

# OPINION & EDITORIAL

## BUCKS COUNTY HERALD

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Mailing Address:  
Bucks County Herald  
875 North Easton Road,  
Suite 1, Doylestown, PA 18902  
Phone: 215-794-1096  
Classified: 215-794-1097  
Fax: 215-794-1109  
Herald@BucksCountyHerald.com

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## With ceasefire, Israel becomes pawn

Amy Neustein

The U.S.-brokered “dizzying deal” — secured by fiat over consensus — struck an incontrovertible blow at the Jewish community this month. Many were left flummoxed, if not demonstrably shaken. On nearly everyone’s mind was how Donald Trump, a proven diehard supporter of Israel, could send an envoy to pressure Benjamin Netanyahu into agreeing to suspend his campaign to extinguish Hamas and to release convicted terrorists who evidently pose an imminent danger to Israel’s security.

In a Jerusalem Post exclusive, it was reported last week that on the heels of Netanyahu having been pressured to agree to the arguably ill-fated Gaza ceasefire/hostage deal, sources close to Trump issued a stern warning to Israeli officials against a possible collapse of the ceasefire agreement in Lebanon, without taking into consideration the need for Israel to maintain its military presence beyond the 60-day deadline due to the “slow deployment of the Lebanese army” in tamping down Hezbollah’s militant forces.

So, before Trump had officially taken office, he bullied the Jewish state into accepting compromises that are contraindicative to its survival. I’m afraid this all points to an elephant in the room that must no longer be ignored. The problem is that we tend to look for easy explanations (we rationalize Trump’s impetuous hostage-release deal as arguably a way of achieving flashy inauguration optics), while haphazardly overlooking major forces that adumbrate geopolitical decision-making and transactional agreements often hidden behind the wrapper of peace talks.

To that end, we must take a step back to accurately comprehend the power dynamics found in the theater of world politics so that we are not so easily caught off-guard. To do so, we must first recognize that it is no secret that Trump’s main objective is to have the U.S. achieve economic superiority over China. In fact, Trump has averred to establish the “External Revenue Service” to collect tariffs from Chinese imports that flood the U.S. consumer markets. Not surprisingly much of Trump’s policies, politics and passions are principally geared toward fortifying America’s presence in trade relations and in closing the U.S. borders to, among other things, prevent the onslaught of illegal drugs coming over from China. To Trump, China presents the greatest existential threat to America.

In understanding this, it would be hard to ignore how Trump, in his mission to defeat his Chinese rival, has been at pains to leverage the support of Russia, by displaying unusual comity and collegiality toward Putin and his oligarchy. By showing fealty to Russia, Trump ostensibly weakens the dyad between China and Russia, making it easier for America to compete with China in global consumer markets. In truth, Russia obviously would want Israel to cease their combat operations in Gaza because continued fighting in the Middle East would portend an eventual assault on all of Iran’s nuclear facilities. Given that Iran is a longstanding ally of Russia, it wouldn’t take much for Putin to encourage Trump to bring an end to Israel’s counteroffensive in Gaza.

Why it is important to understand the larger picture? First, it’s spilled milk to agonize over whether the coordinated efforts to mobilize Jewish communities across the U.S. to vote for Trump has proven justified. Second, it’s an extravagant waste of time to impute solely small-minded motives to Trump — such as glory and pomposity in bringing about a hostage release/ceasefire deal — while overlooking the meta-politics of superpower rivalry that presumably informed Trump’s controversial 11th hour arm-twisting diplomacy.

Similarly, while considering the geopolitical landscape to understand what motivated Trump’s imperious behavior toward his staunch ally, it might help to look at the fuller picture in terms of why Netanyahu had cavied in. Was his pusillanimous behavior partly that of a man enervated by his recent prostate surgery, worn down by his ongoing corruption trial, and drained by the dissenting voices in his cabinet — all of which added to the stress of a 15-month war against Hamas?

The Ferris wheel of fate has played out, I’m afraid, and not to Israel’s benefit. The landslide victory of Trump has emboldened the Jewish state and Jews throughout the world. It’s time to get off the Ferris wheel and stand firmly on the ground. We must use our intellect to analyze, understand, and comprehend, which is by far more prudent than to swing with exultation over election victories. A steady demeanor will make Israel less likely to be moved around as a pawn on a chessboard. And this will augur well for Israel’s longterm survival.

Sociologist Amy Neustein lives in Fort Lee, N.J.

## The Futility of Ethics

Charles D. Dern

Two events of late 2024 caused me to revisit the problem of ethics, that is, the attempt to base morality on reason alone. The first was teaching an undergraduate ethics class. The second was the murder of a health care insurance executive in New York City.

Ethics classes typically explore two major systems, consequentialist types and duty-based types. In the former, the ends easily justify the means. In the latter, one is required do the right thing regardless of the consequences.

In prepping for the ethics class, I was intensely reminded that most ethical systems suffer from the same root problem. They lack any ultimate foundation for defining what is good or right. The duty-based system comes pretty close with an appeal to pure reason and universalizability of norms (What if everybody did X?), however, that system does not tend to find its way into everyday thinking.

What does find its way into the everyday is consequentialism. But as an ethical system it gives virtually no real guidance. In consequentialism, one “weighs” the various outcomes for a given course of action for the “most good.” The means to get to the outcome counts for little, if anything, in the process. Here, the lack of a firm basis for what is “good” is most obvious. Each person is left to himself or herself to make up what is good or evil, what is right or wrong, resulting in the moral malaise of the present day.

The primary consequence of consequentialism is that human life is reduced to an utterly arbitrary value. Thus, it is easy to see how the alleged killer of the healthcare CEO could rationalize that murdering him was justified, perhaps to right perceived wrongs by his company to the alleged killer or society in general. Indeed, it is likely that every person who commits a crime, even something a petty as stealing a candy bar, rationalizes that his or her actions are justified in some way based on supposedly just outcomes. The arbitrariness of such ethical thinking led some philosophers to posit that morality was based on nothing more than mere emotions.

In addition, extreme notions of autonomy and freedom further erode any value of consequentialism as a viable system of ethics. Autonomy,

which means self-law, often is put forth as an absolute by advocates of legal abortion and assisted suicide. However, not even Roe v. Wade recognized autonomy as an absolute legal right, which is why it specified that states could place some restrictions on late-term abortions.

False notions of absolute autonomy, coupled with an idealized concept of unbridled freedom, by their nature invite all of us to just make up rules and reasons as we go. There is no such thing as good or evil, no such thing as right or wrong, no such thing as truth. The implications of such thinking are enormous. In his 1995 encyclical, The Gospel of Life, the late Pope John Paul II argued that:

“... freedom negates and destroys itself, and becomes a factor leading to the destruction of others, when it no longer recognizes and respects its essential link with the truth. When freedom, out of a desire to emancipate itself from all forms of tradition and authority, shuts out even the most obvious evidence of an objective and universal truth, which is the foundation of personal and social life, then the person ends up by no longer taking as the sole and indisputable point of reference for his own choices the truth about good and evil, but only his subjective and changeable opinion or, indeed, his selfish interest and whim.”

If you are wondering why our society is so fragmented, why there is so much crime and dishonesty, one need look no further than the modern attempt at ethics. Outside of pointing out a few things such as conflicts of interest, it has little force, little value. In fact, ethics’ most crass form, utilitarianism, has been used by numerous ethicists to justify the involuntary euthanizing of persons suffering severe dementia or the permanently comatose based on their lack of utility or usefulness to society, in order to save money.

Modern ethics has proven many times over what Russian author Theodor Dostoyevsky wrote almost 150 years ago, “without God and immortal life? All things are permitted then, they can do what they like.” Given all the above, if you think we can reason how to be truly good without the Ten Commandments, think again.

Charles D. Dern, Ph.D. is an adjunct teacher of philosophy and theology.

## LETTERS TO THE HERALD

### Remembering Nurse Gladys Nelson

I must commend you on the article you published in your Jan. 16 edition by Carl LaVO (“Unsung hero in the war on polio came from Bucks County”). It struck a personal chord with me.

As someone who was born and raised in Doylestown, I can honestly say that Mrs. Gladys Nelson was the sweetest (and most dedicated to her profession) woman I have ever known. She was our neighbor and school nurse where my siblings and I attended Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Catholic School in the ‘50s. She also raised the most wonderful daughters I have ever had the pleasure of knowing.

However it was when the symptoms of a polio outbreak became evident in our small town that a number of adolescent boys, including my oldest brother, fell victim to its symptoms, that polio inoculations became paramount. It was a horrific time for many

families, and I’ll never forget my father carrying my brother to the car as he was unable to walk.

I know, without a doubt, that had it not been for Nurse Nelson at the forefront of dealing with this health crisis, many of those young men would never have been able to possibly walk again.

Thank you so much for showing the well-deserved respect that Nurse Gladys Nelson should be afforded for her tireless service to the community and for shining a light on the heroic and admirable profession of nursing in general.

Maggie Ercolino Ellis  
Point Pleasant

### Kash Patel a frightening pick for FBI director

It is urgent that U.S. Senators John Fetterman and Dave McCormick oppose the nomination of Kash Patel to the FBI director’s position. Patel is an extreme and unqualified

individual who met the only qualification that mattered to Trump: unquestionable allegiance to him over the American people.

He has very dangerous views and has said he will use the FBI to go after any perceived “enemies” of Trump, including people and politicians that have not broken any laws. This is not lawful or just.

The American people must band together to ensure that vindictive people with frightening solutions do not gain the reins of power and law enforcement in our government. Please hear our plea.

Iva Voorhees  
Bucks County

### Beautiful service for Jimmy Carter

January 9 saw the most beautiful tribute and funeral for Jimmy Carter that the world could watch. It is exactly what the world needed. Thank you, Jimmy.

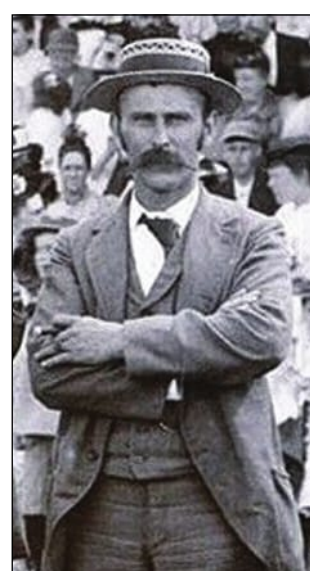
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## HISTORY LIVES

### Jean Rollo, Doylestown Historical Society



COURTESY OF DOYLESTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
In 1900, notable Doylestown entrepreneur James Pollock purchased and operated the Hotel Pollock, today’s Doylestown Inn, on West State Street.



JAMES POLLOCK

**James Pollock — Doylestown Entrepreneur.** Born in Ireland, James Pollock (1857-1927) arrived in Philadelphia when he was eight years old. After completing a rudimentary public education, he started a business selling coffees and teas. By 1880, at age 22, he had moved his enterprise to Doylestown, beginning his career as merchant and entrepreneur.

Three years later, Pollock bought a bottling establishment on State Street filling glass bottles bearing his name. In 1891, Pollock sold the bottling works and purchased the Lenape Cigar Store. The summer of 1895 found him managing a hotel in Atlantic City. Returning to Doylestown, he began the

manufacture of bicycles, partnering with Henry Rous in the P&R Cycle Works on Donaldson Street. He also served on the first board of directors of the Doylestown Electric Company

and was superintendent of its plant for a year and a half.

Having acquired what was known as the Armstrong Farm, in 1898, he divided his “Pollock Tract” into approximately 150 building lots, the sale of which constituted the “largest sale of building lots ever held in Doylestown.” (The lots were located along today’s Shewell and Harvey avenues and on Hamilton Street extending from West Court Street to Avenue A.)

By 1899, Pollock was the proprietor of the Union House in Lambertville. In 1900, he purchased and operated the Hotel Pollock, today’s Doylestown Inn.

Three years a borough council member, he also served as president of the Wangdoodles, a Doylestown men’s club established in 1872 for the purpose of “stuff and nonsense.” In 1904 Pollock sold his hotel to John Schuster, who retained the name.

By 1920, Pollock was working as the steward (manager) of the Bucks County Almshouse. Widowed in 1923, the next year he married Hannah Haddock (aunt of James Michener). On Feb. 21, 1927, James Pollock died and was buried in New Britain’s Beulah Cemetery. Today, the grave of this well-known Doylestownian is marked only with the foundation of a former headstone that’s no longer standing.

Sources: *History of Bucks County*, William W. H. Davis, 1905

*Daily Intelligencer*, April 21, 1898

*Bucks County Gazette*, July 10, 1908

Doylestownhistorical.org

### Send letters

Send letters to 875 N. Easton Road, Suite 1, Doylestown 18902, or janastasi@buckscountyherald.com or fax to 215-794-1109. Letters may be edited for clarity and to fit space available. Only signed letters will be used and a contact phone number must be submitted with letters. Letters that contain slanderous or profane language will be rejected or the text will be cut. The Herald aims to print only factual accounts. Letters are readers’ opinions.