



Life Matters Journal

V. 5, ISSUE 8 — OCTOBER 2017

Overcoming the Two-Evil Option by Rising Above It

Elephants, donkeys, and drama — oh my! Learn how to rise above the rhetoric like a calm, cool giraffe.

“More Lives Were Saved”: Annihilated Cities and Choosing the Lesser Evil

Reasoning that justifies actions because of their consequences, an approach often called “consequentialism,” is flawed.

Expressing the Highest Ideals of the Left

Explaining the shifting positions of liberals on abortion seems to be a tale of oppression, altruism, and — in the case of many liberal leaders — opportunism.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

In our quest for an end to violence against all human beings, dialogue is imperative. And so we ask the question: lesser of two evils? Or is evil an option we never need choose?

Killing is killing. Humans are humans. Truth is, as Aristotle says, saying about what is that it is, and about what is not, that it's not.

In this issue, John Whitehead explores the nuclear option as used in Japan during WWII (compared to Japan's attack on Nanking), in light of saving lives—and perhaps the “lesser of two evils,” while Carol Crossed presents deep and whimsical insight on our two party system (and perhaps a wise escape from an illusive two-evil-option-trap).

An interesting media review of the Korean film, *Tae Guk Gi*, by Andrew Hocking similarly delves into what may lie at the bottom of many (if not all) of the insistences that we must choose an evil: a misperception of our options, or unwillingness to choose an option that is makes us personally uncomfortable for the sake of justice.

Finally, I'm pleased as ever to see Acyutananda discuss liberalism, and its inherent belonging to a movement which protects the vulnerable—the preborn. As one of my favourite professors says, “I'm thoroughly pro-life and for protecting women and the preborn. I used to be a liberal. Now I call myself a conservative. My views haven't changed an iota.”

I hope you'll also enjoy, and even be moved by, an excellent piece of fiction with a spine-tingling twist, doing what story does best: renew our ability to see what is right in front of us.

Don't just think about this material. Chew on it, and take it into your community; share it. Try it. And ask the questions. The options we're given are not always true.

Yours for peace and every life,

CJ Williams



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Life Matters Journal

OCTOBER 2017

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Correction: Genevieve Greinetz was incorrectly credited as "Greineitz" in the previous issue of *Life Matters Journal*. We apologize for any confusion this may have caused.

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

REHUMANIZEINTL.ORG



Tears of St. Lawrence

By John-Mark Henry

The ship held position at the Earth-Moon L4 Lagrange point, light-bending technology within its dark crystalline hull rendering it invisible.

For the last three weeks, since they arrived, the ship's crew had been observing the intelligent creatures on the blue planet...or what was left of them. A decade ago, the creatures unleashed a genetically engineered plague upon themselves. Their civilization had collapsed. Billions were dead. Apparently, the plague had mutated, leaving those left alive sterile.

The ship detected the creatures' laser transmissions 2 years ago, 12 light-years away. The crew hadn't expected to find a devastated world when they finally arrived. Was this why the universe seemed so quiet? How often did wars of annihilation snuff out the first sparks of intelligent life?

The crew decided to remain, at least for now, and study the downfall of these beings. Such knowledge might be of value in the future. Soon they would depart. But first they sent out an automated probe, which visited the blue planet, obtained a sample of the plague, and analyzed it.

"The cure is simple," the ship's biologist told the ship's navigator, after the probe sent back the data from its analysis. "The cure is in us, our tissue. We can help them."

"They doomed their own race," said the navigator. "Would our help do any good? Can they overcome their impulse to destroy the innocent as a means of self-preservation?"

The biologist thought for a moment. "Perhaps there is a way to test that."

An hour later, the ship launched an object resembling a meteor, a black crystalline rock half a meter in diameter. It shot across space under its own power—on its way to join a comet debris cloud that the blue planet happened to be passing through this time of year.

Dr. Carla Rios stared into the tablet screen, examining the results of the latest round of tests. Her heart sank. She really thought this

time would be different, that the new treatment would work. But there was no change. The men still had runaway apoptosis in their sperm as a result of DNA fragmentation. And the women still had total ovarian failure. Those extremely rare cases where a woman did conceive always ended in miscarriage because of tissue damage to the endometrial lining of the uterus.

A decade of research on Red 9, and she had nothing to show for it.

Carla stood up from the desk in her lab, inside a university now under the control of the California militia, a mile west of camp. She'd been sitting too long. She stretched, getting the feeling back in her legs.

The door opened and Sharon Weber, her colleague, walked in. They both wore the dark green work shirt and fatigue pants issued to them by the militia. "So, was there any change?" asked Sharon.

Carla sighed. "None. They're still sterile. All of them." She gazed out the window. Miles away, the empty buildings of what remained of Los Angeles stood in the distance underneath a golden afternoon sun.

Just outside the city, she could see the tall white dome of a Sanctuary, a hermetically sealed community of survivors. Most people lived in such domes now, but many were refused entry due to space limitations. *The outcasts and throwaways*, as Carla's mother, Lila, would have said, if she were still alive. *The ones most in need of mercy*.

Sharon came up behind her. "We'll try again, and again, until we succeed."

"Or until there isn't anyone left alive," said Carla. For a long time they were silent. "Well. We should get back to camp."

Carla reported her results to the militia commander when she returned to camp. Ruben Alvarez had a hard face, weathered and scarred from battle. She had to tell him she'd failed. Once again.

He only nodded, as though he'd been expecting it. She'd given

him the same report many times before. *Camp residents still sterile. New treatment ineffective.*

“What do you think went wrong this time?” he asked her.

“The virus must have changed again. It can adapt very rapidly.”

Alvarez made a dissatisfied grunt. “Keep trying.”

Then she left his office. The residents of the town — which the militia called Camp D — numbered three hundred thirty-seven. Men and women walked up the streets to get their daily rations from the militia food center.

The first wave of the Red 9 plague had been a biological weapon, released ten years ago, in 2022, during the global conflict that began with the Second Korean War. It killed hundreds of millions. Fighting and starvation killed many more.

Then came the second wave of the Red 9 plague, a mutation which didn't kill its victims, but merely rendered them sterile. Most of humanity had contracted that strain by now. Homo sapiens was headed for extinction.

—

That night, Carla sat on a park bench just at the edge of town, staring up at countless stars, like grains of sand on a black veil. She couldn't sleep, thinking about her constant stream of failures.

She also thought about her mother. Today was August 10th, the Feast of St. Lawrence. Carla wasn't very religious, but her mother had been. Lila had died nine years ago, killed by the first wave of Red 9. It was for her that Carla worked so hard. *Take care of the outcasts and throwaways, Carla*, she'd said, her dying words. *Give mercy...*

A meteor streaked across the sky. It was the time of the Perseids. “The Tears of St. Lawrence,” as Lila called them, after the martyred deacon of Rome.

Another meteor appeared, this one brighter. She watched it, expecting it to burn up while entering Earth's atmosphere, like the one before. But it only grew brighter as it continued to fall. Carla rose to her feet, afraid. Then the meteor did something completely unexpected: it slowed — as though it were a craft making a controlled descent.

It fell to the earth in a glow of fire, a hundred yards away, sending thunder into the air and shaking the ground beneath Carla's feet.

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The crashed meteor awoke the entire town. Militia guards on patrol tried to keep everyone calm. The meteor had landed in a small field. No one else was headed there, Carla noticed, so she started running. She glanced back long enough to see Sharon running after her.

“Carla, what are you doing?” she yelled.

But Carla ignored her. When she reached it, she saw that the me-

eteor had made a wide crater, charring the surrounding earth.

Within the smoldering crater, she could see a dark crystalline rock. It began to emanate a blue glow. Then it opened, emitting a beam of blue light that resolved into a holographic projection, displaying a wealth of biological information.

Sharon had finally caught up with her, eyes wide. They examined the data, both realizing what they were seeing. “There's organic material inside,” said Carla. “Highly resistant to viral infection and ...”

“What's wrong?” Sharon asked.

“Look closer. Don't you see? It's an embryo.” Something insect-like, or reptilian. Or both.

“Oh my God.” Sharon put a hand over her mouth.

Carla couldn't believe it. A cure to Red 9 had just fallen from the sky. An alien embryo. She'd have to destroy it to use it, of course.

Then she heard her mother's voice: *Take care of the outcasts and throwaways, Carla. Give mercy.*

She just couldn't do it. “Sharon, I ... I can't.” Clearly it was the young of an intelligent species. Wasn't it another outcast, another throwaway, also in need of mercy?

“What do you mean you can't?” asked Sharon, in disbelief. “Carla, this is incredible. It's a cure. We can have babies again. New life.”

“And what about *this* new life? Where did it come from? Where are its people? I can't just ... kill it to save ourselves.”

“So what do you want to do?”

Carla looked at the “meteor.” It seemed to be on standby, waiting for them to do something. Inside she could see the compartment containing the embryo. She was tempted to reach in and remove it. “Let's close it.” She gestured to four militia guards headed in their direction. “They'll just think it's a rock.”

Sharon hesitated. “I don't know ...”

“Please. You can tell them about it if you want. But I can't. Who knows? Maybe its people will come for it.”

That seemed to persuade her. “Okay,” said Sharon, sighing. “Let's close it.”

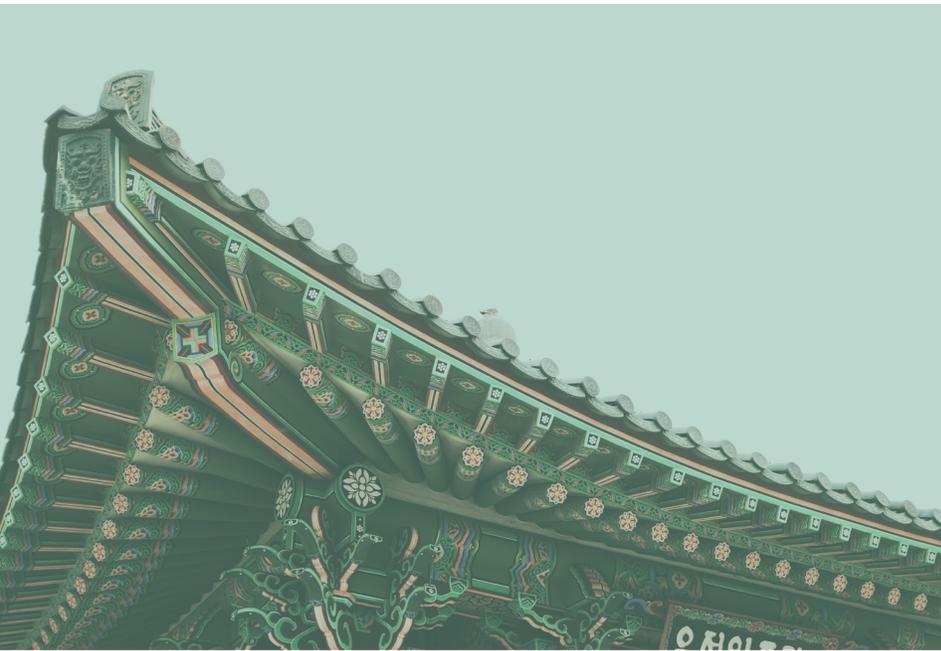
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“Did they pass the test?” the navigator asked.

“It would seem so,” said the biologist. “They closed the pod.”

The embryo was never in any real danger, of course. The pod was programmed to lock itself down if anything threatened its occupant, then return to the ship to depart from this pitiable planet.

“Very well, then,” said the navigator. “We will stay.” Perhaps there was hope for these beings after all. “We will help them.”



Korean War Movie Teaches How to Pursue Peace

By Andrew Hocking

Do you believe war is justified with North Korea? It may depend a lot on how you view Kim Jong-un and his regime. Many Americans see him as mad man, bent on destroying the United States and oppressing his people. This view will lead to war, whether to save us or the North Korean people.

But how do South Koreans see their neighbor? We can find a popular viewpoint in the Korean film, *Tae Guk Gi: Brotherhood of War*, one that embodies the sentiment of many South Koreans and resonates with the hearts of people from any nation. (I've been told no Korean can watch it without crying.) This movie presents the North and South as two brothers — personified as Jin-tae and Jin-souk — who once loved each other and can do so again, showing how many Koreans long for peaceful resolution and even reconciliation. (This possibility is not only evident in film but in recent history, such as the South providing economic aid to the North and the latter sending a delegation to Seoul to pay respects at the passing of a former South Korean president.) Consequently, we need not justify war as the lesser of two evils, while peacemaking stands out as the best option. Why would we ever want to do evil, “lesser” or otherwise, when we have a truly good alternative?

Significant spoilers follow. If you want to see the movie and are not disturbed by graphic violence, stop reading, and go watch it.

Does Violence End or Prolong Violence?

As many view Kim Jong-un as irrationally violent, they fearfully call for a preemptive strike. Surely, bombing them is better than being bombed? They believe violence now would prevent violence later.

In contrast, *Tae Guk Gi* emphasizes that violence results in more violence. When we first see the brothers' platoon, most are like Jin-tae and Jin-seok. They just want to survive, keep each other alive, and be with their families. Not Sergeant Lee. After his family was killed by the North, he only wants to murder communists.

Unfortunately, all but Jin-seok succumb to this hatred as they witness the brutality of war. Finding a village of murdered civilians, they proceed to bury the dead. Suddenly, hidden mines explode, intended to kill those who would bury and honor the deceased. In their next encounter, they take no prisoners, killing unarmed men. Worse still, they find a handful of young men, pressed into military service by the North. The brothers even know one them, a student whom Jin-seok tutored. Only by pleading, he keeps the others from murdering them in cold blood. Unfortunately, their deaths are only delayed, as the platoon executes them while fleeing an invasion from Chinese forces.

The North Korean government is not solely responsible for the death of innocents. When the Southern army regroups in Seoul, the brothers attempt to see their family. At the same time, government authorities capture Jin-tae's fiancée because she had attended Communist rallies for food. Unable to save her, Jin-tae sees her shot and both

brothers are arrested. Then, as the North besieges the city, a South Korean commander burns their prisoners alive, leading Jin-tae to believe his younger brother died. In a rage, he bludgeons the commander and defects, becoming a war hero for the North.

In these scenes, we see people commit atrocities in response to evil, which is unfortunately true in real life as well. It is time for American foreign policy to grapple with this reality, as it frequently leads to the death of countless civilians, especially in the name of killing terrorists. Known as blowback, it creates more terrorists. Perhaps the government would be more wary of jumping into armed conflict if it called civilian death just that, *civilian death*, instead of “collateral damage.”

While many discuss blowback regarding the Middle East, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, why would the North Korean government and people respond differently? Indeed, we currently experience the results of American violence. The Washington Post recounts the American bombing campaign in the Korean War, “The bombing was long, leisurely and merciless, even by the assessment of America's own leaders. ‘Over a period of three years or so, we killed off — what — 20 percent of the population,’ Air Force Gen. Curtis LeMay, head of the Strategic Air Command during the Korean War, told the Office of Air Force History in 1984. Dean Rusk, a supporter of the war and later Secretary of State, said the United States bombed ‘everything that moved in North Korea, every brick standing on top of another.’”¹

If you lost a fifth of your family to a foreign government, how would you feel about them? If you did not respond with hatred and violence like Sergeant Lee or Jin-tae, you would be a saint, *but you still wouldn't trust the foreign government*. Why should Kim Jong-

un's regime trust that America will not bomb again? I'm not saying I want them to have nuclear weapons, but can we blame them for pursuing self defense?

Though we cannot change the past, we can change the future. Further violence against North Korea will more likely cause a nuclear attack by them than prevent it. The former Secretary of Defense for Bill Clinton, William Perry, argues Kim Jong-un primarily focuses on continuing his regime and he knows it will end if war begins. He explains, "The North Korean leadership, while it is evil and sometimes reckless, is not crazy or suicidal." Hence, we should not fear a preemptive strike from them. But if a conventional war breaks out and their loss is imminent, they'll likely launch everything they have.² In this eventuality, we see that war is not the lesser of two evils, as it does not provide the utilitarian benefit of saving lives.

The Third Option

A more compassionate argument for war says we must rescue the North Korean people from their government. To this end, I agree action is indeed necessary! Thankfully, *Tae Guk Gi* points to the path of nonviolence.

When Jin-tae defects, the movie becomes an allegory: Jin-seok embodies South Korea and Jin-tae represents the North. By the time the former learns of Jin-tae's new allegiance, he had already hated him for killing unarmed people as described earlier. Nevertheless, he remembers the time before the war, how Jin-tae had sacrificed as a shoeshine boy to keep him in college, how they laughed and played together.

Believing in reconciliation, Jin-seok crosses the border and surrenders himself to North Korea. When he reaches Jin-tae in the middle of a war zone, now leader of the elite Flag Unit, Jin-tae does not even recognize him. With a crazed look in his eye, he almost kills Jin-seok, but is instead severely injured by another soldier. As Jin-seok compassionately bandages his older brother, Jin-tae's eyes are opened. In joy, they reconcile.

Jin-seok made a choice to change how he viewed his brother, and many in South Korea are doing the same. While they do not naively pretend the North will meet them with open arms, they still believe in, and seek, the redemption of their brother, which can be seen in recent South Korean policy. For years, their government has provided humanitarian assistance to the North, taking a huge step towards reconciliation. Most recently, they've elected a president who is committed to resolving disputes peacefully.

As also recalled by William Perry in the article referenced previously, the United States made significant steps to normalize relations with North Korea in the late 1990s. Unfortunately, the next administration abandoned these efforts and didn't help with the "axis of evil" comment. Nevertheless, Perry argues, diplomacy can work better now even than it did before.

The United States and, more importantly, South Korea have more options than war or inaction, so they need not pick the lesser of two evils. Modelled by Jin-seok, the third route is peacemaking and reconciliation. Like war, it takes courage, creativity, and persistence, *but also compassion*, which leads to the best outcome for all, including the North Korean people.

Learn from Jin-seok

While I understand you are likely not a government official in the State department, your viewpoint matters. It not only affects how you vote and how you might petition your representatives, but it also influences how others do the same, and popular opinion makes a difference.

So, sit down with friends or family, and watch *Tae Guk Gi*. Question your American narrative, and learn from this South Korean perspective.

Then, we can apply these understandings outside the current Korean conflict. We do not have justify war as the lesser of two evils, when we can proactively pursue peace.

Andrew Hocking writes about spirituality in movies, TV, and books at asyourpoetshavesaid.com, often discussing peacemaking and other consistent life concerns.

Notes

¹ Blaine Harden. "The U.S. war crime North Korea won't forget." The Washington Post, WP Company, March 24, 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-us-war-crime-north-korea-wont-forget/2015/03/20/fb525694-ce80-11e4-8c54-fb5ba6f2f69_story.html?utm_term=.533be13529d4.

² William J. Perry, et al. "How to Make a Deal With North Korea." POLITICO Magazine, April 15, 2017, www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/04/north-korea-nuclear-deal-donald-trump-china-215034.





“More Lives Were Saved”: Annihilated Cities and Choosing the Lesser Evil

By John Whitehead

The American atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (whose 72nd anniversaries were this past summer) have long been defended because they supposedly saved more lives than they destroyed. By using atomic bombs to force Japan's surrender in August 1945, the United States, so the argument goes, avoided either an American invasion of Japan or a blockade essentially to starve Japan into submission. Either alternative option would have cost more Japanese and American lives than the 100,000-200,000 killed at Hiroshima and Nagasaki; therefore, the bombings were the “lesser evil” in bringing the Second World War to an end.¹ However, this reasoning that justifies actions because of their consequences, an approach often called “consequentialism,” is flawed.

The consequentialist rationale used to defend the atomic bombings—indiscriminately killing civilians in wartime is justified if it ends the war and save more lives overall—could also be used to defend Japanese wartime behavior. The Japanese Imperial Army also killed indiscriminately during the Second World War. A notable example was their annihilation of the Chinese city of Nanking, which killed a comparable number of people as the atomic bombings, although by less technologically sophisticated means. To justify killing civilians because of such killing's long-term benefits is to make the merits of Japanese wartime atrocities (and similar killing of innocents) open to debate. We should draw back from taking such a step.

Before exploring how the defense of the atomic bombings could be applied to the Japanese war effort, I should describe the relevant principle at stake. A venerable principle of wartime ethics, found in different cultures across time, is that certain classes of people should be immune from attack, even in war. While enemy military personnel are legitimate targets of attack, those not directly involved in fighting are not. This second class of people who should be immune from attack generally includes children or those whom advanced age, illness, or disability have made ineligible for military

service; people engaged in work such as producing food, clothing, or other necessities that are not inherently of a military nature; and enemy soldiers who have been captured (prisoners of war). The immunity from attack of this second class is a principle that has been incorporated into international agreements such as the Geneva Conventions.² In Just War Theory, this principle is known as the “Discrimination principle.”

Killing a large portion of a city's population, military and civilian alike, with a weapon as indiscriminate as an atomic bomb is clearly a violation of the Discrimination principle. Defenders of this violation say that the bombings killed fewer people in absolute numbers than either an American invasion or blockade would have—and they are probably correct on this point. How does this consequentialist justification look, however, if we apply it to the other side in the Pacific War?

The Japanese military's behavior during the Second World War was marked by widespread violations of the Discrimination principle. The Japanese killed and tortured both civilians and prisoners of war whom they captured. An infamous example of Japanese violence toward civilians was Japanese troops' conduct in the Chinese city of Nanking, which the Japanese occupied in 1937 during the early years of their war with China. Nanking is a particularly good

parallel with Hiroshima or Nagasaki because it is another case in which military forces devastated an entire city, and the loss of life is comparable. Estimates of Chinese killed by the Japanese at Nanking vary, but a conservative estimate is comparable to that for the combined estimate for Hiroshima and Nagasaki: perhaps around 200,000 killed.³

Nanking was, in 1937, the Chinese capital. Following the Chinese-Japanese war's start in August 1937, the Japanese had considerable success in occupying eastern China and took Nanking in December. Japanese forces then went on a rampage through the city, torturing and killing tens of thousands of the city's inhabitants. Chinese women were raped on a massive scale during the rampage.

A venerable principle of wartime ethics, found in different cultures across time, is that certain classes of people should be immune from attack, even in war.

This was essentially the same rationale used to defend the atomic bombings: annihilate a city to shock the other side into surrendering and thereby end the war.

Historians debate why the rampage occurred and some point to warfare and military discipline's brutalizing effects on Japanese troops. Another reason may be that the Japanese high command hoped the Nanking atrocities would intimidate China into surrendering or otherwise coming to terms. This was essentially the same rationale used to defend the atomic bombings: annihilate a city to shock the other side into surrendering and thereby end the war.

Nanking is a particularly striking parallel to Hiroshima and Nagasaki because it involved the wholesale destruction of a city. Other Japanese violations of the Discrimination principle could be justified in similar ways, though. As noted above, mistreatment of prisoners of war was common: roughly a third of all Americans taken prisoner by the Japanese died in Japanese custody, sometimes in agonizing, grisly ways.⁴ During the war, a Japanese newspaper offered an apparent consequentialist justification for the mistreatment of prisoners: "To show [the prisoners] mercy is to prolong the war."⁵

We might want simply to condemn the Japanese destruction of Nanking or brutalization of POWs and leave it at that. Yet if we accept the consequentialist argument for Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we must at least ask the question of whether the Japanese military's actions served a useful purpose within the larger context of the war that could have saved more lives in the long run. What if by shocking and demoralizing their enemies by the indiscriminate torture and killing of civilians and prisoners the Japanese could bring a speedy end to the war in Asia? Wouldn't such actions therefore be justified?

Granted, someone might reject consequentialist justifications of Japan's actions for purely consequentialist reasons: the violent nature of Japanese imperialism (the argument might go) meant that a Japanese victory in the Second World War would have led to more deaths than the victory of America and its allies did. If a speedy Japanese victory would not save more lives than continuance of the war, then destroying Nanking or taking similar actions to achieve victory would not be justified. Such an argument might be correct, as far as it goes—although given the violent post-war history of Asia, we should be cautious in concluding that American victory saved more lives in the long-term than a Japanese victory would have. The problem is that making such a consequentialist argument concedes too much, given the enormity of what happened at Nanking.

Assessing the likely alternative outcomes of Japanese victory ver-

sus American victory in the Second World War—which would be a massive undertaking, given the war's scope in Asia and the array of variables involved—and finding American victory the preferable outcome should not be necessary before we can reach the conclusion that torturing and killing hundreds of thousands of civilians, as at Nanking, is wrong. To hold that we must enter into a debate over the larger war and its results in order to condemn Japanese behavior at Nanking runs contrary to our appropriate revulsion at such behavior and obscures the wartime Discrimination principle that must be upheld in such cases.

Yet if we accept the consequentialist rationale

for the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we open the door to accepting such a rationale in other cases and making the most extreme atrocities thinkable and potentially justifiable.

Just as we would reject such arguments in the case of Nanking, we ought to reject it in the case of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The moral principle of discriminating in the use of violence between combatants and noncombatants—and of condemning indiscriminate violence—should be regarded as a principle simply to be upheld, and one we should not dilute by making it dependent on questions of likely outcomes of different scenarios or assessments of which option will save the most lives in the long run.

Notes

¹ The range of estimated deaths is given in Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (New York: Random House, 1999), 287.

² "Convention (IV) Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, Geneva, 12 August 1949," Articles 1–4, 13–18, 27, 32–34, 146–147, International Committee of the Red Cross, accessed August 23, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2ufNjF3>.

³ Michael Bess, *Choices under Fire: Moral Dimensions of World War II* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 50–51; Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 202–203.

⁴ Frank, *Downfall*, 160.

⁵ Paul Ham, *Hiroshima Nagasaki: The Real Story of the Atomic Bombings and Their Aftermath* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2011), 12.

The problem is that making such a consequentialist argument concedes too much...



Expressing the Highest Ideals of the Left

By Acyutananda

“How had I agreed to make this hideous act the centerpiece of my feminism?” Frederica Mathewes-Green asked in 2016.¹ Just a little later that year, pro-choice advocate Camille Paglia wrote, “Progressives need to do some soul-searching. . . . A liberal credo that is variously anti-war, anti-fur, vegan, and committed to environmental protection of endangered species . . . should not be so stridently withholding its imagination and compassion from the unborn.”² Conservatives have sometimes derided the left as “bleeding-heart liberals,” but what happened to liberals’ hearts regarding the unborn?

Explaining the shifting positions of liberals on abortion seems to be a tale of oppression, altruism, and – in the case of many liberal leaders – opportunism.

I would call myself a member of the left, if we have to use such simple concepts. I volunteered with the Delta Ministry briefly in Mississippi in the summer of 1965. I was evicted by police from a university building in 1969 in an anti-Vietnam War protest led by Students for a Democratic Society. A few days later I marched to free Huey Newton, defense minister of the Black Panther Party (though I soon came to realize I had little knowledge of whether he was innocent of the charges). I support universal health care, as long as it is real health care and not abortion or other forms of killing. I think that eventually most industry should be owned by cooperatives or by governments.

To explain my view on abortion in relation to the ideals of the left, let me go back to that 1969 Vietnam protest, with the understanding that I don’t want to start an argument about that war. I have much humility about my understanding of history and geopolitics. I have great respect for American Vietnam veterans. All that matters here is what my perception of the war was at the time I protested it. What motivated me to join that action in 1969 and other anti-war events was a sense of outrage at what I perceived as a devastatingly violent onslaught being perpetrated by the strong against the weak, in another part of the world. Entirely innocent and entirely defenseless sisters and brothers of mine in Vietnam seemed to account for untold numbers of the slaughtered, while those who seemed to me the worst aggressors operated

with complete impunity.

Abortion, if we don’t euphemize, is a devastatingly violent onslaught by the strong – at least relative to unborn children – against the very weakest and most innocent of our sisters and brothers, all over the world. Legal abortion is not the moral equivalent of imperialistic aggression (if the Vietnam war really was imperialistic aggression, as I saw it then), but it is by definition slaughter of the innocent and defenseless with impunity, and the numbers of victims are on a scale that cannot be compared with the relatively modest numbers of victims in mere military wars. Abortion is one more human manifestation of might makes right, and it awakens in me much of the same sense of injustice and outrage as did Vietnam. Not only do present laws (which call for a unilateral decision) mandate might makes right, natural circumstances are also conducive to might makes right, because a woman and a doctor alone have the physical capacity to carry out the abortion. I think that if the balance of might were different and therefore state power were required to carry out the death sentence, the unborn would get a much more equitable hearing (a day in court), and therefore many outcomes would be different. Those already born are flatly taking advantage of the helplessness of those not yet born.

I think that the impulse to defend the weak is one of the highest human impulses. Defense of the weak is normally undertaken without thought of personal gain and hence with minimal thought of self. It is altruistic. And as a species, we have gradually been learning that happiness for an individual involves identification with something greater than oneself. As the abstract of a 2008 psychology study said,

. . . we hypothesized that spending money on other people may have a more positive impact on happiness than spending money on oneself. Providing converging evidence for this hypothesis, we found that spending more of one’s income on others predicted greater happiness both cross-sectionally (in a nationally representative survey study) and longitudinally (in a field study of windfall spending). Finally, participants who were randomly assigned to spend money on others experi-

enced greater happiness than those assigned to spend money on themselves.³

Atheism advocate and neuroscientist Sam Harris recommends and teaches meditation. Meditation is a technique other than altruistic conduct through which one can lose one's sense of self. Harris says that through meditative exercises, "[Certain] people have lost their feeling of self, to a great degree, and with that loss [have] come incredibly positive experiences."⁴ He suggests that there is "a connection between self-transcendence and living ethically," because self-transcendent experiences can involve "forms of mental pleasure that are intrinsically ethical. . . a phrase like 'boundless love' does not seem overblown."⁵ (See also "Sonder: The Key to Peace?"⁶ The word "sonder" has been coined for a state of mind out of which consistent affirmation of life in all one's actions must inevitably flow.)

The loss of the sense of self, however it is achieved, will have some of the same effect for ethical living that Harris claims for meditation.

Harris and most other scientists are confident that such mental states must have an adequate neurological explanation and do not require the religious explanations formerly ascribed to them. Whatever explanation for them may eventually be found, I think of states of transcendence, self-sacrifice and universal love as the highest good that human beings can aspire to. And I think that whatever may be the failings of liberal politics, the liberal principle of defending the weak is the one principle, not only on the left, but anywhere on the political spectrum, that is most conducive to going beyond our normal pettiness and our ordinary boundaries.

Some voices will say that while the unborn are indeed weak and defenseless, they are not human beings, or not persons, and are not deserving of our compassion. But I think those voices have been sufficiently dealt with elsewhere. However great the tragedy of the abortion issue, it is a transformative opportunity for society.⁷

We need to be clear: The quality of a civilization can be measured by the respect it has for its weakest members. (Jerome Lejeune, "the father of modern genetics")

Acyutananda continues to discuss the Left's highest ideals, and illustrates why the Democratic Party belongs to a movement which cherishes all human life, including the preborn, in the next issue of the journal.

Notes:

¹ Frederica Mathewes-Green, "When Abortion Suddenly Stopped Making Sense," *National Review*, January 22, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2h34a90>.

² Camille Paglia, "Feminists Have Abortion Wrong, Trump and Hillary Miscues Highlight a Frozen National Debate," *Salon*, April 7, 2016, <http://bit.ly/1XjLsY6>.

³ Elizabeth W. Dunn, Lara B. Aknin, Michael I. Norton, "Spending Money on Others Promotes Happiness," *Science* 319, no. 5870 (2008): 1687–1688.

⁴ Sam Harris, "Sam Harris on Meditation and Perception Shifts," YouTube, accessed September 13, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2wpewFW>.

⁵ Sam Harris, *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality without Religion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 14

⁶ Aimee Murphy, "Sonder: The Key to Peace?" *Life Matters Journal* 3, no. 2 (2014): 32–33.

⁷ See Acyutananda, "Why Focus on Abortion?" No Termination without Representation, April 20, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2jnGLNx>.





Overcoming the Two-Evil Option By Rising Above It

By Carol Crossed

Can the giraffe be the mascot for the consistent life ethic movement? Can we rise to the occasion?

The giraffe towers above all other animals. She gracefully moves through the wild brush, overseeing her terrain with an elevated perspective, reaching higher than any other.

Her agility allows her to strain her neck, w-a-y far to the left and w-a-y far to the right. (I'd love to see a donkey or an elephant do that.) She is fondly called a camel leopard, because she has spots and sports a small but noticeable hump. Two animals with distinctive features, woven into one creature, taking the uniqueness of each, creating a hybrid of beauty and wisdom.

Nonviolent Communication by peacemaker Marshall Rosenberg says the giraffe has big ears for listening empathetically. She speaks nonviolently, making only low noises. And no other land animal has such a huge heart. It is a full 2-feet long and is capable of pumping blood to the giraffe's farthest extremities. The giraffe's heart can accommodate the far left and right.

Her great lung capacity allows the giraffe to take long breaths just at the right moment, creating poise and vigilance as she oversees the breadth of behaviors below her, alert to violent movements. She doesn't rely on a small playing field but a vast one. She is well grounded, knows the earth, feels the earth, and is acquainted with the smaller species on which she softly does not tread.

Last year, I went on safari and saw these beautiful creatures in the distance and up close. They stared at me, a human being. Their piercing eyes with their long lashes catch mine and won't let me look away. They dwell in my soul, searching to understand who I am. They are self-assured, not threatened by me. Instead they appear to welcome communication, inviting me in. What could I possibly give to this grand creature of the savannas?

Our tour guide said their restful nature is deceiving. The giraffe's awkward posture makes them vulnerable to other predator species who feel threatened by their exceptional height. Can spindly legs really support such a broad vision? They have no weapon, but still their small, downy, innocuous horns are a poacher's prize. So they are wanted. They are threatened. They are hunted. Giraffes are constantly alert, sleeping only 20 minutes a day, going days without drinking and taking tiny power naps along the way. Meanwhile she is ever watchful and observant of both the landscape under her feet and the vast scenery underneath her in the distance. Giraffes have an expansive interpretation of life.

Giraffes are non-territorial, social, and communitarian. There is no belligerence or aggressiveness or egotistical behavior. No possessiveness. Unlike other animals, especially the donkey and elephant, they walk gently over the earth and know instinctively that the territory they inhabit is not theirs alone.

Can we rise to the occasion? Do we dare, can we claim her to be our symbol of breadth of vision and peacefulness?

It is a tall order.

Interested in getting involved?

Want to join the movement against aggressive violence? For information on volunteering or writing for the next issue of *Life Matters Journal*, send an email to info@lifemattersjournal.org.

For information about available internships and upcoming events, check out our website:

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