

Pandemic Edition: What is the Value of a Human Life?

By David Lee Burris

When I was a little boy, I loved war stories and read much of military history. My dad's older brothers all fought in World War Two against Germany and Japan. I still remember the Saturday night conversations about how wars were fought different in strategy based upon shared beliefs about the value of an individual human life. In other words, if there is no human worth in "stand alone value" – wars of attrition are especially futile. After the Korean War, having fought both the Japanese and the Chinese Communists, General MacArthur warned American politicians that they should seriously reconsider before fighting another land war in Asia.

Conversely, the cannon fodder of carnal warfare questions the value of human life by asking: "What is the per capita expense of a human death?" The relative kill cost in asymmetric versus attritional warfare provides a revealing answer. The price per enemy death in U.S. dollars historically ranged from \$0.75 in Imperial Rome, \$3,000 during the Napoleonic Era, \$21,000 during World War One, \$200,000 during World War Two, and can only be measured by the millions per hour beginning with the Vietnam War.

In other words, while in the non-developed world life is cheap – in the developed world we experience the opposite extreme – we are often worth more in death than in life.

Naturalist View: Individual Human Life is a “Sum of its Parts”

Nobel Scientists Answer the Question: **“What is Life?”**

“Life may be recognized in bodies which have particular characteristics not seen in the world of the dead. First, there is definite structure or organization – there is the ability of the organisms to metabolize, to reproduce others like themselves and also their response to stimulation.” - Alexander Oparin

“Life is any population of entities with the properties of multiplication, heredity, and variation.” – John Maynard Smith

“Life is a partial, continuous, progressive, multiform, and conditionally interactive, self-realization of the potentialities of atomic electron states.” – John D. Bernal

“Life is an expected, collectively self-organized property of catalytic polymers.” – Stuart Kauffman

A Human Body Analyzed According to Chemical Composition:

Almost 99% of the mass of the human body is made up of six elements: oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium, and phosphorus. Only about 0.85% is composed of another five elements: potassium, sulfur, sodium, chlorine, and magnesium. All 11 are necessary for life. The remaining elements are trace elements, of which more than a dozen are thought on the basis of good evidence to be necessary for life. All of the mass of the trace elements put together (less than 10 grams for a

human body) do not add up to the body mass of magnesium, the least common of the 11 non-trace elements. The elemental worth of a typical human body is less than one U.S. dollar – much less than even one quart in the elemental composition of human blood.

This naturalistic perspective of human worth combined with the non-humanist collectivist approach of statist societies has in consequence - produced together - the worse horrors of the last century - especially racial motivated genocides and ethnic cleansing. Moreover, the continuing infant genocide of the unborn through abortions of convenience can be directly correlated to this naturalistic perspective of human worth.

The rationale behind this naturalistic perspective of human worth and its “sum of parts” calculation has been amorally extended in argument to its “natural” conclusion – justifying in defense - human organs traded as international currency; Even excusing to the extent this practice provides of perverse incentive for statist societies to trivialize capital punishment - as a means to an end – in order to organ harvest of their incarcerated prisoners.

Whereas, while inhumane statist societies are known to even cost out criminal executions to the prisoner’s family because the autocrats don’t believe killing the condemned worth the price of a single bullet – in more humanistic developed societies – at least in principle – there is similar ranking of relative human worth. For example, in western culture funeral eulogies and newspaper obituaries address local loss, community cost, and overall impact of an individual death. At the opposite extreme, free market forces are allowed to couple a monetary value to the utility value of an individual human corpse. Post-

mortem quantitative pricing of the relative worth of different individuals at death can be demonstrated in their correlation with insurance industry calculations of actuarial formulation, survivor litigation payouts, organ transplant profitability, and body cadaver research.

Battlefield & Pandemic Algorithms Triage By Relative Worth

Triage Ranks in both Pre-Hospital Ambulance Dispatch & Hospital Emergency Entry those that are to be resuscitated or that will qualify for urgent and immediate care. The field of *Triage Ethics* addresses the many moral dilemmas attached to such critical life and death decision-making.

From the experience of those that have had to make these tough decisions consequential of life – the crisis criteria only expedite effectively if those that are triage trained remain objective and dispassionate in providing access to limited resources. The triage guidelines for making these more complicated choices in an emergency or mass disaster situation apply a utility ideology and methodology. This utility algorithm intervenes in prioritizing years and quality of years over and above the singularity of lives. With training and discipline triage decision-making - as long as it remains impersonal - performs in dispassionate efficiency choosing between the lawful and the criminal or the productive giving members of society versus the idle takers or even the future promise of a school child versus the past accomplishments of an elderly retiree. However, studies have shown that the decision criteria lose their methodological effectiveness when the victim is a friend or

relative. Given such an occurrence, the triage discipline along with its utility ideology are invalidated; Triage checkoff criteria are no longer functional when the decision becomes personal.

In my opinion, such a disaster decision-making responsibility would be difficult – if not to impossible - for a Christian to fulfill. Christians should not distinguish or be “a respecter of persons” (Acts 10: 34) based on what someone possesses or because of what another does for a living. Christians should not care for who a person is or who a person knows according to this world. Christians should see the entire human race through the eyes of God – everyone of equal value in His sight!

Wholistic Synergy: An Individual Greater Than Traits Summary

A person’s replacement value is unique. A person’s neighborly value is needful. A person’s friendship value is special. A person’s family unit value is crucial.

I am not who I think I am...

I am not even who you think I am...

I am who God says I am!

You are not who you think you are...

You are not who I think you are...

You are who God says you are!

The Right Question: What is the Value of a Human Soul?

We are multi-dimensionally larger than the total sum of our parts. **We have a soul!** In the perspective of scripture, we are spiritual creatures having a human experience. For our “Book Value” we turn to the Bible which reveals our worth by what price for which it was paid. Our ransom price as missing children was paid in parental blood.

We're Priceless in God's Sight & He Can't Mass Casualty Triage:

HE VALUES US EQUALLY – ACTS 10: 34

HE KNOWS US PERSONAL – JEREMIAH 1: 5

HE LOVES US... SAVES ALL & SAVES LIVES – JOHN 3: 16

“For God **so loved** the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him **should not perish** but have **everlasting life.**”