

*Private Members' Business*

Those who are opposed to legalization of euthanasia deny others the freedom of choice. Pieter Admiraal, a physician in the Netherlands and some like-minded colleagues summed up this discussion nicely when they explained that not everyone would choose euthanasia. There are those who would prefer to fight for life in the midst of pain up to their last breath. This is their right but we should all have the power to choose.

In the debate regarding euthanasia it has been accurately observed that to err on the side of life is to not fully understand that for some patients life in any meaningful sense is already over. Is this the sort of error that a society which truly values life would make?

The argument rooted in the moral issue of the sanctity of life is one of the most common barriers directed in opposite to euthanasia. We are encouraged by those who hold this point of view to consider the rightness or wrongness of allowing doctors to assist patients in their death upon their request, the rightness of taking life with the permission of the person involved.

It is also important to consider the flip side of this argument. Is it right to deny members of our society who have irreversible medical conditions an escape from the suffering they experience? Is it possible to profess a respect for life when we have little or no concern for those whom we force to endure it against their wishes. Certainly if as a society we want to preserve the moral value of the sanctity of life, we need to be clear about what is sacred about life. Is it biological existence of some measure of quality?

If we as members of the Canadian community truly possess a sincere respect for life we should accept that the meaning of life is defined in most personal terms by each individual that some will define their own life in terms of quality and others in terms of basic existence.

Should we not accept that through our own personal definitions of life some of us will support euthanasia and others will oppose it? Would not a genuine respect for life dictate that neither is more right than the other? If we do not want to violate the sanctity of life then I believe we are required to respect each individual's interpretation of life's meaning and accept that this will necessitate the availability of euthanasia within our health care system.

Another argument in opposition to legalization of euthanasia is rooted primarily in religion. Some put forth the argument that only God gives life and only God can take it away and thus euthanasia should be opposed. Can the medical technology of today which can keep the body's vital processes functioning for an indeterminate amount of time be described by those with this perspective in any other way than the moral intervention in this divine plan? Surely, though, those that take this view should not force their views and values on others who do not share them. Physicians are increasingly exercising their power to determine life and death in our own health care system.

Clearly physician aid in dying is occurring presently but without standardized regulations or safeguards. It is this *ad hoc* approach it seems to me that should be feared, not the legalization and regulation of euthanasia. The concern expressed that legalized voluntary euthanasia would lead to involuntary euthanasia is not warranted if the legislation is carefully developed and crafted.

One of the many arguments employed in opposition to any consideration of the legalization of euthanasia is that such a move would subvert the role of the physician. Those who make this assertion typically ground their argument in the Hippocratic oath. They refer to the part of this historic document which commits physicians to the role of healer and insists that this prohibits them from ending life. They suggest that the legalization of euthanasia could serve to relieve physicians of their pledged obligation to preserving life, and not only would the public confidence and trust in the profession be undermined but patients' lives would be at risk also.

I find it impossible to believe that the only thing that has prevented patients from being killed by their physicians is their pledge to the Hippocratic oath. Surely physicians, like most other members of society, are influenced by existing moral and societal values, which prohibit murder, and they are also influenced of course by their code of ethics and conduct.

Now, understandably, the initial purpose of the oath was to establish the medical profession as valuing life. However, it was created prior to any possible conception of what health care would become today and it was created in the absence of any real ability to prolong life in the fact of death. Times have changed drastically in