THE HUMAN LIFE REVIEW

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. . . As we begin our 51st year of publishing, I am overwhelmingly grateful to our readers, donors—and brilliant writers!—who continue to make it possible for us to publish the truth in an increasingly destructive culture. 2025 began with some welcome news. On the eve of the 52nd annual March for Life, we learned that President Trump kept his promise and pardoned all 23 prisoners unjustly held for peaceful pro-life protests. And there are several other important pro-life gains: the restoration of the Mexico City policy, which forbids taxpayer funding of abortion overseas; a similar guidance to the Pentagon, ending its policy to cover travel for abortions; the rejoining of the Geneva Consensus Declaration, which states that there is no international right to abortion; and the Justice Department's memo curtailing prosecutions via the FACE act against anti-abortion protestors.

As I write, however, we are in tumultuous times, and political divisions in the country are represented as well in the pro-life movement. President Trump's videotaped speech to the March seemed to make it clear that returning the legality of abortion to the states was his definitive move; on the campaign trail, both President Trump and Vice President JD Vance evaded the abortion pill question saying that too should be left up to the states—yet the abortion pill is now the method used in the majority of abortions. (Two days after the inauguration, a coalition of pro-life leaders petitioned the Trump administration to take action on the abortion pill by reinstating safety measures and the enforcement of anti-abortion trafficking laws.) To the dismay of those in the whole-life movement, one of the president's first executive orders intended to overturn restrictions on capital punishment and expand states' access to lethal drugs. The Vice President, a recent Catholic, has made waves by accusing the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops of caring about the financial bottom line, not refugees, when the USCCB cautioned that, along with justice, there must be mercy, asking the government to carry out immigration enforcement in a "targeted, proportional, and humane way." And while it is life-saving to cut off the massive exportation of contraception and abortion overseas, the "break everything first" approach to USAID funding would hurt many pro-life programs—like PEPFAR—(President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, created by President George W. Bush in 2003) and in so doing, put the lives of pregnant women and their babies at grave risk.

These are the roiling issues today; we do not know what the landscape will look like when this issue hits your mailbox. What we do know: The *Human Life Review* is here to promote and encourage the right to life of all human beings, and to air out and debate the differing viewpoints sincerely held by our fellow defenders of life. And that brings me back to the March. Even though the movement has always had and always will have diversity not only in religion and politics but in priorities and strategies, the March itself is a shining example (and a joyful one, see newcomer Eva Cooley on p. 94) of putting differences aside to unite in what really is the most crucial thing: to be witnesses that all human life, from conception to natural death, no matter age, race, creed, or ability, is to be valued as precious and in need of protection. An ideal in an imperfect world, yes, but one for which we may never stop striving.

Maria McFadden Maffucci

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INTRODUCTION

At our 50th anniversary dinner last fall, co-host Jack Fowler rolled his eyes at the notion of "depressed" Americans who, unhappy with the election results, wanted to move to Canada: "They *kill* depressed people in Canada," he quipped. That might come as a surprise to Hollywood types who make gauzy films about euthanasia, but it's no surprise here. Since its beginning, the *Review* has paid close attention to post-war efforts to rehabilitate "mercy killing" in the wake of the Holocaust. And to the metastasizing number of kills in countries that have legalized what Canada calls MAID (Medical Assistance in Dying), as if doctors who administer deadly drugs really are—as Hollywood depicts them—mere servants of empowered patients seeking to schedule their own death. Hardly.

"Less than a decade into legalized assisted suicide," writes senior editor Ellen Wilson Fielding in "The Inalienable Gift of Human Dignity," "with annual body counts mushrooming and embarrassing stories of impoverished Canadian elderly and handicapped being counseled to consider suicide, it begins to look like Ottawa has come to consider the only good Canadian a dead Canadian." In this wide-ranging essay, Fielding looks at modern cultural avatars like *Brave New World* and other dystopian novels, which "have insinuated into their futuristic social fabric various forms of expedited 'assisted suicide' or euthanasia." She then makes her way back to the Old Testament, the urtext of Western civilization and repository of its erstwhile moral codes: "While our ancestors apparently resembled us in being tempted to neglect or mistreat their feeble and senile elders," she gleans from Sirach and Job, "they differed from a good number of us in refusing to regard those elders as lacking inherent human dignity." As in: Honor thy father and mother. (Not to mention Thou shalt not kill.)

A "late-comer" to the euthanasia debate, England recently opted to join Canada (and other countries including Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Belgium, as well as 10 American states) in trading the age-old sanctity-of-human-life ethic—and Hippocratic Oath—for something more suited to modern times. As William Murchison reports in "The Irreligious Embrace of Self-Slaughter," Parliament "made international headlines" last fall when it "voted in principle for a bill that, once implemented . . . would let doctors 'terminate' the lives of the 'terminally ill.'" ("Terminally ill" is where Canada, now seeking to kill the *mentally* ill, started in 2016.) "A war against life goes on," says Murchison, with "weariness and futility" taking center stage and "apostles of the modern" like Kim Leadbeater, the bill's Dickensian chief proponent, enshrining "a perverse conviction of life as essentially worth neither the pain nor the sorrow nor the time, nor, frankly, the money." Best to put inconvenient people out of *our* misery.

"The civilized obligation," says Murchison, hearkening back to what we believed just yesterday, "the God-loving obligation, is to the relief of misery—a different

thing from its extinction." But have relief and extinction become synonymous? After all, abortion, the extinction of an unborn innocent, is posited as relieving the mother of an inconvenient life inside her. In "When a "Nurse" Kills Her Unaware Patients," Gerard Mundy, a new contributor and philosophy professor, uses the case of a renegade medical practitioner to frame an important lesson in logic: "If one finds disgust," he insists, "in the acts of [one] who is charged with killing her patients, but simultaneously believes in the moral licitness of someone committing an abortion, one must analyze and refine one's first principles and premises." Which is precisely what Mundy does in this carefully argued article, challenging abortion ideology adherents "to defend rationally how the killing of an unaware innocent child . . . may be licit but not the killing of an unaware health care patient."

Perry Hendricks is also a new contributor, and also a philosopher. His provocatively titled "Abortion Restrictions Are *Good* for Black Women" comes to the *Review* having been accepted by another publisher but then rejected after "a social media firestorm," set off by a fellow academic who questioned on X (Twitter) how an article exhibiting "patent sexism, racism and moralism about healthcare" could have made it "through peer review." *The New Bioethics*, a journal that claims on its website to provide "a space for dialogue between different perspectives" and "offers the chance to find new kinds of common ground," initiated another "peer review" and promptly rescinded its acceptance. We invited Hendricks to send us the offending article, in which he argues that "being prevented from performing a morally wrong act is good for someone," and since "abortion is morally wrong" and Black women have the highest abortion rate, abortion restrictions are especially good for them. A "contentious" claim, he admits, but one that "depends on the ethics of abortion," not on the author's sex or the color of his skin.

We follow with "Changing the Culture of Contraception" by Karl Stephan, an engineering professor from Texas who wrote for us last year about the Kate Cox case ("A Pro-Abortion Epiphany," Spring 2024). Here Stephan argues that the "the push for autonomy," which artificial contraception celebrates, has become "a foundational aspect of popular culture." "Anyone," he says, "secular or religious, who hopes to change some aspects of that culture must start from where it is, not from where we wish it might be." As we are seeing today, cultural addiction to abortion as a contraceptive backup won't be cured by law—pro-life measures in the states have taken a drubbing since *Dobbs*—so much as by radical conversion to another point of view. Natural family planning (NFP), Stephan posits, perhaps "rebranded as something like 'natural birth control to widen its appeal," offers a "family of techniques and practices that all begin by taking a woman's biology as given, rather than as just raw material to be manipulated." Something even progressive-minded women might be ready to embrace (see Alexandra DeSanctis's "Feminists and Contraception" in our Spring 2023 issue).

From artificial contraception to artificial intelligence, or AI. It's hard to avoid the topic these days what with the startling introduction of DeepSeek, a Chinese

AI Chatbot, rocking the stock market even as I write. Jason Morgan's painstaking review essay of Ray Kurzweil's latest book, *The Singularity Is Nearer,* could not be better timed. Readers may be familiar with Kurzweil, the computer scientist—and patriarch of the current generation of tech-bros—who predicted nearly two decades ago that by 2050 humans would merge with machines, a convergence he branded the "Singularity." Definitely not, argues Morgan in "The Singularity Is a Mirror"—not near, not possible, not ever:

> Humans are not things, not machines. We are also not information, and are not information's by-product. Neither are the machines we build. So, no matter how hard we try, we will never be able to "merge" with computers. We can go on training computers to ape our abilities, and soon, if not already, computers will surpass us in the subtle motions of mind. But that will eternally be a derived achievement. Doubly so. First there was us, then there were computers. And before there was either, there was some greater mind, from which the orderliness of information and the ability to know what information means—that is, the mystery of consciousness at play—first came.

Amen to that.

* * * * *

At our anniversary dinner, longtime contributor Wesley Smith paid special tribute to two fellow anti-euthanasia stalwarts who are no longer with us—Rita Marker and Nat Hentoff. Smith's remarks, plus tributes to other pro-life heroes, including HLF board chairman Jim McLaughlin's stirring salute to our editor in chief and the journal she shepherds, follow Morgan's essay. (The complete speaking program can be accessed on our website.) In John Burger's "Intellectual Backbone of the Pro-life Movement Celebrates 50 Years" (Appendix A), our editors reflect on the *Review*'s history and its unparalleled role in the abortion debate. The text of Victor Lee Austin's keynote address at our "Breaking Through" event last summer is next (Appendix B), along with remarks by Diane Moriarty, who also spoke at the conference. The titles of George Marlin's "What Catholics Were Thinking on Election Day" (Appendix C) and Michael New's "New Knights of Columbus/Marist Poll Shows Strong Support for Pro-Life Policies" (Appendix D) speak for themselves. As do "How the Pro-Life Generation Is Redefining 'Unthinkable,'" by John Grondelski (Appendix E) and Kate Quinones' "California Settles with David Daleiden" (Appendix F). We close with a lovely column from our own website, "Reflections on the March for Life" by Eva Cooley. "It is no small thing," she writes, "to have tens of thousands of men and women from all different stages of life, marching in a mass of unity and joy." Not a small thing, indeed.

Anne Conlon
Editor

The Inalienable Gift of Human Dignity

Ellen Wilson Fielding

Fall of 2024 witnessed a variety of news accounts on the topic of assisted suicide. On Nov. 11, *The New Atlantis* broke an exclusive story about Canada's increasingly messy Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) practice. Using leaked documents, Alexander Raikin reported that "Ontario's euthanasia regulators have tracked 428 cases of possible criminal violations—and not referred a single case to law enforcement." Less than a decade into legalized assisted suicide, with annual body counts mushrooming and embarrassing stories of impoverished Canadian elderly and handicapped being counseled to consider suicide, it begins to look like Ottawa has come to consider the only good Canadian a dead Canadian.

Meanwhile, in Switzerland, the home of international assisted suicide tourism, a legal uproar broke out last September over the death of a 64-year-old American woman. She was the inaugural user of the Sarco suicide capsule, a coffinlike structure engineered to administer nitrogen gas once the suicide seeker presses a button. Perhaps surprisingly, four people involved in the suicide (including Florian Willet, head of the assisted suicide advocacy group The Last Resort) were arrested by the Swiss police on a "strong suspicion of the commission of an intentional homicide." Swiss authorities initially apprehended them because a video of the death seemed to show bruising on the woman's neck suggestive of strangulation, although they apparently had second thoughts about this and released them from custody in November.

Then at the end of November came word of the English House of Commons' vote in favor of a British version of assisted suicide. Although the bill still faces months of debate and possible amendment, punctuated by further votes, news reports called ultimate enactment there highly likely.

Back in the United States, increasing numbers of us live in states that either have legalized assisted suicide already or see yearly legislative attempts to do so, with the "pro" count generally creeping up like an insidious tide. Still, I and likely many of the *Review*'s readers have perhaps been tempted to treat assisted suicide like the tail of the pro-life dog, given its lower body counts, more complicated motivations, and less appealing victims.

Over the past century or so, many of our age's dystopian novels have

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insinuated into their futuristic social fabric various forms of expedited "assisted suicide" or euthanasia. *Brave New World* is a classic example: In Huxley's fictional society, while the pre-elderly pursue their pleasures and float along on the pharmaceutical high of soma, the aged are painlessly ushered out of life. Published in 1932, *Brave New World* is itself advancing in age, but it was hardly the first dystopia to introduce euthanasia: Robert Hugh Benson's 1908 *Lord of the World,* for instance, depicted an apocalyptic dystopia ruled by the Antichrist. A memorable scene in Benson's novel describes the involuntary euthanasia administered to an elderly character, and voluntary euthanasia is on offer for any reason in spa-like death clinics after an eight-day waiting period.

More recently, detective fiction author P. D. James's 1992 foray into dystopian writing, *The Children of Men*, memorably portrayed a 2021 world in which women are inexplicably infertile, and society is haunted by the absence of children. As part of the social and psychological fallout from this seeming loss of humanity's future, the predictably totalitarian government has instituted (for all but a privileged few) euthanasia by mass drowning upon turning 60.

Although such fictional representations (along with other sci-fi examples we can recall) depict euthanasia as one aspect of a (usually) totalitarian society, in real life, reactions to legalization are more mixed. Twenty-plus years after the Netherlands became the first nation to legalize euthanasia, and with a growing number of other locales permitting it, and therefore with a growing databank of human beings whose cause of death is euthanasia or assisted suicide, it is perhaps a hopeful sign that we are still debating whether suicide for the sake of a "good" death is a good or bad thing.

On the other hand, even today, despite the antics of some pro-abortion activists, abortion is not generally championed as a good in itself, but as an action made necessary by unfortunate circumstances such as failed contraception and bad timing. When euthanasia or assisted suicide is proposed, however, proponents usually adopt less defensive language. One likely reason is that the person dying is presented as the beneficiary of the right, rather than a sacrificial offering on the throne of a woman's right to choose. On paper, at least, the deceased in an assisted suicide is making the decision. "My body, my choice," but with the difference that it really is "my" body, rather than someone else's body temporarily incubating in mine.

Dig a little deeper, however, and things soon become messier. Although nations that have already taken the plunge soon seem comfortable with increasing numbers of citizens planning the timing and circumstances of their death (see the Netherlands and Belgium, where most of those surveyed seem

to think scheduling death a good thing), those jurisdictions that have not yet legalized assisted suicide often dance around the edge for years, like prospective swimmers afraid that the water will prove too cold. There are legitimate reasons for this squeamishness.

To begin with, there is the second half of the term, "suicide." Suicide is something that we have hotlines to prevent. We have Suicide Prevention Month. We label suicidal ideation a mental health concern. In the transgender world, reluctant parents of a girl desiring to "present" as a boy are pressed to go along to prevent a possible suicide ("Do you want a live son or a dead daughter?"). So we are accustomed in most contexts to consider suicide not merely a bad thing, but just about the worst possible bad thing, so bad that you are willing to permit your minor child to take powerful puberty blockers or undergo mutilating surgery to prevent it.

Then there is the medical community's longstanding predisposition to hold off death by every possible means. This is perhaps the flip side of assisted suicide, deriving from similar assumptions about the human project to control life and death (or at least the timing of it). On the face of it, however, it does muddle the assisted suicide landscape. Depending upon the medical condition and the people treating it, an elderly person can legitimately fear both excessive and insufficient medical treatment. In addition, the patient, too, entertains opinions about desirable levels of control over life and death. Do we most fear the "Do Not Resuscitate" order on our medical chart, or being jolted back from the threshold of death so that (like the resurrected Lazarus) we will one day, perhaps quite soon, have to die all over again? Our predilections about the timing of our own future death are deeply contingent upon the particulars, and also upon our stock of hope, resilience, trust, and ultimately even piety.

This just scrapes the surface of why prolifers can find the euthanasia/assisted suicide conversation uncomfortably complicated to navigate, however clear our basic principles. In contrast, the anti-abortion position (despite the hard cases like rape and incest) is one of the simplest and most morally pristine ones imaginable. The prolifer is already born, so he or she is not acting out of direct self-interest; the intended victim is incapable of personal guilt for anything and is completely dependent on others to continue living. The unborn is the ultimate innocent victim.

But assisted suicide exposes our 21st-century biases to an even greater extent, if possible, than abortion; it feeds off our passion for autonomy and understandable revulsion against pain, weakness, and dependency. One of the most frightening fates most of us fear in advanced old age is senility—seemingly condemning us to the very antithesis of a dignified death. And this

is not a merely modern fear. The author of the Old Testament book of Sirach touches on this very topic:

> Oh son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives; even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance; and do not despise him all the days of his life. For kindness to a father will not be forgotten, and against your sins it will be credited to you—a house raised in justice to you, in the day of your affliction it will be remembered in your favor; as frost in fair weather, your sins will melt away. Whoever forsakes his father is like a blasphemer, and whoever angers his mother is cursed by the Lord. (Sirach 3: 12-16)

Now, precisely because Sirach exhorts his listener so passionately to continue caring for and respecting an aged parent, even if his mind is impaired, we understand that his contemporaries might have been tempted to do otherwise. That is surely why he emphasizes the incentives—"against your sins it will be credited to you," and "in the day of your affliction it will be remembered in your favor"—and spells out the repercussions for those who act otherwise: They will be "cursed by the Lord."

After all, because our minds are tugged this way and that by our desires and emotions, we often fail to do what we know is right. But Sirach's audience would have recognized his counsel as a clear corollary to the corresponding commandment that Moses carried down from Mt. Sinai: "Honor your father and your mother, *that your days may be long in the land*" (Exodus: 20:12; my emphasis). St. Paul points out in Ephesians 6:2-3 that this is the first commandment to which a promise is attached—a promise similar to that spelled out by Sirach.

So while our ancestors apparently resembled us in being tempted to neglect or mistreat their feeble and senile elders, they differed from a good number of us in refusing to regard those elders as lacking inherent human dignity and therefore, perhaps, better off if their end were expedited. Neither Sirach nor Moses says anything about fathers and mothers needing to demonstrate they have earned good treatment before being given it. That's because according to their moral code, human dignity is not something we achieve (and therefore something we can lose).

Senility is not among the many evils that Job has to endure: He "only" lost his children, wealth, and health. Still, Job struggles throughout the book to fathom the ways of God: particularly why bad things happen to good people and vice versa. Job's God either will not or (more likely) cannot illuminate us fully on the whys. When at last God responds to Job's anguished questioning, he leaves the whys unaddressed and instead highlights his immeasurable greatness: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding, Who determined its measurements?" (Job 38:4).

Job's somewhat surprising (to modern ears) response is, "I have uttered what I did not understand, / things too wonderful for me, which I did not know . . . . I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:3, 5-6).

In our more self-idolizing era, we can be somewhat repelled by passages like these that almost seem to show God disrespecting Job. Maybe browbeating him into silence. Perhaps even blasting him with macro-aggressions. Don't we perhaps think that Job—that we—deserve more?

To the extent that we do think so, this is a relatively late-breaking reaction in human history. It is the same instinct that led the English Romantics of the late-18th and 19th centuries to identify Satan as the real hero of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. (Satan, of course, is a pure spirit and therefore incapable of dying, but if he could, we are sure that *there* would be a death with dignity!) Whether or not Milton was, as William Blake contended, "of the Devil's party without knowing it," that description rings more or less true of most of us today, given our jealous prizing of our own way and our own dignity.

I am far from underestimating how very hard it is to accept diminishment, both physical and mental, on the often-difficult road to death. The very human and legitimate process of mourning what we once were is something every generation in human history has been familiar with. The difference between then and now lies in how we regard human beings and human life, and therefore what we do with diminishment, pain, and handicaps. Faced with the "hard cases" that populate the public realm of assisted suicide, and that are often all too familiar to us in our private lives, we need to learn how to evaluate human dignity and therefore human worth beyond the calculus of achievement, self-respect, or self-satisfaction. Prolifers encounter this challenge in the familiar territory of the unborn. But while unborn babies cannot construct syllogisms, solve long-division problems, or surf the internet, the arc of their lives is still rising and not falling. They (and the newborns that, unmolested, they emerge as) learn more, do more, understand more each day. They are almost all potential, all hopefulness. Recognizing their value should be a relatively easy lift, except for the Peter Singers among us.

But looking to achievements, even potential or eventual ones, as the source of human dignity turns out to be a dead end. However lovely they are to contemplate, we do not earn our human dignity, our human worth, by our actions and attainments and productivity, and therefore we cannot possess our dignity as something earned or acquired. Human dignity is ours in the way that everything else about us—our eye color or intelligence or athletic ability or charm—is ours. It is a gift, like life itself.

It is human to seek control over our circumstances and our environment.

And just as each new marker of autonomy attained by the baby, the child, the adolescent, is exultantly celebrated, each decline as we move into middle age and then elder status causes pain. With time, we recognize that in certain quantifiable respects we are becoming less than we once were. Depending upon how and when we die, we may eventually surrender much of what we cannot help but feel made us valuable to others and even to ourselves—perhaps especially to ourselves.

Who are we then, if at some point we can no longer accomplish all or most of what we once could, whether physically or mentally? Here our commitment to reverence for human life "from conception to natural death" should offer clues. The newborn, and before that the late-term fetus, and before that the first-trimester embryo, and before that the blastocyst, all lack the multitude of life-coping skills and other attainments that the very aged or severely handicapped or those in the latter stages of any degenerative disease have now lost. Yet we who defend the unborn's right to life do not perceive in their temporary poverty a barrier to their dignity as human beings.

There is this psychological difference: that when we defend the right to life of the unborn, we feel we are safeguarding for them a great gift. But when it comes to assisted suicide, we may feel (feelings too often being treacherous guides) the reverse: We may feel we are imposing a heavy burden by denying those who wish to die a desired exit strategy. Such feelings derive in part from the impoverished way of thinking we absorb from the times we now live in. We may even be tempted to succumb to our opponents' view that our position largely rests upon slippery slope logic. Our fear of exploding suicide rates, they say, scares us into condemning the incurably comatose or the late-stage Parkinson's patient or the quadriplegic or the person with severe chronic pain to continue life past the point where it can be endured or borne with dignity.

But this is one of those (not uncommon) cases where the evidence for the slippery slope argument is strong. Opponents of assisted suicide are not floating a "you never know what might happen" hypothetical that, if the most heart-tugging classes of assisted suicide were offered the Sarco suicide capsule or some other pain-free ending, the next thing you know every teenager anguished over acne would be clamoring for the right. Instead, we can point to the hard data from assisted-suicide-friendly jurisdictions—an embarrassment of riches demonstrating not only how rapidly the numbers rise after legalization, but how quickly the net widens to include categories we were originally assured would never be considered.

A collateral effect of this net-widening is to make it harder to bifurcate our mixed messages about whether suicide is a good thing. Perhaps we need a

set of Venn diagrams differentiating between teens who are depressed and therefore in need of mental health treatment and teens who are depressed and therefore need to be accommodated by assisted suicide. Or how do we distinguish between the lonely and depressed elderly whose hopelessness can be treated and those deemed hopelessly unfixable?

I opened with *The New Atlantis* article on Canada's explosion of problematic but unexamined MAID cases. Recall that it was only in 2016 that Canada stepped into the brave new world of assisted suicide—and then consider that last year, according to Health Canada, one in twenty Canadian deaths were from assisted suicide. About one in fourteen deaths in Quebec occur through MAID, a rate of assisted suicide higher than that of any other jurisdiction worldwide. Canadian applicants for MAID are asked to list all the kinds of suffering they are experiencing to determine if their condition can be evaluated as "grievous and irremediable." Almost half (47.1 percent) included "isolation or loneliness" among the causes of their suffering, and just under half listed "perceived burden on family, friends or caregivers."

So the slippery slope is scarcely imaginary. But that still leaves us with the task of justifying the denial of assisted suicide for the hard cases, "just because" other vulnerable categories of people would be imperiled by this license. To voluntarily suffer on behalf of others is noble, but that nobility lies precisely in its being voluntary. We are not morally bound to bear a heavy burden solely to prevent fellow human beings in less extreme cases from imprudent or inadvisable suicides.

In reality, however, even hard cases derive a benefit from bans on assisted suicide. Admittedly, this is clearer in certain cases than in others. Consider those who would choose to await natural death if not for their guilt over the burden they are posing to loved ones—or, worse, consider those bullied into a premature death by uncaring or greedy family members. But aside from such cases, all human beings—especially those who are old or infirm or in pain or alone—benefit from the legal recognition of the truth that their lives have inherent value, that their lives have dignity, for no other reason than that they are human, endowed by God with consciousness and the ability to love and be loved.

Nothing can rob us of this dignity that is our birthright—neither disease nor incapacitation nor mental illness nor unproductivity—because human dignity is not derived from any of these. We are more than what we can do or have done. Our dignity does not derive from what we are capable of either now or in the past. It does not derive from how people choose to treat us—Blacks in the Jim Crow era did not lose human dignity because they were

treated as inferior, and the comatose do not do so because they are referred to as vegetables. Like the gift of life we received at conception—unearned and unpaid for no matter how many accomplishments we later amass—our human dignity also is an inalienable gift.

All of us spend a lifetime (however long or short that may be) making good or bad use of this gift of life and the many other gifts accompanying it. At the end of life, or at the point when we wish to end it, maybe, like Job, we need to trust God to know what he is about. Maybe we should trust the God who bestowed our human dignity on us in the first place to know what it is to die with dignity.

And even those of us who do not quite trust life or its Giver may draw inspiration and instruction from the Socratic notion that, not being self-created, we have a certain duty, like soldiers assigned to a post, not to desert that post without leave. The good soldier, willing to suffer and die for his country but not to abandon his life without need, has his own God-given dignity too.

The Irreligious Embrace of Self Slaughter

William Murchison

Ah gits weary
An' sick of tryin';
Ah'm tired of livin'
An skeered of dyin',

—"Ol' Man River," from Show Boat, 1927

And aren't we all, some days, just like Joe and his dockside gang, in that wondrous classic bequeathed us by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II: worn out, beaten down, ready to get outta here? So ready are growing numbers of us, it seems, that the recent vogue for "assisted dying" possesses larger and larger shares of public discourse. Old religious beliefs and understandings about the sanctity of life only slightly obstruct the growing sense that life—being a marginal proposition: some bad things, some good—requires protection and encouragement.

Otherwise, well . . .

- The birth rate slumps throughout the West, stirring predictions. We produce too few babies now to replace ourselves down the line: meaning we won't have enough workers in the future, sans increases in immigration.
- The practice, called abortion, of culling out putatively inconvenient members of the race commands political support, based, often as not, on the conviction that when the people say they want something you give it to them: as much as they want, consistent with what you can get by with giving or withholding. First Lady Melania Trump put her oar in during the presidential campaign, ruling out compromise "when it comes to this essential right that all women possess from birth."
- Shooting a pharmaceutical executive in the back, out of personal pique, can turn the accused murderer into a kind of social media folk hero: Robin Hood with a silencer. Among the doleful ironies of the case: The same media sources that can't talk enough about the alleged killer mention hardly at all the life and background and aspirations of the victim.
- Fewer and fewer religious figures, at any level, feel called on to portray

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life as divinely ordained, hence deserving, at tough moments, of the benefit of the doubt (the same doubt to which you would suppose the late Brian Thompson, of UnitedHealth, was entitled).

- There is abroad in the land, and in many lands besides ours, what you could call at the very mildest a carelessness about life: an indifference not just to its well-recorded divine origins but to its opportunities and capacities for fulfillment.

Fulfillment, in its manifold variations, is a matter, apparently, for individual judgment: the first-person singular; I, me, mine—characteristic, you might say, of any era widely uninvolved with the sacred. Bari Weiss, of The Free Press, recently interviewed one Bryan Johnson, a Silicon Valley type who has structured his whole life—scientifically, medically—around "not dying." "Once you exist," he told Ms. Weiss, "the most important goal is to still exist." To which end he orders virtually everything.

That would be one approach to the business. A shall we say contrasting approach made international headlines around Thanksgiving last year. Britain's Parliament voted in principle for a bill that, once implemented—which could be a year or two from now—would let doctors "terminate" the lives of the "terminally ill": those with neither the hope nor the spirit to follow Bryan Johnson into unending existence.

As the bill's chief proponent, Labour Party member Kim Leadbeater, expressed it to her colleagues: "I can't even begin to tell you the number of stories, the number of emails, and people who have stopped me in the street to tell me of their really traumatic and harrowing stories, which clearly show that the law and legal framework at the moment doesn't exist to really help people." Help meaning, I guess, ending their engagements with the stimulations inherent in life—not all of them kindly, some of them likely quite awful. A war against life goes on—hardly for the first time in history—but more and more broadly directed, with old-fashioned murder less at the center than weariness and futility.

Frankly I'd thought better of the British, a rooted, non-trendy, show-me kind of folk. Maybe this thing won't go as far as it looks like it's going in Blighty; but cousins across the water are shuddering anyway, as many others must be also.

What apostles of the modern, such as Kim Leadbeater, demonstrate is the enshrining here and there and in far too many unlikely places of a perverse conviction; namely, the conviction of life as essentially worth neither the pain nor the sorrow nor the time nor, frankly, the money. Unless you're Bryan Johnson, which you're probably not.

Bend your knees
An' bow your head,
An' pull dat rope
Until you' dead.

Well, yes, life's tough: yours, mine, everybody's, to one degree or another. Tougher, uglier by far are despair and surrender, howsoever appealing the prospect of release from misery and care, from futility and intimations of the sort that Joe and his Mississippi River crew longed to lay aside. Who listens to "Ol' Man River" (or would want to) without the nod of personal identification that Oscar Hammerstein surely knew he was calling up from the depths of human experience? From the sense of life as a series of unending wonders: ups and downs, stall-outs and sideways motions? From the knowledge of life as bestowed by—by who else but God?

I am not going to preach a sermon here, for which I have no remit. I want to tie a few threads together, nothing more. The diminution of religious conviction is a topic that comes at us, often enough, in the form of studies—this or that percentage of males, of females, of old folks (like me), of college kids, whatever, unengaged, if they ever were engaged, in religious worship or pursuits. The last time I saw a Pew Research report on the topic—at the start of 2024—28 percent of Americans were "religiously unaffiliated," styling themselves atheists, agnostics, or just plain not hooked up with a church: whereas G. K. Chesterton a century ago had called America "a nation with the soul of a church." Another, hardly unrelated Pew finding: "[H]ighly religious Americans are much more likely to see society [in good vs. evil terms], while non-religious people tend to see more ambiguity. . ." Ambiguity on moral matters has, I would judge, numberless implications, centered on questions of should-I-or-shouldn't-I? Such as how to view life. Useful? Useless? Somewhere in between? How to know? How to proceed on the knowledge?

Religious affiliation and belief, with all their complexities of understanding, are tricky measurements of belief. Fifty-nine percent of Catholics—communicants of an expressly pro-life church—believe abortion should be legal, according to Pew. The larger point, perhaps, is the relative likelihood of the duly affiliated buying into, at some level, religious teachings about life and the obligations thereunto appertaining.

Death? Better than life? At least some of the time? A soldier, amid the carnage of war, whose whole rationale is the taking of life, may in accordance with explicit religious principles view the deliberate discard of his own life, and possibly the lives of his comrades, as a higher obligation than life's preservation. "Greater love hath no man than this, than to lay down his life for

his friends," was Jesus' own directive (John 15:13), affording the handover of life a barely imaginable perspective.

None of which, for all the radiance that deliberate sacrifice can evoke, quite speaks to the growing indifference—maybe caused by moral confusion—to the whole point. Religious understanding should be considered the central—if not always, unfortunately, dispositive—point.

I know how dust-bedecked that sounds, how antiquated and dead-letter-like. I have just the suspicion that America's religious commitment, prior to the fall-off many see as commencing in the go-go, let-it-all-hang-out 1960s, was less powerful than it seems from nostalgic glance-backs. Why, I have always wondered, if we were such a religiously faithful community in the 1960s and 1970s, did we let the Supreme Court for so many years get by with foisting on the whole nation the idea of abortion as a morally indifferent solution to personal problems? Because that was the meaning of *Roe* v. *Wade*: unborn life as not-very-much-of-anything, a fragment of experience; a blip; a sneeze.

That was no genuinely religious way of looking at things. A genuinely religious approach to the matter would have begun with the plans and vision of the author of life, known to most onlookers and participants as God: whose care for the new nation its founders had emphasized over and over. For instance, at the grassroots level, Surry County, Virginia's leading citizens. These, in a petition to the state Assembly, declared forthrightly "That a conscientious regard to the approbation of Almighty God lays the most effective restraint on the vicious passions of Mankind, affords the most powerful incentive to the faithful Discharge of every sacred Duty. . . is a truth sanctioned by the reason and experience of ages." As God had created life itself, arguments for legally extinguishing the lives of unborn children would not have been pleasantly received.

Roe v. *Wade* may be off the table at last, but its stench lingers in the atmosphere. An age more and more indifferent to the question of life's religious origins is likely to let its imaginations roam. Maybe nothing's the big deal we used to think, back when God was always roaming around, sticking his cosmic nose into people's business, acting like it was all His show, or something close to that!

The abortion question dovetails with the easing—out of compassion, you understand—of resistance to the assisted death, or euthanasia, movement. We're talking release from anticipated or already overwhelming burdens—the accidentally pregnant mom, the worn-out stevedore on the Mississippi, the cancer-ridden hospital patient, crying out in pain; likelier and likelier, it seems to me, the lost, experience-flattened office worker/laborer/retiree/

wanderer, ready to be done with the whole thing. Just sick and tired, you know? Bend you knees an' bow you head. . . as I was preparing this article, the media brought us news of malice or despondency as the causes—who can know with precision?—of two spectacular suicides on New Year's Day, one in New Orleans, the other in Las Vegas; gestures of indifference to life, not least the lives of others. That the New Orleans catastrophe—an action rightly characterized as terrorism—deprived so many others of their lives is incidental, I suppose, to the purpose of the suicidal gesture.

No one would pretend that suicide, under a limitless list of pretexts, is anything new in human existence. (In Jainism it is called "the incomparable religious death.") The *domestication* of those pretexts is the problem: the armchair comfort allowing many to nod agreeably at measures of abstract benefit to the downtrodden and suffering—those who can't live with, whatever "live with" means, loneliness or "bodies all aching and racked with pain," to cite another of Joe's cries from the dock of *Showboat*. Our Mother Country's move in the direction of allowing/promoting release gives assisted suicide that *Masterpiece Theater* taste of dry sherry and croquettes. The truth—one truth among a number demanding attention—is that Britain is a latecomer to the world of assisted suicide. Theoretically Christian nations such as Canada already give assent to the proposition. Likewise Switzerland, Belgium, and the Netherlands; also 10 U.S. states. Plenty of people see no need for extensive conversation with the author of life as to treatment of his creations. We are past that point, it would seem.

The lingering effects of religious belief draw some notice. In England, as Parliament debated (with some passion, one is glad to note) the right-to-die legislation, the Archbishop of Canterbury observed with some cogency that ". . . once you can ask for assisted suicide, it soon becomes something that you feel you ought to do." The old slippery-slope, one-thing-leads-to-another argument, on account of its experiential truth, deserves attention wherever radical change is on the table. Here, all the same, the table itself (if I may metaphorize) merits attention in the highest degree. I would put it thus: Messing around with the Lord's handiwork—in the present case your life—is a bad idea. I am on the side of the Catholic *Catechism*: "We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of."

So what am I doing here—slinging around some ecclesiastical *diktat,* as binding and unrepealable? That is not how it goes with ecclesiastical "*diktats,*" which are not made-up rules on the same order as "No spiked shoes in the locker room." They are distillations of Truth—of Actuality. Attention must be paid. Not to thick theological tomes propped up on the shelf but to

the lives and the challenges to which theology ministers by the grace of God. Any pretense that the sufferer is obligated to quit whining and bothering others is falsehood. The Stoics, so closely identified with noble endurance, never put it so.

The civilized obligation, the God-loving obligation, is to the relief of misery—a different thing from its extinction, though we might not suppose so from listening to the spokesmen for assisted suicide, and enacting laws that in their minds will make everything fine and dandy. It is a great deal to count on—killing as remedy; the substitution of tubes and needles for folded hands, for the sacraments, for prayer to the creator of life.

The chief cause, as I see it, for the subordination of prayer in the world's dealings (beyond, naturally, "our thoughts and prayers") is the lapse of conviction in prayer's efficacy and relevance. Well-meant words wafted through the atmosphere—what's the good? "It can't hoit," maybe, on the order of chicken soup. As for easing pain and heartache, we shouldn't expect too much, right? And how many of the religious are left around this place anyhow? Couldn't be many, just from looking at all the churches turned into fancy digs for the urban upper classes.

The British debate over "assisted death," a/k/a suicide, is a reminder of our civilization's willing descent into self-will as the touchstone of truth: which, of course, it isn't, but we need these reminders of what must be done in response to the great deceits under which our world has come to live. Our task: to re-envision and put once more into general effect the great truths of life, sadly muffled now and mud-caked. Jim himself, down Mississippi way, had some vivid sense of the relationship between sorrow and pain, relief and triumph.

Show me dat stream called de river Jordan,
Dat's de ol' stream dat I long to cross

Flowing, as designed, toward something far better than personal eradication; something akin to victory.

When A "Nurse" Kills Her Unaware Patients

Gerard T. Mundy

In May of 2024, a Pennsylvania nurse who had been charged with 22 counts of mistreatment of her patients was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. Former registered nurse Heather Pressdee was sentenced after having pled guilty to three counts of first-degree murder and 19 counts of criminal attempt to commit murder. Of the 22 patients whom Pressdee was charged with mistreating in November 2023, it is claimed that 17 died after being under her care.

This article will demonstrate that similar principles and applied premises are involved in the deliberation and will of a so-called health care professional charged with killing one's own patients and one who subscribes to abortion ideology. With both actions sharing similar guiding principles and premises, abortion ideology is left to defend rationally how the killing of an unaware innocent child by way of an abortion may be licit but not the killing of an unaware health care patient.

Similarities in Moral Principles and Ethics-oriented Applied Premises

In terms of terminology going forward, practitioner status, in truth, must be qualified; hence, terms such as "ill-functioning practitioner" or quotes around "nurse" or "practitioner" will be used as qualifiers when applicable. The rationale here is that a practitioner who acts willfully in a way opposite to that of the proper health care practitioner, and wills a proximate end opposite to the proper proximate end of the practitioner and the end of the patient, ceases being a practitioner, in truth. Additionally, in order not to confuse the Pressdee case specifically with the philosophical arguments universally applicable to all "practitioners" who might be guilty of killing a patient, this article, inspired by the Pressdee case, will proceed with discussion of the commonalities of any such guilty "nurse," thereby removing the necessity of detailing every minute piece of evidence or argument in the Pressdee legal case. With these clarifications stated, one may begin a deeper analysis.

If, as charged, Pressdee did mistreat almost two-dozen patients, several conclusions may be drawn regarding applied first principles and premises, a few of which will be discussed here.

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First, a guilty killer "nurse" would need to reason that his will may override the will of the patient whom he intends to kill. This rationale would give this ill-functioning practitioner, in his mind, permission to supplant the exercise of the patient's will with the exercise of his own will. A guilty killer "nurse" would be reasoning from the false premise that his will and desire were of greater importance than the will and desire held by each patient. This rationale would be false in terms of its supposition that *any* person has this capacity, and then, secondly, that he individually has this capacity. Further, when the "practitioner" moves to actualize this alleged capacity, its falsity would be inherent upon the exercising of this alleged power. An individual "nurse" who believes, in such a grandiose fashion, that his will supersedes those of all persons around him, evidences influence from the lower passions, which Thomas and Aristotle argue must be tamed and made obedient to reason. (This argument differs from one surrounding mere consent, in the common understanding of the term, as in an analysis of whether a person approves/supports/requests an action, although this also was not present during Pressdee's alleged crimes. Rather than a basic consent analysis, the argument here entails analysis of the very claim that one's will is permitted, *in principle*, to supersede the will of another.)

Second, a guilty ill-functioning practitioner's actions necessitate a belief by the actor that his desires exceed in importance any principle-derived right to life held naturally by a patient. For an ill-functioning practitioner's reasoning would proceed along one of the following lines: First, he could have rejected outright any objective guiding principles on the dignity of life. Second, if the ill-functioning practitioner still believed in the existence of objective guiding principles on life, he would believe that his will, as somehow superior, made those principles of no consequence in general. Third, the ill-functioning practitioner could have determined that any existing principles were not applicable in these instances.

A killer "nurse," in sum, would assert that his desires outweigh any basic, inherent rights of others, even though his patients, simply by willing to live—a precept of natural inclination for living beings, as the being is fully geared to, equipped for, and constantly and forever moving toward, continued life—would be infringing on none of his own natural rights.

One sees the following, then, in a guilty killer "nurse" scenario: a) supplanting of will; b) individualist thought that excludes consideration of duty; and c) a rejection of principles that are in discord with one's own desires.

Principles and Premises Behind Abortion Ideology

Although American society, generally speaking, still reprobates heinous deeds like those with which Pressdee was charged, some of the same people

who would condemn these apparent actions are willing to accept and to apply similar principles and premises to support the action of abortion, the intended murder of an innocent child in the womb.

Among abortion ideology's most common claims is that a birth mother is entitled to end an unborn child's life because the child is residing within her body. On this individualistic line of thought, the ideology often claims that a mother has absolute right to intervene, as she desires, with regard to anything that may be occurring in or to her body. This claim is not entirely false, for all men do hold free will title to their persons, but it is improperly applied in the case of a child residing in the womb.

This claim—one that also rejects human, parental, and motherly duties to others—is faulty when it comes to the issue of a child *temporarily* residing in, and *temporarily* receiving nutrition within, the mother's body. Upon the conception of a human person, a mother's health care practitioner now has two patients under his care, and any rejection of this objectively obvious and evidential truth is a dereliction of medical duty. It is upon a human person's conception that a woman becomes a mother and that a man becomes a father. One does not "become" a mother or father at the birth of a baby. This distinction is significant, especially in the quest to turn minds to the truth. For it is the case, and confirmed biologically, that a conceiving woman and man are parents—mother and father—upon conception; thus, if they procure an abortion, a pregnant couple is killing their son or daughter.

Another frequent rhetorical strategy of abortion ideology is the attempt to deny the personhood of a child in the womb. This attempt, however, is weak, for the philosophical *accident* of a human person's age has no bearing on the *substance's* definition as a human person. The most recent natural science substantiates the metaphysical arguments insofar as it proves that upon conception an entirely different human person, with his own DNA, begins to exist materially as a substance consisting of *form* and *matter*. Barring external powers or circumstances stopping his natural progression, this particular substance, built naturally in every way to continue living, will continue to exist.

In the intended termination of a human person's life in the womb, the congruence of starting premises and principles mirrors those of an alleged killer "nurse."

First, in the case of both a child's abortion and the deliberation of a killer "nurse," there is a presuppositional rejection, ignorance, or inconsideration of a principle of a right to life for *other* innocent persons. In abortion ideology, the desire of another person—and not the person whose life will be ended intentionally—supersedes any right to life of the subject baby. The subject child is the one whose life is at stake. By virtue of the subject child

sharing in the universal nature of a living human being, however, it is objectively evident that the child desires to live, and not to be killed and suffer death. Every human person, at all ages, shares in the universal nature of human personhood; thus human personhood-ness is, by definition, inherent in all *particular* human persons.

In the case of willed abortion, the subject person's naturally oriented will and desire to continue living are supplanted by another's will and desire, with any consideration of the subject person's basic right to life and inherent dignity deemed to be inapplicable. An ill-functioning practitioner who kills his patients is starting from the same premise: That one's own passionate and/or rationally disordered desire to kill one's unknowing patients outweighs any right to live on the part of the subject patient—the one whose life is at stake.

In sum, abortion ideology claims that another person's will overrides any consideration of a) another person's natural rights, b) first principles regarding the human person and his inherent dignity, and c) basic natural evidence that living things seek self-preservation as part of an internal direction.

If the presupposition is that any one person's desires are permitted to supersede, override, or nullify any universal or particularly applied basic natural rights of another, then the principle may be rationally applied by a "nurse" killing his patients; an authoritarian killing persons he alleges to be "undesirable"; a eugenicist sterilizing persons he alleges to be "inferior"; and a eugenicist euthanizing disabled or elderly persons. The list surely goes on, for the faulty suppositional principle places subjective, individualistic, and relativistic conclusions of despair as the barometer of what gives another the "privilege" of continued unencumbered life.

A Comparative Analysis: Similar Moral Principles Guiding Decision-making

Contra the dictates of any one person's passionate disorientation or conclusory alleged reason, there exists no "choice"—a common mantra used in abortion ideology—to kill innocent persons. An action is not choice-worthy simply because it is chosen; rather, actions that happen to be chosen are good or bad. Killing a child in the womb is an action, but it is not a *good* action. The child has not consented to this killing (and he never could consent, for part of his function as a human being is to continue living). Likewise, simply because a guilty killer "nurse" chooses the action of killing his patients does not make that action *good*. One may possess free will to choose, ultimately, what is good or what is bad; however one does not have the capacity to will (or alter) what *is* the good.

A dichotomy alleging that one may "choose" to see a baby to full term or one may "choose" to kill the baby in the womb is both deceptive and faulty. The latter decision, the termination of *another* person's life, is not good as a

choice, and the very construction of dichotomous terms implies moral equivalence between the two "choices."

Choice regards one's decision to perform this or that action, such as a man choosing to eat either an apple or an orange. Following Thomas Aquinas, this man's "choice" on the possible actions to take (whether to eat an apple or to eat an orange) is a decision between potential actions following deliberation. However, there are instances in which a choice does not exist, in truth, *to be chosen*, for by its nature the action is illicit, inherently unchoice-worthy, and disruptive to the achievement of proper ends. (If the *end* of a light bulb is to illuminate, it performs its *function* as a thing that lights itself in order to illuminate. *Acting* so that it lights to the best of its ability and *actualizing* its *potentiality* to its fullest as a *particular* light bulb would be its function. If the light bulb were rational and possessed free will, and it chose an action that would make itself explode rather than light, the light bulb would not be acting in a way to achieve its proper end.)

There is no "choice," in truth, for a man who seeks to act in accord with his function as man, in his deciding between eating an apple or eating a deadly poisonous mushroom. The latter act, the eating of a deadly poisonous mushroom, is geared toward an objectively bad end. If the man is seeking a nutritious breakfast for reasons of health, then, in accord with his function as a human being who cannot eat deadly poisonous mushrooms and achieve health and continued life, the man does not have a choice, in truth, between eating an apple and a deadly poisonous mushroom for his breakfast.

Thus, a claim that "Men have a 'choice' *either* to eat apples *or* to eat poisonous mushrooms for breakfast" is deceptive and faulty as a statement, insofar as it claims moral equivalence between the actions. One may possess a will that is free; but if the man selects the bad (poisonous mushroom) over the good (apple), he has "chosen" something that cannot be chosen in proper accord with his function. The poisonous mushroom will not only bring him the opposite of the health he seeks (his proximate end for eating breakfast), but it will kill him. It is morally abhorrent and objectively wrong for one to claim to a man, then, that "Sir, this morning for breakfast, which you desire to eat because you seek to eat a nourishing meal for the end of health, you have a choice between eating an apple or a poisonous mushroom," as though the two are equivalent to his achieving his proper end.

An analysis of "choice," understood properly, then, is an objective examination of the goodness or badness of particular actions. There is a difference between "choice" *of*/*between* action/s (as in the selection of an apple or a poisonous mushroom) and "choice" *in* action *insofar as* the choice is good (selection of an apple or a poisonous mushroom insofar as

it is in accord with the function and end of the one choosing).

The Basic Fundamentals of the Human Person

Every particular man's life transcends human opinions on the dignity of that life related to any material philosophical *accidents*—age, disability, health, and the like—on the understanding of Thomas Aquinas's philosophy. Likewise, *privations*, which Thomas describes as when a thing is lacking something natural to its *form*, do not affect the wholeness of the *substance*.

When one reduces man to his accidents, privations, or material parts (as in, man is but an animal and only a material body), one reduces a man to something less than the fullness of a human person. A reductionism to privation makes one apt to consider actions that remove human persons' lives, if (allegedly) they are deficient. For, on this view, one with privation is either inherently less than a human person or is existing in a state less than a man should exist in as a man.

However, the child in the womb and the patient under medical care are human beings regardless of their privations or stage of development at any one particular time. Neither unborn children nor medical patients are a collection of material parts, the stage of development of, non-presence of, or malfunctioning of thereby somehow impacting the dignity of the whole substance. Every allegation of lesser personhood is opinion: These claims are subjective, relativistic, passionate claims. Only the objective truth, however, may guide moral actions, most especially those that involve one person deciding that it is permissible to kill another innocent person.

Obviously, the actions of a killer "nurse" and the actions of someone seeking or providing an abortion have the same ends—killing (a term which necessarily means death); this similarity is apparent and is in no need of a discussion. What has been argued in this article is much deeper. Indeed, the conclusions *behind* the determination of permissible actions by a killer "nurse" and abortion ideology have similar roots of starting principles. Some of the main similarities may be broadly analyzed as a) supplanting of will, b) individualist thought that excludes consideration of duty, and c) a rejection of principles that are in discord with one's own desires.

If one finds disgust in the acts of an ill-functioning practitioner who is charged with killing her patients, but simultaneously believes in the moral licitness of someone committing an abortion, one must analyze and refine one's first principles and premises. A truthful analysis will disclose uncomfortable similarities between the two actors' rationale.

Abortion Restrictions Are *Good* for Black Women

Perry Hendricks

What Happened to this Article?

This article was originally accepted at *The New Bioethics* after several rounds of review. However, a social media firestorm caused it to be put "on hold" and reviewed by *new* referees. Upon receiving the new reports, the editor, Matthew James, rescinded the article's acceptance, saying:

> in cases such as this one, where white authors write about racial inequalities, or when male authors write about women's rights, this needs to be done with a considerable degree of circumspection, humility, and sensitivity. This manuscript falls short in that regard…

In James's letter announcing the decision, it wasn't clear what passages didn't express enough circumspection, humility, or sensitivity. Therefore it's not clear what the problem is supposed to be. Worse yet, taking into account an author's race and sex is in conflict with the publisher's guidelines, which state:

> Journal editors should give unbiased consideration to each manuscript submitted for publication. They should judge each on its merits, without regard to race, religion, nationality, sex, seniority, or institutional affiliation of the author(s).[1]

So not only is it unclear why this decision was made, but the decision explicitly conflicts with the publisher's own policy! Of course, even if there were no such policy, it would be unwise to take into account an author's race or sex when making a decision: What matters are the *arguments*, not who is making them. It's a little embarrassing to have to point this out.

What caused the social media firestorm? It looks like the culprit was Elizabeth Chloe Romanis, who posted on X (formerly Twitter): "I cannot even with the state of the field of bioethics—how is stuff like this—patent sexism, racism and moralism about healthcare—getting through peer review."

Unsurprisingly, no evidence of sexism, racism, or moralism was ever provided. Indeed, it's not clear that Romanis even read the article, given that she cited no passages to support her claim, nor can any passages in the article

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reasonably be interpreted as sexist or racist.

But what does her complaint amount to? She says she "cannot even" with the state of the field of bioethics. That's a phrase I haven't heard since my glorious middle school days—but what exactly does she mean by it? Perhaps she means that she cannot *imagine what my article says*, because she didn't read it. Fair enough. But then why the outrage? Or perhaps she means she cannot *comprehend that someone wouldn't hold her exact ethical views*. That would be odd—surely an academic would recognize that people are bound to disagree with her own idiosyncratic views. Perhaps she means instead that she cannot *imagine that someone would even entertain the thought that abortion is wrong and draw conclusions from it*. But surely Romanis is aware that many philosophers think abortion is wrong, and that many arguments have been given for thinking abortion is wrong. Perhaps, instead, we should interpret her as saying that she cannot *believe that so many philosophers have missed the point I (Perry) have raised, and their sexism, racism, and moralism disgusts her*. This is my favored interpretation of Romanis—though it seems to me (regrettably) unlikely.

Given the range of possibilities, it's not clear what Romanis's complaint is supposed to be. My best guess is that she is merely expressing her disapproval that someone would disagree with her.[2] But surely she's aware that many philosophers have given reasons for not holding her views. Why then was she so outraged? Of course, academics are especially fragile and can become upset when their views aren't shared by others, and this is even truer for *activists.* So perhaps Romanis's outrage is due to an activist mindset, rather than to her discerning what is actually true. But I would expect Romanis, as an academic, to do better than this. Of course, it may be that despite my best efforts, I'm misinterpreting Romanis here. If that's the case, I leave it to her to explain what exactly her complaint is supposed to be.

Below is the original version of the article that was first accepted by *The New Bioethics*, and then had its acceptance rescinded.[3]

1. Introduction

Roe has fallen. After gestating 50 years in the United States, it was terminated by *Dobbs*. Proponents of abortion rights say that *Roe* should not have been terminated—it should have been brought to term and permitted to live on. Opponents of abortion rights say that *Roe* wreaked havoc on the United States long enough and was rightly terminated because it was a threat to the life of unborn children.[4] With *Roe*'s fall, decisions about whether (and when) abortion is legally permissible have been returned to the states: Each state

may enact its own laws about abortion. For some states (e.g., New York), this means that women will continue to have the same legal rights to abortion they already had—nothing will change for them. In other states (e.g., Texas), women will—to a large degree—lose legal rights to abortion they previously had. As such, there has been much discussion about abortion restrictions and the effects that they will have on women. Indeed, many have claimed that abortion restrictions are particularly bad for Black women (e.g., Räsänen, Gothreau, and Lippert-Rasmussen 2022). In this article, I challenge this narrative: I show that abortion restrictions are *good* for women, and in particular Black women. (In fact, if we're interested in *equity*, we should be especially concerned with this, since Black women stand to benefit most from abortion restrictions, and they stand to be hurt most by a lack of abortion restrictions.) This is because being prevented from performing a morally wrong act is *good* for someone. And since abortion is morally wrong, abortion restrictions are good for women, and in particular for Black women. Of course, it's contentious whether abortion is morally wrong. Nevertheless, this shows that whether abortion restrictions are bad for women *depends* on the ethics of abortion. And so we can't—as some authors have tried to do—side-step this issue: To make claims about whether abortion restrictions are good or bad for women in general and Black women in particular, we need to know whether abortion is morally wrong.

This article is structured as follows: In Section 2, I talk about the distribution of abortions among women in the United States and some recent commentary on this distribution. In Section 3, I talk about moral luck and show that it's good to be prevented from doing something morally wrong. In Section 4 I argue that since abortion is morally wrong, abortion restrictions are good for women, and in particular Black women—it prevents them from performing a morally wrong action. Finally, in Section 5, I consider an objection to my argument, which claims that what I've argued is only correct if abortion is morally wrong: If abortion isn't morally wrong—the objection goes—then abortion restrictions aren't good for women, Black or otherwise.

2. Abortion Restrictions Disproportionately Affect Black Women

Abortion is relatively commonplace in the United States. A recent study suggests that nearly one in four women in the United States will have an abortion before turning 45 (Jones and Jerman 2017). While White women in the United States[5] account for the largest number of abortions, some studies have shown that Black women get abortions at higher rates than all other groups of women. For example, Jones and Kavanaugh say that:

> [r]egardless of poverty group, African American women had the highest abortion rates, followed by Hispanic women and then white women . . . . These patterns suggest that poverty alone does not explain the higher abortion rates among minority women. (Jones and Kavanaugh 2011: 1364)

And Watson, summarizing some recent data, says that

> The majority (62%) of abortion patients are nonwhite. Black and Hispanic women are overrepresented (53% of US abortion patients versus 32% of the U.S. population) and white women are underrepresented (39% of US abortion patients versus 60% of the US population). (Watson 2022: 2)

Indeed, Watson goes on to claim that because Black women are disproportionately likely to get abortions, we need to reframe our discussions about the ethics of abortion to take this into account: since Black women get abortions at higher rates than non-Black women, abortion restrictions are worse for them. She says:

> This governmental policy of forced childbearing and forced delay of medical care for the poor also has a racially discriminatory impact, since 31% of Black women and 27% of Hispanic women aged 15–44 were enrolled in Medicaid, compared with 16% of white women in 2018. (Watson 2022: 3)

Moreover, Finer *et al* (2005) and Torres and Forrest (1988) show that around 70% of women cite financial reasons (broadly understood) for having an abortion. Insofar as Black women are more likely to live in poverty, this suggests that abortion is going to disproportionately affect Black women.

Lamentations about the effects of the fall of *Roe* on Black women haven't been limited to academics. For example, news pieces written by journalists such as Alfonseca (2022), Carmichael (2022), and Rose (2022) all suggest that Black women will be uniquely hurt by abortion restrictions. Moreover, Jannette McCarthy Wallace—general counsel for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People—says that

> There is no denying the fact that this is a direct attack on all women, and [Black] women stand to be disproportionately impacted by the court's egregious assault on basic human rights. (Quoted in Rose 2022.)

So, many hold that abortion restrictions are particularly bad for Black women. Curiously, whether abortion is morally wrong isn't discussed at all: It seems to be just assumed that it's permissible. However, I will show below that whether abortion restrictions are bad for Black women (or women in general) depends on whether abortion is morally wrong. And so we can't afford to ignore the ethics of abortion—the ethics of abortion must be settled prior to discussing the ethics of abortion restrictions.

3. Moral Luck and Drunk Driving

In this section, I'm going to take a brief detour into the subject of moral luck, and in particular *circumstantial* moral luck. Moral luck, in general, refers to the phenomenon in which a person finds herself to be more or less blameworthy or praiseworthy for an action due to factors beyond her control.[6] For example, consider the following case:

> River Rescue: When walking down a river, Sally stumbled across a drowning child and saved her (the child). Sarah was also walking down the river, but she was one minute behind Sally. Had she come across the child instead of Sally, she would have rescued her (the child).[7]

This is a case of circumstantial moral luck: Circumstantial factors beyond the control of each subject played a serious role in determining the amount of praise each subject merited. Sally deserves more praise than Sarah because she actually saved the child—something Sarah would have done had Sally not been there first. But the only reason Sally and not Sarah was able to save the child was that Sally just so happened to be walking ahead of Sarah by one minute—she just so happened to find herself in the right circumstance. However, this doesn't seem to be the kind of thing that can merit Sally being more praiseworthy than Sarah: That she just so happened to be one minute ahead on her walk doesn't seem like the kind of fact relevant to her praiseworthiness.

Or consider a case of blame:

> Drunk Driving: Samantha drove to the bar to have a few drinks. She ended up drinking more than she expected and was not able to drive safely home. However, she tried to drive home anyway. On her drive home, she struck and killed a pedestrian. Karen also drove to the bar to have a few drinks, also ended up drinking more than she expected, and was also not able to drive safely home. However, Karen's friend, Karrissa, was able to steal Karen's keys from her and keep them from her all night. Because of this, Karen was forced to take a cab home. Had Karen's friend not taken her keys, she would have had the same result as Samantha: She would have struck and killed a pedestrian on her drive home.

In Drunk Driving, it looks like Samantha is more blameworthy than Karen *even though* the only reason Karen didn't kill anyone is because of circumstantial factors outside of her control—her friend happened to be at the bar and was able to steal her keys from her. Explaining how these factors outside of one's control can contribute to one deserving blame or meriting praise is the problem of moral luck.

Fortunately, we need not solve this problem here. Instead, we need only take notice of a phenomenon in the neighborhood of moral luck that is illustrated

by Drunk Driving: There's an obvious way in which Karen was *better off* because she was prevented from driving home drunk; she was prevented from performing a morally wrong action (driving drunk) that would have had severe consequences (i.e., she would have killed another person). But driving drunk is wrong *even if* it doesn't result in the death of another person: It's wrong to drive drunk *even if* you don't hurt anything or anyone. Furthermore, it's good for the would-be drunk driver to be prevented from driving drunk.

Note that my point above isn't wedded to one's views on moral luck. Regardless of one's views on the problem of moral luck, it should be clear that in Drunk Driving, it was good *for Karen* that she was prevented from driving drunk.[8] And it would have been good for her even if she would have driven home without hurting anyone. Indeed, this point can be generalized: It's good *for someone* to be prevented from performing a morally wrong action. For example, it's good *for you* to be prevented from murdering someone—even if you would have gotten away with it. It's good *for you* to be prevented from stealing another person's life savings. It's good *for you* to be prevented from raping another person. And so on. Moreover, these will be good *for you* even if these goods are realized due to state legislation. For example, suppose that a law is enacted requiring bartenders to retain the keys of those who are (clearly) too drunk to drive, and that the bartender is, by law, prevented from giving drunk persons their keys. It's still good for the would-be drunk driver to be prevented from driving drunk. Or suppose (as is actually the case) that there are laws against killing others. In a very real sense, this coerces some from killing others—even if they think it's the best option for them. For example, Samantha might think it makes sense to kill Sarah since that will result in her no longer owing Sarah a large sum of money. But laws against killing coerce Samantha into not killing Sarah—they *prevent* Samantha from killing Sarah—and this has the result that Samantha is, in a sense, morally lucky: She's lucky that there are such laws in place that prevent her from committing a morally wrong action.

The upshot of this section, then, is this: It's good for the would-be perpetrator of a morally wrong action to be prevented from performing said morally wrong action. Indeed, we can see that the worse the action is that one is prevented from performing, the better it is *for the would-be perpetrator*. Think about it this way: It's good for Samantha to be prevented from stealing $20 from her friend, but it's *even better* for Samantha to be prevented from breaking her friend's leg, and it's still better for Samantha if she's prevented from killing her friend.

4. Abortion Restrictions Are Particularly Good for Black Women

In Section 2, I noted that Black women get abortions at higher rates than other groups of women, and that many have claimed that abortion restrictions are particularly bad because of this: Since Black women get abortions at a higher rate than other groups of women, abortion restrictions disproportionately affect them and, therefore, these restrictions are particularly bad for Black women. In Section 3, I briefly discussed the phenomenon of moral luck and noted that it's good to be prevented from doing something that's morally wrong. I will show in this section that these two facts—that it's good to be prevented from doing something morally wrong and that Black women have abortion at higher rates than other groups of women—have the result that abortion restrictions are good for women, and in particular Black women.

Why should we think that abortion restrictions are good for women, and in particular for Black women? Because they prevent women from getting abortions, which means they prevent women from committing a morally wrong act. However, as we saw above, being prevented from committing a morally wrong act is good *for* the would-be perpetrator. And this means that abortion restrictions are good *for women*. Furthermore, this means that abortion restrictions are particularly good *for Black women*. Why should we think abortion restrictions are particularly good for Black women? We should think this for roughly the same reason that abortion restrictions are sometimes claimed to be particularly bad for Black women: If an action negatively affects one group of people in a disproportionate way, it's said to be especially bad *for that group*. So, by the same token, if an action *positively* affects one group of people in a disproportionate way, it's especially good *for that group*. And this means that abortion restrictions are particularly good for Black women: Since abortion is wrong and abortion restrictions disproportionately affect Black women, they're particularly good for Black women. So, the intersectionality of Black women is paying dividends in this case: It results in them benefiting disproportionately from abortion restrictions. Indeed, this can be seen as addressing an inequity: Black women have been subject to unjust discrimination, so abortion restrictions address this inequity by disproportionately benefitting Black women.

Another point in favor of this is related to the eugenic history of the birth control and abortion movement within the United States. It's no secret that Margaret Sanger, founder of the largest abortion provider in the United States (Planned Parenthood), was a proponent of birth control to limit the reproduction of the poor (among others) (Williams 2016),[9] that she was a eugenicist,[10] and that some important voices in the early abortion and birth control movement

were motivated by worries about overpopulation (Williamson 2016: 108-112). Given that Black women are responsible for a disproportionate number of abortions in America, one could be forgiven for worrying that Black women have been further victimized by these eugenic and overpopulation motivations. It might be thought, then, that abortion restrictions are good for women, and in particular Black women, since it pushes back on this trend that appears to have targeted them.

So, being prevented from getting an abortion is good. Indeed, it's *extremely good* to be prevented from getting an abortion: Since abortion involves unjustly killing a fetus, being prevented from getting an abortion is to be prevented from doing one of the worst things one can do. And this means that it's *extremely good* to be prevented from getting an abortion: It's akin to being prevented from driving drunk and killing someone. Indeed, while there may be some downsides that come from not getting an abortion (e.g., financial costs), the good that comes from being prevented from getting an abortion swamps any (or, at least, typical) goods that would come about if one gets an abortion.[11] Think about it this way: Suppose that if I were to drive drunk, I would crash into a car driven by someone I owe $10,000 to, and that person would be killed on impact. There's a sense in which being prevented from driving drunk is bad for me: It means that I remain $10,000 in debt. However, it's far better *for me* to be prevented from killing someone than it is to be out of debt: It's far better for me to not kill someone than it is for me to not owe someone $10,000. Similarly, it may be true that if a woman were to get an abortion she would avoid incurring a significant financial burden (among other things). However, it's far better for a woman to not unjustly kill someone than it is for her to not incur a (significant) financial burden. And so the good women receive from being prevented from getting an abortion swamps other goods that could be obtained by getting an abortion—at least typically.

5. Objection: What if Abortion Isn't Wrong?

The natural objection that will doubtless have struck the reader at this point is this: "You've not argued that abortion is wrong—you've merely assumed it is. And your entire case hinges on this point: If abortion isn't morally wrong, then abortion restrictions won't be good for women, let alone particularly good for Black women."

My response to this accusation? Guilty as charged. I have indeed merely assumed that abortion is morally wrong, and have gone from there. But I've done this *intentionally*: as seen above in Section 2, it is commonplace—though not universal—for authors to claim that abortion restrictions are bad for women, and in particular for Black women. However, these authors don't

consider whether abortion is morally wrong—they just assume it's permissible. I've intentionally mirrored their style here. The purpose of this is twofold. First, while it's commonplace to say that abortion restrictions are bad for women, and particularly bad for Black women, no one has noticed the corollary that holds if abortion is morally wrong. In other words, no one has noticed the important fact that if abortion is morally wrong, then abortion restrictions are good for women, and in particular Black women. I take this result to be extremely difficult to contest: If abortion is wrong in the way that pro-life folk typically argue (e.g., Blanchette 2021, Hendricks 2019 and 2022, Hershenov 2018, Hershenov and Hershenov 2017, Kaczor 2014, Marquis 1989, Miller forthcoming, and Pruss 2011),[12] then *of course* it's good for one to be prevented from having an abortion. And second, this discussion illustrates that we have to consider the ethics of abortion *prior* to making judgments about whether abortion restrictions are good or bad for women or for Black women, which means that the above pieces lamenting the effects of abortion restrictions have at worst put the cart before the horse (because they mistakenly consider the ethics of abortion *restrictions* prior to considering the ethics of abortion) or at best are guilty of preaching to the choir (because they will only cut ice for those who already accept that abortion is morally permissible). So, before lamenting the impact of abortion restrictions on women, we need to first consider the ethics of abortion—there's no side-stepping this issue.

6. Conclusion

I've shown that abortion restrictions are good for women, and good for Black women in particular—or, at least, this is the case if abortion is morally wrong. And so we've got a case in which the intersectionality of Black women is paying dividends. Briefly, the reasoning for this is: If an action negatively affects one group of people in a disproportionate way, it's said to be especially bad for that group. And so by the same token, if an action positively affects one group of people in a disproportionate way, it's especially good for that group. And this means that abortion restrictions are particularly good for Black women: Since abortion is wrong and abortion restrictions disproportionately affect Black women, they're particularly good for Black women. The upshot of this is that we cannot side-step debates about the ethics of abortion when discussing whether abortion restrictions are good or bad for women: We must *start* with the ethics of abortion before considering the ethics of abortion restrictions. And as such, when assessing ethics of the abortion restrictions that arise in response to the fall of *Roe*, we need to first consider the ethics of abortion.[13]

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NOTES

1. https://editorresources.taylorandfrancis.com/publishing-ethics-for-editors/
2. Of course, my favorite interpretation is that she's condemning the sexism, racism, and moralism of other philosophers for not having seen the issue I raised earlier.
3. For more details on this matter, see, e.g., https://www.thecollegefix.com/journal-rejects-white-male-authors-pro-life-article/ and https://dailynous.com/2024/05/24/a-journals-different-standards-for-white-male-authors/.
4. My argument about abortion restrictions being good for women can be understood to apply generally, not restricted to any country. But my argument that abortion restrictions are particularly good for Black women should be understood to apply to Black women in the United States. This is because the data I cite about abortion rates among Black women is from the United States. Perhaps my point holds in other countries. But it's not something I have data on. And those who have the data can tease out the implications easily enough.
5. Hereafter, I will forgo this qualification. All such references and claims should be understood to be about women in the United States.
6. For the classic discussion of moral luck, see Nagel (1979).
7. This example is borrowed (and only very lightly modified) from Swenson (2022).
8. Of course, some consequentialists might balk at this, holding that Karen isn't actually better off. Those consequentialists won't buy my argument here.
9. Though, as Williamson (2016: 51) notes, Sanger had said that abortion is undesirable.
10. Indeed, Planned Parenthood (n.d.) states that Sanger aligned herself with White supremacists.
11. It's also worth noting that the vast majority of women (96%) denied abortions don't regret being denied an abortion (Rocca et al. 2021), meaning that the financial downside of having a child isn't viewed by mothers to outweigh the upside.
12. See Colgrave, Blackshaw, and Rodgers (2022) for an overview of issues pertaining to the ethics of abortion.
13. Thanks are due especially to Elizabeth Chloe Romanis for helping this paper reach a wider audience.

Changing the Culture of Contraception

Karl D. Stephan

The euphoria with which pro-life citizens greeted the 2022 *Dobbs* decision, in which the U.S. Supreme Court struck down *Roe* v. *Wade,* has faded in the two years since then. As Monica Klem points out in a recent article on *National Review*'s website, although several state legislatures have passed laws restricting abortion in various ways, every pro-life ballot measure facing a direct popular vote since *Dobbs* has failed. Five decades of practically unlimited abortion have created a culture in which most U.S. adults believe abortion should be legal under at least some circumstances. And they have been registering that opinion at the ballot box.

An independent scholar and historian, Klem is the co-author of a book called *Pity for Evil: Suffrage, Abortion, and Women's Empowerment in Reconstruction America* (reviewed by Maria McFadden Maffucci in the Summer/Fall 2024 issue of the *Human Life Review*). In it, Klem and co-author Madeleine McDowell recount the period after the Civil War, when women's-rights advocates used their experience with the abolitionist movement not only to pursue women's right to vote but to exert moral suasion to change cultural attitudes and lead to laws restricting abortion. Now that pro-life legal efforts to restrict abortion are running into opposition, Klem recommends taking a cue from the era of Susan B. Anthony. Instead of focusing primarily on laws that will prove unpopular as soon as they are passed, she encourages pro-life organizations to "devote more creative energy to finding ways to change public opinion on abortion at the local, regional, and national levels." To do that, we need to identify as precisely as possible what public opinion is based on.

Carl Trueman, an ecclesiastical historian at Grove City College, has published a penetrating analysis of the mindset that leads to, among other things, the opinion that abortion should be freely available to all women. In *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self,* he shows how cultures that abandon any transcendent foundation default to a materialist view of the world. As human beings are the highest form of intelligence recognized in such a world, a culture without a transcendent basis has only itself to fall back on. In practical terms, this has led in the U.S. to a therapeutic culture in which the well-being of individuals is the highest criterion of right or wrong.

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Autonomy is prized in a culture that sees self-fulfillment as the highest good, and autonomy for women necessarily must deal with their sexuality and fertility. In this culture, abortion is only the most visible part of a program that takes place largely out of sight, in the intimacy of personal relationships and decisions made by women and their partners. This program is aimed at instrumentalizing the uterus: to bring it entirely under the control of the owner, as a coffeemaker is entirely under the control of the person making the coffee. And this control is to be independent of a person's sexual life, which is characterized by a right to pursue whatever desires one finds in one's inner self, which is in turn the only authentic guide to autonomous freedom.

Sarah Lacy is a prime example of someone who has embraced this program. She is a business and technology journalist, as well as one of the relatively few women to found a Silicon Valley startup. In her 2017 book, she described how having two babies in the middle of it all actually made her a better entrepreneur (transforming her from a "cool dude patriarchy enabler" to a "badass feminist warrior," in her words). Even the title of her book expresses an instrumental attitude toward the female anatomy: *A Uterus Is a Feature, Not a Bug*.

Lacy's main point is that women don't have to give in to the patriarchal idea that being a good employee and a good mother at the same time is essentially impossible. She uses her own experiences in the shark-tank male-dominated environment of Silicon Valley to show how being pregnant and having children revealed new capabilities she didn't know she had. She became pregnant deliberately, and as a founder of a venture-capital-funded company, she had the resources for a nanny and other help when needed. So Lacy is not exactly an Everywoman whom middle- and lower-class mothers can easily relate to.

But she wrote her book in the hopes that every woman can help to overthrow the patriarchy, which she defines as that pattern of attitudes, behaviors, and assumptions which "makes it impossible for women to be treated equally." By "equally" she has in mind not only equality among women, but primarily the equality of women with men. Whatever freedoms men have in the sexual arena, women should have too, including the freedom to engage in sexual relations without fear of pregnancy, guaranteed by effective artificial contraception and backed up by abortion when contraception fails. Given the logic of this type of equality, this position makes sense. Something along this line of reasoning has persuaded millions of Americans to see prohibitions on abortion as simply and solely discrimination against women.

If one asks what Lacy's most basic drives are—the things she would put forward as most important in her life—triumphing over increasingly daunting

challenges would have to be high on her personal list. Righting perceived injustices also ranks highly, because she sees the entire patriarchy as an unjust imposition on all women, who should be encouraged to respond by actions like going on a nationwide one-day strike—as 90 percent of the women of Iceland did on Oct. 24, 1975. The resulting personal and economic disruptions in Iceland led to the passage of an equal-rights law for women in that country the following year, and Lacy cites Iceland as now being one of the most hospitable countries in the world for working women and single mothers.

Lacy is not wholly without moral principles. In her book, she calls out numerous ethical lapses on the part of journalists and organizations she was associated with. But underlying her system of ethics is the same basically materialist therapeutic culture that politicians such as Kamala Harris are a part of. If providing more accessible abortions is going to allow women to approach the ideal of personal autonomy, Harris is all for it, which may be one reason she made a Fight for Reproductive Freedoms tour in the spring of 2024 and spoke at a Minnesota Planned Parenthood clinic, lauding it "as an example of what true leadership looks like." And as Trueman points out elsewhere in his book, sexual freedom has become inextricably bound with political freedom, in keeping with the title of a 1969 essay by feminist writer Carol Hanisch titled "The Personal Is Political."

No culture is monolithic, and within the borders of the United States are many subcultures and cultural blends, some of which still acknowledge a transcendent source in the process of justifying their foundational beliefs. But the push for autonomy described above is a foundational aspect of popular culture, the culture that most young people absorb from social media, entertainment, and such institutions as they are obliged to deal with, primarily schools. Anyone, secular or religious, who hopes to change some aspects of that culture must start from where it is, not from where we wish it might be. And this approach can include searching for cultural trends or issues that can be turned in favorable directions.

A sign of one such trend is an opinion piece published in a Nashville newspaper and authored by Veronica Tadross, a freshman in public policy at Vanderbilt University. Her piece was headlined, "Why I, a feminist in college, believe birth control is anti-woman." The Covid experience and the consequent erosion of trust in the medical establishment have led millions to take a second look at reassurances from doctors that were formerly accepted without question. One of these reassurances is that birth-control pills are "safe."

Tadross points out that users of the pill risk an increased incidence of blood clots, migraines, and other adverse effects such as mood swings and weight

gain. Besides the negative consequences for a woman's own health, the pill creates an ideal environment in which men can abuse women. "When I got to college," Tadross says, "my friends were undergoing birth control-induced hormone swings just to be mistreated by men it enabled them to get closer to." She calls on men to accept responsibility for their sexual actions: "I refuse to go on birth control when doing so means assuming a potential risk that a man is not willing to take. Holding men accountable for consequences that are inherently their fault is the only way the feminist movement will succeed in the 21st century."

Tadross speaks for many women of college age who find that relationships between the sexes have been reduced to alcohol-induced hookups in which women are put at a disadvantage, while men are free to pick and choose their pleasures without accepting any of the negative consequences. Despite all the decades of propaganda about sexual freedom, Tadross has seen through it to the extent that she finds women who divert their sexual organs from their intended purpose often end up being exploited by men.

She might be surprised to learn that Pope Paul VI predicted exactly this outcome if artificial contraception were to become widely accepted by society. In his 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, he wrote ". . . a man who grows accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods may forget the reverence due to a woman, and, disregarding her physical and emotional equilibrium, reduce her to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires, no longer considering her as his partner whom he should surround with care and affection." In other words, reducing the uterus to the status of an instrument leads to men using women as instruments as well.

As prescient as Paul VI has proved to be, Tadross writes apparently from an entirely secular point of view, and would probably concede no authority to a pope or other current religious figure. Nevertheless, on her own she has arrived at the same conclusion as the pope: Artificial birth control, at least in the form of the birth-control pill, is wrong. The reasoning by which she arrived at that conclusion is very different, but the conclusion is the same.

Often in history, Christians have made common cause with people of other faiths or of no faith on practical matters of importance. Charles Malik, a Lebanese diplomat and theologian, contributed significantly to the drafting of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, working comfortably with a Confucian and secular diplomats. When certain propositions compatible with Christianity can also be supported with reasoning from philosophy or natural law, Christians can often find common ground with other religions and secular groups with regard to practical legislation and similar public affairs.

Tadross uses two arguments to reach her conclusion that the pill is wrong for her to take. One is that the hormones in the pill are artificially manipulating her body into an unnatural and harmful state of sterility. Besides possibly causing a number of undesirable side effects, the pill violates a widely recognized principle in modern culture: the cult of the natural.

The late historian Jacques Barzun has pointed out that the appeal to nature in deciding moral issues is at least as old as the Enlightenment, and continues to be a prominent theme in matters as trivial as food marketing and packaging. In recent years, food manufacturers have discovered that the word "natural" on the label of almost any kind of product will produce a favorable response, either in terms of increased sales or a better opinion of the product on the part of the consumer. The entire climate-change movement is focused on restoring the earth's atmosphere to its "natural" state before humanity started large-scale burning of fossil fuels. The drive toward natural ways of doing things as opposed to artificial or highly technologized processes and products favors the cause of moving sexually active people in the direction of dealing with their sexuality in the way God intended them to, rather than treating their genitals as biological entertainment centers and the uterus as a product feature.

The second argument Tadross uses to support her decision is the principle of equality between men and women. But she uses it in a way that is uncommon: Rather than asking for men to share with women rights that men already have, she asks for men to share the responsibilities that women inevitably carry as womb-bearing creatures. While in principle a man could fulfill his responsibility in this area by using a condom or a male birth-control pill (should one ever become commercially available), these are simply means to the deeper end of accepting responsibility for his participation in the sexual act. While it is hard to tell from her brief editorial what Tadross would like to see in a man, she would probably be pleased with one who saw her as more than an instrument for his own satisfaction, and more than simply a collaborator in sexual entertainment. She would probably be even more pleased with a man who saw her humanity as an integrated whole, with a history, a present, and a future that might or might not include children.

There are such men, but they are more commonly found in subcultures that recognize responsibility as the necessary flip side of freedom. Not all subcultures recognize transcendent foundations, but many acknowledge that freedom without responsibility is an illusion. For example, even military cultures in atheistic countries acknowledge that freedom from war requires preparing for war and the organization of armed forces who are ready to fight, even though freedom for individuals in the military is highly circumscribed. The

medieval code of chivalry, which was always more fiction than reality, arose in a Christian context. But the code itself, with its idealization of womanhood and strict rules for the behavior of knights with respect to what was then regarded as the weaker sex, did not derive directly from traditional Christian teaching about relations between the sexes. The chivalric theme of courtly love greatly influenced the Romantic movement of the nineteenth century, and its remnants persist today in the cinematic trope of "falling in love" and phrases such as "knight in shining armor" (shorthand for a man that a woman falls for not because he has compatible career goals or appeals to her intellectually, but because he sweeps her off her feet in a way that has much more to do with the heart than the head).

Chivalric romance is more likely to be the butt of jokes today than it is to be taken seriously, but its persistence in fiction and other cultural forms shows that a concept substantially independent of religious content has enough staying power to withstand the onset of modernity.

Although its name was not formulated by advertising executives wanting increased appeal among young people seeking natural solutions to their problems, natural family planning (NFP) is a family of techniques and practices that all begin by taking a woman's biology as given, rather than as just raw material to be manipulated. By various means, NFP seeks to determine the timing of a woman's freely running ovulatory cycle, and to establish what times of the month her fertility peaks and what times it is at a minimum. One of the most advanced methods of NFP, developed at Marquette University, uses a smartphone-size device to directly monitor female hormones, and allows the woman to pinpoint the time of ovulation with unprecedented accuracy compared to previous methods. Further advances in technology may lead to even simpler and cheaper methods of determining a woman's cycle, with perhaps nothing more complicated than a smartphone app.

As a strictly observational process, NFP leaves a woman and her partner free to use the information it provides to either increase or decrease her chances of conception. Couples wishing to have a baby can time their efforts for the greatest chance of bearing fruit, while couples wishing to delay pregnancy can select other times.

Historically, NFP has been most popular among those, like Catholic couples, who generally favor large families, but its use is not restricted just to them. Compared to artificial contraceptive devices and drugs, NFP requires more effort: regular systematic checking of biological signs on the part of the woman and a willingness to forego intercourse at certain times on the part of both partners. Complying with such a program is harder than having the woman take a pill each day, or receive an injection a few times a year, with

the man taking no precautions at all.

But if young women such as Veronica Tadross could easily gain knowledge of their fertile and infertile periods and live in a culture in which men respected their wishes in this area, it seems like NFP would be the pinnacle of all contraceptive methods, even when viewed from a secular perspective. I see no reason why even Christians who homeschool would object to their daughters learning through NFP technology about the details of their developing bodies and exactly what is going on during ovulation. Just as ultrasound technology changed the meaning of pregnancy by showing women their babies before birth, in the proper context showing young women the actual onset of their fertility could have a profoundly positive effect on their attitudes toward sexuality. Even a thoroughgoing modernist such as Sarah Lacy might have more respect for a man responsible enough to take "no" for an answer when "yes" might mean an unwanted baby.

Imagine a culture of such women who are highly aware of the state of their own bodies and invite sexual attention only when they decide on their own terms that they want it. How would men fare in such an environment?

The downsides to men are obvious: replacing sex on demand with the dictates of some arbitrary clock the woman makes the man aware of. Another downside is the genuine danger of pregnancy, avoidable only by diligent attention to the state of the woman's body or (in case that measure fails) backed up by the more drastic measure of abortion. Dealing with a woman who might bear a child as a result of lovemaking would become a more serious matter for all but the most insensitive of men. Widespread availability of artificial contraception has led to an increase, not a decrease, in abortions. If we run Pope Paul VI's argument backwards, supposing artificial contraception becomes less popular than NFP, we might well see a long-term decline in the number of abortions once the culture adjusted to the new status quo.

Tadross sees, however dimly, that the key to regaining the respect that women want from men is to make women worthy of respect, consideration, and even fear. Fear is not always a negative thing. As an electrical engineer dealing from time to time with high-voltage gear, I have harbored a healthy fear of getting electrocuted. The thoughtfulness and observance of precautions this fear inspired in me has allowed my career to continue through five decades, rather than being cut short by an unfortunate laboratory accident.

In the crass sexual marketplace that relations between unmarried men and women have become today, men who are not hunks lose out and often become resentful and bitter "incels" whose involuntary celibacy is a predictable side effect of the free market in sex created by artificial contraception.

But if large numbers of women became persuaded that NFP (which

would probably have to be rebranded as something like "natural birth control" to widen its appeal) was the best way to treat their own bodies, then the unfortunate incels whose physical appearance puts them at a disadvantage would suddenly be handed an option: Cooperate with the woman's preferences, be sensitive to her needs, and make it plain that you have her best interests at heart.

Nothing I say here will prevent some people from interpreting this proposal as simply a call to embrace promiscuity rather than to proclaim abstinence. As a Christian, I recognize that adultery, fornication, and all other sexual activity outside of marriage are violations of the spirit or the letter of the Sixth Commandment (Seventh for those in the Reformed tradition)—the one about adultery. But like all the other commandments, this one gets broken a lot, by both the relatively few people who know about it and the majority of people who have possibly heard of the Ten Commandments but would be hard pressed to name one.

Recall that we are searching in the ruins of a post-Christian culture for trends and tropes we can encourage, because their tendency is to bring people's lives closer to conformance with Christ without yet introducing them to Him. Such a policy may soon be forced on Christians, as the culture's view of Christianity becomes more negative every year, associating it mainly with prejudice, bigotry, and authoritarian personalities and regimes. We are not yet accustomed to working underground, either metaphorically or literally, but our distant forefathers were. The place was called the catacombs, and it wasn't fun, but it was a means of survival.

Sexual morality and the type of fidelity that would lead to both fewer abortions and less use of contraception in general are only two aspects of a way of life that every Christian is called to follow, a way that was encapsulated by an adamantine phrase in an essay by Charles Gore, an Anglican divine who served as Bishop of Oxford during World War I and died in 1932. Two years before his death, Gore published a pamphlet opposing the Anglican Lambeth Conference's 1930 decision to allow the use of artificial contraception for married couples. As described in a recent issue of *Touchstone* magazine, the conference was the first official Christian body to break with the longstanding tradition upheld by Christian churches since the earliest days of the movement: that artificial contraception was a grave sin, inside or outside of marriage.

Gore's pamphlet, which *Touchstone* reprinted in full, is a fascinating window into the state of the question at the time as it appeared to a priest with upwards of six decades of experience in the ministry. Gore claimed that, in allowing artificial contraception for some married couples, the Church of

England was thereby creating two classes of Christians: a higher class who could resist the temptation of contraceptive use, and a lower class who could not. He compared this state of affairs with the way some churches set apart special practices of asceticism for some clergy while not expecting them from the laity. All such distinctions were wrong, he said. Every Christian is called to the same ideal, which is to live like Christ. We shall all fail in the attempt, but we should all have the same goal to strive for. As he put it, "All alike must die to live: before all alike lies an unlimited liability—to suffering loss, to the effort of extreme mortification, even to death itself 'for the Name.'"

"Unlimited liability" is what each Christian accepts when he enlists to follow Christ. The modern age is familiar only with limited liability: no-contract gyms, free apps, government entitlements with no strings attached, and men who say to women, "I'll have sex with you, but I won't accept responsibility for any consequences, such as your pregnancy."

A world in which women take full responsibility for what their own bodies are doing and refuse any artificial means of manipulating them simply for the convenience of men would be a world of unlimited liability concerning the sexual act. While the law can be a teacher, experience is a better one. And both men and women would be wiser in such a world—a world that would be more natural than the artificial-contraception one we have today.

"Hold on, Bob—isn't contemporary art all about provoking outrage?"

The Singularity Is a Mirror

Jason Morgan

Computer scientist Ray Kurzweil's 2005 book *The Singularity Is Near* was a landmark in technological thought. In that book, Kurzweil summed up the progress of computer and other forms of technology in order to formulate a vision for the future of human beings in an increasingly tech-heavy world. Shortly before the middle of the 21st century, Kurzweil famously predicted, humans will merge with machines. By that time of convergence (the Singularity), machine intelligence will have so far outstripped human intelligence that humans will gradually abandon their biological frames and upload their consciousnesses into deathless silicate- and other non-biology-based networks.

When I first read *The Singularity Is Near* nearly two decades ago, much of it sounded like science fiction. To give just one example, Kurzweil argued in that 2005 volume that nanobots—tiny machines visible only under a microscope—would one day flood human bloodstreams, eliminating diseases with pinpoint accuracy and thereby extending the lifespan of the human body to Methuselah-like realms.

As outlandish as these and other predictions seemed at the time, though, I could not argue with one of the two fundamental premises of *The Singularity Is Near*. As Kurzweil says, technology, especially computing power, has been progressing, and accelerating with such formidable and relentless momentum that a day is surely coming when computers will be able to pass the Turing Test, the standard developed by the late computer scientist Alan Turing (1912-1954) for determining when, under certain conditions, it has become impossible to tell the difference between a human mind and an artificial neural network.[1] (In Kurzweil's 1999 book titled *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, he predicted that 2029 would be the year that computers pass the Turing Test.) This seems plausible because computer processing power has been growing by leaps and bounds. Moore's Law, which is more of an observation of past results than a rule about future progress, holds that the number of transistors packed onto a computer chip doubles about once every two years.[2]

There are physical limits to Moore's Law, of course. For example, when transistors reach the size of atoms, it will become impossible to pack any more of them onto a single chip. And some people, such as Massachusetts

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Institute of Technology professor Charles Leiserson, think Moore's Law lost its predictive power around 2016, meaning that now only increases in scale can power further computing development.[3] But even given the sunset-term built into Moore's Law, advances in quantum computing and other technologies strengthen Kurzweil's original thesis that machines are getting faster and smarter all the time. Anyone who doubts whether computers have made enormous advances these past few decades should find an old MS-DOS machine from the 1980s, boot it up (if it still works) and play around with the floppy disk drive for a while, and then have a conversation on a 2025 machine with ChatGPT. The level that computers have reached in just the past few years alone is not even awe-inspiring any longer—it is downright spooky, even terrifying.[4]

But while Kurzweil's first main thesis from his 2005 book is plainly true, it is the second thesis that tripped me up then—and still does. Kurzweil's Singularity (and not just his—many others have argued for the same or similar things before and after *The Singularity Is Near* first came out) rests not just on the notion that computers are getting faster, which they are, but on a second premise, namely that computers and people can somehow come together in the future, becoming one thing: a "singularity" of man and machine. There is no evidence that this is possible. There is much evidence, to the contrary, that it is not. And yet, Kurzweil seems to have let his faith in technological progress overcome attention to more basic philosophical questions.

In his 2024 follow-up to the 2005 volume, *The Singularity Is Nearer*, Kurzweil takes stock of how his predictions have fared after nearly twenty years. The results are impressive when it comes to Kurzweil's first thesis, that computers are improving. Kurzweil zooms out in *The Singularity Is Nearer* to take in human progress in a myriad of other ways as well. Over eight chapters, Kurzweil outlines how our lot as human beings has generally been improving. Kurzweil references the work of cognitive psychologist Steven Pinker and other Enlightenment-positive optimists in arguing that from crime to poverty to education, the world is, on the whole, becoming a better place.[5] The *Singularity Is Nearer* sets up a reinforcement loop between an improving global society and improving computing power to posit the Singularity as a matter of time, an event already approaching. "Human biology is becoming better understood," Kurzweil argues in the Introduction, while "computer power is becoming cheaper" and

> . . . engineering is becoming possible at far smaller scales. As artificial intelligence grows in ability and information becomes more accessible, we are integrating these capabilities ever more closely with our natural biological intelligence. Eventually nanotechnology will enable these trends to culminate in directly expanding our brains

> with layers of virtual neurons in the cloud. In this way we will merge with AI and augment ourselves with millions of times the computational power that our biology gave us. This will expand our intelligence and consciousness so profoundly that it's difficult to comprehend. This event is what I mean by the Singularity.

Kurzweil hinges the Singularity on the "law of accelerating returns," of which Moore's Law could be said to be but one part. Taken more broadly, this law of accelerating returns guides our expanding consciousness along what Kurzweil calls "six stages," a key idea from *The Singularity Is Near* to which Kurzweil returns in Chapter One of his new book ("Where Are We in the Six Stages?") for a reassessment. It is here that Kurzweil seeks to set the stage for the Singularity, but it is also here that we can see Kurzweil's second main premise—that humans and machines can "merge"—begin to come apart. I turn to this in more detail below, but suffice it to note here that Kurzweil's conception of consciousness as basically "information" presents a serious problem for the Singularity. It all starts with Kurzweil's first stage, or "epoch," which began with "the birth of the laws of physics and the chemistry they make possible," something that happened beginning "a few hundred thousand years after the big bang." Here, Kurzweil makes a strange—and, I think, for his thesis, fatal—remark. "'Whoever,'" Kurzweil writes, using scare quotes, "designed the rules of the universe" also arranged the initial atomic forces, thus making subsequent physical "evolution through atoms" possible. This "Whoever" implies that the universe is the product, the creation, of a mind. But mind and information are two entirely different things. The former is necessarily prior to the latter. Kurzweil, then, puts the cart before the horse in arguing that information, worked correctly, can produce a superior mind.

The rest of the six stages follow from this wrongfooted start. In the "Second Epoch," Kurzweil explains, we get life, arising out of complexifying molecules self-braiding into strands of DNA. As he imagines it, information is slowly becoming matter's master. "In the Third Epoch," Kurzweil continues, "animals described by DNA then formed brains, which themselves stored and processed information," thereby providing "evolutionary advantages," which in turn contributed to further brain development. Humans represent the Fourth Epoch, Kurzweil says, when "higher-level cognitive ability" and "thumbs" allowed animals "to translate thoughts into complex actions." With *Homo sapiens*, information broke out of its biological confines and leapt into the wider world as humans

> . . . create[d] technology that was able to store and manipulate information—from papyrus to hard drives. These technologies augmented our brains' abilities to perceive, recall, and evaluate information patterns. This is another source of evolution that

> itself is far greater than the level of progress before it. With brains, we added roughly one cubic inch of brain matter every 100,000 years, whereas with digital information we are doubling price-performance about every sixteen months.

In these first four stages or epochs, it becomes clear that Kurzweil perceives a strange relationship between material and information, with information eventually turning back around to manipulate its material base in pursuit of ever faster and higher iterations of itself. Information mastered matter, and then used matter to supercharge information—but the relationship between matter and information is never properly explained. Kurzweil also makes an illicit shift between "brain" and "mind," viewing both as subordinate to an almost magical force he calls "information." This muddled thinking continues into, and makes possible, the Fifth Epoch: the Singularity. This is when "we will directly merge biological human cognition with the speed and power of our digital technology [achieving] brain-computer interfaces." Finally, in the Sixth Epoch, "our intelligence spreads throughout the universe, turning ordinary matter into computronium, which is matter organized at the ultimate density of computation." Born of information, then, our brains, and minds, immerse themselves and us (whoever we are) in information's endless quest to realize itself more universally.

In Chapter Two, "Reinventing Intelligence," Kurzweil explicates this transformation, from information rooted in biology to information digitized and roaming freely and deathlessly across the cosmos. Kurzweil explains that artificial intelligence (AI) represents a crucial development in the shift from biological to digital intelligence. However, in the history of the AI revolution that Kurzweil lays out, careful readers will be able to see that the AI we encounter in 2025 is not a fellow human mind, but merely a replication of the human brain. That Kurzweil also fails here to see the difference between brain and mind is a further indication that the Singularity he envisions is never going to come about.

To understand more fully why the Singularity is singularly impossible, we have to follow Kurzweil in his life's work on this subject. Kurzweil traces the seeds of the current AI boom to work done by computer scientists Frank Rosenblatt (1928-1971) and Kurzweil's MIT mentor, Marvin Minsky (1927-2016). "Minsky," Kurzweil writes, "taught me that there are two techniques for creating automated solutions to problems: the symbolic approach and the connectionist approach. The symbolic approach describes in rule-based terms how a human expert would solve a problem," such as by breaking mathematical solutions down into axioms and then using those axioms to solve other math problems from a generalized starting point. But this approach has a built-in limit, namely that complexity swamps problem-solving

operations as machine thinking runs up against the highly intricate, recondite, tricky, non-explicit nature of the real world. As Kurzweil explains, a computer scientist named Douglas Lenat (1950-2023) and others created a computer system known as "Cyc," from "encyclopedic," which seeks to "encod[e] all of 'commonsense knowledge,'" such as that dropped eggs break, into language that a computer will understand and be able to apply when formulating program-based models of real-world events.[6]

A moment's thought will reveal that the symbols we humans use—everything from alphabets to analogical reasoning—are connected to an almost infinite Indra's Net of rich meaning (which, like mind, is completely different from information). That we must teach computers that eggs break when we drop them is a very good commentary on the gap—an unbridgeable one, I think—between AI and the human mind. The brain works, not because it has tremendous computing power (although it doesn't do half bad for a wet hunk of biological material), but because it is animated by soul and mind, immaterial things that no amount of silicon will ever be able to replicate. We know that eggs break because we live physically and mentally, spiritually and emotionally, in the world in which this sometimes happens. We have never seen a dinosaur egg break, but if there were any dinosaurs and we found their unhatched eggs, we would know that those eggs must be fragile, too. We know that fossilized dinosaur eggs must once have been breakable as well. No one ever wrote this down for us to remember. It's something we learn as humans, because all things have meaning for us, and all symbols are rooted in this, our significant and signified world.

Our minds know things. Our human minds. Not so for computers, which process not meaning, but mere information. For the Singularity to happen, either humans must become computers, or computers must become humans, but if either of those things occurs, then the Singularity becomes meaningless, so we have a kind of negative tautology. This is Kurzweil's dilemma, one which he himself has experienced throughout his long and illustrious career in computer science and invention. The very need for a Turing Test arises because computers and people are different, and because computers can imitate people but not become them. Computers, ironically, administer to human users something called CAPTCHAs (Completely Automated Public Turing Tests to tell Computers and Humans Apart) precisely because humans, not computers, know how to extract meaning from the grainy photos and wavy alphanumeric characters that such tests use. Computers don't understand those photos and symbols because computers don't have minds. They are separated from us in that way forever.

The other approach to AI, connectionism, is what has allowed the development

of the truly astounding level of computer intelligence we see today. Through "neural nets" stacked and intertwined at increasing levels of internal complexity, machines can use that complexity—slowly and cumbersomely at first, but with increasing and even startling speed—to find solutions to problems on the nets' own terms. Connectionism, Kurzweil writes, fell out of favor after Marvin Minsky's 1969 criticism of "the surge in interest in this area, even though he had done pioneering work on neural nets in 1953." The problem, Minsky and MIT colleague Seymour Papert (1928-2016) determined, was that single-layer neural nets can't solve certain kinds of problems due to the lack of feedback, that is, of reinforcing-type machine learning, in the single-layer models.[7] According to Kurzweil, hardware had to advance to a point where multi-layer neural networks became possible. After this point was reached around the mid-2010s, machine intelligence began to take off, reflecting the steadily accelerating nature of information dissemination and processing in the material universe, with "hundreds of millions to billions of years" required initially for matter "to create a new level of detail." As with current AI systems, hardware needed to catch up with information, so that information could use hardware (computer networks, human brains) to raise itself up to greater and greater heights.

As information was born out of matter, and then, through the vehicle of biology (thumbs and brains), turned back on itself in a reflexive strengthening maneuver designed to intensify the evolutionary process, the power of the human brain, itself both a product and multiplier of this evolutionary power, became apparent. This is Kurzweil's main jam. Eventually, "evolution," Kurzweil says—making the process the agent, as evolutionists are wont to do—"needed to devise a way for the brain to develop new behaviors without waiting for genetic change to reconfigure the cerebellum. This was the neocortex." This new design "was capable of a new type of thinking: it could invent new behaviors in days or even hours. This unlocked the power of learning." Machine learning using multi-layer neural networks "recreat[es] the powers of the neocortex," allowing AI to make the accelerating jumps in ability that it has in recent years. AI cannot understand symbolic thought, in other words, but it can use material power to foster a silicon-based intelligence that can take on, and outdo, some aspects of the human mind. AI can digitally fudge mind by harnessing the multi-layered, multi-connected power of electronic switches. It makes a self-contained Indra's Net and then, ignoring the fundamental split, acts as though the AI world and the human world are one. AI blinds us with science. It uses sheer speed to pretend to be an animate, ensouled being. It is this non-human intelligence, shorn of the

darker aspects of human nature, that Kurzweil projects into the future, adding the plot twist of the Singularity when, he says, we and our AI imitators will "merge" into one superior intellectual force.

Most of the rest of *The Singularity Is Nearer* (with the exception of Chapters Three, Seven, and Eight, to which I turn later) continues along this optimistic line of reasoning. Chapter Four, "Life Is Getting Exponentially Better," is a further Pinkerite celebration of the good news of the world, such as that poverty levels are decreasing and life expectancy is increasing. This good news gets buried under the bad news on which, according to Kurzweil, we are evolutionarily predisposed to focus, as "pay[ing] attention to potential challenges" has long "been more important for our survival." But it's the good news that counts, as we are all moving toward a happier time when we and machines can finally combine.

Chapter Five, "The Future of Jobs: Good or Bad?" is similarly sunny, following the standard creative destruction line (one of the chapter's subsections is even titled "Destruction and Creation") in arguing that "the convergent technologies of the next two decades will create enormous prosperity and material abundance around the world. But these same forces will also unsettle the global economy, forcing society to adapt at an unprecedented pace." AI, Kurzweil predicts, will threaten with extinction or disruption a long list of occupations, from truck driving to factory work. But just as in the past most people were farmers, while now very few are, Kurzweil predicts that the AI revolution will eventually work out for the better for the labor force as a whole. Not only that, but having AI do more work for us will free us up for artistic and other cultural pursuits, as well as making possible a universal basic income from profits generated by automation.

Chapter Six, "The Next Thirty Years in Health and Well-Being," is a more detailed look at how nanotechnology and other high-tech innovations will help humans develop new drugs and defeat disease, including mental health disorders. All in all, the future Kurzweil foresees is bright, and the Singularity will be a tremendous boon for mankind, as well as an acceleration of the positive feedback loop, a function of the benevolence of information, in which we have the good fortune to live.

Kurzweil is an optimist, but not a Pollyanna. In Chapter Seven, "Peril," he addresses some possible nightmare scenarios for the future as AI takes more and more control of our lives. Nuclear war, for example, and the possibility of creating "supervirus[es]" as weapons, loom on the horizon. Nanotechnology, too, Kurzweil admits, could be weaponized. And then there is the possibility of "gray goo," resulting when "self-replicating machines that consume carbon-based matter and turn it into more self-replicating machines [. . .] lead[s]

to a runaway chain reaction, potentially converting the entire biomass of the earth to such machines." But, Kurzweil counters (citing the work of Robert A. Freitas), "blue goo," comprising "defensive nanobots," could be "dispersed optimally around the world." This would allow the good goo to overpower the bad goo, thereby saving the world (and potentially the universe) from being overrun by malicious nanobot swarms.[8] AI in general, Kurzweil argues, can be trained to be moral and democratic to ensure "value alignment" between AI and human ethics.[9] So, while the future has some blemishes, there is nothing in Kurzweil's Singularity vision fundamentally stopping the ever-upward progression of man joining together with machine. Likewise, in Chapter Eight, "Dialogue with Cassandra," Kurzweil answers some objections from a fictional skeptic about the timing of the merger between computers and the human neocortex, and also about the identity of such a hybrid. Here, too, we learn that there is nothing to fear. AI will allow humans to enhance and expand their human capacities while exponentially augmenting and accelerating original mental capabilities and physical longevity.

These seven chapters, which track Kurzweil's decades-old prophecy of a blended tech and humanity farther into the future and in more detail, shape the contours of *The Singularity Is Nearer*. Kurzweil remains optimistic about tech and also about human beings. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that, thanks to the power of Kurzweil's "information," he has never made much of a distinction between computers and people to begin with. At any rate, much has changed since Kurzweil's 2005 *The Singularity Is Near*, with AI now verging on overtaking human ability in many areas, if not already having surpassed it. But Kurzweil's basic view of technology, and of human nature, remains remarkably consistent: Things are getting better all the time, despite occasional hiccups. AI will be a big help in our quest for a fairer world. All will work out well in the end, "the end" being a limitless upsweep of improvement across the board, jointed by a moment in evolutionary history, a Singularity, when information's two offspring, humans and computers, will come together in a marriage of supreme happiness.

This kind of relentless, even ruthless optimism is deemed "futurist" by many Kurzweil interpreters, but in many ways what Kurzweil offers is simply a recapitulation of the political moment, now largely passed, in which it was possible to speak of history as a benign process and of the ages to come as waiting patiently and gently for us to reach them. To put it more bluntly, in Kurzweil's work one detects the smugness of the late-capitalist liberal, secure in his certainty that the way he thinks the world ought to be is an axiomatic must for everyone on the planet. Kurzweil thinks he has given the world a window into time to come, and in many ways he has. But he has

also given us, if we choose to look for it, a mirror, which shows us to be as prideful and conceited as ever.

Human nature is much darker than Kurzweil seems willing to admit. The argument, advanced by Kurzweil, Pinker, and many other liberals, that our species is becoming steadily less violent and more humane, is belied by the billions of children worldwide whom the abortionist has kept from seeing the light of day. Kurzweil's optimism is nice to read, but it is at best a partial glimpse of a species (us) that has a very twisted heart and has used technological advances for evil as well as for good. Kurzweil is betting on the good side of human nature to win out, but it seems to me that the good and bad sides are inseparable, and so whatever future mankind has will be both high-tech and fraught with danger.

But over-optimism is just one problem with the Singularity idea. In addition to many smaller flaws of logic and fact, the one major flaw in Kurzweil's reasoning destroys the very reason for having embarked on the Singularity quest in the first place: He does not know what a human being is. Overoptimism is one thing, but a category error is another.

In Chapter Three of *The Singularity Is Nearer*, "Who Am I?," Kurzweil takes up the crucial question of identity, including consciousness. Here Kurzweil balks, and balks badly. "Despite its unverifiability, consciousness cannot simply be ignored," Kurzweil writes. "We view material objects, no matter how intricate or interesting or valuable, as important only to the extent that they affect the conscious experience of conscious beings." Kurzweil is not a hidebound materialist, then, something that can also be gleaned from his notion that information arises from the material substrate—mind seeping out of atoms and molecules like ghosts from cemetery earth—but it is not identical with the material realm. However, it would have been much better for Kurzweil had he been a thoroughgoing materialist, for then he would have been dealing with the ancient roadblocks, ones encountered by other materialists from Democritus to Dawkins, in thinking about how the mind, a clearly non-material thing, works in a substance-only universe. As a materialist, Kurzweil might have sought to go around those roadblocks by ignoring them, as materialists often do, pretending that the mind is not spirit and that the soul, the seat of the self and the mover of the mind, is a fiction. This would have streamlined *The Singularity Is Nearer* considerably, giving it a philosophical consistency and allowing other Hegelians (for Kurzweil is a Hegelian to beat the band) to assent to Kurzweil's prescriptions for a machine-man future. In other words, if people are just stuff, and computers are just stuff too, then people can become computers, as far as materialism

goes, and Kurzweil would not have to explain anything beyond that.

But Kurzweil is too honest to walk down this primrose path. He is not a materialist, at least not in the traditional sense. He admits that consciousness is hard to pin down, even as he flirts with the materialist interpretation of mind. "Science tells us that complex brains give rise to functional consciousness," Kurzweil says in the "Who Am I" chapter of *The Singularity Is Nearer*. "Gives rise to" is very much a weasel phrase that "science" loves to deploy, of course, although this is no fault of Kurzweil's. Grand pianos give rise to music, but that brings us no closer to unraveling the mystery of what music is, and how it is different from noise, and why it has the power to make us cry. Kurzweil, to his credit, remains open to various other possibilities for consciousness. "What causes us to have subjective consciousness?" he asks.

> Some say God. Others believe consciousness is a product of purely physical processes. But regardless of consciousness's origin, both poles of the spiritual-secular divide agree that it is somehow sacred. How people (and at least some other animals) became conscious is just a causal argument, whether it was by a benign divinity or undirected nature. The ultimate result, however, is not open to debate—anyone who doesn't acknowledge a child's consciousness and capacity for suffering is considered gravely immoral.

I leave aside here the obvious contradiction between Kurzweil's liberal politics and the pain that abortion causes for conscious children in the womb. Kurzweil continues:

> Yet the cause behind subjective consciousness will soon be more than just a subject of philosophical speculation. As technology gives us the ability to expand our consciousness beyond our biological brains, we'll need to decide what we believe generates the qualia [that is, as Kurzweil explains elsewhere in this chapter, "subjective experiences inside a mind"] at the core of our identity, and focus on preserving it. Since observable behaviors are our only available proxy for inferring subjective consciousness, our natural intuition closely matches the most scientifically plausible account: namely, that brains that can support more sophisticated behavior likewise give rise to more sophisticated subjective consciousness. Sophisticated behavior [. . .] arises from the complexity of information processing in a brain—and this in turn is largely determined by how flexibly it can represent information and how many hierarchical layers are in its network. [. . .] Whether a brain is made of carbon or silicon, the complexity that would enable it to give the outward signs of consciousness also endows it with subjective inner life.

There is much more in this chapter that is well worth reading, such as compelling ruminations on computer scientist Stephen Wolfram's theory of irreducible complexity, on physicist Roger Penrose's estimation of the likelihood of a universe having starting entropy low enough to enable complex life to emerge, and on the ethics of dealing with "replicants" (humanoid creations). But the

passages quoted above should make it clear that Kurzweil's anthropology is vague. He is a bad, inconsistent, wishy-washy half-materialist, yes. But that is the least of his worries. He does not know what a human being is. He also does not know what a machine is. He thinks that acting conscious translates to being conscious, and so his explanations of consciousness get badly muddled, too. Because of this, Kurzweil's Singularity, which is a merger of humans and machines, is bound to be off. To put it the opposite way, if Kurzweil were able to give a good definition of a human and a machine, he would have to abandon his Singularity as forever out of reach. *The Singularity Is Nearer* is a good mirror of our current human conceits. It reminds us that for all our talk of human improvement and the centrality of consciousness, we still do not know how to treat everyone in our human family as human beings, because we don't know what humans are. At the same time, the book's author unwittingly proves the opposite of what he has spent much of his life predicting.

A human being, like every other thing, is not an accident, but an iteration of an organizing principle.[10] We humans are a certain kind of being, and the limits of our humanity are not infinitely elastic. We do have some things in common with other living creatures, but are utterly unlike inanimate objects such as tables and rocks. "Tables" and "rocks" are also qualitatively different in a related way, in that the former are designed and made by humans, that is, are products of our minds, while the latter are mere lumps of matter, without any intervention by our minds after the first mind—Kurzweil's "Whoever"—designed and created our shared world. A human can never merge with a thing in such a way that the human identity is lost within the thing. A prosthetic limb, a pair of eyeglasses, a well-fitting hat—these things enhance the human form and function because they are made, by humans, to work with our natures. But that we can become a prosthesis, a pair of spectacles, or an article of clothing is another question entirely, and entirely out of the question.

By the same token, a machine, even the most complex of machines, is technology, from the Greek word for "child"—that is, a product of human invention. To say that the child can give birth to the man—to say that the machine can take in the machine-maker and make of him some new thing—is to get the concept of technology precisely backwards. Nor does it help that Kurzweil does not understand information. Kurzweil sees the universe as having a spirit abroad in it, "information," which has the power to build brains that then use information to build their own improved replacements. Information, if this were what it really is, would then perhaps be able to overcome the maker-made division and allow the machine to remake the machinist. But

with information, too, we run headlong into a logical brick wall. Information is the product of mind. It does not float among the mute, dumb atoms like a Hegelian Geist waiting to be manifested. Kurzweil writes that a "Whoever" designed the universe. Whoever it was, His was an awesome mind. And we are His technology. The consciousness that we have is not information waxing reflective as it gains in complexity. The consciousness that we have is the capacity to know and understand complexity, but complexity is not consciousness's sufficient condition. When it comes to consciousness, all we know is that we know. This knowing is a bit of information, but information is not what does the knowing. Humans—minds—know. And we know *as*, and because we *are*, human persons. It is as simple as that. We know also because, logically, there was first a mind that knew us. Complexity can mimic mind, as AI and artificial neural networks now show in abundance. But first there must be mind to mimic. That is not just information. That is the human person.

Humans are not things, not machines. We are also not information, and are not information's by-product. Neither are the machines we build. So, no matter how hard we try, we will never be able to "merge" with computers. We can go on training computers to ape our abilities, and soon, if not already, computers will surpass us in the subtle motions of mind. But that will eternally be a derived achievement. Doubly so. First there was us, then there were computers. And before there was either, there was some greater mind, from which the orderliness of information and the ability to know what information means—that is, the mystery of consciousness at play—first came. Computers are becoming more like us in information processing, but they will never *be* us, as the parrot who recites phrases is never the parrot-keeper. We are a certain kind of thing, made by a mind to have a nature that we call "human." Humanity is an exclusive club, open only to those who have human nature, which itself was thought up, somehow, by a "Whoever" whose mind "gave rise to" humans, parrots, and all the material pieces of which we are made. Humanity is limiting in that way, not infinitely malleable. There are borders to the human race, and it is precisely those borders that make us who we are and ensure that we will never "merge" with anything, except with other humans in sexual reproduction as we participate in the creation of others of our own humankind.

Kurzweil sees humanity as limiting, too, but he sees those limits as barriers to future glory waiting to be overcome. "The promise of the Singularity is to free us from all those limitations," he writes later in the "Who Am I" chapter, referring to evolutionary features of the brain that restrict our ability to learn and cause us to hold on to "fears, traumas, and doubts," as well as the built-in

destruction of the bodily frame that comes when every organism eventually dies. The Singularity, Kurzweil writes, will let us live lives "not [. . .] marred and cut short by the failings of our biology," and will also let "our self-modification powers [. . .] be fully realized." I think of other "self-modification powers" that humans have attempted, such as birth control pills, that have caused untold damage to the human body and spirit as human beings, modified, began to behave in ways entirely contrary to our nature. Transgenderism, the new birth control, has wrought misery in flesh and soul that may end up going beyond even what the pill has done to us. The Singularity, I believe, will be a similar series of disasters, a chasing after a freakish disfiguring of our human nature made unnaturally machine-like, a warping of the human person in pursuit of an impossible and ultimately anti-human dream. The Singularity is therefore a mirror for our fallen species, if we have the courage to look at ourselves for who we really are.

NOTES

1. On the Turing Test, see Luciano Floridi, *The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere Is Reshaping Human Reality* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 132-135.
2. The namesake of Moore's Law, Gordon Moore (born 1929), passed away in 2023.
3. Audrey Woods, "The Death of Moore's Law: What It Means and What Might Fill the Gap Going Forward," MIT CSAIL Alliances, n.d. https://cap.csail.mit.edu/death-moores-law-what-it-means-and-what-might-fill-gap-going-forward
4. An appendix on "Price Performance of Computation, 1939-2023" to *The Singularity Is Nearer* nicely corroborates Kurzweil's arguments about the steady and increasingly exponential increases in computing power over time.
5. See, e.g., Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York, NY: Viking, 2011).
6. See Cade Metz, "Douglas Lenat, 72; His Life's Work Was Trying to Make A.I. More Human," *New York Times*, September 5, 2023, A19.
7. Marvin L. Minsky and Seymour A. Papert, *Perceptrons* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969).
8. See Robert A. Freitas, "Some Limits to Global Ecophagy by Biovorous Nanoreplicators, with Public Policy Recommendations," Foresight Institute, April 2000 https://legacy.foresight.org/nano/Ecophagy.html
9. See Bruce Sterling, "The Asilomar AI Principles," WIRED, June 1, 2018 https://www.wired.com/beyond-the-beyond/2018/06/asilomar-ai-principles/ and Cameron Jenkins, "AI Innovators Take Pledge against Autonomous Killer Weapons," NPR, July 18, 2018 https://www.npr.org/2018/07/18/630146884/ai-innovators-take-pledge-against-autonomous-killer-weapons
10. See Peter Redpath, *The Moral Psychology of St. Thomas Aquinas: An Introduction to Ragamuffin Ethics* (St. Louis, MO: Enroute), 111-125, and Peter Redpath, "Recovering Our Understanding of Philosophy and Science," Angelicum Academy (n.d.) https://www.angelicum.net/classical-homeschooling-magazine/fourth-issue/recovering-our-understanding-of-philosophy-and-science/

THE HUMAN LIFE REVIEW'S
50TH ANNIVERSARY GALA

November 13, 2024

The Union League Club, New York City

58/Winter 2025

At mid-day on November 13th, *the day of our 50th anniversary gala, Amtrak had a complete shutdown of service between Wilmington, Delaware, and New York City. Sadly, our co-host, and Great Defender of Life, Helen Alvaré, was stuck on a train in Wilmington and didn't make our event! She did send us the transcript of her remarks via phone; her fellow host Jack Fowler started by explaining her absence and later reading her salute to the late Cardinal John O'Connor to our guests. What follows are excerpts from the dinner remarks. You can watch the complete dinner video, as well as our short film and slideshow, on our website, at https://humanlifereview.com/great-defender-life-dinner/special-event-great-defender-life-dinner-2024/*

JACK FOWLER:

I had the great honor to work with Jim McFadden and so many other good people at the Human Life Foundation and the National Committee of Catholic Laymen and the Ad Hoc Committee in Defense of Life. It was a great group. Many people are going to be mentioned tonight, named and noted. I want to talk about one of them in particular, before we get started. Jim McFadden was a work horse and a bulldog, but there is no way that we would be here tonight to mark the golden anniversary of this revered journal if he did not have a right hand . . . helping him produce the *Human Life Review*, *Lifeletter*, and *catholic eye*, and raise funds for baby-saving groups—as we called them—that were holding the barricades in the battle against the culture of death. That right hand was founding publisher Ed Capano, who helped Jim in all these efforts while he performed various duties as associate publisher (and later publisher) at *National Review*—a 45-year career that ended with Ed as NR's chief executive. I think it's very fair to say that there are people who are alive today because of the efforts of Jim and Ed; they gave hope and actual aid to women who were otherwise contemplating abortion. What a legacy for this man, so integral to the creation and growth of the *Human Life Review*. Ed, who was also a longtime HLF board member, could not be with us tonight, but I thought it well worth it, on the 50th anniversary, that we make note of his essential contribution to this great, great cause. So give a little applause for Ed Capano. [Applause] . . .

REV. GERALD MURRAY:

Our thoughts tonight turn to gratitude. Gratitude for what the McFadden family has been doing for fifty years. Gratitude for this offspring of *National Review*—conservatism at its best—protecting human life, upholding a civil order based on just laws—natural law—refusing to accept the exercise of raw judicial power to create a spurious constitutional right to kill innocent

human beings in the womb.

Gratitude for brilliant writers who use their intelligence to refute and demolish falsehoods justifying the unjustifiable. Gratitude for the perseverance in the fight of the staff of the *Human Life Review*. Gratitude for our own gift of life and for the gift of truth that instructs us that we must not tolerate the moral, legal, and social injustice of abortion because "that is just the way things are."

We stand with our unborn brothers and sisters and pledge to keep fighting to end the grave injustice of legalized child-killing by abortion. We stand with those threatened by euthanasia, now known as medical assistance in dying.

It is good to stand for what is right. The *Human Life Review* has done that and will continue to do that. May God favor and bless this fifty-year-old champion of all that is true, good, and beautiful.

WESLEY J. SMITH:

Thank you all for being here at this important event and thank you, Maria and Anne, for inviting me to say a few words.

You know, as I pondered what I would say tonight, I thought about what it is that people with excellence in advocacy—what are their attributes. I came up with five.

One is integrity. Two, know your stuff. Three, be unremitting, never quit. Four, don't be expedient. That's a hard one sometimes—don't be expedient. And five, have a willingness to sacrifice.

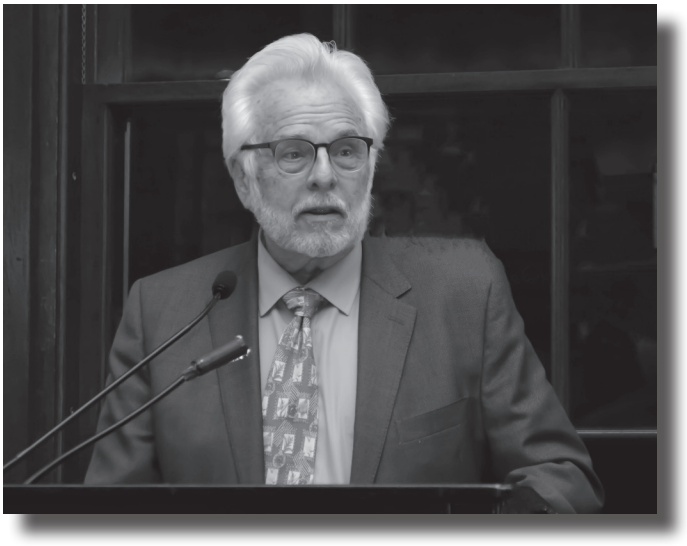
And I have to say the *Human Life Review* epitomizes each and every one of those five attributes. And so do two former defenders of life, Great Defenders of Life, that I've been asked to speak a bit about today, Nat Hentoff and Rita Marker.

The late great Nat Hentoff was my friend. I don't remember exactly how

and when it came about, but he would call me when he was writing about euthanasia for quotes, and at some point, I came to New York and he wanted to have dinner, and it began a friendship that was mostly conducted over the phone. But anytime I was here in New York City, he and I would get together.

He was such an iconoclast, in addition to being a jazz expert—internationally renowned in that regard. He called himself a Jewish, atheist, left-wing, civil-libertarian prolifer. Accordingly, his work castigated legalized abortion, partial birth terminations, unethical experimentation on disabled babies, health care rationing, the intentional dehydration of Terri Schiavo, euthanasia, and other life disaffirming issues and policies that reared their ugly heads over the last thirty or so years of his writing career.

I think Nat deserved the Pulitzer. But he ruined his opportunities because he took those positions. And eventually because of those positions he took, he lost his 50-year writing gig at the *Village Voice*, he was fired, in essence, from the *Washington Post*, and ended up excluded and marginalized in what we now might call the mainstream media. While the mainstream viewed Nat's human exceptionalism advocacy as an embarrassing anomaly, prolifers received it as sweet incense. Nat's ongoing *apologia* compelled the Human Life Foundation to name him its Great Defender Life in 2005.



Nat Hentoff epitomized the power of life. So, thank you my wonderful Jewish, atheist, civil-libertarian, left-wing prolifer friend. We will not see your like again.

Post Script: If I might add a brief point of personal privilege: None of us can judge the state of another's soul. And as others who knew Nat have stated, I never fully believed the atheist part of the iconoclastic self-description. I teased him gently about that whenever I was with him, and his eyes would just twinkle. As I think back on our all-too-brief conversations, as I reflect on what he stood for and his shimmering integrity, I still don't.

My great friend and mentor, Rita Marker, a Great Defender of Life in 2008,

passed away two weeks ago. I don't know if any of you knew Rita. Yes, Rita was one of the greats of anti-euthanasia advocacy. She lived to be 83. And she died after a long illness.

Rita was in Europe in the mid-1980s, and out of curiosity attended an International Right-to-Die convention. I always think of her as a horse smelling smoke and rearing, because what she heard so alarmed her that she and her husband and soulmate Mike Marker formed the non-profit International Anti-Euthanasia Task Force, which was later renamed the Patients Rights Council. Along with a loyal staff, Rita began decades of work pushing back against that dark agenda.

Not every great public policy activist becomes a household name. Rita was not interested in notoriety or fame. Effectiveness was her lone star, that and personal sacrifice. For as long as she was physically able, she gave all she had to the cause. She had stage fright, but she spoke countless times to large and small venues. She was terrified of flying, yet she traveled the world speaking against euthanasia and in favor of compassionate care.

Rita was a devout Catholic, a daily communicant. But she insisted that the task force opposition to assisted suicide be focused through a human rights and secular lens.

Rita did not have a professional degree until she decided that she could be most effective by becoming a lawyer. She attended a mail-in law school, while still working full-time for the task force, and passed the California Bar Exam, the nation's most difficult, on the first try.

Rita's life was full. She is survived by 7 children, 29 grandchildren, and 13 great grandchildren.

So rest in peace, Rita. You fought the good fight. You finished the race. You kept the faith. You served your purpose. And the world is so much better for you having been in it.

HELEN ALVARÉ (TRIBUTE TO JOHN CARDINAL O'CONNOR):

It's a great honor even to be permitted to be a person allowed to honor John Cardinal O'Connor. I'll bet every single one of you has a fond recollection of him . . . I only hope I can capture some of what we love so much about him in a relatively few words.

I have been thinking of him a great deal recently—a great deal at this time in our national saga, when so many people seem to have forgotten what abortion *is* and are therefore installing it into laws without even those basic guardrails that would protect the *woman* involved, even if the child is not

allowed to count for anything.

I have been thinking of how the Cardinal manifested intelligence and reason when they said we were stupid.

About his standing against hatred based upon religion: for every woman who had the good fortune to work in his orbit; for every pregnant woman in turmoil, and against the legalization of killing vulnerable children in the womb . . . not only in the same lifetime, but on the same day and in the same breath. And he did all this when they said we were not consistent in a principled way or claimed we were retrograde and anti-woman.

I think about his standing large when they said we had no one of any influence or stature on our side.

And, of course, his standing courageous at a time of the abortion debate when all the "powers that be" were telling us we were finished . . . that we could not *possibly* succeed or even remain *visible* against the inevitable tide of history.

And then, like the Father he was, he left us a legacy—including so many of us here who were taught, encouraged, mentored by him. My gosh, I was 29(!) when he decided to put his faith in me as a voice for the Church and then guided, cajoled, praised, and, yes, occasionally rebuked me into improving and strengthening that voice. He formed me in a permanent way.

But, *especially*, he left us the spectacular legacy that many of us know simply as "that group of women we cannot say no to," or "some of the most joyful, fun-loving, talented women we know," or "the hardest working nuns in show business"—all of which is to say the Sisters of Life.

So many of these sisters have been mothers, sisters, friends to me and to you—*imagine* what is felt by those women who encounter them when they

Helen Alvaré gives her awardee remarks at our gala dinner in 2019

are at the very end of their rope, when life itself is on the line. Imagine their reaction when they meet women whose hearts and homes are immediately available to them—in the way Jesus was available, in the way a mother is available.

So thank you, Cardinal O'Connor, not only for all you did while you were by our side, but for your legacy, especially your living legacy, your daughters and sons who, with so much gratitude to you, continue the pro-life struggle, assured that we have reason, truth, human rights, *you*, and the Lord, right by our side.

JACK FOWLER:

I want to thank Dale and Wendy Brott, who are not here tonight, for hosting the William F. Buckley Jr. & James L. Buckley level . . . Bill was so supportive of the effort Jim McFadden undertook right after *Roe.* I worked for Jim at the office of *National Review*, but not for *National Review.* Very few companies would do that, but Bill knew the importance of the issue and the passion that Jim and others there had, so it's very deserving that he be recognized at that level. Jim Buckley, who was awarded and spoke here [as the Foundation's 2012 Great Defender of Life]—does anyone know a greater man, a more saintly man than James Lane Buckley? He was the holiest—he was an angel! . . .

Okay, for a moment now I'm identifying as Helen Alvaré: "Helen thanks the Knights of Columbus for hosting the Cardinal O'Connor level," and I want to say that the Knights, the National Office, have been great, great supporters—of course, of the cause we fight, but also of the Foundation and the *Human Life Review*. Jim McFadden and Carl Anderson, the former Supreme Knight, were great friends back when Carl worked on Capitol Hill and then when he worked in the Reagan White House. Carl was always a tremendous supporter, and that this has carried through to the current leadership is just a beautiful thing. So, we are very appreciative of the Knights of Columbus's ongoing support for the Foundation. [Applause] . . .

MARIA MAFFUCCI:

First, I want to thank Pat and Bob O'Brien for hosting the Faith & Jim McFadden level. Obviously, Faith and Jim are my parents. Blessed memory. I am one of five children. My older brother, Robert, who also worked with us, died 30 years ago . . . I grew up kind of wondering how I could ever measure up to either of my parents, because they were both so smart and such great writers, though very different. Dad was, as Jack said, a bulldog, and my mom

was serene. It is a great privilege to follow in their footsteps, and I think of them often, as well as Robert, who I miss a lot. I think they'd be very happy about this gathering, and I am grateful to all of you that we made it—and through some very difficult years—to this our 50th anniversary. . . .

I want to thank Captain Hayes and family for hosting the Nat Hentoff level. As you can see in your program, we also have a "Name Your Own Hero" level, and I would like to announce that the Charles and Mary Crossed Foundation has honored Feminists Choosing Life of New York as their pro-life hero. FCLNY members were tireless in their efforts to defend against Proposition One [Equal Rights Amendment] in New York State, which unfortunately passed, but what they did educated lots of New Yorkers about the potential threats the amendment could pose. Michele Sterlace Accorsi is the Executive Director: She is a fantastic woman, and she did a wonderful job. She is not here tonight, but Margaret Colon, who is with us tonight, is an honorary chairperson of Feminists Choosing Life of New York, so we will present her with the award. [Applause] . . .The late Barbara Connell was the best friend of my mother, and she left the Foundation a generous gift from her trust. As a trustee, my pro-life hero is Destiny Herndon de la Rosa. [Applause] I discovered her in 2016, at a time when I was getting kind of burned out, and she opened new doors for me, including introducing me to many wonderful women in the movement. Destiny, I also have a message from Helen [Alvaré]. She said, "Tell Destiny she was one of the HUGE highlights I was looking forward to this evening; she allows me to breathe with relief that the pro-life movement still has its pure hearts and its fiery spirit." And that's Destiny. [Applause] . . .

JACK FOWLER:

As a donor, I am also in the position of naming a pro-life hero, and my hero is my dear friend and my former colleague at *National Review*, Kathryn Jean Lopez. [Applause] There are three things I want to say. First is the obvious, which we all know: Nobody in the last 25 or 30 years—

even when she first came to *National Review*—has written so much, and so relentlessly, in defense of the unborn, and on related issues. The last few years she has been a tireless fighter on behalf of foster care reform. She is a very unique person . . . One day Kathryn and I were coming from some event, walking down 47th Street, and coming up the block were two Sisters of Life. I got so excited—some nuns coming our way—and the two sisters were so excited because KLO was coming their way. [Applause] It's all deserved. On social media Kathryn is constantly posting "I saw somebody"—sometimes a homeless person—"I saw someone who needs a prayer." Many people follow Kathryn, and she is constantly eliciting prayers from us for people we don't even know. When Kathryn says pray for somebody, you are going to stop whatever you are doing, and you are going to pray. She just has that power, and deservedly so, over people. She is simply one of the most special people I know, someone I have had the pleasure to work with and remain a friend of—a champion for all the causes we believe in. One more round of applause for my dear friend. [Applause]

MARIA MAFFUCCI:

We also have some other pro-life heroes. I would like to thank Allen Roth, whose hero is John Hinshaw.

As many of you know, John Hinshaw is in prison because of peaceful pro-life protest, along with several pro-life heroes, including Joan Andrews Bell. I hope President-elect Trump will free them as he has said he would. John Hinshaw's family is here—would you like to stand up? [Applause, as John's wife, Brenda, and son John Paul accept his award.]

John Ferrari is on our Board, and his pro-life hero is Dana Hendershott. Years ago, Anne Hendershott asked if her recently retired husband, Dana, could volunteer for us. He would have volunteered at a pregnancy center but because he is 6'4" she thought he might scare the ladies! So he came to volunteer for us instead. He soon became a beloved member of our team. He is the captain of our team, and gives me the best advice, and we love him very much.

And Dana and Anne Hendershott's pro-life hero is Pat O'Brien. Now, Pat

and I have been working together tirelessly on the dinner list and tables, and it's been really hard keeping the secret from her. But if you look at your dinner journal, Dana and Anne have written a beautiful passage about why Pat is their pro-life hero. She is the most generous and loving person I think any of us have ever met. God bless Pat.

Now I'd like to thank our Board of Directors: Rev. Ross Blackburn, John Ferrari, Dana Hendershott, Fr. Gerald Murray, Rose Flynn DeMaio, George Marlin, and Chris McEvoy. And once again, before I invite board chairman Jim McLaughlin up here, I just want to thank my staff. We have a very small staff. We don't have event planners, no fancy development people. We have people who sacrifice to make this all happen. That includes our wonderful editor, Anne Conlon; Rose DeMaio, our financial manager, who started off with Bill Buckley; Christina Angelopoulos, my lovely youngest sister who is the only one young enough to help us with technology; and our production assistant, Ida Paz, who is a saint. Jane Devanny, my best friend from grammar school, helps out part-time with fundraising, and Chris Reilly, who has become an integral part of the team, also helps with development and strategy . . . And now I invite our board chairman, Jim McLaughlin, up to talk about hope for the future.

JAMES MCLAUGHLIN:

Thank you, Maria.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging one of this evening's honorees. Maria McFadden Maffucci. Maria took over as editor of the *Human Life Review* after the death of our founder, her father. Without her dedication and leadership over the past 26 years the *Review* would not have survived. But it has survived and flourished. The entire McFadden family deserves credit. Without them, the *Review* would not exist. Now, when I told Maria that I wished to name her as our hero, exhibiting her habitual modesty and generosity of spirit, she said, Oh no. Don't name me. You should name the entire staff. So I am happy to acknowledge the *Review*'s talented editors, writers, staff, and volunteers: Anne Conlon, Christina Angelopoulos, Patricia O'Brien, Rose Flynn DeMaio, Jane Devanny and Ida Paz. They produce the *Review* with the consistently high quality that has been a hallmark of the *Review* since its inception.

We gather here tonight to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the magnificent *Human Life Review*, to renew old friendships, to make new ones, to revivify our commitment to the cause, and most of all to thank each of you. Nothing that we do would be possible without you.

For those of you who may be new to the *Review*, you should know that it

is the leading pro-life journal in America. In addition to the abortion issue, the *Review* publishes broadly on issues affecting the dignity of the human person, including euthanasia, human cloning, and medical ethics. William F. Buckley Jr said, "This powerful journal is quite simply the locus of civilized discussion on abortion, euthanasia, and related issues."

The *Human Life Review* is distinctive. No other publication is uniquely dedicated to the life issues, and there is nothing like it on the other side. The *Review*'s online archive contains everything ever published in the *Review*'s pages over the past 50 years. It constitutes an invaluable record and resource, chronicling all the events and controversies that have arisen during the past half-century in the cause of life.

I have been asked whether we can continue to have hope for the future of the pro-life movement. I believe that we can, and we should. It is not given to us to know the future. So hope, by its very nature, embodies an element of uncertainty. We need to be realistic. It is likely to be a very long battle. There will be victories and defeats, advances and setbacks along the way. We may never perfectly achieve our goals. But eventually I believe we will move decisively toward the goal of having every child welcomed in life and protected in law.

I would like to share a few thoughts on where we have been and where we are going. And I would like to put aside the static of the polls, the commentary of the pundits and politicians, and the daily deluge of information that comes at us from television, the internet, and other sources, to focus on the very basic, fundamental realities that will determine the future of the pro-life cause.

I would like to suggest three reasons we can have hope, and to relate each of the three to articles published in the *Review*. The first reason for hope is right there in the motto of the *Human Life Review*: Truth and Reason in Defense of Life. The power of truth.

In his article "Why They Help Them Lie" (HLR Spring 2001), Professor George McKenna—George and his wife Sylvia are here tonight—wrote: "From its inception the 'pro-choice' movement has used lies to advance its cause."

Before *Roe* v. *Wade*, Dr. Bernard Nathanson, who was then chairman of NARAL—now called the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action

League—was promoting the legalization of abortion. He and other pro-abortion activists consistently claimed that there were 5,000 to 10,000 deaths a year from illegal abortions and that this was a principal reason why abortion should be legalized. These statistics were endlessly recited in the news media. Now, it happens that the federal government keeps statistics on this. The actual number for 1972 was not five to ten thousand. It was 39. In his memoir Dr. Nathanson wrote: "I confess that I knew the figures were totally false . . . but in our revolution it was a useful figure, widely accepted, so why correct it?"

Professor McKenna recites page after page of outright lies told through the years by the proponents of abortion. You all know what I am talking about and there is no need to recite all of them in an assembly of this kind. Professor McKenna concludes: "These are not just lies blurted out on the spur of the moment. They are premeditated lies, lies worked out and rehearsed well in advance, then ceremoniously introduced to the public. Why do they lie? I suppose because they have to. The truth about what they are doing and defending is very unpleasant."

Even the language the abortion advocates use is fraudulent. We are told that abortion is woman's health care. It is the only form of health care that always results in a death. In fact, it is the only form of health care *intended* to result in death.

The cynics can call it mysticism if they want to, but I have always believed that Truth has a mysterious power. If the light of truth comes into a dark room it's not dark anymore. And it doesn't work the other way round. You cannot project darkness into a room. If you want darkness, you have to block out the light. Light destroys darkness. That is our great advantage. That is the power of truth.

But there's a catch. Truth has power only if *we* act. The power of truth becomes manifest only if there are people willing to *speak* the truth. To *stand up* for the truth. To *testify* to the truth. For 50 years the *Human Life Review* has been doing exactly that.

The second reason for hope is that each new generation arrives open to new thinking.

In this room at our 2014 dinner, Kristan Hawkins, president of Students for Life, told us about extensive recent polling data revealing that: "Millennials are demonstrably more pro-life than preceding generations." The findings are detailed in her article "Pro-Life Millennials: The Polls vs. the Facts" (HLR Summer 2014). Students for Life has over 800 active student pro-life groups across the country. The two largest pro-choice activist groups *combined* have fewer than half that number.

Former NARAL president Nancy Keenan revealed a sense of doom when she saw pro-life youth flooding Washington for the March for Life. *Newsweek*

reported: "When Keenan's train pulled into Washington's Union Station, a few blocks from the Capitol, she was greeted by a swarm of anti-abortion-rights activists. She said, 'I just thought, my gosh, they are so young. There are so many of them, and they are so young.'"

Lastly, I believe that we can have hope because we can have faith in the American people.

In 1983, the *Human Life Review* had the distinct honor of publishing an article written specially for the *Review* by a sitting president. President Reagan entitled his article "Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation." In it, he pointed out that the issue of abortion is not about whether the unborn child is a human life. The issue is what *value* do we place on human life. I mentioned the role that lies have played in the pro-abortion movement. Lies are not always black and white. They are more commonly subtle. Obfuscations, half-truths mixed with lies, shadows rather than total darkness. And that type of lie, in its subtlety, can be the most effective kind of lie in misleading people.

This is what I mean: Science is 100 percent clear that the unborn child, from its earliest embryonic stage and throughout its development, is alive. And that life, while dependent upon the mother, is separate and distinct from the mother. Moreover, it is a *human* life. Those are not opinions. Those are facts. Yet Justice Blackmun justified his decision in *Roe* v. *Wade* by holding that the Court could not determine whether the unborn child is a human life. That is what I mean by lies told through obfuscation and shadows. When President Obama was asked whether the unborn child is a human life, he answered "that is above my paygrade."

Professor Hadley Arkes, a frequent contributor to the *Review*, has pointed out that in the Nazi death camps there were great piles of shoes. The shoes were confiscated from victims as they were marched into the gas chambers, to be distributed by the Nazi government to supporters of the regime. Professor Arkes observes that what the Nazis thought was valuable were the soles of the victims' shoes, not their imperishable souls.

President Reagan was correct. The real issue is: What *value* do we place on human life? In our throw-away culture of discarded things, we should not accept that a human life which is in our eyes imperfect, inconvenient, disabled, or unwanted can simply be discarded. As one pregnant woman said, "In this society we save whales, we save timber wolves, we save bald eagles and even Coke bottles. Yet everyone wanted me to throw my baby away."

President Reagan was confident that the conscience of the American people would be awakened. He likened the struggle to recognize the value of the lives of the unborn to the long struggle to end slavery and recognize the full humanity of our Black brothers and sisters. At first a minority deplored

the immorality of slavery, but they persisted and finally prevailed. Reagan concluded: "We know that respect for the sacred value of human life is too deeply engrained in the hearts of our people to remain forever suppressed."

The founding of the American republic 250 years ago astonished the world. The first republic of a free, self-governing people to arise in thousands of years of human history. Now that *Roe* has been finally overturned, the issue of abortion is in the hands of the American people. It will take time, probably a long time, for a resolution. That resolution will depend ultimately on what kind of a people we are.

Shortly after our nation's founding a young Frenchman, Alexis de Tocqueville, came to our young country, travelling to cities and towns to try to discover how and why this great experiment in self-government, based upon the principles set forth in our Declaration of Independence, had come about. He concluded by saying: "If you seek the greatness of America, you will find it in her churches. America is great because she is good." And then he added this: "If she ever ceases to be good, she will cease to be great."

I believe we need to have faith in the goodness of the American people. We need to have the same faith that President Reagan had. That in time, the conscience of our nation will be awakened. When that time comes, the *Human Life Review* will be seen as having played a critical role in the defense of life. Your dedicated support is what makes that possible.

From all of us at the *Human Life Review* to all of you, thank you. Good night. And God bless you.

Patrick Mullaney, Allen Roth, and Edward Short

George and Sylvia McKenna chat With Rose Flynn DeMaio

Sr. Josamarie Perpetua, SV and other Sisters of Life were able to join us this year, to our joy.

Meet your photographer, Michael Fusco, and pianist Joe Longo!

W. Ross Blackburn and son William Blackburn chat with Senior Editor Ellen Wilson Fielding.

Pro-Life hero Destiny Herndon-De La Rosa of New Wave Feminists sparkles!

Raymond and Anne Conlon with Anne Hendershott, center

Reverend John Kalish with Bill and Julie McGurn

Our heartfelt thanks (and theirs, we're sure!) to those who were able to donate student tickets.

RITA MARKER

DECEMBER 10, 1940 - OCTOBER 30, 2024

Rita Marker, Faith McFadden, Maria McFadden Maffucci, and Wesley Smith at the Great Defender of Life Dinner in 2008

In our society, if something is legal people begin to think it is moral and ethical. There is a professor at the University of Virginia, his name is James Davidson Hunter. And I'm paraphrasing him, but he said something to the effect that nowadays people have lost the basis of their beliefs and their values. No longer are individual hearts and minds shaping the culture. The culture is shaping the hearts and minds of individuals.

—Rita Marker, Great Defender of Life Speech, 2008

APPENDIX A

[*John Burger, who writes for the online journal Aleteia, is the author of* At the Foot of the Cross: Lessons from Ukraine*. The following article was published December 24, 2024 (*www.aleteia.org*) and is reprinted with permission.*]

"Intellectual backbone" to the pro-life movement celebrates 50 years

John Burger

If it had happened today, James P. McFadden would have gotten the news right away, likely from the feed on his smartphone.

But it was January of 1973, and McFadden went out to buy a newspaper. The US Supreme Court decision from the day before, in the case of *Roe* v. *Wade*, was splashed across the front page.

"He could not believe that the Supreme Court, with all its moral power, would be behind a decision that would take away the right to life of the unborn," his daughter, Maria McFadden Maffucci, recalled.

The elder McFadden was a journalist—at that time serving as associate publisher at *National Review*, the magazine founded by William F. Buckley Jr. His first reaction to the *Roe* decision was to organize a lobbying organization to work for a legislative reversal of the court ruling. But he also saw the need for a forum to exchange ideas on the life issue.

The result was the *Human Life Review*, a quarterly journal he began publishing in 1974.

McFadden "realized that every good cause, every major cause, needs a good publication," his daughter said.

It would be, in its own words, an academic-quality journal—though accessible to a broad readership, not just scholars—"devoted to civilized discussion of legal, philosophical, medical, scientific, and moral perspectives on all life issues."

Fifty years later, in a world where many print publications have yielded to the digital revolution, McFadden's brainchild still rolls off the presses and arrives in subscribers' mailboxes four times a year. And it is still hailed as the intellectual backbone of the pro-life movement.

Heavy Hitters

Perhaps somewhat naively, McFadden imagined an army of writers and intellectuals supporting the new initiative. He "couldn't believe that writers who were proud of their craft, that brilliant minds would ever be on the side against life," McFadden Maffucci said.

While there might not be an overwhelming bias toward the pro-life position in the literary and journalistic world, *Human Life Review* over the years has featured some

"heavy hitters" in its pages: Venerable Jerome Lejeune, Malcolm Muggeridge, William F. Buckley and his brother, Sen. James L. Buckley, Henry Hyde, Cardinal John J. O'Connor, Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, Nat Hentoff, Clare Boothe Luce, C. Everett Koop, Helen Alvare, Eric Metaxas, Kathryn Jean Lopez, and Wesley J. Smith, among others.

One particular article the HLR is particularly proud of having published—so much so that the magazine reprinted it as a small book—was Ronald Reagan's 1983 piece, "Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation."

"That was an extraordinary piece, and all the more important because it was written by a man who used to be pro-abortion, and so it shows somebody struggling with the issue with intellectual integrity and then coming to the pro-life view, and of course, becoming a great defender of life," said Fr. Paul D. Scalia, a son of former US Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia who worked for HLR in the early 1990s.

Engaging the culture

Human Life Review from the start was very much a "family business," McFadden Maffucci said. That's appropriate for an effort that sought to support the sanctity of human life. James McFadden's wife, Faith Abbott McFadden, served as senior editor of the *Review* for many years and edited a column in a bulletin he had also published, *Catholic Eye*. James McFadden died in 1998, and Faith died in 2011.

Maria McFadden Maffucci, who is now editor in chief, has seen the near demise of the *Review* several times—only to be buoyed by a sudden major donation from a supporter that breathed new life into the effort.

"There have been many times when I really felt like, 'This is it. We're not going to make it. It's over,' and kind of looked up to heaven and said, 'What am I going to do?' And something always would happen—most often a generous supporter would send us a financial gift—so I knew we could keep going."

Sometimes, it was "a supporter's words of encouragement or a wonderful article that gave me the emotional and moral energy to keep going," she added.

With a small staff and a loyal cadre of freelance contributors, HLR continues to explore new facets of the pro-life movement. It has evolved from an intellectual response to legal abortion to a place of debate and source of information on new challenges, such as euthanasia and assisted suicide, neonaticide, genetic engineering, cloning, fetal and embryonic stem cell research and experimentation, as well as underlying issues of family and society.

There's also a new political landscape following the 2022 fall of the Supreme Court decision that originally spurred on McFadden. With *Dobbs* v. *Jackson Women's Health Organization* returning states' power to regulate abortion, pro-lifers find the battle has shifted, and in some cases is more challenging.

"I think the huge message of the post-*Dobbs* world is that the culture is in no way ready to make the argument against abortion and the life issues on their own merit," said McFadden Maffucci. "So my goal is really to work more and more with the culture."

In addition to editing the journal, she has overseen new efforts, such as public

forums and debates over better approaches to influencing people's thinking about life issues. Last June, the Human Life Foundation, the parent organization of the *Review*, held a conference called "Breaking Through: The Culture of Life in Arts and Entertainment."

"We talked about the fact that, for example, fiction portrays the truth of life, and sometimes fiction, without the author even realizing it, will have pro-life themes, because that's actually reality," said McFadden Maffucci.

In the coming year, the foundation plans to hold another conference, about how Churches can best reach out to pregnant women to support human life.

A record

In the words of *HLR* editor Anne Conlon, the quarterly journal is a "record" of the pro-life movement.

"It's important to have a record for history. As Jim McFadden said so eloquently, nobody will be able to say they didn't know what was going on during these dark years, because it is there," Conlon said. "It shows that there were a substantial number of people who didn't buy into this great lie about human life, about unborn children being clumps of tissue that you can casually discard and not think twice about. It's there, over and over again, from doctors, from lawyers, from political scientists, from [ordinary people], from journalists following the development of the history since *Roe* v. *Wade*, everything: the attempts to have a Human Life Amendment, the Congressional legislation, the Supreme Court decisions, the different things that have happened, like going after pro-lifers with the RICO Act, then the whole partial birth abortion era, when Congress was successful, finally, in opening people's eyes to unborn children with diagrams of this hideous form of abortion, which is all chronicled in the *Review*."

But in addition, *HLR* has been a means for people to find their way, whether they were pro-life or not, and for the pro-life movement to mature and respond to the evolving culture.

"For people who did have pro-life values but didn't know how to articulate them or how to argue them to different kinds of audiences, I think the journal has been invaluable," said Richard M. Doerflinger, former Associate Director of the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Doerflinger said he was hired by the bishops' conference "straight out of a graduate program in theology." But the conference wanted him to serve as a legislative assistant.

"I knew virtually nothing about public policy, particularly on these issues," Doerflinger told *Aleteia*. He began reading the *Human Life Review*, to which his office subscribed, and received "a very quick education in the best that's been written on these things."

"It was an enormous help to me," said Doerflinger, who is also a member of the Pontifical Academy for Life. "I don't know how I would have gotten my bearings without it."

At Congress

Ellen Wilson Fielding, a frequent contributor over the years, said HLR has provided a "special kind of cross fertilization of ideas and techniques and approaches to help people become aware of the range of possible things they can be doing and should be doing, to spark conversations among different branches of the pro-life movement."

Laura Echevarria, Director of Communications and Press Secretary of National Right to Life, said she has appreciated the "deep dive" HLR articles often take in philosophy, the law, politics, or simply the reasons women get abortions.

Echevarria, who has written for the journal, said HLR has ended up on the desks of members of Congress.

Hadley Arkes, a frequent contributor and Ney Professor of Jurisprudence Emeritus at Amherst College, noted that former federal judge John T. Noonan had written an article in 1981 about the ability of fetuses to feel pain. Ronald Reagan, in the 1984 State of the Union Address, "seemed to pick up on Noonan, . . . saying that doctors 'confirm that when the lives of the unborn are snuffed out, they often feel pain, pain that is long and agonizing.'"

"And what that produced was a remarkable set of hearings in the Senate," during which a physician from Yale and others withdrew their claim that fetuses could not feel pain at 12 weeks gestation, Arkes said.

Continuing importance

The *Human Life Review* might be even more important now than it was in 1974, some commenters have observed. Fr. Paul Scalia said that what the *Review* does best—making the intellectual argument for the pro-life cause and thinking clearly about it—"is even more important today and more difficult, because we live even more than 50 years ago in not a soundbite culture but a tweet culture."

"And everything is done to appeal to feelings and passions more than to appeal to the intellect," said Fr. Scalia, a pastor in Falls Church, Virginia.

Hadley Arkes added that there has been a loss of the capacity on the part of public figures to talk about abortion in public.

"You know, Lincoln complained that there is slavery," said Arkes. "It was a central issue before us. We can't talk about it in the churches. It's too unsettling there. We can't talk about it in politics. It's too explosive there. It's the thing that we most need to talk about, but we can't find a place to talk about it. And in the years since the *Human Life Review* got going, it's become harder to talk about this issue in public. And it's evident that so many people in public life and so many ordinary people have just obviously not had 10 minutes of serious conversation about the subject."

Now, not only four times a year but with an expanded online presence and a program of public events, the *Human Life Review* is determined to keep the conversation going.

APPENDIX B

[*On June 29, 2024, the Human Life Foundation hosted a conference, "Breaking Through: The Culture of Life in Arts and Entertainment." The full day included talks and panel discussions on film and literature, live performances of poetry, music, and drama, and enthusiastic audience participation. What follows here: the wonderful keynote address by Victor Austin, a contributor to the* Human Life Review*'s website feature Pastoral Reflections, and remarks by frequent* HLR *blogger Diane Moriarty. We will be posting more from the conference soon on our website . . . stay tuned.*

The Reverend Canon Victor Lee Austin is theologian-in-residence for the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas, and the author of A Post-Covid Catechesis and Friendship: The Heart of Being Human*. Diane Moriarty, a freelance writer living in Manhattan, had done art reviews and articles for* Able Newspaper*. She also wrote, produced, and directed* Dish!*, an independent film given a run at Anthology Film Archives.*]

BREAKING THROUGH:

The Culture of Life in Arts and Entertainment

Rev. Canon Victor Lee Austin and Diane Moriarty

Reverend Austin:

What I hope to show in this short talk, in a few different ways, is that in the long run, reality breaks through in our culture.

In the Western Christian tradition of thinking about reality, articulated by Augustine before the end of the 4th century and carried forward brilliantly by Aquinas and Hooker and many others, an equivalence is seen between what's good and what's real. Evil, at the end of the day, is a hole in reality. Evil is essentially unreal, although, as the brilliant 20th-century Dominican theologian Herbert McCabe put it, a hole in a bridge is an absence that can have a serious effect on you if you fall through it. Which is to say, the harms of evil are strongly felt. But nonetheless, in the end, evil is just nothing, and to be evil is to choose nothingness, to opt against reality.

To claim that every human being is a creature made by God with a special dignity (a dignity to which the Scriptures refer when they speak of men and women being created in the image of God); to claim that this is true no matter how small and seemingly insignificant a human being is; to claim that this will continue to be true no matter how superannuated, or addled, or debilitated a human being might become: These are claims grounded in reality. If they are true, that's how things really are.

So when we are talking about the pro-life "message" breaking through in our culture, what we are talking about is reality breaking through in various cultural products. One cultural product is law, and the great virtue of the *Dobbs* decision is that, in it, reality broke through. From the beginning, *Roe* v. *Wade* had been recognized as

based on lies and false ideas; instead of being grounded in reality, it was an exercise (as Justice White said in dissent) of "raw judicial power." Yet among the productions of culture, law is hardly the only, and often hardly the most important. Culture is expansive, including memes and songs, the way we eat and the food we eat, our manner of dress and our manner of addressing one another; it includes dance and film and story and music and words, legends, novels, fiction.

I think pro-life sensitivities and convictions can and do break through in the works of our culture—not because the creators of these works are trying to be pro-life, but rather because they are trying to be good at what they do. We should expect to find, in all sorts of writing and storytelling, affirmations and celebrations of the dignity of human beings, unborn or seen as unimportant or judged useless by others. We should be open to and hopeful of finding this from any author or playwright or film director, because this is what is true. Although faith may help, you don't have to be Christian to be able to grasp human truth. You can be in error or confused about lots of things and still be able to grasp something profoundly true about human beings.

I think reality is breaking through in all sorts of places.

Exhibit A. The film *Juno* came out while I was a priest here in New York City. In coffee hour after church one day, a man of the left came to me and asked if I had seen it. When I allowed that I had, he told me he thought it was a great film. Now I knew this man was in favor of abortion rights. And as I recall, no character in the film argued against abortion rights. But Juno is the story of a girl who becomes pregnant and gives her child up for adoption. Along the way she visits an abortion clinic, and that scene contains the most negative depiction of an abortion clinic I have ever found. The desk clerk is indifferent; the waiting room shabby; the entire atmosphere grimy. Juno leaves it and feels as if she has escaped something ugly. Which, in truth, she has.

Exhibit B. Kazuo Ishiguro has won the Nobel Prize for fiction, and some of his books have become notable films, one of them being *Remains of the Day*. His later novel *Never Let Me Go* is set in an alternative present in which many deadly diseases have been eliminated. The means of elimination is the availability of replacement organs from a population of human clones who have been brought into existence simply for this purpose. The novel is in the voice of Kathy, one of the clones, who tells the story of her childhood and adolescence and early adulthood. The rest of society doesn't want to acknowledge these clones exist: They have to be fed and housed, and they have feelings and thoughts, and yet society cannot recognize them as people, because society's ongoing existence depends on the organs they provide, and once they make their final "donation," society abandons them as lifeless meat on a stainless steel operating table (an image particularly powerful in the film version).

Never Let Me Go sneaks up on the reader (or viewer) and gets us to rethink what it means to instrumentalize other human beings for our own ends, which may be quite noble ends, such as eliminating disease.

Exhibit C. I am convinced that to be fully human is to be able to live by friendship. Friendship is the heart of being human, and the highest human art is to be able to make and foster friendships. And friendship is breaking through, right now,

in our culture big-time. Post-Covid, we are facing the dangers and the vices encouraged by social media, and people are starting to rethink and resist. People are lonely and they are starting to venture out and risk friendships in the real world. An Episcopal seminary in Wisconsin, the venerable Nashotah House, has a new dean who is committed to in-person, residential seminary life. It is in living in proximity to others—and in a seminary that means actual living, dormitory or apartment, and having some meals together, and classes together, and daily Morning and Evening Prayer together, and daily Mass—I say, in living in proximity to others we learn that real people are more important and more surprising than our ideas about people.

Films and novels of great popularity often have friendship of some sort at their heart. This is true of the Harry Potter books. And it is true of *The Lord of the Rings*, which shows, I believe, the affinity of animal welfare and human life.

What I have mentioned so far are probably easy places for many of us to go—film, Ishiguro, Tolkien, and so on. But reality is breaking through even in strange places. Here is one (at least it was strange to me). The author is young, female, a writer for and contributing editor of the solidly left-wing literary broadsheet *The London Review of Books*. Her name is Patricia Lockwood.

Her first and so far only novel is called *No One Is Talking About This*. It's in the voice of a woman who spends every day in "the portal," which is how she speaks of the online world. Lockwood gently and humorously shows us many ironies of life in the portal; for instance, that something which started out as a place where people could be themselves became a place of vigilant groupthink.

Then, in the middle of the book, her sister becomes pregnant. This is wonderful news until, along the way, the child is found to have a scrambled brain. At 20 weeks' gestation, this child's head is as big as one at 30 weeks. She notes that no one ever used the word abortion, but she wants to whisk her sister away to a place where she could have one and save her life. That doesn't happen. Instead, her sister somehow makes it to 35 weeks, labor is induced, and the child is born.

Genetic sequencing has identified the needle in the haystack, the thing that's out of place. It's what's commonly called Proteus Syndrome; think "Elephant Man." This baby was the first case identified in utero. No one expects her to live through birth. She does. No one expects her to be able to go home. She does. The book becomes the most realistic and honest and compassionate picture of loving a disabled child (never called disabled; everything about her reveals a normalness that we don't often see), and the child lives just past six months.

Before the baby was born, they wondered what sort of mind she would have, if any. But: "All the worries about *what a mind was* fell away as soon as the baby was placed in her arms. A mind was merely something trying to make it in the world. The baby, like a soft pink machete, swung and chopped her way through the living leaves. A path was a path was a path was a path. A path was a person and a path was a mind, walk, chop, walk, chop." Two pages later: "She found herself so excited by the baby that she could hardly stand it. She was doing so well. She was *stupendous*. In every reaching cell of her she was a genius. . . Her eyes traveled and traveled

though she could not see—would not be able to see, it was immediately clear, there were drops of wild dragon-scale fluorescence where her irises ought to be. So? So what?"

She loved to read her stories. "What did a story mean to the baby? It meant a soft voice, reassurance that everything outside her still went on, still would go on. That the blood of continuity still pumped, that the day ran in its riverbed. Her blue eyes rolled when the voice of the story came, and sometimes she shook with what must have been excitement, trying in her tininess to be as large as what pressed in on her. In the dome of her head, the mercury of all things was trying to tremble together." Followed by: "'Seizures,' the doctor said, and administered phenobarbital, and she stared at him over her nose like a seagull, because if he wanted her to name a hundred saints and desert mystics who were epileptic, she could do it, starting with the letter A."

She muses while looking at the baby that they could be in a world in which "nothing was wrong or could ever go wrong, that they were on a planet together where this is simply what a baby was . . . . " She asks herself, "What did we have a right to expect from this life? What were the terms of the contract?" The family would say to each other, "She only knows what it is to be herself"; the baby doesn't know or worry about what "a brain and body ought to be able to do." The neurologist, when they first met, "had said gently that maybe the baby would one day be able to count to three," to which she responded inwardly with great anger: "who needed to count to three? Look what counting to three had gotten us. *I'm warning you*."

The baby was different, yes, but there is something they see and learn from her difference. Her strong movements, kicking and punching and windmilling and climbing "the air like a staircase" she, the aunt, now sees as "movements . . . designed for a new and unimagined landscape." The baby was teaching them "how to blast off and leave—how we would fly, touch down, pick flowers in other places." But not yet. They didn't want her to die yet.

This is a book about reality breaking through. In part, it's about breaking out of the "portal" into the real stuff of life that does not, cannot, exist in the portal. It's also a book in which we see the beauty, the sanctity, of a baby that lives only a few months past birth, who requires continual care and attention, a human being whom others would see as a burden, but who is loved and who somehow points to the mystery that is beyond us all.

Diane Moriarty:

When I look out on the pro-choice landscape, something about women's behavior rings false. It's so . . . *butch*! It's as if abortion is something to claim, plant a flag in, and then raise your fist in victory. Isn't that a Guy Thing? It seems the strategy of modern-day feminism is: If you can't beat 'em, join 'em—from adopting the sexual habits of carefree bachelors to demanding the right to serve in combat units. It's one thing to understand it's a man's world, another to aim to live in it like one.

Speaking of combat units, a military-like acceptance of collateral damage is in

pro-choice culture. Last December, during the intense media coverage of the Trisomy 18 baby case, I came across an article with a disturbing angle. It deplored all the attention being given to save-the-mother type issues that the case had generated, insisting that women who just don't feel like being pregnant are just as deserving of sympathy and support as all this save-the-mother *stuff*, written in a hands-on-hips, finger-wagging style. The publication? *Teen Vogue*. We're talking fifteen- and sixteen-year-old girls here. Maybe even younger. Worse, it wasn't some freelance submission—the author was one of the editors. The editor speaks for the brand. The editor says this is who we are and what we stand for.

The saying "It's not about abortion, it's about choice" also rings false, but for a different reason. Whenever this was said to me, I noticed the woman saying it held my gaze a tad too long, as if she were trying to see if I was buying it, as if she weren't totally convinced herself but hoping I'd let it slide and not call her out on this grasping at straws. The idea that the word choice cancels out abortion by dint of bumper sticker logic is chasing rainbows. That's the bad news. The good news is: It may be, however meek, a timid nod to conscience. A blink.

First Wave feminism came into being in the mid-1800s with the goal of gaining the right to own property, the right to vote, and equality in education and divorce proceedings. Abortion was seen as a crime forced upon women by men unwilling to accept responsibility.

Second Wave feminism supposedly began in 1963 when Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, her best-selling book in which she claimed that many (if not most) women were unfulfilled by being only housewives and mothers. She never mentioned abortion in the book. Three years later, in 1966, a group of 28 women, including Friedan, started NOW—the National Organization for Women, focusing on a woman's right to equal education and equal pay. It was two *men*, journalist Laurence Lader and OB-GYN/abortion advocate Bernard Nathanson, who would add abortion to feminism's must-have list. They would go on to found the National Abortion Rights Action League, or NARAL. They concluded they would need feminists on board in their effort to get abortion legalized. One of their strategies was to assert publicly that between 5,000 and 10,000 women died each year from illegal abortions—a massive exaggeration, but one given credibility by reporters who didn't do proper research and just ran with it.

In 1967 there was a NOW membership conference at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C.; besides women's right to equal education and equal pay, proposals now included supporting the right to abortion. Because two men convinced Friedan and other influential women that legal abortion would assure female equality. What happened next is detailed in journalist Sue Ellen Browder's book *Subverted.* "Friedan has saved the vote over the abortion resolution for last. Without warning she suddenly shocks many delegates by belligerently pressing for full repeal of all abortion laws." One of these offended delegates was Marguerite Rawalt, a retired IRS attorney who served as a 1961 appointee to President Kennedy's Commission on the Status of Women. Reasonable voices were drowned out by radicals

who had shown up in *unexpected* numbers to cast their votes for abortion. In other words, they were bused in and stuffed the ballot boxes. How did Friedan let things get away from her like this? She just trusted that two *men* knew what women really needed? Who let those guys in? Did she read her own book?

The events that day in 1967 at the Mayflower Hotel, and the harm they did to the Women's Movement, cannot be underestimated. That was the true beginning of so-called Second Wave feminism, and it wasn't even women leading it. Many NOW members resigned after the abortion resolution was adopted. But the affair sure had all the spit and polish worthy of the launching of a national organization. Delegates, voting, the adopting of by-laws to get a tax exemption. It made things *official*. It identified the brand. This Is who we are and this is what we stand for. And, at worst, pro-choice culture has been defending it with a militaristic zeal ever since, or at best with not very convincing (even to themselves) conscience workarounds like: It's not about abortion you know—it's about choice. Here's the thing. I can empathize with what is at the heart of that timid morality.

I don't think most women want all that butch power, really. For most, it's not about abortion being a proud possession, about planting a flag in it. It's living with the fear that she won't be *allowed to have a choice*.

It's been exploited. Women have become so defensive that, after getting abortion up to birth enshrined in their state constitutions, they celebrate with wild abandon for the television cameras. After such a political victory, from this position of strength, why not go to the microphone and urge everyone to always make abortion the very last resort, not their first choice. What harm could it do?

Our national women's movement was hijacked at the Mayflower Hotel in 1967, and we never got it back. That's the bad news. The good news is the chance to *break through* to a different time and place. What time, what place? The middle of the 1800s? The day before the gathering at the Mayflower Hotel? Or the present, that this Culture of Life in Arts and Entertainment Conference today can begin the imagining of a brand-*new* women's movement, one that redefines who we are, what we stand for—that dares to ask: What else, what's next? By charging up the hill and breaking through enemy lines? Or breaking through—like a chick pecking from inside the shell, not knowing for sure what's on the other side, but ready to get out.

APPENDIX C

[*George J. Marlin is Chairman of the Board of Aid to the Church in Need USA and a member of the Human Life Foundation Board of Directors. His most recent book is* Mario Cuomo: The Myth and the Man*. The following article is reprinted with permission from The Catholic Thing (www.thecatholicthing.org) where it appeared on January 18, 2025.*]

What Catholics Were Thinking on Election Day

George J. Marlin

When Donald Trump lost the closely contested 2020 election to Joe Biden, 51 percent of Catholics supported him, as did 61 percent of Evangelicals, and 35 percent of Jewish voters. In 2024, Trump received a majority of the national vote thanks to the support of 58 percent of Catholics, 68 percent of Evangelicals, and 39 percent of Jewish voters. It was a remarkable comeback built on a coalition of middle- and working-class folks of every religion and every ethnicity.

To get a sense of what motivated Catholics and other Americans to vote on November 5, the noted pollsters and Trump advisors McLaughlin Associates performed a national post-election survey that gets into the weeds on issues and attitudes. John McLaughlin, a friend for over 30 years, was kind enough to share with me his findings, some of which surprised me, particularly the polling on abortion.

Here's an overview of the survey's findings:

Of the Catholics who voted for Trump, 90 percent said it was a vote for him. Only 10 percent said it was a vote against Harris. By contrast, 28 percent of Catholics who supported Harris cast an anti-Trump vote.

When Catholics were asked when they knew which presidential candidate they were going to support, 61 percent indicated they decided before Labor Day. Twelve percent were undecided until early November.

A majority of Catholics (56 percent) believe the Republican Party will do a better job addressing issues that matter most to them. Sixty-one percent indicated that the GOP is best suited to improve the economy and to create more jobs. Sixty-three percent of Catholics believe the GOP will secure the border; 58 percent agree that the GOP will be better at fighting crime.

A plurality of all voters (44 percent) favor smaller government and fewer services, with 35 percent supporting increased government largesse. Catholic sentiment was in line with Americans: 48 percent favor less government and 37 percent favor more.

On the issue of character, despite the media's constant bashing of Trump —and Democrats calling him a Nazi, a threat to democracy, and a convicted felon—51 percent of overall voters and 58 percent of Catholics perceived Trump as the more likable candidate.

Job approval rating on Election Day:

	Trump	Harris	Biden
Catholic	62%	47%	46%
Evangelical	69%	33%	31%
Jewish	45%	91%	83%
Atheist	41%	62%	55%

Favorable opinion:

	Trump	Harris
Catholic	58%	47%
Evangelical	64%	33%
Jewish	41%	81%
Atheist	35%	65%

The most important issue for voters was economics. Forty-seven percent said they were struggling financially as did 49 percent of Catholics.

And the abortion issue?

Election Day was not a good one for the pro-life movement. Pro-abortion referenda won in eight states and lost in only three.

Nationally, abortion was the top issue for 8 percent of voters. For women, it was 10 percent; for men 6 percent. Three percent of Trump voters and 14 percent of Harris supporters considered it highly important. Seven percent of whites, 12 percent of blacks, and 2 percent of Hispanics rated it the number one issue.

Which political party will do a better job of representing their views on abortion?

	Republicans	Democrats
All Voters	40%	51%
Catholics	44%	44%
Evangelicals	58%	33%
Jewish	32%	68%
Atheists	20%	71%

Here's the breakdown between pro-life and pro-choice voters:

	Pro-Life	Pro-Choice
Catholic	51%	49%
Evangelical	66%	34%

Jewish	35%	65%
Atheists	28%	72%
Republicans	68%	32%
Democrats	26%	74%
White	48%	52%
Black	48%	52%
Hispanic	41%	59%
Married	53%	47%
Single	44%	56%
Trump Vote	65%	35%
Harris Vote	26%	74%

When asked what comes closest to your personal opinion about abortion laws: Nineteen percent of pro-lifers replied that an abortion should be permitted to save the life of a mother; 31 percent in the case of rape or incest; 50 percent in a medical emergency.

Thirty-four percent of pro-choice voters believe abortion should be legal up to 6 weeks; 34 percent up to 24 weeks; and 43 percent said abortion should be legal for any reason at any time.

As for using tax dollars to pay for abortions:

	Support	Oppose
Catholics	44%	56%
Evangelicals	27%	73%
Jewish	63%	37%
Atheists	60%	40%

What do these polling numbers on abortion indicate?

Sixty years after Vatican II, not only has Catholic influence declined in the public square, but "cafeteria" Catholic politicians who have claimed for decades that abortion is merely a religious matter, and therefore, the Church's position on abortion must not be imposed on others, have influenced many baptized Catholics.

This is particularly true among younger Catholics, likely due to the Church's declining educational system. In 1965, there were 12,000 parochial schools educating approximately 5 million Catholic children. Today there are about 5,000 schools educating 1.2 million kids. Sadly, some catechists instructing the young are not in agreement with all Church teachings. Then, there have been the abuse scandals that have soured many Catholics on the Church's authority to instruct on moral matters. And the mixed signals coming out of the Vatican on divorce, same-sex marriage, and other lifestyle issues have confused some Catholics and have led others to believe

that anything goes.

As a result, I am not at all surprised that 49 percent of Catholics say they are pro-choice, and 44 percent support Federal funding of abortions.

What can be done to change the trajectory?

Perhaps, Church-going Catholics should heed the words New York's Cardinal Timothy Dolan delivered on Independence Day some years ago:

> The challenge, then, concerns the face of the Catholic faith that our fellow Americans encounter every day. It is a question of evangelization. . . .When done right, our Catholic faith creates a culture of true joy. People can see it in what we do, in how we talk, in the look in our eye. "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn 13:35) Amid the culture of death that we find all around us, our faith is something that our neighbors will find compelling and may even be something they want for themselves. We must show the culture that seeks to marginalize us that our faith is a living and life-changing reality. The more fundamental challenge needed for us to preserve our American ideals is to boldly live our faith, to boldly proclaim it, and to boldly love God and our neighbor. As Jesus taught, "Let your light shine before all."

Amen to that.

APPENDIX D

[*Michael New is an assistant professor of practice at the Busch School of Business at the Catholic University of America and a senior associate scholar at the Charlotte Lozier Institute. The following was posted January 27, 2025, on National Review Online (www.nationalreview.com). @2025 by National Review. Reprinted by permission.*]

A New Knights of Columbus/Marist Poll Shows Strong Support for Pro-Life Policies

Michael J. New

Last Thursday, the Knights of Columbus released their annual poll on sanctity-of-life issues. This poll, which the Knights conduct in conjunction with Marist College, is always welcomed by pro-lifers. Unlike other surveys conducted by professional survey research firms, the Knights of Columbus/Marist poll asks about conscience rights, pregnancy help centers, and other issues of particular interest to people in the pro-life movement. Very often, the Knights of Columbus/Marist poll shows very strong public support for a range of incremental pro-life laws.

This year's poll was no exception. The Knights of Columbus/Marist poll found that, among over 1,387 adults surveyed, clear majorities opposed taxpayer funding of abortion both at home and overseas. Conscience rights polled well, as 62 percent felt that medical professionals should not be legally required to perform abortions. Additionally, 63 percent of Americans felt that an in-person medical exam should be required if a woman wants to obtain a chemical abortion. Finally, a whopping 83 percent of adults support the work of pro-life pregnancy help centers.

Overall, the Knights of Columbus/Marist poll revealed a great deal of stability in public attitudes toward abortion during the past year. Interestingly, the poll found gains in public support for some pro-life policies. There was greater opposition to public funding of abortion both at home and abroad. Since 2024, there has been a gain of two percentage points in support of conscience rights of health care professionals. This is important. During the 2024 election, Kamala Harris and other Democrats clearly prioritized abortion, spending millions of dollars on the issue. This poll shows that support for many pro-life policies is very durable.

As pro-lifers return home from Friday's March for Life, we should take heart. During his first few days in office, President Trump has taken some valuable steps in building a culture of life. He has pardoned the 23 pro-lifers who were jailed for FACE Act violations. He has also restored the Mexico City policy, which prevents U.S. foreign aid dollars from going to overseas entities that perform or promote abortions. This new Knights of Columbus/Marist poll contains more good news. It shows the incoming Trump administration that potential policy steps to strengthen conscience rights and limit chemical abortions will enjoy strong public support.

APPENDIX E

[*John M. Grondelski (Ph.D., Fordham) is former associate dean of the School of Theology, Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey. The following article was published by the* National Catholic Register *(*www.ncregister.com*) on January 20, 2025, and is reprinted with permission. All views expressed here are exclusively those of the author.*]

How the Pro-Life Generation Is Redefining "Unthinkable"

John Grondelski

From college campuses to the March for Life, young people (and young families) are giving new life to the pro-life cause.

I've gone to many Marches for Life since my first in 1975. Two things that have struck me positively: it's more ecumenical and it's growing younger.

That it's growing younger is not just a reverse mirror of me getting older. There are more young people there. Nor is it "compulsory attendance on a field trip" from Catholic schools. Those young people are from colleges and universities: fresh voters. They're also not just from the old Catholic colleges and universities that are March for Life standbys — schools like Franciscan University, Belmont Abbey and Christendom. A few years back I remember getting attached to a large group from Louisiana State University. A state university!

Georgetown hosts a student pro-life conference every year on the day after the March. I've attended it for the last few years, and it's refreshing to see so many young collegians and grad students, serious about their subjects and serious about the issues, attending serious presentations about protecting and defending life.

Somebody today posted a picture online of JD Vance holding the young peoples' trademark sign: "I am the pro-life generation." I don't know if the picture was real or a photoshop, but I do know that picture is worth a thousand words.

That picture will strike terror in the hearts of abortionists because Vance may be the future. Here is a 40-year-old man who, at his inauguration, had fidgety little kids in tow. Kids. Plural. Acting like kids. Americans don't see that much. Marriage scholar and researcher Brad Wilcox has documented that the number of Americans living with a minor in their household and the amount of time they live together have both declined. That's troublesome.

But Vance is not a lecture. He is a living person showing that it is neither "weird" nor even just a "choice" to have children. He reminds us of what Americans once took for granted: that normal human development generally meant there was a stage in adult life when one moved out of a parent's basement, got married and had kids. Or, as a more authoritative source put it, "A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Matthew 19:5).

That terrifies the abortionists. That terrifies the septuagenarians and octogenarians like Joe Biden, Nancy Pelosi, Chuck Schumer, Hillary and Bill Clinton, Jerry

Nadler and others who are still living in and fighting for the 1960s and Woodstock. It frightens them because it sends perhaps the visceral awareness that they are the past — and they are passé.

It doesn't mean they'll go gently into that good night (where they want to send everybody else). Diogenes needs to prowl the north wing of the Capitol because the fact that 60 Senators would not vote "yes" to pass a law on Jan. 22 banning medical abandonment and infanticide of post-abortion newborns is a national disgrace. The bill failed 52-47, because it needed a three-fifths (60) vote.

A few years ago, Jeanne Mancini told the March for Life that it was not just enough to make abortion illegal. We had to make it "unthinkable." And I've been thinking about that.

"Unthinkable" is a big reach. It's daunting, even intimidating. It demands cultural shifts and cultures don't just change.

But we have to think about making abortion "unthinkable." In the 1800s, it was "unthinkable" that slavery would disappear or that the South could survive without chattel servitude. The "unthinkable" happened: nobody today would entertain the idea slavery might have pros as well as cons.

Eighty years ago, America resolved that Nazism would be "unthinkable" and that postwar Germany had to be rehabilitated first by intellectual fumigation. No normal person today suggests we consider Nazism's "good" side.

I'd argue the mistake we made after 1989 was in refusing the intellectual work of stigmatizing socialism and communism. Those systems killed on a magnitude that made Hitler look like an amateur. But we pretended that "history was over" and didn't need to lustrate the post-communist world, which is why an ex-KGB colonel calls himself a democratically-elected president, the world's most populous country remains under communist dictatorship, and some people still have heart flutters for Havana and Hanoi.

Yes, we can make abortion "unthinkable" and the people who are going to do that are "the pro-life generation." Some will do it through their research, their scholarship, and their political activism. But many will do it by doing what our vice president showed by example: by marrying, by having babies, and by being (and looking) happy about it.

APPENDIX F

[*Kate Quiñones, a graduate of Hillsdale College, is a staff writer for Catholic News Agency and a fellow of the College Fix. The following article was published on January 30, 2025 (*www.catholicnewsagency.com*) and is reprinted with permission.*]

California Settles with David Daleiden, Pro-Life Activist who Exposed Planned Parenthood

Kate Quiñones

The state of California has agreed to a plea deal with pro-life activists David Daleiden and Sandra Merritt this week after a yearslong criminal prosecution of the two journalists.

State prosecutors launched the probe following the release of a series of undercover videos that appeared to implicate Planned Parenthood officials and the National Abortion Federation in the illegal sale of unborn baby parts.

On Monday, Daleiden and Merritt pleaded "no contest" to one charge of unlawful recording of confidential communication in exchange for the dropping of several felony charges.

As part of the plea deal, Daleiden and Merritt will receive "no jail time, no fines, no admission of wrongdoing, and no probation," according to a Monday announcement by the Center for Medical Progress (CMP), a pro-life group founded and headed by Daleiden.

According to the CMP, the terms of the plea deal mean the pair will face "zero punishment."

"The new 'no contest' plea — which cannot be used adversely—will be entered into judgment as a misdemeanor in six to 12 months and then converted to a 'not guilty' plea, dismissed, and expunged," CMP said in a statement.

Daleiden welcomed this week's settlement as a "huge victory" and noted that he planned to continue his pro-life work.

"After enduring nine years of weaponized political prosecution, putting an end to the lawfare launched by Kamala Harris is a huge victory for my investigative reporting and for the public's right to know the truth about Planned Parenthood's sale of aborted baby body parts," Daleiden said in a statement Monday.

"Now we all must get to work to protect families and infants from the criminal abortion-industrial complex," Daleiden said.

When CMP in 2015 released the incriminating videos that showed Planned Parenthood officials discussing the selling of baby body parts, California officials launched the investigation into Daleiden and Merritt.

Former Vice President Kamala Harris—then California's Democrat attorney general — met with Planned Parenthood staff before ordering criminal investigations into Merritt and Daleiden, including a raid on Daleiden's home.

California's next attorney general, Xavier Becerra—who went on to become the director of the Department of Health and Human Services under the Biden administration—charged the two with 14 felony counts of unlawfully recording a conversation and one felony count of criminal conspiracy.

In 2019, a California judge ruled that only nine of the 15 charges could be brought to trial. The case never went to trial amid delays. In a separate civil case in 2019, a federal jury awarded Planned Parenthood over $2 million in damages. Daleiden and Merritt appealed to the 9th Circuit, which upheld the jury's findings.

Steve Cooley, the former Los Angeles County district attorney who led Daleiden's legal defense team, called the prosecution "vindictive."

"In my five decades as an attorney, 40 years of which were as a prosecutor, I have never seen such a blatant exercise of selective investigation and vindictive prosecution," Cooley said in a Jan. 27 statement.

"The California attorneys general who initiated this case and pursued it for nearly 10 years should be ashamed for weaponizing their office to pursue people who were merely exposing illegality associated with the harvesting and sale of fetal body parts," Daleiden's lawyer said.

Though Daleiden and Merritt were neither convicted nor found guilty, the state of California stated on Tuesday that California Attorney General Rob Bonta secured a "felony conviction" of Daleiden and Merritt.

Attorney General Bonta said his "office is securing criminal convictions to ensure that Californians can exercise their constitutional rights to reproductive health care" in a Jan. 28 press release.

But Daleiden said the statement is a misrepresentation of the case.

"The attorney general's press release misrepresents our agreement," Daleiden told CNA. "The judge explicitly stated at the hearing yesterday that we would only be 'convicted' and 'found guilty' if we break the agreement."

The attorney from Liberty Counsel who represented Merritt called the deal "essentially a complete victory for Merritt," who was initially charged with 16 felonies and faced more than 10 years in prison. With the plea deal, the charges will be dropped and she will receive no prison time.

"The plea agreement ends an unjust criminal case by dropping these baseless criminal charges without any prison time, fines, or other penalties," Mat Staver, Liberty Counsel founder and chairman, said in a statement.

"Sandra deserves to be applauded and acclaimed for revealing these horrors and then enduring this selective and vindictive prosecution as a result," Staver continued. "Murdering human babies to harvest their body parts for profit is evil and there is no excuse for Sandra's political persecution."

Daleiden plans to continue exposing injustices in the abortion industry.

"Taking the San Francisco case off the board allows me to focus fully on CMP's mission to report on the injustices of taxpayer-funded experiments on aborted babies and continue to expand our groundbreaking investigative reporting," Daleiden said.

APPENDIX G

[*Eva Cooley is a passionate prolifer who works in the communications department at Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America. The following report, published on January 29, 2025, is her first contribution to the* Human Life Review*'s website feature NEWSworthy (www.humanlifereview.com). We are looking forward to more.*]

A Symphony of Hope: Reflections on the March for Life

Eva Cooley

On the morning of the March for Life, my alarm clock was a tiny bird outside my window, belting out the crispest notes she could hit. The bird should still have been sleeping as the temperature was below freezing outside. But instead, she was flooding the sky with her song. A singular voice cutting through the bleak darkness of the morning. She sang a song of hope, crying out to anyone who would listen.

At the March for Life on Friday, tens of thousands of these songbirds gathered to sing their hearts out. Their unifying cry? Life is beautiful. Pro-life advocates from all over the nation flocked to the middle of Washington, D.C., to show their support for the movement. Every face I saw was smiling. Old men strolled through security, bringing with them foldable chairs because their weary legs could only stand for so long. Young women with children and strollers entered the National Mall, wrangling their energetic toddlers. Thousands of college students came prepared with homemade signs with sayings such as "Every person deserves a birthday" and "Defend life like a champion today!"

As we awaited the speeches, I interviewed dozens of pro-life advocates and asked them, "Why are you pro-life?" I knew every attendee would have a different story, a different note they would bring to the event. The refrain of each of their answers was that every life is worth fighting for. Each life is beautiful. Each life has immense value.

I interviewed two petite nuns, Sister Theresa and Sister Mary Rose, bundled up in their warmest jackets and scarves. They told me God has given us life as a gift. They said they've given their lives for life. They said, "You give it away because it's valuable. That's why we've dedicated our lives to God because what else do we have to give?" To struggling moms, they said mothers have the gift of forming a child's soul that will live forever. What could be more valuable than that? Often the things that are most valuable are worth the highest degree of struggle. These nuns sang notes of faith and charity.

A middle-aged man named Pat told me that when he was a baby, he was adopted by a family that already had 13 other kids. He hasn't missed a march for nearly 25 years. Pat is hopeful that in these next years, hearts will change. Pat can see the power of adoption. Whenever I saw Pat during the rest of the day, he had a smile

on his face as he joined fellow pro-lifers. Pat's song was one of quiet, personal gratitude.

A college student named Caroline said she is pro-life because from conception everyone has a soul, and that soul belongs to God. To moms, Caroline wanted to say, "You can, you can, you can. You can do it!" She emphasized that there are so many resources out there and that so many people are praying for mothers. Caroline's song was one of energy and vigor for the movement.

My interviews ended and the speeches began. Politicians spoke about the future of a pro-life America. Saints of the pro-life movement, both fresh and weathered alike, described the amount of love there is for moms and babies.

Two of the most notable speeches were made by everyday people with powerful testimonies. These were songs of determination. Beverly Jacobson, CEO of Mama Bear Care, described her personal experience of being pressured into aborting her child with Trisomy 18. She told the crowd about the fierce hope and love that swept over her as she made the decision to keep her child. Her daughter was able to join her in a wheelchair on stage at the march while she told this story.

Josiah Presley, an abortion survivor, gave his testimony of how his birth mother's attempted abortion failed and he was born and adopted by a loving family. Josiah beautifully articulated the ways in which God redeemed his life from being a voiceless, nearly aborted child to a man who speaks out on behalf of the voiceless. He marches knowing he was almost never given the opportunity to live.

After the speeches concluded, every pro-lifer took to the streets to march to Capitol Hill, signifying that it is where the most pressing pro-life action needs to be taken in the upcoming years. I've never seen such a happy throng. Policemen lined the streets, but they weren't needed. This was a protest of love. A trumpet player stood in the street, serenading the marchers with his instrument's golden sound. Spirited Protestant and Catholic college students sang familiar hymns as their battle cry. Men and women lined the streets with signs saying, "I was conceived in rape, I'm grateful my mom chose life" and "I regret my abortion."

My feeling at the end of the march was one of profound hope. It is no small thing to have tens of thousands of men and women from all different stages of life marching in a mass of unity and joy. Though the song of the pro-life movement has often been overshadowed by a culture of death, we will not stop singing. Though for years, lies have dampened and confused the ringing cry for life, we will not stop speaking out for those who have no voice. Just as a little bird can liven the whole winter sky with her song, so can each pro-lifer contribute to the ringing symphony for life and bring hope to the unborn.

The March for Life 2025:

HLF editors were honored to be invited on-stage at the March this year as Coalition Partners. It was a bit unsettling to be behind bullet-proof glass . . .

But in the warm tent beforehand Maria and Christina met with Peter Wolfgang, Executive Director of the Family Institute of Connecticut . . .

. . . and then enjoyed being up front for the speech by Vice President JD Vance.

The day was crowned by meeting up with HLF team members at the Rose Gala: pictured here, Maria and Christina with young associates William Blackburn and Madeline Fry Schultz.

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"I have been asked whether we can continue to have hope for the future of the pro-life movement. I believe that we can, and we should. It is not given to us to know the future. So hope, by its very nature, embodies an element of uncertainty. We need to be realistic. It is likely to be a very long battle. There will be victories and defeats, advances and setbacks along the way. We may never perfectly achieve our goals. But eventually, I believe, we will move decisively toward the goal of having every child welcomed in life and protected in law."

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—James McLaughlin, 50th Anniversary Gala Remarks