

# How Do I Choose Whom to Vote For?

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In writing this first and hopefully last political entry, I hope to help others who struggle with the question “How should I vote?” or “How do I choose whom to vote for?” If nothing else, I hope it will contribute more depth to the often polemical and superficial discussion that is our political milieu.

First off, let me say that sometimes I wish I could be a Democrat. Democrats have a great story. They work for the average Joe. They want to make sure that the poor are taken care of. They want social justice. That’s admirable; that’s something I can get behind.

For my part, I consider it part of my moral obligation to help the poor and those less fortunate. As a Catholic (or even just a Christian for that matter), it is pretty clear that caring for the poor is a basic moral principle for us, and what this means has been elaborated on and acted on throughout our two thousand year history. It has taken different forms as the cultural, political, and religious landscape has changed, but it was and remains a core concern for the devout Christian.

## Fundamental Principles

By the same token, it’s also my Catholic/Christian philosophy that informs how I think about other social and political issues, including those far more fundamental, those that are the logical source of an active care for the less fortunate.

You see there are those, both antagonistic and sympathetic, who suggest that a concern for others, a care for the less fortunate, should trump these more fundamental concerns. For some, this argument is purely rhetorical, but there are surely those who honestly believe in this perspective. Some of these people are close to me, and I don’t doubt their sincerity.

The problem is, I think, that there is a failure to understand the connection between these more fundamental issues and governments’ role in them, to understand the pragmatic importance of these issues, or, in some cases, to even properly value them. The fundamental issues I am referring to are those of life, first, and family, second.

## Why Life Matters

Let’s begin with the first principle of life. Even our founding fathers saw the primacy and importance of this topic. Our *Declaration of Independence* begins with what they claim are self-evident truths, a list of unalienable rights, the first of which is the right to life. These are there to introduce the primary principles for which government is established and, in particular, our own here in these United States.

It doesn’t take a religious perspective to appreciate the fundamental importance of life, and it is not a logical jump to understand that government, which should be directed toward the common (i.e., shared, social) good, should set as its number one goal to protect the lives of its citizens--all of them, especially those who cannot, for whatever reason, protect their own lives.

It is from this fundamental principle of life that the other principles and rights both logically and practically flow. And therefore there is an implicit subjugation of these other rights (such as liberty and the pursuit of happiness) to the right of life. It follows then that a government can, in order to ensure the most fundamental right to life, restrict these others. I would suggest that it also follows that if a government inverts this order, it is inherently disordered and consequently needs to be corrected.

For if a government cannot duly ensure the right to life, all of these other rights and, certainly, privileges are in no uncertain jeopardy. We must protect life first and foremost and, if necessary, at the cost of other admirable ideals such as liberty (or “choice” as some put it) as well as concern for the economic welfare that enables the pursuit of happiness (or property, as John Locke would have it).

This is why I think that life issues must always trump economic issues (including care for the poor). If we don't get life right, we have to seriously question both our priorities and maybe even our ability to properly think about care for the less fortunate.

Similarly, **we have to vote for candidates who have these priorities straight, those who understand the primordial and fundamental importance of life and government's principle obligation to protect it in all forms, from conception through to its natural end.** Because if they don't then they--just like a government that does not prioritize life over liberty and other rights and privileges--are unfortunately and seriously disordered. However well intentioned they may be, we must seriously question their judgment and their ability to govern wisely if they do not understand the government's priority to protect life.

### **Why Family Matters**

Let us turn now to our second fundamental issue--the family. It is often said that the family is the fundamental building block of society. This is true both in terms of societal stability but also in terms of the fundamental concerns of the perpetuation of a society. It is through the family that the future members of society come, and, therefore, it is through the family that the future of the society itself is perpetuated.

Any human society that values itself will inherently value its own perpetuation; it is essentially societal self-preservation that we are talking about. From our earliest human origins, the family has been the normative means for the perpetuation of society in all its forms. It is the most tried and true (and logical) way for this self-preservation to occur.

Similarly, the normative form of the family has been that of a man and woman. The simplest reason for this is, if for no other reason, due to our biological situation, our needing male and female to engender new lives. And given the very real (even biological) personal investment in the creation of these new lives, it follows naturally that those who engender them will normally be those who care for and raise them. This is of course ignoring the psychological and, dare I say, metaphysical factors that inform us that the biological parents should normally be the ones who take on the roles of mother and father.

(I hate to seem overly simplistic here, but we are talking about fundamental human principles. It seems to me that so many of us must take them for granted, so I think it is worth verbalizing them to help us think about this stuff more clearly.)

Any society worth its salt will do what it can to strengthen the normative family because it is, simply put, in the society's best interests to do so. And we see this played out in those governments (like our own) that do create formal structures to support it, such as marriage and the many privileges given to spouses and parents in our laws. These privileges (not rights!) are there to support the normative family in hopes that it will further the perpetuation of the society and, by extension, our common good.

Supporting the normative family (like life, though secondary to it) is a fundamental issue for government. Supporting and reinforcing this primordial social unit through which the future of society is ensured should therefore supersede other concerns. And ensuring its elemental structure--a man and a woman having children and responsibly raising their children--must supersede concerns about economic welfare because in the same way that life logically precedes the exercise of other rights and privileges, so the structure of the fundamental family unit logically precedes concerns about other social conditions.

It is unfortunate that we have to make this priority explicit—because we should absolutely care about ensuring economic welfare—but this fundamental family unit structure is in question in our society today and is being pressed by many who recognize clearly the secondary concern of economic welfare. Sadly, we must first deal with this question and settle it correctly, in a way that ensures the fundamental structure of our society and consequently its perpetuation. Only then should we turn our attention to the very important concern of economic welfare.

Again, since the essential function of government is to secure the enduring, common good of the society it serves, and since any society that values itself will preserve itself by ensuring and protecting the normative family consisting of a man and a woman having and responsibly raising the future members of society, it follows that **we should elect members of government who will likewise work to ensure and support this fundamental unit of society**. Right now, while the nature of the family is in question in our society, we must more than ever work to elect those who share this urgent priority to finally settle this issue in a way that is in the long-term best interests of our society. We cannot redefine and dilute the elemental structure of the family, however well meaning we may be, without endangering the long-term good of our society.

### **Have Your Principles and Welfare, Too**

Now, I started out by saying that there are times when I wish I could be a Democrat. I said this because they do have many admirable ideals, chief among which is care for the less fortunate. But the thing is, unlike ensuring that our government protects the fundamental principles of life and family, the impact of which can only most fully be realized through government, care for the poor can be (and most often is) attended by charitable works that are not governmental in nature.

In other words, you don't have to work through the government to care for the poor, but you do have to work through the government to ensure the right to life and the fundamental character

of the family. Therefore, if we must, sadly, choose between a government that protects life and the family and one that is focused on economic good, it seems clear to me that we must opt for a the former.

The good news is that in doing so, we don't have to leave care for the less fortunate behind. In fact, I would suggest that a more effective and laudable approach would be for us to make personal, active investment in the care of the less fortunate. Give to charities. Volunteer in charitable works. Give to those who ask and even to those who do not. It is much more blessed and, indeed, enjoyable to choose to give than to be forced to give by your government. And if we all did it, we wouldn't need to try to make each other do so through the government.

So that's how I think about choosing whom to vote for. I hope that there are those who will find some help here, and if nothing else, I hope it will help those who are of a differing persuasion to see that despite the rhetoric, there are good reasons to make issues like [abortion](#), euthanasia, [marriage](#), and [family](#) deciding factors in deciding how to vote. These issues are fundamental and primary for society and government and will therefore have a much more profound and long lasting impact than other, albeit important, issues like foreign policy, economic policy, and national security. It's not a matter of laziness or simplemindedness; it is a matter of principles.

Peace be with you all.

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