



Life Matters Journal

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we can be
HEROES
JUST FOR
One day.
DAVID
BOWIE

“I Can See Consistently Now”: Why We March

Krista Corbello shares her reflections on consistency and compassion in the pro-life movement.

We Don't Lie, We Just Dehumanize

How does an over-reliance on jargon affect our ability to debate issues effectively and honestly?

Expressing the Highest Ideals of the Left

A continuation from Acyutananda: 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 friends,

I hope you've been readers long enough to have picked up the word, *sonder*. It means *the realization that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own*. If we knew this with every fibre of our being, would we ever participate in violence against another?



In this issue of the journal, a hodge-podge of writers have addressed a hodge-podge of human experience.

Through education — which can be an explicit or implicit act — and discourse, that wonderful exchange of experience and thought, they seek to clear the senseless jargon used in society that obscures subtle acts of violence.

The loneliness and isolation of disability in John Whitehead's piece — feelings used by proponents of euthanasia — are quietly pulled back within the context of a short story.

In Genevieve Greinetz's poetry, we find a quick vivid view of the human person, and human society, limned by imagery of aging, and paced by contrasting shots of city/country time.

In a beautiful reflection by Krista Corbello on why she marches in January, *sonder* runs deep in parallel lines, touching both her own experience of being a pro-life activist, and her father's story of participating in the abortion of one of her siblings.

Finally, two authors look at jargon and political creeds. The first by Matthew Robare challenges us to consider housing and the dehumanizing impact of tossing around jargon like "affordable housing" without really defining what that means for individuals. The latter, by Acyutananda, follows up a segment from two issues back, and delves into the roots of liberalism, its historical tradition of *sondering*, and the loss of its high ideals surrounding human dignity to a dubious display of double-speak.

So: jargon can be specialized language, used by trades or schools for precise expression; or it can be claptrap, dehumanizing and obscurantist. Maybe we can make *sonder* the new bar for jargon: human rights jargon. We need good specific words that truly mean something substantial, and help us in our trade, our discourse, our active work to end aggressive violence, and build communities based on the intrinsic worth of every *random human passer-by*, whose vivid being is so precious.

Yours for peace and every human life,

CJ Williams

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.

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A Human Link Through Circuitry

By John Whitehead

Allen wondered what he would find if he smashed the robot's head open. Sitting on the toilet and looking up at that flat face with its permanent smile made him wonder if the manufacturers had, as prank, installed a camera in its head. They probably shared moments like this and other embarrassing footage among themselves. The absence of an accessible club made testing his theory impossible, however.

When he had finished on the toilet, Allen spoke the command "Assist." Then, after a brief pause, he spoke the specific instruction: "Wheelchair." With a whirr, the squat, shiny robot waddled over to him, and reached under his arms and around his body with its padded arms. The 'bot hoisted him off the toilet and, as Allen pulled up his pants, pivoted around to place him in his wheelchair.

After washing his hands, Allen spoke again: "Assist: Kitchen." As the 'bot pushed him down the hall, he listened to the rain outside and realized he probably could not go out today. In the kitchen, the usual sight met him: the dirty dishes in the sink and on the counter; the overflowing trash can; the cans and boxes on the floor. He thought of how no one came to the house, and thought of the safety-minded monologues his daughter would deliver when she arrived. The 'bot rolled him over to the part of the counter where the coffee maker was, and Allen made himself a pot. He used an unwashed mug sitting on the counter—it was probably clean enough, right?

Allen switched on the TV and watched images of carrier battlegroups in the South China Sea while the newsreader droned on about official statements from both sides. He sipped his coffee and found his mind wandering to Laura's visit.

He was grateful for the chance to see her and her family—to see another person's face, rather than just that frozen robot smile. Laura tended to nag, though. He could picture that intent gaze she pinned people with if to say "Now, pay attention." She would demand answers about his health, insist on his need for outside assistance, and otherwise bring up matters that he would just as soon not talk

about. On the other hand, he did not know what else there was to talk about, since he scarcely ever left the house. Maybe he could just let Laura and Bill do most of the talking, about their lives.

What made Allen most uneasy was his grandson. He never knew how to behave around Theo. Did Theo even know who he was? The boy was usually silent and would squirm away if Allen so much as tried to pat his head. Even as a baby, Theo wailed if anyone apart from his mother held him. Allen had learned early: keep his distance.

Allen turned from the TV screen to fix breakfast, again reusing dirty dishes. He took his time eating, watching the rain fall outside. Eventually he called the Medbot again: "Assist: Bathroom."

The rain didn't let up later, but Allen decided to go out anyway, holding an umbrella as best he could. The 'bot had a built-in GPS and trips could be saved and retrieved as needed. One of the trips saved in the 'bot was a circuit of the neighborhood; it pushed him around the block, waddling along on its short mechanical legs. Allen felt water splashing on his toes as they moved.

"You don't happen to have a built-in jet engine, do you?" He found himself frequently talking to the 'bot. "Or something to get us to Mexico, maybe?" Allen thought of how many people from the neighborhood had moved to Mexico or the islands or somewhere else where it was warmer. Maybe he should have done that.

He stared at the rows of houses along the block. They had been nice places once: clapboard houses, some with porches. Most were now marred by peeling paint and overgrown yards. Above all, the always dark windows on most of the houses made them ugly. A few still had lights on. Mrs. Pilsen still lived in that one. That next one was empty. That one, Mrs. Gagnon. Then, empty. Empty. Some new family had moved in a couple blocks away, but he barely knew who they were. What was their name? Cannon? Kincaid?

"You want to go spy on the new neighbors?" He asked the 'bot. "You have spy cameras in your head, I know it." He sat and stared at the darkened windows of the houses along the block.

Not many new people were moving into the neighborhood. It was mainly just him and a bunch of old women. Allen supposed he would be the most eligible bachelor in the neighborhood, if he ever went out for more than a quick stroll. He thought about the notion and thought about his wife, and the idea's appeal rapidly vanished.

The rain was coming down fairly hard now and he felt his toes getting cold. "*Assist: Walk Home.*" The robot kept moving. "*Assist: Walk Home,*" he said, more loudly. The 'bot continued onward. It must be thinking it had to finish the pre-programmed walk; occasionally it got stuck on an action.

Allen sighed and fished inside his coat for the control pad. Allen was so used to voice-activated commands he did not usually use the pad. After he selected and activated "*Walk Home,*" the 'bot turned around and began pushing him back toward the house. He was tired. He closed his eyes and listened to the rain.

—

Laura and her family arrived Friday afternoon, carrying lots of bags, some watery residue from that day's rain, and the frazzled atmosphere of travelers on long journeys.

"Dad! It's great to see you." As she bent down to hug him, Allen smelled that lavender in the shampoo she always used; he did not particularly like lavender but it was so distinctively "Laura" that he was glad to smell it..

"Good to see you, Allen." Another, briefer hug, from Bill.

"Good to see all of you." Allen found himself making the forced smile that often came to him when he was nervous.

Theo was hanging back a bit, clinging to his mother's raincoat.

"Hi there, Theo," Allen said, again forcing the smile. He did not expect, nor did he receive, an answer. The boy was looking around but would not look at him. Allen regretted that it was so rainy and that Theo couldn't play outside. Without anything else to amuse him, the boy had a tendency to start rummaging through various corners of the house and to make it even more of a mess than it already was. Or he might cry and throw a tantrum. Or both. This could be a long few days.

They chatted for a moment about the plane trip and the rain, and Theo eventually let go of his mother and began ambling around the kitchen. Allen envisioned the boy taking all the pots and pans out of the cabinets and strewing them on the kitchen floor like last time.

"So is that the famous Medbot?" Laura asked, nodding toward where the bulky machine stood in the kitchen corner.

"Yeah, that's my constant companion. He gets me everywhere." Allen noticed Theo now staring at the 'bot.

"What about Mrs. Dunne? Doesn't she still come by?"

Here it comes. "Well, she's had family problems. Her mom's been sick. She has to take care of her."

"Dad! You mean you haven't had anyone else to help you around the house? How long has she been gone?" As he feared, the intent gaze was now fixed on him.

Allen shifted in his chair, kept his smile in place, and tried to think of how to answer. Theo was now ambling in a circuit around the kitchen, running his open palm along the cabinet fronts. Laura was plowing on without waiting for an answer. "You need someone other than a medical robot to help you around the house."

Allen shrugged. "The Medbot will call 911 if I tell it. And if that doesn't work, I have my medical alert bracelet." He held up his arm.

"Sure, but you need another human being around sometimes. You shouldn't have to do everything by yourself."

Bill chimed in. "We could find someone else to help you around the house."

Laura picked up the thread. "We could—"

A whirring noise broke into the conversation. Allen turned his head and saw that the Medbot was slowly raising one of its arms, to Theo's great interest. The boy must have pushed the arm; the pressure had triggered a reflexive response from the mechanism inside.

"Theo!" Laura and Bill said, almost in unison. "Be careful there," Bill added, moving toward Theo.

"No, wait," said Allen, grateful to delay the inevitable argument. "It's OK. He's not going to break anything." With another whirr, the 'bot lowered its arm, and Theo followed the downward movement with his eyes. Then Theo pushed upward on the 'bot's hand, making the arm rise again. The boy's eyes followed the mechanical arm up and down. Allen had an idea.

"Theo, watch this," he said. "*Assist: Bedroom.*"

The 'bot shuffled over and began to wheel Allen toward his bedroom. Theo watched and followed the 'bot. When they got to the bedroom, Allen picked up the control pad from his bedside table. He flicked to the commands section. While he looked, Theo came up to the 'bot and tried to pry its hand off the wheelchair handle.

"Hold on there, Theo." He found "*Assist: Kitchen*" and pressed the button to activate the command. The 'bot wheeled him back. Laura and Bill, who had appeared in the bedroom door, moved out of the way and followed them to the kitchen, along with Theo.

"That's pretty neat," said Laura. The intent gaze was gone now and a warmer look had replaced it.

"Wait." Allen held up a finger. He found the "*Assist: Living Room*" command. Then he held the pad out toward Theo. "You can press it here." He pointed to the "Activate" button. Theo had now turned back to pushing the 'bot's hand. Laura got the idea, though.

"Here, Theo, just press here." She guided the boy's hand so he touched the button with his finger. The 'bot responded by wheeling Allen into the living room, leading the troupe of Theo and his parents along.

Now Theo was reaching for the control pad. "OK, let's try another one." Allen found "*Assist: Bedroom.*" Laura again guided Theo's hand to activate the command and they all returned to the bedroom.

"Here's something different," Allen said. He selected "*Assist: Into Bed.*" Then, as Laura readied herself to help Theo, he said: "Wait, let me." With one hand he held out the control pad to his grandson. Theo immediately touched the screen without prompting but his aim was off and he missed the button. Allen took the small hand in his own. With only slight resistance, Theo let him guide his finger to press the button.

The Medbot bowed down with various whirrs and reached under Allen's arms and around his body. "Come on, get this right," Allen whispered to the 'bot.

The 'bot did. It lifted him out the wheelchair and placed him into the bed, as Theo watched. Allen saw the boy flash a smile before whirling around to share his delight at the 'bot with Laura and Bill. Allen smiled too. He didn't have to force it this time.

"Nice job," he whispered to the robot.



city >< country

By Genevieve Greinetz

to go back
--stinging wild place--
to reenter
lights, cars, busy solace

to remain
--poppies, hot winds--
to let it go
sands, scratching, stretch

buildings—
scarring obstructions;
structures feeding vanity

trees—
bodies unmarked by ambition;
roots, time, life

taste.see.feel.human.seen



“I Can See Consistently Now”: Why I March

By Krista Corbello

One of the largest demonstrations in the United States in support of human rights takes place in Washington DC every January: the March of Life. We often see the hashtag #WhyWeMarch float around online every January, but I can honestly say that I marched pretty blindly during my first two years participating in the March.

When I was eighteen, my mother revealed something to me that started my whole pro-life journey. Her parents sent her to America after college to make a better life for herself and eventually for her younger sisters. (This part I knew.) The secrets unfolded when she told me that when she got pregnant at twenty-five out of wedlock, she was pressured to abort. She and her boyfriend at the time got into an argument about it because he mentioned abortion, and they never spoke to each other again. When she sought solace from her family, she found none. She mailed pictures of herself pregnant to them, and they mailed them back either with X's drawn on her stomach or shredded.

Because of the situation with her family back home in the Philippines, her parents urged her to get an abortion, even threatening to disown her if she didn't. They were ashamed and embarrassed by the pregnancy.

Why do I march? For oppressed women like my mom who are given ultimatums instead of support in their times of need. I often hear people ask “How could *anyone* choose abortion?” as if women who choose abortion are heartless monsters. In the case of my mom (and so many other women), it is because they feel coerced into having an abortion because of the deafening voices of their inner circle.

“Get an abortion *or else...*” is hardly a free choice.

Yet, in the darkest time of her life, she chose life. For me.

Her friends and my family members told me throughout my childhood, “You are the light of your mom's life,” something I now fully understand. If a new child in a happy family is a light to their family, I can only imagine that the light shines ever brighter in the darkness.

People could have easily told my mother that I would have a lifetime of suffering, being unwanted by my grandparents and father. I cannot deny that I have heard the argument more times than I care to count. This argument perpetuates two deceptions:

1. It is better for a child to die than to suffer.
2. It is justified to terminate unwanted people.

Why do I march? For the lower class of the “unwanted,” to whom society shows a hollow compassion. For children like me who were “emotionally aborted” by our fathers and endured a life of endless

questioning, crippling self-doubt, and a volatile understanding of self-worth.

At age 21, I reached the final stage of grief: acceptance. I was finally beginning to let go of the hope that I would ever meet my biological father. Over the course of six months, I cried and sought healing for my “father wound.” The day before my twenty-second birthday, he re-entered our lives. That experience was an emotional roller coaster with slow uphill climbs, abrupt and overwhelming drops, and a handful of upside downs. Fast forward to a few years later to when my biological father and I have a decent relationship. I had by this point begun sharing my testimony around my home state of Louisiana in my pro-life youth education.

I knew a lot about my story of origin from my mom's side, but I knew very little about my father's. So I asked him, “Are you glad my mom didn't abort me?” one day at breakfast. At which point, he began to cry. I felt foolish for thinking that asking questions like that one would be purely informational and not at all emotional.

“Of course I'm glad, sweetie. I did abort a child, though.” His next girlfriend got pregnant, too. He told her to get an abortion, and she listened. The only difference between this woman and my mom is my mom's stubbornness.

Never did I expect my life to change so drastically at an IHOP.

My first pro-life instinct was to offer resources to my father. Silent No More Awareness. Rachel's Vineyard Retreat. Websites, books, the works. It wasn't until later when he brought me to the airport that I was able to process the information.

I was flying home to Louisiana, and the plane was on the runway. Picture this: the plane is accelerating, we're lifting off, and I begin to ugly cry, *snot and everything*. Worst time to be in the middle seat, am I right? (I am forever thankful that no one asked me if I had flight anxiety or something.)

Why do I march? For the 1/3 of my generation that is lost to abortion, which I now know includes a sibling of mine.

I cried that day, spiraled into a depression, faced “survivor's guilt,” and most of all, felt immeasurable unworthiness. Why should I have lived when she died? Why should I have a *good life* when I already had life itself? For the better part of a year, I could not cry, though. (Which is rare for me as I've been known to cry for, like, *really good ice skating*.) I remember my friends saying, “I'm worried about you,” and I would respond “You should be.”

I went to a Rachel's Vineyard Retreat, where I wrote a letter to my sibling.

I know I never got to braid your hair or make you laugh, but I would have. I know I never got to pick on your boyfriend or hold

you while you cried, but I would have.

I was shocked by the amount of healing I was in need of. Me. After all, this abortion happened over 20 years ago and involved a man who I've only known for two.

Why do I march? Why do I see consistently now? For everyone trapped in the oppressive cycle of abortion. I marched blindly for two years because I had no idea how far and wide abortion impacted me on a personal level. I can see clearly now because I know where I stand on the issue, and so I march with a comprehensive and consistent life ethic. Although I could have literally been taken by abortion, I know there were so many others involved in the process, and their stories are just as important as mine. I invite you to march and see clearly with me.

As the fourteenth Dalai Lama said, "It is not enough to be compassionate, you must also act."

Consider the unwanted, the inconvenient, and the hurt and grieve for them. Compassion should be all-encompassing, which means we must protect the unborn, love the woman, forgive the fathers, and remember the lost. When you recognize each of these equally valued individuals, you see that a pattern of violence affects more than just one innocent human.

Now, why do you march? Who do you see?

This essay is adapted from remarks Krista Corbello gave at the Rehumanize International sponsored meet-up at the March for Life



Pro-life: Expressing the Highest Ideals of the Left

By Acyutananda

Thanks to Val for a lot of research, and for the good feedback on the writing.

What Happened to Liberals' Hearts?

"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.

The oppression I refer to is the horrific oppression of women for millennia, which naturally led to a backlash that was overdue and highly justifiable for the most part, but that in at least one important way—attitudes toward abortion—went out of control. Altruism, or compassion, is a character trait that is stronger in some people than in others; and even between people of equal compassion, some have more tendency than others to try to translate that compassion into governmental responsibility. That tendency leads people to gravitate toward liberal politics. Altruism can be directed both toward pregnant women and their unborn children, but liberals tend to direct it disproportionately toward pregnant women for reasons I will explain below. And opportunism? The opportunism of some pro-choice politicians and other leaders is related primarily to the out-of-control aspect of the backlash and secondarily to money.

In the history of liberal politics, the forces of oppression, altru-





ism, and opportunism played themselves out against the backdrop of what I see as the main psychological source of the divide between pro-lifers and pro-choicers. That sharp divide seems to stem mainly from differing perceptions of the unborn. Are the unborn full-fledged members of our human family, or are they something much less significant? A greater liberal emphasis on caring for the underdog would seem clearly to lead to a pro-life position *if* liberals see the unborn as full-fledged members of our human family. If, however, they see them as something much less, understandably their caring would focus instead on pregnant women; they would see no need to pay any regard to the unborn, and they would become pro-choice. I personally am strongly pro-life, but if I were to perceive the unborn as insignificant, I would find it abhorrent to try to restrict what a woman can do with her body.

“The sharp divide seems to stem mainly from differing perceptions of the unborn” is my own conclusion based on countless discussions about abortion with a range of people. And following from that conclusion, I naturally think that *in general*, the two-thirds (or so) of rank-and-file Democrats who identify as pro-choice must think of the unborn as something fairly insignificant.

Charles Camosy, relying significantly on the writings of Kristen Day, president of Democrats for Life of America, relates an historical account that I would summarize as follows:³

As of the 1968 general elections, neither major party could be called pro-life or pro-choice. Events at the 1968 Democratic Convention led to activist groups of different kinds, in the aftermath of that convention, gaining more control than they had had before over party policies; and pro-choice activists succeeded in initiating their party’s tilt toward the pro-choice position.

This created an irresistible opportunity for the Republican Party to appeal to pro-lifers (just as if the Republican Party had been the first to tilt either way, it would have created an irresistible opportunity for the Democratic Party to appeal to the voters opposite to the tilt). And things have continued to polarize ever since. For his 1972 re-election, Republican President Richard Nixon used pro-life sentiment to successfully begin attracting Catholics away from the Democratic Party.

“In 1976,” according to Daniel K. Williams, author of *Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-Life Movement before Roe v. Wade*, “the pro-life movement was still overwhelmingly Catholic and mostly politically liberal . . . but by 1980, there was a new group of pro-life activists: evangelical Protestants [overwhelmingly Republican].”⁴ But as we will see, the biggest spike in liberal conversions from pro-life to pro-choice — which is our focus in pondering what happened to liberals’ hearts — seems already to have occurred in the 1968–1972 period.

Ideologically, the pro-choice movement might have found more affinity with the Republican Party than with the Democratic. A key factor, possibly the key factor, in the way things fell out seems to have been that the pro-choice activists, as activists with a new party policy to propose, simply found the Democratic power structure easier to break into. I won’t insist on this view, but it’s consistent with the contributions of Democrats to the pro-life movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which indicate that as of 1972 the Democratic Party had not long been pro-choice in ideological terms.

In fact the pro-life movement that opposed the late-1960s calls for abortion rights (calls that foreshadowed *Roe v. Wade*) was led

importantly by stalwarts of the civil-rights movement and of the anti-Vietnam War movement, and by liberal politicians. Jesse Jackson was both a civil-rights leader and a politician and was at first vehemently pro-life. The clergymen Daniel Berrigan and Richard John Neuhaus were co-founders of Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam; both were pro-life, and Neuhaus was the keynote speaker at the first pro-life rally to be held on the National Mall. Senator Edward Kennedy wrote an open letter in 1971 opposing abortion on demand. Williams finds even more significant the fact that the pro-life movement used the same ideological framework and language of human rights as those earlier movements.

As Democratic Party policies shifted in favor of abortion rights, liberal politicians shifted with them. Nat Hentoff wrote of Jesse Jackson: “But as Jesse Jackson decided to run for president in 1984, his fiery pro-life rhetoric suddenly subsided.” Hentoff didn’t expressly accuse Jackson of hypocrisy, but he concluded his article as follows:

I then asked Jackson about another form of execution. I told him that in speeches I often quote what he wrote as a pro-lifer. He looked uncomfortable. I asked him if he still believed what he said then. “I’ll get back to you on that,” he said. He hasn’t yet.⁵

The opinion of Nat Hentoff, alone, is not enough to convince me that any individual politician is a hypocrite. We can’t know, simply through the images we find in the media, what is in any one person’s heart. But I can see how politics would have a special appeal for those whose ambition overrides their integrity, so I feel sure that in the cases of many politicians, if not in Jackson’s case individually, the conversions to a pro-choice position of Democratic leaders must have been opportunistic. Outside of elected office, also, any movement that offers a chance to become a hero to a large, vocal group or to cash in financially is sure to attract some who have such banal motivations (this would not exclude the pro-life side). The appeal of pro-choice feminists as a huge and motivated voting bloc or audience would have been hard to resist.

While opportunism might explain the shifting positions of Democratic leaders, however, rank-and-file members of the Democratic Party would not have felt the same compulsions of allegiance that politicians did, and it seems that many of the rank and file also must have undergone a conversion to pro-choice. The *Washington Post* of Aug. 25, 1972, reported that when Gallup asked whether “the decision to have an abortion should be made solely by a woman and her physician,” 59% of Democrats agreed (among Republicans agreement was at 68%), and that “support for legal abortion ha[d] increased sharply” since the previous survey five months earlier. The report did not explicitly say that Democratic (liberal) support had increased since the previous survey, and I could not find earlier surveys asking exactly the same question or giving a breakdown by party. A Gallup poll in November 1969, however, had found only 40 per cent of all Americans in favor of a law “which would permit a woman to go to a doctor and end a pregnancy at any time during the first three months.”⁶ Such a huge number of pro-choice converts must have included many who would call themselves liberal.

Let’s try to find the inner reasons why people might have been converting to pro-choice during the years 1968–1972. First, few

people would have been converting due to bodily-autonomy arguments. Judith Jarvis Thomson's "A Defense of Abortion" was not published until 1971, and it takes time for academic thinking to trickle down and affect popular opinion. I believe that pro-choice arguments leading up to *Roe v. Wade* were largely arguments about women's attaining career equality with men; about controlling population growth; about the fear that if a woman does not have access to a safe abortion she will seek out an unsafe one (the "back-alley abortion" argument); and, for seven Supreme Court justices, about a rarefied argument concerning privacy under the Constitution.⁷ Moreover, some people may have come to take the abortion-rights movement more seriously as women took over the leadership that had previously been held by men.

But few people would say that anyone should have the right to kill a full-fledged member of our human family for a job, or to control population, "killing" such persons "in safety".. Thus the above arguments would not fully explain how Mathewes-Green's "hideous act" became a cornerstone of liberal politics. I wrote before, "if liberals . . . see [the unborn] as something much less [than full-fledged members of our human family], understandably their caring would focus instead on pregnant women, they would see no need to pay any regard to the unborn, and they would become pro-choice." For this reason, I think that many liberals around the 1968–1972 period must have actually changed their intuitive perception of the unborn.

Would that have been psychologically possible? I get the impression that with people who have not thought much, in an individual capacity, about the nature of the unborn, their perceptions are extremely malleable. After all, except for a few surgeons, no one has ever seen an *in utero* fetus with their own eyes, and even if we saw an early fetus, that might not help us to assess its moral value without some deep contemplation. So if those who have not thought much about the topic are told repeatedly that the unborn has a soul, they will believe it has a soul. If told in secular terms that it is "a distinct, living and whole human being," they will believe that. If told it is just tissue, they will believe that. I believe the last of those statements is what happened to liberals' hearts — or perhaps not exactly to their hearts but to something in their minds closely related to their hearts.

The above arguments gave people incentives to change their perceptions of the unborn to perceptions that dismissed their humanity. Psychologically such changes would, in fact, have been possible given two factors that were then present: first, the fact that many people were just beginning to think about the matter for the first time; and second, what seems to have been a concerted effort at dehumanization by pro-choice feminists. People's unformed perceptions were influenced in the direction of dismissing the unborn.

Pro-choice advocate Naomi Wolf has explained that "Many pro-choice advocates developed a language to assert that the foetus isn't a person. . . . An account of a pre-*Roe* underground abortion service inadvertently sheds light on this: staffers referred to the foetus — well into the fourth month — as 'material' . . ."

That would be consistent with the picture that we get from Daniel Williams. Williams relates that in 1967 the National Organization for Women decided to demand women's full control over their bodies, and that their adherents undertook to justify that control by claiming that the unborn were less than human.⁸ (I assume that

they chose that course because they then had no other means of justification; Thomson-style arguments that claim to establish such a right to bodily control even if the unborn are fully human were not yet available to them.) Their adherents proceeded to develop what Wolf calls "a lexicon of dehumanization."

I don't think that a spike in conversions to pro-choice between 1969 and 1972 following an intensification of the push for dehumanization in 1967 was a coincidence.

In a 1980 article in *The Progressive*, "Abortion: The Left Has Betrayed the Sanctity of Life," Mary Meehan wrote:

...it is out of character for the Left to neglect the weak and helpless.

The traditional mark of the Left has been its protection of the underdog, the weak, and the poor. The unborn child is the most helpless form of humanity, even more in need of protection than the poor tenant farmer or the mental patient... The basic instinct of the Left is to aid those who cannot aid themselves — and that instinct is absolutely sound.⁹

As we saw earlier, liberals are, if not the voters who care most, then those who try hardest to translate their caring into governmental responsibility. So Meehan is, of course, right that liberals should be pro-life — *if* the unborn are full-fledged members of our human family. If they are perceived as something much less, however, the movement can escape the obligation to attend to these weak, these poorest, of the human family...

Acyutananda began this discussion of the Left's highest ideals in a previous issue of the journal, Volume 5 Issue 8.

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 Charles C. Camosy, *Beyond the Abortion Wars: A Way Forward for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 22-24.

⁴ Eric C. Miller, "When Being Pro-Life Did Not Mean Being Conservative," *Religion & Politics*, May 31, 2016, <http://bit.ly/29GoQ1a>.

⁵ Nat Hentoff, "Pro-choice Bigots: A View from the Pro-Life Left," *ASAP*, November 30, 1992, <http://bit.ly/253XFor>.

⁶ Both polls are discussed in George Gallup, "Abortion Seen Up to Woman, Doctor," in *Before Roe v. Wade: Voices That Shaped the Abortion Debate Before the Supreme Court's Ruling*, ed. Linda Greenhouse and Reva B. Siegel (New Haven, CT: Yale Law School, 2012), 207-210, available at <http://bit.ly/2xYR17O>.

⁷ For a discussion of women's equality and abortion, see Serrin Foster, "The Feminist Case against Abortion," YouTube, accessed September 13, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2w7DzSh>.

⁸ "Civil Rights and the Pro-Life Movement," *Flagship Freedom*, March 13, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2w8FsOF>.

⁹ Mary Meehan, "Abortion: The Left Has Betrayed the Sanctity of Life," *The Progressive*, September 1980, available at <http://bit.ly/2vTb8U3>.

We Don't Lie, We Just Dehumanize

By Matthew M. Robare



Most of us do not lie to each others faces, or at least, not often, but we do often allow cliches, headlines, and slogans to do our thinking for us. As we adopt the detritus of other people's thinking without doing our own, we lose sight of what we mean and end up using a lot of words to say nothing at all.

One of the ways we fall into the trap is through an over-reliance on jargon. Jargon in itself is not bad, being the specialized language developed in some professions. Some bits of jargon are now quite venerable, having passed out of their original context and into mainstream language. But some words of jargon have been ripped from their contexts in order to stifle or control debates, often at the expense of society.

This is most evident at the local level, where intensely emotional and divisive debates over housing occur. The most famous bit of jargon to emerge from this decade's housing debates is the word "gentrification."

The word originally was only a description for a process where middle-class people would move into a working-class neighborhood where they would buy up and restore old homes. Now the word is emotionally loaded and means a great deal more, to the point where, for many, it sums up the dominant narrative of all American cities.

A glance at the typical articles and recent books on urban problems will see "gentrification" invoked as the cause of displacement, homelessness, an increasing cost of living, racial segregation, income inequality, and pretty much every other bad thing or trend that can happen in today's cities. Fear of gentrification has led neighborhood activists to oppose much-needed investments in poor and working-class neighborhoods, such as in Nashville, where Mayor Megan Barry's transit plans have been opposed by left-wing activists.

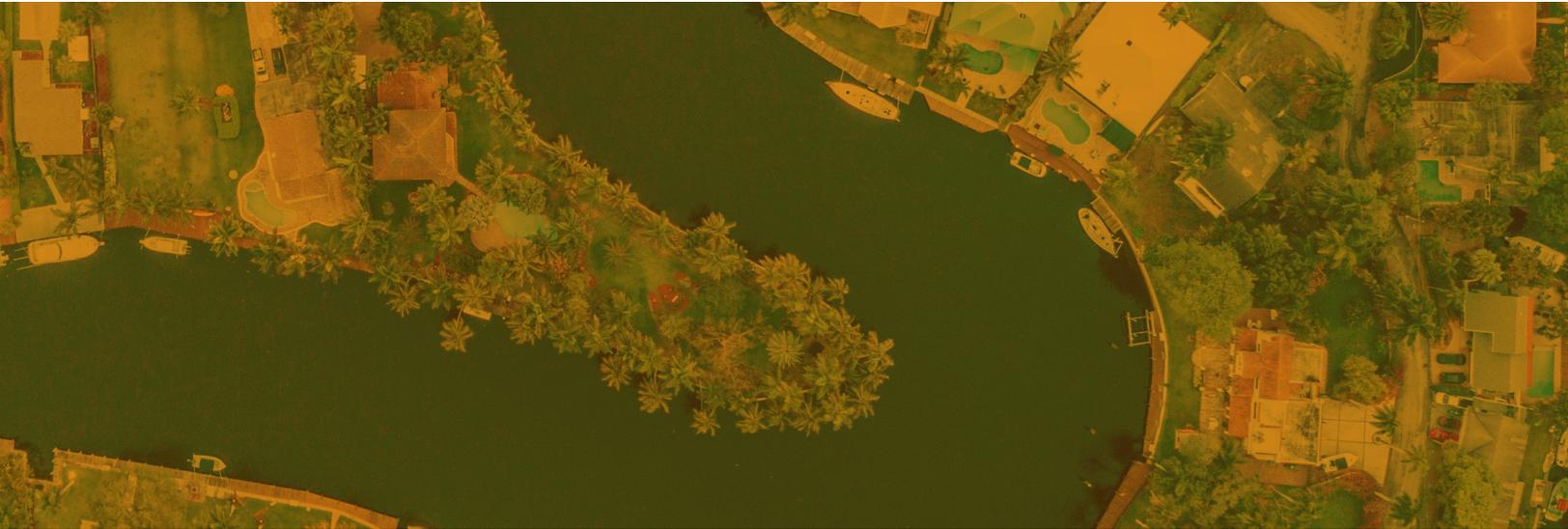
However, the truth is that gentrification, for all the press coverage it receives, is a small problem. Most poor urban neighborhoods are growing poorer, according to research done by Joe Cortwright at City Observatory, and most American cities are not sharing in the growth and abundance of Boston, NYC, Washington, Miami,

Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle.¹

In cities like Detroit, Baltimore, St Louis, and Cleveland, the population remains overwhelmingly poor and without opportunity. Schools are bad, jobs have mostly gone to the suburbs, they have little access to capital, and their neighborhoods have often been already written off by city officials. Services and infrastructure are so expensive to maintain and so many neighborhoods are now so sparsely populated that cities refuse to serve certain homes in them. Many homes in these cities have been abandoned for so long they have fallen into ruin and so get demolished to prevent them from becoming fire hazards and criminal hideouts. This can be seen by viewing a city street on Google Maps, where green fields grow in between homes in an otherwise built out block.

In such a situation, one would expect that anyone willing to bring in capital to renovate homes and get them back on tax rolls, to start a small business, or to make any other investment in the neighborhood would be welcomed with open arms. Instead, fear of "gentrification" makes neighbors hostile and suspicious, as though Detroit is going to turn into San Francisco overnight because someone wants to open a brewpub. As Jason Segedy writes, "Even the earliest signs of neighborhood revitalization . . . are frequently opposed by people who are convinced that they are acting in the name of social justice."²

Another phrase that obscures the issue it refers to is "affordable housing." Obviously, everyone wants affordable housing, but what does it mean? Our preconceived notions about the nature of good housing, the traditions of architects and economists who study such housing, and the biases against the people who live in it all go into each person's understanding of "affordable housing" and help make sure that the people who need it most don't get it. Housing scholars traditionally define affordability as meaning that a person or household spends no more than 30 percent of their income on it. This definition is somewhat arbitrary, but it is conventional at this point. Note that the type of housing, tenancy, and income don't matter. If someone is paying \$100,000 of their annual \$150,000 salary on a single family home, they are still considered to be paying too much.



Complicating matters is that many cities have enacted inclusionary development policies to create affordable housing—but they use a different measure of affordability. Inclusionary development is a kind of tax on developers, whereby if they want to build a new multifamily development, they will be required to set aside a portion of the units, usually between 10 and 20 percent, to rent at below market rates. These “below market rates,” however, are based on the area median income (AMI) as determined by the United States Census. Normally, the rate is based on being affordable to someone making 80 percent of the AMI, but the AMI includes high-income suburbs, pushing it up. In Boston, for example, the “affordable” units created by inclusionary development are designed to be affordable to people on a police officer’s, firefighter’s or teacher’s salary—people who are more middle income than the people activists are trying to help or whom many think are being helped.

The opacity of affordable housing allows people who oppose any new housing from being built in their communities to appear to support the poor while denying them the housing they need. Under inclusionary development, the housing is still built by for-profit developers and so in order for anything to get built the developers still need to be able to profit from it—and selling or renting units at below market rates detracts from profitability. In some cities this is understood and developers will be granted a “density bonus”—additional market-rate units that replace the affordable ones. In some cities, however, the inclusionary requirements are deliberately made too high to prevent any apartments from being built. This lets the opponents of housing claim to be for it and put the blame on developers.

Another trouble with affordable housing is that focusing on the housing can sometimes obscure the reasons it’s unaffordable. The housing crisis in St Louis and the housing crisis in Boston are very different. Boston’s high rents are primarily due to laws and processes that delay the construction of housing, especially in the suburbs, resulting in an insufficient supply. In other parts of the country the problem is primarily one of poverty: there are numerous homes for sale, right now, in Akron, Ohio, for under \$100,000. One is even

available for \$7,900. It’s hard to imagine homes getting less expensive while still being livable.

While there is certainly poverty in Boston, the housing crisis here is marked by the inability of middle- and even upper-middle-income people to afford housing, while in places like Akron, people can’t afford what Bostonians would consider dirt-cheap homes.

Lastly, affordable housing is complicated by what the people in power consider to be good housing. Many suburbs have what are called “snob zoning” ordinances that use elements like minimum lot sizes, parking requirements, setbacks (a requirement that a building or structural element be so many feet from the property line) and other methods to ensure that the easiest homes to build are large, expensive, and single family. “Progressive” reformers of the early 20th century promoted outlawing boarding houses and rooming houses, which are both excellent ways to provide low-cost housing, because they disliked the sort of people who used those kinds of housing. In a similar way, mobile homes are frequently prohibited by zoning regulations and their owners are derided at every turn.

The housing crisis in this country is very real and has led to an increase in homelessness and its attendant pathologies and is causing a growing number of families to be cost-burdened. But if we remember the truths that housing issues are contextual, that new development is not automatically bad, and that different people and families have different needs and desires when it comes to housing—needs and desires these are not always shared by the people in power—then we can do something about it. Housing is a human issue, which is forgotten in concerns about property values, aesthetics, and shadows.

Notes:

¹ <http://cityobservatory.org/more-evidence-of-the-growth-of-concentrated-poverty/>

² http://cityobservatory.org/g-word-poison_segedy/

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.

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