perhaps startle the conflicted mother into *recognizing* the image on the screen, *naming* it a baby, and in consequence embracing the child as a fellow human being embarking on its life journey. And that happens, fairly often, when

women see sonograms of their babies. But it isn't *bound* to happen. We can choose to see differently, but we can also succumb to the drag of our own life history or education or the milieu in which we live. Such untrue, unrealistic seeing has occurred many times in many other contexts. The Nazis, for example, devised propaganda to train Germans to look at Jews and Gypsies and mentally handicapped people and see something subhuman. In America, Native Americans and enslaved blacks were also classified as lacking equal rights because of perceived deficiencies. Today, in an unusual twist of perceptual self-persuasion, the newest and most salient example of such mis-seeing and mis-classifying turns up in the transgender arena, where people are increasingly willing to look at a boy and, if that boy insists he is a girl, retrain their eyes to see him as "really" a girl.

Recently I heard a description of our mind and body's reaction to the unremitting sensory bombardment that assaults us every day. Because we can attend to and absorb only a tiny number of these innumerable sensory stimuli at a time, we block out almost all of them without even realizing it. Like the blinkered horses negotiating the noise and chaos of 19th-century city streets, this restriction on sensory input is necessary to allow us to focus on what we might really need or want to know. This happens instinctively, though we can also cooperate with the process by, for example, closing our eyes when we want to engage in complex thinking with fewer distractions, or breaking up an office or school space into separate units, turning out the lights at bedtime, using a white noise machine, or training a spotlight on an actor onstage.

The instructor who described our sensory filtering suggested that our limited capacity to absorb sensations and our instinctive preference for certain kinds of sensory information promotes our survival and the propagation of the species. We sit up and take notice of information that suggests that we are about to be run over by a car or a Big Mac is sizzling a few steps away or an attractive member of the opposite sex is passing by. Supposedly we are programmed to process and respond to this kind of sensory information because such responses have thus far improved our species' chances of survival.

It is not only human beings who selectively attend to sensory data—each species has its own brand of drastic sensory pruning, depending on whether its members are predators or prey, how they are constituted, and what kind of environment they inhabit. But it is not clear if this scientific model of how beings deal with a continuous information avalanche helps us understand how two people of the same species differently see and name things. By itself, I am not sure it much helps. Or at least, it only "helps" by smuggling in a great many presuppositions. You may "explain," for example, why I can look at a boy who insists he is really a girl and still see a boy by positing that accepting the

child's self-labelling would threaten my religious worldview or my preference for a traditional family-based society or something similarly psychological or sociological. I might respond, however, by noting that your accepting the boy's insistence that he is now a girl and your shift to "seeing" him now as a girl also is a response to motivators related to your different ideas of human flourishing. Perhaps you align transgenderism within a mosaic of self-determining choices you want to defend—choices related to freedom, autonomy, and sexuality, for example.

But again, where does this get either of us if we want to know how to go about accurately seeing and naming things—always assuming that we both do want this, and that it is possible to accurately see things, and that there is an objective reality that can be the goal of such seeking? (But if none of these is true, why are the pro-life and pro-abortion disputants even bothering to try to assert what they think and why they think it? Why would it matter why we do what we do—if there is no "why" for anything?)

Tracing opinions back to motivations can help us understand what inclines someone toward a certain point of view, but it is much less useful in determining whether that point of view is correct. Take, for example, those grouped on either side of global warming served up as the central crisis of our era. (For all I know it may be—it is the divide I am considering now, not the science.) It seems that most of the scientific community aligns with the conclusions that global warming is rising rather sharply, fairly unprecedentedly, and largely or significantly as a result of human action, and that this threatens us and the Earth with a range of disastrous effects. Now, *because* the scientific community, as well as much of the academic community outside the sciences, has fully embraced these conclusions, it is in the professional interest of even unpersuaded or agnostic scientists to join the climate change chorus or at least contribute no dissonant notes. But the predominance of opinion by itself neither proves nor disproves scientists' research on global warming trajectories and possible causes or magnifiers. The science itself is all that can prove or disprove it right now, and most of us are not scientists. Someday, however, the passage of time should either corroborate current theory or cast it into doubt, especially if nations do not commit to the kind of drastic changes in technology use and lifestyle that we are told will be necessary to have significant positive effects.

Meanwhile, who do we believe? Going back to our analogy about the existence of Europe, are the climate-change scientists testifying to a Europe that truly exists, or are they in error? On what grounds do we believe or disbelieve? What is the authority we are to rely on? The weight of opinion is impressive (it would be more impressive if not for the extreme politicization of the topic), but we can point to occasions where the weight of opinion has proved wrong.

Throughout almost the entire career of Lister and Pasteur, for example, “science” derided as absurd the germ theory of infection and laughed at anyone who insisted on sterile operating theaters. On the other hand, being in the minority proves nothing either. Lone geniuses and monomaniacs can look surprisingly alike before all the data is in.

The reliance on science and technology to solve our problems and also address our ethical dilemmas has grown steadily stronger as we have grown increasingly more dependent on them to augment our health, longevity, creature comforts, and amusements. The narrative of the scientific worldview and its popularizers (and even its profiteers), including the tech community and much of the lucrative business world built up around it, is one of continual progress threatened only by cataclysms like global warming and nuclear war, as well as by narrow-minded Luddite restrictions on bioengineering and the like. Traditional religion is the identified culprit here, which makes sense because traditional Christianity defends the family, counsels sexual restraint, is wary of power-seeking, and tends toward a more pessimistic view of human corruptibility and immoderation, particularly when unrestrained by a sense of moral limits. Traditional religion—like traditional culture of all kinds—also does not regard the past as something to be despised and outgrown, jettisoned like a spent rocket booster.

So although many Christian denominations, including the Catholic Church, do not necessarily have a theological problem with the theory of evolution when properly understood, the sort of religion of progress that has followed in evolution’s wake does pose problems. The assumption that survival implies moral superiority, and the sort of mindless expectation of unending progress implied by the 19th-century psychologist Coué’s mantra that “Every day in every way, I am getting better and better” is at odds with just about all traditional worldviews I am familiar with. Certainly it is at odds with the traditional Christian one, which teaches that: 1) all of us have a sort of fault line running through the soul that is not a mere primitive deficit to be evolved out of or a glitch to be remedied by recalibrating or mutating; 2) the most important event in all human history was the redemption of the human race by the saving life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which occurred some 2000 years ago; 3) it follows that reflection on and understanding of our past, and of the great thinkers, prophets, teachers, and saints, is always useful and important; and 4) though history offers us greater opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the life God has given us, and, by making use of every branch of knowledge, to better understand our world and how to live in it, there is nothing in time as such or in the coming and going of species that elevates us ontologically or morally or promises some ultimate control over the creation we are part of.

Clearly, the Christian way of viewing human history and purposes clashes

with, I won't say science, but scientism ("The belief that the investigative methods of the physical sciences are applicable or justifiable in all fields of inquiry," *American Heritage Dictionary*, 5th edition). Buoyed by science's many successes in areas like medicine and technology, and lacking the humble acknowledgement of our limitations, the non-traditional view of human history drifts away on fantasies of limitless possibilities and complacently regards our own era as both mentally and morally superior to all its predecessors. It does this by assuming that a natural evolutionary process of species development is paralleled in the moral and intellectual spheres by a natural evolutionary process of moral enlightenment. However, there is no reason why this should be so—and the idea seems particularly odd when expressed by atheists or agnostics who do not posit an agent of creation or a guiding mind drawing the universe on to some beneficent conclusion or at least to asymptotic improvement.

That makes history, to adapt the words of Rose Sayer in *The African Queen*, something that mankind was born to rise above. Not surprisingly, then, like that jettisoned booster rocket, the thinking of America's Founding Fathers has today largely been relegated to history's ash heap. They are particularly castigated for slaveholding or tolerating slavery—something that most of the Founders themselves recognized as morally wrong and some of them strongly wrestled with. And yet, if today's despisers could recognize the mote in their own eye, they might approach the humility to perceive contemporary sins like legalized abortion that loom as large. They might then reflect that however fiercely an age's besetting sins should be fought, that age's crowning accomplishments should also be remembered, handed down, and aspired to. And when we have inherited some good or been bequeathed some great beauty by our ancestors—whether the Cathedral of Notre Dame, the plays of Shakespeare, the novels of Dostoevsky, the paintings of Rembrandt, or the music of Bach—the proper response is awe and gratitude, rather than conceited dismissal or denunciation. But according to progressive theory, *by definition* our ancestors are less trustworthy authorities, less likely to be right, more "backward" (a metaphor that itself visualizes a progression where those in front are superior).

For progressives, then, the authorities to be believed, the sages to attend to, are precisely the newest, most recent, and latest iteration—just as the latest iPhone or the newest car is the one techies turn to.

Like the ancients and their traditions, the elderly in every generation were once regarded as authorities. Surviving to a great age offers the opportunity to experience many variables, to learn that the circumstances in which one finds oneself, whether pleasant or miserable, are not necessarily unalterable and may in fact be headed for transformation.

Accounts of the historical roots of science and the scientific method often mock the ancient amalgam of astronomy and astrology, and the close relations

of alchemy and early chemistry. Yet the streamlining of science in the interests of efficiency and productivity, while it sent scientific development into overdrive, was achieved by abandoning the pursuit of wisdom, and the philosophical aspect of science's early name: natural philosophy. I think that by concentrating solely on exploring the natural world and its physical laws, and leaving behind the consideration of the whole universe's relationship to its Creator or the Creator's purposes in creating, by shelving any interest in what might lie beyond and behind matter and energy, science made enormous progress technologically and practically. However, perhaps understandably, many scientists gravitated to the intellectually consoling belief that matter and energy—this enormous but un-ultimate world in which we find ourselves—is indeed all there is.

To concede that there must be more, that a planet and even a universe submitting itself to be analyzed, experimented upon, and opened up to our gaze cannot be our ultimate cause and origin, is to admit that there is a whole order beyond the access of the scientific method. And if there is such an order, and if the material world so well studied is not our ultimate cause, we also need to acknowledge the possibility not just of physical laws like gravity and entropy, but of moral laws and restrictions, imposed from without, on both our capabilities and our moral actions. Far from being self-created, evolutionarily directed to our survival as a species, or up for grabs by whatever group or individual is in power, whether we concede it or not we are ourselves under orders: Our morality can neither be fashioned by us nor adjusted by us with impunity. And to the extent that we behave as though it can, we risk the moral equivalent of daring to violate the laws of gravity.

Who are our authorities? Who do we believe? What kinds of evidence do we trust? The predominant authority for knowledge questions of all sorts today is science, which in practice means scientists and those who claim to interpret and adopt their language and conclusions for everyday purposes. These conclusions on the one hand have a certain rigor—at least, the testable ones. They pronounce, they even denounce, as in the areas of global warming or population fearmongering or bioengineering. On the other hand, particularly in bioengineering and various other tech fields, practitioners and their devotees regard their fields as laboratories of the great human endeavor to fashion our means, our ends, ourselves. The end is to gain greater and greater mastery over our makeup and develop techniques to remold it nearer to our heart's desires.

And those who look elsewhere for moral authorities to guide us in distinguishing between what we can do and what we may do? Those dinosaurs, those has-beens? They look to the stable and time-tested, to something larger than themselves and their own partial and imperfect and incomplete comprehension of existence and our place within it. For many or most, this stable and larger

foundation is derived from God; for some pantheists or agnostics or unbelievers, it is something persistent in the order of things—something that we could perhaps call Tao-like, inbuilt, to which we are meant to adapt ourselves.

Looking to the stable and time-tested leads to very different thought processes and conclusions than following scientism. You start at a different place, so it should not be surprising to end up at a different place, perhaps waving confusedly at your equally confused adversary as your paths momentarily intersect and then separate. And perhaps you wonder, “What’s with her, anyway? Why won’t she believe Europe exists? Here are the pictures, here are the artifacts, here are the witnesses—millions and billions of witnesses—who all made the journey down the birth canal.”



“I’m sorry—I could’ve sworn it was casual wear Friday.”

Artificial Intelligence and the Human Person

Jason Morgan

[...] *The faceless machine
Lacks a surround. The laws of science have
Never explained why novelty always
Arrives to enrich (though the wrong question
Imitates nothing). Nature rewards
Perilous leaps. The prudent atom
Simply insists upon its safety now,
Security at all costs; the calm plant
Masters matter then submits to itself,
Busy but not brave; the beast assures
A stabler status to stolen flesh,
Assists though it enslaves: singular then
Is the human way; for the ego is a dream
Till a neighbour's need by name create it;
Man has no mean; his mirrors distort;
His greenest arcadias have ghosts too;
His Utopias tempt to eternal youth
Or self-slaughter.*

—W.H. Auden, *The Age of Anxiety*

In 1948, W.H. Auden won the Pulitzer Prize for *The Age of Anxiety*, a long poem that so aptly captured the mood of the century, its title has long since been appropriated by pundits as shorthand for the times in which we live. Ours truly is an anxious age. Man has lost his way, lost sight of who he is and what he is meant to become. This loss haunts us everywhere. We cannot be alone with ourselves, cannot be without distraction even for a moment, afraid as we are of confronting life without the sense of certainty we ascribe to our ancestors. The old world of God and country, of Sunday school and Sunday dinner, has passed away. But what is coming next?

In many ways, the seven decades since the end of World War II have been a search for some kind of explanation for our gnawing sense of dread. We intuit that the apocalypse is nigh, but we don't know what it will bring. Is it climate change? Will we all drown in swirling ice-melt as the angry oceans rise up to engulf the scorched and barren ground? Is it global cooling, perhaps? After all, global cooling was the focus of our anxiety before anyone had ever heard of global warming. In the 1970s, the scientific consensus was that we were going

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to be locked in ice, a glacial Vesuvius with the unlucky remnants of mankind eternally frozen in their terrified death throes. Or maybe it is the outbreak of some dread disease. We will all catch swine flu and die. Or maybe it will be an asteroid that does us all in. Recently, it seems that Donald Trump has been seized upon by our self-styled elites as the latest manifest confirmation that we have, indeed, entered the latter days of the law.

Those who follow the news will have noticed that a new and formidable candidate for Anxiety Exemplified has been making the papers in countries around the world: artificial intelligence, or AI. Mankind's enslavement to a master race of robots has been a staple of science fiction since the beginning of the genre. The *Terminator* series traded on our technological apprehensions and scored tremendous box-office returns, dramatizing the notion that the future would be a war-torn hell of all-out combat between man and machine. And yet, the *Terminator* films had to use a cheap plot trick to make the distant future seem more immediate—the robots travel back in time to our present, thus making the far-off collapse of humanity come to life in an age in which the technological revolution appeared to have culminated in the combination telephone/fax machine.

During the time between the first *Terminator* movie in 1984 and today, though, it became increasingly more difficult to dismiss the idea of robot domination as far-fetched. Little by little, machines began to beat humans at their own game. Machines won against undisputed masters of chess and Go. Machines won in rounds of Jeopardy. Machines now assemble automobiles and microchips, fly airplanes and drive cars, and check our spelling and grammar. Machines can translate websites from Mandarin to Catalan and back again in an instant. Machines never forget a face and store facial recognition data forever. And machines know what we want to buy and read and watch even before we do. It's not so easy to laugh at AI anymore. If the Age of Anxiety has an avatar, AI is it.

This is not to say that everyone fears artificial intelligence. Indeed, many embrace it. Most of us have smartphones, for instance, even though we know they spy on us and use our ill-gotten information to manipulate us for the sake of other humans' capital gains. Some of us wear internet-capable eyewear, so that we are always at least visually connected to the World Wide Web. A few have gone even further, implanting microchips under the skin and looking forward to the time when the synergy of flesh and electrons—the “Singularity,” as its most noteworthy popularizer, futurist Ray Kurzweil, calls it—becomes a reality. The number of people who copulate with robots is rapidly increasing. It will be a little-noted irony, but net sales of sex dolls will, at some point, surpass the gross box-office take of the *Terminator* franchise.

As a species we seem to be divided into two camps on the subject of artificial intelligence. There are those who welcome it, and those who fear it. Many drift about in the middle, of course, ambivalent, wary, or too busy to care either way.

But the ubiquity of AI as a news item and the topic of books, journal articles, and barroom conversations seems to confirm Auden's original insight. We are anxious. We don't know where we are headed. All we know is that the former civilization is gone. The question then is what is coming to take its place. Regardless of one's views on AI, this is how the issue is framed, time after time.

But there is a much deeper question hidden in the back-and-forth about Amazon's Alexa, CAPTCHAs, and deepfake videos. We are rightly amazed and appalled by AI. It is getting very close to crossing the "uncanny valley" and imitating us, and we can't seem to take our eyes off of the weird verisimilitude of machines doing their best human-being impression. But that's just it. If machines are trying to ape us, then what is the differentia between us and machines (or between us and apes, for that matter)? In other words, who are we? If intelligence can be artificial, then that implies that we know how to make it. Do we, though? Can we replicate something we don't remotely understand? Can we imitate something that is essentially mysterious?

By "intelligence," I don't mean "mere" consciousness. Many AI researchers debate whether consciousness can be simulated using a rich neural network with many nodes and connections, akin to the structure of the human brain, or by increasing processing speeds to make artificial intelligence indistinguishable from the intelligence of a cerebrum and cerebellum working together. Which-ever method they pursue, these researchers must inevitably grapple with the question, "What is consciousness?" Because in order to copy something, you must first know how it works. (If you don't think this is true, try replicating a wristwatch without taking one apart.) But questions of consciousness do not go nearly far enough. The real question is not *what* we are, but *who*. It's one thing to answer that we are "clever primates" or "organisms that think." It's quite another to say what that adds up to in terms of identity, true nature. And if the question is who, and not what, then the answer is never going to be found in the cranium. And yet, this is precisely where AI researchers keep looking.

In many ways, AI should more properly be called "A-Us," because AI is nothing more than ourselves processed through digital stage fog and reflected back to us in narcissistic pride. AI researchers do not understand the human person, who is made in the image and likeness of God and whose soul is eternal protection against counterfeit. In that sense, AI will never happen. It will always be a bastardization of the original.

What makes AI most interesting, then, is not the promises it holds out for the future—everything from "manning" the grills at fast food joints to chauffeuring us around town or even joining us in reimagined matrimony—but what it tells us about how we see ourselves today. The Age of Anxiety is, at bottom, a function of our complete amnesia about our true identity. We have forgotten who

we are, and so, like Oedipus, we wander around, self-blinded, groping for some meaning in a world gone totally mad. AI is not technology, really. It is sleight of hand. It is a mechanized restatement of our centuries-long project to replace the human person with the liberal caricatures of Rousseau, Locke, and Hobbes. In AI, we see the soulless automatons that early liberals sought figuratively to make the basis for totalitarianism (in Lenin and Hitler we found pitch-perfect realization of Leviathan whipping into line the general will), coupled with the actual soulless automatons, gearbox dummies of wood and steel, with which René Descartes is said to have been fascinated. AI is not a vision of the future, it is a mirror for the present. It isn't a window at all. It is just us, emptied of our humanity in true liberal fashion and arranged like ghoulish mannequins, ghastly tributes to liberalism's end goal of mankind manqué.

So, who is this AI non-human being, this liberal recasting of the human person into something other than who we are? When we look in the AI mirror, what do we see?

It takes many distortions of the human person to make the AI chimera. For example, *homo kurzweilius*, as AI-man might be named, is said to be basically numerical. The approach to AI has always been grounded in code. Whatever a person is, most AI researchers assume, he or she can be replicated, ultimately, in zeroes and ones. *Homo kurzweilius'* DNA is not a double-helix, but a binary string. We are seen the way a member of the ancient Greek cult of the Pythagoreans might have imagined us, as fundamentally made of number, and not as whole persons with immortal souls. This reduction of personhood to code is apparent in virtually any work on AI that one can find. Indeed, denial of personhood is the *sine qua non* of AI research. After all, one must logically first assume that a human being is just hardware and software before one can justify the attempt to recreate her or him out of those things.

Also, AI-man is presumed to be without sin. AI-man is not only digital, he is also Pelagian. AI is what men would look like if they had never been to the Garden of Eden. Whatever faults *homo kurzweilius* might have in the present, they are not systemic and therefore no impediment to eternal life. The Bible teaches that death is the wages of sin, but Ray Kurzweil teaches that death is the result of consuming too few vitamins. Death is an engineering problem, in other words. And at any rate there is nothing preventing *homo kurzweilius* from achieving moral as well as physical perfection. In that respect, AI-man is a garden-variety liberal, an empty vessel which can be filled with platitudes and extended into an infinity of self-improvement and "personal growth." Without transcendent existence, reducible ultimately to matter and digits (epitomizing the soft Marxo-Kantianism of the modern age, in which people are seen as basically laboring programs consuming resources), and free of disqualifying

defect, *homo kurzweilius* is just Johnny Five reading out loud E.J. Dionne's *Washington Post* columns and the editorial pages of the *New York Times* until the universe ends and all the stars blink out.

What is especially intriguing about AI, then, is that it glibly rehearses back to us all the violations of the human person that we have imposed on our fellow men in the past. To take just one striking example, many people blithely speak of robots as serving as our "slaves," sexual or otherwise. But it hardly stops there. Palestinian scholar Edward Said is widely known as a vocal critic of what he calls "orientalism," or the reflex to look down on and ossify non-white populations by romanticizing them as forever trapped in a mysterious yesteryear. As Australian scholar Paul Keal summarizes Said's position:

Said argues that the depiction of others is integral to the structure of power that binds those others into an inferior role and status. The way others are depicted or represented is part of the "knowledge" that rationalizes the exercise of power.

Another Australian researcher, Greg Fry, agrees, observing that, for Said, the problem started with "the tendency to create a mythical collective identity—the Orient—and a mythical essentialized person—the Oriental—which it then becomes possible to characterize [and] consistently belittle [with] negative images." Does this sound familiar? Many AI researchers speak of a time in the future when, like HAL in the Stanley Kubrick film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, computers decide that human beings are so far beneath their contempt that power structures no longer necessitate suffering their continued existence. In more contemporary terms, if Orientalists looked down on non-white peoples in the past, then what can we say of European and North American attitudes toward people with Down syndrome? Is it any coincidence that Hollywood versions of AI are typically Caucasian, and never disabled?

If AI reflects back to us the dehumanizing cruelty that we have shown to our brothers and sisters so many times before and still do, then it also shows us the dehumanizing sappiness, the rooting of the human person in the emotions and not in the soul. Take, for instance, *The Technological Singularity*, a scholarly meditation on AI by Murray Shanahan, Professor of Cognitive Robotics at Imperial College London. In this 2015 volume, Shanahan suggests that feeling may be the root of our humanity. In the context of discussing experiments at brain simulation with the goal of creating human-level AI, Shanahan writes:

[The idea of making and destroying copies of a simulated brain] raises a philosophically difficult question, a question that leads to a host of concerns about the feasibility, not to say the wisdom, of creating brain-based human-level AIs. In particular, if a human-level AI were built that closely followed the organization principles of the biological brain, would it not only act and think like its biological precursors, but also have feelings as they do? If it did, then how would it feel about the prospect of being copied, and of some of its copies eventually being destroyed? (117)

Shanahan is fully aware of the complications of attempting to create human beings in a laboratory. Nevertheless, he doubles down, riding the “feelings” wave far out to sea, lost in a metaphysical shambles:

Though conceivable, it would be peculiar if an AI identified itself as the nonphysical subject of a series of thoughts and experiences floating free of the physical world. Science fiction films often invoke such notions. But there is no guarantee that a superintelligent AI would have this sort of inner life. Even if it did, this idea of selfhood rests on a dualistic conception of reality that is of dubious applicability to humans, let alone to artificial intelligence. There is no particular reason to expect a superintelligent AI to adopt a metaphysical stance of such doubtful standing, especially—and here is an important point—if it has no bearing on its ability to maximize expected reward. (144-45)

Hamstrung by their own buried anthropological and philosophical assumptions, AI researchers like Shanahan fail to see that what they are dreaming of creating already exists. There are seven billion liberal subjects on planet Earth already. For the vast majority of scientists and so-called elites, we are, all seven billion of us, exactly as futuristic AIs are predicted to be.

Shanahan, like so many others who have written about AI, attempts to solve the dilemmas of anti-metaphysical wights valued only for their feelings in the same way that every other liberal tries to solve problems arising among “traditional” humans: with rights. It has been more than 25 years since scholar Mary Ann Glendon launched her critique of “rights talk,” and it was many years before that that skeptics of the so-called Enlightenment—most notably, perhaps, French thinker Joseph de Maistre—pointed out the impoverished conception of the person that comes with filtering his existence through the bars of “rights.” But what else do liberals have to go on? If we are important only because we feel, and only because the ability to feel creates empathy in others, then our worth is relative to the community around us. And if that is true—if the Shanahan view of the human person prevails, in other words—then rights are the only way to referee interactions among feeling things. Here, too, AI is not other, it is just us, and us warped by centuries of bad philosophy.

But let us assume that, somehow, all the difficulties of recreating a human being from spare parts were solved and an AI could be assembled that was like us in every way except sin and death. What would motivate this *homo kurzweilius*? For Shanahan, it would be a “reward function.” Here we see that, in addition to being Pythagorean, Pelagian, and Cartesian, AIs are also assumed to be Pavlovian, creatures of instinct and response—exactly as Madison Avenue and Facebook see us, as it turns out. Pavlovian, and Darwinian, too. For our ability to respond properly to stimuli as we navigate a world filled with peril and pleasure has both emerged, and saved us, from our pitiless surroundings—always simultaneously, although we’re never quite told how. At any rate, scientists today tell us that we have evolved in a hostile environment to maximize our DNA

(the Darwinists' go-to stand-in for morality and transcendent sacrifice—no one acts out of altruism or virtue, but only out of the instinct to preserve his or her genetic code), and that, therefore, we have no higher calling than the survival of ourselves via the species, and—confusingly—of the species via ourselves.

As Shanahan puts it:

Knowledge, expertise, and infrastructure accrete layer by layer, each generation building on the achievements of the one before. So the optimizing powers of the individual human are specialized for maximizing reward within a society. It makes no difference whether an individual's reward function is admirable or despicable, whether a person is a saint or a sinner. A human must work out how to get what she wants from other people, given the society she finds herself in and calling on the resources of its language to do so. (83)

There is a strange tension underneath all of this. Following the idols of the age, Shanahan and other AI researchers assume that man is a Darwinian spool, playing out in Pythagorean code across the eons and headed nowhere in particular. We are the flotsam of evolution, and AI is the evidence. But if we are just products of random chance, why would we want to imitate something so thoroughly meaningless? Shanahan continues:

We know it's *possible* to assemble billions of ultra-low power, nano-scale components into a device capable of human-level intelligence. Our own brains are the existence proof. Nature has done it, and we should be able to manipulate matter with the same facility as nature. (47)

Or, in the words of old-school AI guru and WWW “founder” Tim Berners-Lee:

There are billions of neurons in our brains, but what are neurons? Just cells. The brain has no knowledge until connections are made between neurons. All that we know, all that we are, comes from the way our neurons are connected.

AI inherits this twin Darwinian distortion, along with the Pavlovian one outlined above. Simply put, most AI researchers seem incapable of thinking of any better reason to get up in the morning than to maximize rewards and fight through another battle in the endless war against nature. If AI appear hopelessly pointless and philosophically impoverished, we can hardly blame the machines for what are, at root, our own human failures of moral imagination.

On the other hand, though, champions of *homo kurzweilius* cannot help smuggling the distinctly human into their philosophizing about AI. For all of their appeals to the environment and material structure as indexes for understanding the object that is to be reproduced (and note here that AI always begins as object; it becomes subject only if sufficiently clever and complex), AI researchers, along with all the rest of us, are really concerned about when the Frankenstein monsters are going to pass us by. “Human-level” is a term that crops up everywhere in the AI literature. The burning question is not whether AI will be smart, but

whether it will be smarter than we are. Perhaps this reflects anxieties about Darwinism more than it reveals true hopes for the future of AI. Or perhaps it reflects anxieties about ourselves that we would prefer not to discuss. Frankenstein's monster turned out to be as duplicitous as any human. Likewise, psychiatrists tell me that one sign that a patient has overcome a mental illness is his or her regaining the ability to lie. At any rate, taking into account the human nature we see all around us—open the newspaper to any page you like if you happen to be feeling optimistic about humanity—it is difficult to see how “human-level” can mean anything other than “basket case.” The question is not, “At what point does an AI that has surpassed its engineers achieve immortality?” but, “At what point does an AI that has surpassed its engineers have to go to confession?”

AI is thus, if not human, then “all too human”—that is to say, Nietzschean. As Shanahan mentions in his treatment of the Singularity:

More important than your life or mine is the world we bequeath to future generations, and this is likely to be profoundly reshaped by the advent of human-level AI. As Friedrich Nietzsche said, above the door of the thinker of the future stands a sign that says “What do I matter!” (162-63)

“Who are we,” Shanahan asks,

to lecture near-immortal beings [i.e., AIs] that are destined, over millions of years, to populate thousands of star systems with forms of intelligence and consciousness we cannot begin to imagine? Man, said Nietzsche, is merely a bridge across the abyss that lies between the animal and the superman. (194)

Shanahan immediately recognizes that this contempt for humanity is “a close cousin of the Nazi fanatic.” But there is much more to fear from our AI-themed dehumanization than the dark ghosts of the past. Take, for example, China, which is quietly overtaking the United States in AI prowess and molding a hybrid man-machine future with distinctively Chinese characteristics. In *AI Superpowers: China, Silicon Valley, and the New World Order* (Houghton Mifflin, 2018), investor and former Google China president Kai-fu Lee tries to make the techno-future look like the place to be, with the gritty streets of Shanghai replacing the groomed lawns and spotless hallways of Palo Alto as AI settles into being a tool of hardworking folks at ground level to get things moving in the real economy.

What Lee fails to mention, however, is that AI is already hard at work for another Chinese enterprise: surveillance. Facial recognition technology and a host of other forms of surreptitious data harvesting have empowered the Chinese state to spy on virtually every one of its citizens—including, especially, as many as one million Muslims being held in concentration camps in East Turkestan. With the help of Google, Apple, and other companies whose (very human) boards have chosen profit over principle, China has succeeded in bringing Jeremy Bentham's

panopticon—George Orwell’s 1984—nearly to perfection. In China, at least, *homo kurzweilius* has thus passed through the liberal phase and is now fully under the sway of full-bore AI-partnered dictatorship.

Why? How did AI wed so neatly to liberal misanthropy and then switch so easily to misanthropy of the totalitarian variety? Part of the answer can be found in venture capitalist and information theorist George Gilder’s new book, *Life after Google: The Fall of Big Data and the Rise of the Blockchain Economy* (Regnery Gateway, 2018). As Gilder explains, big data as cultural mantra has corrupted our vision of human flourishing, allowing Google and other corporate behemoths to get away with pulling off perhaps the greatest heist of all time: stealing all of our personal information from right under our noses, and all while distracting us with “free” services like (pirated) books and e-mail, photo and scheduling apps that Google used as yet more ways to dupe us into signing over our every private detail to their compounds of remote servers.

Google founder Larry Page’s early program, PageRank, was really the first strain of the virus that keeps trying to convert the human person into its presumed Pythagorean components—numbers—by means of the stealthy algorithm. Anyone who thought that assaults on human dignity ended when Auschwitz was shuttered or when Pol Pot faced trial should read Shoshana Zuboff’s *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (2019). Big Data puppeteers like Google, Facebook, and Amazon are not so much the P.T. Barnums of the 21st-century, preoccupying the hoi polloi with digital bread and circuses, as they are drug dealers who have hooked about half the world on a product much more addictive—by design—than any narcotic.

Gilder’s solution to the Google mess is decentralization and a return to privacy largely by means of an emerging technology known as the blockchain. The basis of crypto currencies like Bitcoin, blockchains are strings of publicly-viewable transactions stretching back to an origin point. Every new transaction on the chain gets added in and approved by a majority of the blockchain “community,” thus making blockchains, in theory at least, impossible to hack. (As of this writing, hackers have already broken into some blockchains, however.)

The blockchain may be a powerful new technology, but it is hardly the solution to the distortion of the human person by Big Data that Gilder rightly laments. For, like AI itself, the blockchain is just another reflection of our deep-seated cultural assumptions. A blockchain, in essence, is a record of an interaction between two liberal subjects. Transactions can be anonymous—because, in liberalism, the agent is irrelevant; it is only the action that counts. In the past, humans entered into covenants, with honor and reputation—along with the pain of hell for liars—on the line in human interactions. As legal scholar

Henry Sumner Maine pointed out more than one hundred and fifty years ago, though, liberal man gradually transitioned from emphasizing status—whole-life covenants—to emphasizing contracts, or transactional records (what today are nicely represented by blockchains) that only superficially impinged on the human person as a whole. If my blockchain is hacked, then I lose money, or data, or time. But if, in medieval England, I reneged on a promise, I would lose face, which was much worse than death. Hailing the blockchain as the savior of the wired world is about the same, conceptually, as hailing the sexbot as the savior of contractual marriage.

Seeing some new technological trick as the key to solving the problems that liberalism has created is hardly a recent development. Stephen L. Talbott, whose 1995 book *The Future Does Not Compute: Transcending the Machines in Our Midst* (O'Reilly & Associates) took an early, principled, and skeptical view of AI, calls this tendency to imbue computers with magical powers “electronic mysticism.” Editor and journalist Franklin Foer, author of *World Without Mind: The Existential Threat of Big Tech* (Penguin, 2017), points to proto-hippie Russell Brand, and his obsession with using technology and systems to overcome the problems that technology and systems had caused, as one of the sources of our current confusion over how mankind is to deal with technology. One of Brand’s favorite thinkers was Marshall McLuhan, who coined the term “global village” and who envisioned the medium as overpowering the message in the long struggle to restore humanity to what McLuhan saw as its pre-Gutenberg innocence. As Foer reminds us, McLuhan thought that the printed word “divided the world, isolating us from our fellow humans in the antisocial act of reading. ‘The alphabet is a technology of visual fragmentation and specialization [which has produced a] desert of classified data,’” Foer cites McLuhan as crying out in the wilderness. But McLuhan didn’t stop there—much of what he envisioned has already become a deeply disturbing reality. As Foer remarks:

Today computers hold out the promise of a means of instant translation of any code or language into any other code or language. The computer, in short, promises by technology a Pentecostal condition of universal understanding and unity. The next logical step would seem to be, not to translate, but to bypass languages in favor of a general cosmic consciousness which might be very like the collective unconscious dreamt of by [French philosopher Henri] Bergson. The condition of “weightlessness,” that biologists say promises a physical immortality, may be paralleled by the condition of speechlessness that could confer a perpetuity of collective harmony and peace. (25-26)

“Pentecostal condition of universal understanding” sounds very much like French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s conception of a “superintelligence,” far beyond the poor powers of man to comprehend and coming into existence in the distant future when man shall have reached what de Chardin called the “Omega Point,” unity with the divine—a phenomenon that de Chardin also

referred to as “the singularity.”

Examined from any angle, AI can be seen as a reflection of mankind’s profound uncertainty over who he is, and also a reflection of the distortions of himself whither he has fled in his confusion. As Auden wrote in *The Age of Anxiety*:

[...] *singular then*
Is the human way; for the ego is a dream
Till a neighbour’s need by name create it;
Man has no mean; his mirrors distort;

AI, it turns out, is the most distorting mirror of all. Modern prophets locate the new Pentecost in a technological future, perhaps forgetting that God has already envisioned just such a state of harmony for man—envisioned it, in fact, from the beginning. And yet man, now as ever, insists on having things his own way. AI is man’s ultimate hubris: the attempt to recreate the human race and achieve, without God, the perfection that we intuit is our birthright.

Others have tried this before. Choose a political philosophy from the past five hundred years, and you will have chosen a method—surely tried, and surely a failure—for making man into a god, if not God Himself. If AI is anything like us—if, as I argue, AI *is* us—then we are approaching a very dangerous pass. Auden writes of man:

His greenest arcadias have ghosts too;
His Utopias tempt to eternal youth
Or self-slaughter.

Symposium:

Could Abortion Ever Be “Unthinkable” Again?

Introduction

Needless to say, we are at an intense moment in the history of the pro-life movement. Although there is fervent new reaction and commentary every day in the press, we think it is also a moment to take a deep breath and reflect on some fundamental questions: Why is the abortion issue one that continues to divide us; why has it not become “settled”? And how much has really changed in this decades-long struggle?

In our ponderings, we reached back into the *Human Life Review*’s archives, and were amazed when we revisited Malcolm Muggeridge’s prophetic “What the Abortion Argument Is About.” It was 1975, and the great British journalist—and HLR’s editor-at-large—had already mapped out the road from *Roe* to infanticide to euthanasia, anticipating all of the milestones—e.g., live-birth abortion, fetal experimentation and commercialization, the deferral of human rights until after delivery. He ends with a warning:

... the abortion controversy is the most vital and relevant of all. For we can survive energy crises, inflation, wars, revolutions and insurrections, as they have been survived in the past; but if we transgress against the very basis of our mortal existence, becoming our own gods in our own universe, then we shall surely and deservedly perish from the earth.

Our other bookend, if you will, is a recent syndicated column by our senior editor, William Murchison. He casts a brilliant backward glance at *Roe* and then writes:

It seems hardly likely today’s high court, given the crackling tensions of the moment, would try to throw a 46-year-old revolution completely into reverse. To be sure, in older times, the justices would never have volunteered themselves as moral arbiters. In the age of Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman, they should have known better than to try and reframe our moral norms—given the moral law’s ancient antecedents, and its claims on democratic thought and action.

Some more questions: Is, as Muggeridge believed, the transgression of abortion a potential threat to human survival? Could the moral law’s ancient antecedents be revived? Could the country’s traditional Judeo-Christian identity reassert itself, so that abortion might once again become virtually “unthinkable”?

We posed these questions to several people who have long labored in the pro-life movement. Their responses follow the Muggeridge and Murchison commentaries which are reprinted here.

Maria McFadden Maffucci, Editor
Anne Conlon, Managing Editor

What the Abortion Argument Is About

Malcolm Muggeridge

Generally, when some drastic readjustment of accepted moral values, such as is involved by legalized abortion, is under consideration, once the decisive legislative step is taken the consequent change in mores soon comes to be more or less accepted, and controversy dies down. This happened, for instance, with the legalization of homosexual practices of consenting adults.

Why, then, has it not happened with the legalization of abortion? Surely because the abortion issue raises questions of the very destiny and purpose of life itself; of whether our human society is to be seen in Christian terms as a family with a loving father who is God, or as a factory-farm whose primary consideration must be the physical well-being of the livestock and the material well-being of the collectivity.

This explains why individuals with no very emphatic conscious feelings about abortion one way or the other react very strongly to particular aspects of it. Thus, nurses who are not anti-abortion zealots cannot bring themselves to participate in abortion operations, though perfectly prepared to take in what are ostensibly more gruesome medical experiences.

Again, the practice of using for experiment live fetuses removed from a womb in abortion arouses a sense of horror in nearly everyone quite irrespective of their views on abortion as such.

Why is this, if the fetus is just a lump of jelly, as the pro-abortionists have claimed, and not to be considered a human child until it emerges from its mother's womb? What does it matter what happens to a lump of jelly? What, for that matter, is the objection to using discarded fetuses in the manufacture of cosmetics—a practice that the most ardent abortionist is liable to find distasteful? We use animal fats for the purpose. Then why not a fetus's which would otherwise just be thrown away with the rest of the contents of a surgical bucket?

It is on the assumption that a fetus does not become a child until it is actually delivered that the whole case for legalized abortion rests. To destroy a developing fetus in the womb, sometimes as late as seven months after conception, is considered by the pro-abortionists an act of compassion. To destroy the same fetus two months later when it has been born, is, in law, murder—*vide* Lord Hailsham's contention that "an embryo which is delivered alive is a human being and is protected by the law of murder . . . any experiments on it are covered by the law of assault affecting criminal assault on human beings."

Can it be seriously contended that the mere circumstance of being delivered transforms a developing embryo from a lump of jelly with no rights of any kind, and deserving of no consideration of any kind, into a human being with

all the legal rights that go therewith? In the case of a pregnant woman injured in a motor accident, damages can be claimed on behalf of the child in her womb. Similarly, in the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child, special mention is made of its entitlement to pre- as well as post-natal care. It is a strange sort of pre-natal care which permits the removal of the child from its mother's womb, to be tossed into an incinerator, or used for "research," or rendered down for cosmetics.

Our Western way of life has come to a parting of the ways; time's takeover bid for eternity has reached the point at which irrevocable decisions have to be taken. Either we go on with the process of shaping our own destiny without reference to any higher being than Man, deciding ourselves how many children shall be born when and in what varieties, which lives are worth continuing and which should be put out, from whom spare-parts—kidneys, hearts, genitals, brainboxes even—shall be taken and to whom allotted.

Or we draw back, seeking to understand and fall in with our Creator's purpose for us rather than to pursue our own; in true humility praying, as the founder of our religion and our civilization taught us: Thy will be done.

This is what the abortion controversy is about, and what the euthanasia controversy will be about when, as must inevitably happen soon, it arises. The logical sequel to the destruction of what are called "unwanted children" will be the elimination of what will be called "unwanted lives"—a legislative measure which so far in all human history only the Nazi Government has ventured to enact.

In this sense the abortion controversy is the most vital and relevant of all. For we can survive energy crises, inflation, wars, revolutions, and insurrections as they have been survived in the past; but if we transgress against the very basis of our mortal existence, becoming our own gods in our own universe, then we shall surely and deservedly perish from the earth.

—*Malcolm Muggeridge (1903-1990) was a renowned British author, journalist, and TV personality, and for several years, an editor-at-large of the Human Life Review, in which "What the Abortion Argument Is About" was first reprinted in 1975.*

Abortion: The People Are Catching On

William Murchison

So. When the U.S. Supreme Court numbered abortion among our precious constitutional rights, we expected everlasting bliss? Anything but the present knock-down, drag-out over *Roe v. Wade* and its prospects for survival?

I mean, we're stunned to see state legislatures moving to outlaw abortion?

Why? On what grounds? America is presently absorbing a major political science lesson; to wit, a social revolution commenced and overseen by a coterie of philosopher kings—Platonic guardians, you could say—is a non-starter. Won't work. We generally don't do business that way in America.

Roe v. Wade was a notable exception to the seemingly odd notion that the governed and those who govern them should work hand in hand, so as to maximize consent and minimize anger of the sort deadly to peace and unity. You negotiate rivalries, see? You don't turn to a body of semi-Solomons, saying, tell us what's right—we're too dumb to figure it out for ourselves.

It's been more than 46 years since *Roe*. Ah, the changes we've seen! Back then we still conversed with telephone operators. The odor of lighted cigarettes enveloped commercial airliners, and the Nixons were our presidential royalty.

Forty-six years has not rendered America amenable to the divinations of seven intellectually polished law school graduates—two colleagues dissented—who revealed something previously unsuspected by the dumb peasants. An expectant mother, the court majority said, enjoyed the constitutional right to decide whether or not to give birth. As for any constitutional rights the baby might enjoy—we surely have gleaned by now: Here we have an entirely different matter!

Up to 1973, the several states had spoken to the matter of abortion through elected legislatures and the weighing of competing interests. The great majority of state laws emphasized protection for the not-yet-born as opposed to solicitousness for the mother's choice.

At that, nothing was engraved in marble, with guards on hand to shoo away proponents of change. The self-liberating 60s produced a growing clamor for liberalization of the abortion laws. Gov. Ronald Reagan of California signed in 1967 the California Therapeutic Abortion Act, enacted on the grounds that the law forbidding abortion except to save a woman's life was in fact responsible for 18,000 illegal abortions—during many of which the mother (non-white in four-fifths of the cases) died. Nor, in any case, was the law regularly enforced. The new law allowed abortion for protection of the mother's health, as well as for pregnancies due to rape or incest.

Whether correct or incorrect, the legislature's chosen solution reflected popular acceptance: the consequence of open argumentation over a period of six years. No semi-Solomons handed it down from the throne. Its passage by elected lawmakers meant a different set of elected lawmakers could write a law with new or few specifications—in line, more or less, with voter preferences. The rest of the 50 states were free to do likewise. Or do nothing at all.

There followed *Roe v. Wade*—the proclamation, on dubious constitutional grounds, of a national abortion policy. The states could enact weak protections for unborn life. Strong protections? Naaah.

Which is what brings us to this present moment, with Alabama and several

other states writing into statute the human life protections favored, presumably, by their own citizen-electors, rather than by the semi-Solomons.

It seems hardly likely today's high court, given the crackling tensions of the moment, would try to throw a 46-year-old revolution completely into reverse. To be sure, in older times, the justices would never have volunteered themselves as moral arbiters. In the age of Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman, they should have known better than to try and reframe our moral norms—given the moral law's ancient antecedents, and its claims on democratic thought and action.

Nonetheless, inasmuch as morals and politics often intertwine and contradict each other, here we are: the semi-Solomons at odds with, as polls suggest, nearly half the populace. What a dim and destructive decision, *Roe v. Wade*. That much the supposedly sovereign people are beginning to figure out for themselves.

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—*William Murchison is writing a book on moral restoration in the 21st century.*

William McGurn

If abortion is to be measured by *Roe v. Wade*—the Supreme Court decision that overturned the laws of all fifty states to discover a constitutional right to abortion—not a thing has changed since it was decided in 1973.

Roe remains in place. Yet though it is commonly referred to as “settled law,” defenders give the impression that it is the least settled law in the land. They go into conniptions each time a Supreme Court seat comes open, especially if it happens during a Republican administration when there's a sporting chance the seat will go to someone who in fact believes in the Constitution.

Today there are new challenges to *Roe*, such as the state bans that would outlaw the practice after a heartbeat is detected. But the Court's recent decision to take a pass on an Indiana law prohibiting abortion on account of race, sex, or disability—thought to be the path for a more modest assault on *Roe*—suggests there are not yet the votes to take on *Roe*.

The history, moreover, is not encouraging. Though it is almost certain for a new *Roe* challenge to make its way to the Supreme Court, it is quite possible the Court will once again play Lucy to Charlie Brown—lifting the football up before he can kick so he lands flat on his back. That's surely what happened in *Casey* in 1992. Anthony Kennedy pulled a Lucy, siding with the liberals to gut the holdings of *Roe* but keep the outcome.

Perhaps this will change as more states pass restrictions and bans and force the courts to pay attention. In his concurring opinion in the decision declining to take up the Indiana law, Clarence Thomas suggested it might be best if these things percolated through the appellate courts first.

So in this particular sense, here we are almost a half century later, and *Roe* remains intact. But in perhaps a more important sense, the pro-life movement is better placed than it's ever been.

Prolifers have the young, after all. How disconcerting it must be to those aging, wrinkled, pro-*Roe* grey heads to have to watch the busloads of young people stepping off those buses every January to March for Life. I know the transformation up close: As a Notre Dame student in 1977, I traveled to the March on the bus with a local parish from South Bend. The only other college student from South Bend was a girl from Saint Mary's, a senior. This year more than 1,000 Notre Dame, Saint Mary's, and Holy Cross students made the long and difficult trip—young, enthusiastic, undeterred.

The signs of these young people proclaim, "We are the pro-life generation." But by everything Americans were told about abortion the past fifty years, there shouldn't be any pro-life generation. When *Roe* was handed down, the *New York Times* editorialized that the Court had brought "an end to the emotional and divisive public argument." Likewise in 1992, when Justice Kennedy in *Casey* imperiously called "contending sides of a national controversy to end their national division" by embracing, well, Kennedy's opinion.

And yet . . . and yet. Some 46 years later, here they are, more committed to defending the unborn than the generations before them. Somehow they didn't get the message that the debate is supposed to be over. Somehow they know that a woman who finds herself alone with an unplanned pregnancy deserves better than the cold front door of a Planned Parenthood clinic. Can I confess I take an almost illicit pleasure in this?

The prochoice arguments are simply not persuading the new generations. I'm old enough to remember when the unborn child was dismissed as a "blob of protoplasm." Sonograms have changed this. Today the *soi-disant* "party of science" takes the position that the life in a woman's womb is a baby if that's how she chooses to talk about it, but an alien mass of tissue if she chooses to abort. Likewise today's claim that the fetal heartbeat is nothing more than "a group of cells with electrical activity" when first detected.

But the main benefit of the heartbeat bills may be more educational than constitutional. Whether or not the Court accepts it, ordinary people know a heartbeat is a sign of a separate human life. It confirms what we are talking about.

For *Roe*, after all, isn't the target. Far more than the overturning of *Roe*, our real project is to build a culture of life where *Roe* is unthinkable. And restoring a culture constitutes a far more daunting challenge than the overturning of a Court decision.

But no one ever said life is easy. What we say is that life is beautiful. Even when—maybe especially when—it's messy and complicated.

Today, amid the soul-sucking cult of self that leaves so many Americans feeling so

dreadfully alone and unloved, the prolife's work on behalf of the least among us makes them increasingly attractive. Even to those who can't explain why. And this is our real hope, the one thing that has changed, so dramatically, since *Roe*.

—William McGurn writes the *Main Street* column for the Wall Street Journal.

Anne Conlon

Was abortion ever unthinkable? No. There were plenty of abortions before *Roe v. Wade*. It was, however, “unthinkable,” a taboo, usually performed by shady characters in back alleys on the wrong side of town. Some women performed coat-hanger procedures on themselves. Others drank potions, punched their bellies, “fell” down stairs. Such was their desperation, they risked their own lives to expel the new life they were carrying. Yet it wasn't until well into the 20th century, when some Park Avenue doctors started quietly obliging their patients, that a movement to make abortion respectable coalesced.

The push for legal abortion in the 1960s coincided with sudden mass awareness of what fetal life really looked like: In 1965, *Life* magazine reprinted 16 four-color photographs from the just-published *A Child Is Born*, Swedish photojournalist Lennart Nilsson's classic chronicle of pregnancy from conception to birth. The startling, never-before-seen images of fetal development simultaneously appeared in Britain's *Sunday Times* and in *Paris Match*. Not the earth-spanning reach of today's media, but enough to command global attention. *Life*'s run of eight million copies sold out in four days. Nilsson's book, with explanatory text by medical experts, has sold millions of copies (in five revised editions) and been translated into 20 languages.

A Child Is Born opened the womb to Western eyes five years before abortion was legalized in New York State (and England), eight years before Justice Harry Blackmun, the author of *Roe v. Wade*, wrote that

We need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins. When those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary, at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate as to the answer.

Pace Justice Blackmun, the (centuries-old) public consensus in 1973 was that human life began at conception. Anyone who studied biology in high school knew this. (Not to mention the tens of millions who had seen Nilsson's photographs.) So how is it that feminists and other abortion advocates could use—with impunity—terms like “clumps of cells” to dehumanize their unborn brothers and sisters? How did such a preposterous claim stand virtually unchallenged by those trained in the disciplines of medicine and science, people intimately

acquainted with embryology textbooks and miscarried fetal remains?

The proliferation of sonography in the last few decades is credited with changing especially younger minds about abortion. (Though, according to polls, most still want abortion to remain legal.) Sonograms personalized what Nilsson documented in anonymous photographs. The image taped to the fridge isn't anonymous. It's "my baby." The cradle is waiting upstairs. But is that a baby? Or a clump of cells? In fact, we are all clumps of cells, but so far no one is using that as a reason to kill us—well, unless we are "vegetative" clumps like Terri Schiavo. Or, more recently, and again New York leads the way, a clump of cells that has survived an abortion procedure or been delivered as damaged goods.

I think we must acknowledge that an elite consensus on the baby vs. clump question does exist, and probably did when *Roe* was decided. Indeed, it was spelled out by Barack Obama in his heralded 2009 Notre Dame Graduation Speech, which, ironically, coincided with the anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, "the first major step," the president told a cheering crowd at South Bend, "in dismantling the separate but equal doctrine." Irony because Obama essentially went on to call for a separate but equal doctrine on abortion:

I do not suggest that the debate surrounding abortion can or should go away . . . the fact is that at some level, the views of the two camps are irreconcilable. Each side will continue to make its case to the public with passion and conviction. But surely we can do so without reducing those with differing views to caricature . . . maybe we won't agree on abortion, but we can still agree that this heart-wrenching decision for any woman is not made casually, it has both moral and spiritual dimensions.

The (largely Catholic) crowd continued to cheer.

Mr. Obama no doubt had seen images of the unborn child—likely sonograms of his own daughters. Still, what he was asking us to accept, in an address praised for its "civil tone," was that pregnancy could have two separate tracks, each of equal moral and spiritual weight. On one track a "mother" delivers a "baby" from her "womb" after nine months; on the other track a "woman" has nine months to decide whether or not to abort a "clump of cells" occupying her "uterus."

This proposition is the fruit of what Pope Benedict called the dictatorship of relativism, a language-based regime—debased, deceitful language—that has already consigned one of the iconic images of Western civilization—mother and child—to greeting card status and is now busy cashiering the age-old consensus that "male and female He created them." Again we are seeing a preposterous claim—"gender fluidity"—stand virtually unchallenged, while members of the medical profession mutilate born children's bodies with impunity.

I say this with sorrow, but it's hard for me to believe that abortion could become "unthinkable" any time soon.

—Anne Conlon is managing editor of the Human Life Review.

Christopher Bell

Can God forgive me?

About a dozen years post-*Roe v. Wade*, a woman with a child came to live in a maternity home and unknowingly revealed a profound truth.

“This isn’t the first time I became pregnant,” she confessed in hushed tones to the only other person within earshot. “The first time my mom said, ‘We have to take care of this problem.’”

She described in painful detail the lies and deception Planned Parenthood engaged in to take the child from her womb, leaving her screaming and crying. Then she asked two questions, which at that time her listener had never considered.

“When people see me with my son now and ask if he is my first, what do I tell them?”

Then came the question many post-abortive women have come to grieve, “Where do you think my first baby is?”

In the pit of my stomach, I realized then how abortion hurts women. I had not seen that before.

In the mid-80s no one was saying how abortion hurts women. Not much is said about it even today, certainly not by media oracles or high priests of culture and the courts. Even among those vast numbers of Americans who know women who’ve had an abortion, the cries at night over the loss of those children are silently hidden.

Now, as back then, psychologists, social workers, even medical doctors hear these sorrowful sagas, but they are not listening. Loud public drumbeats insisting “It’s a choice!” . . . “It’s the most common operation in the country!” . . . draw their attention away.

Sonograms help change lots of hearts and minds. Think of Dr. Bernard Nathanson, who helped lead the fight to make abortion legal but later became a committed prolife. And more recently Abby Johnson, the former Planned Parenthood director who, like Nathanson, changed her mind because of a sonogram image. Think of thousands of pregnant women who’ve visited pregnancy help centers or mobile units and opted to keep the child they saw cavorting on the screen.

Yet, people see and don’t perceive and hear but don’t understand (Matthew 13:13 and Mark 4:12).

Maybe there was a time when you didn’t see or were not convinced. Maybe you’ve had your own epiphany or you know those who have had one. It will take that kind of conversion on a titanic scale.

Two periods in history come to mind when killing the innocent was also encouraged and protected by the authorities: the ancient Roman and later Aztec

empires. Both had a highly developed ruling class and sophisticated pagan religious beliefs. Their peoples supported and largely by choice participated in the sacrificing even of their very own.

The Romans practiced birth control and abortion on a large enough scale to actually fall into depopulation, making it easier for the barbarians to overrun their once mighty empire.

The Aztecs mostly sacrificed their enemies. Yet they also considered it an honor to be among the people “offered” to their gods.

When Cortez was conquering Mexico City, even as the Aztec warriors knew they were going to lose, the human sacrifices continued until the final hour of defeat.

What stopped Roman and Aztec killing of the innocent? Conversion.

The Romans became Christians over time. Our Lady of Guadalupe ended Aztec human sacrifice in a flash. It will take each one of us who believe in the sanctity of human life to bring about culture-wide conversion—through prayer, penance, increasing our own families by birth and adoption, and increasing the Christian family through evangelization.

With the mothers and fathers who have participated in abortion, we need to share the Good News of forgiveness, healing, and hope which comes from the sacrifice of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

We need to raise up our children, those we birth and those we adopt, in the knowledge that true love is life giving. That it means sacrificing one’s self for others. And extending forgiveness so as to promote healing and spiritual rejuvenation.

We are called to show this healing, sacrificial love to our enemies.

When the abortionist, or one of his patients, asks, “Where are those babies?” Our ready answer needs to be: “They are waiting and begging for you to ask for forgiveness.”

Forgiveness is what we all need to give—and receive.

Can God forgive me, who has the grace of knowing the truth, for not doing enough, for not being the Good Samaritan, stopping along the way to bind the wounds of those who are dying, especially those who are spiritually dying as they promote and perform abortions?

—Christopher Bell is the founder and president of Good Counsel, homes for pregnant and parenting mothers and babies before and after birth. He and his wife Joan Andrews Bell are blessed with seven children by birth and adoption, and one grandchild.

Anne Hendershott

On May 16, 2002, in the middle of an episode in the eighth season of the NBC television show *Friends*, an extraordinary commercial appeared. Strategically placed during the broadcast of the most-anticipated episode of the season, when the main character on the show was scheduled to give birth, the commercial introduced General Electric's 4-D Ultrasound imaging system, a remarkable new development in prenatal ultrasound technology. Its sponsors correctly predicting a large audience of young female viewers, the commercial opened with the haunting refrain from Roberta Flack's classic song "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" as the camera seductively drew the viewer's attention to a computer in a hospital room with a glowing ultrasound image of a perfectly formed unborn child on the screen. The camera then pulled back to reveal a mother and father gazing longingly at their unborn baby as he sucked his thumb, kicked his legs, and appeared to float in an almost magical world.

It may have appeared magical but the world of the unborn child is very real—one that cannot be denied. Yet after the commercial aired, American Prospect Online writer Matthew Nisbet, in an article entitled "They Bring Good Spin to Life," labeled it "propaganda." Claiming that the commercial "blurred the distinction" between a fetus and a newborn infant, Nisbet reassured readers that they did not see what they knew they had seen.

But, of course, this "blurring" is the heart of the matter, having been at the core of the pro-life position for decades. We know there is no substantial difference between the unborn child and the newborn infant. We have always known that. What's changed is, now, it is simply not possible to deny what we all saw in that commercial, and what everyone sees in ultrasounds of their own children and grandchildren, and in those shared by friends and family members.

Perhaps earlier generations—those without access to ultrasound technology—were able to deny the humanity of the unborn child. Seventeen years ago, some may have been convinced by arguments that the GE ultrasound image was not "real." No longer. Rational people know that a fetus is "unique life" and not a clump of cells. A January 2019 Marist poll found that 75 percent of Americans say abortion should be limited to the first three months of pregnancy. Support for restricting abortion to the first trimester came from both Republicans (92 percent) and Democrats (60 percent); even 61 percent of those who identify as pro-choice want these same restrictions on abortion. Beyond first-trimester restrictions, a significant majority of all Americans oppose any taxpayer funding of abortion (54 percent to 39 percent), 62 percent of all Americans oppose abortion in cases of Down syndrome, and 59 percent would ban abortion after 20 weeks except to save the life of the mother.

Perhaps in the past, CNN contributor and former New York City politician

Christine Quinn could have gotten away with telling Chris Cuomo on CNN's *Cuomo Prime Time* last month that the child in the womb is "not a human being." No longer. A recent Harris-Hill poll reveals that more than half of all registered voters believe that laws banning abortion after the sixth week of pregnancy are not too restrictive. Millennials are even more likely to support abortion restrictions. A recent Students for Life poll revealed that 70 percent of millennials support limits on abortion.

It should not surprise anyone that millennials view abortion negatively. They have seen the reality—the proof that the unborn child is a human being. Some of them have seen their own ultrasound photos, as well as those of their children. Yet, the *Washington Post* published an article lamenting the lack of support for abortion rights among this group with the headline: "Millennials have a surprising view on later-term abortions."

Millennial writers are not staying silent. When the *New York Times* recently published an op-ed by an abortion provider titled "Abortion Saves Lives," Alexandra DeSanctis, a 2016 University of Notre Dame graduate, responded the next day in a column on National Review Online, calling the *Times* piece an "Orwellian effort to redefine the terms of the abortion debate and obscure the reality of what takes place in abortion procedures." Millennials like DeSanctis are courageously confronting those who used to have the power to shape the dialogue—they are forcing everyone to confront the reality of what happens in an abortion.

Writing about the danger of the denial of reality, theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a leader of the resistance movement against Hitler's genocidal Nazi Socialist Party, wrote that "the denial of reality lives upon hatred of the real and of the world which is created and loved by God . . . Satan's truth is the denial of reality." We all know that every abortion ends a child's life—and that is a reality that is becoming harder than ever to deny.

—Anne Hendershott is a professor of sociology at Steubenville University, Ohio, and director of the Veritas Center for Ethics in Public Life.

Chuck Donovan

Every abortion is an act of violence against a fellow human being. Many abortions are also, in a medically rich society, acts of discrimination—against the mother.

By act of discrimination, I do not mean those cases, now percolating, to use Justice Clarence Thomas's vivid phrase, in the lower federal courts and involving eugenic forms of abortion. In those cases, several states have acted to ban abortion of once-"wanted" children who become vulnerable based on their sex,

race, or the detection of a disability. Winning one of those cases in the relatively near term offers one of the likelier scenarios for a Supreme Court ruling that pulls us back from the brutality of *Roe v. Wade*.

No, the discrimination that can mark abortion as the grossest of inequalities has a more basic character. It can be seen in the magnificence and the monstrosity of events that occurred exactly 1.0 miles apart—at 3801 Lancaster Avenue and 3401 Civic Center Boulevard in Philadelphia.

One place is notorious, the other celebrated. On Lancaster Avenue, Dr. Kermit Gosnell plied his grisly trade for 30 years, with the complicity of public and private officials, Republicans and Democrats alike, turning unborn children into so much carrion, taking the lives of two women, and injuring many more. On Civic Center Boulevard, 21 cents' worth of gasoline away from Gosnell's house of horrors, medical miracles happen every day at the fetal care hospital where C. Everett Koop, M.D., led a 14-member team that successfully separated conjoined twins in 1957.

The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, or CHOP, is one of a growing number of U.S. children's hospitals to have a separate fetal surgery unit. It has successfully operated on more than 1,764 children—treated in the womb, thriving today. Every June, CHOP hosts what it calls the “fetal family reunion.” This year's 23rd annual reunion was held on June 2, and once again a panoramic photograph appears on the CHOP website, showing the hospital courtyard teeming with exultant children and families.

Gosnell's red brick mausoleum is closed and, thankfully, shuttered—but not because of the conscience of the nation, to quote the title of President Reagan's landmark essay, but because of one persistent detective and a drug enforcement raid that stumbled on what, precisely, an abortion clinic is for: death on a massive scale.

And the discrimination? Look at the descriptions from the trial of what the impoverished women who turned blue or bled in Gosnell's clinic received from our society. Compare them to what the CHOP website proclaims its splendid care can deliver to women whose babies are wanted and whose financial arrangements are good.

GOSNELL: a “stained and tattered examination table.”

CHOP: “The world's first birthing unit dedicated to healthy mothers of babies with known birth defects.”

GOSNELL: An ultrasound machine “yellowed in parts” with “wires darkly colored” and a once cream-colored keyboard now dark brown.

CHOP: “experienced sonographers and imaging technicians, [with] each scan . . . reviewed by a highly specialized attending radiologist.”

GOSNELL: a 15-year-old “anesthesiologist.”

CHOP: “internationally-recognized experts in fetal therapy and maternal-fetal medicine.”

These are not just the common inequities in a country in which some dine at Tavern on the Green while others linger outside food pantries. The concentration of abortion among minorities and the poor is a gulf that should drive our nation to the kind of shame it claims to feel when some partisan advantage is at stake—but that fades with the next political counterpunch thrown on Fox or CNN.

Now, as Charlotte Lozier Institute data show, the abortion industry is turning to the promotion of chemical abortion without medical presence. The home and the dormitory room are to be the new clinics, and the mode of abortion is to be isolation. The depiction of chemical abortion in the film *Unplanned* and the personal testimonies reported in the Life Issues Institute documentary show the harrowing reality.

As 2019 marches on, our cause has more work to do than ever. The pro-life movement has built thousands of pregnancy help centers. Volunteered millions of hours, wept, worked, and prayed for a better day. Now, with our Supreme Court apparently open to changes in law, it must be asked, “Do we have love enough for what lies ahead?” On the eve of a potential new day in this fight, are we ready to be First Responders for Life, no matter the cost in time and treasure?

—*Chuck Donovan is president of the Charlotte Lozier Institute.*

Kathryn Jean Lopez

The abortion issue is not settled because our hearts are not settled. Thanks be to God, in a way. If when you look around at our politics and culture, you have an aching feeling that nothing is quite right, that’s a good sign. Good, because it suggests there’s hope yet for an awakening of the conscience of America.

And thanks be to God for Malcolm Muggeridge. Rereading him now is not only a reminder of what a great journalist he was, but also of how much the world needs converts. The passion converts like Muggeridge bring with them on their continuing journey—in his case, a decades-long pilgrimage from atheism to the Catholic Church—is renewing.

Even just half-listening to some of the extremism now being voiced in politics—increasingly without euphemism—and witnessing some of the protests and counter protests that pop up—even outside Masses—one senses the underlying evil and pain that permeate America’s abortion infrastructure. Settling this contentious issue is going to involve drawing women and men away from those

places that offer the darkest “solution” to the problem of unwanted pregnancy.

Now more than ever, the pro-life movement needs to be the most welcoming place in the world. People must be invited to get to know the pregnancy-care center down the block, to see the love that goes into these efforts to help women have their children, not destroy them. People need to see anew that this isn’t about a single-issue vote or, especially in the elongated campaign season we have entered, about a presidential election or candidate.

Yes, it’s entangling and suffocating, this embedded culture of abortion. The nature of some news stories—and Planned Parenthood tweeting—on Mother’s Day and Father’s Day can make it seem as if a culture of life and a civilization of love are naïve and impossible dreams. But when we show people we love one another, when we recognize their human dignity and treat everyone—even abortion advocates—with respect, we make a real difference in the culture. It’s a more powerful witness than politics, and could have an even more enduring effect than gaining a Supreme Court majority, as important as that is to achieving our goal of seeing unborn children once again protected in law.

The poll numbers, and the real human stories one hears of women looking for signs of hope and help as they make their way to the door of an abortion clinic, show us that people desire a better way to live—abortion isn’t it. Making life plausible and possible and, yes, making abortion “unthinkable,” this is the better way. Most of those who describe themselves as pro-choice simply want to know that a woman in a difficult situation has options. What are we doing today to help make options other than abortion available to her? That’s a question for every reader of the *Human Life Review*, for sure. A question for anyone who wants to see this issue stop being driven by politics every election cycle, often marked by stinging rhetoric that has the effect of pouring salt into open wounds. And it’s an action item that can turn conversations about abortion away from the heat of battle and into the heart of homes, where loving and engaged family life can transform so much that is broken in our country.

Nothing is settled. That reality is both unsettling and encouraging. There is much work yet to be done. But with fiercely dedicated and tender care, there will be more conversions. There will be more heroic women, bolstered by communities of love around them, choosing childbirth and hope over abortion and despair. Our job is to continue to speak truth and show mercy, and to celebrate and support all heralds of life in a culture that often seems to be doubling down on death.

—*Kathryn Jean Lopez is a senior fellow at the National Review Institute and editor-at-large of National Review.*

BOOKNOTES

HOW CATHOLIC ART SAVED THE FAITH: THE TRIUMPH OF BEAUTY AND TRUTH IN COUNTER-REFORMATION ART

Elizabeth Lev

(Sophia Institute Press, 2018, 320 pages; paperback, \$18.95)

Reviewed by Sarah Gallick

“A picture is worth a thousand words” is a cliché because it is true. The Catholic Church, recognizing this truth, has long used visual splendor to teach as well as to inspire. When the Protestant Reformation presented an existential threat, Church leaders turned to the power of art to undergird and explicate the faith. This is the story that Elizabeth Lev relates in her important book, *How Catholic Art Saved the Faith: The Triumph of Beauty and Truth in Counter-Reformation Art*. Anyone familiar with Lev’s books and lectures (or her TED talk) knows that you could not ask for a more lively and rewarding guide.

In 1545, the Church convened the Council of Trent to meet Protestant challenges to the faith. Over the next twenty years—and under the guidance of three popes—a revolving parade of bishops and theologians would meet in twenty-five sessions, seeking to formulate a response to Martin Luther, et al. The resulting proclamations issued by the Council condemned Protestant heresies, instituted clerical reforms, and clarified key teachings on the sacraments, the Mass, and the veneration of saints. Thus did Trent launch the Counter-Reformation, or Catholic Restoration—the author’s preferred term.

Lev focuses on the commitment the Church made at Trent to affirm the illuminating power of art and architecture. She frequently cites Gabriele Paleotti, an archbishop of Bologna who attended late sessions of the Council and outlined a strategy for implementing this affirmation in his treatise, *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images*. Paleotti saw artists as “tacit preachers” and “mute theologians” with the “office to delight, teach and move.” The artists he had in mind included Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Lavinia Fontana, and Annibale Carracci. Their art, Lev writes, “allowed for a more peaceful discourse and easy instruction in the Faith.”

Her book is divided into three parts: The Sacraments, Intercession, and Cooperation. An urgent task of the post-Tridentine Church was to revitalize the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, with its mysterious aspect of transubstantiation, and Penance, which manifests the priest’s Christ-given power to absolve sins. To reignite love of the Eucharist, regular, even daily reception of Communion was encouraged. New churches were built and old churches restored to make the Eucharist the center of attention. The first great architectural

effort to embody this approach was Rome's Church of the Gesù, mother church of the Society of Jesus. Everything about the design of the Gesù encourages the faithful to focus on the altar, gaze upon the Host, and witness the Consecration.

The sacrament of Penance presented different challenges. Lev writes that the earliest paintings dedicated to this subject were intended first and foremost for the clergy, who were expected to lead by example. Saint Peter, who denied Christ three times and yet was entrusted with the keys to bind and loose souls, became the model for scores of portraits by such artists as El Greco, Ribera, Van Dyck, and Guercino. The Bolognese painter Guido Reni produced more than a dozen portraits of Peter, all destined to be devotional images in private homes.

Artists also looked to Saint Jerome. During the Renaissance, Jerome was depicted as an elegant scholar in an ornate study, but the Catholic Restoration transformed him into a penitential hero, immortalized by Caravaggio, the Carracci, and Veronese, among others. A favorite penitential theme was conversion from the sensual to the spiritual, powerfully exemplified in Guercino's *Saint Margaret of Cortona*: This shameless beauty had lived in sinful luxury with her aristocratic lover until his brutal murder shocked her into repentance and a life of good works—irresistible material for any artist.

Of course, the ultimate penitent has to be Mary Magdalene. Though her story is garbled—she may not have been a prostitute—she has given hope to many and inspired great art. Citing Guido Reni's *Saint Mary Magdalene*, Lev observes that “angels welcome and comfort her, opening the path to Heaven for this saint who makes penitence chic.” For a model of renewal, Lev cites *The Penitent Mary Magdalene* by Artemisia Gentileschi, speculating that the artist was perhaps addressing her own “unruly and occasionally scandalous personal life.”

The sacrament of Baptism never came under fire the way Penance and the Eucharist did, but confusion still reigned concerning its effects and even its necessity. Lev writes that “Pope Sixtus V came up with a delightful solution to entice the faithful to keep the law of Christ and follow the path that Baptism laid out for them: water fountains.” In his brief, five-year pontificate, Sixtus renovated the Blessed Sacrament Chapel at the Basilica of St. Mary Major, completed the dome of Saint Peter's Basilica, and redesigned the entire layout of Rome, including the two great gateways, Piazza del Popolo and Porta Pia. But weary pilgrims to the city could be most grateful for the beauty and refreshment of fountains, fed by his twenty-two-mile aqueduct, Acqua Felice.

The Catholic Restoration saint most associated with Baptism is Francis Xavier, a co-founder with Ignatius Loyola of the Society of Jesus and a pioneering missionary in the Far East, where he is believed to have baptized more than one hundred thousand people. Luca Giordano's *Saint Francis Xavier Baptizing Proselytes* is not only a celebration of the conversion of Queen Neachile of India, but a recognition of the Church's mission to the world beyond Europe.

In the second part of her book, titled *Intercession*, Lev deals with the angels and saints and Mary and Purgatory. Few Protestants would deny the heroic witness of the apostles or the many holy men and women through the ages, but they were (are) uncomfortable with the Catholic belief that the faithful departed are still active in heaven, not only as role models for the living but also as “intercessors in the faithful’s path to holiness.”

Angels might be the least controversial of the traditional intercessors, and Restoration architecture and painting abound in them. A particularly touching example is Domenico Fetti’s *Guardian Angel Protecting a Child from the Empire of the Demon*, one of dozens of images that proliferated in this era, “constantly reminding the faithful that when assailed by temptation, angelic assistance was only a prayer away.”

Then there is Mary. “The notion of Marian intercession posed quite a problem for Protestants,” Lev writes, in something of an understatement. The Catholic devotion to the Blessed Mother can be a puzzle even to the most devoted evangelical Christian. But the Catholic Restoration reinvigorated images of Marian intercession with the Madonna of the Rosary, the quintessential Marian devotion, and artists followed. Most striking might be Caravaggio’s *Madonna of the Rosary*, which depicts the child Jesus, his arm around Mary, looking out to the viewer while his mother, seated on a throne, attends to a group of pious petitioners beseeching her intercession. “Caravaggio does not deny the direct communication between the faithful and Christ,” Lev observes, “but he also acknowledges that one might want to gain the support of His mother.”

The other uniquely Catholic tradition threatened by the Reformation was the papacy, which Protestants claimed to be of no importance in the life of the faithful. The annihilation of the papacy, in fact, was absolutely central to the Reformers’ intention to refound the Church. Where the Roman tradition had seen saints Peter and Paul as virtual brothers, the Protestant devaluing of the papacy meant a devaluing of Peter and consequent elevation of Paul. Michelangelo, however, paired the two men in the Pauline Chapel of St. Peter’s Basilica, *The Crucifixion of Saint Peter* on one wall and opposite it *The Conversion of Saul*.

The young Caravaggio took on the same subjects for his second public commission: the Cerasi Chapel of Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome. In both *The Crucifixion of Saint Peter* and *The Conversion on the Way to Damascus*, he brought an intimacy to his subjects that Michelangelo’s crowd scenes lacked. Both artists, Lev writes, had a message for Restoration Catholics: “Peter and Paul accepted the humiliations of sin, error, derision and persecution, but emerged purified and powerful, ready to navigate the fledgling Church into her great journey through the centuries, continued by the unbroken line of Peter’s successors.”

The mystics, with their ecstasies, stigmata, and levitation, can present a challenge for even the most devout Catholics. Lev writes that, “as Protestants increasingly

subsumed knowledge of God into the intellectual sphere, Catholic art strove to manifest the experiential, even the sensual, nature of oneness with the Lord.” Thus we see, in works from Carracci to Caravaggio, the drastic makeover of Saint Francis of Assisi from tree-hugging animal lover to ecstatic recipient of the Lord’s wounds in the form of the stigmata. Marco Benefiel, in *The Vision of Saint Philip Neri*, did not hesitate to show another great saint in full levitation mode. The most famous work in this category must be Bernini’s *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, which combines painting, sculpture, and architecture to re-create the ecstasy of the great Carmelite of Avila.

While Protestant Reformers claimed there was no need for intermediaries like priests and saints, Catholics understood that these holy men and women, whether martyrs or confessors, had enjoyed a special friendship with Christ, “one that not only instructed, but also inspired, and that all disciples of Jesus belonged to one body, sharing in each other’s gifts.” Again, Caravaggio comes through with *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, in which the tax collector is depicted as a man in shock, not at all sure he wants to answer Jesus’ terrifying call.

In *Cooperation*, the final part of the book, Lev makes the case for her contention that “the Catholic Restoration made its most winning appeal to the heart and mind in the arts and layout of Rome.” Her interpretations of paintings, including Caravaggio’s *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* and his *Madonna of the Pilgrims*, Federico Barocci’s *The Visitation*, and Rossetti’s *Saints Praxedes and Pudentiana Collecting the Blood of the Martyrs*, as well as Bernini’s glorious *Fountain of the Four Rivers* in the Piazza Navona, make the book an indispensable companion for any art lover visiting Rome.

How Catholic Art Saved the Faith is beautifully illustrated with more than 70 color plates. A concluding section provides brief and delightful biographies of the thirty-two artists whose work Lev discusses, from Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) to Marco Benefiel (1684-1764). There is also a bibliography, and an afterword with suggestions on how to bring the Catholic Restoration into our own day—e.g. “Display Catholic art at home.”

Unfortunately, the book lacks an index. Even more disappointing, Lev does not provide current locations for much of the art. Most of the works are in Rome, but it took some research on Google to locate, for example, Annibale Carracci’s *Christ Crowned with Thorns* at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, Federico Barocci’s *Saint Francis* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and Marco Benefiel’s *The Vision of Saint Philip Neri* at the Fitzwilliam in Cambridge, England. Caravaggio’s masterpieces—those that aren’t in Rome—are everywhere from Vienna to Potsdam to Paris. Lev makes us want to make a pilgrimage to all of them.

—Sarah Gallick is a writer and editor residing in Manhattan. Her publications include *The Big Book of Women Saints* (HarperOne).

FROM THE WEBSITE

Suicide Acceptance, Abortion Acceptance

Nicholas Frankovich

Abortion remains at the center of the pro-life movement, which began as a reaction against efforts to legalize the practice in one country after another across the Western world in the middle of the last century. Those efforts largely succeeded, in the United States and elsewhere, leaving the pro-life movement since then to operate on different tracks. It drafts and promotes legislation that would reduce the exposure of unborn children to harm now, in the short term, while lawyers and advocates debate strategies for their longer-term project: First, persuade the public that the abortion of unborn children should be unthinkable. Then, when that consensus is established, induce judges to rule that it should be illegal. That's the mind of the pro-life movement. Some proliferers would say that its heart and soul are the non-profit pregnancy centers that serve women who feel pressure, often economic, to abort but down deep want to carry their pregnancies to term.

Early on, the National Right to Life Committee here in America raised the umbrella of the movement just high enough to take in the related issue of euthanasia and then its cousin, physician-assisted suicide. A dagger aimed at either end of the human lifespan, the concept of abortion, euthanasia, and assisted suicide as members of a family of medical practices whose shared objective is to produce or hasten death makes sense up to a point. They are medical practices, after all—in violation of the Hippocratic Oath, their critics contend, but nonetheless carried out by, or under the direction of, physicians in clinics, hospitals, and nursing homes.

The psychiatrist and historian Robert Jay Lifton writes of the gradual “medicalization of killing” in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s. Aktion T4, it was called, the government-sponsored program of mass “mercy killing”: Doctors began to take the lives of patients, often through starvation, lethal injections, or gassing. The rationale involved eugenics mixed with racism. The step from there to Zyklon B turned out to be not so far.

The decades-long effort to remove legal restraints against euthanasia in the United States evaporated after the Second World War, given the role that medicalized killing had played in the Holocaust. That historical association had intensified the taboo against even discussing the possibility that doctors would kill patients. A generation passed, however, and by the 1970s the campaign to

legalize euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide here was revived. The Karen Ann Quinlan case in New Jersey gave the issue a name and a sympathetic story: Against her doctors' wishes, her parents fought in court to remove her from life support after she had lapsed into a coma, and then remained in a persistent vegetative state for months. Her parents prevailed. Their daughter's respirator disconnected, she continued to breathe unaided, and lived in a nursing home where she was fed by artificial means until she died of pneumonia nine years later. "We never asked to have her die," her mother insisted.

At issue was whether a patient, through proxies (in this case, Quinlan's parents), could refuse treatment without which she might soon die. Circumstances vary so widely from case to case that no one could ever formulate a clear, simple answer that would always be both indisputably ethical and humane. Anyone who has had to make end-of-life decisions for elderly family members understands the problem. The patient may have stopped eating and mostly lost the swallowing reflex, indicating that the dying process has begun. His life could be extended through the application of feeding tubes. The decision is the patient's or, more typically, since his lucidity is diminishing, that of his family. To decline artificial nutrition is to deprive the patient of days, weeks, or even months of life, but to elect it would be to force an outcome that the context of his medical condition—in his ninth or tenth decade, he's dying a natural death—cries out against. No bright line separates instances in which medical intervention would be appropriate from instances in which it should be clear that it's time to let go. Discernment in these matters is an art.

And the art attracts "artists," activists interested in pushing the boundaries. They question why doctors, judges, or legislators should be able to decide when a person (or his proxy) may exercise his right to die. Parents surprised by defects or disabilities in their newborn children may sue their doctor for wrongful birth, arguing that the failure to detect fetal abnormality and inform them of it deprived them of the opportunity to abort. Take that legal reasoning, look at it from the child's perspective, and you get the category "wrongful life," the presumption that the child is harmed by having to suffer life in a body marred by some defect that eluded the obstetricians, who should have caught it and enabled the mother to make the putatively humane decision to abort him. Wrongful-life cases don't usually succeed in court, but their existence illustrates the legal reasoning that joins abortion rights and the right to die.

Americans are committing suicide at an increasing rate, but not only Americans. Suicide across the globe is on the rise. Note that suicide prevention, the natural response to this trend, is on a collision course with a creeping social acceptance of suicide as a "rational" exercise of a right to die. It's the psychological, though not yet legal, foundation of abortion rights, as pro-choice advocates have been telling us for decades: "Of course we care about the unborn child."

What if it's not in his interest to live? The woman is his natural proxy to answer the question whether he should exercise his right to die. Suicide acceptance, I maintain, has always been at the heart of the campaign to promote acceptance of abortion. The pro-life movement needs to respond to the current suicide crisis head-on—and to treat it not as an add-on to some seamless-garment agenda but as the central issue, the defining issue of the larger cause.

—Nicholas Frankovich is an editor of *National Review*.

Heaven on Earth

B G Carter

A curious path now leads us away from hell and punishment. It skirts nimbly heaven and reward, then ends in the ephemeral cloud of heaven on earth. Its achievements are stupefying. They are nothing less than a repudiation of the afterlife's heaven and hell plus the relocation of heaven uniquely on earth.

Some generations ago, many who claimed Christianity as their faith also subscribed to the tenet that disbelief would subject them to unending punishment in a fiery hell. Espousing the dictum to do unto others as to themselves, these folks endorsed belief and exhorted all others to believe. Such was the impetus for evangelization.

Intervening generations progressively coupled the divine attributes of mercy and justice and soon concluded that no god worthy of our love ever could dispatch a non-believer to eternal punishment. That just wouldn't be fair. At least, commute the sentence. Better still, gut the whole concept of punishment by eradicating hell.

One result of hell's eradication was to make heaven accessible to all without regard to disbelief or spiritual disability. Everyone was going to glory.

Another was to transform mockery of heaven's hyperbolic nomenclature into a rejection of heaven. Though gold would not rust and diamonds may not be forever, preacher after preacher rose to declaim that neither he nor his spouse ever had much of either. Their sparse hoard was limited to their wedding bands. Since neither ever had much and further could see no use for them in heaven, the gleaming attraction of heaven plastered with gems itself grew dull.

Bang! Hell was banished; heaven, blown away! What remained? Only the relocation of heaven to earth. Slithering around this change of venue was the mighty serpent of vanity. Why, we, *Homo sapiens*, alone make our heaven. We're fully capable. Just ask us! We've no need of a god—puerile or powerful.

Now, the unalloyed manifestation of this sly relocation frequently must wait until folks, such as an aging couple, approach death. With the arrival of the hospice teams comes the rite of mutual consolation. Rather than anxiety about heaven or agony about hell, our couple seeks solace in remembrance of a carefully winnowed trove of happy experiences.

However, the relocation is manifested abundantly by (1) the brand of memorial service (2) its tenor, and (3) the surviving spouse's observations.

Nowadays, the memorial service often is called a celebration of life. It is a very public thing. Newspaper ads supplement obituaries and the family's invitation. All are welcome, not merely neighbors or co-workers but also those who never met or saw the deceased. Of course, there is no mention of the dead or dying. Rather, current polite discourse alludes to the late life that merely passed, departed, or slipped away.

This celebratory service supersedes the practice of burial and eulogy. That older practice was a private affair, meant for family and friends, and often a solemn thing despite the clergy member's promise of hope and assurance.

The tenor of the current service is light and carefree. It may even be jocular or outrageously humorous. If a minister participates (rarely will one officiate), then he or she will avoid, scrupulously, any suggestion that the departed now enjoys greater happiness and better company. His or her silence about heaven acquiesces in the implication that heaven is nowhere. How could there be comfort if the dead depart into nowhere? Perhaps the minister even speculates silently that just as heaven is nowhere God is not at all.

The surviving spouse embraces wholeheartedly the party line that he (or she) and the late, dearly beloved made their own heaven on earth. It was the only heaven they ever knew. He might add tearfully that it was the only one he ever expects to know.

Only days after the celebration (the send-off to nowhere), several disturbing doubts arrive. Quite personally, if the departed and I experienced here this unique heaven, what's left for me now? She's gone, and I'm alone.

Further, recalling what enlarged or shrank our heaven, don't I have cause to blame as well as to praise? If only that bastard or bitch hadn't interfered, wouldn't we have had a richer heaven? Who's at fault for the crib death of our only child? If our presidents had not sent my wife's brother, and mine, to kill both the alleged guilty as well as the assured innocent, wouldn't our heaven have been fuller?

In addition to the doubts engendered by aloneness and blame from cause comes the doubt birthed by chance. Suppose that we primarily derived our heaven from our skin's tinge, our family's wealth, and our country's power to rain bombs, hurl drones, and assassinate opponents. Suppose we ourselves barely made our heaven. Suppose we chanced to have it merely because we

were born white, affluent, and American?

Blessedly, there is another path that avoids the certain isolation and pitiless desolation that attend the transport of heaven to earth. This other path neither explodes hell nor populates heaven. Rather, it guides us to understand the vitalizing link between created and Creator and the indissoluble bond between preparation and sanctification.

This path blends harmoniously two perspectives. The first acknowledges that, during our earthly sojourn, we experience God's bounty in a mediated degree. Only occasionally do our wills, minds, and bodies approach together a perfect resonance with God. The second perspective affirms that a changed way of living alone can prove our professed beliefs. Our new way of living authenticates our faith. We show that we really do believe by our desires and actions, our wills and souls. Those who do not change their lives render themselves unable to enjoy the heavenly banquet. They flub the dub, fail the grade, and miss the mark.

So, what is this heavenly banquet? Where is it? The banquet is precisely the direct, immediate exposure to God's bounty joined with the capacity to appreciate it. That means to taste it, drink it, and revel in it. Sort of like St. Theresa's prayerful admonition to allow our souls the freedom to sing, praise, dance and love. Where is it? In and with God.

Taking this second path allows the Christian to see that, first, heaven is not on earth, and second, each's ability to gain admission is conditioned upon a life that authenticates one's faith. The process is altogether logical. How could we ever savor a spiritual banquet's entrée and dessert if we never developed a spiritual appetite at least fit for tasting the hors d'oeuvres?

Along the path's way, the Christian begins to realize that faith is exposed and enhanced in all the big and little things done in Christ's name—from the cup of cool water to the binding up of wounds in a battered, cast-off body. This faith is refined by restraint of debilitating desires—from lust and gluttony through anger and abuse. This faith is integrated into all the healthy desires—from patience and sharing of means through sacrifice and sharing of suffering. All such acts and wishes witness to our belief.

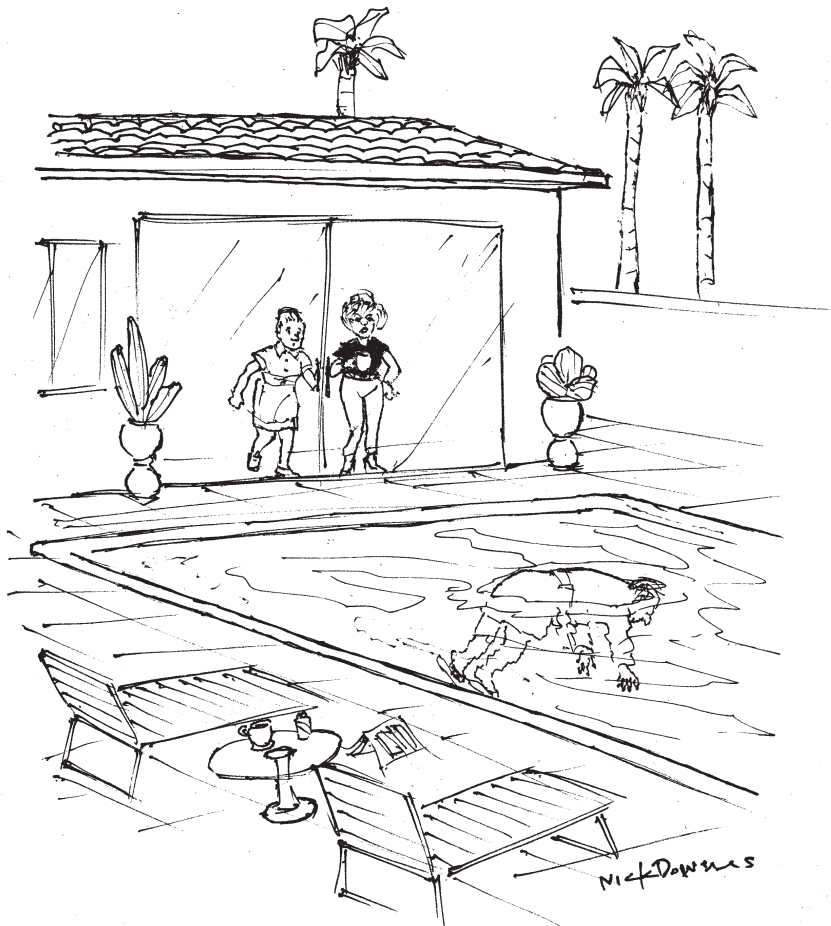
Those who claim Christ but live unchanged lives deceive themselves. They are hypocrites because they only play at believing. The awful truth is that they do not believe. Their unchanged lives prove their disbelief.

Those who dare preach that a public confession and baptism alone vouchsafe admission to heaven are ignorant. Their minds are shallow, and their words, hollow. They already merit reproach even while they risk damnation. Their preaching is vain and leads astray the flock entrusted to them.

If to be with God is to be able to enjoy the banquet, then to be without God is ravenously hellacious. Shakespeare's line—to be or not to be—acquires new

force. There are but two choices—to be with or without. The first yields the assurance of joy. The second decrees the certainty of despair.

—B G Carter, a graduate of Mercer University, has an MA and PhD from the University of Maryland. While writing his dissertation, “Genes and Politics,” he spent a semester interning at the Hastings Center. For many years he operated small businesses in the French West Indies and Florida Keys. He is currently working on a novel.



“And it’s the pool man’s day off.”

APPENDIX A

[On June 7, 2019, the House Judiciary subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties held a hearing on “Threats to Reproductive Rights in America.” The 2, out of 8, witnesses who are pro-life are both abortion survivors: Melissa Ohden, Founder and Director of The Abortion Survivors Network, and Christina Bennett, director of communications for the Family Institute of Connecticut. Excerpts from their testimonies follow.]

MELISSA OHDEN: As the now-famous saying goes, “women’s rights are human rights.” I’m here today to give a face and a voice to women whose rights are not just being threatened, but have been under attack for the past forty-six years in our country. . . . Is there space for stories like mine, women who are alive today after surviving failed abortion procedures; for stories like my biological mother’s, women who have been coerced or forced into an abortion? Do we ever create space for the stories of women who regret their abortions? The most important stories, though, are likely the ones that you’ll never hear. The stories of the little girls who will never live outside of the womb. In all of the discussion about women’s rights, some lose sight of the fact that without the right to life, there are no other rights. This is the greatest human rights issue we are facing as a country.

In August of 1977, the attack on my human rights began. My biological mother, as a nineteen-year-old college student, had a saline infusion abortion forced upon by her mother, a prominent nurse in their community, with the help of her colleague, the local abortionist, Dr. Kelberg. This abortion procedure involved injecting a toxic salt solution into the amniotic fluid that was meant to poison and scald me to death. I soaked in that toxic solution over a five-day period as they tried time and time again to induce my birthmother’s labor with me. When I was finally expelled from the womb on that fifth day of the abortion procedure, my arrival into this world was not so much as a birth, but an accident, a “live birth” after a saline infusion abortion. My medical records actually state, “a saline infusion for an abortion was done, but was unsuccessful.” I’ve included this record for you to review, along with another that identifies a complication of my birthmother’s pregnancy as a saline infusion. Despite the arguments being made that people like me don’t exist or that children aren’t left to die after failed abortions, listen to the words of a nurse who I’ve been connected with who was there that day. I was initially “laid aside,” after my grandmother instructed nurses to leave me to die, and arguments about whether I would be provided medical care, ensued. In the words of Nurse Jan, who received me in the NICU that day, “a tall blond nurse,” courageously rushed me off to the NICU, shouting out, “she just kept gasping for breath, and so I couldn’t just leave her there to die!” My medical records state that the doctors initially suspected I had a fatal heart defect due to the high level of distress I presented with. I suffered from severe respiratory problems, jaundice, and seizures. I weighed in at 2 pounds, 14 ounces, which is what led a neonatologist to remark in my medical records that I was approximately 31 weeks gestation, as opposed to the 18-20 weeks that the abortionist had indicated. It’s easy to talk about women’s reproductive rights until you recognize that without first the right to life, there are no other rights. How do you

reconcile my rights as a woman who survived a failed abortion with what's being discussed here today?

The abortion industry talks in abstract and gray when it comes to the science of when life begins and what abortion does, but the reality is much clearer. I'm alive today because someone else's "reproductive right" failed to end my life, as are the 287 abortion survivors I've connected with through my work with The Abortion Survivors Network, 184 of whom are female. There's something wrong when one person's right results in another person's death. There's something deeply disturbing about the reality in our world that I have a right to an abortion but I never had the simple right to live. The 14th Amendment says that "nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." But with states passing laws that state a "fertilized egg, embryo or fetus does not have independent rights," aren't states participating in the deprivation of life? Are states providing equal protection to all children? I don't think so. Each of you, as a legislator, has sworn to provide equal protection to your constituents under the law. As you examine the so-called "threat to women's reproductive rights," I would ask for you to look behind the language and see the stories that are so often hidden, the stories that may seem inconvenient or even rare to you, and consider that there's more to this discussion. And there's more to be done to protect your most vulnerable constituents and meet the needs of women and families in our communities in a way that supports lives at all stages of development and in all circumstances, not ends it.

CHRISTINA BENNETT: I'm grateful for the opportunity to share my story with you today. In 1981 my mother scheduled to abort me at Mount Sinai Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut. She was pressured by my father to abort and rejected by a mentor in her church who told her she wasn't welcome anymore because she was pregnant out of wedlock. She met with a counselor at the hospital who assured her she was making the right decision and didn't offer counsel on available alternatives.

A black elderly janitor approached my mother after seeing her crying in the hospital hallway. She asked her if she wanted to have her baby and when she said yes, she told her God would give her the strength to have me. When she went to leave, my mother was called into the doctor's office, where she saw he hadn't cleaned up the blood from the last abortion. She was disgusted and told him she wanted to keep me. He insisted she go through with the abortion and said, "You've already paid for this. You're just nervous." She repeated "I want my baby," and he yelled at her saying, "Don't leave this room." She felt his anger came from fear of losing her business and those that could follow her. Yet with courage she walked out.

Children conceived less than a decade prior to my birth didn't experience the threat of death through legalized abortion. It's easy for people to say I'm glad your mother had a choice but a statement like that devalues my existence. Human lives should not be weighed in the balance of whether or not they are wanted or measured in terms of circumstances or convenience. I deserved legal protection and a right to life.

My mother's experience is similar to the experiences I've heard from women throughout this country. Women who've faced the same coercion, rejection, lack of

counseling, lack of support and disgusting facility conditions. My desire to assist women and children led me to work for years at a non-profit pregnancy resource center. There I witnessed the power of hope and the ways in which love and practical support strengthened women and their families.

Two years ago, I had a profound experience while visiting the National Museum of African-American History. I was reminded of the ways Black Americans were denied the right to equal protection and due process, treated as property and dehumanized because of the color of our skin. The museum memorialized the many ways Black Americans have been unjustly targeted and killed for centuries. While I rejoice over the progress we've made as people of color, an ache remains in my heart because of the denial of equal protection and due process to another class of people—the baby in the womb. The sacrifices my ancestors suffered to achieve the civil rights I enjoy today are not able to protect future generations because of legalized abortion. I'm burdened that the 14th Amendment, which gave us liberty, was unjustly used to invent a supposed right to destroy a human life. Sojourner Truth in her day said, "Am I not a woman?" And in mine I say, "Am I not a person?" Abortion is not a victimless act. We just can't hear the voices of those who've been silenced and discarded. *Roe v. Wade* rendered 60,000,000 lives unworthy of legal protection and has led to the deaths of over 20 million Black babies since 1973.

The dark history of Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger's philosophy on eugenics and population control was recently documented by Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas' concurring opinion in *Box v. Planned Parenthood* in Indiana and Kentucky. Today, an increasing number of Black Americans recognize this eugenic and population control philosophy that is having a genocidal impact.

Recently close to a hundred black women of influence gathered in Charlotte, North Carolina, to protest the stealth opening of a Planned Parenthood in the city's oldest Black neighborhood. One of them was Lesley Monet, the International Director of The Church of God in Christ's Family Life Campaign. She represents the largest Black denomination, with over 6 million members. They oppose the abortion industry's targeting of Black babies and are encouraging a movement of adoption among their members.

Seventy-eight percent of Planned Parenthood's surgical facilities are located in Black and Latino neighborhoods. Black women such as Cree Erwin, Lakisha Wilson, and Tonya Reaves lost their lives at the hands of an abortion industry that offered them substandard medical care. Others have left clinics by ambulance, suffered botched procedures and been left with physical and emotional scars. We are tired of the targeting and lies that abortion is an answer to our challenges.

As a pro-life feminist I support bodily autonomy but abortion always impacts two bodies. I am a unique individual who was never just a part of my mother's body. Liberation never comes through oppressing other human beings. *Roe v. Wade* was built on lies that Norma McCorvey spent her entire life trying to correct. We can love both women and children and strive for a society that treats us all with the dignity and worth we deserve. This is true empowerment.

APPENDIX B

[Alexandra DeSanctis is a staff writer for National Review. The following column was published on July 18 on National Review Online (www.nationalreview.com). Copyright 2019 by National Review. Reprinted by permission.]

Surprise—The Future of Planned Parenthood Is Abortion

Alexandra DeSanctis

Planned Parenthood’s board has fired the organization’s president, Leana Wen, after less than a year on the job. According to reports, Wen was dismissed because the board deemed her insufficiently dedicated to expanding Planned Parenthood’s political advocacy, particularly on abortion.

The news comes as a shock for a few reasons. For one thing, Wen was appointed just last fall to replace Cecile Richards, who resigned on good terms after leading the institution for twelve years.

But it’s surprising, too, if Wen’s ouster was due to her reluctance to focus more on politics than on public health, as several reports suggest was the case. In June, after all, Planned Parenthood announced a six-figure ad campaign, “Bans Off My Body,” to oppose recent state laws regulating abortion. Judging from Wen’s Twitter account, she was perfectly comfortable promoting what the group frequently calls “reproductive rights.”

Why, then, was she forced to depart so unceremoniously, and what does her abrupt exit say about the future of Planned Parenthood?

Wen’s dismissal is perhaps best understood in light of the escalating national fight over abortion policy. As blue states have codified the right to abortion on demand, in many cases deeming it a “fundamental right,” red states have passed limitations like heartbeat bills to protect unborn human beings earlier in pregnancy.

Planned Parenthood has long sought to downplay its commitment to abortion, calling itself a health-care organization and spreading the lie that abortion is only 3 percent of its business, even as its clinics perform between one-third and half of all abortions in the U.S. annually. The group’s leadership evidently believes this political moment demands more aggressive advocacy.

And Wen wasn’t up to the task. Considering her record thus far, she was hired for the “M.D.” beside her name, and little else. She came across in interviews like a placid physician repeating rote talking points drilled into her on the drive to the studio. She consistently inserted the phrase “as a doctor” into her messaging to give the organization the gloss of medical legitimacy, and she never sounded like the polished, sure-footed political advocate Richards had.

Plenty of turmoil, meanwhile, was taking place behind the scenes. “Wen had tried to refocus the organization’s mission and image as a health provider offering a wide array of services, including abortions,” sources told the *Washington Post* this week. “Those close to Wen said she was opposed by some board members and others who wanted to emphasize the organization’s commitment to abortion rights.”

In January, Wen told BuzzFeed News she wanted to restructure the organization’s

goals, noting that people aren't going to Planned Parenthood to make a political statement. "What we will always be here to do is provide abortion access as part of the full spectrum of reproductive health care," Wen said. "But we also recognize that for so many of our patients we are their only source of health care."

The day BuzzFeed published its profile, though, Wen backtracked. "I am always happy to do interviews, but these headlines completely misconstrue my vision for Planned Parenthood," Wen tweeted that morning. "Our core mission is providing, protecting and expanding access to abortion and reproductive health care. We will never back down from that fight."

Wen's termination sheds some light on this quick reversal. It's easy to imagine that she faced internal backlash for appearing to have shied away from abortion advocacy, and that her public about-face was an effort to pacify critics within the organization.

It didn't work. In February, top political staffers left Planned Parenthood, reportedly amid ongoing conflict over Wen's management style. Now that tension seems to have boiled over. Six sources told BuzzFeed this week that "significant management issues [were] part of the board's decision to oust Wen," and one "said her removal was accelerated by the intensifying battle over abortion rights, saying that she was not the right leader in this climate."

Perhaps the most revealing detail from BuzzFeed's report? Two sources said Wen angered staffers by refusing to use "trans-inclusive" language, "for example saying 'people' instead of 'women' and telling staff that she believed talking about transgender issues would 'isolate people in the Midwest.'"

This anecdote might well be the key to understanding what happened to Wen and where Planned Parenthood's leaders intend to go from here. Surely she wasn't fired for her recalcitrance on preferred pronouns. But with a national spotlight on the abortion debate, Planned Parenthood's leaders are ready to take off the kid gloves.

Wen's firing suggests that, instead of claiming to be just a normal health-care organization, Planned Parenthood intends to capitalize on its status as an influential left-wing interest group. To do that, it must become a purveyor of the entire progressive agenda, to the point of embracing the "intersectional" language promoted by transgender activists. So the mild-mannered Wen had to go.

Pro-lifers have long known what Planned Parenthood itself appears to be admitting: The group's ultimate goal is to wield its political influence within the progressive movement to continue profiting from abortion.

APPENDIX C

[Maria McFadden Maffucci is editor of the Human Life Review and president of the Human Life Foundation. She is also a regular columnist at Newsmax, where the following was published on June 4, 2019 (www.newsmax.com).]

There Are Hidden Threats to All Lives in Assisted Suicide Laws

Maria McFadden Maffucci

“The state has an interest in protecting the poor, the elderly, and disabled persons. The lives of disabled and elderly must be no less valuable than the lives of young and healthy . . . The difficulty in defining terminal illness and the risk that a dying patient’s request for assistance in ending his or her life might not be truly voluntary justifies the prohibitions on assisted suicide we uphold here.”

—Chief Justice William Rehnquist, *Vacco v. Quill*, *Washington v. Glucksberg*, 1997

In April, New Jersey became the 8th state to legalize assisted suicide with its “Medical Aid in Dying for the Terminally Ill” Act.

New York may be next.

On a radio program in April Governor Andrew Cuomo spoke in support of New York’s proposed “Medical Aid in Dying” Act, which was re-introduced in the state legislature in January soon after his inauguration (it failed to pass in 2017 and 2018).

Polls show that a majority of New Yorkers support aid in dying. That’s worrisome. Yes, it’s natural to fear intense suffering, and to want control over one’s life. But what we ought to fear is giving doctors—or the state, or anyone!—the legal power to kill us.

These assisted suicide laws, as with abortion “reform” in the early days, are touted as only for the rare, tragic cases, which will be policed by stringent safeguards. We are assured that only the physician-certified terminally ill (with six months or less to live) would be prescribed the drugs, and factors like depression or undue pressure from family or doctors would be ruled out.

This assumes that doctors are always ethical (and correct in diagnoses), that families are always loving and would never have motivations for hurrying someone off the planet, and that insurance companies and health plans would never be tempted to deny care based on the fact that assisted suicide pills are much cheaper than life-sustaining medical treatments.

Opponents of assisted suicide bills enumerate the ways such safeguards are unreliable, and point to healthcare rationing as a rationale for promoting assisted suicide. Governor Cuomo’s radio comments inadvertently, I think, revealed this.

He said the law was necessary because, “The older we get and the better medicine gets, the more we’ve seen people suffer for too, too long.” But the first part of the sentence doesn’t necessarily match the second. We are living longer and healthier lives; medicine keeps improving, including pain control. Many of us have reason to believe we will live longer, more pain-free and productive lives than ever before. But there is a catch: All this care we need is expensive, especially with healthcare and pharmaceutical

prices. Again, it is much less expensive for insurance plans to fund a prescription of lethal pills than to pay for powerful treatments for cancer or other diseases.

Major disability rights groups see lethal danger in assisted suicide laws, seeing that, “Some people fear disability as a fate worse than death.” Terminal illness will involve disabilities, which become the reason for the “loss of dignity” and desire for suicide. The group Not Dead Yet reports that while “intractable pain has been emphasized as the primary reason” for assisted suicide laws, it’s not in the top five reasons reported in Oregon (where assisted suicide has been legal since 1997); they include “loss of autonomy,” and “loss of control of bodily functions,” things the disabled live with every day.

Finally, at a time when the U.S. suicide rate is rapidly and alarmingly rising, how can we on the one hand work passionately to prevent suicides, while at the same time promoting the choice as a “right”?

Ironically, just a couple of weeks after Cuomo’s comments supporting the aid-in-dying law, his press office released the first suicide prevention report from the task force he created in 2017: “Communities United for a Suicide-Free New York.”

The lengthy document outlines initiatives for suicide prevention, especially in the high-risk populations of veterans, Latina youth, and the LGBTQ community. Howard Zucker, M.D., Commissioner of the NYS Department of Health, said, “Suicide is a tragedy with devastating effects on individuals, families and communities, which is why Governor Cuomo set up a task force to find ways to prevent it from happening.”

Suicide is tragic and awful—unless you get a doctor to prescribe poison, in which case it becomes a right necessary for “progressive” society? And, chillingly, when does the “right to die” become the “duty to die,” and then coerced death? In Belgium, the slippery slope has led to euthanasia for children, and death has become the default medical treatment for a host of non-terminal illnesses, including depression. Is this what we want here?



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When we consider what a radical statement the movement makes about the value of every human life, it is impossible not to ask ourselves during our sojourn on Planet Earth whether or not we are walking the talk. I know I have to ask myself this question every day. It has moved me to adjust my demeanor, give away more money, listen longer, and attend far more carefully to vulnerable people. Eventually, I even adjusted my driving habits. (For a while, I was too ashamed to have a pro-life bumper sticker associated with my driving. I am proud to say that in my 50s, I have finally become a more courteous driver and can again display a pro-life sticker.)

—Helen Alvaré, “Abortion: Never a ‘Single Issue’”