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# Colloquī *: to discuss*

**Virtue in the Abstract**

*The cart pulling the horse*

# Virtue in the Abstract

*The cart pulling the horse*

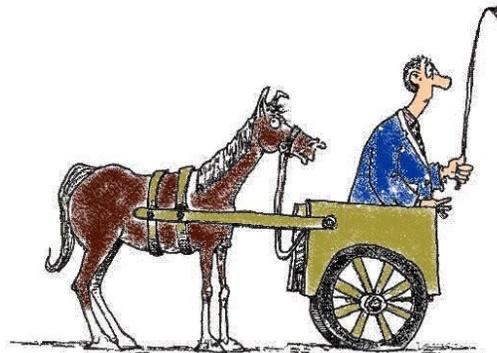
All my favorite people are or have been human, not the least surprising, some might well affirm. Likewise, all my unfavorite people have been human, though often-times I cannot seriously resist reconsidering. I suppose it is a truism that should rightly go unchallenged, but it is increasingly difficult to recognize the truth of it given the foul mental weather—*homo caeli mutatio ignoramus*—affecting the considerable and alarming lot of self-anointed intellectual elite, the hubristic political class, technocratic oligarchy of social media and the useful idiots once known as honest journalists who see people as nothing more than an obnoxious abstraction. Pretending to be secure in their gilded towers, they suck up all the oxygen and exhale poisonous, foul-smelling greenhouse gases they then flatulently force people in the abstract—the rest of us—to breathe; they feed on carrion cake and ice cream topped with the blood of the naïve and gullible. If truth be told, I much prefer the practicality of the bloodsucking vampire who preys in the dark, studiously avoiding the light of day. At least the vampire leaves flesh and bone intact; they have their scruples after all. Yet, there is something which must be said of people in the abstract: “Abstract people have an immortality which flesh-and-blood people have yet to achieve.”

Thus, a historian writing about the newly-created state of Czechoslovakia after the First World War, said that its policies regarding the ethnic groups within it were designed “to correct social injustice” and to “put right the historic wrongs of the seventeenth century”—despite the fact that actual flesh-and-blood people from the seventeenth century had died long before, putting the redressing of their wrongs beyond the reach of human power.

Much the same kind of reasoning has continued to be ideologically powerful among the intelligentsia in twenty-first century America, who speak of “white” and “blacks” as intertemporal<sup>1</sup> abstractions with centuries-old issues to be redressed, rather than as flesh-and-

blood individuals who take their sins and sufferings with them to the grave. There is surely no more profound difference between human beings than the difference between the dead and the living. Yet even that difference is glided over verbally when speaking of races as intertemporal abstractions, of whom the current living generation is just the latest embodiment.

Unlike real people, abstract people can be sent “back” to places where they have never been. ... Perhaps the most persistent efforts to repatriate intertemporal abstractions were nineteenth-century American proposals to free the slaves and then send them “back to Africa”—a continent which in most cases neither they nor their grandparents had ever seen.



Intertemporal abstractions are especially useful to those intellectuals who tend to conceive of social issues in terms which allow the intelligentsia to be on the side of the angels against the forces of evil. When intellectuals are unable to find enough contemporary grievances to suit their vision or agenda, they can mine the past for harm inflicted by some on others. By conceiving of those involved in the past as members

of intertemporal abstractions, the intelligentsia can polarize contemporary descendants of those involved in past acts. The kind of society to which that leads is one in which a newborn baby enters the world supplied with prepackaged grievances against other babies born the same day.<sup>2</sup>

Social justice warriors are especially fond of intertemporal abstractions—they cannot help themselves—for referring to abstract people grants them *carte blanche* license to consider feelings, sentiment, assumptions, and opinion while self-justifiably denying fact, reality, and truth. It is no longer the individual human being but the society, group, culture, cult, biologically confused, racially confounded, downtrodden, oppressed, and victimized who are the focus of their angst and misapplied dyspepsia. It should be made clear the intentional meaning of “social” as applied in this context as an adjective, relating to society or its organization, is nowise an indication of one’s sociability, one’s need or desire for companionship or one’s generally not so charming personality. In almost every instance and circumstance popularly identified today, *social* opposes itself: social order<sup>3</sup> a descent into

chaos, social media imbues self-isolation and antisocial behavior, social justice subsumes injustice, social distancing serves to divide us further, social gatherings impossible (see social distancing,) social responsibility demands self-immolation, social science an academic pursuit with no science and no profit to ever come of it, social conscience—an oxymoronic euphemism for no conscience at all.

For the left, socialists, progressives, intellectuals, and social justice warriors, achieving equality of outcome rather than affording equal opportunity is their utopian fantasy. Equality of outcome disallows opportunity to pursue one's own dreams, no one is permitted to exercise their God-given talents or to best make use of them to achieve what is within their self-interests; it is the common good, the good of society which thus must quite clearly bind and rule them all, irrespective of the detrimental consequences to the individual. George Orwell, perhaps unintentionally, in a backhanded way giving license to the constant use of doublespeak,<sup>4</sup> once wrote "Political language ... is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind." God is dead, "war is peace; freedom is slavery; ignorance is strength,"<sup>5</sup> equity not equality, injustice transmuted into an obscenity now misidentified as justice, virtue signaling defined as virtue, good and evil now identically twinned, every sin a virtue, every virtue a sin, everything and everyone is racist, success the tattoo of selfishness and greed. What is worst: thinking has become vestigial like a tail wagging the man, not at all useful nor becoming.

Fulton Sheen once said, "Once there were lost islands, but most of them have been found; once there were lost causes, but many of them have been retrieved; but there is one lost art that has not been definitely recovered, and without which no civilization can long survive, and that is the art of controversy."

The hardest thing to find in the world today is an argument. Because so few are thinking, naturally there are found but few to argue. Prejudice there is in abundance and sentiment too, for these things are born of enthusiasms without the pain of labor. Thinking, on the contrary, is a difficult task; it is the hardest work a man can do — that is perhaps why so few indulge in it. Thought-saving devices have been invented that rival labor-

saving devices in their ingenuity. Fine-sounding phrases like "Life is bigger than logic," or "Progress is the spirit of the age," go rattling by us like express trains, carrying the burden of those who are too lazy to think for themselves.

Not even philosophers argue today; they only explain away. A book full of bad logic, advocating all manner of moral laxity, is not refuted by critics; it is merely called "bold, honest, and fearless." Even those periodicals which pride themselves upon their open-mindedness on all questions are far from practicing the lost art of controversy. Their pages contain no controversies, but only presentations of points of view; these never rise to the level of abstract thought in which argument clashes with argument like steel with steel, but rather they content themselves with the personal reflections of one who has lost his faith, writing against the sanctity of marriage, and of another who has kept his faith, writing in favor of it. Both sides are shooting off firecrackers, making all the noise of an intellectual warfare and creating the illusion of conflict, but it is only a sham battle in which there are no casualties; there are plenty of explosions, but never an exploded argument.

The causes underlying this decline in the art of controversy are twofold: religious and philosophical. Modern religion has enunciated one great and fundamental dogma that is at the basis of all the other dogmas, and that is, that religion must be freed from dogmas. Creeds and confessions of faith are no longer the fashion; religious leaders have agreed not to disagree and those beliefs for which some of our ancestors would have died they have melted into a spineless Humanism. Like other Pilates they have turned their backs on the uniqueness of truth and have opened their arms wide to all the moods and fancies the hour might dictate. The passing of creeds and dogmas means the passing of controversies. Creeds and dogmas are social; prejudices are private. Believers bump into one another at a thousand different angles, but bigots keep out of one another's way, because prejudice is antisocial.

The second cause, which is philosophical, bases itself on that peculiar American philosophy called "Pragmatism," the aim of which is to prove that all proofs are useless. Hegel ... rationalized error; James ... de-rationalized truth. As a result, there has sprung up a disturbing indifference to truth, and a tendency to regard the useful as the true, and the impractical as the false. The man who can make up his mind when proofs are presented to him is looked upon as a bigot, and the man who ignores proofs and the search for truth is looked upon as broadminded and tolerant. Another evidence of this same disrespect for rational foundations is the general readiness of the modern mind to which it is couched, or because of the popularity of the

one who says it, rather than for the reasons behind the statement. ... To some minds, of course, the startling will always appear to be the profound. It is easier to get the attention of the press when one says, as Ibsen did, that "two and two make five," than to be orthodox and say that two and two make four.<sup>6</sup>

We live in a risk-averse, state educated, know-nothing, indoctrinated, propagandized, amoral society in which fear has become a virtue; Christ's frequent admonition to "be not afraid" has been turned on its head, thus, it is rewritten, "Be afraid, be very afraid. "It is now a virtue to be afraid."<sup>7</sup> This, quite naturally, applies to people in the abstract more so than to any specific individual. The more abstract a society, the less practical; the less informed, the duller the thinking; the less knowledgeable, the greater dependence on opinion; the more abject the ignorance, the more concretized and unyielding the fear. Fear of cancellation over any potential controversy begets zippered lips, mums the word. For the modern mind, controversy may seem as perplexing and misunderstood as argument, both producing an unpleasant connotation and the threat of cancellation, yet such discomfiture the result of now discarded traditions of philosophy, reason, argument, and dialogue. An argument, as understood by the thoroughly modern mind, is an exchange of divergent or opposing views, almost always the result of or resulting in heated, vitriolic diatribe or rant. There is little or no opportunity—nor any desire, for the matter—to utilize logic or reason, no consideration for reasoned argument or thoughtful dialogue. Yet, traditionally, argument has been defined as a reason or set of reasons given with the aim of persuading others that an action or idea is either right or wrong. This, then, is another concept no longer much in vogue, much less appreciated. Tradition has become archaic detritus, best left buried with the dead. Chesterton once said there was one thing that he never from his youth up had been able to understand, "where people got the idea that democracy was in some way opposed to tradition. It is obvious that tradition is only democracy extended through time. It is trusting to a consensus of common human voices rather than to some isolated or arbitrary record." He goes on to note that too often those who deny the obvious efficacy of tradition appeal to "the superiority of one expert against the awful authority of the mob. It is quite easy to see why a legend is treated, and ought to be

treated, more respectfully than a book of history. The legend is generally made by the majority of people in the village, who are sane. The book is generally written by the one man in the village who is mad."<sup>8</sup>

Those who urge against tradition that men in the past were ignorant may go and urge it at the Carlton Club, along with the statement that voters in the slums are ignorant. It will not do for us. If we attach great importance to the opinion of ordinary men in great unanimity when we are dealing with daily matters, there is no reason why we should disregard it when we are dealing with history or fable. Tradition may be defined as an extension of the franchise. Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our groom; tradition asks us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our father. I, at any rate, cannot separate the two ideas of democracy and tradition; it seems evident to me that they are the same idea. We will have the dead at our councils. The ancient Greeks voted by stones; these shall vote by tombstones. It is all quite regular and official, for most tombstones, like most ballot papers, are marked with a cross.<sup>9</sup>

What has become a banal overused catchphrase, "There is no 'I' in 'We'," is seldom received in the way it is meant or mentioned. It is the "I" which is so soon suppressed; more so, it is the meaning implicit in that "I" which has been of late so vehemently denied, it is the "We" upon which is portioned the weightier pound of flesh. Carl Jung once said, "The world will ask you who you are, and if you do not know, the world will tell you." Or, as Jordan Peterson, referring to Freud and Jung, argues, the ego (the individual "I") is often unbearably crushed between the id (nature in all its tyrannical power) and the superego (the sometimes-oppressive social order).<sup>10</sup>

Victor Frankl, a survivor of two of the deadliest, horrific concentration camps (Auschwitz, Dachau) was concerned less with the question of why most died than with the question of why anyone at all survived.

In the foreword to Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, Harold S. Kushner writes, "Terrible as it was, his experience in Auschwitz reinforced what was already one of his key ideas: Life is not primarily a quest for pleasure, as Freud believed, or a quest for power, as Alfred Adler taught, but a quest for meaning."

The greatest task for any person is to find meaning in his or her life. Frankl saw three possible sources for meaning: in work (doing something significant), in love (caring for another person), and in courage during difficult times. Suffering in and of itself is meaningless; we give our suffering meaning by the way in which we respond to it. At one point, Frankl writes that a person "may remain brave, dignified and unselfish, or in the bitter fight for self-preservation he may forget his human dignity and become no more than an animal."

One of Frankl's most enduring insights: "Forces beyond your control can take away everything you possess except one thing, your freedom to choose how you will respond to the situation. You cannot control what happens to you in life, but you can always control what you will feel and do about what happens to you." Frankl concludes with what I consider one of the most profound of religious dogma:

We have come to know Man as he really is. After all, man is that being who invented the gas chambers of Auschwitz; however, he is also that being who entered those gas chambers upright, with the Lord's Prayer or the *Shema Yisrael* on his lips.

From all this we may learn that there are two races of men in this world, but only these two—the "race" of the decent man and the "race" of the indecent man. Both are found everywhere; they penetrate into all groups of society. No group consists entirely of decent or indecent people. In this sense, no group is of "pure race"—and therefore one occasionally found a decent fellow among the camp guards.

Life in a concentration camp tore open the human soul and exposed its depths. Is it surprising that in those depths we again found only human qualities which in their very nature were a mixture of good and evil? The rift dividing good from evil, which goes through all human beings, reaches into the lowest depths and becomes apparent even on the bottom of the abyss which is laid open by the concentration camp.<sup>12</sup>

What ought to be intuitively obvious is the "I" absent in the abstract. "Abstract people are implicitly either equal

or at least randomly variable among individuals, which would amount to being equal as groups, where the groups are large enough for these random variations to preclude substantial *systematic* differences between groups containing millions of people. But actual flesh-and-blood people are remote from any such condition or ideal."

Inequalities of income, power, prestige, and other things have long preoccupied intellectuals, both as things to explain and things to control. The time and attention devoted to these inequalities might suggest that equality is so common or so automatic that its absence is what requires an explanation.

Various causes of this apparently inexplicable inequality of outcomes have been suggested—racism, sexism, or class bias, for example. But seldom is it considered necessary to demonstrate the automatic equality which makes an explanation of its absence necessary. Anyone who suggests that individuals—or, worse yet, groups—are unequal in behavior or performance risks being written off intellectually and denounced morally as biased or bigoted toward those considered less than equal in some respects. Yet the empirical case for equality of consequential characteristics ranges from meager to non-existent.

Once the focus shifts from abstract potential to empirical capabilities, the notion of equality is not merely unproven but unlikely to the point of being absurd. How could the people living in the Himalayas develop the seafaring skills of people living in ports around the Mediterranean? How could the Bedouins of the Sahara know as much about fishing as the Polynesians of the Pacific—or the Polynesians know as much about camels as the Bedouins? How could Eskimos be as proficient at growing tropical crops as the people of Hawaii or the Caribbean?

Such considerations are far more crucial for mundane knowledge than for academic knowledge. Ph.D.s in mathematics can have the same knowledge in Delhi as in Paris. However, in the world of mundane but consequential knowledge, how could an industrial revolution have originated in places which lack the key natural resources—iron ore and coal—and are too geographically inaccessible for those resources to be transported to them without prohibitive costs? The industrial revolution could hardly have begun in the Balkans or Hawaii, regardless of what people were living there—and *neither could the people in those places have developed the same industrial skills, habits and ways of life* at the same time as people in other places where the industrial revolution in fact began.

Differences among racial, national or other groups range from the momentous to the mundane, whether in the United States or in other countries around the world and down through the centuries.

Empirically observable skills have always been grossly unequal—which is to say, real people have never been even close to the equality of abstract people, when it comes to developed capabilities, as distinguished from abstract potential.<sup>13</sup>

As Thomas Sowell correctly notes, “There is no way, for example, that the patterns of economic and social life which originated and evolved in Europe could have originated among the indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere, where the horses that were central to everything from farming to transportation to warfare in Europe simply did not exist anywhere in the Western Hemisphere when the European invaders arrived and began transplanting horses across the Atlantic to the New World. ... Not only horses were lacking in the Western Hemisphere, neither were there oxen, which were common in both Europe and Asia.”

There were, in short, no such heavy-duty beasts of burden in the Western Hemisphere as existed on the vast Eurasian land mass, where most of the human race has lived throughout recorded history. The way of life in these different regions of the world had no basis on which to be the same—which is to say, there was no way for the skills and experiences of the races in these regions to be the same.

The wheel has often been regarded as fundamental to economic and social advances but, for most of the history of the human race, the value of wheeled vehicles depended to a great extent on the presence of draft animals to pull those vehicles—and there were no wheeled vehicles in any of the economies of the Western Hemisphere when the Europeans arrived. The Mayans had invented wheels, but they were used on children’s toys, so the issue was not the intellectual capacity to invent the wheel but the circumstances that make wheels more valuable or less valuable. Clearly, the way of life among the indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere could not have been the same as that on the Eurasian land mass when there were neither wheeled vehicles nor draft animals in the Western Hemisphere when the Europeans and their animals arrived.

Geographic differences between Europe and sub-Saharan Africa are even more numerous and more drastic than those between Europe and the Western Hemisphere. In addition to severe geographic limita-

tions on the production of wealth, due to deficiencies of soil and unreliable rainfall patterns, sub-Saharan Africa has had severe geographic restrictions on communications among its fragmented peoples, and of these peoples with the peoples of the outside world, due to a dearth of navigable waterways within sub-Saharan Africa, as well as a dearth of natural harbors, the difficulties of maintaining draft animals because of the disease-carrying tsetse fly, and the vast barrier of the Saharan desert, which is several times the size of any other desert in the world, and as large as the 48 contiguous states of the United States. With an expanse of sand that size standing between them and the outside world to the north, and with three oceans on the other sides of them, the peoples of sub-Saharan Africa have long been among the most insulated from the rest of the human race.

Isolated peoples have for centuries lagged behind others, whether the isolation has been caused by mountains, deserts, or islands far from the nearest mainland. Eminent French historian Fernand Braudel pointed out, “mountain life persistently lagged behind the plain.” The inhabitants of the Canary Islands were people of a Caucasian race who were living at a stone-age level when they were discovered by the Spaniards in the fifteenth century. On the other side of the world, the similarly isolated Australian aborigines similarly lagged far behind the progress of the outside world. Sub-Saharan Africans have been part of a worldwide pattern of isolated peoples lagging behind others in technology, organization and in other ways.

In addition to having many geographic barriers limiting their access to the peoples and cultures of other lands, sub-Saharan Africans also faced internal geographic barriers limiting their access to each other. The resulting internal cultural fragmentation is indicated by the fact that, while Africans are only about ten percent of the world’s population, they have one-third of the world’s languages.<sup>14</sup>

What Sowell says is true in the truest historical sense: that for much of the intertemporal world, it has been found most productive to place the horse before the cart, which to individual persons *not* intertemporal abstractions the word *horsepower* is quite easily understood. Post-modern intellectuals, i.e., self-proclaimed experts—who, because they are so-called, insist that intertemporal abstractions have remained unchangeable through time immemorable, could not discern the difference between a horse and a horseless carriage—having no transportation expertise beyond a passing disinterest, are quite comfortable describing intertemporal transportation as the cart

powering the nonexistent horse. The exponential growth of such “experts” who lack any observable applicable expertise has severely outpaced the spread of the Wuhan virus. They are, should one bother to examine their self-proclaimed *bona fides*, as genuine as medieval alchemists and as much the failure at propounding the universal elixir; they submit they have the answer without the smallest curiosity of knowing the question. After all, they are the ex-spurts, which always counts for everything.

One book, which I have long ago worn out the pages through uncountable readings, *The Past Through Tomorrow*, by Robert Heinlein, has as its main character, Lazarus Long, blessed, or cursed, with long-life (over 2,000 years.) Though there are many memorable quotes attributed to Lazarus Long, one of my favorites seems especially apropos: “A committee is a life form with six or more legs and no brain.” I would add only that a committee or panel of “experts” is a lifeless, brainless form, however many legs of no importance. I am also fond of Mark Twain, who once asked, “How can you tell when a politician is lying? When its lips are moving.” The same can well be said for other public figures (so-called experts including public health officials, liberal theologians, religious leaders, social scientists, pollsters, mainstream media talking heads, political activists, etc.) far too glib of the tongue on matters they know not nor care nothing of what they speak. The guiding principle of these “experts” is to always pronounce intertemporal abstractions, never letting facts, reality, or truth stopper their flatulence. Though there are far too many distractions to commend, let me conclude with, first, a few personal observations, and then, deal with the masked elephant now a rather annoying obstacle to a meaningful life.

For some time now, though more often now than then, discomfiting encounters have tremored my spirit. Each, though not of the same meter, has shared a common trait, one that I can only describe as willful blindness. “Willful blindness ...is a terrible temptation, as it allows for the sequestration into the future the trouble we could face today. That would be fine if trouble did not compound, like interest—but we all know that it does.”<sup>15</sup> It is manifest by a “what I do not know cannot kill me” attitude, further exacerbated by a willingness to blindly follow the blind without ever pausing to question why. It is

an unwillingness to step outside that comfort zone, to dare to meet the challenges and sacrifices that life inevitably presents.

It is by no means a good thing to be the oldest person at the frat party. It is desperation, masquerading as cool rebelliousness—and there is a touchy despondence and arrogance that goes along with it. It smacks of Neverland. In the same manner, the attractive potential of a directionless but talented twenty-five-year-old starts to look hopeless and pathetic at thirty, and downright past its expiration date at forty. You must sacrifice something of your manifold potential in exchange for something real in life. Aim at something. Discipline yourself. Or suffer the consequence. And what is that consequence? All the suffering of life, with none of the meaning. Is there a better description of hell?<sup>16</sup>

I have often wondered why so many avoid the unavoidable necessity to face the unpleasant, the difficult, the unknown, to refuse to suffer “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.” I suppose, for some, the aphorism, “curiosity killed the cat” is a measure of their caution, but I am not a cat and curiosity has always irresistibly beckoned me, which is why, perhaps, I have most often followed the path of greater struggle for “nothing ventured, nothing gained.” Opportunity never knocks for those who merely wait to be handed an unearned inheritance; you cannot win the lottery most predictably if you fail to purchase a ticket.

The world is full of hidden dangers and obstacles—and opportunities. Leaving everything hidden in the fog because you are afraid of the danger you may find there will be of little help when fate forces you to run headlong toward what you have refused to see. Impaling yourself on sharp branches, stumbling over boulders, and rushing by places of sanctuary, you will finally refuse to admit you could have burned away the haze with the bright light of your consciousness, had you not hidden it under a bushel. Then you will come to curse man, reality, and God himself for producing such an impenetrable maze of impediments and barriers. Corruption will beckon to you, led as you increasingly will be by dark, unexamined motivations—bred by failure, amplified by frustration—viciously culminating in the resentful belief that those who have transgressed against you are getting from you exactly what they deserve. This attitude and the actions and inactions it will inevitably produce will impoverish your life, your community, your nation, and the world. This will in turn impoverish Being itself (and that will be exactly what

they deserve. This attitude and the actions and inactions it will inevitably produce will impoverish your life, your community, your nation, and the world. This will in turn impoverish Being itself (and that will be exactly what your darkest unexamined motivations desire).

With careful searching, with careful attention, you might tip the balance toward opportunity and against obstacle sufficiently so that life is clearly worth living, despite its fragility and suffering. If you truly wanted, perhaps you would receive, if you asked. If you truly sought, perhaps you would find what you seek. If you knocked, truly wanting to enter, perhaps the door would open. But there will be times in your life when it will take everything you have to face what is in front of you, instead of hiding away from a truth so terrible that the only thing worse is the falsehood you long to replace it with.

Do not hide unwanted things in the fog.<sup>17</sup>

What Peterson speaks of relates directly to one person with whom I have had more than a few terse conversations. At the age of twenty, she is not unlike so many young people these days, —though such an outlook on life is not limited to youth and inexperience—floating through life with neither aim nor purpose, unbothered by anything beyond the moment. Unemployed, a listless dropout from college, followed by a six-month layover at a trade school “learning” what she did not want to do; tuition, rent, car, insurance, living expenses provided by indulgent parents unwilling to say “no.” Her days are spent with her friends or, more frequently, in solitary confinement on social media. When asked what she plans to do with her life, her guess is to perhaps, maybe, possibly, probably, go back to community college, get a business degree so she can start a business. What business? She has no idea. It never dawns on her that college is not as important or even necessary as is hard work, experience, drive, goals, financial resources, and a willingness to struggle and possibly fail without the safety net of deep-pocket government largesse or enabling parents. The ancient Roman gladiator toast, “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die” comes to mind whenever I think of her. Tragic.

There are others, older perhaps though by every measure no wiser, still floating aimlessly, satisfied with nothing in particular as long as there is cream for the coffee, beer in the icebox, and a toothbrush. Their world is small, well-insulated, and secure; the world is their oyster,

most often an unremarked mollusk unoccupied by a pearl courting a grain of sand. There is neither door nor window, no entrance, no exit. That mollusks are abundant and common is of little notice; what is of utmost importance is the tightness of the seal. You cannot argue with a mollusk or a jackass any more than you can remove a leopard’s spots or enjoy a nice glass of hemlock chased with a jigger of cyanide. Facts don’t matter and figures don’t figure, it is all in how you feel or what you have been told you must believe. Imagine if you will, in your compassion and concern for the poor mollusk, how uncomfortable it must feel hosting not a pearl of great price but an ungainly elephant eating bon bons and peanuts with no indication nor inclination to pack up and pachyderm out of such a small, small world.

Nowhere has the overbearing weight of the overgrown pachyderm been felt than with the manufactured mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the onset, the constant refrain from medical professionals, experts of every tilt and fancy, politicians, media propagandists, education and religious leaders have led us to believe that “significant restrictions in the form of lockdowns, social distancing, quarantines, and mask mandates are necessary for the ‘common good’.” Yet, looking at data from all disciplines, including the physiological, psychological, and psychosocial, calls into question whether the common good has truly been served by these restrictions. In all that has taken place, in all that we have observed, one has to ask whether the real pandemic was truly virus-induced or human-imposed.” Throughout this period of increasing government overreach and suppression of basic human rights, one thing has been studiously avoided: putting it all into proper context.

Realistically speaking, there remains plenty of confusion pertaining to the real number of deaths associated with COVID-19, and part of this stems from the ambiguous definitions applied by authorities such as the WHO (WHO, 2020) or CDC (National Center for Health Statistics, 2020). However, the WHO and CDC are clearly not solely to blame for the confusion, given how some deaths have been attributed to COVID-19 despite a clear lack of connection.

One noticeable source of confusion is the persistent choice of members of the media and of politicians to speak in terms of raw counts rather than percentages.

Raw number counts mean very little, given that they can only be understood appropriately if a context is provided. For example, claiming that 100 people died means different things if you are addressing a small rural community with a population of 1,200 or a city of 120,000. In the context of other diseases, and not taking the intentionally ambiguous definitions mentioned above into consideration, COVID-19-related deaths have not, realistically speaking, been any more alarming than any other global disease. It therefore appears that news outlets and politicians present the raw numbers not to aid understanding, since it does not, but to put forward a more dramatic view of the disease.

In 2020, globally, 1.8 million people were reported to have died of COVID-19. However, global deaths from diarrheal disease was reported to be 1.7 million in 2016 (Troeger et al., 2018), while cardiovascular diseases claim 17.9 million lives a year. Last year abortion claimed 42.7 million lives while the first ten days of January 2021 alone claimed the life of 1.1 million unborn children globally.

Firstly, from a statistical perspective ..., given the low mortality rates (measured as Infection Fatality Ratio (IFR)), given the prognosis of most of those infected, given the abundance of potential methods of minimizing death in those infected, and given the potential common sense and non-stressful methods for minimizing the spread of infection, the measures imposed are disproportional to what the disease has shown itself to be.

Secondly, in medicine, as in life, the goal is always to reduce the risk/benefit ratio. This concept has been totally abandoned in the case of COVID-19, biasing the measures towards the risk, and ignoring the harms caused by the measures themselves.

Lockdowns, social distancing, quarantines, and mask mandates have clearly negatively impacted the dignity of the human person. Sadly, those responsible for this assault include not just the state, but also many within the Church, which in most cases appears to be a willing enforcer of the mandates. Even sadder is what appears to be the misuse and abuse of fundamental principles of Christian life. In some cases, this has taken the form of seeking to impose compliance to the mandates through fear, misinformation, and dramatization, sometimes of personal events that may or may not reflect the general reality of COVID-19, while appearing to preach charity or the principle of the common good.

Such misrepresentation of the common good ignores human history: those who intend evil have often twisted Christian principles to implement their evil aims. This has been evident in pro-abortion "Catholic" politicians, for example, and in words of Karl Marx himself,

who states in the Communist Manifesto, "Nothing is easier than to give Christian asceticism a Socialist tinge. Has not Christianity declaimed against private property, against marriage, against the State? Has it not preached in the place of these, charity and poverty, celibacy and mortification of the flesh, monastic life and Mother Church?" (Marx and Engels, 2003)

One key aspect that seems to be forgotten in these efforts is that the common good is much greater than the individual and the few people that surround each individual. It considers "the good of **all people and of the whole person**" [my emphasis] (Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, 2006, para. 165). Thus, the common good implies that we consider the reality of what is best for society's health.<sup>18</sup>

It is this final thought which must be considered and, dare I say, reconsidered often and with the gravity it deserves: "the good of all people and of the whole person," which is more often than not misconstrued or deliberately ignored. "All people" should never be considered in the abstract, but singularly as whole persons, individually, each a unique human being created equal among equals by God in his image and likeness. I cannot help but return to that salient thought from a survivor of man's most desperate hour, that hour when the evil of man's inhumanity toward man was on ghastly display: "From all this we may learn that there are two races of men in this world, but only these two—the 'race' of the decent man and the 'race' of the indecent man. Both are found everywhere; they penetrate into all groups of society. No group consists entirely of decent or indecent people."

In "*Before I Formed You in the Womb I Knew You: A Pastoral Letter on the Human Dignity of the Unborn, Holy Communion, and Catholics in Public Life*", Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone writes, "This is especially a time for us Catholics, whose faith calls us to advocate for the universal good of a consistent ethic of life, in every stage and in every condition, to call our country back to respect for human life."

Abortion is the axe laid to the roots of the tree of human rights: when our culture encourages the violation of life at its youngest and most vulnerable condition, other ethical norms cannot stand for long. ... I begin with principles of law and science because abortion is not a "Christian" or "Catholic" issue: the dignity of the human person is a value that is, or should be, affirmed by

us. all.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men . . . are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” With these stirring words, the Declaration of Independence affirms that fundamental human rights do not find their source in any individual, court, or government: fundamental human rights are not bestowed, they are inherent and must be acknowledged as such. These truths are self-evident because they emerge from the very nature of what it is to be human, and they are accessible to reason alone. The assertion of these unalienable rights in our Declaration of Independence is not a matter of religious doctrine, but rather it flows from the same natural law basis as the answers to other moral questions upon which our laws are based: forbidding stealing, lying, cheating, racial discrimination, homicide, and so forth. Furthermore, these inherent rights, knowable by human reason, are presented in the Declaration with a definite order of priority. Thus, one’s right to the pursuit of happiness is limited when it deprives another of the right to liberty or life; one’s right to liberty is limited when it deprives another of the right to life. The right to life itself is the foundation of all other rights. Without protection of the right to life, no other talk of rights makes sense.

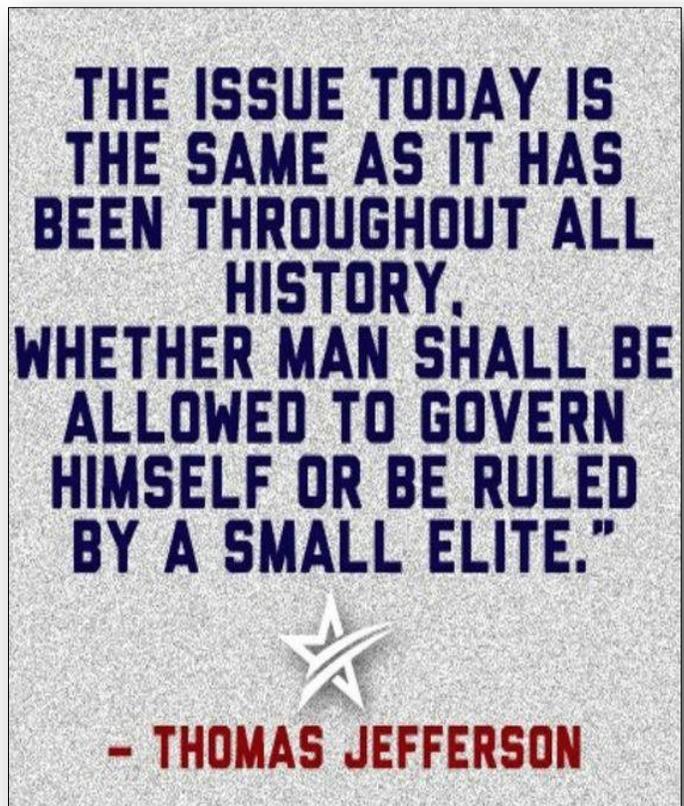
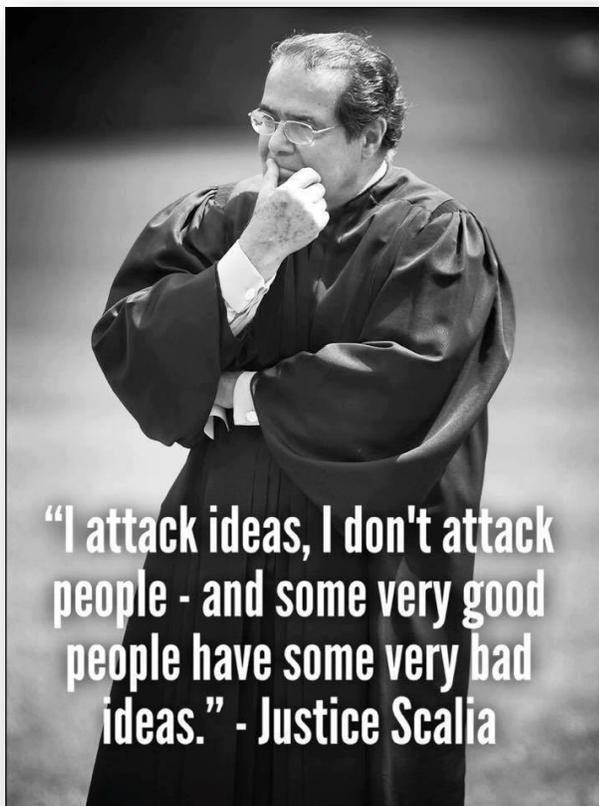
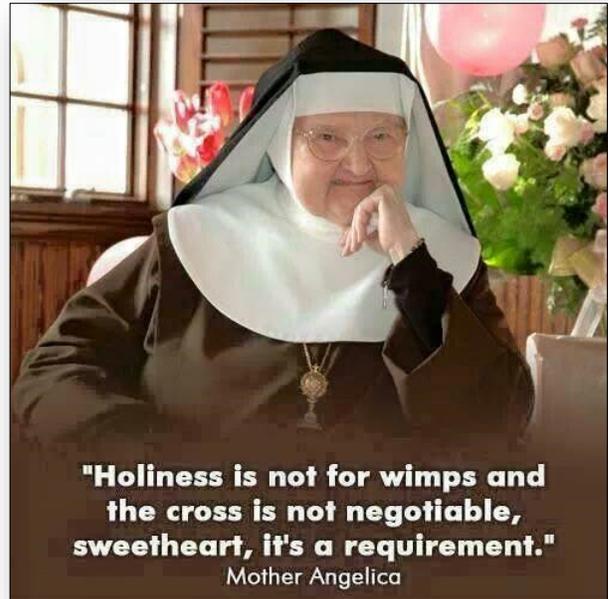
Who possesses the right to life? The natural law teaches, and the Declaration proclaims, that every human being possesses the dignity that forms the foundation of these unalienable rights. Proponents of abortion raise a chorus of theoretical questions about “what constitutes human life? When does it begin?” The answer from science is clear: a new, genetically-distinct human life begins at conception, defined as fertilization: “Development of the embryo begins at Stage 1 when a sperm fertilizes an oocyte and together they form a zygote.” Because an embryo is a unique and developing human organism, it follows that she or he possesses an inherent right to life from the moment of conception. Thus, the violent invasion of the act of abortion ends a human life. Likewise, those contraceptives which prevent the implantation of the embryo are in fact abortifacients that kill an innocent, growing human being.

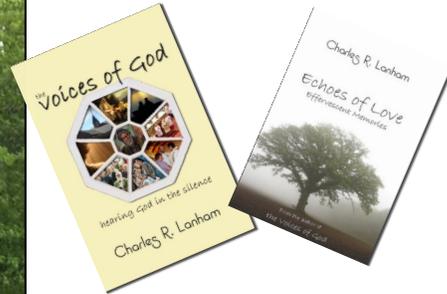
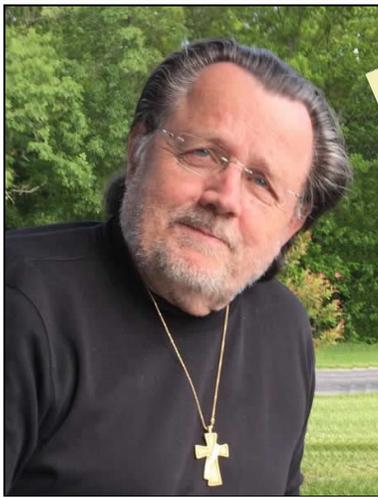
No matter the means or method, age, gender, or ethnicity, the killing of a human being is inherently, morally, and ethically wrong. “You shall not kill” has long been etched in stone; the fifth commandment does not equivocate or permit the exercise of human judgment. It is intrinsically evil to deny or destroy the virtue of life; this includes the taking of innocent unborn life in the womb as

well as simply denying the human person his or her value and dignity endowed by the Creator, and the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Virtue in the abstract is no virtue; intertemporal abstractions are an exercise *reductio ad absurdum*.

1. **Intertemporal** (Adjective) Describing any relationship between past, present and future events or conditions.
2. Thomas Sowell, *“Intellectuals and Society”* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 126-127.
3. **Order** is explored territory. We are in order when the actions we deem appropriate produce the results we aim at. We regard such outcomes positively, indicating as they do, first, that we have moved closer to what we desire, and second, that our theory about how the world works remains acceptably accurate. Nonetheless, all states of order, no matter how secure and comfortable, have their flaws. Our knowledge of how to act in the world remains eternally incomplete—partly because of our profound ignorance of the vast unknown, partly because of our willful blindness, and partly because the world continues, in its entropic manner, to transform itself unexpectedly. Furthermore, the order we strive to impose on the world can rigidify as a consequence of ill-advised attempts to eradicate from consideration all that is unknown. When such attempts go too far, totalitarianism threatens, driven by the desire to exercise full control where such control is not possible, even in principle. This means risking a dangerous restriction of all the psychological and social changes necessary to maintain adaptation to the ever-changing world. And so we find ourselves inescapably faced with the need to move beyond order, into its opposite: chaos.  
**Dr. Jordan B. Peterson, *Beyond Order* (p. xxiv).**
4. **Doublespeak** (noun): deliberately euphemistic, ambiguous, or obscure language. Doublespeak is language that deliberately obscures, disguises, distorts, or reverses the meaning of words. Doublespeak may take the form of euphemisms (e.g., “downsizing” for layoffs and “servicing the target” for bombing), in which case it is primarily meant to make the truth sound more palatable. It may also refer to intentional ambiguity in language or to actual inversions of meaning. In such cases, doublespeak disguises the nature of the truth.
5. George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, “The Ministry of Truth, which concerned itself with news, entertainment, education and the fine arts. The ministry of Peace, which concerned itself with war. The Ministry of Love, which maintained law and order. And the Ministry of Plenty, which was responsible for economic affairs.”
6. Fulton J. Sheen, *“Old Errors and New Labels”* (New York: Century Co., 1931).
7. Heather MacDonald in an interview, April 2021.

8. Chesterton was, if nothing but, a brilliant sarcastic genius. Those who are unappreciative of his genius, who are somewhat lacking in comprehending such wit will, no doubt, fail to find the sarcasm in what he wrote. Personally, I must submit to being the one man who is mad for I have written just such a book.
9. G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1908), 39-40.
10. Dr. Jordan B. Peterson, *Beyond Order: 12 More Rules for Life* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2021), 3.
11. Dr. Jordan B. Peterson, *Beyond Order*, XXVI.
12. Victor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959, 1984, 1992, 2006).
13. Thomas Sowell, *Intellectuals and Society*, 128-29.
14. Thomas Sowell, *Intellectuals and Society*, 120-21.
15. Dr. Jordan B. Peterson, *Beyond Order*, 119.
16. Dr. Jordan B. Peterson, *Beyond Order*, 116.
17. Dr. Jordan B. Peterson, *Beyond Order*, 107-8.
18. Stephen Sammut, Ph.D., *"Do COVID-19 Restrictions Serve the Common Good?"*, Crisis Magazine, March 10, 2021.
19. Salvatore Joseph Cordileone, Archbishop of San Francisco, *"Before I Formed You in the Womb I Knew You: A Pastoral Letter on the Human Dignity of the Unborn, Holy Communion, and Catholics in Public Life."*, May 1, 2021, Memorial of Saint Joseph the Worker.





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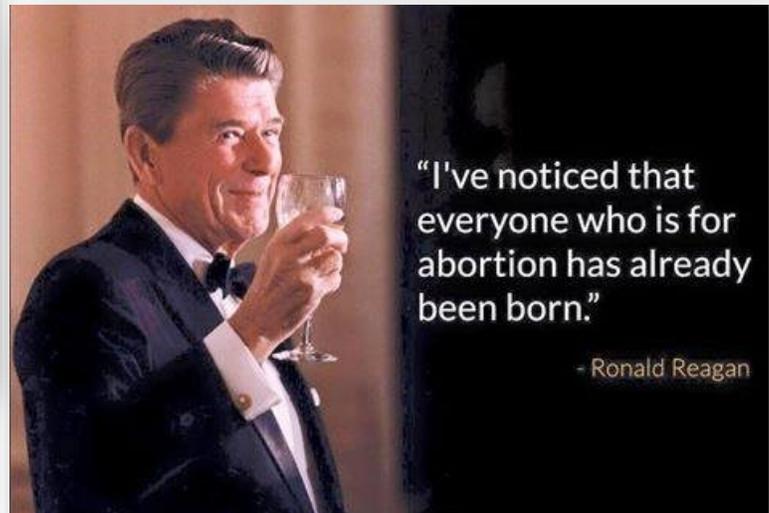
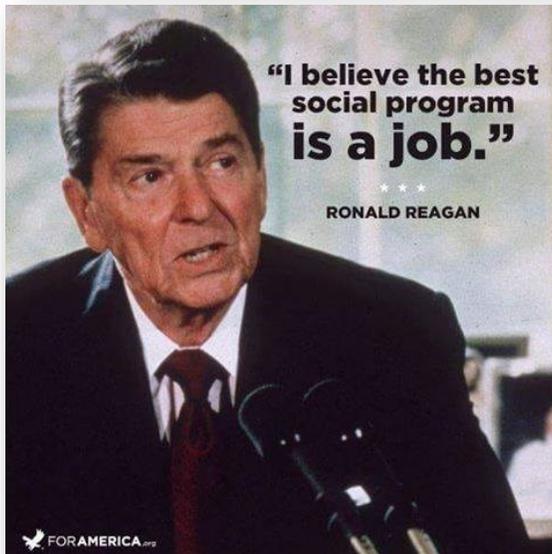


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**Deacon Chuck Lanham** is a Catholic author, columnist, speaker, theologian and philosopher, a jack-of-all-trades like his father (though far from a master of anything) and a servant of God. He is the author of **The Voices of God: Hearing God in the Silence**, **Echoes of Love: Effervescent Memories** and has written over 500 essays on religion, faith, morality, theology, and philosophy.

Deacon Chuck can be contacted thru email at

**deacon.chuck@deaconcorner.org**



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