

Euthanasia and Suicide

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INTRODUCTION

“Suicide has always been a contentious issue, but it is only in the twentieth century that governments have been forced to confront the issue of euthanasia” (Torr 11). As any government undertakes an issue, it is wise for her citizens to do the same (if they have not already done so) — for her rulings effect us all.

We who are Christians, in particular, need to be keenly aware of the attitudes and actions of society vs what God says about them, always remembering that God’s will shall prevail in the end, regardless of society’s desires and actions! John 12:48 ***“He that rejecteth me and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”***

THE PROMOTION OF EUTHANASIA & SUICIDE AS VIABLE ALTERNATIVES

“At it’s simplest, euthanasia involves the decision to end life” (Bloyd 12). Rita Marker, in her book, “Deadly Compassion,” says,

The typical discussion of euthanasia, couched in the language of choice and individual rights, gives the impression that a persons’ rights to be free of painful and unwanted medical intervention is at issue. This perception, coupled with euphemisms like the “right to die,” “death with dignity,” and, more recently, “aid-in-dying,” has led to a mistaken belief that euthanasia allows the natural process of dying to take its course.

Nothing could be further from reality. Euthanasia is making people die, rather than letting them die. It is giving a cancer patient a lethal injection, for example, actually to cause death, as opposed to stopping chemotherapy and allowing the patient to die. Put bluntly, euthanasia means killing in the name of compassion. (7)

Barbra J. Lougue, in her book, “Last Rights,” defines euthanasia as “Death Control.”

Death control is deliberate behavior that causes a quicker death for a person suffering from an incurable condition, or complex of conditions, including degenerative symptoms of old age. It encompasses self-deliverance (suicide or autoeuthanasia), where the individual terminates her own life, and assisted suicide (euthanasia), in which a mentally competent person makes the decision to die but receives help in implementing his plan. (1)

Suicide, is simply, “the act of killing oneself intentionally” (Neufeldt 1339). It has taken place, to some degree, throughout the ages, and “the idea of a noble death carried over to early Roman society. A person who no longer felt useful or suffered disgrace might find suicide the acceptable way to die” (Gay 26).

“The modern right-to-die movement can be tracked back to 1935, when a group of intellectual mavericks...founded the British Euthanasia Society” (Torr 11). Such efforts were opposed by the Judeo-Christian doctrine which, “held — and still holds — that God ordained life and that each life is sacred” (Gay 26). “Word War II put a temporary halt to these movements...and the euthanasia debate did not resurface in America until the 1970s” (Torr 11).

Why did it take so long for the call for legalized euthanasia/suicide to resurface? Because of what Americans and Europeans learned about the despicable acts of the Nazis under German dictator Adolf Hitler. “During world War II, the Nazis launched a secret euthanasia program that they claimed was mercy killing but was actually a calculated and cruel extermination of people the Nazis labeled ‘useless eaters’” (Gay 27). “Nazi officials emptied the country’s hospitals of the aged, the handicapped, and chronically ill people of all ages. These patients were shipped off to special institutions to be secretly killed” (Bloyd 48).

In more recent times the debate on “the right to die” has escalated and support for “assisted suicide” seems to be growing. A “Gallup Poll” shows very clearly the changing mind set through the years. The question was asked,

When a person has disease that cannot be cured, do you think doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient’s life by some painless means if the patient and his family request it? The responses:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Put out of misery (%)</i>	<i>Wrong (%)</i>
1947	37	54
1973	53	40
1978	58	38
1980	61	34
1985	64	33
1986	66	30 (Lougue 81)

When we add to this, a chart which Sunni Bloyd speaks of, in her book on Euthanasia, which notes Physicians’ response to the statement, “*There are some situations in which assisted suicide should be legal*”, it becomes very scary. The answers were: “Yes, 53%; No, 37% and Neutral, 10%” (80).

Thankfully, “Many physicians say they would be clouding their roles as healers if they helped patients to die. They could never accept the idea of being both a healer and a killer” (Gay 36).

With more and more efforts to legalize euthanasia, and so many Doctor’s being willing to participate in it — who knows what the future holds? We now have — in America — the killing of the unborn and the elderly. This is bad enough in itself, and if we continue on the road many are striving to take us down, how far will we go? Will we become like other countries, such as China, in their infanticide (another form of euthanasia)?

CHINA: August 2000 — The Huong family already had three children when the mother became pregnant again. “Family planning” officials seized the house and ordered the father to kill his newborn son, who he instead attempted to hide. Officials found the baby and drowned him in a rice paddy, in front of his parents. (Saini 25)

CHINA: February 15, 2002 — A newborn girl, her naked body still warm, lies dead in the gutter along side a road in a small town in Hunan province. She clearly has been dumped and has just died. On their way to work most passersby ignore the child. Some stop to stare and then walk on. Life goes on as normal. Eventually an elderly man puts the tiny body into a box and carries it away. (25)

Some will quickly say, “that will never happen here!” Yet, how often do we think about, much less try to do anything about, the thousands of babies that are already being murdered in our country?

Why are euthanasia and suicide promoted as viable alternatives? “Many people have come to fear a long and painful dying more than they fear death itself” (Bloyd 12). They see death as “the end” of pain, not understanding or accepting as real, life after death in heaven or hell. They, therefore, in helping a friend to die, see themselves as performing “...an act of caring and compassion” (Torr 23). So, when “...qualities of life such as being able to interact with others or being able to live with dignity are gone,” death is hastened. (Gay 29)

Also, in my estimation, a growing number are supporting euthanasia/suicide because of the cost of keeping people alive. Insurance companies take center stage in this regard, through their “managed care.” “At its best, managed care cuts medical costs by eliminating unnecessary tests, treatments and medicines. At its worst, it puts a dollar value on human life” (Altman 26).

REASONS FOR INCREASED SUICIDE (ESPECIALLY AMONG OUR YOUNG).

It is said,

About 6,000 young Americans kill themselves each year. That number is more than *three times* higher than the number of teen suicides in America 30 years ago. ... One survey found that 1 out of every 12 American high school students *tried* to commit suicide in 1990. ... White teenage males kill themselves far more than any other teenagers, accounting for over 70 percent of all teen suicides. (Schleifer 12)

“Only accidents cause more deaths each year. That means more young people die by suicide than from almost any other cause” (Smith 10).

In seeking answers as to, “Why young people commit suicide,” it should be beneficial to consider the “reasons given in notes which were left behind after suicides.” Those reasons include:

- ▶ Breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend
- ▶ Doing poorly in school, or not being accepted for a job or by a college
- ▶ Not doing well in sports or other activities
- ▶ Moving and leaving friends behind, or having a good friend move away
- ▶ Divorce or other problems in the family (such as alcohol, drugs or sexual abuse)
- ▶ Being unable to repay a large debt
- ▶ A serious physical injury or illness
- ▶ Being responsible for an injury to another person
- ▶ Having committed a serious crime
- ▶ The death of a parent, close friend, or other family member (Schleifer 15)

Eleanor Ayer, in her book, “Teen Suicide, Is It Too Painful To Grow Up,” listed the following as causes for suicide.

- ▶ Depression - an overwhelming state of sadness or feeling of hopelessness is the root of nearly all teen suicides.
- ▶ Drugs and Alcohol - According to statistics from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 3.3 million American teenagers, or one out of every nine, are alcoholics.
- ▶ Feelings of Guilt or Shame - The burden of bringing embarrassment or disgrace to one’s family can be overpowering.
- ▶ The Pressure to Succeed (16-23)

These lists are at times hard to understand, or accept. After all, why would someone with so much to look forward to, contemplate — and even attempt (successfully or un-successfully) — suicide? We must understand that, “Most suicidal teens who talk about killing themselves are crying for help...so it is up to a friend or acquaintance who hears a teen talking about committing suicide to intervene...” (Colman 104, 105). When considering the “cry for help,” “It is interesting that many more girls than boys attempt suicide and don’t die. A suicide attempt is a way of asking for help” (Smith 10).

Is there anything, besides listening for their “cry for help,” that adults, particularly parents, can do? First of all there is a great need for parental guidance, because,

Most sociologists agree that suicide often has its roots in the home environment. Children whose home lives fit one or more of the following patterns are considered higher risks for suicide.

- ▶ Two working parents
- ▶ Children born to parents who did not really want or expect them
- ▶ Families that do not express their feelings, either verbally or physically
- ▶ Only children
- ▶ Social-climber parents

- ▶ Families on the move
- ▶ Death or divorce
- ▶ Problems in the family
- ▶ Alcohol and drug abuse
- ▶ Suicidal parent
- ▶ Threatening environment
- ▶ Rejection
- ▶ Child Abuse (Ayer 24-26)

There is also a great need to look for the “warning signs.”

- ▶ a previous suicide attempt
- ▶ suicide threats
- ▶ dramatic change in eating or sleeping habits
- ▶ dramatic drop in school performance
- ▶ sudden loss of interest in activities and possessions
- ▶ extreme restlessness or irritability
- ▶ feelings of hopelessness
- ▶ feelings of worthlessness and self-hatred
- ▶ deep, prolonged depression
- ▶ drug or alcohol abuse (Goldman 47)

It is much easier to “deny” the reality of suicide, but by so doing, we may be inadvertently helping it become a reality with someone we know and love!

III. THE BIBLE RESPONSE TO EUTHANASIA and SUICIDE.

Is it ethical to encourage, assist or in any way participate in euthanasia or suicide? With such a subject, emotions too often blur the answer. In regard to Euthanasia for the sick and elderly, we don't want to see them suffering. Yet, we surely don't want to see our young people taking their own lives (unless it is an unwanted “unborn” child, many would say). While emotions are important, and necessary, they are not to determine right and wrong.

Please consider: Human life is sacred because God “**. . .giveth to all life, and breath, and all things. . .**” and “**. . .in him we live, and move, and have our being. . .For we are also his offspring**” (Acts 17:25-28). God's regard for the sacredness of life is seen in the regulation recorded in Genesis 9:6, which says, “**Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.**” This contains two very strong points: 1) Man's life is sacred for he is made in God's image. 2) The one who sheds innocent blood becomes guilty and worthy of capital punishment. This principle is re-stated in the New Testament — Romans 13:4.

In condemning the ones who shed “innocent” blood, which of the following would not be held accountable for doing so? 1) The murderer of the unborn? 2) The murderer of the old? 3) The

murderer of self (whether old or young)? None would be held unaccountable, rather all will have to answer for their deeds!

Repentance is necessary for a Christian to receive forgiveness of his sins. One who kills himself cannot repent, and will thus be lost eternally! This fact alone shows euthanasia and suicide to be unethical!!!

The Psalmist requested of God: ***“Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth”*** (Psalm 71:9). Again, in verse 18 he declared, ***“Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.”***

God does not forsake the elderly, and neither should we! The wisdom and love of the elderly is very important in our society, and we need to remind them of their vital place in our lives.

The one who put King Saul to death, even though it was at Saul's request, was condemned by God and thus put to death himself (2 Samuel 1:1-10). Will it be any different for anyone today who takes his own, or another persons, innocent life? No, those guilty will answer to the divine law-giver!

The Bible is clear! It IS NOT ETHICAL to take the innocent life of another, whether he be poor, aged, handicapped, sick, or unwanted — regardless of age; nor is it ethical to kill ourselves! Instead,

...God charges his people to benevolently care for them.

- ▶ We are to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, providing their needs (James 1:27).
- ▶ We are to rise up with respect for the aged (Leviticus 19:32).
- ▶ We are to plead the cause of the poor and oppressed (Isaiah 1:11, 23).
- ▶ We are to bear the burdens of those who are struggling through life and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).
- ▶ We who are strong are to help the weak (Romans 15:1).
- ▶ We are to do good unto all men (Galatians 6:10).

But to offer death to a suffering soul is the opposite of all these injunctions. (Waddey 87).

CONCLUSION

Although it is clear to me that both euthanasia and suicide are unethical, I also recognize that there are some things I do not know. For example, I don't know the condition of a persons mind who takes his own life. Was he lucid? Did he know what he was doing? Surely there are occasions in which the person does indeed know what he is doing, since most plan their actions, sometimes as much as six months in advance. Yet, there may also be situations in which the person is not aware of his actions.

Will God hold someone who is not in his “right mind” accountable for harming or killing himself? That is something that I can't answer, although the reason for his mind being “out of sorts” would probably

enter into any conclusion. We will simply have to leave that to God! In any case, let us be vigilant to “see,” “understand,” and “properly respond” to those who are in need — regardless of their age.

People lose hope, and see no way out of their problems. But there is a way out — and it is IN CHRIST! Let us never fail to show Him to those who are without hope!!!

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