



VOLUME XLVIII No. 4 ♦ FALL 2022

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THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF VICKI THORN

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Appendices: Jonathon Van Maren • Edie Heipel • Progressive Anti-Abortion Uprising
Madeleine Kearns • Wesley J. Smith

ABOUT THIS ISSUE . . .

. . . Senior editor William Murchison's "Farewell *Roe*, Hello *Dobbs*" leads our issue with a bracing evaluation of cultural realities in the United States post-*Roe*.

The pro-life cause in the 21st century consists in continuing, against hardship and rebuke—including political rebuke—to proclaim the moral worthiness of life yet unborn. That a Court or a Congress might buy into such a duty is logically consequent upon the nation's antecedent understanding of duty and love, and its attachment to those virtues.

As I write this, just days after the November elections, those who would protect the unborn have indeed suffered political rebuke. Now that *Dobbs* sent the matter of abortion back to the states, the consequences of almost 50 years of *Roe* and the erosion of the culture are inescapable—aided mightily by over a billion dollars of false advertising aimed against anti-abortion politicians (we know of no anti-abortion state law that does not include a life-of-the mother exception, for example).

Writing in 1979, merely six years after *Roe*, our founding editor, J.P. McFadden, observed with prescience: "The greater the polarization becomes, the harder it is to imagine what kind of compromise will heal a wound so festered. . . . Solomon in his wisdom suggested that each party get half the baby, but that was not the solution—the solution came from the mother who chose life."

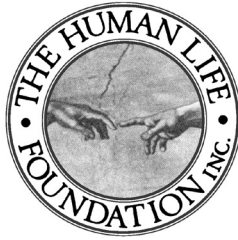
Encouraging mothers and others to choose life continues to be our mission, and the issue you hold has abundant evidence that the brightest minds and hearts share our conviction. Our articles include fascinating explorations of the results of embryonic vs. adult stem-cell research; the rise of transhumanism; our understanding of freedom vs. liberty; and the current, alarming, persecution of pro-life activists.

But we will not be deterred, and, on a positive note, if you would like to see brilliant pro-life scholarship and joyful pro-life activism in living color, please tune in to our website and watch the film of our Great Defender of Life dinner (October 6) honoring brilliant law professor Gerald Bradley and New York City's Pregnancy Help, Inc. (<https://humanlifereview.com/special-event-great-defender-life-dinner-2022/>). Printed remarks and photos will appear in our next issue.

Our thanks for permission to reprint go to the good people at: *First Things* (Appendix A); *Catholic News Association* (Appendix B); Progressive Anti-Abortion Uprising (Appendix C); and National Review Online (Appendices D and E).

It's been a remarkable year! We look forward to bringing you more information and inspiration, for life.

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INTRODUCTION

Let's face it. Until the Supreme Court overturned *Roe* last June, most Americans had largely ignored the nation's ongoing abortion debate for almost 50 years. Why? Maybe because to pay attention would entail coming down on one side or the other regarding the desirability of killing little humans, ones that look just like the sonogram on the fridge. Or, as William Murchison puts it in "Farewell *Roe*; Hello *Dobbs*," our lead article, "We seem as a nation, as a people, to desire a little of this and a little of that: not wholesale permission to abort and not a wholesale prohibition either." For nearly half a century most Americans have been irresolute, comfortable with the judicially imposed *Roe*, willfully ignorant about the details. "*Dobbs*," Murchison goes on, "was the precondition of our coming at last to grips, as a nation, as a culture, with the immensity of the right-to-life question. *Dobbs* summons us to look around, as did Alec Guinness, in the catastrophic final scene of *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, upon the consequences of moral miscalculation."

Three weeks before *Dobbs* was officially pronounced, the Human Life Foundation sponsored "Liberty to Do What?," a panel discussion inspired by George McKenna's prescient essay "The Odd Couple: Freedom and Liberty" (published in our Fall '21 issue). By then the decision had already leaked; unhinged abortocrats were storming public and media venues while proliferating, aghast at the violence, cautiously anticipated a "win." But the conversation that evening—McKenna was joined by Rusty Reno and Hadley Arkes—touched on moral miscalculation all around: "If we think that the Left in this country is unmoored," wondered Arkes, "what will we think on the day after *Roe v. Wade* is overturned, when we strip away the cover and see, I'm afraid, the crippling moral divisions among conservatives, running down to the very root of things?" McKenna began the discussion with a crisp summary of his essay, reprinted here along with the other panelists' opening remarks. You can watch their ensuing—and absorbing—interchange on our website (<https://humanlifereview.com/liberty-to-do-what/>).

Even before *Roe*, reports William Doyno in "Pro-life Trailblazer: The Life and Legacy of Vicki Thorn," the founder of Project Rachel had witnessed how abortion could upend a young woman's life. "I can live with the adoption," a high school friend who had twice become pregnant confided to her, "but I can't live with the abortion." Her friend's confession was "a life-changing event," Doyno writes in his wide-ranging profile, which features extensive interviews with Thorn's husband and colleagues—one that "taught her the virtue of accompaniment and led her to become a certified trauma counselor and spiritual director." In 1984, Thorn launched Project Rachel in her Milwaukee archdiocese to console and heal women mourning aborted children—a process, she observed, that could take years to complete. Her message, says Doyno, "was so new, so bold and so challenging that it left both sides of the abortion divide unprepared—and even a little unnerved." Today, Project Rachel is a nationwide ministry of the Catholic Church, and Vicki Thorn,

who died suddenly last spring, is a hero to countless women (and men) who have remade abortion-damaged lives.

The immensity of the right-to-life question encompasses the tiniest human creatures, those residing in research laboratories where the abortion damage is irreparable. “Social and religious conservatives have robbed American scientists of their chance to play a leading role in the promising field of stem-cell research,” the late actor Christopher Reeve (who suffered an incapacitating accident mid-career) told Yale medical students back in 2003. “We’re giving away our pre-eminence in science and medicine.” In “Does Effective and Ethical Stem Cell Therapy Exist?” Grace Emily Stark reports on how successful therapies are being generated today using adult stem cells while the death-dealing embryonic variety that Reeve, along with fellow actor Michael J. Fox, famously promoted on television and in Congress has failed to live up to its (and their) “promise.” Stark’s carefully annotated article takes readers through the recent history of stem cell research—including the Nobel Prize-winning discovery that adult stem cells could be “reprogrammed” to exhibit the same pluripotency and capability of self-renewal as embryonic stem cells—and demonstrates without a doubt “that healing born bodies need not be done at the expense of unborn human lives.”

But what about scientists who aren’t looking to heal born bodies so much as to upgrade them? In “Transhumanism and Being,” Jason Morgan explains how scientists are seeking what popular transhumanist Ray Kurzweil has dubbed the Singularity, where humans “leave behind flesh-and-blood biology and merge with computer hardware.” And become immortal. Or so preach the high priests of Silicon Valley, who would remove the original sin of *humanity* from humans by installing the techno-self, which in reality would be no “self” at all. “Uploading consciousness to a mainframe and slipping the body off like an old shoe,” Morgan writes, would be tantamount to death. “Whatever comes next is not immortality but wishful thinking.” But even if “the most science-fiction-esque scenarios” never materialize, transhumanism is already having an effect: “We are not really arguing centrally over whether a child in the womb is a human being,” he reminds us. “What an increasing number of those on the anti-life side are saying now is that it doesn’t really matter.”

Ellen Wilson Fielding also has something to say about the Singularity, the “sort of sidestepping of death,” she quips, “that surely only a socially challenged techie would find appealing.” In “*The Silmarillion* in Silicon Valley,” Fielding compares the Kurzweil project to “Tolkien’s mortal human race” and “their quest to escape their own mortal fate by toppling the laws of nature and of nature’s god.” Beginning with America’s founding, her essay is an extended meditation on the shared “understanding of a stable human nature with defined capabilities, characteristics, and rights” that has informed most of Western history. And how its fracturing in identity-scrambled America today is manifesting in dangerous absurdity: “If our pet dog leaped from our second-story window under the delusion that it was a bird,” she posits, “we would not benignly endorse its choice of identity . . . Why don’t we react to our fellow deluded humans with similar seriousness and a determined grip

INTRODUCTION

on (stable) reality?” Gender reassignment surgery? It is “astonishing,” she says, “how many go along with it.”

Astonishing, too, how many go along with physician-assisted suicide—or medical aid in dying, call it what you will—even as the evidence piles up that eventually it will metastasize into involuntary euthanasia (see the Netherlands). In this issue, John Grondelski interviews FamilyVoice Australia’s National Media Spokesman Greg Bodnar for an update on the debate down under, which, Bodnar reports, “is currently skewed heavily in favor of proponents of euthanasia, who have support from the pro-death Australian media, celebrities, politicians, and even some in the church.”

* * * * *

How the Catholic Church is failing to make the best case for its teaching—one that not only wins legal battles but also hearts and minds—is the subject of Helen Alvaré’s new book *Religious Freedom after the Sexual Revolution*, reviewed here in Booknotes by Edward Mechemann, who concludes this “road map for effective Church communication on all the major contemporary challenges . . . couldn’t have come at a more propitious moment.”

From the Website features Pastoral Reflections from three Protestant ministers: Paul Stallsworth, W. Ross Blackburn, and Victor Lee Austin, as well as signature blogs by Diane Moriarty and Peter Pavia, and a poignant piece on the pain that accompanies miscarriage from Maria Maffucci’s online *Insisting on Life* column. We wrap up with an array of arresting appendices: Jonathon Van Maren’s “Canada’s Killing Regime” and Wesley Smith’s “Jared Kushner—the Transhumanist in the White House” complement articles in this issue, while three others focus on recent stories in the news: CNA’s Edie Heipel smashes the *Guardian*’s incredible claim that a fetus isn’t visible in the womb till after 10 weeks of gestation; a Progressive Anti-Abortion Uprising press release denounces the federal indictment of 26-year-old “pro-life atheist” Herb Geraghty, “the latest to join the growing list of peaceful pro-life individuals targeted by AG Garland and the Biden administration’s extreme pro-abortion agenda”; and Madeleine Kearns reports on liberal hysteria over how abortion scenes in *Blonde*, a new biopic about Marilyn Monroe, depict the unborn child.

With this edition we complete 48 years of continuous publishing. When he launched the *Human Life Review* in 1975, J.P. McFadden feared he might not have ample material to fill subsequent issues. He sure was wrong about that.

ANNE CONLON
EDITOR

Farewell *Roe*; Hello *Dobbs*

William Murchison

You think you know. In fact, much of the time, you don't, nor can you. Life in the 21st century is harder to unscramble than an omelet.

The U.S. Supreme Court stretches out its arm to undo a predecessor Court's imposition, half a century ago, of a national policy of official indifference to unborn life: Maybe a good thing, maybe not so good, figure it out for yourself. Exit that novel policy, as of June 2022—to the gratification of unborn life's unrelenting friends and advocates, and, it follows, to the benefit of countless unborn lives exposed to that same indifference. Cue the bottle rockets and Roman candles. Whoopee! Hooray!

Then the nervousness commences, and the feeling that something's still not right around here. What could it be? It could be, and is, the feeling that large numbers of Americans, despite the Court's probing rationality in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, are as mixed and muddled in their thinking about abortion as was the case, say, a dozen years ago. We seem as a nation, as a people, to desire a little of this and a little of that: not wholesale permission to abort and not a wholesale prohibition either.

Mental and moral confusion is the *Roe* Court's so-far-enduring legacy.

If too few—as yet, according to polls—feel able to recommend a satisfactory exit from the abortion briar patch, that could be for two reasons: 1) the dishonesty inherent in the politicizing and judicializing, since 1973, of a moral question existing at humanity's foundational level; and 2) the resultant feeling that abortion, being “political” in the contemporary sense, is a matter—yes—of personal choice: MAGA vs. progressivism, carbon-based fuels vs. offshore wind power; that sort of thing.

In politics you pick your friends and foes as often as not for interior reasons, unrelated mostly to the large questions of existence. Who yells the loudest, organizes the most people, has the most voluble presence in social media—such are the main considerations that drive political arrangements in 2022.

What's on, I beg to guess, is a challenge waiting to be grasped. It has not been grasped yet—not firmly enough by any parties to the swirling complexities of the post-*Roe* moral and political order. The land cannot be said yet to lie in favor of the pro-life movement, whose refusal ever to give up led to the

William Murchison, a former syndicated columnist, is a senior editor of the *Human Life Review*. He will soon finish his book on moral restoration in our time.

overthrow of *Roe*. Nor can that same land be said to lie in favor of those who continue to assert, with practiced skill, the preeminence of a woman's right to say what goes on with her body.

We cannot yet know the ways, and they are likely various, in which this matter is going to end up. One would think anyway, when so much has been won on behalf of unborn life, that it would be, let's just say misguided, to despair that no complete and final victory is in sight.

There's room for discouragement, to be sure. Take Kansas, and its voters' rejection, August 2, of an amendment which would have overturned a 2019 Kansas Supreme Court decision that discovered a right to abortion in the state's 161-year-old constitution. Take the victory of pro-choice Democrat Pat Ryan August 23 in a special House election in New York, where, according to Ryan, "Choice was on the ballot, and tonight choice and freedom won."

The boastful language of other "reproductive freedom" advocates doesn't help a lot either. Democratic strategist Tom Bonior writes in the *New York Times* of how in his 28 years of analyzing elections, he's never seen the like of women's—pro-choice women's—response to the *Dobbs* decision. "Women are registering to vote in numbers I've never witnessed," he declares. "I've run out of superlatives to describe how different this moment is." Democrats, to en flesh his vision, could upend early Republican expectations of taking back Congress in this midterm cycle featuring widespread voter disaffection from progressive headship. As Iowa Democratic Congresswoman Cynthia Axne wrote in the *Des Moines Register*: "Reproductive rights and the health care rights of women are on the ballot this November."

There's no reason or right to suppose that Justice Samuel Alito's incisive logic and clarity as he spoke for the Court's 6-3 majority in *Dobbs* rendered abortion rights as quaint as a quilting party. Heated and costly struggles lie ahead. This expectation touches not only the overthrow of the *Roe* Court's misbegotten venture into Social Justiceland, but equally the dislocations that mission put immediately in play.

A 21st-century democracy is ill-prepared to grapple with a profoundly moral question: for that matter, with the range of moral questions playing themselves out in social media and politics, such as transgender rights, affirmative action, and the use of guns. In a moral debate, you need moral premises. A plebiscite or referendum won't get the job done. Neither will a brilliantly crafted constitutional exposition. I have long suspected that the vast majority of people who follow the Court care more what side the justices come down on than they care about the Court's power of reasoning. (I have noticed the scandalous tendency even in myself, if you can imagine such a thing!)

Ross Douthat, in a *New York Times* column titled "The New Politics of

Abortion,” sums it up: With *Roe* out of the way, “the pro-life movement now has to adapt to the democratic contest that it sought.” Like it or not, “you have to deal with public opinion as it actually exists.” That would include opinions such as Nancy Rommelmann, writing for Bari Weiss’s “Common Sense” online newsletter, elicited on a post-election trip to Kansas. Mike Roggero, a Trump voter in 2016, and a “no” voter on the amendment question, said to her, “I would probably never get an abortion if I was a woman, or ask my significant other to have an abortion, but I believe that it is their right to do it. I am a Republican but very much on the fence now and leaning more independent.” Likewise Artie Scholes, taking his own stand for personal choice: “I think some of those [“no” votes] are gun people. Like, ‘I don’t want you to take my gun. I’m not going to tell you what to do with your body.’” Live and let die, to play off the Ian Fleming title.

William A. Galston, in the *Wall Street Journal*, highlighted the complexities of the matter: “Most voters accept abortion in some circumstances but not others, and candidates who appear dogmatic or extreme will pay a price at the polls. By a margin of 25 points, voters favor protections for abortion in their state constitutions—a position backed by most demographic groups and even by one-third of Republicans.”

Which leaves us . . . where? No further along in the protection of unborn life than before the U.S. Supreme Court at last told the truth about *Roe v. Wade*? The legal/constitutional truth, I mean? That *Roe*—to wit—was an “egregious” decision, inviting dismissal from the constitutional order, as pretending to show us, and enforce the consequences of showing, a right that *Roe*’s 7-2 majority had dreamed up?

I think we need quickly to rid ourselves of the notion that, whatever the outcome in Kansas, the overthrow of *Roe*, in *Dobbs*, was a case equivalent to that of the dog who finally caught the car he was chasing. It was no such thing.

Dobbs was the precondition of our coming at last to grips, as a nation, as a culture, with the immensity of the right-to-life question. *Dobbs* summons us to look around, as did Alec Guinness, in the catastrophic final scene of *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, upon the consequences of moral miscalculation. Brought to his senses by the sudden knowledge of his responsibility for an unplanned, unforeseen debacle, Guinness’s stiff-upper-lip British officer character says in bewilderment: “What have I done?”

There is no profounder question to ask in the context of moral restoration. What have I done? What have *we* done? Then: What do we do about it?

Who under the sun could expect a panel of jurists, howsoever eminent, to provide the answers? The answers will be a long time in coming. And I hate

to mention it, but they may never be clear as day. On the other hand, the time to start sorting through the evidence, some of which we may not yet have at hand, is the time we are living in.

Dobbs, despite widespread misunderstanding, encouraged I can only suppose by some opponents of the decision, didn't outlaw abortion; it left abortion policy to the decision of the voters of every state. The national policy *Roe* was supposed to establish went away. We went back to basics. The people of each state—including the people of Kansas—could establish their own policies: pro, con, or, just as often, mixed, ambiguous, uncertain.

Dobbs thus restored what we could call the *status quo ante bellum*—the condition of things before the war that the Court precipitated by canceling state abortion laws seen as compromising a woman's "right" to bodily autonomy. It is a perverse way of viewing things. The pre-*Roe* abortion laws were enacted, I am guessing, out of the vision range of most voters, and with other agendas in mind, such as protecting women from those now-famous back-alley butchers. Women's 14th-Amendment rights were not at issue. Legislators can have worried little about political backlash when they passed laws that, broadly speaking, gave unborn life the stature it had enjoyed since early Christian times. That the unborn were really *persons* in their own right, ready to join the rest of us persons upon their emergence from the womb, was hardly a troublesome point, from a political standpoint. Feelings of responsibility for their protection shielded the great majority of the unborn.

Not so now. It's half a century since Justice Harry Blackmun, with the backing of six male colleagues, proclaimed the new, supposedly enlightened version of what women were due in the society of the 20th century—namely, personal latitude, personal choice un-dependent on the views of others, especially male others. A multitude of women, over the past half-century, have grown very accustomed, thank you, to the opportunities of deciding this or that, in an atmosphere of freedom such as their mothers or grandmothers, certainly their great-grandmothers, could never have imagined.

Meanwhile, moral codes binding on persons of both sexes have eroded. The idea of duties owed God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of *all things* visible and invisible (as the Nicene Creed cogently put it) collides with more appealing ideas—duties we owe ourselves, delights just waiting for us to experience. With no one allowed to get in our way. Got that? No one!

Shall we back off a bit for a running start? We need to consider as a society, as a people, the question of whether our premises—the notions and understandings by which we live—are valid or whether, having grown outdated, they can go out with the trash. We think the politics of the moment matter more than anything else. Thus we have to take over Congress! We have to

throw out the bums now in control so as to install new bums who will pass better laws and enact more wholesome regulations. We hope . . .

I think we think this way because our political and governmental assumptions have led us to think thus. Political power is power over others, and if we use that power adroitly, we will surely have our way, and the nation will be saved; and maybe more unborn children will emerge intact from the womb. More? That's the best we can do? What about all?

"All" isn't envisioned in what a noted ex-president has called the art of the deal. A deal, in democratic political terms, is some for me, some for you, in proportion as I or you bring to bear more shrewdness or plain old-fashioned power.

I make no argument against democratic politics, which are more wholesome any day in the week than authoritarian politics. I argue only against staking deeply moral outcomes on the numbers spewed out by voting machines or tallied by a sergeant at arms; reflective as they are of emotions, deals, and perpetually shifting alliances. Not to mention, *vide* 2022, personalities of one kind and another!

There probably is no better short-run way of dealing with the post-*Roe* world than that of making the most—as Ross Douthat suggests—of the hand that world has dealt. That would mean accepting the realities of democratic politics, and framing immediate political measures in terms of those realities—all the while driving home, in discourse of every kind, the immemorial idea of moral reality as preeminent: right above wrong, truth above falsehood and deceit.

There is much, in our time, to be taught about moral truth. There is much necessary to re-learn. We have forgotten much over recent years. The room is dark. For God's sake, would someone put the lights back on?! Would someone at the very least locate a match or two?

No one can know whether and to what extent the moral understandings of a century ago, and earlier—with their emphasis on human duty and responsibility, as opposed to personal fulfillment—can successfully be restored. But it seems plain the effort must commence without delay. What people believe they should do—because it is the right thing to do—is a consideration more powerful than what the government tells them to do, on whatever grounds.

The pro-life cause in the 21st century consists in continuing, against hardship and rebuke—including political rebuke—to proclaim the moral worthiness of life yet unborn. That a Court or a Congress might buy into such a duty is logically consequent upon the nation's antecedent understanding of duty and love, and its attachment to those virtues.

We are not there, when it comes to abortion, nor anyplace close. Not yet.

“Liberty to Do What?”

[On June 1, 2022, the Human Life Foundation hosted a panel discussion inspired by George McKenna’s “The Odd Couple: Freedom and Liberty” (published in the Fall 2021 edition of the Human Life Review). McKenna, who began the evening with a summary of his essay, was joined by Rusty Reno, editor of *First Things* and former professor of theology at Creighton University, and Hadley Arkes, professor emeritus at Amherst College and founding director of the James Wilson Institute in Washington D.C., whose mission is “to recover, and to teach again, those anchoring truths that provided for the American Founders the moral ground of the law.” We reprint here their opening remarks—preamble to a riveting and enriching conversation, which can be accessed and viewed on our website at <https://humanlifereview.com/liberty-to-do-what/>—Editor]

George McKenna:

Two words, “freedom” and “liberty,” are often used interchangeably. In my essay I have given them very different meanings. “Liberty” is the easy one to define because we all associate it with “rights,” notably “the right to do what you please.” We may soften the formulation by adding, “as long as you don’t harm others in the doing of it,” but the core of it is self-oriented. It is the language of individualism.

“Freedom” is harder to define. It has moral connotations that place limits on what we are allowed to do. Why, then, call it “freedom”? Aristotle’s teleology helps us understand. A human being is a very special animal, one who speaks (not just grunts, barks, or whinnies) and lives in a community (not a herd). What is the end, the *telos*, of a human being? It is *to live happily with other human beings in a speaking community*. It is not a momentary high but a settled state of fulfillment proper alone to humans. We are most free, then, when we are able to hit that virtuous bull’s-eye (Aristotle’s metaphor) toward which our very nature is oriented. We are least free when we give ourselves over to drugs, drunkenness, pornography, and other social vices that drag us down from our humanity. We pity people in these situations because we know that they are not free; they are slaves.

Unlike Freedom, “Liberty” is a more recent arrival in Western political thought; historians usually place it somewhere in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. The key distinction between the two terms is that Liberty, unlike Freedom, does not mean liberty *from* but liberty *to*. Liberty to do what? Well, pretty much whatever you want, unless—libertarians are always careful to add this—you harm someone else by doing it. Liberty, then, does not have a teleological component. It does not necessarily seek the moral elevation of human beings. Libertarians don’t make value judgments about the content of what they’re defending. That is why they are always ready to

defend your right to attend Mass along with your child's right to attend the Drag Queen Story Hour.

America was "conceived in liberty," Abraham Lincoln reminded us in his Gettysburg Address. Compared to that of other nations, American government has had a fairly light touch. Socialism is so unpopular here that even *de facto* socialists run away from the term, preferring to be called "progressives." A motto of uncertain origin, "That government is best which governs least," has a distinctly American ring. One famous American, Henry David Thoreau, went it one better by saying, "That government is best which governs not at all."

All of which (except for Thoreau's hyperbole) is fine. In this essay I have gone to some length to identify liberty as the perennial—and irreplaceable—American ideal, the right, as General Eisenhower said, "to live as you please, provided you don't get in someone's hair." But here again comes the question: Liberty to do *what*? The "what" used to be negotiated largely at the level of "civil society," the non-governmental community of interests and morals. Government did not need to play much of a role because the mores of society did most of the work. Those moral lessons were taught in church, of course, but also in the home and school. Even children's literature and entertainment reflected those mores. Historically, in the West at least, social mores were deeply informed by Judeo-Christianity. Even the non-religious were influenced by its moral codes.

Today, when those social mores are coming under increasing challenge, some who embrace them are trying out different ways of spreading the word that we can only be *truly* free by striving toward the *telos*, the end to which our human nature is oriented: a life of speaking and acting together in a vital community. This is a Freedom agenda because it tells us what a life of freedom should be like. It conforms with what Eisenhower called "the dignity of the human soul."

But how to spread that news? How to infuse it, or reinfuse it, into our social-political culture? For Rod Dreher, direct involvement in the current political system is a "waste of energy." His "Benedict Option" is to build "alternative institutions" or "parallel structures," much as St. Benedict did in the sixth century amid the ruins of the Roman Empire. In somewhat the same vein we have the so-called "relocaters," the families that have packed up and left Northern cities for faith communities in the South like Ave Maria in Florida or Veritatis Splendor in Texas. I, for one, wish them well. But there is *another* part of me that also wishes for a large segment of our population to *stay home and fight from where they live right now*—like Seattle, Sacramento, Chicago, New York, or, yes, even Washington, D.C. If they make their case well, they may find more allies than they could have imagined.

This is a real fight, with real enemies. Abortion has killed more than sixty

million children since *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. Hard-core pornography is a few clicks away from any child with a cell phone. Recreational marijuana is already legal in seventeen states and the number is expected to grow as sales provide much-needed state revenues. Gender is now considered to be “assigned” at birth, so it can be “reassigned” later by request. Physician-assisted suicide is available in nine states and the District of Columbia, and court cases are pending on whether druggists can be forced to fill death prescriptions. And then there are the “Drag Queen Story Hours” in dozens of American libraries. All of this is protected by powerful, well-financed lobbies and their supporters in government and the press.

These, then, are the enemies of Freedom. They must be fought. But here is the question: *While fighting them do we also need to fight some of our friends?* What I’m talking about now are people who might be called libertarian conservatives, people who may share our moral beliefs but insist that we never, in any setting, have a right to seek the suppression of contrary views.

David French is senior editor of *The Dispatch*, a conservative online journal, and a columnist for *The Atlantic*. He loves America and has spent time in its military service. He is also a devout Christian, has brought lawsuits to defend the civil liberties of Christians, and he hates pornography. But French is a libertarian; he fights our cultural enemies with the weapons perfected by John Stuart Mill. He believes in unfettered freedom of expression, a public forum open to all points of view, and, as libertarians like to say, a level playing field. But what he would rule out in any public debate are judgments about the moral content of the other side’s position. This approach, which French calls “viewpoint neutrality,” is the hill on which he is willing to die.

In my essay I brought my readers into a 2019 debate between David French and Sohrab Ahmari, formerly the op-ed editor of the *New York Post* and now the founding editor of *Compact*, an online journal. What stands out in it is Ahmari’s adamant refusal to accept “viewpoint neutrality.” Using the terms I defined at the beginning of this essay, it seems clear that French favors liberty while Ahmari emphasizes the Aristotelian goal of freedom, which requires more than just the right rules of debate; it puts on trial the moral content of what it is that is being proposed. But to do that, said French, would be a “disaster.”

The contest between the two kinds of conservatism, moral and libertarian, seems to be irresolvable. But is it? At one point both debaters seemed attracted to the moderator’s suggestion that the two positions didn’t have to be “either/or,” but could be “both/and.” Neither of them followed up on that, but perhaps there is something to it. No champion of freedom would rule out the tactical use of French’s weaponry, such as demanding equal time or objecting to bias from the debate moderator. And why not? In warfare you use

any weapon that comes to hand. But presumably he would make sure that the thrust of his case didn't depart from the underlying moral binary: This is good and that is evil. There are some ways of living that should be preserved, or revived, or encouraged. There are other ways of living that have already caused great harm to our republic, so they need to be resisted and repelled with energy, determination, and good will.

Rusty Reno:

I'm not sure that George McKenna's distinction between "liberty" and "freedom" holds in every respect, but it is without doubt useful, for it highlights the difference between the classical liberal or libertarian outlook and the view of a free life articulated by figures such as Aristotle (as well as St. Paul). But instead of differences between liberty and freedom, I want to emphasize similarities. And I'll do so not to dispute McKenna's conviction that we must recover the substantive foundations for freedom, but in order to reinforce it.

Let me begin by venturing an ecumenical definition of freedom, one that ought to appeal to the most rock-ribbed libertarians: It means doing what you want to do, or, to use McKenna's formulation, doing as you please. Aristotle does not put it this way, but that's the implication of his view of freedom. After all, the virtuous man, by virtue of his virtue (as it were), wants to do that which conduces to his flourishing. Moreover, in light of the fact that human nature is a real thing, the vicious man can never entirely want to do that which runs counter to his nature.

Put differently, the free man is undivided. That which he seeks accords with who he is. The virtuous man seeks fitting goals without the impediments of vice. By contrast, the enslaved man is divided. This is the way St. Paul puts the matter in the seventh chapter of his Letter to the Romans. "I do not do what I want," he laments, "but I do the very thing I hate." He is in bondage to what he calls "the law of sin and death," and freedom is to be found in "the law of the spirit of life," which is revealed in Jesus Christ. This is not the same as Aristotle's view of virtue and its formation in a well-ordered community, but St. Paul's approach runs along the same lines. We can only do as we please if we're pleased to do that which is right, true, and good. This is the case because it is in our nature to do certain things (Aristotle). Or, in an existential key, because we're called to live in a certain way (St. Paul). In view of these deep facts, we can only be at one with ourselves, pulling in the same direction and without debilitating friction, if we think and act in accord with our nature and our calling. All of this is just another way of stating that we're free to the degree that we're aiming at the mark, as McKenna puts it.

* * * * *

We are living in a paradoxical time. By any measure, society jealously guards our liberties. Since the end of World War II, our courts have deepened and expanded the First Amendment's limitations on government power. Over the last two generations, a quasi-official doctrine of non-judgmentalism has dramatically weakened social control. More than one hundred years ago, John Stuart Mill urged that we provide room and scope for "experiments in living." His hopes have been realized to a degree my grandparents' generation would have thought impossible.

And yet the present-moment expanded liberty is characterized far more by bondage than freedom. More than 100,000 died of drug overdose last year. This death toll contributes to the overall decline in life expectancy in our very rich country. The cultural vital signs are also bad. Marriage rates are down, while rates of illegitimacy are up. These reflect free choices. Nobody is forcing young people not to marry. But both polling and common sense tell us that the trend in choices runs contrary to what people actually want. (Populism and angry politics have roots in this clash between apparent expansions in liberty and profound dissatisfaction in the general population.)

Even those at the top of society are in the grip of powerful fears. Talented young people are afraid of making the slightest misstep as they navigate the gauntlet to gain the right credentials, honors, and internships. Far from a culture of freedom, anything remotely carefree or adventuresome seems impossibly remote for society's "winners." Polling suggests that the rising generation views the future with foreboding. This does not surprise me, given the constant drumbeat of apocalyptic warnings about the coming "climate catastrophe" and relentless denunciations of our society as rooted in countless injustices.

The founders of the American republic recognized that a free society requires free citizens capable of self-government. If this is so, then the various forms of bondage I have outlined suggest that our American traditions of liberty are imperiled. It is telling that university students who claim to be "triggered" and demand "safe spaces" summarily dismiss classically liberal ideals of free and open debate. It's also telling that young people fearful of their economic prospects call for socialism. And that those convinced that we're on the brink of "climate catastrophe" are happy to sign off on extensive measures of social control. And that after an onslaught of propaganda about the impending wave of death caused by the pandemic, the university class (or what a young friend calls the "laptop class") denounced dissent and demanded to be locked down. As Thomas Hobbes recognized, fear is the great enemy of freedom, which is why he stokes it in order to induce men to give up their liberties. (St. Paul takes the same view—fear of divine punishment makes us slaves of the law, while fear of death makes us slaves of worldly powers.)

As I argued in *Resurrecting the Idea of a Christian Society*, freedom is not created by permission. All the rights in the world become empty if we are abandoned to our passing whims, or, worse, to our persistent and gnawing fears. True freedom arises from our loves and loyalties, our convictions and commitments. Even a man devoted to a falsehood enjoys a greater degree of freedom than someone who lacks passions and attachments. Those who worship idols are more likely to demand liberty than the secularists of the present day who seek nothing other than health, wealth, and pleasure.

In a society like ours, which is increasingly atomized and demoralized, the position taken by David French and others is worse than irrelevant. “Viewpoint neutrality” is a simple-minded shibboleth, not a serious position. One cannot (and should not) be neutral with respect to justice and other substantive goods. When a judge disciplines himself to be impartial, he is doing so out of deep conviction that it will serve justice.

Moreover, notions such as “viewpoint neutrality” reinforce the general atmosphere of moral relativism that undermines the loves and loyalties that give rise to freedom. This atmosphere leaves our fellow citizens adrift, vulnerable to fears that make them more and more inclined to enlarge the powers of the state, the better to protect them.

I find myself exasperated by conservatives who recoil when Sohrab Ahmari and others speak in a strong voice about central truths, not the least of which concern what it means to be a man and a woman. Freedom is a watchword for American conservatives, and limited government has always been an important plank in the modern conservative approach to political life in this country. We are right to leave as much as possible to the discretion of individuals and wisdom communities rather than vesting authority in remote technocrats. But that discretion and wisdom—and with them the capacity for self-government—is imperiled by a flesh-eating liberalism that roots out all appeals to metaphysical and transcendent truth. If we’re to restore our culture of freedom (and with it our liberties), then our first task will be to affirm the truths we are called to obey rather than so-called “meanings” that we invent and choose. I’m encouraged by how the *Dobbs* decision apparently will go. It signals that our legal system is once again open to the truth about the sanctity of the lives of the unborn. Let’s build from there.

Hadley Arkes:

I should not neglect to mention the rare bond that George and I have: We both spent our first two years (in my case three) as undergraduates at the University of Illinois in Chicago. It was located at Navy Pier: five blocks of warehouses along Lake Michigan that were converted into a college in 1946, when the

soldiers came home and, in many cases with the help of the G.I. Bill, headed to college. The university was called “Harvard on the Rocks.” And it contained so many smart kids, ready to work hard, and often the first child in their family to go to college.

In those days the Cook County Democratic Party, headed by Richard J. Daley, would not have tolerated the election of a city attorney who refused to prosecute people for shoplifting and even more serious crimes. It was a time, that is, before “liberal governance” turned our cities into ruins of civil order. Today, as the hand of the law is held back, we see stores on lovely Michigan Avenue forced to close because they cannot sustain themselves through an unimpeded and unpunished wave of destruction and shoplifting.

Nor did we find back then, in Daley’s Democratic Party, a political class who affected not to know the difference between males and females. Even more critically, Daley’s Democratic Party had not yet taken as its central defining issue—the issue on which all other interests hinged—the right to destroy the living child in the womb. But of course legalized abortion has been part of a drive, rising in momentum, to liberate sexuality from all manner of moral and legal restraints, and even from nature itself. And now we have something never seen before in my lifetime: a party of the Left that has virtually liberated itself even from tests of truth, with adherents who have now made themselves incapable of having any serious conversation about *the truth*, whether the topic is climate change, or the human standing of the child in the womb, or those things that, grounded in nature, must ever distinguish males from females. Instead, the Democratic Party simply puts down a story line and holds to it—and pretends that it’s true or that the truth doesn’t finally matter. Following Brett Kavanaugh’s nomination to the Supreme Court, life-destroying charges are leveled against him by a woman, and we’re enjoined to credit them because they are “her truth.” Trying to confirm the identity of voters is labeled an attack on democracy; killing babies is called “reproductive health.” “War is peace, peace is war”—even the world of Orwell’s *1984* dystopia seems a mere warm-up for what has come to pass in our own time.

But I will take my entry into George’s paper by turning to the opening sentence in Aristotle’s *Politics*, a sentence that still delivers news to people with pricey educations: that every act we take—whether we’re seeking change or deciding to remain still—every practical act implies our understanding of the things as good or bad, better or worse. Is it better to go to work or to remain idle? And is it better to work at a legitimate occupation or one that is shady or forbidden in the law? The point that has been persistently missed is that when we are speaking in moral terms about the things that are good or bad, right or wrong, just or unjust, we are not dealing with foggy ideals located in

the sky, but with the ground of our most *practical* judgments.

We begin then with the recognition that acts can be directed to good or bad ends; but then follows the further recognition (coming perhaps with Kant) that there is nothing we can name—no act, no *thing*—that cannot be part of a means-end chain leading to wrongful harms. I can use the skills of driving to drive an ambulance—or a getaway car for the Mafia. I can use a pen to make a donation or to defraud. I can hit golf balls with vengeance through the windows of a neighbor.

And so when people in the Founding generation of our nation raised the banner of “liberty,” it was instantly paired with a warning about “license”; meaning the misuse of that freedom when our liberty or our freedom is directed to a wrongful end. But we recognize liberty and freedom only in *creatures of reason*, who can impart a moral purpose to their acts. Cows and horses cannot have property rights. Rights flow only to moral agents, beings who can recognize the moral limits that must always be at work—beings who may come to recognize the things they may never claim the right to do, even in the name of their freedom.

I think that what George may be pointing us to here is the way in which the courts, over the last 50 years, have given us a truncated understanding of liberty precisely by detaching liberty from the moral test of the ends for which that liberty is used. And so the Supreme Court in *Roe* and its successors puts the accent on autonomous individuals prizing their liberty, and persistently erases from the screen, say, the unborn child, the victim of that exercise of freedom in abortion. More recently we are told by Justice Scalia’s successor on the Supreme Court (Justice Gorsuch) in *Bostock* that if a man simply asserts, as an act of will, that he has changed his sex, everyone around him is obliged to respect that judgment or put themselves and their employers in legal peril, for they could be creating a “hostile work environment.” Here we see liberty utterly detached from the grounds on which rational beings rightly claim it and respect its moral limits.

The judgment of every act will pivot then on our understanding of the end to which it is directed. And so John Marshall famously said that anyone who publishes a libel in this country can be *sued or indicted*: sued for personal damages, or punished for inciting hatred to a religious group and bringing on a riot. In other words, even with the First Amendment, from the early days of our nation it was understood that all uses of speech are *not categorically innocent*. Speech can be used to carry out assaults, as with threatening phone calls or crosses burned outside the home of a black family. And when a “speech act” is used in that way, we try to gauge it as we would any other act, by asking whether the hurt it inflicted was inflicted *with or without justification*.

But now we've reached a point where conservative writers, and even conservative judges, tell us that "hate speech" is protected under the First Amendment. And so even Justice Scalia thought he was obliged to strike down a law that barred the burning of crosses, and conservative justices moved, with the same understanding, to protect the right of a man to picket the funeral of a dead marine with signs saying "God hates fags" or "Thank God for dead soldiers." The conservatives have been so alarmed by the repression of the Left, getting more and more aggressive, that they have come to think that the best line of defense is to insist that there are no standards for judging the difference between legitimate speech and the speech that assaults, or the speech that just poisons the climate of civility for serious discussion.

All of this finds its expression in two recent decisions written by one of my best friends on the Court. Justice Alito stated in *Matal v. Tam* that a law restricting certain uses of speech "offends a bedrock First Amendment principle: Speech may not be banned on the ground that it expresses ideas that offend." A year later came the case of Jack Phillips, the Masterpiece Cakeshop baker who refused to make a cake to celebrate a same-sex wedding. In that case Justices Alito and Gorsuch, in a concurring opinion, extended the new doctrine of conservative relativism to the domain of religion: "Just as it is the 'proudest boast of our free speech jurisprudence' that we protect speech that we hate, it must be the proudest boast of our free exercise jurisprudence that we protect religious beliefs that we find offensive."

But what does that mean: to be "offensive" and "offend"? Forty years ago I was invited by the ACLU to debate the "right" of self-styled Nazis to stage a march in Skokie, Illinois, a Chicago suburb where many Jews who had survived the death camps made their home. David Hamlin of the ACLU declared that the First Amendment "protects all ideas—popular or despised, good or bad . . ." In Hamlin's translation, to be despised was merely to be "unpopular." It was no part of his understanding that certain things may be in principle despicable. And now this position of the ACLU seems to be settling in as the position even of conservatives on the Supreme Court.

With the Nazis in Skokie, Hamlin said that *we must be free to choose the Nazis*. We are free, that is, to choose the party that would end free elections and our very freedom to choose—as it would remove the First Amendment and the whole regime of constitutional rights. This is what Lincoln called the degradation of the democratic dogma: that we are free to choose anything—even slavery or genocide—as long as we do it in a democratic way with the vote of a majority and the trappings of legality. And this is what some of our conservative lawyers call a jurisprudence of "neutral" rules, as when Justice Kavanaugh said, in the oral argument over the *Dobbs* case, that the Constitution is

“neutral” on the matter of abortion—that people in the states are free to be pro-life or install abortion on demand. But can it really be the case that the deep principles of this regime, the principles that underlie the Constitution, would be indifferent to genocide or to a supposed “right” to take innocent life *without justification*?

And so as we find ourselves on the threshold of overruling *Roe v. Wade*, the conservative movement is on the edge of serious schism, which will divide us along shocking lines, now made brutally clear. Conservatives are facing the choice between two different paths. One side goes this way: We look back to the brief offered by the lawyers for Texas in *Roe v. Wade*, where they drew on the most updated evidence from embryology, woven with principled reasoning, to establish that the offspring in the womb has never been anything but human from its first moments and never merely a part of the mother. If the Court made that anchoring, substantive point, it could then send the matter back to the states to ponder just how to reconcile the taking of this small human life with their other laws of homicide. For the laws of homicide should ever be indifferent to the size and age of the victims. The wrongful killing of a small child is not a lesser murder than the killing of an older, heavier man.

On the other hand, the Court may send the matter back to the states on the terms already set down by even the conservatives on the Court: that the question of when human life begins—or when the being in the womb can be regarded as a human—cannot be answered by judges. It can be answered only by a “value judgment” made by people on just how much they happen to “value” that living thing in the womb as a human being.

One friend, a committed Originalist, has described the latter approach as “cringeworthy.” But that is the groove in which the conservative justices seem to have settled themselves as they approach the decision in *Dobbs*, for this is the doctrine that has been set in place now over the past 40 years.

The telling mark here comes from Justice Alito: In his draft opinion he has thoroughly shown what is indefensible in principle in every argument that claims the child in the womb is anything less than a human being. And yet he carefully avoids drawing the conclusion. He will not go beyond referring to the offspring in the womb as a “potential” human being, even though he knows that the line makes no sense: If there were nothing already alive and growing in the womb, an abortion would be no more relevant as a surgery than a tonsillectomy. What, then, prevents six conservative justices, vetted through the Federalist Society, from being willing to speak that one inescapable truth: that the child in the womb has never been anything other than a human life from its first moments. The answer, I think, reveals itself: If the

justices pronounced that key truth, they would take from voters and legislators in the states the power to make their own judgments on when human life begins—and on just how much protection to withhold from those small human beings in wombs. At the same time, the justices would lay the predicate for the Congress and the federal courts to act when the protections of the law are withdrawn from this whole class of small human beings in the Blue states.

But if this is indeed the route the justices end up taking in *Dobbs*, we ought to be clear that the conservative justices will have talked themselves into the fantasy that federal judges can deal with abortion as some purified matter of “law” quite detached from any need to judge the substance of the moral question before them. Even worse, they will have convinced themselves that conservative jurisprudence must be willing to affirm, as an anchoring maxim, a radical falsehood: that federal judges may claim to know nothing officially, as judges, about the most objective truths of embryology about the nature of the child in the womb. My melancholy judgment, offered with regret, is that a conservative jurisprudence that *finds its ground in the willingness to accept this radical untruth* is a jurisprudence that cannot give a coherent account of itself. What does it offer then against the full panoply of radical untruths that the Left is willing to unfold for us? If we think now that the Left in this country is unmoored, what will we think on the day after *Roe v. Wade* is overturned, when we strip away the cover and see, I’m afraid, the crippling moral divisions among conservatives, running down to the very root of things?



Hadley Arkes, George McKenna, Rusty Reno, and Maria McFadden Maffucci

Pro-life Trailblazer:

The Life and Legacy of Vicki Thorn

William Doino Jr.

When Vicki Thorn died in April 2022—suddenly, at the age of 72—the pro-life community lost one of its genuine pioneers. As the founder of Project Rachel, the healing ministry of the Catholic Church in the United States, Vicki helped women and men bearing the unhealed emotional, psychological, and spiritual wounds of past abortions to receive God’s forgiveness and overcome trauma. The outpouring of tributes following her death expressed the immense gratitude proliferators feel for her ministry, as well as their desire to expand it.

“Vicki’s life and work,” said Archbishop Jerome Listecki of her home diocese in Milwaukee, stand as “an unwavering and unconditional defense of life at all stages, and to the mercy of God’s love.” Pro-life Wisconsin honored her as a woman who brought more people harmed by abortion “to a place of healing than any human being that has walked the earth.” The University of Notre Dame, which had awarded Vicki its prestigious *Evangelium Vitae* Medal, praised her as a “witness to the unconditional love and mercy that lies at the heart of the Culture of Life.” And the Pontifical Academy for Life, of which Vicki was a member, declared, “On behalf of all the Academicians we thank Vicki for her life witness. May she rest in peace.”¹

Were Vicki Thorn known only for Project Rachel, her reputation as a pro-life trailblazer would be secure. But Vicki was also a faithful and dynamic Catholic; a spiritual guide and counselor; an active opponent of prejudice; a supporter of interfaith relations; a gifted teacher and speaker; and a wife and mother of six, who strove for personal holiness and inspired others to do the same.

No one knew that better than William Thorn, Vicki’s husband of fifty years. Now a professor emeritus of Journalism at Marquette University, he spoke with me at length about Vicki.

A Small Town with a Big Heart

To understand Vicki, William told me, one has to begin with her childhood in Little Falls, Minnesota. The Catholic high school she attended there, run

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by the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, educated young Catholic women who lived nearby, but also served as a boarding school for female students from abroad. Vicki befriended many of them, broadening her knowledge of other cultures. That experience, combined with what the Sisters taught her about service to the poor and marginalized, affirmation of the unique worth of every person, and faith in a personal and loving God, gave Vicki a “very Franciscan outlook,” said William.

Vicki drew strength from her Catholic beliefs, especially when she was confronted with an unexpected crisis in high school. A fellow student confided to Vicki that she had become pregnant twice; though her firstborn had been welcomed by adoptive parents, her second child was aborted. Vicki’s friend was in anguish as she described the wrenching events leading up to the abortion—which included abuse and coercion—and ended with a heart-breaking lament: “I can live with the adoption, but I can’t live with the abortion.”²

Vicki never forgot those words, but finding help for her friend was a challenge in the pre-*Roe* era, and Vicki’s friend feared she would be shunned if she spoke more openly about her abortion. Vicki comforted her as best she could, prayed with her, and encouraged her to seek peace through the Sacrament of Reconciliation (also known as Confession). As vital as Confession was, however, Vicki soon learned it was just the beginning of a healing process that could take years to complete. She also came to believe that her Church needed to do much more for the women, men, and families whose lives had been shattered by abortion.

Marriage and a New Mission

After Vicki graduated, she attended the University of Minnesota, where she met her future husband—“at noon Mass at the campus Newman center,” William recalls affectionately. William obtained his Ph.D. in mass communication, while Vicki majored in psychology—largely because of her high school friend’s harrowing abortion. Consoling her friend had been a life-changing event, leading Vicki to become a certified trauma counselor and spiritual director.

The newlyweds moved to Milwaukee, where William began teaching at Marquette and Vicki became the Respect Life Director for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. Her arrival there coincided with the early aftermath of *Roe v. Wade*. When the American bishops issued their 1975 pastoral plan for pro-life activities, largely in response to *Roe*, Vicki was impressed by their three-pronged approach. They advocated “womb-to-tomb” education about the sanctity of human life; promoted pro-life legislation; and offered pastoral care for anyone vulnerable to abortion or wounded by one. At first the bishops were only able to implement their first two goals: The last and most

innovative, concerning pastoral care for abortion's aftermath, was delayed because of its novelty and complexity. Vicki saw this as an opportunity for her to help the bishops fulfill their third goal. Pro-life scholar Mary FioRito, one of Vicki's best friends, describes what happened next:

At her kitchen table in Wisconsin, Vicki drew up the outline for a groundbreaking program of accompaniment and healing for those impacted by abortion. As she did with everything else in her life, Vicki asked God's guidance in naming the program. Opening the Bible, her eyes fell on a passage from the book of Jeremiah: "Thus says the Lord; in Ramah is heard the sound of sobbing, bitter weeping! Rachel mourns for her children, for her children—they are no more!" (Jer 31:15) Vicki now had the name for her program: Project Rachel.

The passage was appropriate in more ways than one. Not only did it powerfully capture the anguish of a woman who has lost her child, but it also offered forgiveness, and a path to peace and restoration. The verse continues, "Thus says the Lord: Cease your cries of weeping, hold back your tears! . . . There is hope for your future" (Jer 31:16-17).³

Vicki knew from the outset that, if Project Rachel were to succeed, it had to be a major team effort. That meant involving a wide array of experts and above all priests, whose role of bringing God's mercy and reconciliation through the Sacrament of Penance was indispensable.⁴

With the approval of her ordinary, in the fall of 1984, Vicki hosted the first Project Rachel training session, gathering priests, canon lawyers, spiritual directors, and medical professionals. Vicki encouraged the journalists present to take notes, but asked them to hold their stories until she had everything in place to make Project Rachel accessible. But a reporter for the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* who had a friend still suffering from abortion wanted to publicize the good news sooner. The next morning, Vicki was awakened by media wanting to interview her about the *Journal-Sentinel's* front-page article.

Vicki spent the next few days speaking to the media about every aspect of her new ministry. This was the moment when Project Rachel erupted onto the pro-life scene, but Vicki's vision—so new, so bold and so challenging—left both sides of the abortion divide unprepared and a little unnerved.

Confounding Expectations

Lydia LoCoco, who worked as an intern in Vicki's Respect Life Office, described Project Rachel's birth as a "lightning strike." Many Catholics "won't believe this," she told me, but back then "it was quite scandalous to even mention that someone had an abortion, much less advance the concept that in every abortion there are two victims."⁵

The abortion debate, then as now, was intense. But what Vicki did, said

Lydia, “is turn everything on its head so that people could discuss the subject and approach it with tenderness.”

That meant being “non-judgmental and compassionate,” added William, without compromising the Church’s pro-life teachings. In Vicki’s mind, there was never any conflict between the two, and she saw her approach as fully Catholic. Yet that’s not how everyone received it.

“Vicki met opposition to Project Rachel almost as soon as she began,” William recalled, “and some of it came from within the Church.” Certain Catholics thought Vicki’s ministry would make it easier for women to have abortions, since being “non-judgmental,” in their eyes, meant being morally lax. Others feared her ministry would elevate women at the expense of their unborn children, and still more felt that Vicki was trying to create special privileges for Catholics involved in grave sin.

Of course, these criticisms and apprehensions were unfounded. Project Rachel was created to address the acute, enduring pain of abortion for mothers (and fathers)—not to minimize it. It never placed mothers above their unborn children, but believed the loss of or harm to either was a direct assault upon human life and dignity. Precisely because of its compassionate approach toward serious sin, Project Rachel created more, not less, pro-life passion, especially among those it saved from the destructive consequences of abortion.⁶ Still, pockets of disapproval followed Vicki, sometimes even in Church.

The week Project Rachel was announced, a number of people stopped Vicki at Mass, chastising her for welcoming women who’d had an abortion. As jarring and offensive as their criticism was, Vicki never allowed it to shake her; for she knew that mercy, forgiveness, and restoration are at the heart of the Gospel, and *that* was what Project Rachel was all about.

If some proliferers didn’t understand Vicki, abortion-rights advocates were even more perplexed. In their minds, anyone opposing “choice” was by definition cold-hearted and condemnatory, so people like Vicki Thorn weren’t supposed to exist. Yet there she was, on television, in newspapers and at conferences, week after week, proclaiming Project Rachel’s unconditional love for anyone who had had an abortion, and offering its services for those in need.

The abortion industry didn’t know how to respond. At first, they tried to ignore Project Rachel, hoping it would fade away. When it didn’t, they tried to claim that abortions didn’t harm women, but that was rebutted by first-hand testimonies and medical evidence.⁷ Some even accused the women supported by Project Rachel of *not telling the truth about their suffering*—and simply repeating whatever they were told to say. That this baseless allegation continues to be made reveals how far pro-choice activists are willing to go to defend abortion and disparage its victims.

Undeterred, Vicki pressed on, gaining an increasing number of supporters. Among them was Olivia Gans Turner, who was one of the first women to join forces with Vicki in the 1980s after enduring her own devastating abortion. Today Turner directs American Victims of Abortion, which complements Project Rachel on a host of fronts, especially by providing expert testimony for pro-life legislation. When I asked Olivia about the attacks against the integrity of pro-life women trying to overcome their abortions, she replied:

I have spoken in all 50 states, and 17 countries abroad and I have never met a woman who, when she spoke to me sorrowfully about her abortion, was not speaking solely and directly from her own heart and her own life.

It is patronizing, ugly, and sad that there are those who still want to create a different narrative and disregard the testimonies of women who have courageously described what abortion did to them and how much they mourn the loss of their unborn child.

But when you have a culture as profoundly damaged as ours, Olivia continued, “you produce generations of people who try to make something that never can make sense seem reasonable. Vicki understood this and devoted her life to repairing that damage.”

Project Rachel’s Growth and Influence

Meanwhile, the new ministry continued to clear hurdles and make strides. After Vicki formalized Project Rachel as an official ministry of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, its name was trademarked. Project Rachel proved so effective that, following a multitude of requests, Vicki helped establish similar programs in many dioceses throughout America. In 1990, she founded the National Office of Post-Abortion Reconciliation and Healing to facilitate this process. By 2010, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee had transferred its trademark to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, which adopted the entire ministry and updated its name. “Project Rachel Ministry” (PRM) is now the official diocesan-based post-abortion healing ministry of the Catholic Church in the United States.

To supplement diocesan outreach, the USCCB has set up a website and a national helpline for those suffering the aftermath of an abortion.⁸ After speaking to a specially trained diocesan representative confidentially, the caller in need is then referred to a priest or licensed health professional for individual consultation or enrolled in group healing such as a support group or retreat. While each diocese varies in how it implements PRM, according to the local bishop’s directives, there are constants they all share: sacramental reconciliation and a network of services offering an integrated approach to post-abortive healing.

Consistent with Vicki’s vision, there is no time limit on when or how often

women and men can come to Project Rachel Ministry, nor is the PRM limited to Catholics. “Project Rachel Ministry is open to people of all faiths or no faith at all,” Mary McClusky, who helps direct PRM for the USCCB, told me. While a diocesan ministry always offers an authentically Catholic approach for those seeking one, and while the guidelines for the sacraments are maintained, there is a great deal of common ground between Catholics and non-Catholics, she said. Many healing opportunities address the grief and trauma experienced after abortion, and these are applicable to people of all beliefs. In addition, psychological counseling, under the guidance of PRM, can and has brought about spiritual renewal among many non-Catholics, and even inspired non-believers to embrace faith.

Project Rachel’s mission has also drawn major interest from other parts of the globe. During her life, Vicki traveled extensively to spread the message of diocesan abortion healing ministry, especially in countries and cultures with high abortion rates. It was often a struggle to break through, but the seeds she planted are now bearing fruit. Countries as distant as Romania and as repressive as China now have budding post-abortive ministries, thanks to Vicki’s determination.⁹

What Vicki started in her modest Wisconsin kitchen has resonated in ways that no one could have imagined. She always attributed Project Rachel’s astonishing success to prayer, the grace of God, and the sheer power of truth.

Trusting the Science and God’s Wondrous Creation

After counseling women traumatized by abortion for years, and seeing how connected they are to every pregnancy and relationship, she felt compelled to study the subject in depth and speak about it as often as she could.

Vicki delivered many talks on the “Biology of the Theology of the Body” (drawn from Pope St. John Paul’s insights into the “Theology of the Body”) to adults, and a slightly revised version for students in high school and college entitled “What They Didn’t Teach You in Sex-Ed.” Blending scientific data with the classic insights of theology, Vicki explained how men and women are inherently different, yet built to complement one another. She spoke about the biochemistry of sex, the upheaval of the sexual revolution, and the science of attraction.¹⁰ “One of Vicki’s real gifts was an ability to read complex scientific material and make it perfectly understandable to audiences of many ages,” said William. Among the facts she relayed to her audiences:

- Physically, psychologically, and emotionally, men and women are designed to bond with one partner, in long-term marital relationships, not with frequent, impermanent partners.
- When a woman and man conceive a child, their bodies undergo profound

biochemical changes and their cells become part of one another, as well as their child's, linking them for life in a unique and inextricable way.

- When women use artificial contraception, it can easily change what kind of men they are attracted to. As a result, when they stop taking the pill, or begin taking it after a relationship begins, it can radically alter the affection they have for their partner, provoking estrangement, heartbreak, and bewilderment.¹¹

Vicki's engaging talks made a world of difference to those that heard them. "I find that people are most receptive to the information and that knowing how complexly we are made and how we are truly changed in every act of intimacy reconfigures some of the lies of society," she said.¹²

Women were enlightened by her insights, but men even more so. Most expectant fathers, Vicki noted, have no idea that they, and not only their pregnant wives, undergo bodily changes that prepare them for fatherhood. In 2014, a groundbreaking study for the *American Journal of Human Biology* indicated that expectant dads undergo significant hormonal changes during a pregnancy, including a reduction in their testosterone levels, making them less aggressive and better caretakers.¹³ By 2020, the *New York Times* reported that "globally, study after study" has found similar results, and commented:

While news of this drop in testosterone is often greeted with groans of resignation from men—choose fatherhood and choose the road to emasculation, they think—some studies have suggested that the lower a man's testosterone, the more likely he is to release key reward and bonding hormones, namely oxytocin and dopamine, when interacting with his child. Caring for your child, therefore produces not only a strong bond but a neurochemical reward, inducing feelings of happiness, contentment and warmth—a welcome trade-off.

The *Times* also reported that brain changes of expectant fathers "mirrored those previously seen in new moms: certain areas within parts of the brain linked to attachment, nurturing, empathy and the ability to interpret and react appropriately to a baby's behavior."¹⁴

All of which Vicki conveyed when speaking about men, marriage, and child-rearing. "Learning that they have biological knowledge of the pregnancy of their partner and that their body is also changed by pregnancy opens their hearts to the marvel of creating new life," she said. Men are astonished to learn that "they are being hard wired to respond to ovulation as well as fatherhood," which "gives them a sense that the responsibility of fatherhood is not to be taken lightly."¹⁵

That the discoveries of modern science echo the truths of the Bible only strengthened Vicki's passion for proclaiming her Church's teachings. "It is the role of the Catholic Church to speak the truth of sexuality as God intended

it,” she affirmed, and it is a truth she lived out in her personal life. One of her happiest moments was when she, her husband, and all six of their children visited the Vatican to meet St. John Paul II, who blessed them and thanked Vicki abundantly for her “special work.”¹⁶

Vicki would often say that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made by God.” But when we disrupt His divine plan, and place our desires above His, negative consequences are bound to follow. In contrast, when we respect our bodies and follow God’s wondrous design for them, it strengthens society at large. Everyone benefits.

Project Rachel and the Post-*Roe* Era

Vicki Thorn did not live to see the dramatic overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, a goal she ardently desired, yet she is surely celebrating that decision now in the presence of the Lord.¹⁷ At the same time, everyone who knew Vicki believes she would have said that the post-*Roe* era will demand even more from the pro-life movement. With the advent of new and diverse laws in the individual states—some life-affirming, others quite deadly—pregnant women will continue to feel pressure to make a momentous decision, and the pro-life community has to be there for them in every way possible—spiritually, emotionally, economically, and socially—guiding them towards life.¹⁸

In doing so, we should follow Vicki’s example of never succumbing to harsh or judgmental language, and of trying to empathize with our opponents, even as we firmly uphold our pro-life convictions. This is not a contradiction, and Olivia Gans Turner explains why:

The tragedy of legalized abortion has been to create multiple generations of women who have been led to believe that abortion is vitally important to their safety and well-being in the face of an unexpected or complicated pregnancy. The abortion industry has successfully forced a message that abortion is safe and has no consequences. The result has been decades of self-inflicted wounds that have also taken the lives of our children. So the recent Supreme Court decision has served to rip away the tragic scars and unresolved trauma that is part of every abortion decision.

Vicki was deeply aware that abortion memories never really leave women unscathed. She would have been the first to be calling for an open discussion about the injury that has been done in virtually every family and to millions of women and girls. She would have pointed out that the response to the shouting we now see in the streets calls for even more compassion.

The catastrophic effect of *Roe v. Wade*, said Olivia, was to separate a mother from her child—in the most violent way possible—and to tell women this was a requirement for success, safety, and their very lives. “For almost fifty years Americans have been told that their children are not worthy of protection and

that has meant, by default, that neither are their mothers . . . All of which means we have a great deal of work ahead to heal the wounds left behind by *Roe*.”

The Untold Legacy of Vicki Thorn

If there is an overarching and reoccurring theme to Vicki’s life, it is that she left an impact on everyone she knew, and transformed even more people she did not know, or never expected to meet.

Two stories recounted by her husband illustrate the point. The first involves a friend of Vicki’s who, after an eventful life as a young man, had turned his life around for the better. He was driving through Wisconsin one night and stopped at a bar to get a bite to eat. A woman who was sitting nearby noticed he was wearing a pin with tiny feet on it, and began to poke fun at him, not knowing what it symbolized. So he explained, “I wear this in memory of my child who I lost through an abortion, and as a reminder to help prevent an abortion whenever I can.”

The woman’s expression began to change. She choked up, then began to weep uncontrollably. Longingly she asked, “Where were you two weeks ago?” She had just had an abortion, and the nightmare of it all, which she had been trying to suppress, suddenly came rushing back. Moments later, Vicki received a call. It was 3:30 a.m. Her friend told her he had a woman grieving from abortion, and asked Vicki to speak with her, “and she did,” said William. “Having been a counselor for twenty-five years, she knew exactly what to say, and remained on the line until Vicki convinced her that Project Rachel would be there to help her recover every step of the way—which it did.”

The second story occurred shortly before Vicki’s death. Sitting in a restaurant with her husband, she was reflecting on having recently scaled back some of her activities because of her age, and wondered whether all her hard work would really make a difference. At that moment, as if the Holy Spirit wanted to send a message, a group of college-age students walked in. Among them was a young woman who stared at Vicki before sitting down with her friend. After a few minutes, the young woman came over to Vicki’s table and said, “Excuse me, are you Vicki Thorn?”

Vicki affirmed that indeed she was, and the young woman told her, “I just want you to know that you changed my life.”

The two went over to a separate table to speak privately for a few moments. When Vicki returned, William asked who the woman was. Smiling, Vicki replied, “I have no idea, but she seems awfully happy and thanked me for Project Rachel!”

These were not unusual occurrences. Mary FioRito said that Vicki referred to them as “God moments.” Perhaps the most frequent of them were the occasions when women whom Vicki did not know came up to her and simply

hugged her. These women had been engulfed by guilt over their abortions, but restored through Project Rachel.

“Vicki knew that healing—total healing—is possible,” said Lydia LoCoco. “And she became an instrument to offer that healing, through the all-encompassing mercy of Jesus Christ.”

NOTES

1. For these tributes, and many more, see “Pro-life Advocates Mourn Vicki Thorn, Founder of Project Rachel Healing Ministry” by Shannon Mullen, *Catholic News Agency*, April 21, 2022; “Vicki Thorn Dies; Founded Post-Abortion Healing Ministry Project Rachel,” *Catholic News Service*, April 22, 2022; and “The Milwaukee Woman Who ‘Single-Handedly Created a Post-Abortion Ministry’ for the Catholic Church Has Died” by Sophie Carson, *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, April 24, 2022.
2. Vicki recounted many of these events in “Ethics and Culture Cast,” produced by the University of Notre Dame and available online at <https://share.fireside.fm/episode/oLpI9plr+0l-cBmb0> (Episode 57, August 26, 2021.)
3. See “Remembering Vicki Thorn and the Legacy She Left” by Mary FioRito, *Our Sunday Visitor*, April 25, 2022.
4. Vicki expressed her admiration for priests frequently, and thanked them for their selfless work with Project Rachel: See “Priests Touch Lives in Ways Most Never Know” by Vicki Thorn, *The Compass* (Official Publication for the Diocese of Green Bay), July 21, 2009.
5. A mother and her unborn child are certainly the primary victims of an abortion, but fathers can suffer acute pain as well. Vicki and Project Rachel made it a point to emphasize this, hosting numerous conferences for men who had lost their unborn child through abortion. On this topic, see Vicki’s conversation with pro-life activist Jason Jones, who lost one of his children to an abortion, on EWTN’s “Life on the Rock” program, January 19, 2012, available on YouTube.
6. For two moving accounts of post-abortive women who were healed through Project Rachel and became dedicated proliferers, see “Project Rachel Marks 30 Years of Counseling,” *The Catholic Herald* (of Milwaukee), October 9, 2014; and “Hope and Healing After Abortion,” *Catholic Digest*, January 24, 2015.
7. See “Analysis of 22 Studies Confirms: Abortion Harms Women’s Mental Health,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, press release, September 2, 2011. See also “The Abortion and Mental Health Controversy” by David C. Reardon, *Sage Open Medicine* online, Volume 6, 2018, which, after citing an exhaustive amount of research on the subject, asserts, “The claim that abortion trauma is a ‘myth’ advanced purely for the purposes of anti-abortion propaganda is itself nothing more than pro-abortion propaganda.”
8. See the USCCB’s website on Project Rachel Ministry at: <https://www.usccb.org/topics/project-rachel-ministry> as well as the associated “HopeAfterAbortion.com” website.
9. For Vicki’s impact on post-abortion ministry throughout the world, see “Thorn Leaves Behind Legacy of Healing” by Karen Mahoney, *The Catholic Herald* (of Milwaukee) online, April 21, 2022. The article also notes that Vicki was the author of the Italian book *Progetto Rachele, il volto della compassionate* (“Project Rachel: The Face of Compassion”), commissioned and published by the Vatican.
10. Many of Vicki’s lectures are on audio or video: See the collection available at: OFWC MEDIA.com.
11. See “Researcher Uncovers the Dark World of the Pill” by Lilian Qinoes, *The Catholic Herald* (of Madison) online, March 6, 2013.
12. See the text of Vicki’s talk “A Christian Vision of Sexuality,” available online at: <http://www.laici.va>
13. See “Expectant Dads May Also Have Hormonal Changes” by Kathleen Doheny, *HealthDay News* online, December 17, 2014.
14. See “How Men’s Bodies Change When They Become Fathers” by Anna Machin, *New York Times*, June 24, 2021.
15. From Vicki’s talk “A Christian Vision of Sexuality,” noted in endnote 12.
16. In addition to Vicki’s being a life-long Catholic, strongly supportive of the papacy and Catholic

teaching, Vicki's husband told me that their marriage was influenced by the lives of many blessed and saints, especially Blessed Anna-Maria Taigi (1769-1837), a model Catholic wife and mother of seven children.

17. See "Vicki Thorn Retires," by Karen Mahoney, *Catholic Herald* (of Milwaukee) online, December 2020, where Vicki made the prophetic comment: "I am seeing more people who are adamantly pro-life, and I don't know how to say this, but they are determined to make a change and I think they are willing to do what needs to be done to overturn *Roe v. Wade*."

18. Vicki's husband William and her close friend Mary FioRito told me that Vicki was an advocate of the "seamless garment" and "consistent ethic of life," often associated with the late Joseph Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago. But both emphasized that Vicki believed that this ethic, properly understood, embraced *all* of the Church's teachings, including those regarding human sexuality and Vatican II's Call to Holiness. For more on this often-debated topic, see my column "Sex and the Seamless Garment," *First Things* online, May 7, 2012; and Mary FioRito's important essay, "The Consistent Ethic: Context and Controversy," *Chicago Studies*, Spring/Summer, 2019.



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Does Effective and Ethical Stem Cell Therapy Exist?

Grace Emily Stark

For folks of a certain age, the championing of stem cell therapy research is inextricably tied to cultural icons like Marty McFly or Superman—or, as they are known in real life, Michael J. Fox and Christopher Reeve. Both of these men are famous for more than just the beloved characters they brought to life, having made impassioned pleas over the years for the continuation of research on stem cell therapy—specifically, embryonic stem cell therapy. But despite the insistence of Fox, Reeve, and others in the late 1990s and early 2000s that embryonic stem cells would pave the way for an untold number of cures (if only we would keep religion out of it), today, *adult* stem cell therapy research leads the way, both in terms of the sheer volume of research conducted and in promising results for stem cell-based therapeutics. However, as we will discuss, even ostensibly ethical adult stem cell therapy research faces moral conundrums. But, as we will also see, one organization has been working tirelessly over the past two decades to develop new methods of conducting stem cell research that are free from the morally problematic use of abortion-derived cell lines plaguing all other forms of stem cell research—both embryonic and adult.

The Failed Promise of Embryonic Stem Cells

Christopher Reeve suffered from a traumatic equestrian accident that left him paralyzed from the shoulders down until he died in 2004 at the age of 52. For the past 30 years, 61-year-old Michael J. Fox has suffered from Parkinson's disease. Both men established eponymous foundations to advocate for and fund research on embryonic stem cells, which are cells taken from (and thus requiring the destruction of) human embryos, prized for their ability to replicate and proliferate quickly and for their pluripotency. (Pluripotency, or the ability to differentiate into all of the various types of cells that give rise to our bodily tissues, had long been considered the sole purview of embryonic stem cells; this is no longer the case, as we will discuss in more detail later.) The great differences between Reeve's and Fox's conditions (one an injury, the other an autoimmune disease) gives one an idea of the breadth and span

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of the long-promised curative potential of embryonic stem cells.

Of course, controversy has swirled around embryonic stem cells ever since their promise became widely known and championed, most notably during the Bush Administration of the early 2000s. Often conducted on stem cells harvested from the “leftover” embryos created by the in vitro fertilization (IVF) process, embryonic stem cell research has long been criticized as highly unethical by Christians and other religious conservatives (since it requires the destruction of unique, embryonic human lives), yet has been championed by its proponents as a hidden wellspring of remedies for nearly every malady imaginable.

For decades the religious conservative view has been vilified as unnecessarily hamstringing scientific progress. “Keep religion out of stem cell research, Reeve urges medical school audience,” reads a 2003 article by the Yale School of Medicine, detailing a speech Reeve gave to Yale medical students.¹ The article summarizes Reeve’s talk, identifying the enemy of such research and the stakes: “Social and religious conservatives have robbed American scientists of their chance to play a leading role in the promising field of stem cell research. ‘We’re giving away our pre-eminence in science and medicine,’ he said.”

Because people are going to use the increasingly socially acceptable option of IVF to build their families, so the logic goes, and because IVF necessitates the creation of multiple embryos that will go “unused” (i.e., unimplanted into a womb), why not use those embryos for good? And so it is that many “excess” IVF embryos end up “donated to science.” For those IVF patients who see no moral value in their embryos, or who desire “closure” from the IVF process and are eager to be done with the costly fees of keeping the embryos on ice, the offer of furthering the science of embryonic stem cell research—and all its therapeutic promises—encourages them to donate. And biobanks and researchers are only too eager to persuade would-be parents to do so. In this view, it’s a win-win situation for IVF patients—and for “science.”

If it were that simple, though, everyone would donate their excess embryos without a second thought, and there wouldn’t be hundreds of thousands (perhaps millions) of embryos frozen in limbo all over the United States. A 2016 NPR report on “leftover” embryos includes the following quote from Francine Lederer, a clinical psychologist in private practice in Los Angeles: “After successful IVF treatments, *many couples come to view their embryos as human life*, which makes it even harder for them to find closure” (emphasis mine). “Some,” says the report, “even have funeral ceremonies for the embryos.”²

But it’s not just the arguably natural feeling of value that many people attach to their embryos that has “hamstrung” the science of embryonic stem cell research. The science itself has been plagued with issues since its inception,

including (and especially) the high potential for embryonic stem cells to become cancerous. They can cause teratomas, which are tumors that may contain hair, bone, or muscle cells, and may or may not be malignant.

In fact, it is precisely because of the fast replication rate and pluripotency for which they are so prized that embryonic stem cells are prone to these oncogenic effects. As Kögler et al. summarize it in a 2004 *Journal of Experimental Medicine* article: “Although embryonic stem cells have the broadest differentiation potential, their use for cellular therapeutics is excluded for several reasons: the uncontrollable development of teratomas in a syngeneic transplantation model, imprinting-related developmental abnormalities, and ethical issues.”³ Others have pointed to difficulties in precisely directing cellular differentiation, and the potential for these cells to be rejected (similar to organ rejection) in transplantees, as additional practical obstacles hindering the therapeutic use of embryonic stem cells.⁴

Adult Stem Cell Research

Eighteen years after his impassioned pleas and untimely death, Reeve would perhaps be surprised to learn the market for adult stem cells has far outstripped that of embryonic stem cells, for precisely the reasons outlined by Kögler et al. above. In an extensive overview of all U.S.-based stem cell clinical trials occurring from 1999-2014, Redfield et al. found that “the vast majority of stem cell clinical trials from 1999 to 2014 have been conducted with adult stem cells.”⁵ On the financial side, adult stem cells dominated the stem cell market in 2020, capturing 85.7 percent of the \$9.38 billion market, according to a Grand View Research Market Analysis Report.⁶ The same report projects the market for stem cells to reach \$18.41 billion by 2028.

Adult stem cell therapy uses adult somatic stem cells (ASCs), defined as “self-renewing groups of cells in tissues and organs that can produce specific lineages of precursor cells leading to differentiated cell progeny.”⁷ While ASCs lack the pluripotency of embryonic stem cells, they still have the ability to differentiate into other types of cells (a phenomenon known as multipotency).

ASCs have been successfully (and ethically) used to treat certain cancers of the blood and bone, through processes known as hematopoietic stem cell transplants. Procedures that fall under this umbrella include bone marrow transplants, peripheral blood stem cell transplants, and (umbilical) cord blood transplants. Transplantation of healthy stem cells usually follows the destruction of a patient’s cancer cells via chemotherapy or radiation therapy, which also kills the stem cells found in their bone marrow (where new blood cells are normally created). Transplantation can be allogeneic (meaning that the cells come from another individual) or autologous (where the cells come

from the patient, previously harvested and preserved prior to cancer treatment). In this way, a patient's immune system can be "rebuilt" from the cellular level on up, as the healthy transplanted stem cells take over for the now-destroyed, diseased cells.

The potential for using hematopoietic stem cell transplants to treat not only bone and blood cancers, but autoimmune diseases, HIV/AIDS, and other conditions is exciting, to say the least. However, the complete destruction of a patient's existing stem cells poses an unrealistic treatment plan for those who do not already require chemotherapy or radiation therapy. While many challenges remain, some reports of success using adult stem cells have been particularly noteworthy. For example, a New York City woman now appears to be cured of HIV after receiving a transplant of stem cells from an adult relative. The stem cells, which contained a rare genetic mutation that prohibits HIV invasion, were in umbilical cord blood (which itself contains stem cells) from an unrelated (living) newborn child.⁸

Additionally, a particular type of ASC, known as a mesenchymal stem cell (MSC), has shown promise in animal models in the treatment of neurodegenerative disorders such as Multiple Sclerosis, Alzheimer's Disease, Huntington's Disease,⁹ amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, Parkinson's Disease, stroke, spinal cord injury, and others, for both cellular replacement and neuroprotection. Notably, MSCs are currently in Phase II trials for the treatment of Parkinson's Disease. Importantly—and ethically setting ASC-based therapies above embryonic stem cell based-therapies—these therapies do not require the ongoing destruction of embryonic human life, but rather the continued proliferation of human life.

New Frontiers in Stem Cell Research: Induced Pluripotent Stem (iPS) Cells

Despite the promise of ASCs (and their comparative lack of ethical concerns), the technology has limitations. Harvesting adult stem cells is invasive, and they lack the pluripotent and self-renewal capacities of embryonic stem cells, which limits their potential as therapeutics across a wider range of injuries, disorders, and diseases, especially depending on how advanced a disease is.

For example, human adult somatic stem cell therapy acts via paracrine effects, that is, the stem cells secrete bioactive molecules that bind to receptors on neighboring cells to protect and repair damaged tissue. While this mechanism may be helpful in the early stages of neurodegenerative diseases (for example, in early-stage Parkinson's disease, where adult human somatic stem cell therapy could repair and protect dopaminergic cells from further damage), for late-stage neurodegenerative diseases, there may be no cells left to protect and repair. In these cases, embryonic stem cells are hypothetically

avored for their ability to differentiate into specialized tissue, therapeutically acting by physically replacing damaged cells and tissues. As we've discussed, though, the use of embryonic stem cells is ethically problematic, and carries significant risks of teratoma formation—which is especially concerning when implantation of these cells is done in the brain. So, it is at this point that one might be wondering: Are there options for safely and ethically conducting research on stem cell-based therapeutics for things like late-stage neurodegenerative diseases? Encouragingly, the answer is “yes.” Enter induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells.

In recent years, a growing segment of the stem cell market concerns what are known as induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells, which are created from adult stem cells that have been “reprogrammed” to exhibit the same pluripotency and capability of self-renewal as embryonic stem cells. This exciting development may provide the bridge needed to further research the therapeutic potential of pluripotent stem cells, without requiring the destruction of human embryos. However, as we will discuss, the technology is not without its own practical complications and ethical conundrums—that is, until very recently.

History of iPS Cells

In 2006, Japanese researcher Shinya Yamanaka discovered that the adult, mature cells of mice could be reprogrammed back to a state of pluripotency; that they could, essentially, become stem cells with the introduction of various protein transcription factors (or genes), known now as “the Yamanaka factors.” As we've discussed above, pluripotency was once thought to be the exclusive purview of embryonic stem cells, which was the key reason behind the concerted push to make the controversial research mainstream. But Yamanaka's research proved differently, and in 2012, he won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine “for the discovery that mature cells can be reprogrammed to become pluripotent,” alongside British scientist Sir John B. Gurdon, who first discovered in 1962 that the specialization of mature cells could be reversed.¹⁰

Today, a growing portion of the stem cell market centers on Yamanaka's induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells, which are adult somatic cells “that have been genetically reprogrammed to an embryonic stem (ES) cell-like state through the forced expression of genes and factors important for maintaining the defining properties of ES cells.”¹¹

Practical and Ethical Issues with iPS Cells

Early on in the development of iPS cell technology, Yamanaka and other researchers favored integrative viruses as the primary means for delivering

the genes needed to “reprogram” adult somatic cells to a state of pluripotency, so they could be used in stem cell therapeutics research. An “integrative virus” is one which, upon infecting a cell, integrates its genome into the host cell’s chromosome, either incidentally or as part of the virus’s life cycle (as is the case with retroviruses).¹² However, the use of integrative viruses in cellular reprogramming proved problematic, because it introduced oncogenic (cancer) risks as well as risks of viral contamination of the cells.

Most recently, the non-integrative Sendai virus has been favored by researchers for gene delivery in the creation of iPS cells, although Sendai still poses a cancer risk through a different mechanism. Furthermore, as a virus, Sendai also carries risks of viral contamination. In addition, ethical concerns accompany the use of the Sendai virus, as it must be grown and incubated within human cells. Most commonly, this is done via the immortalized, abortion-derived human embryonic kidney (HEK) 293 cell line (which, incidentally, is the same cell line that has been historically used for the development of several different vaccines, including for Covid-19, as well as drugs and medicines for various diseases).¹³

In more recent years, non-viral methods of gene delivery, including the messenger RNA (mRNA) and episomal methods, have become increasingly appealing alternative, non-integrative approaches for the delivery of the genes needed to create iPS cells. Yet these methods also carry practical challenges and ethical concerns. The mRNA method, while non-integrative, has several shortcomings: Notably, it is an expensive and time-intensive process for creating iPS cells, it does not work for every type of cell, and it requires the use of cancer genes (which likewise means it poses a cancer risk). The use of episomes, which are defined as “extrachromosomal, closed circular DNA molecules of a plasmid or a viral genome origin, that are replicated autonomously in the host cell,” which therefore gives them “significant vector potential for the transfer of nucleic acids into cells,” has become an increasingly attractive option for iPS cell creation, because it is both quick and free of viruses.¹⁴ However, like the mRNA method, the episomal method also carries oncogenic risks due to its use of cancer genes.

Towards the Development of Ethical iPS Cells

In an exciting new development, Cellular Engineering Technologies (CET), a biotechnology company owned by American pulmonary physician-scientist Dr. Alan Moy, was recently issued a U.S. patent for its method of producing iPS cells *without* the use of viruses or cancer genes, eliminating viral contamination risk and substantially reducing the cancer risk associated with other methods of iPS cell creation. Furthermore, the cell line is ethical

in origin, coming from a rare cord blood stem cell, and placental-derived mesenchymal stem cell, eliminating concerns of the destruction of human life associated with embryonic stem cells.

In 2017 and 2018, in collaboration with the John Paul II Medical Research Institute (JP2MRI), CET published the first report of efficiently produced iPS cells via CET's novel, cancer gene-free episomal method, and received their patent this year, in 2022. Moreover, the National Institutes of Health awarded a grant to CET to develop commercial methods to scale-up production of iPS cells for therapy, without the use of abortion-derived cells (including the immortalized HEK-293 cell line). This means that, for the first time ever, iPS cells can be developed more quickly, cheaply, and ethically than both embryonic stem cells and iPS cells produced by other means.

Implications for the Ethical Production of Vaccines, Medicines, and Other Therapeutics

Truly, with recent advancements in adult stem cell therapy, and with the development of Dr. Moy's improvements to iPS technology, the need for using embryonic stem cells in research has been eliminated (if it ever existed in the first place). Equally exciting, the technology developed by CET and JP2MRI has implications beyond stem cell therapy. In developing the technology to transform adult stem cells from cord blood and placenta tissue into immortalized human stem cell lines, JP2MRI has also eliminated the need for using aborted fetal cell lines, including the commonly used HEK-293 line, for the bio-production of vaccines, medicines, diagnostics, and research reagents.

The work of CET and JP2MRI vindicates those who have long insisted that the healing of born bodies need not be done at the expense of unborn human lives. A far cry from Christopher Reeve's lament to Yale medical students that "social and religious conservatives have robbed American scientists of their chance to play a leading role in the promising field of stem cell research," Dr. Moy's work rather affirms the exciting potential for ethical stem therapy to outperform the waning, destructive approach of embryonic stem cell research. It also provides another powerful refutation of the various claims throughout human history that the youngest, weakest, and most vulnerable among us must be sacrificed to preserve the lives of the stronger and more powerful.

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Transhumanism and Being:

The Bleakness of Objective Tomorrow

Jason Morgan

Monozukuri (ものづくり) is one of the most important concepts in the Japanese cultural universe. The straight translation of monozukuri is deceptively simple: literally, “making things.” But in practice it is so much more than that.

My colleague Rebecca Chunghee Kim at Ritsumeikan University in southern Japan has a very good one-word gloss for monozukuri: “craftsmanship.” Writing about the founding philosophy of Toyota Motors, Kim defines monozukuri more precisely as “stand[ing] for the development of people as a natural function of “a manufacturing company” (Kim 2018, 15). As the “man” in “craftsmanship” hints, monozukuri is not just about making things, but about building up the people who make them. The thing made and the thing’s maker are paired in step along a lifetime path of developing skills and growing as a conscientious, responsible human being.

In recent years, scholars of Japanese business philosophy have been using the ubiquitous—in Japan, at least (see Kaizen and Monozukuri, npd)—term monozukuri as part of a triad that includes hitozukuri (“making the person”) and kotozukuri (“making things happen”). In their essay on the Toyota business model, for example, Michael Ballé, Daryl Powell, and Kodo Yokozawa write that kotozukuri “refers to the passion to make things happen, value creation from knowledge creation. The energy, the vitality to keep both monozukuri and hitozukuri strong by encouraging doing, not just thinking” (<https://planet-lean.com/monozukuri-hitozukuri-kotozukuri/>). As these latter-day iterations reflect, no matter how far one telescopes from the monozukuri concept, the core remains the same, and so do the ramifications. Monozukuri is about human beings as the crafters of material objects (Saito et al. 2011, 1). Ideally, out of this work grow richer human relationships (between a company and its customers, for example, or among workers on a shop floor).

It is for this reason that Kim connects monozukuri to sanpō yoshi, or the business philosophy of the Ōmi merchants of the Edo Period that commerce should benefit (yoshi, literally “be good for”) the buyer, the seller, and society as a whole (sanpō, literally “in three directions”) (Kim 2018, 15). At the

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heart of *homo habilis* is *homo*, in other words. In Japanese, this can nicely be reflected by a pun on “mono,” which can mean both “thing” (物) and, when written with a different Chinese character, “person” (者). The term monozukuri is almost never written in Chinese characters, leaving the meaning of mono intentionally ambiguous. What is being made is both the person and the thing, both the maker and the work of his hands.

One of the most eloquent expressions of this very deep Japanese cultural reality can be found at Monozukuri University in Saitama Prefecture. The way that Monozukuri University is translated into English is interesting: Institute of Technologists. Monozukuri University is a technical school, and its website features students designing and building all manner of things, from robots to vehicles to wooden houses (<https://www.iot.ac.jp>). In the West, we would surely call this kind of university an institute of technology. But monozukuri is different. It means the things and the people making them. Therefore, Institute of Technologists. Technology, after all, is what people do. It doesn’t happen by itself. And the name reflects the reality. As in most other iterations of monozukuri, the mono in Monozukuri University is not written in Chinese characters. The essential ambiguity is preserved.

Monozukuri was one of the central ideas of Japanese philosopher Umehara Takeshi (1925-2019). Umehara’s ideas, and Umehara himself, were behind the establishment of Monozukuri University in 2001. But here we encounter some interesting contradictions in the idea of monozukuri, at least according to the Umehara reading of it. Umehara was a small-“s” shintoist. He hewed to the very, very old Japanese idea of animism, or the notion that there are souls, or perhaps varying degrees of divinity, in everything. For Umehara, monozukuri was about overcoming the Cartesian divide between body and mind. He wanted to emphasize the fact that plants and animals are also alive (Heisig et al. 2011, 1236-1237). Umehara went even further. People with their rational brains had come to occupy the center of ontology, he thought. Umehara declared against “anthropocentrism” and wanted to bring nature back into the human story (Rots 2021, 68). For Umehara, then, monozukuri was about a new—and old—theory of existence. People and nature, all joined in an animistic harmony of creation.

At first blush, it may seem that the idea of monozukuri, of seeing people as inseparable from the things and creatures of the world, bears some resemblance to the much more recent Western idea of transhumanism, or the idea that “science and technology [can] extend human opportunities and potential by transforming the human being so that its [sic] capacities and abilities are capable of overcoming any number of natural human limitations such as aging, death, suffering, intellectual capacity, moral shortcomings and so forth”

(Philbeck 2014, 2). After all, transhumanists seem to play *monozukuri* thinking to the hilt. For transhumanists, technology is not just something that humans make, but something which also can enhance humans. Transhumanism sees the human form as malleable, as subject to modifications and upgrades. Starting small and working up, transhumanists foresee a future in which, eventually, human consciousness will be uploaded onto a machine, enabling humans to live forever, clad immortally in transistor and motherboard.

But in this extension of the transhumanist ideology we can see the divergence between *monozukuri*—resolutely person-inclusive, no matter how much Umehara wanted to decenter ontology from the human being—and transhumanism, which is rushing to leave the human person behind. Transhumanism, on my reading, zooms past the human and into a great beyond, or possibly a black abyss, where humans have been left behind (see Davis 2015).

Transhumanist Ray Kurzweil’s 2005 book *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* embodies (no pun intended) the nature of transhumanism as aimed at posthumanism, that is, seeing the human as something to be overcome, not just enhanced. The book expands on ideas Kurzweil and others worked out over previous decades positing that, given Moore’s Law of exponential growth in computing power, at some point machines will outstrip humans in intelligence. The trend of human life, Kurzweil and many other transhumanists think, is toward the “singularity,” the point where humans leave behind flesh-and-blood biology and merge with computer hardware. According to Kurzweil and his many followers, this will make us immortal. But for those like me who are stuck in the old “meatware” version of the human being, uploading consciousness to a mainframe and slipping the body off like an old shoe is exactly death. Whatever comes next is not immortality but wishful thinking.

I’m not the only one who is skeptical of the transhumanists’ and posthumanists’ claims. For example, literature scholar N. Katherine Hayles’ 1999 book *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* provides a history—quaintly humanistic in our Metaverse age—of the disembodiment of information. “As early as the 1950s,” Hayles writes:

[mathematician] Norbert Wiener proposed it was theoretically possible to telegraph a human being [. . .] The producers of *Star Trek* operate from similar premises when they imagine that the body can be dematerialized into an informational pattern and rematerialized, without change, at a remote location. (Hayles 1999, 1)

And this is not just the stuff of mad science or television scripts. “Much of the discourse on molecular biology,” Hayles continues:

treats information as the essential code the body expresses [. . .] A defining characteristic of the present cultural moment is the belief that information can circulate unchanged among different material substrates. (Hayles 1999, 1)

For Hayles, this divorce between intelligence and the body, between mind and matter, can be traced proximately to the “imitation game” of computer scientist Alan Turing (1912-1954), the “Turing test” which is still used in some form on many websites to distinguish human beings from machines (Hayles 1999, xi). “Here, at the inaugural moment of the computer age,” Hayles laments, “the erasure of embodiment is performed [in the Turing test] so that ‘intelligence’ becomes a property of the formal manipulation of symbols rather than enaction in the human lifeworld” (Hayles 1999, xi).

One figure who appears in several places throughout Hayles’ book is Hans Moravec, a robotics researcher who:

argues that the age of carbon-based life is drawing to a close. Humans are about to be replaced by intelligent machines as the dominant life-form on the planet. Drawing on the work of [molecular biologist] A[lexander].G[raham]. Cairns-Smith, Moravec suggests that such a revolution is not unprecedented. Before protein replication developed, a primitive form of life existed in certain silicon crystals that had the ability to replicate. But protein replication was so far superior that it soon left the replicating crystals in the dust. Now silicon has caught up with us again, in the form of computers and computerized robots. Although the Cairns-Smith hypothesis has been largely discredited, [for Moravec] it serves the useful purpose of increasing the plausibility of his vision by presenting the carbon-silicon struggle as a rematch of an earlier contest rather than as an entirely new event. (Hayles 1999, 235-236)

The silicon-carbon rivalry may be farfetched, but in the notion of competition between material things and the contingency of the human, one can discern a big difference between the transhumanist and monozukuri philosophies. It is not for nothing that in a 2004 *Foreign Policy* article political philosopher Francis Fukuyama called transhumanism the “most dangerous idea” (<https://www.au.dk/fukuyama/boger/essay/>). In a follow-up piece, *Reason* magazine writer Ronald Bailey set Fukuyama’s misgivings about what he calls a “strange liberation movement” against Richard Dawkins’ notion of the “extended phenotype,” which leads organisms to make use of the physical world, such as by building nests (<https://reason.com/2004/08/25/transhumanism-the-most-dangero/>). Bailey sums it up this way:

Our ancestors had no wings; now we fly. Our ancient forebears could not hear one another over 1,000 miles; now we phone. And our Stone Age progenitors averaged 25 years of life; now we live 75. Thanks to our knack for technological innovation, humanity has by far the largest extended phenotype of all creatures on planet Earth. Nothing could be more natural to human beings than striving to liberate ourselves from biological constraints. (<https://reason.com/2004/08/25/transhumanism-the-most-dangero/>)

Well, perhaps Fukuyama was being paranoid, then. However, Bailey balances his observations by noting that “left-leaning bioethicists George Annas, Lori Andrews, and Rosario Isasi” take a much dimmer view of transhumanism, one closer to Fukuyama’s. What is to stop the liberated, transhumanized posthuman, Annas, Andrews, and Isasi wonder, from seeing “the old ‘normal’ humans as inferior, even savages, and fit for slavery or slaughter”? And oppositely, what is to stop us humans from seeing the posthumans as a threat in this way and killing them first? It’s a recipe for a very dark future for all. “It is ultimately this predictable potential for genocide,” Annas, Andrews, and Isasi write, “that makes species-altering experiments potential weapons of mass destruction, and makes the unaccountable genetic engineer a potential bioterrorist” (Annas, Andrews, and Isasi 2002, 162). I wish I had a soothing retort to these warnings. But I don’t. I find myself in the Fukuyama camp—transhumanism really is the “most dangerous idea.”

However, not everyone views human demotion in negative terms. In *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013) and *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (2017), English scholar Timothy Morton rings the changes on what has been called “object-oriented ontology” since philosopher Graham Harman first used the phrase some twenty years ago (Kerr 2016; Ivakhiv 2009). In his jaunty style (I rather enjoy reading his work), Morton writes that “destructuring Western philosophy to include nonhumans in a meaningful way” is a question of:

releas[ing] the anthropocentric control on the [human-world] gap and allow[ing] everything in the universe to have it, which means dropping the idea that (human) thought is the top access mode and holding that brushing against, licking or irradiating are also access modes as valid (or as invalid) as thinking. (Morton 2017, 11)

So much for transhumanism as posthumanism, pushing beyond the human form to an improved model on the other side of biology. On Morton’s reckoning, posthumanism sounds more like demoting humans to a level somewhere between a tree sloth and a quasar.

Morton is very much interested in updating the ideas of Karl Marx to remove the “bug” of his anthropocentrism (Morton 2017, 7). But even more than Marx, German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) figures prominently in the work of most object-oriented ontologists, and Morton is no exception (see Wilde 2020, 5). Heidegger was a philosopher of being, of course. But Heidegger deconstructed being, as it were, to bring it down from the Aristotelian-Thomistic heights to what Heidegger called *Dasein*, “being-there.” And part of this “being-there” was what Heidegger described as *Welt*, world. “World,” Morton writes:

is a profoundly Heideggerian concept—it has to do with how Dasein co-creates or correlates or decides on reality (whichever term you prefer). For Heidegger, humans are the ones with a full world: world is a process, *worlding*, and humans are the *worlding* beings. [. . . However], the notion of world only works if we allow non-humans to have it. Heidegger says that ‘animals’ are ‘poor in world’ (*Weltarm*) and inanimate beings such as stones have no world at all. But in truth, not only can we allow cats to have a world, but even waterfalls. We can do this because *world* is very cheap. We don’t have to raise cats and waterfalls up to human status to do so. [. . .] Why is world cheap? Because world is inherently lacking, inherently ragged and faulty. World is perforated. There are not perfect, smoothly functioning worlds, and poor people’s versions. To have a world intrinsically is to be *Weltarm*. [. . .] Our human world is shared with all kinds of other tattered, broken worlds. The world of spiders, the world of tigers, the world of bacteria. (Morton 2017, 90-93)

In other words, object-oriented ontology, at least as professed by Graham Harman in Morton’s admiring estimation, “simply [drops] the specialness of Dasein, its unique applicability to the human” (Morton 2013, 14).

Morton, Heidegger, and Harman’s ideas may seem off the wall. But—and maybe you won’t be surprised to hear this—these wacky notions are at the vanguard of academic discourse today. Fukuyama’s dystopian hand-wringing about transhumanism is *passé* on college campuses in the third decade of the twenty-first century. And it has been this way for a very long time. Probably the best-known early work of transhumanism is feminist scholar Donna J. Haraway’s 1985 essay “Cyborg Manifesto,” an exploration of the “hybrid of machine and organism,” of “creatures simultaneously animal and machine” (Haraway 1991, 149). For Haraway, feminism has moved very far from the early days when females were defined in oppositional tandem with males. “It has become difficult,” Haraway writes:

to name one’s feminism by a single adjective—or even to insist in every circumstance upon the noun. Consciousness of exclusion through naming is acute. Identities seem contradictory, partial, and strategic. With the hard-won recognition of their social and historical constitution, gender, race, and class cannot provide the basis for belief in ‘essential’ unity. There is nothing about being ‘female’ that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state as ‘being’ female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices. (Haraway 1991, 155)

In what could be a critique of the Turing test, Haraway argues that “the cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code” (Haraway 1991, 163). Haraway wants a cyborgism to counter the “organisms and organismic, holistic politics” that “depend on metaphors of rebirth and invariably call on the resources of reproductive sex” (Haraway 1991, 181). In the good old days when I was in grad school, it used to be only Republicans who weren’t welcome in seminar. I wonder how much longer it will be before “No Non-

Cyborgs Allowed” signs start appearing on classroom doors.

Reading Haraway confirms what English scholar Anthony Esolen refers to as “the unreality of our time” (Esolen 2020, 7). “Now, in our supposedly enlightened time,” Esolen continues, “we have declared that an insistence upon reality is to be condemned. We do not therefore believe things that are false. We believe in *falsehood*. We do not merely believe in gods that do not exist. We believe in *un-being*” (Esolen 2020, 9). Or, to put it another way, we believe in human beings as having no fixed being at all; we see them as being not part of the physical universe or apart from it, but blowing through it, careening through evolutionary changes until eventually we evolve out of our contingent humanity and enter a technological nirvana of no-place. Esolen, too, is a veteran of college campuses. The anti-human notions against which he has bravely fought for his entire career have slipped out of the ivory tower and multiplied like gremlins in the cultural wilds. Now, with object-oriented ontology defining so much of our contemporary discourse via transhumanism and all of its many variations, Esolen’s “un-being” really does take on the cast of object (with supreme irony) of religious worship.

To get a sense of just how far transhumanism has made inroads into the general mode of thinking, consider Yuval Noah Harari’s bestselling books *Sapiens: A Brief History of Mankind* (2011) and *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (2015). Both are mass-market primers on the very theme of transhumanism. The last chapter of *Sapiens* is, fittingly then, “The End of *Homo Sapiens*.” It begins by reiterating the book’s focus on “history as the next stage in the continuum of physics to chemistry to biology” (Harari 2011, 445). The words link up like boxcars on a train line, or like subjects in a high schoolers’ day—history, physics, chemistry, biology. But what Harari is blithely explicating is nothing less than the end of the human race as we know it. This is transhumanism for the paperback-buying crowd, posthumanism at the airport book store. “*Sapiens*,” Harari continues:

are subject to the same physical forces, chemical reactions and natural-selection processes that govern all living beings. Natural selection may have provided *Homo sapiens* with a much larger playing field than it has given to any other organism, but the field has still had its boundaries. The implication has been that, no matter what their efforts and achievements, *Sapiens* are incapable of breaking free of their biologically determined limits. But at the dawn of the twenty-first century, this is no longer true: *Homo sapiens* is transcending those limits. It is now beginning to break the laws of natural selection, replacing them with the laws of intelligent design. (Harari 2011, 445)

We clever humans are outsmarting our biological captors, liberating our minds from our genes. But what happens when we succeed? Will the victory be pyrrhic?

Will we achieve liberation from both our genes and our humanity at the same time?

At first Harari offers a stridently triumphal answer to these questions, but a few years later he reconsiders the problem in a second book that takes a much darker tone. In his earlier, more optimistic take, Harari argues that “the world of 2014 is already a world in which culture is releasing itself from the shackles of biology” (Harari, 2011, p. 459). That book ends with an afterword titled “The Animal that Became a God” (Harari, 2011, pp. 465-466). So far, so good. We all get to be Zeus and Hera—hurrah! Harari’s next book, *Homo Deus*, however, picks up where the first left off. Algorithms and Big Data are becoming a new religion for this *Homo sapiens* god, Harari warns. Again taking up the thread of Alan Turing, Harari asserts that “dataism,” which “declares that the universe consists entirely of data flows” and that “the value of any phenomenon or entity is determined by its contribution to data processing,” has the effect of “collaps[ing] the barrier between animals and machines” (Harari 2015, 428). Under this powerful new paradigm, “electronic algorithms” are expected “to eventually decipher and outperform biochemical algorithms” (Harari 2015, 428).

This dataism could spell our doom, Harari forebodes.

We are striving to engineer the Internet-of-All-Things in the hope that it will make us healthy, happy and powerful. Yet once the Internet-of-All-Things is up and running, humans might be reduced from engineers to chips, then to data, and eventually we might dissolve within the torrent of data like a clump of earth within a gushing river. . . . Over the course of history humans created a global network and evaluated everything according to its function within that network. For thousands of years this inflated human pride and prejudices. Since humans fulfilled the most important functions in the network, it was easy for us to take credit for the network’s achievements, and to see ourselves as the apex of creation. The lives and experiences of all other animals were undervalued because they fulfilled far less important functions, and whenever an animal ceased to fulfil any function at all, it went extinct. However, once we humans lose our functional importance to the network, we will discover that we are not the apex of creation after all. The yardsticks that we ourselves have enshrined will condemn us to join the mammoths and the Chinese river dolphins in oblivion. Looking back, humanity will turn out to have been just a ripple within the cosmic dataflow. (Harari 2015, 460)

Who will look back? Harari doesn’t say. But it won’t be us. Or, if the singularity is true, then maybe it *will* be us, in some form. Maybe our humanity is elastic enough to accommodate upgrades forever without giving way to a posthumanism of undefined status. At any rate, the physical world which we have striven to master, and over which we had seemed poised to set ourselves as gods, is overtaken by data, by the invisible and not substantially real. Perhaps transhumanism isn’t, even on the most optimistic reading, all it’s cracked up to be after all.

But even if the most science-fiction-esque scenarios envisioned by the

transhumanists do not prove to work in real life, humanity may still “join the mammoths and the Chinese river dolphins in oblivion.” For transhumanism is not just a philosophy, but a way of death for many of us already. For example, the Anthropocene of which Morton and many others write, the notion of climate change and an overburdened planet, have led to startlingly widespread movements worldwide to shame those who have children. On that note, the debate in the United States over abortion has shifted, imperceptibly perhaps, this past decade or so. We are not really arguing centrally over whether a child in the womb is a human being. What an increasing number of those on the anti-life side are saying now is that it doesn’t really matter. No humans should exist, period. This generation of *Homo sapiens* should be the last. Transhumanism may not kill us by converting us into uploaded electrons, but by breaking our spirit and causing us to commit species suicide out of sheer regret at having been born. Object-oriented ontology is a quirky sub-sub-subfield of academic philosophy. But, like a lot else in that realm, when put into practice it turns lethal.

I return to the idea of *monozukuri*, and to the deep cultural wellsprings from which it bubbles up into daily life in Japan. Looking for a way to humanize the transhuman, to keep the human person firmly fixed in object-oriented ontology, I think of Sen no Rikyū (1522-1591), the master of the tea ceremony who lived during a time of extraordinary violence and political upheaval. He, too, needed to humanize a broken world. Sen no Rikyū was not just a proto-version of an interior designer, someone with very good taste in austere furnishings and whisks and teabowls. Sen no Rikyū was a philosopher. He held, in my view, what today we might call an object-oriented ontology. Or at least close to it. Sen no Rikyū’s idea of “*wabi-sabi*,” untranslatable into any other language that I know (see Handa 2013, 231), connotes a kind of pathos for the material world, a heart-touching fondness for the chipped cup and the etiolated spoon. It is a way of *Einfühlung* into the physical world (see Latta 2009, 873). It is, perhaps we might say, a precursor to Umehara’s notion of *monozukuri* as decentering the human in ontology. It certainly grows out of the same rich philosophical tradition (see Alpert 2016, 41; Sugimoto et al. 2019).

And yet, Sen no Rikyū’s tea ceremony is not a renunciation of the human (see Wakafuji 1963, 96). It is a quiet celebration of the best of who we are. Sen no Rikyū may have spent much thought on objects, their qualities, what they mean. But he thought about all this because he wanted to hold the human person up as high as he could, especially in an age in which death was all around. His core virtue was respect: silent awe in the presence of the other

person. Sen no Rikyū borrowed from the Catholic Mass the motion of turning the cup before passing it across to one's counterpart. This is a beautiful expression, he thought. This is how one should treat one's fellow human beings. Sen no Rikyū was killed for this belief. (Beauty saves the world but often kills the beautifier.) And yet, Sen no Rikyū won the war after losing the battle. His tea ceremony continues to be practiced in Japan. People continue to learn, through the seemingly insignificant art of whisking tea powder in a bowl, how to be a human being.

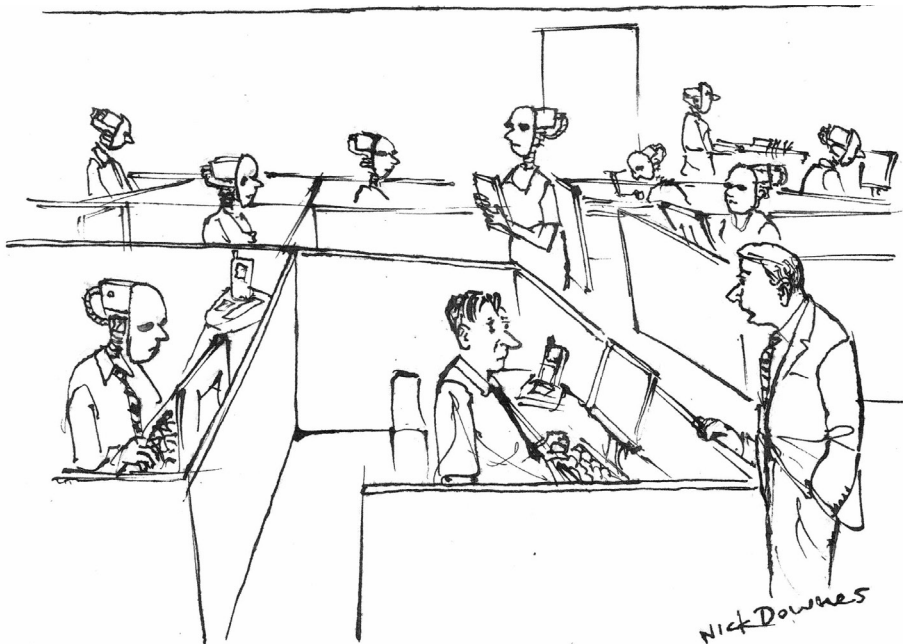
We are left, then, with the monozukuri pun. Do we make objects while they make us? Or do we collapse the pun's waveform and keep just the one or the other side? Are we people without objects, a Platonic vision which denies our physicality? Or are we mere objects ourselves, material without destiny any different than the cosmic swarm of neutrons and electrons? Sen no Rikyū would say that we are humans in a world of things, and that we should humanize by welcoming objects, especially natural objects, into our circle of being. Umehara Takeshi would probably agree.

Modern-day Western transhumanists and posthumanists, however, seem bound to destroy the human, making them more like Sen no Rikyū's tormenter, the hotheaded shogun Toyotomi no Hideyoshi (1537-1598). Hideyoshi ordered Rikyū to commit ritual suicide in a fit of pique over a trifle. Sen no Rikyū wrote a parting poem—to the knife with which he had been commanded to slit open his own belly (Okakura 1906, 160). Object-oriented ontology had given way to the posthumanism which all of us will encounter in the end. I cannot help but wonder if the object-oriented ontology and craze for post- and transhumanism which the West has given itself over to will lead to a similar fate for mankind.

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"Why aren't you working from home, Norris? Only cyborgs are required to come into the office."

Euthanasia in Australia: An Update

Australia and Canada are the two English-speaking jurisdictions where the legalization of euthanasia has made the greatest inroads. Critics charge that Canada follows an expansive and permissive approach to promoting “medical assistance in dying,” leading to increased numbers of dead with almost no oversight to check abuse even of the stated rules. As of May 2022, all six Australian states now allow some form of “voluntary assisted dying” (VAD), while pressure to extend killing to Australia’s territories grows. In some ways, Australia is just “getting used to” its newfound pro-euthanasia status. Greg Bodnar, the National Media Spokesman of FamilyVoice Australia (FVA), based in New South Wales, spoke with John Grondelski for the Human Life Review about the situation down under.

Human Life Review (HLR): Euthanasia is a confusing term to many people. Many different ideas fall under its umbrella: removal of extraordinary means to preserve life, removal of food and fluids if provided artificially, directly bringing about death, whether self-administered or by involving other people. How is the debate shaping up in Australia, and what is the legal situation in your country?

FamilyVoice Australia (FVA): Last year’s introduction by Independent New South Wales (NSW) Member of Parliament (MP) Alex Greenwich of his Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill (2021) (the “Bill”) is a momentous shift in medical practice and community expectation. It marks the final abandonment of one of the cornerstones of Western civilization: the sanctity of life.

First, let’s differentiate between “euthanasia” and “voluntary assisted dying” (VAD) or “government-sanctioned assisted suicide,” as the Christian community in Australia refers to it. Physician-assisted suicide is where a doctor assists a patient to commit suicide by prescribing the lethal drugs to take when he or she chooses. Euthanasia is where a doctor administers a lethal drug to a patient to end his or her life. “The main difference between euthanasia and assisted suicide is who performs the final, fatal act,” said Richard Huxtable, professor of medical ethics and law at the University of Bristol.

Australia’s debate is currently skewed heavily in favor of proponents of euthanasia, who have support from the pro-death Australian media, celebrities, politicians, and even some in the church.

In Australia, euthanasia is a state—not federal—issue. Every state and territory has some form of VAD in place. Voluntary assisted dying began in Victoria in 2017 and Western Australia in 2019. Tasmania and South Australia both legalized VAD in 2021, the latter on the 17th attempt after a three-decades-long

campaign. Queensland introduced VAD in September 2021. NSW ceased to be the last state holdout, adopting a VAD law on May 19, 2022, by a 23-15 vote.

The Northern Territory legalized VAD in 1995, the first jurisdiction in the world to do so. Its law came into force in mid-1996, when federal Liberal MP Kevin Andrews introduced a private member's bill in the federal Parliament to ban the territories from legislating for VAD. The Andrews bill passed in 1997. Both the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory are again calling on the federal government to restore their ability to enact VAD laws, a campaign likely to intensify after the change in government following the May 2022 federal elections.

HLR: Help to effectuate one's death—whether through “physician-assisted suicide” (PAS) or “medical aid in dying” (MAID)—is making advances in many Commonwealth countries. Can you provide a rundown of where PAS/MAID stands in Australia?

FVA: Suicide and attempted suicide were originally crimes but are now legal in Australia. Though it is not a criminal offense for a person to take his or her own life, assisting or encouraging (i.e., aiding, abetting, procuring, counseling, commanding, or inciting) another person to commit suicide is illegal in all Australian states and territories. This is so even where the person requested assistance to die, and regardless of whether the assistance is provided by a relative, friend, or medical professional. It is also an offense to take active steps to bring about the death of another person, even where the deceased requested the action causing death. That's the distinction between VAD and euthanasia.

Motive for assisting or causing another to die—even if to alleviate pain—is irrelevant to determining whether a crime has been committed. Even if the person asks another to end that person's life, the one causing the death may still be charged with and found guilty of murder or manslaughter. There have been numerous prosecutions against family, friends, and medical practitioners for aiding and abetting suicide, murder, or attempted murder.

Voluntary assisted dying in Victoria and Western Australia are an exception. In those states the legislation protects authorized health practitioners who provide VAD in accordance with the Act, and also protects others (including other health practitioners, family, or care providers) who assist or facilitate a request for VAD.

It should be noted that a person with capacity can lawfully refuse ordinary food and drink, as well as artificial nutrition and hydration (for example, given through a tube into the person's stomach). This is not suicide in Australian law.

Terminology differs around the world. “Physician assisted suicide” (PAS) is used in Oregon and other American states. “Medical Assistance in Dying” (MAID) is the term of art in Canada. “Euthanasia” is used in Belgium and the Netherlands. People of good conscience, including many physicians, are sharply divided on the ethics of MAID/PAS. Unfortunately, much of the support for this practice is founded on several myths and misconceptions regarding existing MAID laws and practices.

Voluntary assisted dying (VAD) continues to be a major legal, ethical, and social policy issue that has been enacted by all of Australia’s six states. The term “voluntary assisted dying” has been evolving in Australia in recent years following inquiries and parliamentary debates about laws enabling a terminally ill person to seek medical assistance to die. This term, rather than euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide or dying, is now the term commonly used in Australia.

In Australia, there have been studies investigating Australian pharmacists’ views about their role in physician-assisted suicide (PAS), their ethical and legal concerns, and overall thoughts about PAS in pharmacy, which found that their role in PAS highlighted the need for a sound ethical and legal framework to support PAS, as well as the need for training and budgetary considerations.

HLR: All six Australian states now allow some form of active euthanasia, although the federal government does not, and has turned away efforts to legalize it in places directly under its jurisdiction (e.g., the Northern Territory or the Australian Capital Territory). Why this difference between the states and Canberra?

FVA: Australia’s Constitution limits what states can and cannot do. The Australian states existed even before Australia’s federal government was created in 1901, so these states have their own state governments, whereas territories are under the control of the federal government. The Northern Territory (NT) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) remained under the control of the Commonwealth parliament, including for matters of euthanasia/VAD. Both the NT and ACT have campaigned for repeal of the 1997 federal law banning them from adopting VAD, and will likely renew that effort.

HLR: What’s driving state efforts to legalize euthanasia? Is euthanasia broadly gaining public support, or are these efforts due to the well-coordinated efforts of an aggressive lobby?

FVA: The shift in the exponential growth of support for euthanasia/VAD in Australia has been fueled by both a gradual departure away from a Christian worldview and, unfortunately, a lack of understanding of the benefits of palliative care as an alternative to VAD.

Proponents of euthanasia and PAS identify three main but misleading benefits to legalizing death: (1) individual autonomy, (2) reducing pain and suffering, and (3) providing psychological reassurance to dying patients. What the proponents fail to disclose is the fact that the main motivations for seeking VAD support are (1) loneliness, (2) the stigma of being a burden, and (3) the pressure from relatives to fast-track inheritance windfalls, as was shown in recent studies of the “no” side of the New South Wales VAD debate.

There is no doubt that the efforts of various pro-euthanasia/VAD organizations have been so aggressive that they make pro-life organizations sound as if they promote pain and suffering, when in fact research shows that VAD techniques can also result in pain. The pro-VAD lobby has used celebrities and media spokespersons to push the cause for euthanasia/VAD through testimonials and endorsements.

The other major driving force in all the states in Australia to legalize euthanasia/VAD is political. Many local MPs are situated in anti-Christian pro-LGBTIQA+ and left-wing progressive electorates, which means that MPs are electorally forced to support euthanasia/VAD in Parliament to secure the vote of constituents. In NSW for example, the Independent MP Alex Greenwich’s Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill (2021) (the “Bill”) was prompted by the pro-LGBTIQA+ and left-wing progressive voters who live in the inner-city electorates of Sydney.

In addition, skewed surveys and opinion polls have shown, incorrectly, that most Australians support voluntary euthanasia due to the prominence of several overseas jurisdictions (such as Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Oregon) that have legalized voluntary euthanasia. On the other hand, polls undertaken by pro-life groups have shown that when opinion polls include questions/statements such as “(1) Would you support euthanasia/VAD if alternative palliative care were available?” and “(2) Would you support euthanasia/VAD if your medical condition could be treated to extend your lifespan...?,” support for euthanasia/VAD drops by over 35 percent.

HLR: Is there any organized or effective opposition in Australia to staunch, if not roll back, the advances euthanasia has made in Australia?

FVA: Yes. There is currently a campaign by organizations such as FamilyVoice Australia, Right to Life Australia, and the Catholic Church to revisit the euthanasia/VAD legislation in place in the various states through new research and through the lobbying of parliaments to undertake “reviews” of existing legislation.

For example, more than 50 people died under Victoria’s euthanasia scheme during its first six months, with the state’s VAD Review Board confirming 52 deaths under the scheme between June and December 2019. Nine of those

died using medication administered by a practitioner, while 43 self-administered. Medication has been dispensed for 66 people. The VAD Review Board chair and former Supreme Court justice Betty King said at the time that because some family members of those who chose to die have not agreed with their decision but supported them nonetheless, a review must be undertaken as access to VAD becomes more readily available.

On 24 November 2021, the Minister for Health, Roger Cook, told the Legislative Assembly that 50 people had “completed the process under voluntary assisted dying,” by which he means that 50 people had died by assisted suicide or euthanasia using a lethal poison prescribed and supplied under the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2019.

This equates to a rate of 0.82 percent of all deaths being deaths by assisted suicide or euthanasia. This is already 64 percent higher than the Victorian rate for the period of January to June 2021—after the Act had been operating for two years—and 34 percent higher than Oregon after its Act had been operating for 23 years.

Total figures from around the world are hard to collate. Figures from Switzerland show that the numbers of those living in the country who underwent assisted suicide rose from 187 in 2003 to 965 in 2015.

According to the 2017 Regional Euthanasia Review Committees (RTE), in the Netherlands there were 6,585 cases of voluntary euthanasia or assisted suicide—4.4 percent of the total number of deaths. About 96 percent of cases involved euthanasia, with less than 4 percent involving assisted suicide; the largest proportion of cases involved people with cancer.

The trend worldwide is that euthanasia and assisted dying rates are soaring. It must be remembered that euthanasia was originally intended for severe cancer patients, and this has now been abused by others with less severe medical conditions seeking VAD options. This indicates signs of a “slippery slope,” with the practice being applied too widely.

As the Dutch laws were designed with cases like terminal cancer in mind—but with cancer patients still making up the majority of requests—the proportion of requests related to other conditions is growing, as it becomes more widely known to both physicians and patients that they could also apply VAD to other categories.

Under these circumstances, pro-life groups in Australia have sought provisions for “review” clauses in legislation that would allow submissions on the failure and/or abuse of VAD.

HLR: What protections exist in Australia to protect people from being pressured/coerced into euthanasia? How effective and well-enforced are they? Are there efforts to undermine or weaken them?

FVA: The various state VAD legislations in Australia do vary in terms of the protections that exist to protect people from being pressured/coerced into euthanasia. Victoria stipulates that people will only receive access to the VAD drugs if they meet all of the following conditions:

1. They must have an advanced disease that will cause their death and that is:
 - a. likely to cause their death within six months (or within twelve months for neurodegenerative diseases like motor neurone disease).
 - b. causing the person suffering that is unacceptable to them.
2. They must have the ability to make and communicate a decision about voluntary assisted dying throughout the formal request process.
3. They must also:
 - a. be an adult 18 years or over,
 - b. have been living in Victoria for at least twelve months (aimed at stopping euthanasia tourism), and
 - c. be an Australian citizen or permanent resident.

So, whilst these conditions exist, people with disability or mental illness who meet the conditions have the same right to ask for voluntary assisted dying as others in the community. However, having only a disability or mental illness is not sufficient reason for a person to receive access to the drugs: They must also have an advanced disease likely to cause death within six months (or twelve months for neurodegenerative diseases) and have the ability to make and communicate a decision about voluntary assisted dying throughout the process. Dementia alone is insufficient to procure these drugs without another condition, but when dementia affects a patient's ability to make decisions about VAD, the patient will not meet the conditions to receive assistance to die.

It is against the law for a doctor to suggest a person seek VAD. He cannot raise the topic unless the person asks the doctor first. Once someone has chosen to seek VAD, that person works with a physician through the legally established process. The doctor cannot advocate VAD and must remind the person of the right to change his or her mind.

Other states generally follow the Victoria model, but the question remains: How effective and how well enforced are their guardrails? The simple answer to this is that there have been cases highlighted by pro-life groups where a doctor has diagnosed a patient with a terminal illness such as the meningococcal disease. After various enquiries about VAD, a decision has been made to "live on" with treatment, resulting in an extended life of another 4-5 years.

Their law had no regulatory or compliance provisions to ensure that VAD was not incorrectly administered in such cases.

The real and growing issue, as evidenced by overseas developments and proposals by Australian pro-death groups, is to extend VAD to people who are depressed or have Down syndrome, or intellectual disability, or autism spectrum disorders, including babies. The Australian groups are fueled by developments overseas in places such as Belgium, which amended its 2002 Euthanasia Act to extend the rights of euthanasia to minors. All these proposals are in effect undermining or weakening the protection provisions in place.

HLR: In countries where physicians have become involved in euthanasia, there is often pressure to erode professional conscience, either by compelling doctors to provide such “services” or at least to refer people to those who will. What does the situation for health professionals’ conscience rights look like in Australia?

FVA: The protection for medical professionals in Australia is not as good as it should be. Victoria offers good legal protection for doctors participating in VAD under its laws. If a doctor abstains out of conscientious objection, that’s fine. But if, in following the law, the doctor makes mistakes, the law has clear and strong protections against liability or professional complaints. In short, a doctor has to deliberately flout the law not to have access to these protections.

The laws are very broad as to what one can object to, ranging from information, any part of the assessment, or actual presence at the death. Some doctors will object to voluntary assisted dying entirely, while others may be willing to provide information and referrals.

Current state and common law protections adequately protect doctors when patients are treated palliatively, when the intent is not to kill the patient. According to the group Doctors Opposed to Euthanasia (submission to Victorian Parliament’s Legal and Social Issues Committee, July 29, 2015), both the community and the medical profession need better education in palliative care practices, to improve awareness of current end-of-life treatment and planning options.

In Victoria, South Australia, and Queensland, a person with a conscientious objection can also refuse to provide information about VAD, but in Western Australia and Queensland, a medical practitioner (such as a general practitioner) who refuses to accept a first request for VAD because of a conscientious objection must inform the person immediately and give the person contact details for a service that provides VAD assistance. Providing this information is also a requirement in Tasmania. Clearly, the obligations of health practitioners who conscientiously object to VAD differ in each state.

HLR: The Low Countries were among the first to legalize euthanasia and have progressively expanded the scope of those who can access euthanasia to include minors. What does that situation look like in Australia?

FVA: Australia has been closely following the Low Countries. Belgium extended its euthanasia legislation to minors, making their legislation the first in the world without a minimum age limit. There is, however, some qualified support against extending euthanasia legislation to minors, but Australia has yet to delve into this issue. Also, unlike in the Low Countries, euthanasia is generally not regulated by national legislation.

This development has caused a lot of angst for the pro-life movement in Australia. The Dutch considered expanding eligibility for euthanasia to children between one and twelve, as children under one were allowed to be killed with their parent's consent following criteria set out in the Groningen Protocols. Children older than twelve are already eligible. After neighboring Belgium passed legislation in 2014 enabling child euthanasia, doctors and activists in the Netherlands were keen to catch up, so now euthanasia is currently legal in the Netherlands for children older than one, with mandatory consent from the patient and their parents. It is also legal for babies up to a year old with parental consent. The patient must be enduring "unbearable and endless suffering," and at least two doctors must agree to the procedure.

Australia is in a different place and asking different questions. So, while those interested in the issue in Australia should be aware of what's happening abroad, caution is needed in applying the Belgian experience here—and particularly without careful regard to the scope of those amendments.

HLR: Another area where euthanasia has made advances is, at minimum, discriminatory non-treatment of handicapped newborns, although arguments exist in the bioethics literature justifying the active killing of handicapped neonates. There have been several cases in Britain of handicapped children (for example, Charlie Gard and Alfie Evans) being denied care, even over the objection of their parents. How does this look in Australia?

FVA: In 1983 the Human Rights Commission was invited by the Australian College of Pediatrics to join with it in promoting discussion of legal and ethical issues related to deciding whether life-sustaining treatment should be given to infants with major disabilities. These issues clearly concern a core area of human rights: the value placed on life. The Human Rights Commission was set up by the Commonwealth Government in 1981 to promote and protect human rights in Australia.

As early as 1985, there was an analytic review of issues relating to the care of newborns with severe disabilities, with particular emphasis on the human rights involved. These derived from the International Covenant on Civil and

Political Rights, the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, and the Declarations on the Rights of Disabled Persons and Mentally Retarded Persons.

The Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons says that disabled persons have the inherent right to respect for their human dignity. Disabled persons, whatever the origin, nature, and seriousness of their handicaps and disabilities, have the same fundamental rights as their fellow citizens of the same age, which implies first and foremost the right to enjoy a decent life, as normal and full as possible.

Further, disabled persons have the right to medical, psychological, and functional treatment, including prosthetic and orthotic appliances; medical and social rehabilitation; education, vocational training, and rehabilitation; aid, counselling, placement services; and other services which will enable them to develop their capabilities and skills to the maximum and hasten the process of their social integration or reintegration.

Baby M was the pseudonym of an Australian girl named Allison who was born with severe birth defects, whose treatment and eventual death caused significant controversy and international discussion about the medical ethics of disabled newborns. Right-to-life activists accused her parents and the hospital of murdering the infant, leading to a lengthy legal inquest.

The quality of life and the death of “Baby M” highlighted the issue that Australian doctors, like their American counterparts, are frequently making decisions resulting in a severely disabled infant’s death, without public guidance and against the backdrop of laws and traditional ethical precepts which uphold in spirit (although, as we shall see, not always in practice) the traditional “sanctity of life” view. It should be no surprise then, when doctors and parents ready to end a child’s life come up against zealous defenders of an infant’s “right to life” who will invoke the law to try to prevent what they see as immoral and unlawful decisions. That happened in 1989, when a severely disabled infant was born and died twelve days later. The case is still invoked by pro-euthanasia groups claiming children as young as twelve should be able to choose to end their own lives, with civil libertarians citing European laws as a model that could be replicated in Australia.

Pro-life organizations like FamilyVoice and the Australian Christian Lobby have warned of the euthanasia slippery slope as pro-euthanasia organizations like the Queensland Council for Civil Liberties promote access to assisted dying for children as young as twelve. Extending euthanasia legislation to children that young sends a dangerous message on the value of life to very young kids, especially when suicide is currently Australia’s leading cause of death of young people aged 14-17 years.

HLR: Philip Nitschke is perhaps one of Australia’s most infamous euthanasia

advocates. His most recent effort is to try to develop a suicide pod called “Sarco” to allow for do-it-yourself suicide. What’s his standing in Australia?

FVA: The concept of a capsule that could produce a rapid decrease in oxygen level while maintaining a low CO² level (the conditions for a peaceful, even euphoric death) was the idea behind Sarco (short for “sarcophagus”). The company behind a 3D-printed pod that can help carry out assisted suicide has said it is confident it could be used in Switzerland as early as next year. Assisted suicide, in which somebody is given the means to end his or her own life, is legal in Switzerland, with about 1,300 people having died this way in 2020.

The capsule’s creator, euthanasia campaigner Dr. Philip Nitschke, sometimes known as “Dr. Death,” invented Sarco in 2017; he has said he plans to make the blueprints available so anyone could download the design. This will be made available for free to “demedicalize” the dying process.

Nitschke, who embarked on an Australia-wide tour in 2019 promoting his space-like Sarco suicide capsule, no longer practices as a doctor in Australia. He burned his medical registration documents in protest of the restrictions against promoting suicide placed on him by the Australian Medical Association in 2015. He maintains that his still notional death-by-design pod will deliver a “peaceful, elegant, almost-euphoric” ending, yet euthanasia opponents see his death-by-design pod as another false step into a dystopian future.

His general standing in Australia ranges from being seen as a “saint” by some patients to being viewed as “Dr. Death” by pro-life supporters.

HLR: While much of the focus in the Covid pandemic has been on preventing deaths from that virus, the world’s nearly two-year lockdown has also seen an increase in depression and suicides, especially among certain more vulnerable populations. Australia has been among the more rigid jurisdictions in matters related to Covid. What does the “bigger” picture look like in Australia? Michael Cook has argued that voluntary assistance in dying can even become “contagious.” Do you expect it will contribute to further acceptance of euthanasia?

FVA: No. Covid-19 has indeed presented a dilemma for both pro-life and pro-euthanasia supporters. On the one hand, there are campaigns to preserve life at all costs, whilst on the other hand, legislation supporting deaths is on the increase.

As of the end of April 2022, there were just under 7,000 deaths in Australia due to Covid; whilst it is difficult to estimate the abortion rate in Australia, as most states do not routinely report abortion data and published national data have been incomplete, it is estimated there are over 100,000 abortions in Australia each year.

Likewise, it is difficult to estimate the euthanasia/VAD rate in Australia, given its newness. However, as a guide, the recent VAD Review Board report in Victoria shows that since June 2019 (when the Act commenced) until 30 June 2021:

- 836 people have been assessed for eligibility to access voluntary assisted dying.
- 674 permit applications have been made.
- 597 permits have been issued.
- 331 people have died from taking the prescribed medications.

Applicants were between the ages of 18 and 101 years, and the average age was 72, with around 46 percent of applicants being female and 54 percent male. Extrapolating this nationally, the growth rate for VAD in Australia is likely to exceed Covid fatality rates and mirror those of abortion in a matter of 10 years.

HLR: Any last thoughts?

FVA: The idea that all human life is inherently precious was not generally affirmed in the world into which Jesus Christ was born. It spread with the growth of early Christianity and finds expression today in the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

For pro-life groups like FamilyVoice Australia, opposition to euthanasia is not just a biblically held view but a moral and ethical view that says life is precious and must be preserved at all costs.

The issue that is rarely addressed is: Who “benefits” from euthanasia/VAD legislation? Suggestions have ranged from the funeral industry to health insurance companies. Is insurance for “voluntary suicide” moral and ethical? Should it be insurable? Likewise, the cost of aged care is skyrocketing worldwide, so is euthanasia/VAD an answer for governments having to care for the aged? There are, it appears, numerous and convincing economic arguments favoring euthanasia/VAD as opposed to the moral, ethical, and social justice arguments that don’t seem to resonate with politicians.

There is simply “no dignity in dying,” regardless of how it is presented.

HLR: Thank you.

The Silmarillion in Silicon Valley

Ellen Wilson Fielding

In light of our culture's cantankerous disagreements about the extent to which our biological and social nature is fixed and therefore inaccessible to radical change, it is worth noting how greatly our Founding Fathers' defense of independence from Great Britain was grounded on a fixed human nature. In fact, if we were today debating the same decision to break off from our mother country's perceived tyranny, during a period more agnostic about both moral absolutes and natural law, we would likely need to rely on less objective and less rational justifications than the appeal to the "laws of Nature and of Nature's God."

The most well-known expression of our Founders' sense of the legitimacy of the American Revolution is the Declaration of Independence, which directs our attention to the previously mentioned "laws of Nature and of Nature's God," apparently without seeing the need to prove the existence of either.

And those writing and deliberating about the Declaration were not alone in this. Revolutionary-era pamphleteer Tom Paine's *Common Sense* (published, like the Declaration, in 1776) accuses Great Britain of "declaring war against the natural rights of all mankind, and extirpating the defenders there from the face of the earth." He defends his preference for a restricted form of government by referring to "a principle in nature, which no art can overturn, viz., that the more simple any thing, is the less liable to be disordered." Enlightenment political thinkers like Locke, whose thought the Founders respected and absorbed, acknowledged natural human rights, principal among them being the rights to life, liberty, and property. In our own time, such "natural rights" ascribed to a God-given, stable human nature may strike many of our citizens as uncomfortably dogmatic or unnecessarily transcendent, but in the Enlightenment era (and long before that—reaching back in conscious thought at least to classical Greece and the Hebrew Scriptures), this understanding of a stable human nature with defined capabilities, characteristics, and rights was both deeply embedded in Christian Europe and, in its particular political implications, cutting edge.

So ubiquitous were natural law-style arguments for human rights throughout

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not only the pre- and post-Revolutionary period of U.S. history but also the nineteenth century that even champions of human rights abuses turned to natural rights arguments. One example was slavery. While many of the slave-owning Founding Fathers admitted the inconsistency of defending this institution while resisting, on grounds of a natural human right to liberty, Britain's curtailment of their own political freedoms, a later generation of Southern slaveholders preceding the Civil War defended slavery as a positive good for the slaves as well as the slaveholders. John C. Calhoun, among lesser-known Southern contemporaries, drew on Aristotle's theory of natural slavery (briefly, that slavery was a state naturally suited to human beings less capable of independent living). What is interesting for our purposes is the resort to arguments on behalf of slavery that interlock with the accepted idea of a stable and identifiable human nature, rather than merely appealing to pragmatism and economic necessity. This human-nature defense of slavery distorts natural law in attempting to defend what the slave-owning Washington and Jefferson had earlier conceded was morally indefensible, but the inclination of slaveholders to justify their "peculiar institution" in this way is telling.

When we skip ahead to today's human rights issues, we often find people expressing agnosticism about a stable and dependable human nature, though these expressions are frequently accompanied by emotional appeals to people's unanchored rights to autonomy, choice, and happiness. Such rights, however, are unstable and cannot be legitimately appealed to if they are grounded in nothing more substantial and enduring than emotion encoded in positive law resting upon fluctuating majorities and a changeable Constitution. At that point it is not clear whether these fiercely defended rights and liberties are based on nothing more than a distaste for tyranny. (This is generally a healthy distaste, I would agree, but we can only conclude that if we understand what it is based on.)

One of the popular justifications for treating the lives of unborn human beings differently from those of the safely born is that the unborn human (or sometimes the unborn up to a certain milestone of development, such as heartbeat or quickening or the possibility of surviving outside the womb) is not yet really one of us, the safely born. Often this attitude is couched in terms of the unborn's attainment of merely "potential life," often distinguished from "actual" human life through the standard of personhood. *We* possess certain rights because we are no longer merely fertilized ova journeying, cell division by cell division, toward the status of human personhood, but actual persons. Once we have achieved personhood, we are henceforth invested with these precious human rights (which may, however, still be lost

under certain conditions, such as extreme physical disability or dementia).

Basing human rights on our discernible status as human persons—a status ascertained by, perhaps, perceived emotional and intellectual responses to stimuli, or even by crude physical markers such as breathing outside the womb—makes them precarious and unstable. They are unstable objectively, because our condition or others’ perceptions of that condition can change. However, they are also unstable subjectively, because of the ambiguity that surrounds human personhood. Right off the bat, if we are relying on our perception of someone’s similarity to us before awarding human rights, we may (it has happened often enough) exclude certain races, or those with low IQs, or those with deformities in appearance, those with physical and mental disabilities that hamper their full participation in the life and work of society.

And at many times and in many places, using such markers to judge whether someone has achieved full humanity has proven convenient to some group or groups in order to leverage them above others or gain some advantage. Holding fast to a stable standard of human definition—and to a correspondingly stable standard of moral behavior—would close off those easy outs, those convenient escapes from responsibility to others.

As we once understood, recognizing a stable human nature that operated according to the laws of Nature and of Nature’s God helps protect against capricious, self-interested, or emotional evaluations of our rights and the duties we have towards one another. The dissolution of our corporate agreement about what human nature is therefore not only threatens the vulnerable categories we have already singled out—the unborn, the unproductive, the expensive, the senile, and those who, because they look or act differently from us, we judge to be subhuman—it also potentially threatens the rest of us.

Recently I was reflecting on this question of human nature from the vantage point of mythological and fictional depictions of created beings. I was considering how the nature of various beings played out in *The Silmarillion*, the foundational mythology on which J.R.R. Tolkien’s books *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* rely. *The Silmarillion* opens with the creation myth of his legendarium, continues with the introduction of evil into this fictionalized version of our prehistorical world, and then spirals into the tragedies that ensue when elves and mortal human beings attempt to surmount or violate the laws of their nature.

Much of the tragedy of Tolkien’s humans during the fictional millennia preceding *The Lord of the Rings* derives from their desire to escape death—the so-called “gift of Iluvatar” (the name of their rather distant Creator) to human beings. Their desire is exacerbated by their envy of the seeming

immortality of the elves.

Technically, as Tolkien explains in *The Silmarillion* and posthumously published work, the elves' gift from Iluvatar is not precisely earthly immortality but "limitless serial longevity" (Letter 208)—the long endurance of life, barring violent death, throughout the long ages of the world. And this built-in consequence of their elven natures carries its own burden of sorrow and temptations to escape. Or as Tolkien explains the separate challenges of men and elves in Letter 186: "The real theme for me is . . . death and immortality. The mystery of the love of the world in the hearts of a race doomed to leave, and seemingly lose it; the anguish in the hearts of a race doomed not to leave it until its whole evil-aroused story is complete."

Now, the hankering of Tolkien's mortal human race for that "limitless serial longevity" and their quest to escape their own mortal fate by toppling the laws of nature and of nature's God resonate strongly with aspects of our own times. Consider, for example, our speculations about how far medicine can expand the bounds of the human lifespan; the preoccupation of Ray Kurzweil and much of the Silicon Valley crowd with achieving the Singularity (the point at which technological growth accelerates to such an extent that, among a mixed bag of consequences, human bodies can be shielded from the effects of aging, effectively launching our own less picturesque version of elvish limitless serial longevity). And then there is the geekier, less viscerally satisfying version of immortality through uploading of the brain's contents into a computer (the sort of sidestepping of death that surely only a socially challenged techie would find appealing).

While privileged pockets of humanity plot to cheat death in various ways through the progress of medicine and technology, there are other less extreme but more broadly applicable sorts of grappling with a heretofore fixed human fate. Since the goal of euthanasia by definition is death, mercy killings and assisted suicide cannot be labeled as solutions to mortality. However, they are promoted as ways to give human beings greater control over the timing and circumstances of death. In a sense (if only symbolically), they wrest control over our mortality from God (who, whether we who were banished from Eden consider death his gift or his punishment or a combination of both, is as little esteemed by our age as Iluvatar was by the Numenoreans rebelling against the natural order in Tolkien's mythological pre-history).

But we post-moderns have developed much more imaginative ways of denying the constraints of human nature. We now insist that gender itself is not fixed, and in pursuit of the power of self-creation pump our bodies full of hormones and wield scalpels to chisel them into shapes and functions intended to align with our imaginings. Although a great many people catch

the insanity of this project, and back away from its Tower-of-Babel implications, it is astonishing how many go along with it. If a lion in the wilds of Africa gave up catching prey to live life as a vegetarian, we would perceive the obstinate self-destructiveness of its dietary choices, because we know a lion is by nature carnivorous. If our pet dog leaped from our second-story window under the delusion that it was a bird, we would not benignly endorse its choice of identity. The truth is clear enough when we picture other species choosing categories of behavior that do not accord with their nature and can therefore only end in disaster. Why don't we react to our fellow deluded humans with similar seriousness and a determined grip on (stable) reality?

The Numenorean rebellion against mortality was also accompanied by a turn to devil worship, as they "made [human] sacrifices to Melkor that he should release them from Death. . . . But for all this Death did not depart from their land, rather it came sooner and more often, and in many dreadful guises" (*The Silmarillion*, pp. 273-274).

In the real world of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, we have adopted our own version of those human sacrifices. The enormous numbers of those aborted in modern times must surely cast into shade all those sacrificed by such earlier practitioners of human sacrifice as the Aztecs, Incas, some of the peoples of the ancient Near East, and many other primitive cultures. A mountain of corpses reaching the height of Everest likely would not deplete the available inventory, which is daily being added to. The ancient pagan human sacrifices were generally offerings to obtain good fortune of some kind from the gods, to accompany the deceased king to the underworld, or to ward off evil. Although our own era's abortions are not intended to placate actual pagan idols, they may perhaps be understood as sacrifices to our contemporary idols of human autonomy and sexual fulfillment.

It is not that the immediate motivations of the women sadly occupying molded plastic seats in a Planned Parenthood waiting room can easily be identified with the idol worship of sexual pleasure or moral relativism. Many of the women who wind up in abortion clinics are abandoned by partners or family, young, and frightened by the life-altering implications of their pregnancy. Some have swallowed our contemporary fairy tale about how "natural" sexual desire is, and therefore (in a conclusion even those ancient cultures would not have arrived at) how inconsequential and unprofound it is, how unnecessary to restrain and, indeed, how necessary to indulge. One result of accepting this fairy tale is the funeral march of hundreds of thousands of American women to abortion facilities each year. There they take part in a great national act of sacrifice at the altar of sex free from unintended consequences.

The ancient pagan societies that tolerated acts of abortion or infanticide at the margin or in exceptional times or circumstances still understood better than we do the laws of nature and of nature's God, though that knowledge remained partial and restricted. They understood that sex was an activity specially set apart from other human pleasures and pastimes like eating and drinking because it generated life, and therefore was in some sense sacred. In tandem with this understanding was their grasp of the critical social importance of properly caring for the children that were not sacrificed to those pagan gods. From this context arose the double standard under which fornication or adultery was judged more damning for women than for men: To their minds, this was a necessary adjunct to the effort to guarantee (as far as possible) that children would be reared in a family capable of handing onto them the laboriously accumulated customs, skills, and cultural wisdom required to extend into the future the life of their society. All the effort of each generation to pass on to the next the tools and traditions it has acquired represented a desperate flinging into the future of the hope for a bloodline that would survive and multiply. If each generation did its part, there would be an increasing store of history and wisdom to hand on, as a relay racer hands the baton to the runner of the next leg of the race.

The stakes are very high, as many of us can see by our own civilization's bobbling of the baton transfer. If one generation, one link in the chain of tribal history, decided to jettison its treasury of knowledge about how to live and work and worship, what would happen both to that generation and to those who would have been receiving the precious legacy? What would happen if one of those ancient tribes decided, for example, *not* to protect and support and encourage marriage, *not* to develop among themselves strong kinship bonds, reciprocal relationships of support, and an ethic of duty towards parents and elders? The tribe would fail to cohere, fail to offer meaning, purpose, and belonging to its members. But also, it would fail in very material and even economic ways. Members would face a predictable crisis in old age, if their children had not been taught to care for those who had given them life—or if they had never chosen to have children, or had reproduced irresponsibly and lived chaotic, unstable lives.

Today, in modern societies with social welfare nets and 401ks, where almost no one but the Amish attempt to make a go of the kind of family farm in which even pre-adolescent youngsters can be an asset, we may be tempted to view this primitive dependence on children as outmoded. But as we age, our own social and emotional dependence on the generation after us remains a greater staff of support than we like to acknowledge. And despite the political, economic, and scientific advantages of our contemporary lives,

we too continually require a rising generation of peak productive adults to provide for those aging out. Younger replacements are needed to produce our food and goods and to pay for our Social Security, Medicare, and pensions. But in addition, no matter how prudent, self-sufficient, and financially successful we may be, in old age we will still need the services of police officers, firefighters, emergency personnel, and soldiers to protect us. We need doctors and nurses. Eventually, we will need someone to bury us, and we may hope for someone to pray for our souls.

If there aren't enough younger people to fill all those roles—and to begin the process of bearing and bringing up the next generation—then we (and they) suffer. That's an operation of natural law, too. Even China has recently recognized the disastrous consequences looming over them as their population begins to tip into decline. Attempting to reverse the effects of decades of draconian limits on family size, the Chinese government is now encouraging larger families, though it is unclear what effect this will have. In any case, even if their about-face is wildly successful, it will not relieve the next couple of generations of the struggle to survive the stresses of their inverted population pyramid.

Sometimes a society will misinterpret or misread or just plain revolt against a particular aspect of reality because it constrains us in an area where we refuse to be constrained. And sadly, almost every society I can think of has singled out some group or groups to treat inhumanely—racial or ethnic minorities, the poor, religious minorities, political opponents, foreigners, the very young or very old, the mentally ill or disabled. We may wish to try to minimize our own shortcomings by dwelling on the record of historical violators of human rights. However, we might take less comfort in comparisons with imperfect societies of the past if we took into account the numbers (and percentages) of those sinned against.

Let's consider that mountain of the aborted I talked about earlier. Comparisons with primitive societies of the past are particularly telling when we remember their extreme precariousness. Although we still have people going hungry and living without basic necessities in our country, our agricultural, political, social, and technological development makes possible the kind of safety nets that a pre-modern subsistence society subject to famines, floods, disease, and other assaults of nature could not even have conjured up as a fairy tale. If members of one of these pre-modern pagan societies could speak to us, they might say something like this: "We sacrificed our children in cataclysmic times, or if we deemed them incapable of bearing their share of the necessary burdens of life, or if we worshipped brutal gods who demanded this of us. What is your excuse? Why do you

sacrifice yours?”

I suppose that a partial answer relates to the very prosperity that makes our lives (up until their end, as we await the Singularity) less precarious, less vulnerable to the variations of nature, even in the era of Covid. Despite the deaths and hardships caused by the pandemic, our losses have been relatively minor compared to those societies that underwent any of the great epidemics before the era of modern medicine. In fourteenth-century Europe, the Black Death killed one-third to one-half of the population. However, the same medical and economic progress that enables us to better provide for the unborn and the just born and young children also raises their price tag and postpones their productivity, encouraging us to regard them more as costs and less as assets, at least in the short term. And our progress also opens us up corporately and individually to the illusion that we can more and more wholly devote our lives to individual fulfillment and personal pleasures without putting either society or ourselves at risk.

One of the reasons we can be blind to the consequences of violating natural laws related to our human nature and to our moral duties is that these laws do not necessarily prevent us from violating them, as physical laws like gravity do. Instead, our fixed boundaries and the moral map in which we are intended to navigate life become more apparent to us after we have violated the natural law, in the form of unpleasant or unforeseen consequences. We are physically capable of aborting a child or ending our own lives early or blocking puberty or producing male secondary sex characteristics in a girl. We are not capable of altering moral law to make these things be right, and therefore we are not capable of preventing them from having adverse consequences.

Like overwrought two-year-olds enthralled by the word “no,” we in our era have largely been seeking our own way, screaming our freedom to choose who we are and how we will live. Our denial of the need to live within the limits of the “laws of Nature and of Nature’s God” is our rebellious “No!” to the Universe and, ultimately, to its Creator. And we do have that freedom to choose and that right to scream “No!” to the Universe. But not without consequences. Closing our eyes to reality or putting our fingers in our ears to block out God’s voice is not in the end a viable strategy for either happiness or survival. Holding our collective breath until we all turn blue in the face will not render our bodies capable of living without oxygen, and it will certainly not transform us into Masters of the Universe. It is more likely to earn us a lengthy time-out.

BOOKNOTES

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AFTER THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION: A CATHOLIC GUIDE

Helen Alvaré

(Catholic University of America Press, 2022, paperback, 248 pages, \$24.95)

Reviewed by Edward Mechemann

Battles over religious liberty are in the news daily. These take place not just in courts and legislatures, but in the forum of public opinion. The main conflict is between post-modern sexual orthodoxy and traditional religious beliefs on the nature, purpose, and meaning of sex.

Helen Alvaré's new book, *Religious Freedom After the Sexual Revolution*, offers an approach to this conflict that is likely not only to help win victories in courts and legislatures, but also to convert people's hearts. The book couldn't have come at a more propitious moment.

Alvaré is uniquely qualified to address this problem. She has worked for decades at the intersection of law, religion, and public communication. She is deeply respected in the Catholic Church and in other faith communities. She has written extensively and thoughtfully on empirical studies of the sexual revolution and its negative impact on individuals and families.

Her premise is that, while religious organizations and individuals are winning many of the legal battles, they are not presenting robust and convincing arguments about why they *should* win. In that sense, these legal victories are nevertheless failures. They are not convincing people of the reasons behind traditional religious beliefs and why they should be protected by law.

This book provides a way not only to win legal cases but also to “shore up respect and affection for religious freedom and for Catholic teachings on sexual expression.”

The author begins with an excellent diagnosis of the factors that define the dominant ethos of “sexual expressionism.” This ethos is rooted in individualism and subjectivism, and imbued with the sense that sex is the most important element defining a person's identity. It rejects and inverts traditional values—among them, the value of children. All of this is in service to a completely subjective notion of happiness that individuals define for themselves, and in the pursuit of which sex is just another commodity to be used.

The legal manifestations of sexual expressionism are well-known—the Supreme Court's creation of a “right to privacy,” the legalization of abortion and ultimately the redefinition of marriage and sex, and the advance of gender

ideology. The operative legal theory is summarized in the infamous non-sense expounded in the Court's *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* decision—that the Constitution protects “the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.”

All this is preparation, however, for Alvaré’s blunt and incisive critique of the way the Church presents Catholic teachings in public and in court. While technical and rule-based arguments may satisfy legal requirements in court, they are ultimately “insufficient and ineffective.” They fail to offer a robust and inspiring explanation of the nature of Church institutions and why her teachings on sex make sense.

To overcome this failure, the Church must emphasize that her institutions are communities “gathered in response to God’s invitation and a shared conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior,” that all the Church’s policies are an expression of authentic love for neighbor, and that employees of these institutions are personally committed to this mission.

What a contrast to the sterile and boring “mission statements” of too many Church agencies!

This means that Church agencies must ensure that their staff are fully on board with the mission and cannot tolerate employees who undermine it. To prove her point, Alvaré lays out the substantial social science evidence (known as “Social Influence Theory”) that the conduct and attitudes of individuals affect whether the institution can accomplish its mission.

This is the book’s most important contribution—an empirical explanation for why integrity of mission is indispensable. If dissent is permitted, it necessarily metastasizes and undermines that mission. At the same time, as long as integrity of mission is maintained, authentic and enthusiastic personal Christian witnesses will convert others and enhance the mission. This provides powerful evidence that Church institutions must retain control over whom they employ, even against the requirements of anti-discrimination laws.

But for this striving for mission integrity to be effective, “Catholic identity” must mean more than having crucifixes on the wall. Church institutions must become “integrated communities of witness to Christ” that are ready to oppose sexual expressionism through a compelling presentation of God’s vision of sex as a radical way of loving our neighbors and the path to true happiness. Alvaré’s chapters on these interrelated topics are clear and challenging. Leaders of all Church institutions need to be much better formed in these principles, and this book is an excellent guide.

Having laid this foundation, Alvaré next provides a road map for effective Church communication on all the major contemporary challenges, from same-sex marriage to abortion to gender identity. She weaves together the

themes from the earlier chapters into compelling arguments for religious freedom. Readers may be tempted to consult just this chapter, because it is so obviously practical. But these arguments will only be effective if they rest on a solid understanding of what has gone before.

To be sure, such arguments will still cause offense to people in the grip of the ideology of sexual expressionism. But Alvaré is absolutely correct that the Church must be a countercultural witness against the fallacy this ethos propagates. In the end, error can only be successfully countered by the truth.

This book should be required reading for Catholic bishops, as well as their lawyers, communication directors, and anyone in a leadership position. While it is explicitly aimed at Catholics, it can easily be adapted to and applied by other religious communities. All the book's arguments are presented clearly and cogently. Some subjects, particularly the legal ones, are complex and difficult, but the author succeeds in making them accessible to non-experts, thereby achieving an eminently practical book.

Alvaré is optimistic about what would happen if her advice were heeded. One can only hope that she is correct. But it is certain that if the Church continues to use the same old arguments she has employed in our era to fight for religious liberty, she may win more legal battles, yet continue to lose the war.



"T.M.I."

FROM THE WEBSITE

BOTTLE BABIES

Diane Moriarty

With the overturn of *Roe* and its emphasis on viability, “life begins at conception” has a chance of graduating from opinion to law in the form of fetal personhood legislation. This raises issues ranging from the ridiculous to the sublime. Ridiculous as in the abortion rights advocates’ fear-mongering about ectopic pregnancy; sublime as in the matter of “test tube babies.”

The Supreme Court declined to weigh in on fetal personhood in *Dobbs*. “Our opinion is not based on any view about if and when prenatal life is entitled to any of the rights enjoyed after birth,” wrote Justice Alito. Legislation concerning fetal personhood, however, has been introduced several times in Congress, most recently last year. The Life at Conception Act (H.R. 1011) would extend 14th Amendment protection to all unborn life: “This bill declares that the right to life guaranteed by the Constitution is vested in each human being at all stages of life, including the moment of fertilization, cloning, or other moment at which an individual comes into being. Nothing in this bill shall be construed to authorize the prosecution of any woman for the death of her unborn child.”

While there is no longer a constitutional right to abortion, such a law could still be challenged for violating state constitutions, and, let’s face it, it could be a way to use Congress to enact a nationwide ban on abortion, which conflicts with the pro-life political stance that abortion law should be left up to the states. Of course, Nancy Pelosi’s Women’s Health Protection Act sought to establish a nationwide abortion mandate, but Democrats are often keen on one-size-fits-all solutions. It’s interesting to note that the Life at Conception Act includes cloning. To be so comprehensive suggests that it’s more than just an abortion-ban gimmick. Perhaps it aims to keep the white coats from having their creepy merry way with human embryos in laboratories?

The prospect of fetal personhood also has the fertility industry worried. A fundamental reason for its success here is that the United States has fewer limits on in vitro procedures—such as how many eggs may be fertilized and implanted at the same time—than many other countries. Before *Roe* was overturned, Nebraska was thought to be one of the states most likely

to ban abortion. Not so, at least not for now, as lawmakers there recently failed to pass a 12-week ban. But prior to this a measure defining life as beginning at fertilization had been under consideration in the state legislature. Elizabeth Constance, a doctor at the Heartland Center for Reproductive Medicine in Omaha, was quoted in a *Washington Post* story last May claiming the bill had “a very real potential to impact our ability to safely and effectively perform IVF procedures.” No, doc, enacting a state fetal personhood law would just mean you’d have to close up shop in Omaha and, along with your neighborhood abortion clinic, open up for business in another state. Geeesh!

The subject of in vitro fertilization raises moral and humanistic questions, and opinions vary. Back in 1978, after the birth of Louise Brown, the world’s first “test-tube” baby, Israel’s Chief Sephardi Rabbi Ovadia Yosef ruled artificial insemination was halachically valid as long as there was no other way for the woman to become pregnant. But at the same time Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren said that although there was no halachic ban on the procedure, the practice was contrary to Jewish morality. Protestant theologian Karl Barth, the father of “neo-orthodoxy,” warned that artificial insemination would lead to a “dreadful, godless world” à la that depicted in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*. In 1987, the Catholic Church’s Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued *Donum Vitae* (The Gift of Life), which concluded that in vitro fertilization violates the dignity of the human person and the institution of marriage because it replaces sexual intercourse. More recently, however, the Pontifical Academy for Life (PAV) has implied that in some instances artificial procreation could be morally licit. In response to those who accused him of giving authority to theologians considered to be heterodox, Bishop Vincenzo Paglia, the president of the Academy, replied: “We rather wanted to bring together different opinions on very controversial topics, offering many points for discussion.” The Russian Orthodox Church has also announced (last year) that it is considering revisiting its negative stance on artificial conception.

One concern about test-tube baby technology impossible to ignore from a life-begins-at-conception standpoint regards “spare” embryos and what to do with them. Efficiency and success rate determine the fertility industry’s bottom line—spares or “extras” are labeled mere “products of conception,” the same term used for aborted-baby parts, and are to be discarded without thought. Or donated to “science.” Or, as is the case in our country, frozen indefinitely, because in many cases, the parents of the embryos don’t want to destroy them, even if they suspect they won’t be using them in the future. A couple with moral convictions, and a lot of money, can address this by

making sure all their embryos are implanted. It's more strain on the woman—who is likely to have already endured several cycles of fertility drugs to boost her egg production, and maybe miscarriages when the embryos failed to implant and thrive—but ultimately, it's her choice.

Perhaps, if there is a moral push to do so, legislation in the U.S can be brought in line with that of other countries, eliminating the problem of “left-over” embryos. The sticking point for many religious leaders, however, is their contention that using the test-tube baby process makes the child a product of technology instead of a gift from God, hence the indignity. A few also say that the process is tantamount to adultery, because the doctor is impregnating the wife, not the husband. Risking irreverence, it seems to me like a thousand angels on the head of a pin all gazing at their navels. Life is a precious thing to possess, no matter if it begins in a petri dish. To exist, to be here. That is the gift. Believe me.

* * *

My mother had polio and was told she'd never have children. She had four. The first three were very easy, about 30 minutes labor each. I was number four and from the beginning she had a “bad feeling.”

In 1950 a disabled woman could get a legal abortion; all she had to say was “I don't think I can handle it.” If her doctor had compunctions, there were others who didn't. Her doctor had compunctions and talked her out of having an abortion. Her fears came true; she couldn't push me out. The doctor told her, “You have to be brave and die for the baby.” Shocked, she cried out “No!” He picked up a syringe and moved towards her. “I want a policeman,” she screamed. A nurse knocked the needle out of his hand. Then he walked out, and another doctor took his place. Mom said she thought he was Greek, and uncommonly small for a man. “Save us both,” she told him. He told her she was risking her life. She said every woman risks her life. He said she would have to work very, very hard, and began a forceps extraction, pulling the baby out by the head. Almost always the baby was decapitated, a “late term abortion” circa 1950. But my mother had said “Save us both,” so he worked hard too. A nurse cried: “I see an arm!” The doctor hooked one finger under my armpit and completed the delivery. Happy mother, happy doctor, the nurses applauded. On my birth certificate the space for attending physician is blank.

I say my morning prayers when I walk to the corner to get the newspaper: This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it; the Our Father and the Hail Mary; Glory Be; Grace (I read in a novel it's apropos at

any time). I don't say an Act of Contrition (c'mon! I just woke up!). Then I ask God to save babies today, as I was saved, for them to have life, as I've had life. I guess it's what shrinks would call a "trigger," but every time I say this, I get the same rush of feeling—what it means to be alive. The gamut. The high of finally getting something you've worked for; grief so deep your chest hurts (they don't call it heartbreak for nothing). The simple bliss of feeling the sun on your face and smelling just-cut grass. Isn't simply to be here precious? Isn't being labeled a "product" an indignity?

(For an in-depth analysis of the Catholic Church's position on in vitro fertilization as laid out in *Donum Vitae*, and the ways in which a recent book issued by the Pontifical Academy for Life challenge it, see "Going Beyond the Letter of the Law" by Gerhard Ludwig Müller and Stephan Kampowski, published by *First Things* on August 27, 2022.)

—Diane Moriarty is a freelance writer living in Manhattan.

OVER THE POST-ROE BLUES (PART II)

Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth

The Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* sparked celebration and joy throughout the pro-life community. It also unleashed protest and anger in many sectors of the pro-abortion community.

"Pro-choice" outbursts of fury in the streets and in the media were a sober reminder to the pro-life community that we are, and always have been, in a precarious position. While proliferators make up a formidable social and political force in our society, we lack the overwhelming institutional support enjoyed by abortion advocates. Medicine, law, media, education, entertainment, and increasingly, corporate America are generally pro-choice in their ethos and messaging. In short, abortion supporters are the establishment.

Throughout history, others have faced similar seemingly overwhelming opposition. Consider the Swiss Calvinist Karl Barth (1886-1968), the greatest Protestant theologian of the twentieth century. After serving as a Reformed Church pastor for several years in Switzerland, Barth became a professor of theology and, between 1921 and 1935, taught at three German universities.

Barth's public witness could be described as an unofficial minority report. In the early 1930s, National Socialism was metastasizing in German culture and politics—particularly among the country's elites, and especially in the

universities. It was poisoning, if not unto death, most German institutions—including the churches. Barth recognized the National-Socialist threat for what it was—darkness, lies, and violence. As a Christian theologian, he was deeply disturbed by Hitler’s plan to take over the churches and make the Gospel serve Nazi ideology.

Barth was not alone. There were other Protestant pastors, professors, and laity who were disgusted and alarmed by National Socialism’s infiltration of the churches and manipulation of the Gospel. Many bonded together to form the “Confessing Church” (to confess the Church’s historic faith over against National Socialism’s politicized faith). In late May of 1934, they gathered in Barmen, Germany, to issue a theological declaration to strengthen church resistance to the Nazi threat.

Earlier that month, Barth had met with two Lutherans, Hans Asmussen and Thomas Breit, at the Basler Hof Hotel in Frankfurt. The three had been charged by Confessing Church leaders with drafting the declaration that would be refined and adopted at the Barmen gathering. About the actual writing of it, Barth quipped: “The Lutheran Church slept, and the Reformed Church kept awake.” In reality, he reported, while the two Lutherans took a three-hour nap, he “revised the text of the [declaration’s] six statements, fortified by strong coffee and one or two Brazilian cigars.” Two weeks later, the pastors and professors at Barmen enthusiastically endorsed what is known today as the Barmen Declaration. (Google it, read it, and be inspired by it, if you dare.)

In the face of what seemed to be an overpowering totalitarian enemy, the Barmen Declaration asserted the truth about Jesus Christ and His Church. In every line, if not every word, it challenged National Socialism’s ruthless takeover of the churches and the Gospel. For example, Article 2 thundered: “We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords. . . .” In the midst of a rising Nazi tide, Barmen proclaimed that only Jesus Christ is Lord—not National Socialism, not the Fuhrer, not vicious and violent bureaucrats.

“For All the Saints,” one of the Church’s great hymns, offers hope to the saintly in their earthly struggles: “And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,/steals on the ear the distant triumph song, and/hearts are brave again, and arms are strong/Alleluia, Alleluia!” (stanza 5). The Barmen Declaration offered a measure or two of “the distant triumph song” to embolden Protestants who were suffering under National Socialism.

Today, government officials in the United States, at both the federal and state level, are using raw (not constitutional) power and plentiful resources

to harass, intimidate, and undermine the pro-life movement. The Justice Department, for instance, has launched a campaign against abortion clinic protestors, with gun-toting FBI agents making early-morning, at-home arrests in front of pajama-clad little children. Meanwhile, pregnancy centers are vandalized or destroyed, demonstrators illegally disrupt the neighborhoods and threaten the lives of Supreme Court justices, churches are defaced and desecrated—and law enforcement is not bothered.

Karl Barth and the Confessing Church faced similar circumstances. In 1935, when Barth refused to sign an oath of allegiance to Hitler—he had mailed Hitler a copy of the Barmen Declaration—he lost his university job and subsequently returned to Switzerland. The response is simple but difficult. Be faithful to Jesus Christ and His Lordship—which includes not only helping to protect the lives of unborn children and their mothers but also taking part in the political process and voting. Fixing everything is beyond our ability. But we can stand up for what we believe. Be faithful—in word and in deed—one day at a time.

—Rev. Paul Stallsworth is a retired pastor in The United Methodist Church. He leads the Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality, edits its quarterly newsletter Lifewatch, and lives with his wife Marsha in Wilson, NC.

THE BREAKS, OR THE MORAL OF THE STORY

Peter Pavia

Some years ago, twenty-three to be exact—I'm sure because it was the occasion of my wedding day—I received this note: "Hope everything breaks your way." It was from one of the most generous people I've ever known, a man who committed much of his life to splashing money around. He used to own a big house, styled-out with tasteful furniture and a "built-in" swimming pool, as we used to call them back in the day. He drove flashy cars. Inside the card on which the note was written were a faded ten-dollar bill and two dog-eared twenties. I knew what a sacrifice that fifty bucks represented, but I also knew how much more he would have wanted to give me if he still had the means. I winced.

The man was suffering from a dramatic reduction in circumstances. And had been for some time. New owners were frolicking around in the built-in pool. The fancy car had roared off in a cloud of some other joker's dust. The

usual pitfalls were to blame: drugs, crime, ill-taken “romantic” decisions, and a couple of prison bounces, all leading to that ultimate *bête noire*, failing health. Note: When you were a kid, the old-timers who used to say “If you’ve got your health, you’ve got everything,” knew what they were talking about. And when this man included that note with his wedding present, he knew what he was talking about, too: Hope everything breaks your way.

Needless to say, everything hasn’t broken my way, because it doesn’t, not for any of us. I am a fallen inhabitant of this fallen kingdom, and it would be absurd to expect anything different, but managing my expectations has evolved into something of a full-time job.

It would be self-pitying and sad-sack, bad form really, even to attempt to catalog my disappointments. But in the main, they’re marooned in that barbed-wire-strewn no man’s land of my writing career. To say it hasn’t worked out in the way I once hoped (expected?) would be spectacular understatement. The objective was—and still is, despite some embarrassment—to support myself and my family as a writer. The reality is if my wife didn’t work the way she does, I’d be sleeping on your couch.

Learning early on that my pursuit of a literary career would likely produce the financial burden I now shoulder, I determined not to waste one more minute writing about cuff links or sandwich-making or the exertions of some mediocre rock band. I would focus on the things that mattered most to me, things that I love. I love a lot of things. Families and horse racing and God, to name three. Some things I love maybe a bit too much. But I concluded that writing is a mission. And you don’t abandon a mission.

Once I was asked to review yet another biography of Ernest Hemingway. (I love books and I love Hemingway, so okay, acceptable assignment). This particular effort made extensive use of the novelist’s letters, many of them from friends and associates who were also writers. I was startled to see Hemingway’s contemporaries, towering figures of 20th-century American literature, begging him for money. One of them—it may have been Scott Fitzgerald, who had money problems of mythical proportion—wailed, “I might have to get a job!” I can’t express how much better I felt after reading that.

There’s little point in delivering an unseemly resume here, but I’ve been a lot of things: researcher, television producer, unskilled laborer, deadbeat writer, racetrack bum. One friend characterized me as a street guy with an education. That’s pretty accurate. But I cultivated some major values in my halting progress up the hill: sobriety, the Catholic faith, the love of my family, and, though the returns are diminishing, physical fitness. And I remain devoted to them. The only reason I’ve been able to accomplish anything is

that I refuse to quit—about the only quality (I hesitate to call it a virtue) I can take credit for is perseverance. If regular readers here can bear one more reference to Aquinas: The super-brained intellectual mystic of the Middle Ages, with his usual nod to Aristotle, described perseverance as “long persistence in any kind of difficult good.” So there.

Now, far be it from me to evaluate another’s spiritual condition, and I’m not talking about burning sage or burying crystals, although I suppose they’re okay too, but there’s no question that the man of the precipitous fall, he of the dog-eared twenties and the note about the breaks, had a relationship with God. He was as Catholic as anybody. So, after all the money-making and spending, the drugging and the sexing, the setbacks and the losses, he ultimately accepted that what the Lord was talking about in the Gospels—the parables and the works—these had meaning for him, too. His children asked me to say a few words at his funeral. I mentioned perseverance.

Awake in the predawn hours, my current wont as I slouch toward decrepitude, a dim light glows in my home office. I can make out the pictures hanging there, snapshots of my wife and our daughter, a miniature lobby poster for what may be my favorite movie, *The Third Man*, my artist-brother’s interpretation of an infamous Marvel comics sequence, a detail from Heinrich Hofmann’s depiction of an adolescent Jesus teaching in the temple. The latter reproduction has always been with me (I suspect one of my grandmothers obtained the print in some long-ago supermarket giveaway). All of these are signifiers of things I love, artifacts of my life, and as I gaze on them, I am overwhelmed with a swelling sense of gratitude. Hope everything breaks your way. I’ve had every break a guy could have, and then some.

—*Peter Pavia is the author of The Cuba Project and Dutch Uncle, a novel. His work has appeared in the New York Times, GQ, Diner Journal, and many other publications.*

RECLAIMING MOTHERHOOD

W. Ross Blackburn

Motherhood is denigrated in our culture, sometimes even within the church. This stifles our witness on behalf of the unborn and the women who are their mothers. Something similar could be said of the denigration and abdication

of fatherhood. But that is for another day.

There are many examples—such as calling abortion “a medical procedure”—of the not-so-subtle seeking to sever the bond a mother has with the child in her womb. Rarely does one find the word mother in abortion literature, unless a woman says she isn’t ready to be one. But we expect that from abortion culture.

Another example, to my mind more insidious, can be found in the following quote from the work of James Davison Hunter, a well-respected sociologist who has written wisely and incisively about modern cultural conflict. Let me say, by way of disclaimer, that I am not entirely sure whether Hunter is speaking in his own voice or raising plausible objections. I suspect the latter—a thoughtful sociologist, Hunter works diligently to keep his perspective at bay. In either case, his words uncover a common cultural perception. Regarding abortion he writes:

A male pro-lifer’s objections to abortion implicitly endorse a division of labor in which women, by virtue of their anatomy, are largely relegated to the role of caregiver and therefore made dependent upon an economically independent male. A pro-life male, especially one who relies upon Scripture or a socially conservative religious and moral tradition (as many pro-life advocates are inclined to do), may respond, “This is the way it should be, particularly through the child-rearing years.” The problem is that childbearing and child rearing need not necessarily be linked. Pro-life men could just as easily stay at home and allow their wives to work; moreover, day care could be encouraged as another alternative for families where both parents prefer or need to work. (James Davison Hunter, *Before the Shooting Begins: Searching for Democracy in America’s Culture War* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 70-71. The book is well worth the read.)

Leave Scripture aside. Note the word “relegated.” To relegate is to downgrade or demote. The word betrays an alarming value judgment about child rearing—which is that a woman’s role in the workforce is an upgrade from her calling in the home.

Furthermore, the words above assert that female anatomy is the reason women are “relegated to the role of caregiver.” I assume he alludes to breastfeeding, since technically that is the only post-birth task a man cannot do. Strangely, it sounds as if the nature of their breasts is the only difference between a woman and a man when it comes to caring for an infant. Are we really to believe that how God fashioned a woman is incidental to her calling, that her body is irrelevant to who she is? That is not to say that motherhood defines all she is, or that her worth depends upon her being a mother. But to deny that her body is a sign pointing to something fundamental about who she is relegates her indeed.

Finally, consider the implication that something is amiss about being “dependent on an economically independent male.” Dependence is not deficiency; it is how God designed the world to be. We are all dependent. The wealthiest man in the world needs someone to grow his carrots.

A woman who raises her children is not relegated to anything. She undertakes a calling as important, glorious, wearying, and difficult as any outside the home. Moreover, it is a calling she is fit to undertake. Chesterton exposes the absurdity of such thinking when he describes the calling of a mother:

To be Queen Elizabeth within a definite area, deciding sales, banquets, labours, and holidays; to be Whitely within a certain area, providing toys, boots, sheets, cakes, and books; to be Aristotle within a certain area, teaching morals, manners, theology, and hygiene; I can understand how this might exhaust the mind, but I cannot imagine how it could narrow it. How can it be a large career to tell other people’s children about the Rule of Three, and a small career to tell one’s own children about the universe? How can it be broad to be the same thing to everyone, and narrow to be everything to someone? . . . A woman’s function is laborious, but because it is gigantic, not because it is minute. (G.K. Chesterton, *What’s Wrong with the World* [Mineola, New York: Dover, 2007], 99-100.)

Exposing what is hidden in plain sight, Chesterton elevates our conception of motherhood. And perhaps implicitly shows us why so many men and women today increasingly find their life in the workforce, not in the home.

The church, of course, knows better, as do many Christians. But the way of thinking Hunter cites is commonly absorbed, albeit unwittingly, by many of us within the church. If we are to have a hope of undoing abortion culture, we must recover an appreciation of the sanctity of motherhood. And use our voice to proclaim it.

—Ross Blackburn is the founding pastor of Christ the King, an Anglican fellowship in Boone, NC. He is married with five children.

THE CHILD IS REAL

Victor Lee Austin

He came to a midweek theology class I offered but not to Sunday church. He was drinking the truths about God like the young adult he was, totally innocent of Christianity. Creation, the cross, the resurrection, the importance of the body: All of this was news to him. Theology was his water in a secular desert.

And one day he asked me to baptize his children

They were not yet born. He and his husband would go receive them once

they were delivered. Would I do the baptism?

I thought: If you had asked me in advance, I would have raised some cautions about IVF. But I had not been asked—in fact, I’ve never been asked. These children, although not yet born, were already real. My heart told me to say yes. And it wasn’t long before my head got in line with my heart: I recognized the reality of the children. Of course, I would be glad to baptize them, to encourage that they be taught Bible stories and grow in faith and goodness. Of course.

* * *

Technology increasingly alters our lived reality. In order to help people understand this—to “feel” it—I have encouraged them to read *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro. In this novel, which is set in an alternative present, the technology has been perfected to clone a class of humans to make “donations” once they reach maturity. A humanitarian effort was underway before the story begins to treat these clones better, principally by giving them an education.

The novel opens with its characters residing in a special boarding school. They never go home for vacations. There is no formal prohibition of them having sex, but they are told never, never to smoke. We learn that they are sterile, and their body’s organs must be kept healthy. Meanwhile these clones grow through the stages of childhood and adolescence. They have crushes. They try to figure out how the world works. Their function in the world is to make “donations”—provide organs—perhaps three or four; with the last donation they will “complete.” Their lives will end. And yet they do not seem to be machines, or animals, or subhuman. The reader thinks: These children could be our friends.

* * *

Technology continues to alter lived reality, and yet, however strange it becomes, however close we draw to actually manufacturing human beings—beyond assisting in their conception and gestation—they remain human, and their humanity—their reality—makes a claim upon us. The question is, will we continue to acknowledge that claim? And to be clear, the question of whether we recognize their claim is a question not about their humanity but about ours.

—*The Rev. Canon Victor Lee Austin is theologian-in-residence of the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas.*

THE LOSS OF NEW LIFE

Maria McFadden Maffucci

Dear John Isaiah,

Your mother and I named you after the saint, John the Baptist, whose birth we celebrated the day we lost you. Your middle name is the prophet whose words gave us so much solace at Mass that day: “The Lord called me from birth, from my mother’s womb he gave me my name.”

We had only just gotten used to the idea of your existence. The faint line on the pregnancy test strip had appeared a couple weeks earlier. We told your siblings about you the day before we lost you, when everything seemed normal. They shrieked with delight and asked if we could fit a sixth baby in our minivan. We said we could, but they want to level up to something that looks built to move school students or Amazon packages.

Don’t worry: They handled your death well. We told them that not every baby in mommies’ tummies survive to birth. Every new life brought into the world is also a new death; it’s only a question of when.

So begins an achingly beautiful column by Brandon McGinley (in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*), about the loss of his sixth child, “Letter to the child I never met.”

In the days since the overturning of *Roe*, there has been lots of rage and fury about women’s “rights” and women’s “bodies”; and yet the prime issue is about someone else’s tiny body, just starting his or her life journey. The loss of that little life often brings piercing grief.

Reading McGinley’s piece brought back memories of my two miscarriages. Without going into too much detail, I experienced fresh grief and guilt because there is no resting place for the remains of my two little ones, except in my heart.

Almost 30 years ago, after my first miscarriage, I wrote an article for the *Review* (“Bringing it All Home,” Fall 1993), about my new experiences of both pregnancy and pregnancy loss, and how I felt about it in light of my pro-life work.

Being pregnant held some surprises for me. I have always, always wanted children, and I was thrilled to find myself pregnant. Still, as the days of morning sickness (throughout the day), fatigue, and hormonally-induced anxiety wore on, I had some ambiguous feelings. Am I really ready to be a mother? Am I ready for my life to change? Rather than spending every minute of the day in rapture about the thought of a baby, I sometimes felt depressed about having no energy, and feeling sick, and then guilty for not being constantly thrilled. And yet I knew I already loved and

fervently wanted the baby . . . As I struggled with these new and complicated feelings, I understood better, almost in spite of myself, the abortion controversy. If the pregnancy had been unwanted, if I were unwed, panicked and alone, then how would I feel? Very much like someone (for it was someone) was taking over my body, very vulnerable, my fear exacerbated by hormones, by the inability to make decisions. I realized that part of the problem with abortion is that we are asking women in crisis, women who are in their least calm and reasonable state, to make a decision that will affect them the rest of their lives and will end another life. In the “old days,” the consensus that abortion was a grave moral wrong set up a sort of guardrail for pregnant women who might be veering, out of despair, towards a dangerous edge. Today, with the idea pushed that a fetus is a human life only if you want it, the guardrail is gone, and women who are in a crisis are being taken advantage of, by men in their lives, by feminists who want to deny that childbearing is more than just a choice among many other choices, and by an abortion industry that makes millions of dollars a year from women “in trouble.”

I wrote in my article in 1993 about the lack of resources for those grieving the loss of a pregnancy. Today there is so much more, and one organization that comes immediately to mind is Life Perspectives, founded by Michaelene Fredenburg, which has terrific resources for those suffering from pregnancy loss of any kind. She began in 2008 with AbortionChangesYou, a website where women, men, grandparents, siblings—anyone grieving pregnancy loss—can go for anonymous and confidential support. And now there is also a special website for those who have suffered a miscarriage, miscarriagehurts.com. In addition, Life Perspectives has recently opened the Institute of Reproductive Grief Care, which “provides education, research and expertise to health professionals and other care providers to offer support after reproductive loss.”

Back to my 1993 article, I reflected:

. . . we in the pro-life movement ought to know that each pregnancy is unique and irreplaceable. That is one thing I now know on a level deeper than words. You cannot replace a pregnancy with the next one. . . . And parents and families who suffer a pregnancy loss mourn the child who didn’t make it. For those who work in Pro-life, and I am sure for those who work in the medical profession, there is the added irony that we try to save children we don’t know, but we often can’t save our own.

Yet in God’s mercy, those we love and lose will rest with the angels.

—*Maria McFadden Maffucci is the Editor in Chief of the Human Life Review.*

In Memory of

Michael R. Long

Chairman, N.Y. Conservative Party, 1988-2019



Great Defender of Life

February 1, 1940-July 24, 2022

APPENDIX A

[Jonathon Van Maren is a public speaker, writer, and pro-life activist. The following article was published on October 18, 2022, on the website of First Things (www.firstthings.com) and is reprinted with the magazine's permission.]

Canada's Killing Regime

Jonathon Van Maren

On October 7, Dr. Louis Roy of the Quebec College of Physicians stated that in the view of his organization, euthanasia for children younger than age one is appropriate if the child has “grave and severe syndromes” or “severe malformations” or “prospective of survival is null, so to speak.” He was testifying before the Canadian House of Commons’ Special Joint Committee on Medical Assistance in Dying. Disability advocates—and other Canadians who still possess the minuscule amount of moral courage it takes to oppose infanticide—were horrified.

Krista Carr, executive vice president of Inclusion Canada, is one such Canadian. “Most families of children born with disabilities are told from the start that their child will, in one way or another, not have a good quality of life,” she told the *National Post*. “Canada cannot begin killing babies when doctors predict there is no hope for them. Predictions are far too often based on discriminatory assumptions about life with a disability.”

Roy’s statement is merely the latest episode in a series of euthanasia horror stories from Canada that are shocking even to dulled Western sensibilities. Canada’s Supreme Court overturned criminal prohibitions on assisted suicide in *Carter v. Canada* in 2015. Shortly afterward, parliament passed Bill C-14 in 2016, which legalized “medical aid in dying” (or MAiD) for adults with “enduring and intolerable suffering” and a “reasonably foreseeable death.” In 2021, Bill C-7 was passed, which legalized MAiD for those struggling with mental illness. Canada has become an international cautionary tale.

Impoverished people are turning to MAiD out of desperation because they cannot access the resources they need or the treatments they require in Canada’s broken healthcare system. *The Toronto Star*—the largest and most liberal newspaper in the country—called it “Hunger Games style social Darwinism.” The story detailed how one woman is considering assisted suicide because she cannot find an affordable place to live in her city with wheelchair access. Her tale is becoming a common one.

Sixty-three-year-old Alan Philips, who has lived with chronic pain for almost two decades, recently got approved for assisted suicide after trying for eighteen years to get spinal fusion surgery to relieve his agony. He cannot get the surgery and has been prescribed opioids instead. “I cannot get adequate healthcare,” he said. “I am fed opioids and left to kill myself. So I asked MAiD [medical assistance in dying] to kill me and they said ‘sure’!”

A mother named Gwen, who suffers from chronic pain and disability from an accident, is considering assisted suicide because she has been denied coverage for treatments that could reduce her pain and allow her to care for her three-year-old daughter. “I didn’t have any idea how bad this condition would get when I had my daughter . . . and I feel like I’m failing her,” she told *The Tyee*. “I’m just so desperate to be with her . . . It’s eugenics, because they don’t want us to be properly supported and be OK. And if we don’t have family to take care of us, it’s ‘Please just go and die.’”

Forty-four-year-old Sathya Dhara Kovac, a Winnipeg woman suffering from a degenerative disease, died by MAiD recently after her persistent attempts to procure home care were denied. In an obituary published after her death, she revealed: “Ultimately it was not a genetic disease that took me out, it was a system. There is desperate need for change. That is the sickness that causes so much suffering. Vulnerable people need help to survive. I could have had more time if I had more help.”

In many cases, desperate Canadians are being offered death in lieu of treatment the system can’t (or won’t) provide them. In one recent incident that triggered national outrage, a Canadian combat veteran reached out to Veteran Affairs Canada for assistance with post-traumatic stress disorder. Instead of providing help, they proposed assisted suicide. As *Maclean’s* magazine titled a chilling essay on Canadians driven to state-sanctioned suicide by their economic conditions, many are “dying for the right to live.”

Their suicides save the system money—as Canada’s state broadcaster inelegantly put it in a 2017 report: “Medically assisted deaths could save millions in health care spending.” A disabled man in London, Ontario, secretly recorded a medical ethicist suggesting MAiD to him; the ethicist reminded the patient that his care was incurring costs “north of \$1,500 a day.” Body bags are cheaper than the virtually inaccessible palliative beds. Canada’s MAiD numbers are spiking year by year, with over 10,000 people dying at the end of a needle in 2021 alone.

Technically, assisted death for mental illness will become available in March 2023 due to a temporary restriction in Bill C-7. At that point, the floodgates will open even farther, because to qualify you will simply need to suffer from something which “cannot be relieved under conditions that you consider acceptable,” an intentionally vague framing. The reality is that these killings have already begun. Alan Nichols, a man from British Columbia suffering from severe depression, was euthanized after his family took him to the hospital for a psychiatric episode. His family was devastated. As Wayne Nichols bluntly put it: “They killed our brother.”

Once the only necessary requirement for doctor-assisted death is suicidal ideation, the Nichols family’s tragic story will become a feature of Canadian life. Canadians who suffer from mental illness, poverty, or chronic pain frequently cannot get help—but they can get killed.

After the Supreme Court’s *Carter* decision, a national debate began over euthanasia and assisted suicide. Bill C-14 was proposed, and many of the country’s elites leapt to defend it. On Canada’s national broadcaster, conversations about it featured only those who agreed with the new law and those who thought it didn’t go far

APPENDIX A

enough. Those of us opposed were cut out of the discussion and called hysterical. Now the media is reporting on the growing pile of corpses that is partly the result of their stupidity and hubris, but no publication will run a column admitting that maybe—just maybe—those who opposed euthanasia and state-sanctioned suicide were right in the first place.



"Just plumping his pillow."

APPENDIX B

[Edie Heipel is the Political Correspondent for the Washington, D.C. bureau of Catholic News Agency, where this article was published on October 21, 2022 (www.catholicnewsagency.com). It is reprinted here with permission.]

***The Guardian* is wrong: this is what a 9-week old unborn baby looks like**

Edie Heipel

An article published this week by *The Guardian* that purports to show that an unborn child “is not visible” until after 10 weeks of pregnancy is “intentionally misleading,” says a board-certified OB-GYN.

The photos accompanying the article, she says, have been manipulated—because the embryo would be clearly visible at this stage of development.

Misleading images claim ‘no visible embryo’

The article, titled “What a pregnancy actually looks like before 10 weeks—in pictures,” by Poppy Noor, includes a series of photos supplied by the My Abortion Network (MYA Network) showing what it says is “what tissue in the first nine weeks of pregnancy actually looks like.”

The MYA Network, directed by Dr. Joan Fleischman, states on its website that it is a “network of clinicians who are expanding early abortion options in primary care settings.” The group offers consultations for early abortions, primarily by abortion pills that women can take at home.

The Guardian’s article states that “patients may come in for an abortion fearful [having] looked at images online,” referring to the many images showing the humanity of an unborn child, even in the earliest stages of pregnancy.

Fleischman said these images make many people “[expect] to see a little fetus with hands—a developed, miniature baby.”

The photos included in the article, however, do not appear to include the embryo at all. Instead, they depict white pieces of the gestational sac and surrounding decidual tissue.

Fleischman says patients are “stunned” when they see the images of what an abortion “actually looks like.”

“This is everything that would be removed during an abortion and includes the nascent embryo, which is not easily discernible to the naked eye. Showing this tissue can be a relief to patients,” the article reads.

“Manipulated” photos

Dr. Christina Francis, board member and CEO-elect of the American Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists (AAPLOG), called Fleischman’s

claims misleading.

“The ‘pregnancy tissue’ photographed by My Abortion Network in this article has clearly been significantly manipulated to the point of being intentionally misleading,” Francis told CNA.

“These pictures, combined with the commentary in the article, erroneously assert that a 6-10 week pregnancy is just a clump of cells, nothing more, or that it’s too small to be seen without a microscope,” she explained.

“This organization’s website states that they removed portions of the tissue and washed off the blood to show ‘the gestational sac alone.’ This means either they removed the embryo from the pregnancy tissue, or the embryo has been so destroyed by the abortion process that it cannot be distinguished from the rest of the tissue photographed,” she said.

“A gestational sac is all we see in early pregnancies (see photos above) as the embryo is not yet visible,” the website states. “What you see here is the gestational sac alone.”

Francis debunked MYA Network’s claims, saying that a fetus at that stage would be clearly visible.

“In fact, between 6 and 10 weeks’ gestation, the embryo grows into a fetus, from the size of a baked bean to the size of a prune. In many cases, they are, in fact, visible to the naked eye. Many women who have experienced a miscarriage or medication abortion can attest to this,” she said.

“This article is insulting to those women, and the misinformation within it does a disservice to all women. It intends to dehumanize preborn human beings, but anyone who has sat through a basic human development class or visited a pregnancy website should be able to see through it,” she said.

“*The Guardian* has deceitfully and strategically chosen to feature an image of the gestational sac around the preborn child, while deceptively refusing to show the humanity of the child,” Noah Brandt, vice president of communications for Live Action, told CNA.

“Lying to women by entirely removing the beating heart, developing organs, and little toes of the person in the womb, calls into question the integrity of *The Guardian*,” he added.

MYA Network also claims that unborn children do not have heartbeats.

“At six weeks of pregnancy the so-called ‘heartbeat’ is just electrical activity of cells, before an actual heart is formed,” their website states—even though the long-standing medical consensus is that an unborn child’s heart begins to beat by six weeks’ gestation.

The group says its goal is to “counter misinformation with facts about what pregnancy tissue looks like in an early abortion or miscarriage.”

The MYA Network did not respond to CNA’s request for comment.

APPENDIX C

[The following press release, which is reprinted with permission, was issued on October 17, 2022, by Progressive Anti-Abortion Uprising, whose website states: “Our mission is to mobilize grassroots anti-abortion activists for direct action and educate on the exploitative influence of the Abortion Industrial Complex through an anti-capitalist lens.”]

PRO-LIFE ATHEIST INDICTED UNDER FACE ACT— FACES ELEVEN YEARS IN PRISON

On Friday, pro-life atheist Herb Geraghty, 26, was indicted by Attorney General Merrick Garland’s U.S. Department of Justice under the FACE (Freedom to Access Clinic Entrances) Act. This is part of the Biden administration’s ongoing persecution of nonviolent anti-abortion activists and leaders.

Geraghty is the executive director of Rehumanize International, a founding board member of Progressive Anti-Abortion Uprising, and is the first atheist to be charged with alleged violations of FACE.

Geraghty is the latest to join the growing list of peaceful pro-life individuals targeted by AG Garland and the Biden administration’s extreme pro-abortion agenda.

This is not about judicial prosecution; it is discriminatory political persecution.

If convicted of the offenses, these nonviolent defendants each face up to 11 years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of up to \$260,000.

For the nearly three decades since FACE was enacted in 1994, it has rarely been used to prosecute life advocates. Yet in 2022 alone, under the Biden/Garland DOJ, there have been at least 22 peaceful pro-life activists indicted under the act.

The DOJ has charged the defendants with conspiring to “deny civil rights,” but the Supreme Court has made it clear that abortion is not a constitutional right.

Terrisa Bukovinac, founder and executive director of PAAU stated, “We stand in solidarity with Herb and the others being ruthlessly prosecuted by the Biden Administration and Garland’s DOJ. This abuse of power is an unacceptable violation of our constitution. We believe Herb will be vindicated from these draconian charges and we will not allow the Abortion Industrial Complex to use fear, isolation, and the threat of incarceration to stop us from protecting unborn children from their killers.”

Caroline Taylor Smith, Public Relations Director of PAAU stated, “The fear that Biden and Garland’s DOJ is attempting to instill in the anti-abortion movement will never succeed the way they hope. We will never cease to act while the genocide of abortion still has a grip on this country.”

The charges against Geraghty and others are particularly problematic because Garland’s DOJ has failed to make any arrests for the targeted vandalizing, blocking, or firebombing of more than 70 churches and pregnancy centers—entities supposedly granted equal protection under the FACE Act.

We implore Congress to impeach Attorney General Merrick Garland and to repeal the archaic and oppressive FACE Act.

APPENDIX D

[Madeleine Kearns is a staff writer at National Review Online (www.nationalreview.com), where the following article was published on October 22, 2022. © 2022 by National Review. Reprinted by permission.]

The *Blonde* Abortion Controversy Puts a Myth on Trial

Madeleine Kearns

What the Marilyn Monroe movie gets right.

“A clump of cells” as a description of the unborn was rendered untenable by advances in ultrasound technology. The preferred strategy now is to change the subject, speculating a series of catastrophes and misfortunes associated with bringing a child to term: “If I don’t have this abortion, I won’t be able to finish college, go to law school, marry the man of my dreams,” etc. Or it can be retrospective, as when Michelle Williams, in accepting her Golden Globe, said she wouldn’t have been able to win the award “without employing a woman’s right to choose.” Whatever the specific circumstances, the justification is always the same: My abortion is (or was) necessary, and I know that for a fact.

Blonde, a biopic about Marilyn Monroe written and directed by Andrew Dominik and released last month on Netflix, has challenged this narrative. By engaging seriously with both the humanity of the unborn and the uncertainty involved in choosing abortion, it has, perhaps expectedly, proved unpopular with abortion advocates. Feminists went into an uproar upon the release. Planned Parenthood condemned it as having “contributed to abortion stigma.”

The movie, based on the novel by Joyce Carol Oates, is fictionalized but stays true to the general arc of Monroe’s life. Norma Jeane Mortenson (later Marilyn Monroe) grew up without a father in the home. Her mother was mentally unstable, and Monroe spent time in foster care. Monroe sought her fortune in Hollywood where she sold nude pictures and slept with producers to advance her career. As for abortions, in his biography, *The Genius and the Goddess: Arthur Miller and Marilyn Monroe*, Jeffrey Meyers wrote that Monroe had as many as twelve backstreet abortions, which “may have caused infections and adhesions that either prevented pregnancy or led to miscarriages.” This is especially sad given that Monroe reportedly wanted children.

In *Blonde*, Monroe (played by Ana de Armas) experiences two abortions, as well as one miscarriage. The first, a result of her ménage à trois with Charlie Chaplin Jr. and Eddy G. Robinson Jr., Monroe is forced to complete after changing her mind. The second, after an affair with President John F. Kennedy, is performed on her when she’s unconscious and unable to consent.

With each pregnancy, the film uses CGI at a high level of detail to show the unborn. Not only are the unborn given screentime—they are also given a voice. During her

marriage to Arthur Miller (Adrien Brody), Monroe, before her miscarriage, clutches her abdomen as the child says, "Don't hurt me like you did last time." When she replies that she didn't mean to, the child's voice says, "Yes you did, you chose this."

According to pro-choice dogma, Monroe's abortions should be understood in the context of a confident career woman who knew what she needed. What we see instead is a highly successful yet broken woman with deep wounds from her childhood.

Despite her deep desires to meet him, *Blonde*'s Monroe is forsaken by her father. She calls each of her lovers "Daddy." Her mother tells Monroe that it's her fault that her father abandoned them and tries to drown her in the bathtub. After her attempt on her daughter's life, Monroe's mother is sent to a mental institution and Monroe to an orphanage. As an adult, Monroe tries to have a relationship with her mother but is ignored. Her acting career begins by her undergoing painful, degrading sex in exchange for a role. This kind of attention follows her throughout her career, as she reaches the heights of fame and fortune. In one scene, as leering men crowd around her, their mouths are huge and distorted. It is as if she's being consumed by them. After multiple failed marriages and mental breaks, Monroe dies a drug-induced death of despair at age 36.

How different Monroe's life might have been if, early in her career, she had gotten pregnant and withdrawn from the dog-eat-dog world of Hollywood. De Armas's Monroe is one of untapped maternal potential. But that potential is thwarted by fear. Fear from her childhood—the fear of being the kind of mother her own mother was. Moreover, there's also the fear that, without "Marilyn Monroe," her escapist identity, she would be lost. In the end, Marilyn Monroe kills Norma Jeane. At the premiere of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, she mutters, "I killed my baby for this?"

What Monroe seems to realize is that having a child might have been a balm for the abuse and rejection she endured in her own childhood. Not only could she have saved her baby, her baby could have saved her. *Blonde* never resolves this question decisively but leaves it open for the audience. Seemingly, though, that's enough to elicit condemnation from Planned Parenthood: "We still have much work to do to ensure that everyone who has an abortion can see themselves onscreen. It's a shame that the creators of *Blonde* chose to contribute to anti-abortion propaganda and stigmatize people's health care decisions instead."

What Planned Parenthood is really demanding is that women who have had abortions see only depictions of women who have had abortions without doubt, conflict, or regret. And that they are spared depictions of the child's humanity and any hope associated with their future. What's vexing to abortion advocates about *Blonde* is that the movie's narrative does not imply that women need abortions, only that some women need to believe they needed them.

APPENDIX E

[Wesley Smith is an author and a senior fellow at the Discovery Institute's Center on Human Exceptionalism. This article was published August 22, 2022, on National Review Online (www.nationalreview.com). ©2022 by National Review. Reprinted by permission.]

Jared Kushner, the Transhumanist in the White House

Wesley J. Smith

Jared Kushner might have used “The Transhumanist in the White House” as the title for his new memoir. Apparently, he has bought into the transhumanist idea—also embraced by the likes of Ray Kurzweil and Zoltan Istvan—that through the wonders of applied science he can live forever, telling Richard Grenell in a recent podcast interview:

From the last year, the one thing I've tried to put a priority on since I left the White House was, you know, getting some exercise in. I think that there is a good probability that my generation is, hopefully with the advances in science, either the first generation to live forever, or the last generation that's going to die. So, we need to keep ourselves in pretty good shape.

Transhumanism is a dangerously Utopian, materialist social movement that worships technology, and believes that a point in time is coming at which the crescendo of scientific breakthroughs—known as the Singularity—will enable us to live forever. How? The most popular idea is to upload one's mind into a computer and live the good eternal life in cyberspace. But what happens if there is a power outage that shuts down all the servers?

It's fun to make fun, but there is a darkly serious side to transhumanism, a deep nihilism that seeks to replace hope lost when God is rejected, and when we are believed to be nothing more than carbon molecules.

To hear more details about this philosophy, you might want to listen to my Humanize podcast interview of Istvan, who ran for president in 2016 on the Transhumanist Party ticket promising to end death—and made international headlines by campaigning in a bus converted to look like a coffin. Yes, he's a great self-promoter, but he is also—pardon the pun—deadly serious about this. And, apparently, he now has Kushner joining the great transhumanism cause.

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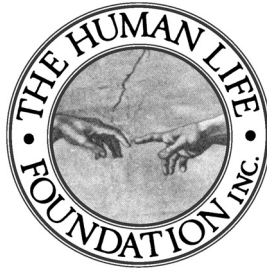
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“Let’s consider that mountain of the aborted I talked about earlier. . . . If members of one of these pre-modern pagan societies could speak to us, they might say something like this: ‘We sacrificed our children in cataclysmic times, or if we deemed them incapable of bearing their share of the necessary burdens of life, or if we worshipped brutal gods who demanded this of us. What is your excuse? Why do you sacrifice yours?’”

—Ellen Wilson Fielding, “*The Silmarillion* in Silicon Valley”