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137

ETHICS OF EUTHANASIA

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Moral Values Must be Weighed

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Man, in essence of body-soul unity, has been created by God with an end, which end besides having to be accomplished here on earth, is directed by a supernatural force the destined end of which perforce being supernatural.

It follows, therefore, that man has not a perfect dominion over himself as is the case when man is seen in his relationship with beasts. The gift of life and soul belong only to the Divine Creator.

When man takes away his own life, "*suicide*" being the term adopted in civil and canon law, he not only commits an act of cowardice, an injustice towards his family and country, but he perpetrates a violation of the Almighty's Divine Will and hence a grave sin is committed.

It may be argued that more often than not individuals who commit, or at least attempt to commit suicide, have been found to be of unsound mind or their balance of mind at the suicidal moment *was disturbed*; hence these same individuals are not guilty or responsible for their execrable action before their Lord.

Admittedly, this line of argument is sound, but what should be said of those ideologists, amongst them doctors and scientists, (whose sanity, it might be added is unquestionable), who defend and even attempt at securing legal sanction for a certain form of suicide termed "Euthanasia"? It is true that Euthanasia falls within the province of legal medicine, but can

moral theology be disinterested or indifferent? It is precisely the moral values in the balance that shall take up our trend of thought.

Derived from the Greek, *Euthanasia* (*eu*=well, *thantos*=death) translated literary it means *easy death*. The modern English idiom asks us however, to translate the term as a *pleasant* or *peaceful* death. Reverting to the initial and real meaning of the word in question we see that the first writers took the word to signify a *glorious* death sustained for a noble cause as in the case for science, justice, the welfare of the nation, etc. Medical terminology takes up *Euthanasia* and throws over it a different shroud, hence a specific signification, namely, a peaceful death produced through the means of scientific expedients. Here it might be stated that *Euthanasia* and *Mercy Killing* many a time are used synonymously as it is the case in our article; strictly speaking they are not the same thing, because "*Mercy Killing*" is carried out when

an individual watching by the bed-side of one who is slowly dying in great suffering upon his or her own responsibility, decides to terminate the life of agony of the sufferer with or without the knowledge of the sufferer himself.

Aim of Euthanasia

Euthanasia, in its supposedly religio-moral milieu, aims at freeing man from the atrocious spasms of his physical infirmities by means of a serene death. Needless to say, the aim of Euthanasia is a noble one, humanitarian besides beneficent, at least in the intention of many of its followers, doctors and scientists again included (*P. Munus* 1948, p. 229).

Hence we do not intend to parley on this end; but more so on the immediate motives and means adopted to reach that aim. Nor do we wish to deliberate on that Euthanasia which directly intends the good of the society, an age-worn practice favoured so much by the ancient Spartans and exalted to this day by some nations, (especially by Germany during both the World Wars with motives both racial and political); this kind of Euthanasia being not only spurned by the Catholic moral code but also by every individual of sane and upright mind.

Here we would rather discuss that Euthanasia which tends directly towards the good and benefit of the infirm (or unfit, as the modern superman holds them to be). For the sake of clarity we shall label the unfortunate ones as patients.

Two Hypothesis

Two hypothesis may be put forward in regard to the patient, namely:—

(a) Either he is already near his end and, to remove the spasms and horrors of death in grave and specific cases, anaesthetics are given hence the diminution and removal of pain; or

(b) the patient is suffering solely from a lengthy illness, perhaps incurable, painful or contagious, and, intending the removal of anxieties and sufferings, medicines that cause or greatly accelerate the end are prescribed.

In the first hypothesis, when moderation in the administering of non-lethal and non-noxious anaesthetics, is observed, according to the opinion of many moralists licity is not questioned. The reason is that the immediate effect secured is not death, nor an acceleration of it, nor a danger to the physical well-being, but only a diminution or abolishment of sensible perception and hence unconsciousness. If this were not so we would have to regard all surgical operations as illicit. Differences in case-histories are only a reflection of sentimentalism, not one of moral criterion.

Voluntary Anaesthesia

It must be remembered, however, that there are still many moralists who maintain that voluntary anaesthesia of the consciousness should never be permitted, especially in those last moments when the patient clutches for the fullest con-

sciousness of himself. According to these authors, shortening of the spiritual life would constitute an illicit act. This is an opinion which sounds rather rigid; and seeking the golden mean we may assert that these extreme means should not be utilized before the administration of the Last Sacraments, especially when one may conjecture that the patient is in a state of mortal sin. But when the patient is spiritually peaceful and not against the lethargic doze, why should illicitness be rooted up? Are the comforts of religion always and in all cases sufficient to relieve physical disfunction or pain? (Pujiula S.J. *De Medicina Pastoralis* n. 208, 3). If a medicine such as pethedine which possesses analgesic properties but does not produce hypnotic effects were to be more fully developed, the above thorny problem will be rendered obsolete with moralists.

Upon considering the second hypothesis, the question is more complex, because it is so very true that in every country in the world there are thousands upon thousands of sick people who cherish no possible hope of recovery. Again so many of these patients are in a state of continual pain and they can almost count the number of days they have to live. Then there are the totally insane who, like the rest, are a source of burden and expense to both the relatives and the State. Why should these wretched creatures be allowed to live? Why should not some merciful opiate or other drug be given them and thus their life would be spared agony and strife?

Ray of Hope

Before proceeding any further let us remember that it is not the first time that doctors have been mistaken in their prognosis, and after all, we must admit that today the medical sciences are so advanced that there is generally always some ray of hope for the patient. But for the sake of the argument let us take up a case where the disease is definitely incurable; would it be licit to use drugs that shorten or destroy life altogether? The answer is a definite *NO*. The "yes" answer would imply a direct act of homicide, and hence definitely against Divine right, since God only is the Supreme Master over man's sojourn on this earth besides of course a violation against the Human Rights of Man and the moral virtue of Christian Charity, since the patient unknowingly perhaps, has his ideals of freedom and liberty flaunted, discarded and annihilated. Again we must not lightly pass over the psychological imbalance originated in a patient's mind when he is not sure that every cup of drink or morsel of food is polluted with the "sweet" yet deadly and final drug. Mental agony will certainly be enhanced and increased when the patient's thoughts are centred around the "poisoned cup."

The Right of the State

The State cannot come out boldly and assert that it can wield the sceptre of life and death over its citizens, certainly not with the pretext that its intention is to free us all from the heavy burdens

and other dangers directed perhaps against us. Why? Simply because human authority has not the right to take away the lives of innocent citizens.

Justice declares punishment on criminals and evildoers. Or does modern justice classify an unfortunate and sick human being as a criminal or public enemy? After all it must not be forgotten that the basis of terrestrial justice must be drawn from the Divine.

We admit that God is the Master of life and death, we really believe that God is our Supreme Ruler, and still some courts of justice would have us believe that they also are gods, and that would be assuming too much for themselves.

Maimed or Insane

During wars so many thousands of soldiers are left irremediably maimed for life. A fine kind of thanks for their valour and loyalty it would be if suddenly the State decided to rid itself of them! Another example: a mother after having sacrificed herself and her all for the education of her children goes insane; the State to show its appreciation for such heroic self-sacrifice sends the unfortunate mother to the grave. Is such treatment from the State to be tolerated? We wonder how many children, including adults, would wish to live to see the day when their mothers would be carried off by the State to be noiselessly and neatly packed away below ground! Such treatment would be tantamount to

saying that human beings are no different from dogs, cats, trout or humming birds. Perhaps the State might think that thus the encouragement for sacrifice for the family and State would be fostered! As if modern society has not already a hard enough lot, without adding the ever lurking fear and dread of blind and premature death. Do the protagonists of Euthanasia see and understand all this? If they do not, we can only feel sorry for them and we wish them to die a peaceful and natural death. Again, when prominent members of a society brush aside the dictates of their consciences and begin advocating Euthanasia (not to mention as well methods of conception-preventives such as abortion, infanticide, contraceptives and sterilization, which, in reality, are in line with the subject in hand) then we may be sure that bad days are in store for us, and that civilization is on the downhill. Heaven help us if this is the case today.*

Voluntary Euthanasia

But the most important and thorny problem of the day is *Voluntary Euthanasia*. By this term we mean that Euthanasia which is expressly desired and asked for by the patient. As a matter of fact the idea of such Euthanasia in some countries is so much in the limelight that only legal sanction is awaited. In England the movement in favour of Voluntary Euthanasia was first initiated in

*The State Eugenic Murder was also condemned by the Holy Office on December 2, 1940.

November, 1931 by Dr. Killick Millard, President of the Society of Medical Officers of Health. Later, towards the end of the year 1935 the Voluntary Euthanasia Legalisation Society was inaugurated in London with the late Lord Moynihan as its first president. When this peer died, the "Voluntary Euthanasia Bill" was introduced into the House of Lords in November, 1936, by Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede. The bill was entitled as "An Act to legalise under certain conditions the administration of Euthanasia to persons desiring it and who are suffering from illness of a fatal and incurable character involving serious pain." The purpose of the procedure as set forth in Paragraph 1 of the proposed Act, was "the termination of life by painless means for the purpose of avoiding unnecessary suffering."

In December, 1936, the Bill again appeared before Parliament where it underwent a two-hour debate of an incomparable spirit of religious conviction on both sides. It was Viscount Fitzalan of Derwent, the Catholic Peer, who moved its rejection. The two medical men in the House, Lord Dawson and Lord Horder, were also against the Bill; whilst the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Lang, supported the rejection, but went on to say that "if there were extreme cases where it was morally legitimate to shorten a life of pain it should be left to the medical profession."

Murder and Suicide

The motion was finally rejected with a 35 against 14

vote defeat.* And rightly so too, since this type of Euthanasia is as Viscount Fitzalan called it, "a Bill to legalise murder and suicide". It is "murder" because it is a killing of an innocent citizen; it is "suicide" because it is a direct killing of oneself. It is also murder when some one kills another person upon the desire or command of the latter, and incitement to suicide, if successful, is also murder, and, beyond all doubt, "the action of inducing a quiet and easy death" is in law murder. Particular cases declared "not guilty" by a jury do not alter in any way the legal position. Hence the penalties formulated in both Civil and Canon Law against the above mentioned crimes (i.e. Murder and Suicide) perforce come in against Euthanasia.

We admit that certain diseases and maladies have as their concomitants distressing pain, even the thought that a disease is incurable and that nothing can be done is enough to create severe mental torture, but these reasons are all sentimental. However, common sense dictates to us that because of all the tragic circumstances we should all the more retain our sense of proportion. We must not forget that during the administration of Euthanasia we commit suicide and the man, whether nurse, physician, or the Law at that, commit an act of Murder.

Self-Conservation

Man is bound not only to refrain from taking his own

* *Bonnar A.: The Catholic Doctor, London, 1944, p.p. 99-104.*

life, but also he must defend himself against those who attempt to murder him. Man's duty is to preserve his life. The idea behind Euthanasia even goes against mother nature since everyday we can trace instances where every creature tends towards the instinctual behaviour of self-conservation.

Besides, what about those patients who have had innumerable certificates from doctors and physicians testifying to the gravity and incurability of such and such a disease, only then to be up and well again and on their feet! "How fallacious experience may be in medicine,"—to quote Lord Horder's words—"only those who have had a great deal of experience fully recognise." Even if some physicians do not believe in miracles, and one hears them terming such cases as coincidental, why should they be so bold as to assert to themselves and others certain future data? It would seem that man is ever seeking to make himself believe that he is a god—quite a psychopathic personality!

Dr. Millard Again

Recently, the same Dr. Killick Millard, the Hon. Secretary of the Voluntary Euthanasia Legalisation Society, writing in "Everybody's Weekly (Mar., 18, 1950)" on the question of *Mercy Killing* expressed the fact that his Society hoped to reintroduce the Bill into Parliament before long. The same author also invited opinions on the subject from readers, and many answered for and against Voluntary Euthanasia (Everybody's April 1, 1950). As it was expected, the

author rejected the opinions of those who were against; firstly, because whether suicide is condemned by reason or not is a *matter of opinion*, and, secondly, because suicide is not condemned either in the Old or New Testament. (Everybody's, April 22, 1950).

But here I should like to point out that since *suicide* is a *direct killing of oneself*, it is truly "a serious violation of God's law" which reason cannot be denied or doubted. Secondly, I should like to ask Dr. Millard whether he has skipped Ex. xx, 13; Gen. ix, 6; Deut. xxxii, 39; Sap. xvi, 13; Ad Rom. xiv, 7-9 before dictating that suicide is not condemned by the Holy Scripture.

It must be mentioned too, that Dr. Millard's analogies between killing in war and capital punishment do not stand in line with Euthanasia. The two analogies mentioned are recognised legally by God Himself, because everyone has the right to defend himself and his country, and the criminal should be punished adequately. (Ex. XXII, 18 — Ad. Rom. XIII, 4). This is not the case in Euthanasia, because the patient is not defending himself against anybody, nor is he a criminal, but simply an innocent citizen. All other sorts of killing are not legalized by God. What is not licit before God cannot be legalized by the State, and if the latter does, it recognizes the *illegal killing* which, also in the case of Voluntary Euthanasia, would be called *Murder*.

Citizens are Not Guinea Pigs

If laws supporting the adoption of the Euthanasia

Act be enacted and put into force these same laws should be disregarded. The State is not entitled to treat its citizens as a scientist would treat his mice and guinea pigs. The State must be conditioned by public opinion, and it is certain that the mass of the people would not accept the legalisation of Euthanasia because the desire that the sick person should be left in peace is the uppermost consideration of a civilized nation. The Catholic Church shudders at the mere thought that man could arrive at such extremes, and although the Anglican Church leaders appear to be divided on the euthanasia problem all of

them would agree that the life of man belongs to his Creator.

Fourteen years have elapsed since the Bill to legalise Voluntary Euthanasia was introduced and during this period the frontiers of medical research have been pushed far forward and it is to be expected that the future will show us a definite increase. It is up then to the men of sound mind and unbiased opinion to stand up not only for themselves but also for their fathers, mothers, sisters, relatives and friends who unfortunately may not be in a position to be able to stand and fight for their life and sense of liberty.

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Pao XII - P. 11, 1963, p. 85