



Life Matters Journal

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear reader,

One of the best introductions to the philosophy of the consistent life ethic is a book of essays compiled by Rachel MacNair and Steven Zunes entitled *Consistently Opposing Killing*. Our authors in this month's Life Matters Journal, similar to that essay collection, cover news stories and provide historical context across a range of human rights issues, united in how they consistently oppose killing and value human life regardless of age, innocence, circumstance, or ability.



John Whitehead writes on the efforts of diplomats to renegotiate the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, terminated during the Trump administration but vital to securing a future with fewer nuclear weapons. He also considers the legacy of twenty-one years of U.S. targeted killings of terrorists. Jack Champagne writes about the possible innocence of Kosoul Chanthakoummane: "[t]he execution of any man is a tragedy, but the execution of an innocent man is a travesty." Samuel Parker mourns the death of an innocent child at the hands of police in Albuquerque, in yet another case of brutal and unnecessary police overreach in pursuit of an alleged criminal. Writing on developments in Canada, Sophie Trist examines the inevitable pressure to choose death that the widespread availability of assisted suicide and Medical Assistance in Dying places on the poor, those reliant on government assistance, and other marginalized groups.

Finally, although the subjects of the stories at risk of being killed vary widely in their perceived level of innocence or worth to society, the consistent life ethic movement steadfastly advocates for each human life's worth by virtue of its humanity. Sean Wild's piece on the recent history of the Consistent Life Ethic movement gives context for its origin, preceding movements, and some important figures; for those interested in learning more, his references provide a great starting place to find out more about those who believe "all human life is precious."

For peace and every human's life,

Sarah Slater

This journal is dedicated to the aborted, the bombed, the executed, the euthanized, the abused, the raped, and all other victims of violence, whether that violence is legal or illegal.

We have been told by our society and our culture wars that those of us who oppose these acts of violence must be divided. We have been told to take a lukewarm, halfway attitude toward the victims of violence. We have been told to embrace some with love while endorsing the killing of others.

We reject that conventional attitude, whether it's called Left or Right, and instead embrace a consistent ethic of life toward all victims of violence. We are *Life Matters Journal*, and we are here because politics kills.

Disclaimer

The views presented in this journal do not necessarily represent the views of all members, contributors, or donors. We exist to present a forum for discussion within the Consistent Life Ethic, to promote discourse and present an opportunity for peer-review and dialogue.

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Unheard Pleas for Mercy

By Jack Champagne

Because justice delayed is justice denied, any cognizable claim of innocence asserted by an incarcerated person inherently has a sense of urgency attached to it. However, in the case of a person condemned to die at the hands of the state, that sense of urgency takes on a grim and devastating purpose. This is certainly true of Kosoul Chanthakoummane, a man who was killed by the state of Texas on August 17th for the murder of real estate broker Sarah Walker. Kosoul's execution, just one in a state that still leads the country in the number of people put to death, is particularly noteworthy.¹

The first reason for this is the witness of Joseph Walker, the father of Kosoul's alleged victim. A devoted Catholic, Walker was a steadfast opponent of the death penalty, and Chanthakoummane was sentenced to die over and above Walker's direct opposition. Walker was one of the strongest advocates for saving Kosoul's life, even corresponding with the condemned prisoner for a time. "Even though the thing he did gives us the right to do the same," said Walker, "I am against violence." Walker did not testify at sentencing, a decision he made in the belief that his testimony would not make a difference, but claimed that he would personally attend the execution and "make a big scene" in order to stop it.² Sadly, Walker was not able to fulfill this promise — having passed away in the spring of last year — though his pugnacious attitude in defense of the inherent dignity of a man whom he had every reason to hate is a true example of a sincere commitment to an ethic of life.

However, even beyond this witness of mercy in the face of Kosoul's putative guilt, there was his assertion of actual innocence. Kosoul maintained his innocence from the very beginning, and the manner of his conviction makes his guilt ambiguous enough that the irrevocable sentence of death cannot be countenanced. He was identified by two eyewitnesses whose testimony was elicited under hypnosis.³ Due to the suggestible nature of hypnotic subjects creating the propensity to alter or fabricate memories, many states have strictly limited such testimony, which has been previously responsible for erroneous convictions based on misidentification.⁴ Additionally, the state relied on the testimony of dentist Dr. Brent Hudson, who asserted that bite marks found on Sarah Walker's body matched Kosoul's teeth — a forensic technique known colloquially as "bite mark evidence." The Innocence Project estimates that roughly a quarter of prisoners exonerated since 1989 were convicted via bite mark evidence, which it calls "discredited science," relying heavily on the National Academy of Science's 2009 report on forensic evidence:

Although the majority of forensic odontologists are satisfied that bite marks can demonstrate sufficient detail for positive identification, no scientific studies support this assessment, and no large population studies have been conducted. In numerous instances, experts diverge widely in their evaluations of the same bite mark evidence, which has led to questioning of the value and scientific objectivity of such evidence.

Bite mark testimony has been criticized basically on the same grounds as testimony by questioned document examiners and microscopic hair examiners. The committee received no evidence of an existing scientific basis for identifying an individual to the exclusion of all others. That same finding was reported in a 2001 review, which "revealed a lack of valid evidence to support many of the assumptions made by forensic dentists during bite mark comparisons." Some research is warranted in order to identify the circumstances within which the methods of forensic odontology can provide probative value.

[...] Some of the basic problems inherent in bite mark analysis and interpretation are as follows:

1. The uniqueness of the human dentition has not been scientifically established.
2. The ability of the dentition, if unique, to transfer a unique pattern to human skin and the ability of the skin to maintain that uniqueness has not been scientifically established.
 - i. The ability to analyze and interpret the scope or extent of distortion of bite mark patterns on human skin has not been demonstrated.
 - ii. The effect of distortion on different comparison techniques is not fully understood and therefore has not been quantified.
3. A standard for the type, quality, and number of individual characteristics required to indicate that a bite mark has reached a threshold of evidentiary value has not been established.⁵

The execution of any man is a tragedy, but the execution of an innocent man is a travesty. Kosoul Chanthakoummane, put to death by the state in the name of a man who desperately wished to spare his life and convicted by evidence not equal to the dreadful finality of the sentence, is another victim of a culture that chooses death as a crude facsimile of justice. It makes a mockery of Governor Greg Abbott's assertion that Texas would "always foster a culture of life," which he called "the most precious freedom of all." If these are to be more than just words, Texas cannot afford to continue to ignore these demands for justice and pleas for mercy.

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Gross Negligence and Excessive Force: Albuquerque Child Killed During Police Raid

By Samuel B. Parker

In early July, Brett Rosenau, a fifteen-year-old boy, died in a house fire during an Albuquerque Police Department raid on a home in Albuquerque, New Mexico.¹ Rosenau was not the subject of the raid, nor was he wanted by law enforcement officials.

Instead, the Albuquerque Police Department was attempting to arrest Qiaunt Kelley, a man wanted for parole violations who fled inside a house he was visiting when police tried to arrest him.² Kelley is a person of interest in an ongoing homicide investigation and was thought to be carrying a gun at the time of the raid; however, contrary to initial claims, no outstanding felony warrants existed for Kelley and there has been no indication that his possession of the firearm violated any state or federal laws. He did not even live at the residence where the raid took place.³

None of these facts stopped the Albuquerque Police Department from initiating a volatile standoff that included the deployment of dangerous flash-bang grenades and tear gas into the house, which ultimately burst into flames. Reportedly afraid that Kelley was armed, police officers made no effort to combat the blaze or rescue victims for at least forty minutes. By the time they made it inside the charred remains of the house, a child had died of smoke inhalation, a dog had burned to death, and uninvolved residents were left homeless.⁴

Unsurprisingly, the Albuquerque Police Department quickly indulged in the use of the ever evasive exonerative tense. They announced an investigation into whether or not they “may have caused the fire,” although it seems quite likely; most homes do not spontaneously burst into flames, and flash-bang grenades are known to cause serious harm.⁵ They also vowed to “take steps” if they concluded that their actions had “inadvertently contributed to [Rosenau’s] death,” although, of course, “contributed” would be the wrong word altogether.⁶ If the Albuquerque Police Department did indeed ignite the fire in question, they directly caused the death of Brett Rosenau.

Other comments betrayed their incompetence. In a post on Twitter regarding the incident, the Albuquerque Police Department remarked that the “individuals were given opportunities to safely exit” the building; as if this were valid justification for gratuitous escalation, and as if it were acceptable for the victims to be killed, even accidentally, because they failed to leave the building.⁷ The comment implies that Albuquerque police officers had no options for responding to the situation short of burning down a civilian residence; at the very least, it seeks to absolve the police officers for doing so.

When confronted on the issue, representatives for the Albuquerque Police Department doubled down. “Are police supposed to let his warrant slide,” the public information officer asked rhetorically, “and hope there isn’t another carjacking, shooting[,] or murder in the meantime?”⁸

But of course, none of the loudest objectors actually contended that Albuquerque police officers should have just walked away. They simply challenged the effectiveness and ethicality of the tactics that, in this case, appear to have killed a child. The unwillingness of the Albuquerque Police Department to entertain legitimate criticisms of their conduct is concerning. But more than that, their apparent inability to strike a balance between “let[ting] the warrant slide” and starting a house fire is deeply disturbing. Their response suggests that, to them, these were the only available options.

Moreover, Albuquerque Police Chief Harold Medina admitted that “devices used to introduce irritants into the home may have caused the fire,” and that he was aware of reports that tear gas canisters like the kind used in the standoff had previously caused fires.⁹ The Albuquerque Police Department used them in spite of these known risks.

This event is the latest in a series that conclusively demonstrates the lethality of gross negligence and disproportionate uses of force on the part of law enforcement officials. Legislators must recognize

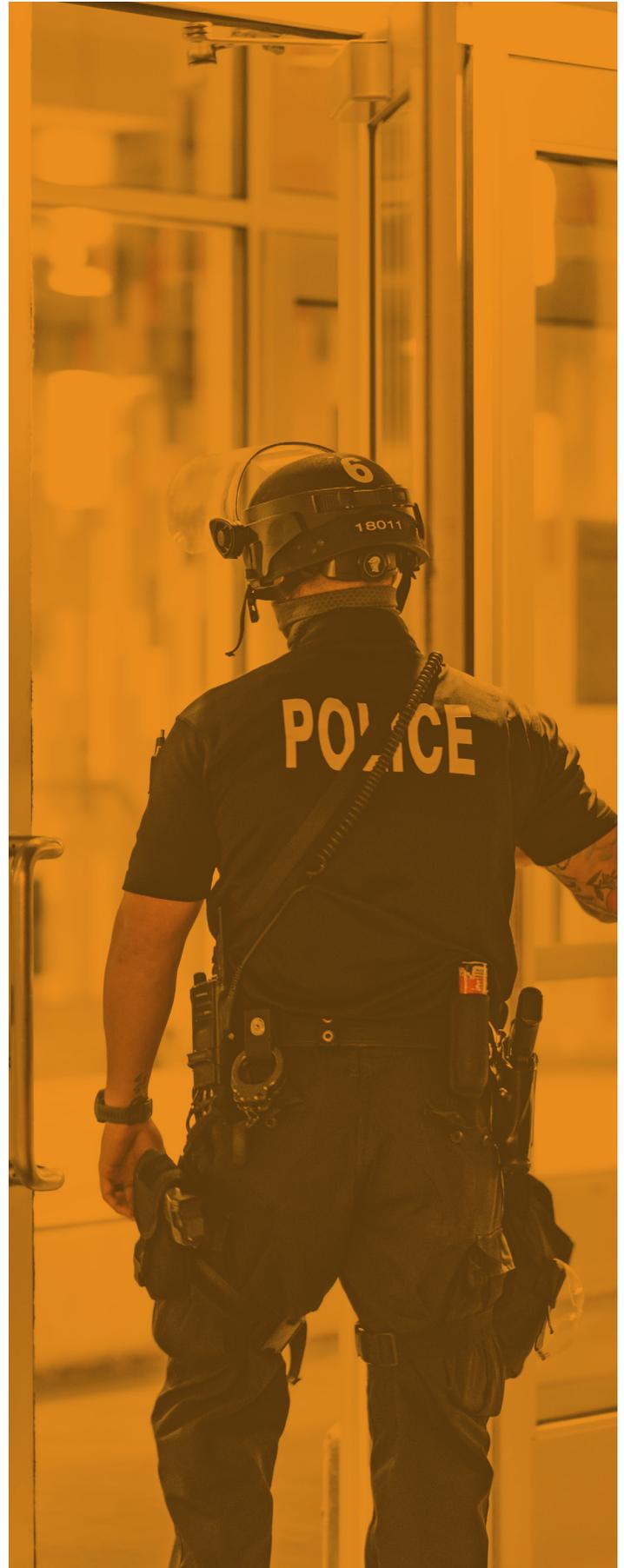
and correct fundamentally poor policy decisions, such as the authorization of flash-bang grenades, chemical irritants, and other such devices during police raids. Individual police officers must exercise discretion and restraint and must refrain from and even refuse to implement such drastic measures.

More generally, police officers and departments must ask themselves: is it really worth it? Are the additional effort and mere hours ostensibly saved by these extreme methods worth the violent end of innocent human lives?

Are the additional effort and mere hours ostensibly saved by these extreme methods worth the violent end of innocent human lives?

Notes

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Canada's Medical Assistance in Dying Program is Ableist, Classist, and Coercive

By Sophie Trist

TA 2015 ruling by the Canadian Supreme Court in the case of *Carter v. Canada* paved the way for the country to legalize physician-assisted suicide (PAS) and euthanasia in 2016.¹ At first, the Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) program was strictly limited to competent adults with terminal medical conditions, which is bad enough. But in 2021, Canada passed the horrific Bill C7, which drastically expanded the eligibility for MAID, opening the door for disabled people and people with psychiatric disorders to be killed if their suffering seems intolerable.²

Canada's disability rights activists vehemently opposed Bill C7 on the grounds that vulnerable people will face increased coercion to die with dignity rather than being given the necessary social supports to actually live with dignity.³ Suffering is an extremely objective measure, and society as a whole and doctors specifically hold overwhelmingly negative views about disability and mental illness.⁴ Because of this, programs like MAID create two healthcare systems, where the wealthy and able-bodied receive suicide prevention and the disabled and poor receive suicide assistance. The implementation of Canada's MAID program over the past few years shows how the country's healthcare system has systematically devalued disabled lives, killing thousands of people and putting profit ahead of human dignity.

In Quebec, the College of Physicians had to issue an ethics bulletin after several doctors denied care to people who had attempted suicide, believing that their attempts to take their own life represented an implicit refusal of treatment.⁵ It should go without saying that when someone in a dark and desperate mental place attempts

suicide, they do not forfeit their human dignity or right to rigorous medical treatment. As Quebec's College of Physicians pointed out, doctors' first duty is to save lives. The normalization of suicide and the devaluing of certain lives goes directly against the primary medical precept: "First, do no harm."

In 2017, just one year after Canada legalized assisted suicide, Sheila Elson claims that a doctor at a Newfoundland hospital pressured her to choose this option for her twenty-five-year-old daughter Candice, who has spina bifida and cerebral palsy.⁶ When Elson insisted that she would never kill her daughter, the doctor accused her of being selfish. A social worker clarified that because Candice could communicate, she would not have been eligible for MAID in 2017, but whether her life would be protected under the new expanded guidelines is in considerable doubt. This case aptly illustrates the ableism that pervades every facet of the medical industry.

Statistics show that the number of people dying by PAS and euthanasia in Canada has steadily increased every year since 2016. Since MAID expanded to include disabled and mentally ill people in 2021, the increase has been downright horrifying, with 10,064 people being killed last year alone, up from 7,603 in 2020. The number of assisted deaths increased by 32.4% in just one year, accounting for 3.3% of all Canadian deaths.⁷ Since Canada spends less on healthcare than most other industrialized nations, it's no surprise that pressure to choose assisted death falls disproportionately on poor people and those reliant on government assistance.⁸

In many cases, people at the end of their rope choose assisted suicide because the government does not provide them with the ho-

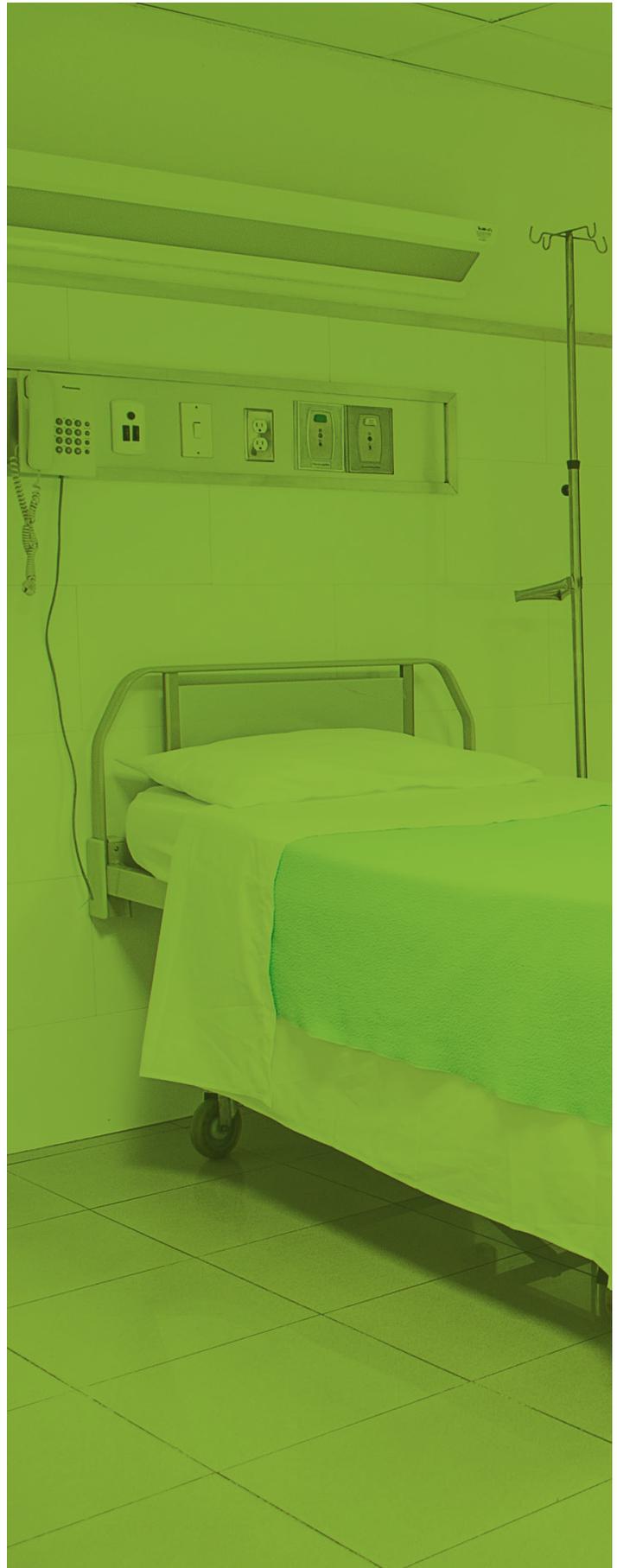
listic support they need to live fulfilling, dignified lives. According to statistics published in the National Review article above, only 15% of Canadians have ready access to palliative care. A 42-year-old Ontario man, Roger Foley, claims that medical staff repeatedly offered him PAS, despite his requests for home care.⁹ Another patient, a thirty-one year old disabled woman from Toronto applied for MAID because she could not find affordable, accessible housing. She only suspended her request after well-wishers donated enough money for her to get a place to live.¹⁰ Let that sink in for a moment. A disabled woman felt pressure to end her life because the Canadian government refused to help her find accessible housing. Poor people are especially vulnerable to pressure to end their lives. Another woman chose assisted suicide simply because she couldn't afford to live.¹¹

Pushing PAS and euthanasia on poor and disabled people is good for Canada's bottom line. According to a 2021 report published in a premier Canadian medical journal, PAS could save the country between \$34 million and \$136 million in healthcare spending.¹² Because of their reliance on doctors, insurance providers, and caregivers, many disabled people are vulnerable to coercion and pressure to end their lives. Proponents of medically assisted dying claim to look out for disabled people's interests, but programs like MAID only further entrench classism and ableism in society and do nothing to protect disabled people from abuse.

Instead of killing its poor, disabled, and chronically ill citizens, Canada should ramp up its efforts to support them physically, socially, and psychologically so they can live fulfilling, dignified lives. Disability and poverty should never be a death sentence. As long as the medical establishment and society more generally do not appreciate the innate human dignity of disabled people, thousands will continue to die needlessly under the guise of mercy and compassion.

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Choosing the Least Bad Option: Restoring the Iran Nuclear Agreement

By John Whitehead

The United States and Iran have been engaged in negotiations for over a year in an attempt to reach a new agreement meant to curb Iranian nuclear activities.¹ While the final agreement is yet to be determined, it will likely be imperfect. Even an imperfect deal is worth supporting, however, if it delays another nation in building nuclear weapons.

The current negotiations are intended to replace the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) negotiated in 2015 between Iran and a coalition of nations consisting of the United States, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Russia, and China. Under the JCPOA, Iran accepted temporary limits on its nuclear-related capabilities, including its ability to enrich uranium and how much enriched uranium it could possess. Because enrichment is the process by which uranium is refined into a form suitable for use in nuclear weapons, this was a significant concession. Iran also accepted monitoring and inspections of its nuclear activities by the International Atomic Energy Agency. In return, the United States and European Union (EU) agreed to lift various economic sanctions and restrictions imposed on Iran.²

As a means to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, the JCPOA was far from ideal. The limitations on Iran's uranium enrichment would expire in 10-15 years.³ After that point, Iran could theoretically begin enriching uranium with the aim of producing nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, the JCPOA offered the hope of, at the very least, pausing for a decade or more another nation's development of such weapons.

The JCPOA started to come apart in May 2018, when the Trump administration decided to withdraw the United States from the agreement and reimposed US sanctions on Iran.⁴ A year after the US withdrawal, the Iranians responded by gradually disregarding various JCPOA limitations, including on uranium enrichment and stockpiling. The Iranians have maintained, however, that they would undo these violations of the JCPOA if sanctions are lifted.⁵

The Biden administration, in collaboration with the EU, has been seeking a revived version of the JCPOA.⁶ In August, the parties seemed to be approaching acceptance of an EU proposal for a new agreement. Diplomatic wrangling has continued, though.⁷ One sticking point is Iran's request that the IAEA drop an investigation into uranium found at previously undisclosed locations.⁸

Only time will tell if the United States, Iran, and the other parties can restore the JCPOA. Even if restored, such an agreement will likely face opposition from the US Congress and Israel.⁹ The agreement will presumably still provide only temporary limitations on Iran's nuclear activities and likely will have other flaws as well.

Nevertheless, peace advocates should hope that some form of JCPOA can be revived. Even temporary restrictions on Iranian nu-

clear activities are worthwhile if they delay another nation from developing nuclear weapons. (Also, some future diplomatic breakthrough might be possible in another 10-15 years.)

Yet another nation joining the ranks of the nuclear powers would have severe consequences for peace in the world. More nuclear weapons multiply the chances that these weapons will be used, whether in aggression, retaliation, or by accident. The dangers are especially great in the Middle East, where increased tensions and confrontation are likely between a possibly nuclear-armed Iran and the already nuclear-armed Israel.

Further, Iran developing nuclear weapons may encourage other nations to do so. In a narrow sense, an Iranian nuclear arsenal may prompt other nations in the region (Saudi Arabia, for example) that, like Israel, are hostile to Iran to pursue their own nuclear arsenals. In a broader sense, the continued expansion of nations with nuclear weapons weakens the global political taboo against such weapons that agreements such as the UN Nuclear Ban Treaty tries to strengthen.¹⁰ The more nations that develop nuclear weapons, the less significant it might seem for yet more nations to do so.

A revived JCPOA is especially worthwhile in the absence of an alternative option. The Trump administration's withdrawal from JCPOA failed to produce a better arrangement and encouraged Iranian uranium enrichment. Using military force to stop Iran's nuclear activities would just begin another destructive conflict in the Middle East. A revived JCPOA is the least bad option available.

Notes

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The Consistent Life Ethic: A Historical View

By Sean Wild

The street is lined with people. Each end of the sidewalk is filled with protestors and counter-protestors. The issue at hand is one that each side feels passionate about. Tensions are high. Not only does pavement keep these two sides apart, but ideological differences detach and separate them from one another: sometimes one side is even unable to perceive what the other is saying over all the shouting and slogans.

This scene has been acted out again and again throughout modern history over a wide array of issues. We see it in the battle over abortion. We see it when a death row inmate is set to be executed. We see it when it looks like America might be on the brink of another war.

When one of these issues hits the news cycle, it can often be guessed what stance each side of the political spectrum will take: “This is the left-wing position... That is the right-wing position...” An unfortunate aspect of today’s political climate is that it insists on a restricted set of opinions one can hold. Either you’re in camp A and believe all of this, or you are in camp B and believe all of that.

Despite the ever-more-polarizing political culture of our present day, however, there have been those who have found their way outside the views of whichever political party they might affiliate with. The consistent life ethic is a viewpoint that transcends the usual partisan categories.

The consistent life ethic attempts to understand and connect a variety of issues under the principle that all human life is precious. In short, it is a way of looking in a consistent manner at issues concerning life. While a more formalized version of the consistent life ethic has only really made the rounds within the last 50 years or so, the ethic’s framework and respect for the sanctity of life has been guiding the lives, politics, and activism of folks throughout history.

An early iteration of what today we would call the consistent life ethic was known as the “seamless garment.” The term was coined in 1971 by Catholic activist Eileen Egan and is a reference to the Christian New Testament. At the crucifixion of Jesus, guards divided up all Jesus’ clothes except for his tunic, which they were unable to tear into fragments as it was made from one seamless piece of cloth (see the Gospel of John 19:23). Egan used this imagery to show that certain issues concerning the dignity of human life could not be separated from one another but must be understood in tandem. “The protection of life is a seamless garment,” wrote Egan in 1971, “You can’t protect some life and not others.”¹

The consistent life ethic, both the term and idea, gained more

widespread attention in the 1980s thanks to numerous speeches given by Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, a Catholic cardinal and archbishop of Chicago, who became a prominent figure in the American Catholic Church during that time period. These addresses as well as a symposium on topics concerning life were eventually compiled in 1988 into a book called *Consistent Ethic of Life*. In an address given in 1983 at Fordham University in New York, Cardinal Bernardin stated quite directly, “Precisely because life is sacred, the taking of even one human life is a momentous event.”²

Even though the consistent life ethic framework did not take form until the 1970s and ‘80s, many before that time had connected different issues concerning the inherent dignity of the human person and worked to shape the society we live in to reflect those values.

Along with the consistent life ethic taking a more cohesive structure, the term “pro-life” did not come into fashion until the ‘70s and ‘80s as well. However, many in the early women’s suffrage movement would be considered pro-life by today’s standards.

On the early suffragette movement, Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of the Susan B. Anthony List organization, wrote: “Many of today’s feminists see abortion as one of the touchstones of their movement. Yet many of the early leaders of the women’s suffrage movement in the U.S. believed that the rights of mother and child are inextricably linked and that the right to life and the right to vote are rooted in the inherent dignity of each human person.”³ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a pioneer of the early women’s suffrage movement, wrote, “When we consider that women are treated as property, it is degrading to women that we should treat our children as property to be disposed of as we see fit.”⁴ Another early feminist and drafter of the original Equal Rights Amendment, Alice Paul, called abortion “the ultimate exploitation of women.”⁵

Like the era of the First Wave Feminist movement in the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the late 1960s was also a time of great change in American history. A cultural shift started to emerge. Questions of gender, sexuality, and women’s role in society became more commonly discussed; the fight for racial justice made headway into the consciousness of mainstream America; advocates for disability rights were working to make their voices and concerns heard; and many began to question the United States’ involvement in the Vietnam War.

At this time, *Roe vs. Wade* had not brought the abortion debate onto the national stage, so the issue was largely discussed at the state level. With women’s liberation being a central topic of the era,

the role of abortion was hotly debated. Though people today may associate the 1960s feminist movement with the pro-choice side, there were actually progressives on both sides of the debate. In fact, it was not until the mid-1970s and into the 1980s, when conservative evangelicals became more interested and involved in the issue, that being pro-life (or right-to-life, as it was known at the time) became associated mainly with right-wing politics.

In an article on the history of the early pro-life movement, NPR stated, “In the decades before the (Roe v. Wade) decision, opposition to abortion was a fairly bipartisan issue.”⁶ Daniel Williams, author of the book *Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-Life Movement before Roe v. Wade*, similarly found that “the pre-Roe anti-abortion movement was filled with liberal Democrats who had supported the federal anti-poverty initiatives associated with President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal in the 1930s and President Lyndon Johnson’s social programs in the 1960s. They wanted to couple abortion restrictions with additional efforts to fight poverty and expand government-funded health care.”⁷

Abortion was mostly illegal in the United States before the Supreme Court in 1973 decided *Roe v. Wade*. However, in the years prior to that decision, support for abortion’s legalization started to rise. As a result, many felt the need to take a firm stance for the rights of the unborn. Right-to-life activists began to understand and discuss abortion as a human-rights issue. This framing helped politicians, many of who were also opposed to forms of violence such as the Vietnam War and the death penalty, to become more involved in the movement. Mark Hatfield, for example, who served as governor of Oregon and later as a senator for that state, held a pro-life position, was against the death penalty, was an early supporter of civil rights, and, in 1966, was the only governor to vote against a resolution supporting the war in Vietnam.⁸ Still, as Williams explained “the most visible pro-life spokespersons were... liberal antiwar activists, college students, and feminists.”⁹

Today, the consistent life ethic and the ideas it inspires continue to develop and influence those who strive to create a world built around the dignity of life. In the present American two-party system and the polarizing dichotomy of the current political atmosphere, neither major political party holds a consistent viewpoint on the interrelated life issues. Because of this, it is everyday citizens going out to fight for these important causes. Like in previous generations, these activists do not wait for the politicians to act, but act on their own morals, start to organize, and advocate for policies and a culture that honors the dignity of all.

Throughout the past few decades, there have been many who have been doing this work. Groups such as the Consistent Life Network (which is made up of a multitude of organizations from around the globe), Democrats for Life of America, Feminists Choosing Life of New York, and Secular Pro-Life, just to name a few of many, have been sprouting up and actively promoting the consistent life ethic. Some groups, such as Progressive Anti-Abortion Uprising (PAAU) focus on a single issue, in this case abortion, but hold and promote a consistent life outlook.

Other groups, such as Pro-Black Pro-Life, work at the intersection of race, racism, and issues of life. Founder Cherilyn Holloway, in an interview with Gloria Purvis, said of Pro-Black Pro-Life: “We want there to be a space for you to be able to wrestle through all

racial injustice, including racial injustice within the womb.”^[10] Still other groups, such as Rehumanize International, take on an array of consistent life issues. A relatively new group is a third political party called the American Solidarity Party, which supports and promotes a consistent life politics — good news for those who may be feeling disillusioned with the inconsistent views of both the Democrats and Republicans.

Many if not all of the aforementioned groups willingly and actively work with people who have different opinions on a range of issues all along the political spectrum. It has been through finding common ground on these important issues that people from all walks of life have been able to work together to advance the principles of the consistent life ethic.

The consistent life ethic may not be the majority perspective in today’s society, but maybe, just maybe, the dial is moving in its favor. In an article analyzing the complexities of capital punishment and abortion, the *Washington Post* found that “the segment of those who oppose abortion who also oppose capital punishment was 41 percent in 2021, the highest percentage on record.”^[11] Those statistics suggest that the tides may indeed be turning. One can only hope these trends continue, and that one day we live in a world that consistently upholds the inherent dignity of all human life...from womb to tomb.

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A Time to End the Killing: The Significance of Ayman al-Zawahiri's Death

By John Whitehead

Ayman al-Zawahiri, an Egyptian doctor who became the head of al Qaeda, reportedly met his death on July 30. President Joseph Biden announced that Zawahiri had been killed in Kabul, Afghanistan, by a US airstrike.¹ The airstrike may have been carried out with a missile fired by a drone.²

The US killing of Zawahiri, who was a leading figure in al Qaeda since before the 9/11 terrorist attacks, is a crucial moment for reflection. US policymakers and citizens should reflect on the almost-21-year Global War on Terror and the similarly long-lasting US policy of targeted killing of alleged terrorists. Zawahiri's death is a sign that the time has come finally to end both these policies.

Zawahiri was originally involved in extremist politics in Egypt, co-founding an organization there known as Jamaat al-Jihad. This organization was involved in the 1981 assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. Zawahiri subsequently spent years in prison, where he may have suffered torture. After his release, he formed an alliance with Osama Bin Laden, eventually merging Jamaat al-Jihad with al Qaeda.³

Zawahiri was reportedly involved in planning multiple terrorist attacks, including the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States. Following the US invasion of Afghanistan (during which Zawahiri's wife was killed), he went into hiding, presumably in Pakistan.⁴ When US forces killed Bin Laden in 2011, Zawahiri became al Qaeda's new leader. He occasionally released writing and video speeches, although how much power he wielded over an increasingly splintered organization is unclear.⁵

That Zawahiri was living in Afghanistan when US intelligence located him may create threats to the Afghan people. Although the Taliban publicly denies knowledge of the al Qaeda leader's presence in their country, his presence suggests that the ruling regime is allowing terrorist groups to find refuge in Afghanistan.⁶ Providing haven to terrorists is contrary to a US-Taliban agreement, and following Zawahiri's killing US Secretary of State Antony Blinken publicly accused the Taliban of having "grossly violated" the agreement.⁷

This apparent violation may provide the justification for continued economic punishment of ordinary Afghans. Afghanistan has been in a humanitarian crisis since the Taliban's takeover. The US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction recently estimated that almost 19 million Afghans face "potentially life-threatening" hunger. Current foreign aid flows are insufficient to meet the need, and the United States is aggravating the situation

through economic sanctions and by withholding billions in frozen Afghan government assets.⁸

Zawahiri's presence in Kabul must not become justification for continuing to damage Afghanistan's economy. Current policies hurt many people while likely doing little to prevent the Taliban from sheltering terrorists (an activity that requires far fewer resources than sustaining a functioning economy). The Afghan people desperately need assistance, which requires lifting sanctions, unfreezing funds, and providing humanitarian aid.

Rather than being an occasion for hurting more people, the killing of Ayman al-Zawahiri should become an occasion to end the US policy of killing alleged terrorists.

The targeted killing policy was adopted in late 2002, in response to 9/11. Since then, the policy has certainly taken its toll. Osama Bin Laden is dead. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al Qaeda in Iraq, is dead.⁹ Anwar al-Awlaki, an American citizen who became a propagandist for al Qaeda in Yemen, is dead.¹⁰ Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the al Qaeda off-shoot ISIS, is dead, as is his successor Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi.¹¹ These men are a few of the roughly 5,000 people killed by US targeted killing.¹² Now, Ayman al-Zawahiri, one of the "original generation" of al Qaeda terrorists, is dead.

After almost two decades and thousands of deaths, targeted killing can no longer be justified as an exceptional response to a crisis. It has become a normal part of US foreign policy. To continue this practice is to accept a permanent situation in which American presidents can serve as judge, jury, and executioner for any human being on earth under the justification of fighting terrorism.

This situation must end. The original 2001 Authorization of Military Force (AUMF) against al Qaeda must be repealed and, if necessary, laws explicitly prohibiting targeted killing must be passed.¹³

Please consider contacting your representatives in the House and Senate to call for repealing the 2001 AUMF.

Please also consider contacting your representatives and the Biden administration, whether by phone or email, to urge them to end sanctions on Afghanistan and release frozen Afghan funds.

Giving to humanitarian organization working in Afghanistan, such as World Food Program U.S.A., Catholic Relief Services, or other organizations is also an important way to help.

Let's not follow the killing of Ayman al-Zawahiri with still more killing. Let's turn away from targeted killing toward policies that alleviate the suffering of those in need.

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