

November 9, 2015; Arguments Against Euthanasia

Those opposed to right-to-die legislation, also known as euthanasia or assisted suicide, cite religious, legal, ethical, and moral grounds in support of their objections.

Those who oppose assisted suicide for religious reasons, point to the 6th Commandment's clear language on the subject: "Thou shall not kill." This commandment is aimed at those who may wish to kill others, as well as those who wish to take their own lives. Taking a life is never acceptable, regardless of the reason. Humans are the sacred creation of God, and therefore human life itself is sacred. Clearly, committing an act of suicide, or assisting someone to do so, is against the will of God and is therefore sinful.

Similarly, the American legal system holds human life in high regard. As result, there is no Constitutional basis to support an argument that all states MUST grant all citizens the right to decide for themselves whether to live or die.

Physicians have a sworn ethical duty to protect life. Almost all American physicians take the ancient Hippocratic oath as they begin their medical careers. As originally written, the oath prohibits doctors from killing patients, or from helping patients kill themselves, even upon the request of the patient.

Also, if physicians openly embrace the right to die movement, patient trust in the medical profession will eventually erode. Patients will begin to question the motives of doctors who suggest considering the possibility of assisted suicide. Are the doctors looking out for the ailing patient's best interests, or are they more concerned with their own convenience or in protecting the insurance companies' financial bottom line? Within the medical community, the ultimate goal should be to assist patients to live long, healthy lives rather than to pursue expedited deaths.

Opponents also argue that great caution must be exercised in opening the door to euthanasia, even a crack. Because, once the door is unlatched, divergent interests will thrust the door wide open setting our society on a slippery slope to legalized murder and putting pressure on our most vulnerable citizens to commit suicide.

The Netherlands serves as a prime example of the slippery slope theory as highlighted in a February 12, 2015 *Newsweek* article entitled "Death Becomes Them," written by Winston Ross. In 1984, the Dutch Supreme Court ruled that voluntary euthanasia was acceptable, as long as doctors followed very specific guidelines. However, the legal plight of physicians remained in limbo because under Dutch criminal laws physicians who assisted patients in committing suicide potentially faced criminal charges of murder. In response, the Dutch Parliament decriminalized euthanasia in 2002.

For the next few years, the number of assisted deaths actually decreased. Then, beginning in 2007, the numbers began to dramatically climb at the worrisome rate of 15% per year. In 2013, according to official records, 4,829 people turned to doctors for assistance to end their lives. This number is three times higher than similar deaths recorded in 2002. In fact, one in every 28 deaths in the Netherlands is now due to euthanasia.

Among the possible causes is the fact that qualifying for assisted suicide has become easier. Where once euthanasia candidates had to be terminally ill, this is no longer the case. According to Ross, Dutch doctors are now “helping people die if they no longer want to bear depression, autism, blindness or even being dependent on the care of others.” Babies can be euthanized, as can children from ages 12 to 15, with their parents’ consent. After 16, only “parental involvement” is required.

Opponents of assisted suicide also fear that financial considerations are driving the numbers up. The huge Baby Boomer generation is rapidly aging, putting pressure on healthcare providers to reduce expenses by cutting corners. There is growing fear that euthanasia may become a viable option in the quest to contain costs.

This may not be as farfetched as some may believe. In 2008, Medicaid officials in Oregon, where euthanasia is legal, denied the request by a couple, both suffering from cancer, to receive costly treatment services. Instead, their denial letter listed alternatives, including an offer to pay for assisted suicide. Many fear that those who live on the social margins, the disabled, and other vulnerable individuals will likewise be encouraged, if not pushed, to consider this option.

Euthanasia opponents argue that instead of spending time and resources trying to find better ways to help patients die, the focus should be shifted to helping patients better manage pain and to provide more extensive services to those who are facing imminent death, and those who are disabled, socially ostracized, or mentally ill. This is a religious, moral, ethical and legal imperative.